

Is Cross-Strait Unification Possible?

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Abstract

Mainland China and Taiwan share a common people, history and culture, despite the political division which represents an artificial relic of the Cold War. The different political models followed by the two sides have made the possible integration between them difficult, though many parallels with the German reunification have pointed to the possible reunification of mainland China and Taiwan. While the existing literature on the prospects for the reunification of mainland China and Taiwan focuses primarily on the economic consequences of such unification, this paper examines the possibility of such reunification from a more global perspective that encompasses not only the economic dimension but other relevant dimensions as well, with the use of the GDRI Model which looks at regional integration simultaneously from political, social, economic and technological perspectives.

Keywords: mainland China, Taiwan, unification, GDRI Model, global development indices

1. Introduction

China has been divided into two political and economic entities since the civil war ended in 1949 with the establishment of the People's Republic of China by Mao Zedong on the mainland. Mainland China and Taiwan (Republic of China) share a common people, history and culture, despite the political

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division which represents an artificial relic of the Cold War. Continuous rapid growth and expansion of trade in the world context have transformed mainland China from a typical developing country into an economic powerhouse which is now the world's third largest economy. On the other hand, Taiwan experienced decades of constant economic growth from the 1960s until today. However, the different political models followed by the two sides have made the possible integration between them difficult until today, though many parallels with the German reunification which took place in the 1990s have pointed to the potential reunification of mainland China and Taiwan.

The existing literature on the prospects for the reunification of mainland China and Taiwan focuses primarily on the economic consequences of such unification. This is perfectly understandable in the light of the fact that the gaping difference in income levels between the two sides is now smaller compared to 30 years ago and the lower economic costs of such unification for Taiwan. On the other hand, the poor performance of the German economy since reunification has highlighted the potential adverse effects of unification for the economy in the case of mainland China and Taiwan. The central objective of this paper is to contribute to the literature on China integration by examining the possible reunification of mainland China and Taiwan from a more global perspective that encompasses not only the economic dimension but other relevant dimensions as well. To do so, we use the Global Dimension of Regional Integration Model (henceforth GDRI Model) developed by Ruiz (2004). The defining characteristic of the model, which we discuss in the next section, is that it looks at regional integration simultaneously from political, social, economic and technological perspectives. We apply the model to a comparative analysis of the development levels of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000-2009 period. Convergence has positive implications about the prospects for unification whereas divergence has negative implications.

2. The Global Dimension of Regional Integration Model (GDRI Model) and Its Application to a Comparative Analysis of Mainland China and Taiwan

The main objective of the GDRI Model is to provide policymakers and researchers a new analytical tool to study the evolution of any regional integration process from a global perspective encompassing the political, social, economic and technological dimensions. The simple and flexible model is based on a group of indexes and graphs, and it can be applied to any case of regional integration. The GDRI Model involves four basic phases. The first phase is the design of the multi-input database table. The second phase is the measurement of individual Regional Global Development Indexes

(Xi), which include the Regional Global Political Development Index (X1), Regional Global Social Development Index (X2), Regional Global Economic Development Index (X3) and Regional Global Technological Development Index (X4). The third phase is the measurement of the Regional Global Development (RGD) index. The last phase is the measurement of the Regional Integration Stage (RIS) index.

Let us now discuss each of the four basic phases, beginning with the design of the multi-input database table. Table 1 is an example of the multi-input database table and shows the global regional political development. “Global” refers to the multidimensional nature of political development and is represented by a wide range of political variables. “Regional” refers to the specific region of interest to the research. Therefore, in our case, global regional political development refers to the political development of mainland China and Taiwan as measured by the 15 political variables in Table 1. There is no reason why the number of variables in a multi-input database table should be constant and it can vary according to the objectives of the research and data availability. We can similarly construct multi-input database tables for the global regional economic, social and technological development.

Table 1 Multi-Input Database: Global Political Development

Code	Political Factors
<i>P.1.</i>	<i>External factors</i>
P.1.1.	Colonization (country)
P.1.2.	Group negotiation power
P.1.3.	Foreign policy influences
P.1.4.1.	Regional
P.1.4.2.	Global
P.1.5.	Negotiation style
<i>P.2.</i>	<i>Internal factors</i>
P.2.1.	International organizations support
P.2.3.	Political regime
P.2.4.	Legislative background
P.2.5.	Internal security
P.2.6.	Human rights
P.2.7.	Border problems
P.2.8.	Political stability
P.2.9.	Political structure and public administration
P.2.10.	Army size
P.2.11.	Bureaucracy level

The second phase of the GDRI-Model is to measure the Global Development Indexes (X_i) using the variables in the four multi-input database tables described above. The four Global Development Indexes are the Global Political Development Index (X_1), Global Social Development Index (X_2), Global Economic Development Index (X_3) and Global Technological Development Index (X_4). The data we input for each political entities in the region – in our case, mainland China and Taiwan are the political entities and China, encompassing the two, is the region – are based on statistical and historical data. Furthermore, all our data are binary – i.e. either 1 or 0 – and determined by either quantitative or qualitative criteria. An important reason for using binary data is that we attach the same level of importance to all the variables in our multi-input database tables.

Table 2 is an example of a multi-input database table with binary data inputted, and it shows the global political development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s. For example, the value for the variable “political regime” is 1 for a democracy and 0 for a non-democracy, and similarly, the

Table 2 Global Political Development of Mainland China (m) and Taiwan (t) in the 1980s

Code	Political Factors	m	t
<i>P.1.</i>	<i>External factors</i>		
P.1.1.	Colonization (country)	0	0
P.1.2.	Group negotiation power	0	0
P.1.3.	Foreign policy influences		
P.1.4.1.	Regional	1	0
P.1.4.2.	Global	0	0
P.1.5.	Negotiation style	0	0
<i>P.2.</i>	<i>Internal factors</i>		
P.2.1.	International organizations support	0	1
P.2.3.	Political regime	0	1
P.2.4.	Legislative background	0	1
P.2.5.	Internal security	1	1
P.2.6.	Human rights	0	1
P.2.7.	Border problems	0	0
P.2.8.	Political stability	0	0
P.2.9.	Political structure and public administration	0	0
P.2.10.	Army size	0	0
P.2.11.	Bureaucracy level	0	0
TOTAL		2	5
TOTAL (%)		14%	31%

value of the variable “human rights” is 1 if a country’s protection of human rights is strong and 0 if it is weak. The last two columns of Table 2 show the respective values for mainland China and Taiwan. The table shows the total to be 2 or 14 per cent and 5 or 31 per cent respectively for mainland China and Taiwan, hence the global political development of the two sides in the 1980s is 14 per cent and 31 per cent respectively.

We can similarly input binary data for all the variables in the multi-input database tables for social, economic and technological development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s. We find the global social development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s to be 39 per cent and 47 per cent respectively, the global economic development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s to be 30 per cent and 55 per cent respectively, and the global technological development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s to be 30 per cent and 60 per cent respectively.

The third phase of the GDRI model is to use the four Global Development Indices (X_i) we found in the model’s second phase – i.e. political, social, economic and technological – to estimate the Global Overall Development Index (X), which sums up the information contained in the four indices. Intuitively, the Global Overall Development Index (X) measures a country’s overall level of development from a multidimensional or global perspective encompassing political, social, economic and technological development. Furthermore, as we saw earlier, we measured political, social, economic and technological development themselves from a multidimensional or global perspective, using a wide range of variables relevant to the development of each sphere. The first step in estimating the Global Overall Development Index (X) is to plot the values of the four Global Development Indices (X_i). We compute the overall global development index (X) as the sum of the four areas – A_1 , A_2 , A_3 and A_4 . In computing A_1 , it is useful to think of the value of the Global Political Development Index (X_1) as the base and the value of the Global Social Development Index (X_2) as the height. We compute A_1 by first multiplying X_1 and X_2 , and then dividing their product by four. Similarly, we can compute A_2 , A_3 and A_4 by doing the same with the pairs (X_2 , X_3), (X_3 , X_4) and (X_4 , X_1), respectively. For example, for Taiwan, A_1 is 7.3 per cent since X_1 is 31 per cent and X_2 is 47 per cent. Likewise, we compute A_2 , A_3 and A_4 for Taiwan to be 13 per cent, 16 per cent and 9 per cent. Therefore, Taiwan’s overall global development index (X_i) is 48 per cent. We can similarly compute X for mainland China as 28 per cent. Therefore, in the 1980s, Taiwan’s overall development level was about five times higher than that of mainland China.

The fourth and final phase of the GDRI model is to use the four Global Development Indices (X_i) and coefficients to measure the Global Development Stage (Y) of mainland China and Taiwan. The coefficient

indicates the relative importance of the political, social, economic and technological dimensions, and sum up to one. For example, if we attach equal importance to the four dimensions, the coefficient for each dimension is 0.25. To obtain the Global Development Stage (Y), we first multiply the Global Development Index (Xi) with the corresponding coefficient – for example, the Global Political Development Index (X1) and the political coefficient – and then sum up the four products. Assuming that each of the four coefficients is 0.25, so that the four dimensions are equally important, we can compute the Global Development Stage (Y) for mainland China and Taiwan as 28 per cent and 48 per cent respectively in the 1980s. The large gap in Y between mainland China and Taiwan indicates a large gap between the two in terms of overall development.

The Global Development Stage (Y) is broadly similar to the Global Overall Development Index (X) since both reflect the overall development level of a country or a region. We define a value of Y between 0 per cent and 33 per cent as the underdeveloped stage, 34 per cent and 66 per cent as the developing stage, and 67 per cent and 100 per cent as the developed stage. Therefore, in the 1980s, mainland China was in the underdeveloped stage whereas Taiwan was in the developing stage. We should note that Y is more flexible than X in the sense that it allows us to attach any combination of relative weights to the political, social, economic and technological dimensions. For example, if we attach more importance to the political dimension than the other dimensions, the political coefficient may be 0.40 while the social, economic and technological coefficients may each be 0.20. More generally, we can flexibly vary the relative sizes of the four coefficients to suit our needs.

We now report the main results of our GDRI Model analysis of mainland China and Taiwan during the 1980s and the 1990s. Taiwan's Global Political Development Index (X1) increased from 31 per cent in the 1980s to 47 per cent in the 1990s and 59 per cent in the 2000-2009 period, which indicates that Taiwan has become progressively more politically developed over time. This reflects Taiwan's transformation from authoritarian military-based governments to a thriving pluralistic democracy. In contrast, the same index has remained a constant growth from 14 per cent in the 1980s till 38 per cent in the 2000-2009 period for mainland China in the three decades, which is hardly surprising given the almost unchanged political system on the mainland. The large and growing gap between mainland China and Taiwan in political development does not bode well for the prospects of reunification since common political values facilitate regional integration, as most clearly evident in the European Union.

The social development of Taiwan has moved significantly forward in the 1980s and 1990s, *vis-à-vis* the mainland, which has proved to make a lot of

progress in this area. Taiwan's Global Social Development Index (X2) rose from 47 per cent in the 1980s to 65 per cent in the 1990s and 75 per cent in the 2000-2009 period, which, to a large extent, reflects Taiwan's rapid economic development since basic social services such as healthcare and education tend to improve with a country's living standards. In stark contrast, the same index increased from 39 per cent in the 1980s to 45 per cent in the 2000-2009 period for mainland China. The large gap in social development between mainland China and Taiwan and the consequent costliness of integrating the social systems of the two sides has negative implications for unification.

The economies of mainland China and Taiwan have achieved rapid growth and development in the last 30 years. Taiwan's Global Economic Development Index (X3) has more than doubled, from 55 per cent in the 1980s to 70 per cent in the 1990s and 84 per cent in the 2000-2009 period. This is consistent with her radical transformation from a poor developing economy to a highly successful newly industrialized economy (NIE) that has become a model of economic development for the Third World. For mainland China, the same index has expanded from 30 per cent in the 1980s to 75 per cent in the 2000-2009 period. The economic development of mainland China is reflected in her rapid economic growth. The closing economic gap between mainland China and Taiwan generates favourable conditions to unify the two sides. It implies that the financial and economic costs of unification may be sustainably low for Taiwan. Taiwan has made substantial technological progress and has reached a high level of technological development, as evident in the evolution of its Global Technological Development Index (X4), which rose from 60 per cent in the 1980s to 70 per cent in the 1990s and 90 per cent in the 2000-2009 period. This is hardly surprising in the light of the fact that technological upgrading has been an essential ingredient of Taiwan's successful economy. On the other hand, China's X4 increase from 30 per cent in the 1980s to 45 per cent in the 1990s and 65 per cent in the 2000-2009 period. The small and closing technological gap between the two sides decreases the technological costs of unification and thereby has positive implications for the prospects of unification.

Table 3 summarizes the global development of mainland China and Taiwan in the political, social, economic and technological spheres during the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000-2009 period. Table 3 clearly shows an unmistakable difference between the two sides.

We now use the four Global Development Indices (Xi) to estimate the Global Overall Development Index (X) for mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. To repeat, the Global Overall Development Index (X) measures a country's overall level of development from a multidimensional perspective encompassing the political, social, economic and technological aspects. The evolution of each aspect over time confirms the picture of a

Table 3 Global Political, Social, Economic and Technological Development of Mainland China (m) and Taiwan (t) in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000-2009 Period

Variables	1980s		1990s		2000-2009	
	m	t	m	t	m	t
Political	14%	31%	28%	47%	38%	59%
Social	39%	47%	40%	65%	45%	75%
Economic	30%	55%	50%	70%	75%	84%
Technological	30%	60%	45%	70%	65%	90%

shorter gap between mainland China and Taiwan. Taiwan has managed to reach a high overall development level through rapid progress in all four areas while mainland China's overall development level continues to expand at a very high level.

We use the four Global Development Indices (X_i) and coefficients reflecting the relative importance of each X_i to measure the Global Development Stage (Y) of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. To repeat, the Global Development Stage (Y) is similar to the Global Overall Development Index (X) in the sense that both reflect a country's overall development level. Assuming that each coefficient is 0.25, so that the political, social, economic and technological dimensions are equally important, we compute the Global Development Stage (Y) for mainland China and Taiwan to be 28 per cent and 48 per cent respectively in the 1980s. Our computed value of Y rises to 70 per cent for Taiwan but falls even further to 50 per cent for mainland China in the 2000-2009 period. According to our earlier definitions, Taiwan has been well into the developed stage *vis-à-vis* the mainland. The large and growing difference in Y between the two sides mirrors growing difference in their overall development level.

3. Analysis on Viable and Sustainable Union

The results in this paper show that a viable and sustainable union between mainland China and Taiwan is very difficult to achieve. The economic and technological development gap between mainland China and Taiwan is narrowing decade by decade, but the social and political development gap between them is widening. The development gap between mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s was 17 per cent in terms of political development, 8 per cent in terms of social development, 25 per cent in terms of economic development and 30 per cent in terms of technological development. The development gap between mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s was not

so large as in the 1990s and the 2000-2009 period. The balance point between mainland China and Taiwan was large and difficult to reach by both sides. To do so, Taiwan needed to sacrifice from her political development -8 per cent, social development -4 per cent, economic development -12 per cent and technological development -15 per cent. For mainland China to arrive at the balance point in the 1980s, she needed to gain in political development +8 per cent, social development +4 per cent, economic development +12 per cent and technological development +15 per cent. The development gap and balance point in the 1980s meant that it was hard to facilitate the union of the two sides (see Table 4).

Table 4 Viable and Sustainable Union, 1980s

Variables	m	t	C	GD	BP	LC-m	LC-t
Political	14%	31%	45%	17%	23%	+8%	-8%
Social	39%	47%	86%	8%	43%	+4%	-4%
Economic	30%	55%	85%	25%	43%	+12%	-12%
Technological	30%	60%	90%	30%	45%	+15%	-15%

Notes: m = mainland China t = Taiwan C (China) = m + t

GD (Development Gap between mainland China and Taiwan) = $t - m$

BP (The Balance Point is the point that the two sides need to arrive for a possible viable and sustainable unification, e.g., mainland China and Taiwan):

$$BP = C/2$$

LC-m (Level of contribution of mainland China in the process of unification with Taiwan):

$$LC-m = BP - m$$

Negative result (-) = How much mainland China needs to sacrifice of her development to arrive at the balance point to generate a possible unification with Taiwan

Positive result (+) = How much mainland China needs to work to arrive at the balance point to generate a possible unification with Taiwan.

LC-t (Level of contribution of Taiwan in the process of unification with mainland China):

$$LC-t = BP - t$$

Negative result (-) = How much Taiwan needs to sacrifice of her development to arrive at the balance point to generate a possible unification with mainland China

Positive result (+) = How much Taiwan needs to work to arrive at the balance point to generate a possible unification with mainland China

In the 1990s the development gap continued decreasing: 19 per cent in terms of political development, 25 per cent in terms of social development, 20 per cent in terms of economic development and 25 per cent in terms of technological development. However, the balance point was less distant for Taiwan in comparison with mainland China. Taiwan needed to sacrifice more than mainland China to unify the two sides (see Table 4). In the case of mainland China, she needed to work harder to meet Taiwan at the balance point (see Table 5).

Finally, in the 2000-2009 period the development gap between mainland China and Taiwan was extremely small compared to the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2000-2009 period the development gap showed: 21 per cent in terms of political development, 30 per cent in terms of social development, 9 per cent in terms of economic development and 25 per cent in terms of technological development. The balance point in the 2000-2009 period between mainland China and Taiwan was relatively small and hence possible to arrive at by both sides. Taiwan needed to sacrifice more than mainland China in the last two decade (1980s and 1990s) in her political development -10 per cent, social development -15 per cent, economic development -4 per cent and technological development -12 per cent. In the case of mainland China, to arrive at the balance point in the 1990s required political development +10 per cent, social development +15 per cent, economic development +4 per cent and technological development +12 per cent. The small development gap and

Table 5 Viable and Sustainable Union, 1990s

Variables	m	t	C	GD	BP	LC-m	LC-t
Political	28%	47%	75%	19%	38%	+9%	-9%
Social	40%	65%	105%	25%	53%	+12%	-12%
Economic	50%	70%	120%	20%	60%	+10%	-10%
Technological	45%	70%	115%	25%	58%	+12%	-12%

Notes: As with Table 4.

Table 6 Viable and Sustainable Union, 2000-2009 Period

Variables	m	t	C	GD	BP	LC-m	LC-t
Political	38%	59%	97%	21%	49%	+10%	-10%
Social	45%	75%	120%	30%	60%	+15%	-15%
Economic	75%	84%	159%	9%	80%	+4%	-4%
Technological	65%	90%	155%	25%	78%	+12%	-12%

Notes: As with Table 4.

balance point in the 2000-2009 period for both sides generate possibilities for a possible union in the medium term (see Table 6).

We can say that the unification of the two sides has a cost for Taiwan, because Taiwan needs to sacrifice a lot of her political and social development to achieve the union, but in the case of mainland China, she needs to work harder to reach the balance point and reduce the development gap between the two sides. Therefore, a possible successful unification between mainland China and Taiwan is not easy to achieve.

4. Concluding Remarks

Unification is inherently a complex and multidimensional phenomenon entailing the unification of the two sides' economies, political systems, social systems, and a wide range of other societal hardware and software. The German unification of 1990 clearly illustrated this multidimensional nature. In this paper, we look at the prospects for the unification of mainland China and Taiwan by comparing their development from a multidimensional perspective rather than focusing solely on any single dimension. To carry out such a broader analysis, we use the Global Dimension of Regional Integration Model (GDRI Model) developed by Ruiz (2004), which evaluates the prospects for regional integration from a global or multidimensional perspective. More specifically, we use the GDRI model to examine and compare the political, social, economic and technological development of mainland China and Taiwan in the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000-2009 period. Our main finding is a large and growing gap between mainland China and Taiwan in terms of political, social, economic and technological development and consequently, overall development. Our analysis thus clearly reveals a divergence between mainland China and Taiwan rather than a convergence, which suggests that unification is likely to be a painful and disruptive process entailing large adjustment costs.

In terms of policy implications, our analysis suggests that while the large and growing political, social, economic and technological gap between mainland China and Taiwan is indeed a serious obstacle to integration and unification, policymakers would do well to appreciate the inherently multidimensional nature of unification. That is, unifying mainland China and Taiwan is not simply a matter of unifying two economies but also unifying the political, social and technological systems as well. This is a valuable lesson that is also highly relevant for policymakers in other countries pursuing closer integration. Our analysis provides support for the effort of diplomatically engaging the other side across the Strait and providing economic assistance in the sense that such a policy will slow down the momentum of divergence in the short run and promote convergence in the long run. The international

community also has a stake in facilitating the eventual unification through dialogue and assistance since convergence and stronger links between the two sides offer the best hopes for a peaceful solution.

At the same time, policymakers should pay closer attention to the non-economic aspects of convergence. Our analysis implies that a narrow policy approach based only on the economic aspect alone is likely to be misguided and unproductive since the lack of political convergence may hinder unification even if there is significant progress in terms of economic convergence, which in a way also lends support to the European Union's policy of requiring potential new members to pursue reforms in non-economic areas well as economic areas. Of course, economic convergence could indirectly promote convergence in the political, social and technological spheres as well. After all, materially better off societies tend to have more open political systems, provide better education and use more advanced technology. Be that as it may, in the light of our findings, policymakers would do well to take into consideration a more multidimensional perspective which has direct positive implications for multidimensional development and hence multidimensional convergence.

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