

Taiwanese Attitudes Towards Cross-Strait Relations: Findings from the Polls

ABSTRACT

Cross-strait relations have been the topic of great research due to its political nature and unresolved issues of contention. This report seeks to reexamine major cross-strait issues in light of recent developments and Taiwanese public opinion. We find that although Taiwanese recognize the necessity of cross-strait interaction, many are concerned about the level of China's influence in Taiwan. We also find that the majority of the public do not feel well represented by the current administration and is dissatisfied with President Ma's performance.



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TAIWANESE ATTITUDES TOWARDS
CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS:
Findings from the Polls

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ABOUT TAIWAN THINKTANK

Taiwan Thinktank conducts policy research, proposes policy recommendations, provides a platform for discussion involving both industry and academic professionals and informs the public on governmental and social issues. Taiwan Thinktank aims to strengthen Taiwan's democracy and encourage Taiwanese to be informed citizens and play an active role in improving Taiwan's political, economic and social stability.

Taiwan Thinktank aims to understand and explain the public's opinion on these key issues facing Taiwan today. Some of the questions addressed in this study are:

- How do Taiwanese identify themselves?
- Has President Ma acted accordingly with his campaign promises?
- Are Taiwanese concerned about Chinese influence in Taiwan?
- How do Taiwanese feel about the Cross-strait Agreement on Trade in Services?

METHODOLOGY

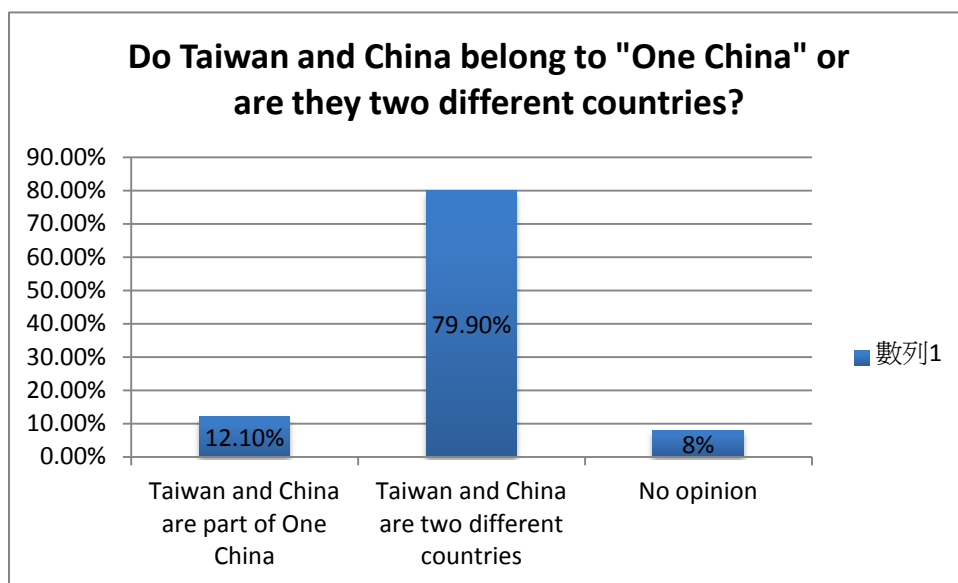
This report is a compilation of nine public opinion surveys by *Taiwan Thinktank*. Results are based on telephone interviews conducted 2012/3/19 to 2013/7/28¹, each consisting of 1,000 +/-50 adults, aged 20 and older. The polls are conducted using stratified random sampling from the full national household telephone database. Results have a 95% confidence level and a sampling error of +/- 3%.

¹ Survey dates: 2012/3/19, 2012/4/27, 2012/9/17, 2012/10/21, 2012/11/25, 2012/12/23, 2013/1/28, 2013/6/23, 2013/7/28

FINDINGS

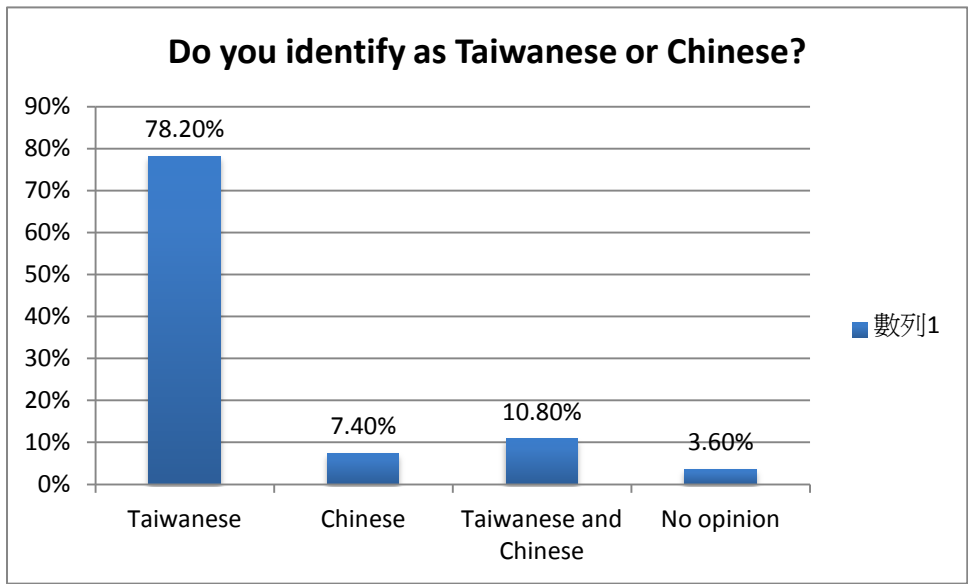
TAIWANESE IDENTITY

The number of people identifying them as Taiwanese has greatly increased over the past decades. The Taiwan Thinktank survey in June reported that 80% of Taiwanese recognize China and Taiwan as separate countries, 12% believe they are part of “One China” and 8% have no opinion.



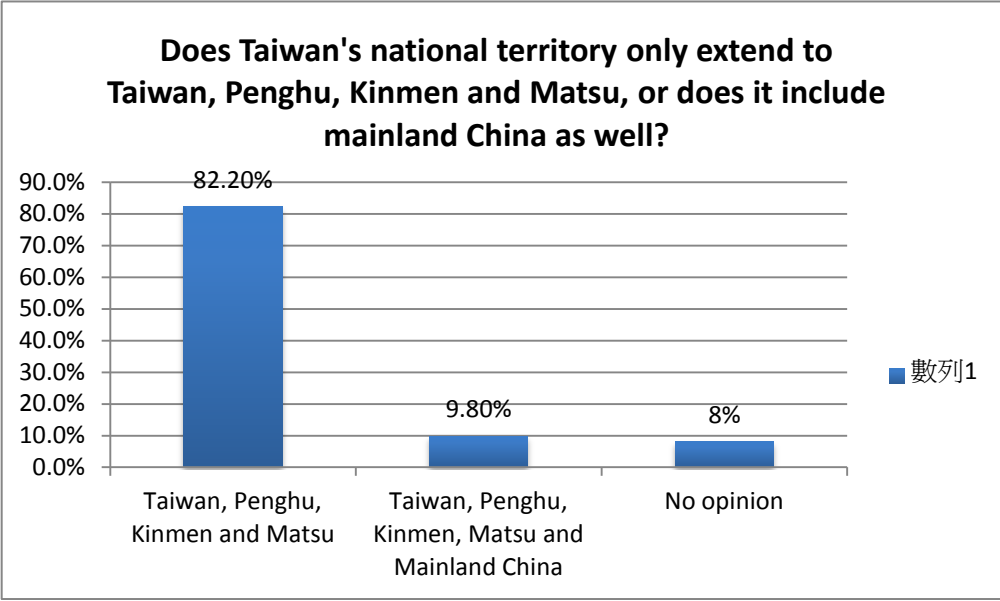
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

Regarding self identification, 78% view themselves as Taiwanese, compared to the 7.8% who view themselves as Chinese and the 10.8% who view themselves as both Taiwanese and Chinese.



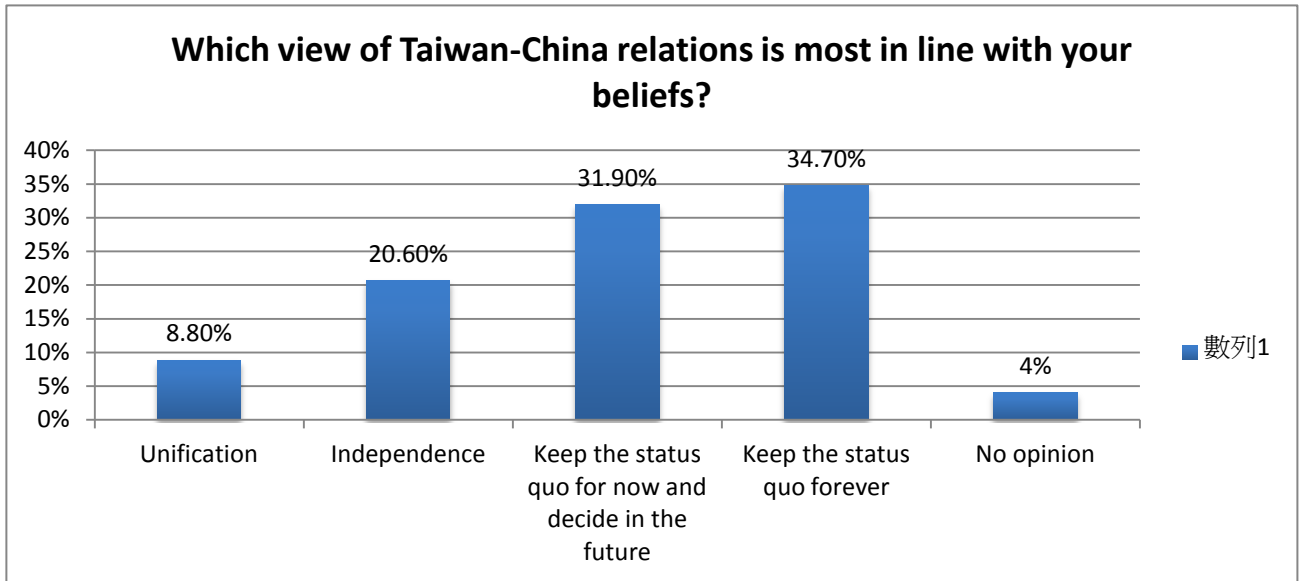
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

An overwhelming majority, 82% believe that Taiwan’s territory extends only to Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu and does not include Mainland China. 9.8% believe that Taiwan’s territory include mainland China and 8% have no opinion.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

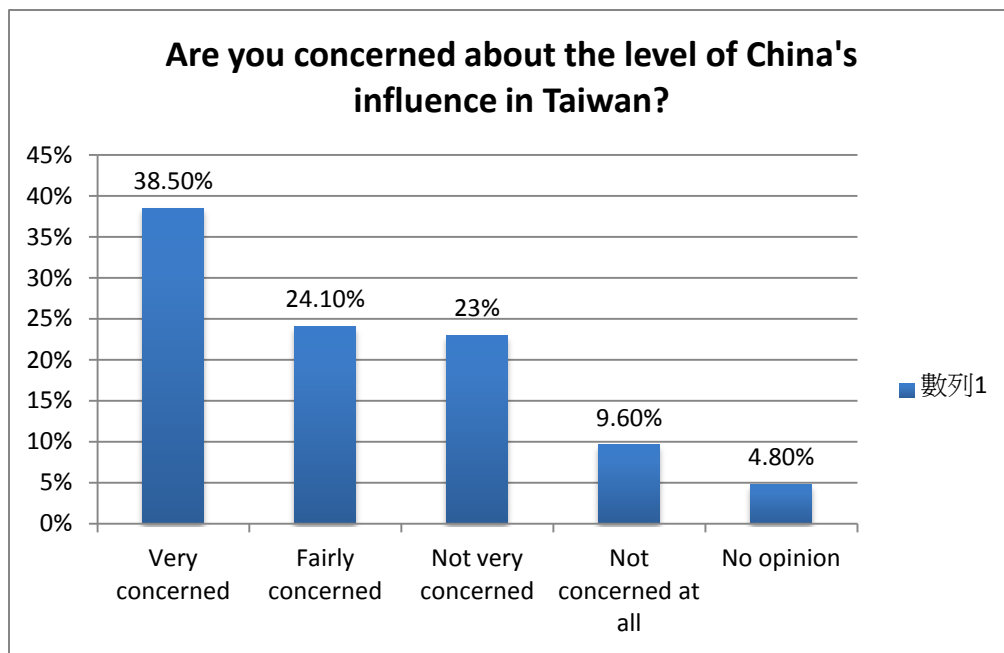
Concerning the relationship between Taiwan and China, the majority wants to maintain the status quo. A closer breakdown reveals that 20% want independence, 9% want unification and 67% want the status quo (35% want the status quo forever, 32% want the status quo and then to decide later).



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

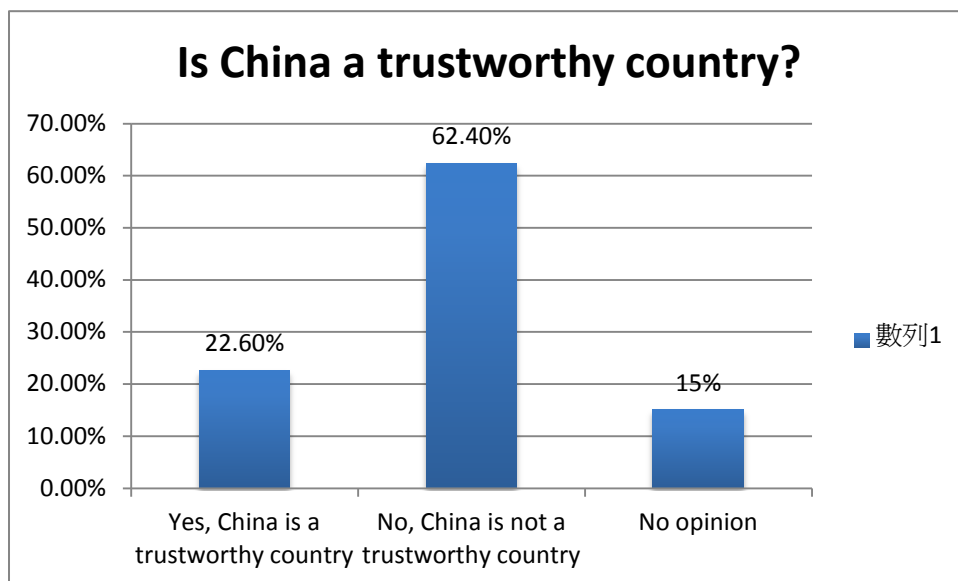
CHINESE INFLUENCE

In light of growing Taiwanese economic dependence and closer political ties with China, a recent survey asked Taiwanese if they were concerned about the level of Chinese influence in Taiwan. Results show that a combined majority of 62.6% are concerned (38.5% very concerned, 24.1% fairly concerned) and 32.6% are not (23% not very concerned, 9.6% not concerned at all).



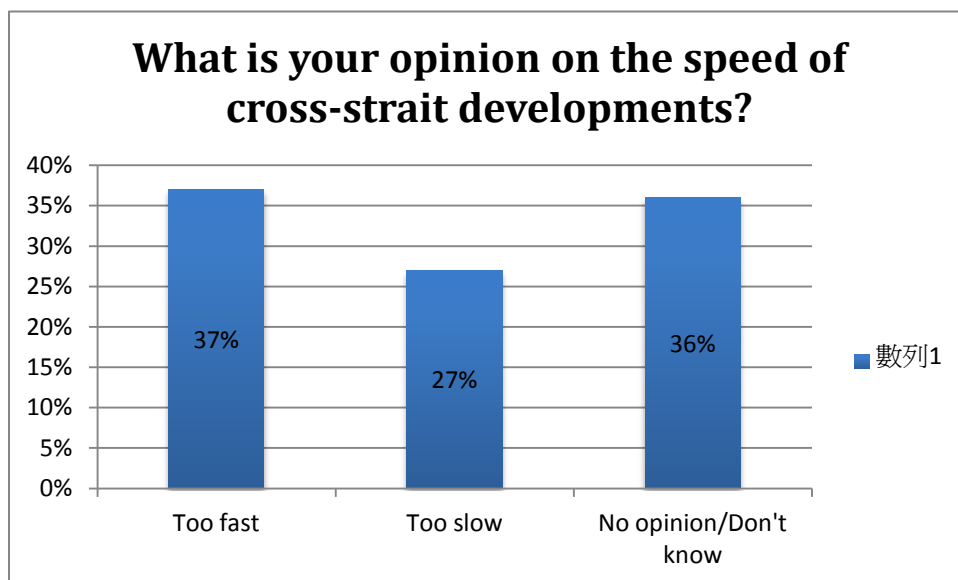
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

The lack of trust between Taiwanese public and China is seen in that 62% have indicated that they do not trust China and 23% indicating that they trust China.



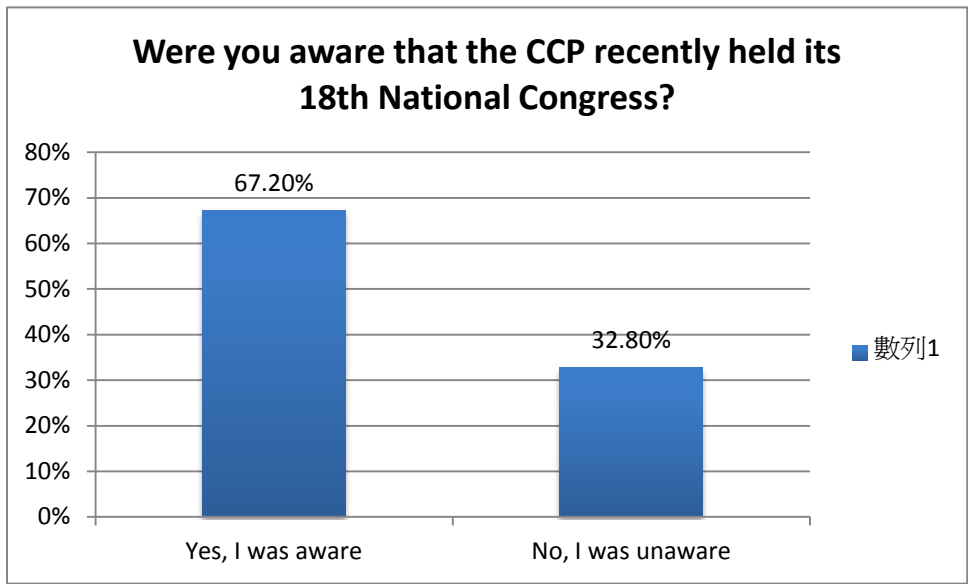
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, March 2012

This affects how the public views Taiwan-China relations. When asked about the speed of cross-strait developments, 37% believe it is too fast, 27% too slow.



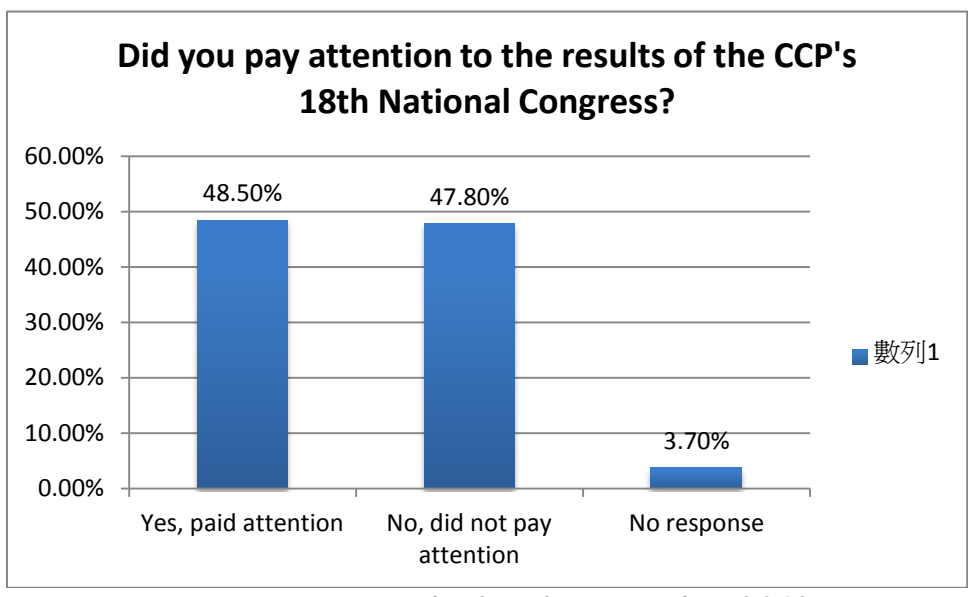
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, October 2012

However, although most of the Taiwanese are aware of China's major political events, there is relatively little attention to Chinese events. Taiwan Thinktank's public opinion survey shows, up to 67% of the public knew that the CCP recently held its 18th National Congress and 33% did not.



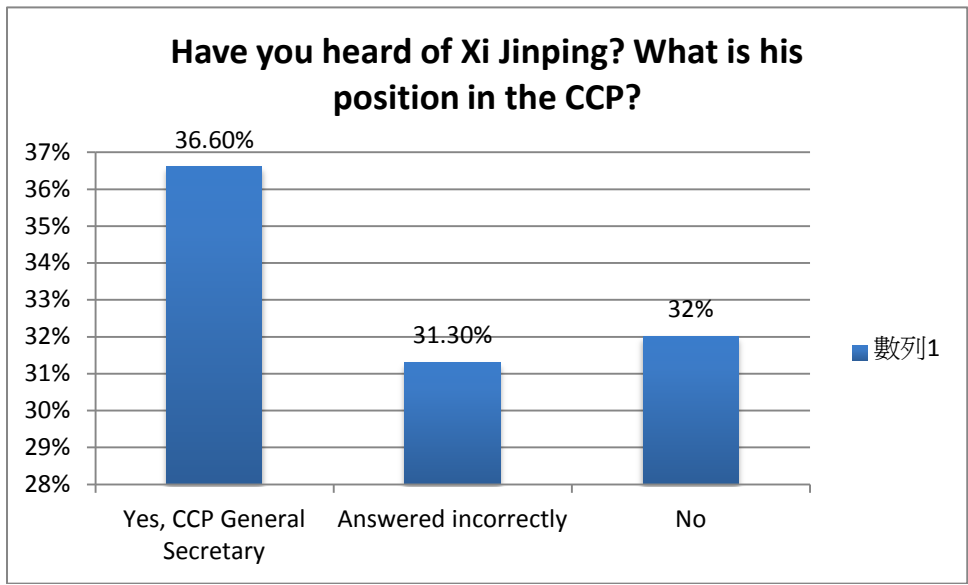
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, November 2012

However, responses were split regarding attention to the results: 48% did not pay attention to its results and 48.5% paid attention.



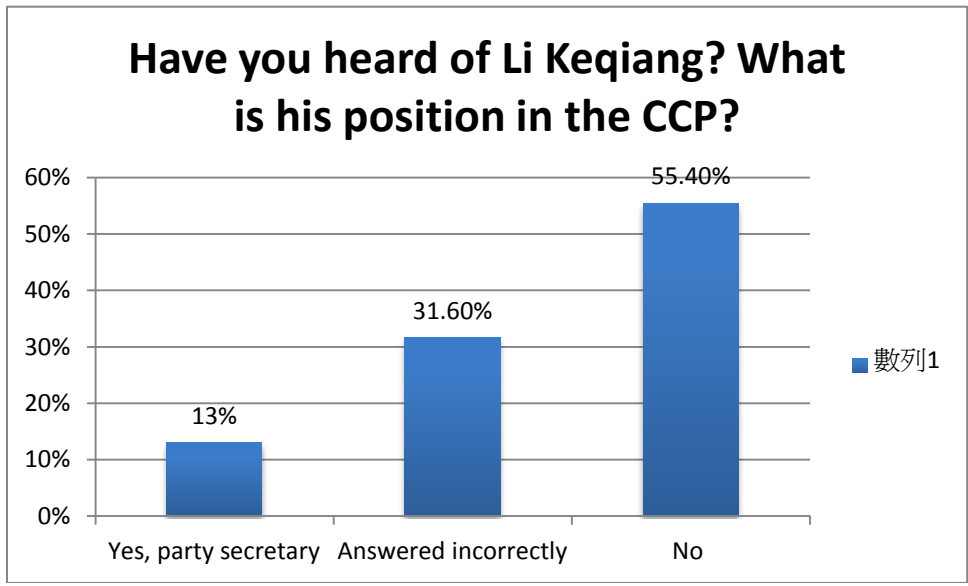
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, November 2012

The meeting involved a key power transition, with Hu Jintao handing the highest position of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to Xi Jinping, and the second highest position, premier, to Li Keqiang. When pollsters asked “Have you heard of Xi Jinping? What is his position in the CCP after the 18th National Congress?” a majority of Taiwanese 63% did not recognize the name Xi Jinping (a combination of those who answered incorrectly, 31.3% and those who responded no, 32%).



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Nov. 2012

Even more 87%, did not recognize the name Li Keqiang (31.6% answered incorrectly, 55.4 responded no).

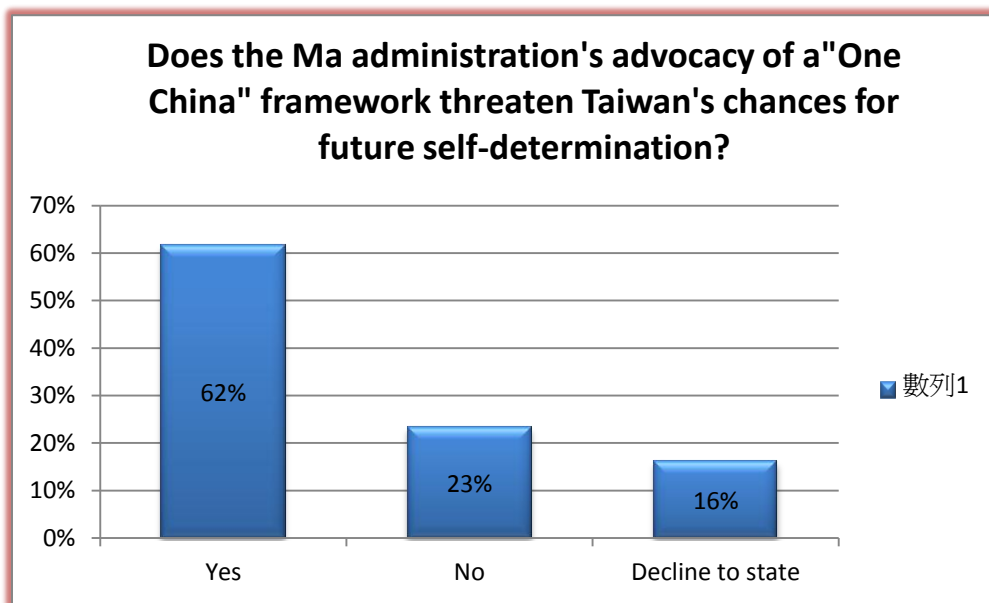


Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Nov. 2012

MA ADMINISTRATION’S APPROACH

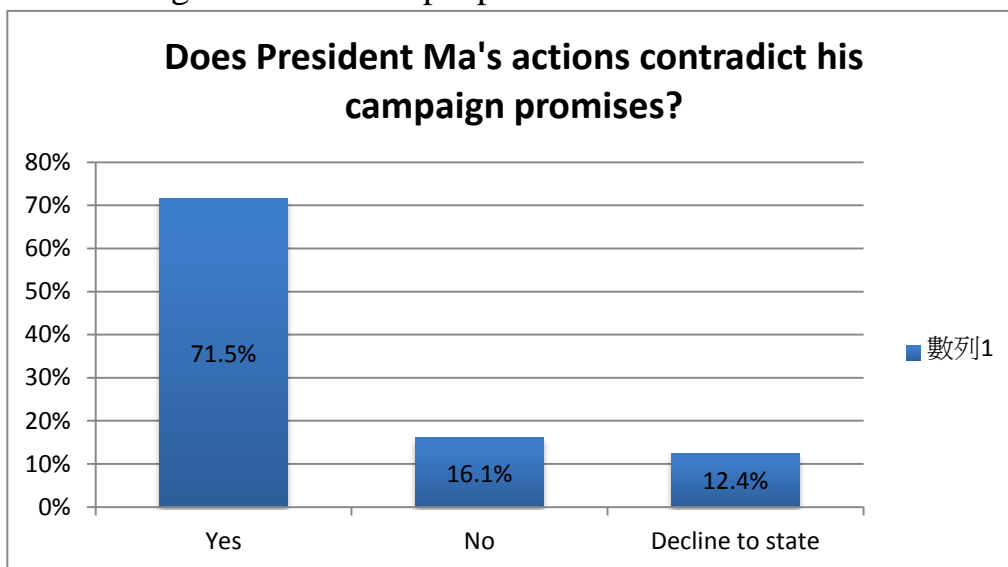
President Ma has taken significant steps to reopen and expand cross strait relations. Most Taiwanese support cross strait communication, but 75% believe that democracy, freedom, human rights should be discussed in addition to economic and trade issues.

President Ma’s administration has taken a “One China” view towards cross strait unification issues, a position claiming that both ROC and China are part of a single “China.” This position was exemplified during KMT Honorable chairman Wu Poh-Hsiung’s recent visit China in June 2013, where he stated his support for the “One China” framework and his opposition to Taiwanese independence. This position is contrary to President Ma’s campaign promises of allowing Taiwan to use self-determination to decide its future. A majority (61.6%) of the public believes that President Ma’s “One China framework” strips Taiwan's freedom of choice for its future.



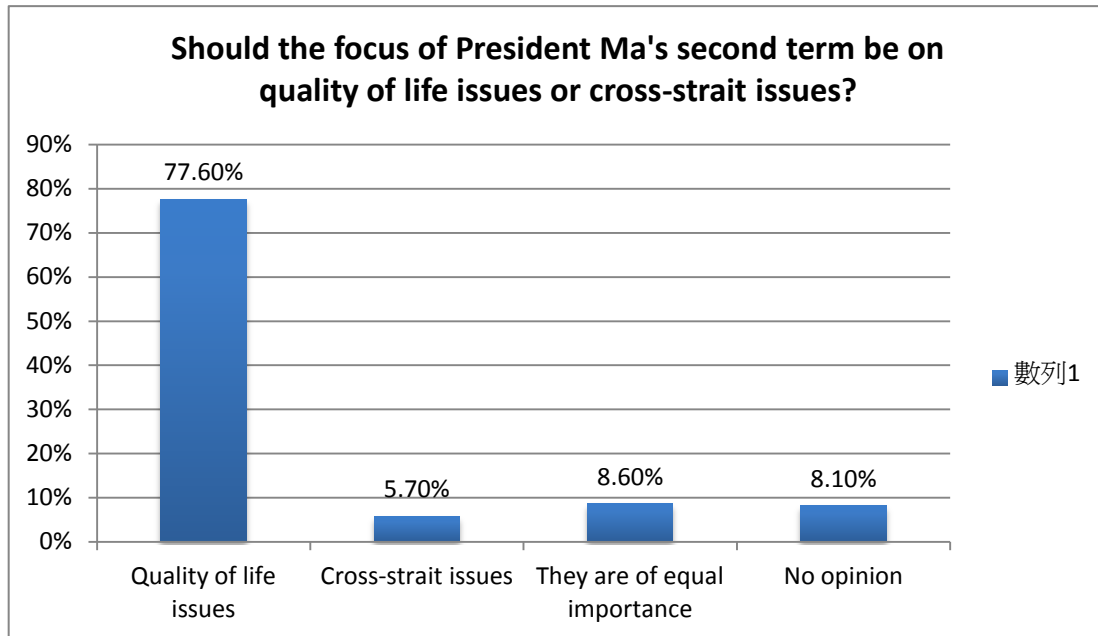
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

Furthermore, 71% believes that President Ma’s actions are contrary to his pledge of allowing the Taiwanese people to determine their future



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

Although cross-strait issues are a major point of controversy, Taiwanese are more concerned with quality of life issues. 78% believe President Ma's second term, which began in 2012, should focus on livelihood issues over cross strait relations.



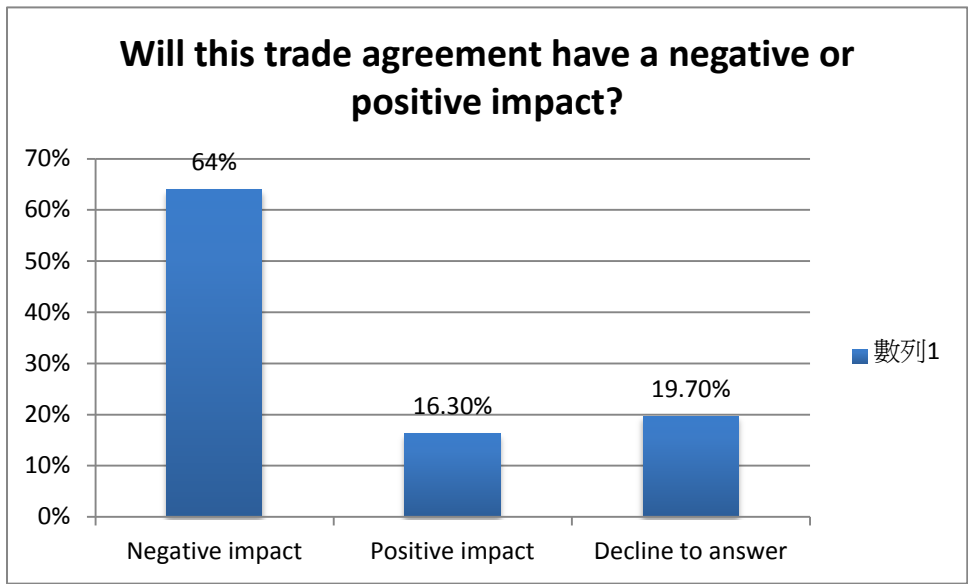
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, April 2012

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Taiwan and China have greatly increased their economic cooperation in the last few years, having signed the Economic Co-operation Framework Agreement (ECFA) and adopted measures for greater cross-strait investment². The latest step towards increasing trade cooperation is the Cross-Strait Agreement on Trade in Services, which would open 64 Taiwanese service sectors and 80 Chinese service sectors to investment. The agreement was signed in June 2013 and is awaiting ratification from the Legislative Yuan. The public has questioned the government's lack of communication with the public during the negotiation process and expressed concern about the impact of the agreement on Taiwanese businesses³. The majority of the public, 64%, believed that the pact would have a negative impact if ratified. 16% believed it would have a positive impact and 20% declined to answer.

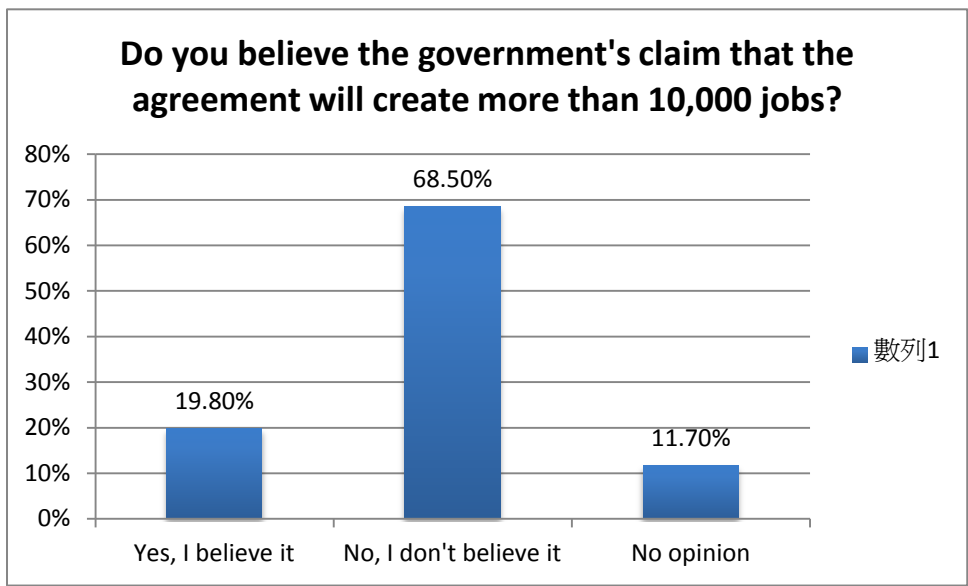
² Mishkin, Sarah. "Chin and Taiwan Agree to Lower Service Sector Trade Barriers." *Financial Times*. 21 June 2013. Web. 8 July 2013.

³ Kuo, Chen-hero. "Act Cautiously on Cross-strait Pact." *Taipei Times*. 3 July 2013. Web. 8 July 2013.



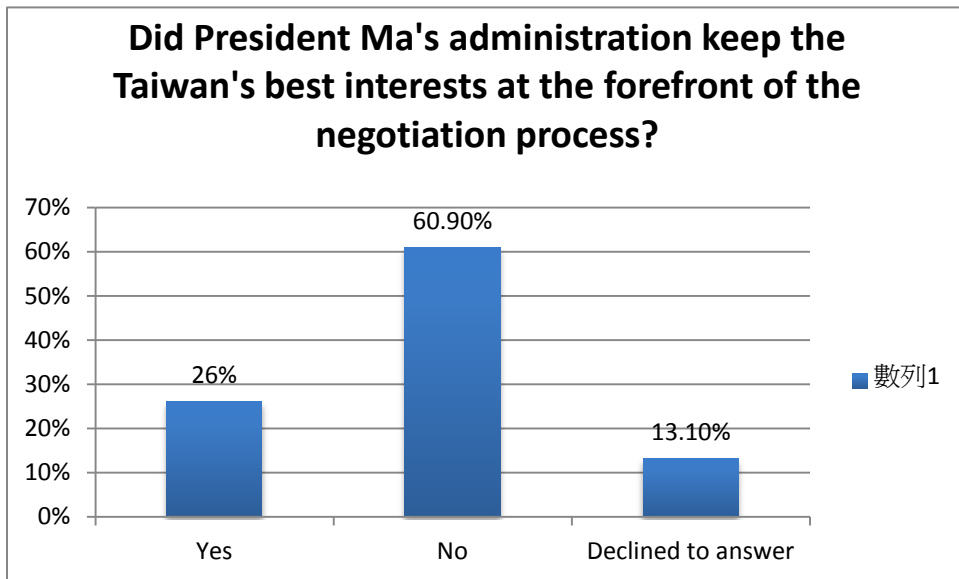
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, July 2013

The Ministry of Economic Affairs recently released an impact assessment of the agreement, claiming that it would create over 10,000 jobs. When asked “Do you believe the government claims that the pact will create more that 10,000 jobs?” 69% responded “no” and 20% responded “yes”.



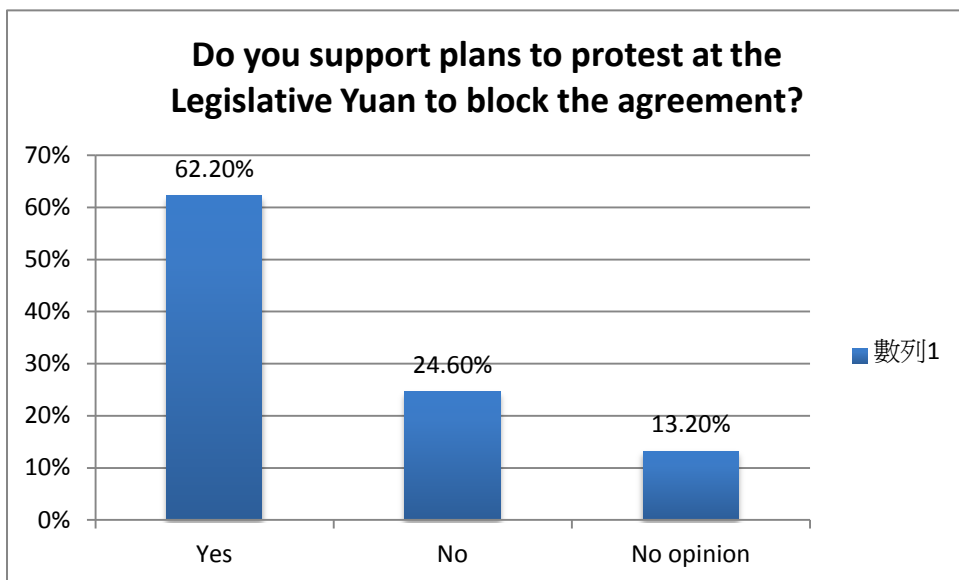
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, July 2013

When asked if President Ma’s administration had kept the best interests of the Taiwanese at the forefront during the negotiation process of the agreement, 26% responded “yes” and 61% responded “no.”



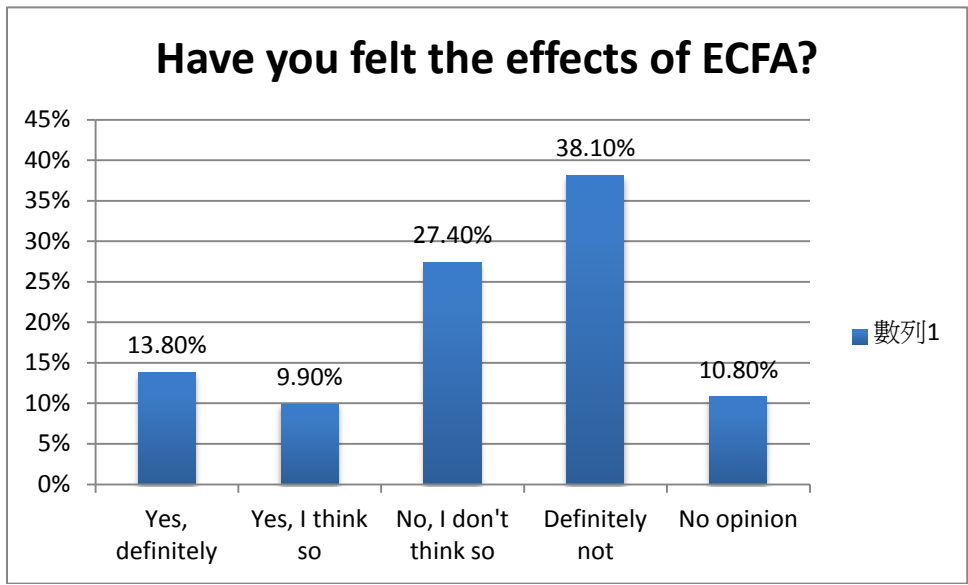
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, July 2013

Regarding the upcoming Legislative Yuan session determining the passage of this agreement, a majority, 62%, of respondents stated that they support the plan to protest the Legislative Yuan to block the agreement.



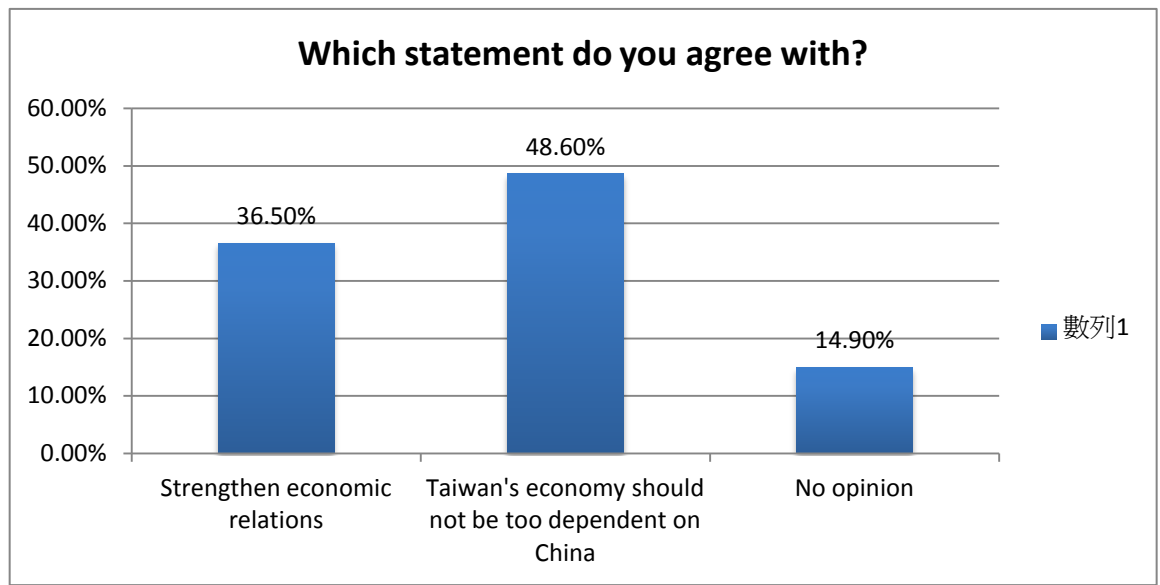
Taiwan Thinktank, July 2013

Despite this, President Ma continues to strongly support its passage, disregarding complaints that the effects of this new agreement have not been adequately studied and that the benefits promised from ECFA are yet to be seen. 66% of Taiwanese say that they do not feel the effect of ECFA.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Sept. 2012

When confronted with the question “Some people believe Taiwan and China should strengthen economic and trade relations and others believe Taiwan’s economy should not be too dependent on china. Which statement would you agree with?” 49% of Taiwanese responded that the economy should not be too dependent and 36.5% responded that Taiwan should strengthen economic and trade relations with China.

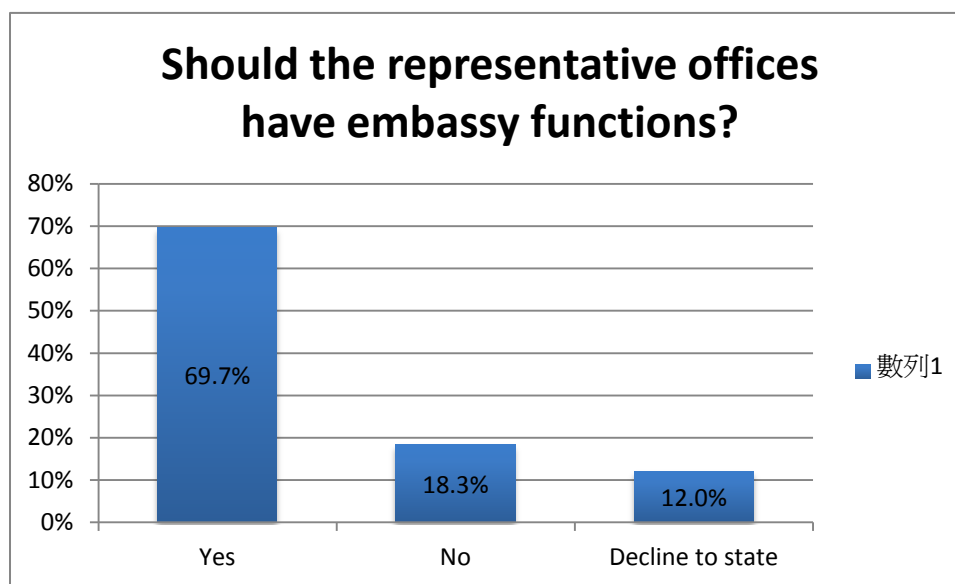


Source: Taiwan Thinktank, October 2012

ESTABLISHMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE OFFICES

Taiwan and China have agreed to establish representative offices in each other's territory. Taiwan will open offices in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou called the Representative Office of the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and China is opening an office in Taipei called the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS). These quasi-official institutions are supposed to handle bilateral relations in the absence of official relations between the two countries. Their functions include promoting trade, economic, cultural, education and social exchanges and emergency assistance.

However, many Taiwanese have protested against the inability of the office to conduct basic consulate functions, such as ability to issue travel documents, deal with legal matters and visit detained citizens⁴. Most (70%) believe representative offices should have the right to perform normal embassy actions.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June 2013

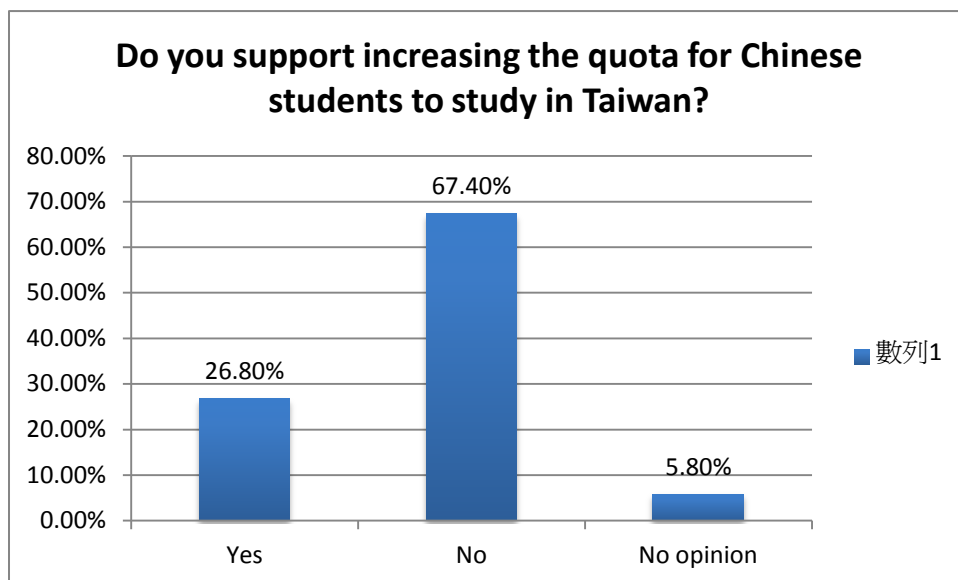
⁴ Wu, Sophia. "Progress Made on Exchanges of Rep Offices." *Focus Taiwan*. 15 June 2013. Web. 8 July 2013.

DOMESTIC ISSUES

Policies regarding Chinese in Taiwan

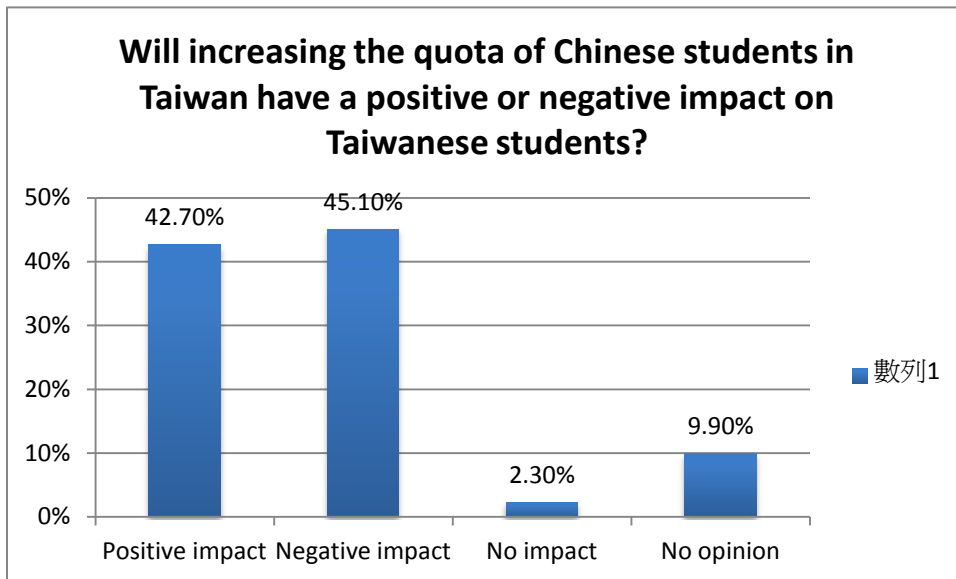
President Ma has stated that his government plans to loosen restrictions on Chinese students in Taiwan, including increasing the quota of Chinese students studying and working in Taiwan, and potentially opening up Taiwanese healthcare to them.

A majority of Taiwanese does not support an increase in the number of Chinese students in Taiwan, with 67% against a Chinese student quota increase.



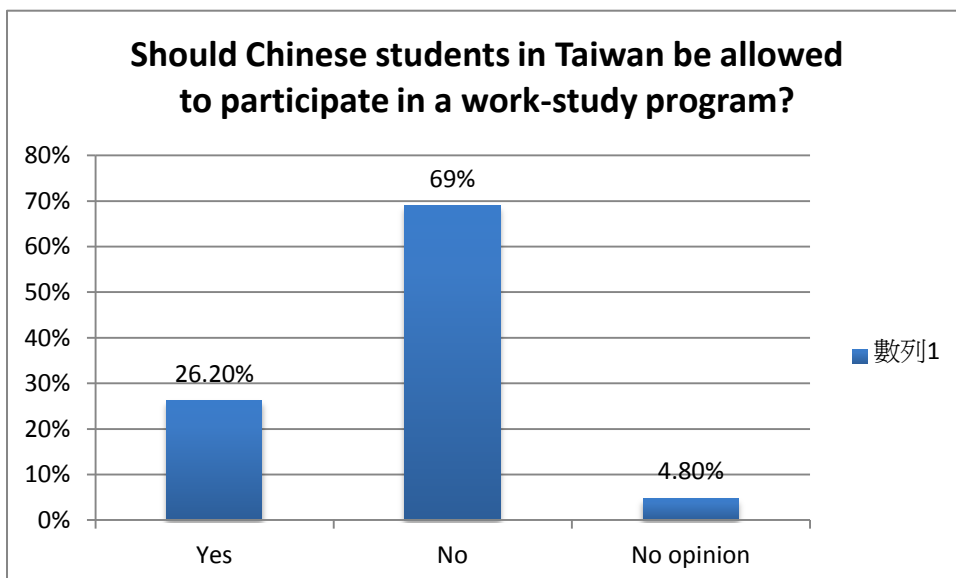
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

The public is divided on whether increasing the quota for Chinese students in Taiwan has a positive or negative impact on Taiwanese students, with 43% believing it has a positive impact and 45% believing it has a negative impact.



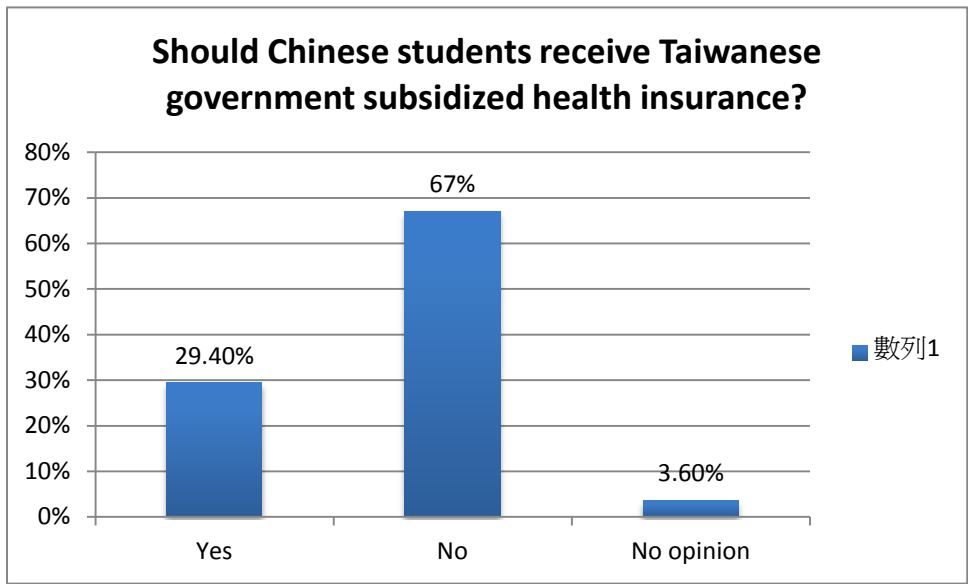
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

Regarding the issue of allowing Chinese students to participate in a work-study program, 69% are against and 25% are in support.



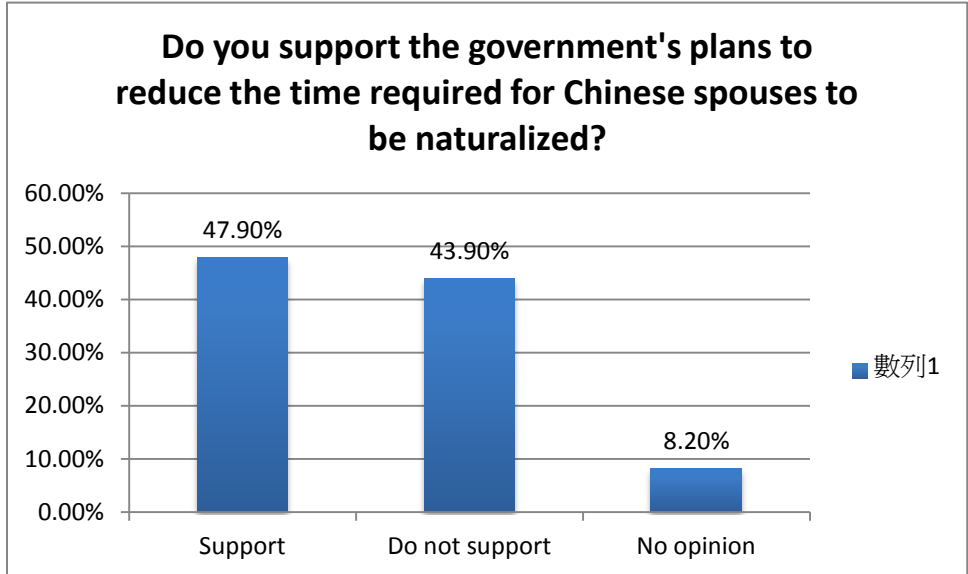
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

A majority, 67%, are against Chinese students receiving Taiwanese government subsidized health insurance.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

Another issue facing the Taiwanese legislature is a proposed bill changing from six to four the number of years it takes for a Chinese spouse to be naturalized. Public opinion is split on this issue, with 48% of Taiwanese in support and 44% are against.

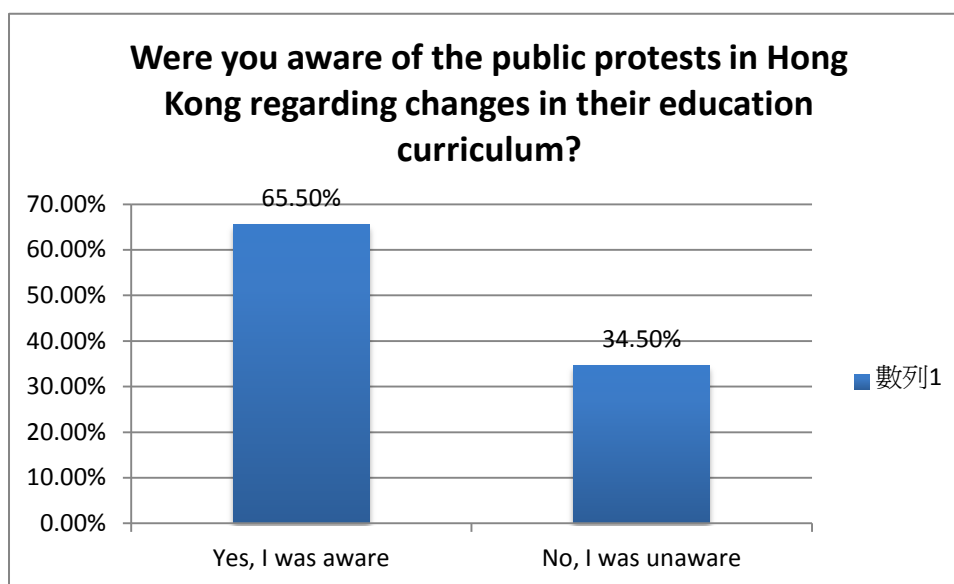


Source: Taiwan Thinktank, January 2013

*Among KMT party supporters, rates of support for the above issues are slightly higher.

Taiwan and Hong Kong

Last September, thousands in Hong Kong protested plans to introduce Chinese patriotism classes into schools. The curriculum would teach students about China's political leaders, their contributions and their challenges. People worried that these classes aimed to indoctrinate their youth with nationalist education classes, like those used in China, to instill support for the Communist government and reduce their autonomy⁵. According to a poll by Taiwan Thinktank taken in September, a majority (66%) of Taiwanese was aware of the protests in Hong Kong.



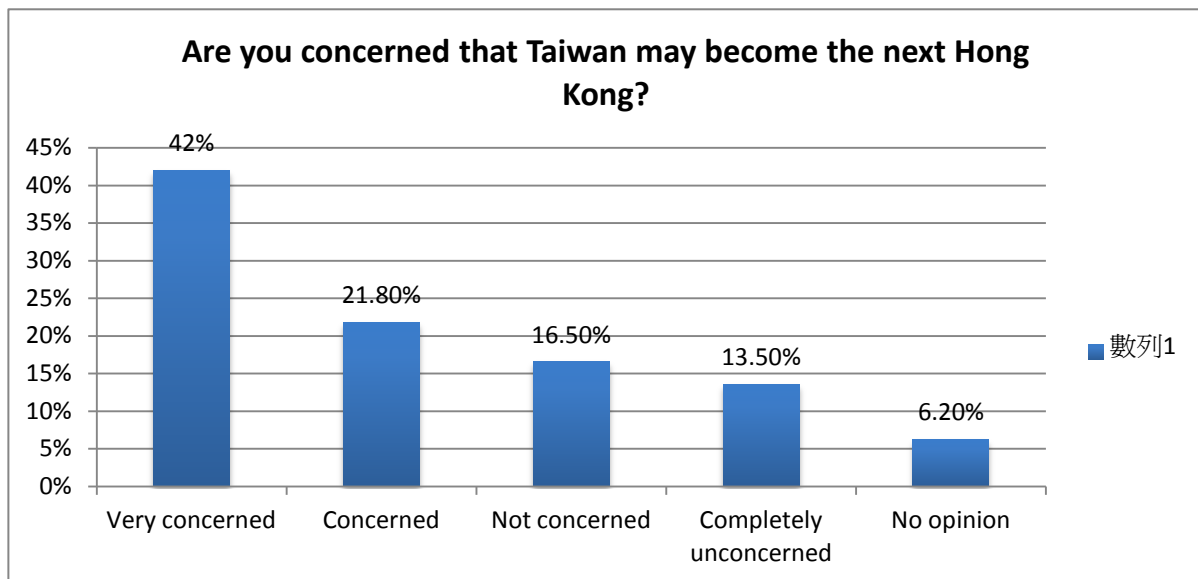
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Sept. 2012

The Hong Kong government ultimately responded to the protests and withdrew its plans for the classes. However, this event stirred fears in Taiwan about its own future, since China has repeatedly expressed desire to unify Taiwan under the "One China, Two Systems," the framework currently in place in Hong Kong⁶.

When asked "Are you concerned that Taiwan will become the next Hong Kong, meaning, increased political control by China and an economy heavily dependent on China, a combined majority of 63.8% said they were concerned (42% very concerned, 21.8% concerned) while a combined 30% stated that they were not concerned (16.5% not concerned, 13.5% completely unconcerned).

⁵ The Associate Press, "Hong Kong Drops 'brainwashing' Classes." *CBCnews*. CBC/Radio Canada, 8 Sept. 2012. Web. 9 July 2013.

⁶ "Editorial: Taiwan, Hong Kong and Democracy." *Taipei Times*. 12 Sept. 2012. Web. 9 July 2013.



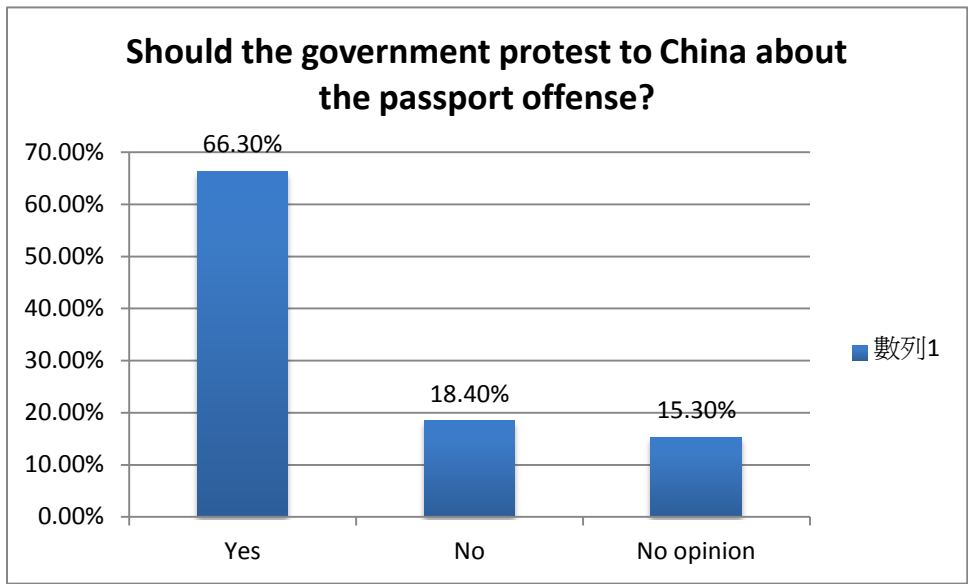
Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Sept. 2012

China's passport offense

Images on China's latest passports showing disputed areas as Chinese territory have caused protests in Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines and India. China's bold act has been met with creative responses. India has refused to stamp the new passports and has stamped the passports with a different map showing the disputed areas as Indian territory.

In contrast, the Taiwanese government was much less vocal which prompted many to claim that President Ma had failed to respond appropriately to China's affront on Taiwan's sovereign status. Frustrated with the administration's lack of reaction, Taiwan's opposition party, the DPP, has issued passport stickers with "Taiwan is my country" superimposed on a map of Taiwan⁷. In a poll taken by Taiwan Thinktank in December 2012, results showed that 66% of Taiwanese believed the government should take further action to protest the China's inaccurate depiction of Taiwan.

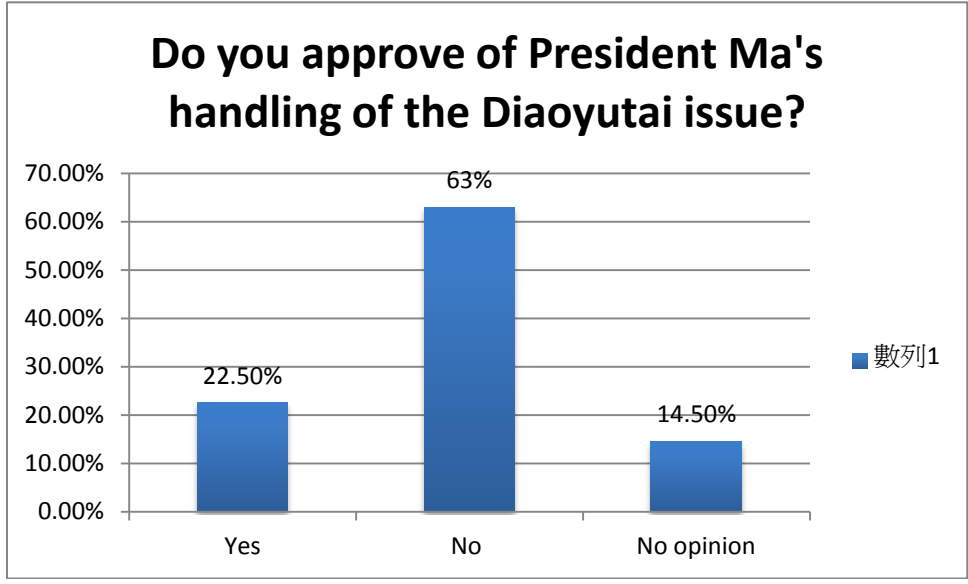
⁷ Cole, Michael. "Taipei Tells China to Note Indignation over Passport." *Taipei Times*. 28 Dec. 2012. Web. 9 July 2013.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, December 2012

Representation in the Diaoyutai dispute

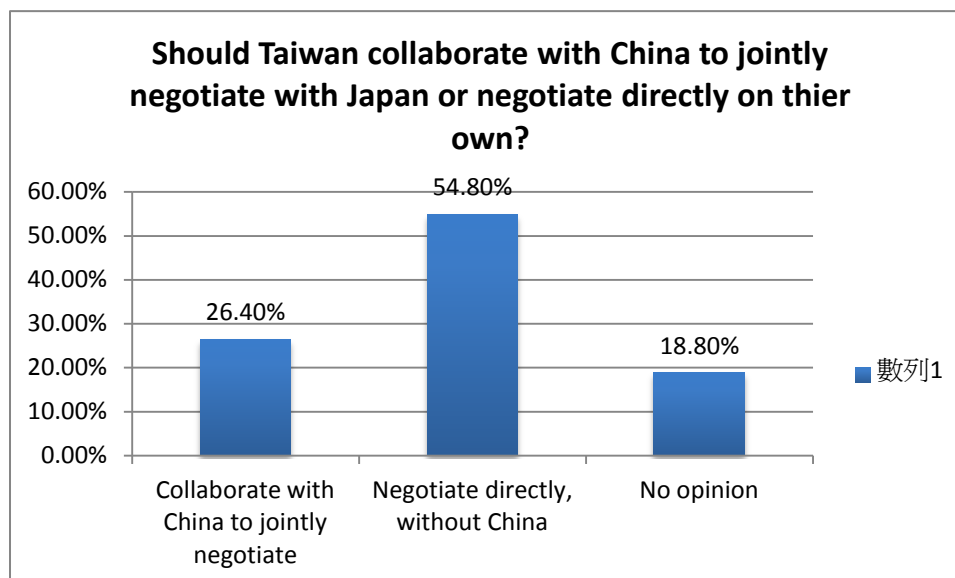
The Diaoyutai islands are a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea. It is under territorial dispute between Taiwan, China and Japan who all claim the islands are their territory⁸. President Ma’s handling of the Diaoyutai issue has been largely met with disapproval at home. Approval and disapproval rates were polled at 22% and 63%, respectively.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Sept. 2012

⁸ Chen, Rogge, and Elizabeth Hsu. “Taiwan Urges Dialogue in East China Sea.” *Focus Taiwan*. 29 June 2013. Web. 9 July 2013.

Around half, 55%, believed that Taiwan should negotiate directly with Japan, without collaborating with China while only 26% believed Taiwan and China should jointly pressure Japan for the territory.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, Sept. 2012

These results show that a majority of Taiwanese is unwilling to sacrifice their sovereignty while addressing this issue.

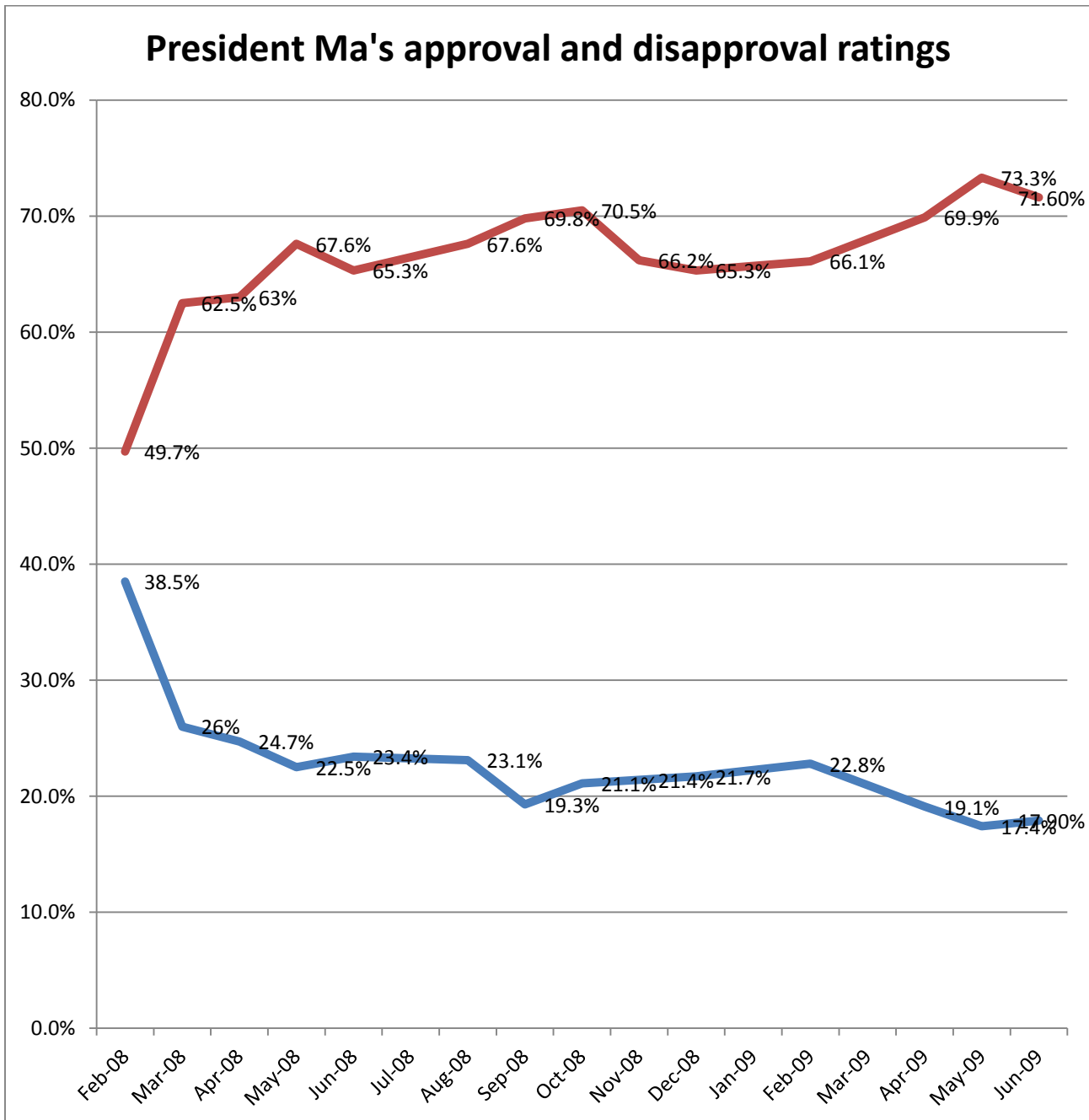
CONCLUSION

The findings of this report suggest that although the vast majority of Taiwanese agree that there must be some degree of interaction with China, most are concerned about the speed of cross-strait developments and the level of China's influence in Taiwan. Many concerns revolve around the expansion of privileges previously limited to Taiwanese citizens, such as healthcare, to the Chinese. This aspect of Taiwanese concerns reflects the growing number of people identifying themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, despite the rise in cross-strait interactions and China's increasing global power.

The direction of cross-strait developments plays an influential role for Taiwan, affecting its current position in the international arena and its future chances of sovereignty. Dealing with a powerful neighbor that presents an existential threat as well as vast economic opportunities requires a careful balance. The current administration's handling of cross strait relations has been, for the most part, met with public disapproval. It is clear that on the issue of cross-strait relations,

the government's policies have not adequately accounted for the concerns of citizens.

Cross-strait development is just one of the many issues Taiwan faces on the domestic and international level today and just one of the many factors that influence President Ma's approval ratings. President Ma's record low approval rate, of 17.4% is a reflection of larger public discontent towards his behavior and policies.



Source: Taiwan Thinktank, June. 2013