

No Need to Beg China? Taiwan's Membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation as a Contested State*

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Abstract

This article examines the process, causes and repercussions of the accession of Taiwan, as a contested state, together with China, to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 1991, the first intergovernmental organization that Taipei has joined since 1971. Based on an analysis of elite interviews, primary and secondary data, the paper traces the under-explored diplomatic history of the accession. It argues that changes in Taiwan's domestic and external environments, as well as changes in the diplomatic process, account for Taipei's admission, rather than the China factor alone. The paper examines four positive effects of accession on Taiwan's international space and the implications for Taiwan's continuous survival as a contested state. By undertaking a nuanced analysis of an important yet little explored milestone in the contested state's struggle to mitigate its international isolation, the article sheds light on Taiwan's external ties against the backdrop of the sovereignty dispute between Taipei and Beijing.

Keywords: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; contested state; Taiwan and China sovereignty dispute; convergence of interests

After 1949, both the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) strove to win recognition and legitimacy from the international community. In 1971, Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations and became what Deon Geldenhuys describes as a contested state.¹ Contested states constitute anomalies in the conventional interstate system as they often lack sufficient international recognition.² Although some have possessed a certain degree of statehood by viably ruling their domestic constituents and demonstrating

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1 Geldenhuys 2009.

2 Ibid.; Berg and Toomla 2009.

domestic sovereignty,³ the international community challenges their purported statehood.⁴ Examples of contested states include Palestine, Kosovo, Taiwan and Transnistria. Since 1971, Taiwan has received *de jure* recognition from a minority of confirmed states but has lacked sufficient international legal sovereignty,⁵ and thus has had only limited participation in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs).⁶ However, it has achieved domestic sovereignty by effectively controlling events within its borders. Moreover, it has expanded its functional ties with a majority of confirmed states and used its economic power to win some degree of international recognition, thereby mitigating its level of isolation, in contrast to other contested states.⁷ Kosovan and Transnistrian officials have even regarded Taiwan as an example to follow.⁸

This paper presents the findings of original research on the important yet under-explored case of Taiwan's admission to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1991.⁹ It moves beyond a state-centric analytical framework to explore how and why APEC became the first IGO that Taipei joined as a contested state, despite Beijing's initial opposition. The first enlargement of APEC took place in Seoul in November 1991, two years after its formation, when Taiwan, the PRC, and Hong Kong (the so-called "three Chinas") were admitted as new members. By including three economies that had strong regional links, APEC strengthened its "stature as the single largest forum speaking on the subject of trade liberalization."¹⁰ Although its accession to APEC was a milestone in Taipei's struggle as a contested state, it has not been thoroughly examined in the scholarly literature. This paper fills the void by explaining the process, causes and repercussions of the accession through original research.

In terms of methodology, I adopted a qualitative single case study approach because of the paucity of existing knowledge on the subject.¹¹ This approach allows the researcher to focus on marshalling facts in order to offer a holistic description of the complex case in question and to retain the meaningful characteristics of real-life events.¹² Research methods included in-depth interviews and the collection of primary and secondary materials.¹³ Major interviewees included American and Taiwanese officials and business leaders involved

3 Krasner 1999, 2001.

4 Geldenhuys 2009; Ker-Lindsay 2012, 19–20.

5 Krasner 1999, 2001.

6 Cho 2005; Wang 2006; Chang, Jaw-Ling Joanne 2010.

7 For Taiwan's evolving status in the international system, see Yahuda 1996; Hickey 2007; Fell 2012, 151–170.

8 Ker-Lindsay 2012, 19–20; Ignatiev 2012.

9 In June 1989, Australian prime minister Robert Hawke called for the establishment of a more formal intergovernmental vehicle for regional cooperation, which led to the birth of APEC. See Hawke 1989, 1994, 431; Funabashi 1995, 58–61.

10 Hoon 1991.

11 Gerring 2004.

12 Yin, Robert K. 1994, 2.

13 Interviews were carried out in 1997, 1998, 2013, 2014 and 2015. While interviews can help to correct distortions in primary and secondary materials, the use of the latter can compensate for the weaknesses of the former. See Tansey 2007.

in the diplomacy leading up to Taiwan's accession. Library research was carried out in the US, Taiwan and mainland China.

The paper is divided into four sections. After the introduction, the second section uses process tracing to detail the pertinent diplomatic history, highlighting the key events and multiple players of state and non-state capacity.¹⁴ The third section argues that a combination of factors emanating from changes in Taiwan's domestic and external environments as well as from the diplomatic process has accounted for Taipei's diplomatic breakthrough. Taiwan's domestic changes, namely its economic success and the pursuit of pragmatic diplomacy as a new foreign policy initiative, proved to be assets in its pursuit of APEC membership. Externally, Beijing's post-1978 economic reforms and the Tiananmen Incident were also conducive to Taiwan's accession. Moreover, the bottom-up approach to regionalism prior to APEC allowed Taiwanese business elites to utilize their accumulated connections within regional non-governmental organization (NGO) networks to lobby for Taiwan's membership to compensate for the handicapped formal channels of diplomacy stemming from Taipei's status as a contested state. During the diplomatic process, decisions by APEC to define members as economies and to admit the "three Chinas" simultaneously further facilitated Taipei's entry. So did the convergence of interests among pertinent multiple players. Eventually, creative formulae were found, resulting in Taiwan's accession. The final section discusses the four positive effects of accession on Taiwan's position as a contested state and the implications of the study for Taipei's continuous survival as a contested state.

The Diplomatic Process of Taiwan's Accession

The diplomatic process leading up to APEC's first expansion comprised the pre-negotiation phase, from early 1989 to the July 1990 Singapore meeting, and the negotiation period, from October 1990 to October 1991. The issue of expansion was problematic for APEC because of Taipei's sovereignty dispute with Beijing. According to Richard H. Solomon, former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, "The issue was constant. That is, would China agree to it [Taiwan's admission to IGOs]? Then there would be negotiations on the language – how would Taiwan be described?"¹⁵ The diplomacy leading to enlargement, however, was far more complicated than that described by Solomon.

Pre-negotiation period

Before the formal negotiations began, a number of actors had worked for or against Taiwan's entry. They included the Australian, American and Chinese

14 Process tracing enables us to examine multiple interaction effects "where it is difficult to explain outcomes in terms of two or three independent variables." See George and Bennett 2005, 206.

15 Interview with Richard H. Solomon, Washington, DC, 1 April 1998.

governments, the members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Taiwanese state and non-state actors.

Even before the inception of APEC, Taiwan's private sector elites had started lobbying for Taipei's membership. In April 1989, heavyweight Taiwanese businessman, C.F. Koo 辜振甫, met the Australian envoy, Richard Woolcott, during a meeting of the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) in San Francisco. He argued that Taipei's official designation would not become a problem so long as it could join APEC.¹⁶ Australia initially sought the inclusion of the "three Chinas" but later decided to defer the issue.¹⁷ In March and April 1989, Woolcott sought the opinions of proposed APEC members on the issue.¹⁸ He concluded that, "most countries believed that China should become a participant, as well as Taiwan and Hong Kong, as major regional economies, *if* the difficulties surrounding their status could be overcome."¹⁹ On 15 May, the Australian minister of foreign affairs, Gareth Evans, expressed Canberra's desire to include Taiwan in the APEC regime: "Because of the importance of the Taiwanese economy and its links with other regional economies, we would also like to see Taiwan – although recognized by most potential participants as part of the PRC – *associated in some way with the initiative.*"²⁰

In May 1989, Woolcott met the Chinese premier, Li Peng 李鹏, foreign minister, Qian Qichen 钱其琛, and the minister of foreign economic relations and trade, Li Lanqing 李岚清, in Beijing.²¹ China insisted that if APEC meetings were to be held at a formal, intergovernmental level, then only sovereign states should participate, not Taiwan and Hong Kong.²² Subsequently, Woolcott deferred the issue.

In Washington, DC, Woolcott met US officials and regional NGO leaders to discuss membership issues.²³ The focus was to establish APEC along the lines of a "six plus six" formula, with six ASEAN countries "counterweighted" by six non-ASEAN members in order to allow APEC to get off the ground and to assure ASEAN of its central role in the APEC regime.

According to Robert Zoellick, the US state department counsellor at the time, the immediate membership of the "three Chinas" would hinder the US objective of getting APEC started.²⁴ Furthermore, this formula was to convince ASEAN of its key role in the creation of APEC. From the outset, ASEAN members were ambivalent about the participation of the three Chinese economies.²⁵

16 Interview with a Taiwanese participant in the meeting, Taipei, 28 October 1997.

17 "Unspecific Pacific," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 May 1989, 144(19), 20.

18 These included New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN member states.

19 Woolcott 1994.

20 Evans 1989; Evans and Grant 1991, 126. Emphasis added.

21 Woolcott 1994.

22 Funabashi 1995, 65.

23 Australian Background 1989; a private correspondence between an American PBEC participant and his Taiwanese counterpart, 24 May 1989; interview, Richard H. Solomon.

24 Telephone interview with Robert Zoellick, Washington, DC, 1 April 1998. Also see interview, Richard H. Solomon.

25 Bonnor 1990, 61.

Some were against including China without Hong Kong and Taiwan for fear that ASEAN's collective voice would be muted.²⁶ Others were suspicious of Taiwan, dreading that the latter's friendly ties with Washington would threaten ASEAN's position.²⁷

In Washington, Woolcott gave an American member of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC), another regional NGO, the briefing papers on the Australian initiative. On 24 May, these papers were sent to Koo, deputy international president of PBEC at that time. Given Koo's close relations with the Taiwanese authorities in his capacity as a member of the Central Standing Committee of the ruling Kuomintang, these papers must have reached the Taiwanese government.²⁸

After Woolcott's second-round trip came the Tiananmen Incident on 4 June 1989, which resulted in Beijing's temporary diplomatic isolation. The Tiananmen Incident helped to reinforce the existing consensus among the initiators of APEC that it should be launched on a "six plus six" basis. On 7 July, the US secretary of state, James Baker, stressed that the China-Taiwan issue was a political problem of long standing, and that Washington preferred to establish APEC using a "six plus six" formula.²⁹

By this time, it was certain that Taiwan would not be included in the initial APEC membership. The major reasons were Beijing's opposition to Taipei's membership, the consensus on launching APEC with a smaller group of 12 members, and ASEAN's worry that its own position would be undermined if the "three Chinas" were included from the start. The revulsion created by Tiananmen did not cause the exclusion of the "three Chinas" from the 1989 meeting. At a Senior Official Meeting (SOM) held in September in Sydney, it was decided that the three entities would not be admitted to the inaugural meeting. Nevertheless, Taiwan continued to lobby for membership. At the September PECC meeting in New Zealand, Koo argued that since PECC had decided to support APEC, PECC should demand that Canberra invite all the PECC member countries, including Taiwan, to the meeting.

Meanwhile, Taiwan was offered some conciliatory arrangements that would allow it to be "associated" with the inaugural meeting. As Frederick Chien 錢復, Taiwan's then-foreign minister, recalled, "We were allowed to send one or two people to Australia so as to establish contacts with APEC delegations outside the formal meeting."³⁰ The Taiwanese delegation included Tzu-dan Wu 吳子丹, C.F. Koo, and C.K. Chang 張錦崑.³¹ Wu was a career diplomat, Koo

26 Funabashi 1995, 65.

27 Koo 1989.

28 Woolcott's visit to Taipei was not included in his published official itinerary. Interview with C.K. Chang, an economist from a think tank run by Koo's conglomerate, who was involved in the diplomatic process, Taipei, 28 October 1997.

29 Baker 1989.

30 Interview with Frederick Chien, former minister of foreign affairs, Taipei, 24 October 1997.

31 Interview, C. K. Chang; Koo 1989; Huang, Shuling. 1991. "Guzhenfu yu Yataijinghehui" (C.F. Koo and APEC), *Lianhe bao*, 30 September.

was the deputy international president of PBEC, and Chang was an economist from Koo's think tank. Owing to his position in PBEC, only Koo was formally invited to the APEC opening banquet.³²

By utilizing the connections he had established in regional NGOs since 1969, Koo collected information for Taipei and lobbied for Taiwan's membership during meetings with officials and his NGO counterparts during the 1989 meeting. On 5 November, he met Japanese and South Korean ministers, and the Indonesian PECC representative, Jusuf Wanandi. He also phoned Richard H. Solomon seeking American support. During the banquet, Koo lobbied the Australian prime minister, Robert Hawke, the Australian foreign minister, Gareth Evans, as well as the Singaporean representative, Lee Hsien Loong 李显龙, for Taiwan's membership. According to Evans, Beijing criticized Canberra for inviting Koo to the banquet, and refused to send the Chinese ambassador to Australia and the Chinese PECC delegate to the event. Some participants expressed their support for Taipei and suggested that Taiwan should work out a feasible formula.³³

On 7 November, APEC members discussed the expansion issue. The positive attitudes of South Korea, Japan and Canada were countered by ASEAN's reservations, and no conclusion was reached. In March 1990, the first SOM in Singapore concluded that, on this issue, it would be necessary to proceed by consensus despite internal discord over the question of timing and modalities.³⁴ The second SOM in May addressed the issue of admitting the "three Chinas" by establishing the principle of simultaneous participation, with still no resolution on the expansion of APEC.³⁵

Disagreement over enlarging APEC membership continued during the first few days of the second APEC ministerial meeting in July. While some ASEAN members considered the inclusion of the "three Chinas" as premature, others believed that their entry should take place as soon as possible.³⁶ A breakthrough emerged during a five-hour lunch attended only by the heads of the delegations.³⁷ Members agreed that consultations should proceed with the three economies, with a view to reaching modalities acceptable to all parties involved, for the simultaneous participation of the three as soon as possible.³⁸ Furthermore, the decision-making process would be a "collective" one. All consultations would be referred back to the ministers at APEC who would then reach a consensus on the final inclusion of the three.³⁹

32 Interview with Richard H. Fairbanks, former president of PECC, Washington, DC, 3 April 1998.

33 Koo 1989.

34 APEC 1990a.

35 APEC 1990b.

36 "No consensus on whether to admit China, Taiwan and HK," *Straits Times*, 31 July 1990.

37 Interview with Robert Fauver, former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Washington, DC, 1 April 1998.

38 APEC 1990c; Youngblood 1990.

39 Solomon 1990a; Youngblood 1990.

Behind this decision lay a complex political drama. First, Taiwan continuously lobbied for its inclusion, with its state and non-state actors working before, during and after the Singapore meeting.⁴⁰ As one participant recalled, “Taiwan’s role at that point was lobbying different delegations.”⁴¹ In contrast, Beijing reiterated its refusal to allow Taiwan and Hong Kong to become members because “they are territories.”⁴²

Second, Washington tried repeatedly to resolve the enlargement issue. State Department officials kept contact with Seoul, the designated host of the 1991 APEC, and worked closely with the Taipei representative in Washington, Mao-shih Ding 丁懋時. Taipei and Washington agreed that Seoul should take the lead in negotiating with Beijing. Washington viewed Seoul as a less difficult negotiating partner for the Chinese than the US would be. If Washington worked as a mediator, issues about its Taiwan policy would become part of the discussion and further complicate the negotiations. Concurrently, America knew that Seoul was willing to undertake such a project and it had confidence in the skill of the person chosen to undertake the mediation, Lee See-young. As Robert Fauver recalled, “Once America had made that determination to get the Koreans to work in the front, the US delegation worked behind the scenes during the surroundings of the meetings and Baker worked on the agreement at the lunch itself.”⁴³

A third complication involved the wording of the July agreement and ASEAN members. As one participant observed, “Technically it allowed ASEAN to say ‘we have not yet agreed’ but it got the process going to see if there would be a solution ... So they still had a chance to say ‘no’ even though the process had started.”⁴⁴ From Washington’s standpoint, to maintain ASEAN’s comfort level was important for APEC, and “to maintain that comfort level was critical to answer the Three Chinas’ question.”⁴⁵

Formal negotiations

Following the July 1990 agreement, consultations began, with Seoul as the mediator and Beijing and Taipei as the concerned negotiating parties. Behind the scenes was the “silent but active bystander” – America.⁴⁶ The key players in the formal negotiations were diplomats from Seoul, Taipei, Beijing and Washington; Taiwanese non-state actors moved into the background.

Nine rounds of negotiations took place between October 1990 and October 1991. Taiwan negotiated with Korea alone three times; the rest of the

40 Interviews, C. K. Chang and Robert Fauver.

41 Interview, Robert Fauver.

42 Youngblood 1990.

43 Interview, Robert Fauver.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

negotiations were conducted between Korea and Taiwan, and Korea and China in a “simultaneous but non-overlapping” manner. There were no face-to-face negotiations between Beijing and Taipei. The negotiations took place in locations such as Beijing, Taipei, Seoul, Washington, DC, and New York.⁴⁷

In October 1990, the Taiwanese negotiator Tzu-dan Wu set out Taipei’s position in Seoul.⁴⁸ In January 1991, Lee embarked on his mission to incorporate the three entities into APEC. From 19 to 23 August, crucial negotiations took place in Seoul, with Korea proposing a compromise plan concerning Taipei’s designation within APEC.⁴⁹ However, no agreement emerged until the August SOM meeting in Kyongju. “Lee received the news by phone of Taipei’s acceptance when he was chatting with Bob Fauver in his hotel room, who congratulated him on the breakthrough,” wrote Yoichi Funabashi in his account of the negotiation.⁵⁰ APEC members then endorsed the secret Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), which set out the terms for the expansion of APEC, and announced that the “three Chinas” would participate in the November ministerial meeting.⁵¹

In late September in New York, the final agreement on the wording of the Korea–PRC MOU and the Korea–ROC MOU was reached at midnight before the morning that the Chinese foreign minister was due to leave. The signing of the Korea–PRC MOU on 2 October was followed by the signing of the Korea–ROC MOU on 15 October, concluding the pertinent negotiations.

It is noteworthy that Washington had continued to work behind the scenes trying to find a solution. As Fauver recalled, “During the discussions, from the beginning to the end, we talked to all participants on a number of different occasions, trying to move all sides towards the middle.”⁵² Furthermore, Washington continued to express its support for Lee and the proposed enlargement.⁵³ As Fauver noted, “All three sides knew that they could not split us from See-young. That was important to the process.”⁵⁴ During the US–Korea summit on 2 July, US president, George Bush, supported the enlargement.⁵⁵

Once the negotiations had started, thorny questions pertaining to the sovereignty dispute between Beijing and Taipei were brought to the negotiation table. These included issues such as the timing of membership, the name of participants, the level of representation, the ministries of representation, as well as the future hosting of APEC meetings. Procedural questions were also negotiated, such as who would enter the door first, and whether there would be the use of

47 Chang, John 1991; interview with John Chang, vice-minister of foreign affairs at the time, Taipei, 24 March 2015.

48 Yin, Nai-jing 1991.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Funabashi 1995, 74.

51 APEC 1991.

52 Interview, Robert Fauver.

53 Solomon 1990b; US Department of State 1991.

54 Interview, Robert Fauver.

55 Solomon 1991; interview, Frederick Chien.

national flags.⁵⁶ As Lee recalled, the two sides were initially “far apart and compromise seemed elusive,”⁵⁷ with both merely agreeing not to use flags in the meetings, a consensus that had already been reached when APEC was established.

The contrasting focus of the two sides loomed large, with Taiwan concerned about substance while Beijing concentrated on process. One American official observed that, “Taiwan was interested in the substance of APEC first and the process second. My foreign ministry friends in Taiwan understood the longer-term interest was more on the substantive benefits of APEC than on the diplomatic benefits ... Conversely, for Beijing, the focus was on process first, process second and process third, with a focus on substance coming in last.”⁵⁸ On the issue of timing, for example, Beijing initially suggested that the PRC should be the first to be admitted, and hold the right to veto new applicants.⁵⁹ Others, however, insisted on the simultaneous admission of all three in accordance with a prior principle established by APEC.

Taipei’s designation was a sticking point in negotiations. Both sides were initially poles apart on this topic. Taiwan first put its official name, “ROC,” on the table; however, this was rejected by the PRC. Beijing demanded that Taipei should agree to enter APEC as a province of China, under the name of “Taipei-China” or “Taiwan-China.”⁶⁰ Taiwan disagreed. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) model and the formulation proposed in General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations were also tabled for discussion.⁶¹ While Taipei intended to choose a name that would not imply the inclusion of Taiwan as part of the PRC, Beijing favoured names that would not signify Taiwan’s independence from the mainland.⁶² Eventually, Lee put forth “Chinese Taipei,” known as the Olympic model, and both sides agreed.⁶³

Equally thorny was the protracted question of who would represent Taipei in APEC. Taipei initially insisted on sending its foreign minister to APEC meetings, on an equal footing to Beijing’s representation, but Beijing disagreed. Subsequently, Taiwan agreed that only its ministers in charge of APEC-related economic affairs would attend the meetings, and not its foreign minister or vice-foreign minister. The Taipei delegation could, however, include officials of foreign and other ministries at or below the level of department directors.⁶⁴ As Frederick Chien explained, “Foreign ministers attend APEC mainly to conduct private bilateral talks outside the formal meetings, whereas APEC is a forum to discuss issues of a non-political nature. So whether our foreign minister attends

56 Ibid.

57 Funabashi 1995, 73.

58 Interview, Robert Fauver.

59 Interview, Richard H. Solomon.

60 Chang, John 1991, 332; Funabashi 1995, 74.

61 Chang, John 1991, 315; interview, Robert Fauver. For the ADB model, see Hsieh 1994; Deng 1997, 72; interview with Samuel Hsieh, former ADB staff member, Taipei, 4 November 1997.

62 Interview, Robert Fauver; Chang, John 1991, 332.

63 Chan 1985.

64 Funabashi 1995, 74–75.

APEC would not influence our main interest ... Because APEC discusses trade matters, we insist on the participation of our minister of economic affairs. We have to be treated as an equal in this regard.”⁶⁵

Factor Analysis

Arguably, Taipei succeeded in joining APEC because of a combination of factors emanating from Taiwan’s external and domestic environments as well as from the diplomatic process. The external environment focuses on the trend of regionalism and on the China factor, whereas the domestic environment refers to political and economic changes at home.

External and domestic changes

The first external factor refers to the shift in regionalism in the Asia-Pacific region. For nearly three decades prior to APEC’s inception, regionalism was characterized by a bottom-up approach with a strong societal involvement because of deepening regional economic interaction. The formation of APEC, however, signalled a shift towards state-led economic regionalism, driven by a sense of economic insecurity among some members in the face of a multilateral trading system under threat. This shift created problems for Taiwan’s accession because of Taipei’s status as a contested state. While Taiwan’s business leaders had forged stronger connections with their regional counterparts and influences in regional NGOs, its state actor was unable to join the inaugural IGO in 1989.

However, the long-standing bottom-up development of regionalism created opportunities for Taiwan’s accession because it enabled Taiwanese business leaders to take part in regional NGOs and thus enhanced their ties with their regional counterparts. They utilized these NGOs as platforms of diplomacy to help Taipei’s bid for APEC membership in pursuit of national interests. Because of Taiwan’s contested statehood, these informal diplomatic channels became important in partly alleviating Taipei’s isolation for the sake of gaining APEC membership.

The second external factor refers to China’s domestic transition, namely the Tiananmen Incident and Deng Xiaoping’s 邓小平 economic reforms after 1978. Some contend that the Tiananmen Incident led to the exclusion of the three Chinese economies from the inaugural APEC meeting; yet, if it were not for the Tiananmen Incident, China would have been invited to Canberra in 1989, which might have created more obstacles to Taiwan’s entry.⁶⁶ This explanation is problematic in that the exclusion of the three entities from the Canberra meeting primarily resulted from a consensus to start APEC with a smaller grouping, and such a consensus predated the Tiananmen Incident. As Fauver argued,

65 Interview, Frederick Chien.

66 Bonnor 1990, 60; Yin, Nai-jing 1991.

“I don’t think it [Tiananmen] affected the membership question or the timing of the membership question.”⁶⁷

However, the Tiananmen Incident indirectly influenced Taiwan’s accession. With its strategic position eroded by the East–West détente in the late 1980s and its international reputation damaged because of Tiananmen, China suffered a severe blow to its international importance. Accordingly, it had less bargaining power vis-à-vis the relevant parties regarding Taipei’s accession. Furthermore, Tiananmen challenged the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime. To make up for legitimization deficits, Beijing aspired to improve its foreign relations so as to restore its great-power status and to regain its international acceptance.⁶⁸ Although hardliners became dominant following the Tiananmen Incident, the CCP would still have to pursue an open-door policy in order to sustain economic growth, which would be central to regime legitimacy. Hence, friendly relations with the West were deemed important. The aftermath of Tiananmen thus reinforced China’s desire for membership of APEC. Given APEC’s preference for Taipei’s accession, Beijing had to make concessions on Taiwan’s admission during the negotiations, which began just months after Tiananmen, in order to make its own accession possible.

Deng’s post-1978 economic reforms included the expansion of trade and the encouragement of foreign investment.⁶⁹ China’s links with the international economy deepened, especially in the Asia-Pacific region,⁷⁰ and Beijing decided to embrace international economic organizations, including APEC.⁷¹ These changes were conducive to Taiwan’s APEC membership because China consequently saw multiple economic interests in Beijing’s APEC accession. The membership could help Beijing manage its relations with pertinent market-oriented economies, engage in economic rule-making, seek foreign resources for economic cooperation, and pursue trade liberalization. APEC’s aim to save a shaky multilateral trading system further matched China’s interest as a growing trading power. Owing to the aforementioned political and economic considerations, China could not afford to be excluded. Hence, the principle of simultaneous participation increased the costs to Beijing of its initial move to block Taipei’s membership.

Taiwan’s domestic transition in the late 1980s created further boosts to its APEC membership. Politically, the move towards pragmatic diplomacy after 1988 was conducive to accession because Taipei was no longer constrained by the zero-sum rationale that had dictated its strategy towards IGO membership. Economically, Taiwan’s trade liberalization reinforced its preference for joining APEC, and its increasing economic regional links through overseas investment,⁷²

67 Interview, Robert Fauver.

68 Kim 1995, 466.

69 Shirk 1996.

70 Hartland-Thunberg 1990, 55–62; Lardy 1994, 71.

71 Deng 1997.

72 In 1989, Taiwan’s investment ranked second in the Philippines. In 1990, Taiwan was the number one foreign investor in Malaysia. See Cheng 1992, 42.

intra-regional trade, and technology transfers made it more attractive to APEC. The formation of APEC was driven by an urgent regional need to establish a grouping in order to secure an open trading system, and APEC recognized that Taiwan's accumulated economic power could enhance the collective strength of the regime. This demonstrates that the well-documented economic statecraft was functioning. Taiwan's economic clout further facilitated the active engagement in regional NGOs of its business leaders, which, in turn, contributed to Taiwan's bid.

Effects of the decisions by APEC

Enabling factors emanating from the diplomatic process included two decisions by APEC prior to negotiations. The first was to define APEC as an organization composed of "economies" rather than "states." The second referred to the principle of simultaneous participation. Arguably, these rules were the accommodations APEC made in order to facilitate Taiwan's inclusion, because the IGO regarded Taiwan, despite its contested statehood, as an asset to the nascent regime because of its economic power.

Each rule influenced the negotiations as follows. The first decision, made in 1989, aimed to make the involvement of Taiwan (and Hong Kong) possible.⁷³ Specifically, the rule was to bypass the issue of statehood and sovereignty that had irritated Beijing over Taipei's IGO membership, thereby minimizing the emergence of political disputes in negotiations on enlargement.

The second principle of simultaneous participation, as argued above, constrained Beijing's manoeuvrability to block Taipei's inclusion. If the PRC blocked Taiwan's membership, it would be excluded as well.⁷⁴ Once the price of exclusion became too high because of its aforementioned interests, Beijing had to accept this rule in order to join the regime.

Concessions by Beijing and Taipei amid APEC incentives

Another enabling factor from the diplomatic process resulted from concessions made by Taipei and Beijing partially because of perceived incentives offered by APEC membership. As William Habeeb argues, "All negotiations involve concessions and all successful negotiations involve convergence."⁷⁵ Both parties made concessions during the negotiations, finally reaching a convergent point from their initially disparate positions over Taiwan's membership. Because perceived political and economic incentives offered by APEC made the price of exclusion exceedingly costly, concessions became desirable.

73 Interview, Richard H. Solomon.

74 Interviews, Frederick Chien and Richard H. Solomon.

75 Habeeb 1988, 28.

Beijing's major concession was to consent to Taiwan's membership, thereby agreeing to a format that would allow dual Beijing–Taipei membership of the new IGO. Before the launch of APEC, Beijing had insisted that members should be limited to sovereign states in order to keep Taiwan and Hong Kong out of the IGO. In July 1990, Beijing reiterated the same stance. In the initial rounds of negotiations, however, Beijing gave consent to Taipei's membership on condition that Taiwan would join APEC as a province of China. It eventually agreed to terms that would allow Taipei to become a member but which would not necessarily imply that Taiwan was a province of China. Nonetheless, it still managed to prevent Taiwan from using its official designation and to limit the political presence of Taipei in APEC by ruling out the participation of its foreign minister and vice-foreign minister. Arguably, China's concessions demonstrated, as of the early 1990s, what Gary Klintworth describes as a growing Chinese tolerance of Taiwan's new international role.⁷⁶

Beijing's concessions can be partly explained by the strong economic and political incentives offered by APEC membership. In economic terms, as argued earlier, APEC attracted China because it could offer the country multiple benefits. First, APEC's objective to push the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of negotiations would also be in China's interest as a growing trading power. According to a Chinese official, APEC membership dovetailed with Beijing's outward-oriented economic reforms.⁷⁷ Second, China aspired to engage with this rule-making regional mechanism in order to create a predictable environment for its economic development.⁷⁸ Finally, Beijing regarded its accession to APEC as useful to its GATT membership.

Politically, APEC membership was attractive to Beijing for two reasons. First, the regime created a regional setting in which Beijing could pursue its bilateral diplomacy outside formal discussions.⁷⁹ For instance, after its admission to APEC in Seoul, the Chinese delegation met the Korean president, Roh Tae Woo, to discuss bilateral issues, paving the way for the normalization of Beijing–Seoul relations in 1992. Second, accession served as a political asset for Beijing because it marked China's return to the international community after Tiananmen.

Taipei yielded mainly its name and level of representation of its delegation to APEC. As illustrated above, even before the negotiations Taipei had recognized the external constraints imposed upon its pursuit of membership and indicated its willingness to concede regarding its designation in APEC. Although Taipei put its official designation on the negotiation table, it was highly likely that Taipei knew that it would attend APEC using a different name.

That Taipei viewed joining APEC as a priority was clear from the outset. According to Chien, "There is a total consensus in the government that we should

76 Klintworth 1995, 505.

77 *Zhongguo shibao* 1991.

78 Klintworth 1995, 497.

79 Deng 1997, 62.

participate. The only concern is how we can minimize damage to our country. If we do not participate, it will violate our logic of pragmatic diplomacy.”⁸⁰

In order to achieve its objective of joining APEC, considering the strong economic and political incentives offered by membership, Taipei was ready to make concessions. In economic terms, APEC appealed to Taiwan for four reasons. First, APEC aimed at maintaining an open trading system, which served Taipei’s economic interests as an aggressive export maximizer. Second, accession would help Taipei to manage its interdependence with neighbouring countries.⁸¹ Third, Taiwan shared APEC’s objective of economic liberalization. Fourth, Taiwan could use APEC to seek support for its GATT membership.

In political terms, membership would provide both symbolic and substantive gains for Taiwan because APEC would become the first IGO that Taipei had joined since 1971, despite Chien’s claim that the main reason for Taiwan’s accession was “economic, not political” considerations.⁸² Symbolically speaking, the act of entering its first IGO since the inception of its contested statehood would enhance Taiwan’s official visibility and improve its international standing. More importantly, Taiwan could use APEC to promote its interests of “dual recognition”; by concurrently becoming a member together with the PRC, Taipei could seek de facto recognition from APEC members of two separate political entities on each side of the Taiwan Strait. After all, confirmed states could grant Taiwan, as a contested state, de facto recognition through participation in multilateral conferences with the latter.⁸³ Besides, accession could help Taipei improve its political legitimacy at home by presenting the IGO membership to its domestic audience as a product of the success of its pragmatic diplomacy in response to the growing desire among its constituents to expand Taiwan’s international space. As for substantive political gains, membership could enable Taiwan to establish high-level bilateral diplomatic channels with its neighbours, channels that had been largely blocked since 1971 because of its contested statehood.

In sum, both political rivals, partly driven by the perceived gains from their membership of APEC, put accession as the first priority, and thus made concessions in order to achieve their top objective.

Convergence of interests among actors other than Beijing and Taipei

During the diplomatic process leading up to the first enlargement of APEC, the impact of what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye describe as “the multiple

80 Interview, Frederick Chien.

81 Interview with Chiang Pin-k’un, former vice-minister of economic affairs, Taipei, 10 November 1997.

82 Hu, Yu-li. 1991. “Duo zuo shaoshui jiaru yataijinghehui Nanhan youzou liang’an he Xianggang sanfang tongshi ruhui queshi youkeneng” (Doing more and talking less: South Korea’s shuttle diplomacy involved both sides of the Strait and Hong Kong and may lead to simultaneous participation by three parities), *Lianhe bao*, 21 July.

83 Geldenhuys 2009.

channels of contacts among societies”⁸⁴ became critical to Taipei’s accession. Besides the Chinese and Taiwanese officials, additional key players included Taiwanese business leaders, the Korean official mediator and American officials. Arguably, each player was driven by different interest calculations, and it was the convergence of their interests that contributed to Taiwan’s accession. Since the converging interests of Taiwanese and Chinese state actors have already been analysed, this section will examine the convergence of interests among the Taiwanese non-state actors and the Korean and American state actors.

First, Taiwanese business players utilized their private sector resources to facilitate Taipei’s accession because of their interest in ending their country’s international isolation, an interest which overlapped with that of the state. According to C.F. Koo, “There are many countries with which we do not have diplomatic relations, and in striving to join international organizations we must use the strengths of civil industry and business to influence representatives of each country and thus through them influence their governments.”⁸⁵ These non-state actors utilized regional NGO settings to lobby for Taiwan’s entry and gather information for Taipei. For instance, Taiwanese PECC members invited their NGO counterparts, especially those with influence over their governments, to Taipei to lobby for Taiwan’s membership.⁸⁶ They also used their NGO connections to gain acceptance as Taipei’s unofficial representatives when dealing at the official level, as illustrated by Koo’s attendance of the opening banquet of the inaugural meeting.

As Lawrence T. Woods argues, “There is a possibility that NGOs may at times be better at performing tasks of interest to states than states themselves or IGOs.”⁸⁷ While the Taiwanese state actor found the utility of formal diplomatic channels lacking because of its position as a contested state, its societal actors better served the state interests by utilizing their private sector resources, thereby bypassing barriers in the formal channels. Hence, multiple channels engineered by Taiwanese economic elites helped the state actor in its bid to join APEC. During the process, official channels did function, as demonstrated by the low-profile presence of a Taiwanese diplomat in the surroundings of the inaugural meeting and later by the diplomatic negotiations. However, these official channels were supplemented by unofficial ones, especially when the Taiwanese diplomat was excluded from the inaugural meeting. It was Koo who attended the opening banquet, whereas his official partner stayed outside the official gathering. By utilizing his “unofficial” status as the PBEC representative at the banquet, Koo pursued the official interest of Taiwan – to be admitted to the IGO. His unofficial status thus became blurred, yet his interest overlapped with that of his country.

Second, Korea’s mediation was important to Taiwan’s membership, and its success resulted from the special Taipei–Seoul–Beijing relationship and the

84 Keohane and Nye 1977, 24–25.

85 Wei 1992, 89.

86 Interview, C.K. Chang.

87 Woods 1993, 15.

well-respected diplomatic skill of the leading Korean negotiator. The diplomatic channels between Taipei and Seoul were smoother than those between other APEC members and Taipei because South Korea was the only APEC country that still recognized Taiwan. Moreover, Seoul was eager to normalize relations with Beijing, which made South Korea a less confrontational negotiating partner for China compared to other major APEC powers, such as the US and Japan. Seoul's success was also owing to the honed diplomatic skill of Lee. As Fauver commented, "his demonstrated objectivity in finding a solution was assumed to win the respect of parties negotiating the deal."⁸⁸

It was Seoul's perceived future interests that made it keen to conclude the negotiations. As the host of the 1991 meeting, Seoul saw the first enlargement, if achieved, as a way to enhance its international reputation.⁸⁹ In addition, the negotiation process would hopefully accelerate the normalization of Seoul–Beijing relations, and so formed part of its *Nordpolitik*.⁹⁰ The strategic calculation concerned the changing Seoul–Beijing–Pyongyang relationship. In the mid-1980s, the second wave of East–West détente began to affect the Korean Peninsula, resulting in a warming of ties between Seoul and Pyongyang.⁹¹ However, Seoul aspired to befriend Beijing and Moscow in order to gain the upper hand when dealing with Pyongyang. Seoul's economic calculation was aimed at deepening its business relations with China through the pursuit of normalization following accelerating bilateral commercial links since the 1980s.⁹²

Although Lee stressed that he took on the role of negotiator in his capacity as the chair of APEC SOM and not as a representative of Seoul,⁹³ the result of his endeavours benefited his government by bringing the Chinese delegation to Seoul, thereby facilitating bilateral high-level official meetings. The political returns to South Korea were later vindicated by the Seoul–Beijing joint communiqué on normalization on 24 August 1992.

Finally, the American support, driven by interest calculations, was conducive to the accession.⁹⁴ In economic terms, the US saw the importance of including the three economies because of their strong regional links and their individual comparative advantages, which could be useful to other APEC members. Taiwan could especially share its experience in developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with industrializing countries in APEC.⁹⁵

In strategic terms, Washington had three considerations. First, the US intended to maintain a strategic balance within the region, so having one (China) without the other (Taiwan) would cause problems. "I think it [to exclude Taiwan from APEC]

88 Interview, Robert Fauver.

89 Hoon 1991.

90 Ahn 1991, 816.

91 Lee 1990.

92 Clifford 1988.

93 Funabashi 1995, 74.

94 Ding 1992.

95 Interview, Richard H. Solomon.

would have been unfortunate to the regional stability and development both economically and strategically,” admitted Fauver. Second, the US remained behind the scenes while assisting Korea to work in the front for the enlargement in order to avoid a direct Sino-US confrontation.⁹⁶ Third, Washington chose Korea as the “stalking horse” owing to Seoul’s position as a reliable ally, and also because of its intention to assist Seoul in strengthening its ties with Beijing through the negotiation process. Seoul’s *Nordpolitik* aimed at moving closer to Beijing and Moscow so as to dominate relations with Pyongyang, which matched Washington’s strategic interest in establishing a counterforce against Pyongyang. In short, the US wished to help Korea become the mediator in order to move Seoul and Beijing together.⁹⁷

Creative solutions embodied in MOUs

The creative solutions embodied in the MOUs finally led to Taiwan’s accession. “Chinese Taipei,” Taiwan’s designation in APEC, was creative because it offered ample room for respective interpretation by Taiwan and the mainland. Both could choose to translate this English title for Taiwan into a different version of Mandarin Chinese to echo their respective interpretations of the status of Taipei. The PRC chose to call Taipei *Zhongguo Taipei* 中国台北 because *Zhongguo* was the Mandarin Chinese abbreviation for the PRC, a move that reflected Beijing’s sovereignty claim over Taiwan. However, Taiwan chose to call itself *Chung-hua Taipei* 中華台北 because *Chung-hua* was the abbreviation for the ROC. By doing so, Taipei could link its name in APEC to its official designation — at least in front of its Mandarin-speaking constituents.

Furthermore, three face-saving formulae were found for China in some parts of the MOUs, thereby ensuring Taiwan’s membership. First, the Taiwanese foreign minister should not attend APEC because China regarded the post as a symbol of Taipei’s political sovereignty. Second, the PRC–Korea MOU took note of Beijing’s position “that there is only one China,” which satisfied Beijing’s need to proclaim its status as the sole legitimate government of China. Third, the same MOU noted that “distinction should be made between sovereign states and regional economies as a basis for the consultations.” The wording of the MOU reveals Beijing’s intention to define itself as a sovereign state and Taiwan as a non-state. It could be argued that Beijing’s position was unilateral because the phrasing that preceded Beijing’s stated position in the MOU was “taking note of,” instead of “accepting” or “recognizing.” Besides, APEC defined all members as economies, so no distinction should be made between sovereign states and regional economies.⁹⁸ As Fauver commented, “If China made its own stance, that’s fine. However, it had no standing in the group and in the

⁹⁶ Interviews, Robert Zoellick, Richard H. Solomon, and Robert Fauver.

⁹⁷ Interview, Robert Zoellick.

⁹⁸ *Zhongguo shibao* 1991.

official document of APEC.”⁹⁹ Nevertheless, these unilateral pronouncements helped to make Taiwan’s accession possible.

Conclusion

Taiwan’s APEC accession was an important breakthrough in the contested state’s struggle to break its international isolation, which had lasted since 1971. The nuanced process leading up to this diplomatic watershed and the complex explanations of Taiwan’s success, as analysed above, demonstrate that the China factor does not single-handedly determine the timing and modalities of Taiwan’s IGO membership. In September 1991, Qian Qichen argued that Beijing had “taken the most flexible stance on the issue of Taiwan’s accession to APEC.”¹⁰⁰ However, as shown above, such flexibility is not the only major factor accounting for Taipei’s membership.

The accession has four positive effects on Taipei’s position as a contested state. First, recognition of Taiwan as a *de facto* state has increased since 1991 owing to the participation of confirmed states in APEC along with the Taipei delegation, although Taiwan’s international legal sovereignty has not necessarily improved accordingly. Second, APEC membership has enabled Taipei to engage in international cooperation with member economies on a wide range of issues, including narrowing the digital divide among members, anti-terrorism measures, and capacity building for SMEs. Consequently, Taiwanese officials have worked with their counterparts to deal with pertinent transnational issues, and these deepening intergovernmental linkages are key assets to Taiwan as a contested state.¹⁰¹ Third, APEC accession has helped Taipei mitigate legitimacy concerns at home that stem from its thwarted status as a normal state. For instance, the image of an envoy representing Taiwan’s president, side-by-side with other heads of state during the annual APEC summit, a practice established since 1993, has sent a powerful message to Taiwanese constituents that Taipei has a presence, albeit not of equal standing as that of its regional counterparts, at this regional summit.¹⁰² As a senior Taiwanese diplomat insisted, APEC membership makes Taiwanese constituents feel that their country “exists” on the international stage.¹⁰³ Fourth, APEC accession has enabled Taiwan to advance its interests through the conduct of bilateral diplomacy outside the formal meetings.

99 Interview, Robert Fauver.

100 Fu, Yi-chieh. 1991. “Qian Qichen: Taiwan xunqiu jiaru guanmaozongxie, Beijing lichang yizhi bijiao huanhe; Taiwan jiaru yataijinghehuiyi yong Zhongguo Taiwan mingcheng” (Qian Qichen: Beijing is relatively moderate concerning Taiwan’s attempted GATT accession; Taiwan to join APEC under the title of “Taiwan of China”), *Lianhe bao*, 28 September.

101 These officials are in charge of foreign, economic, financial, agricultural, health, judicial, interior and environmental affairs.

102 The summit comprises heads of state from its members and has been held since 1993, although Taiwan is barred from sending its president to the meeting. The Taiwanese president appoints a personal envoy, often agreed upon by the host country in advance, to represent Taipei at the summit.

103 Interview with a senior diplomat, Taipei, 3 April 2013.

For instance, outside the 1991 meeting, Taiwan made its first official contact with Japan at a ministerial level since Tokyo severed ties with Taipei in 1971.

As for the major implications for Taiwan's continuous struggle as a contested state, the study shows that many external actors have facilitated Taipei's accession, thereby challenging Beijing's delineation of the Taiwan issue as an "internal" affair. For its future IGO memberships, Taipei should avoid any unqualified reliance on negotiations with Beijing because it may reinforce Beijing's claims over Taiwan.¹⁰⁴ However, China's increasing power implies that Taiwan's struggle to expand its contested statehood will become more difficult. Even so, it is not enough for Taipei to rely on Beijing's goodwill in order to break its international isolation; Taiwan should also ensure that the functioning of economic statecraft and the conduct of sophisticated diplomacy in various major capitals through multiple channels will continue to be in place, and use favourable external and internal conditions, as they arise, to its advantage.¹⁰⁵

摘要: 本文探讨台湾身为一个受争议国家, 在 1991 年与中国大陆同时加入亚太经济合作会议的过程, 成因及影响。亚太经济合作会议是台北自 1971 年以来加入的第一个政府间国际组织。本文藉由分析精英访谈, 第一手以及第二手资料, 追溯此段未被充分探索的外交史。本文主张, 台北之所以能够成为该组织的会员, 主要是因为台湾内外环境的变化及外交折冲过程中的变因, 而非唯独凭藉中国因素。文章进而分析该会籍对于开拓台湾国际空间的四大正面效益, 以及对于台湾身为受争议国家的生存之道的启示。本文细緻入微地解析此一受争议国家在降低国际孤立的历程裡, 一个重要却受忽视的里程碑, 有助读者了解在台北与北京的主权争议下, 该国的对外关系。

关键词: 亚太经济合作会议; 受争议国家; 台湾与中国的主权争议; 利益趋同

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104 For Taiwan's international space since 2008, see Chan 2013; Wang, Lee and Yu 2011.

105 Interview with director-general of Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taipei, 5 August 2014.

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