

President Chen's interview by the Washington Post

Following is the transcript of the interview with President Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan by Philip P. Pan, the Washington Post's Beijing bureau chief, and David E. Hoffman, foreign editor. The interview was conducted at the presidential palace in Taipei on March 29, 2004 with a government translator.

Q: The Chinese government refused to deal with you during your first term because you would not accept their "one China" principle. You recently put forward a proposal for a peace and stability framework, but they rejected it. What new policies will you adopt in your second term toward China?

A: I think the key issue is not that I personally refuse to accept the "one China" principle. It's the 23 million people of Taiwan who cannot accept the so-called "one China" principle. Because the "one China" principle denotes the "one country, two systems" formula, making Taiwan into the second Hong Kong, making Taiwan into a special administrative region of China, and also making Taiwan a local government of China, which is totally unacceptable to our people.

Only a small minority of Taiwanese society is willing to accept the "one China" principle. I think Beijing should be very clear about this and also understand this, because they have repeatedly said they will place their hopes on the people of Taiwan. And it is very obvious the majority of our people do not want to accept the "one China" principle and the "one country, two systems" formula. Therefore it is unreasonable for them to force us to accept such a "one China" principle.

I think the fundamental reason why I won this presidential election, garnering 50.1 percent of the total vote, compared with 39.3 percent of the total vote four years ago, is because there is a rising Taiwan identity and it has been solidified. I think the Beijing authorities should take heed of this fact and accept the reality.

Four years ago, in my inauguration speech, I mentioned that it is up to the leaders of the two sides of the strait to use their wisdom and sincerity to deal with the future one China question. However if China insists on the precondition of forcing Taiwan to accept the "one China" principle, I think it is totally unacceptable to both the people and government of Taiwan. If they insist on having dialogue and consultation based on

such a precondition, the "one China" principle, I think it will be rather difficult for both sides to sit down and talk. That is why I proposed the idea of establishing a framework of peace and stability for cross strait interactions based on the "one peace" principle to deal with four major issue areas. I think only through this framework of peace and stability can we seek the highest welfare for peoples on both sides.

Q: In your answer, you said very little about your second term. Do you have any initiatives or anything in mind that will be different from the status quo?

A: I have said before the election that the future goal and mission that I shoulder upon me is to unify Taiwan and promote stable cross-strait relations as well as to stabilize our society and reinvigorate our economy. Among which, stabilizing cross-strait relations is one of our key issues. Therefore, I called for the establishment of a special task force to deal with the cross-strait relations and also to promote the establishment of a framework for peace and stability. We will have Academia Sinica President Lee [Yuan-tseh] head this task force in order to promote cross-strait interactions.

We hope that under "one principle, four issues," we can push and establish a cross-strait peace and stability framework. The one principle is the principle of peace, because if the "one China" principle is emphasized, then Taiwan will have other demands in response, for example, "one country on each side of the strait" versus the "One China" principle. Then I believe the two sides will be forever deadlocked, major differences cannot be solved and it will be impossible for both sides to sit down and talk. We understand this in our hearts. So don't raise the "one China" principle. Don't raise "one country on each side of the strait." We figure it's best for the interests of both parties to negotiate on the principle of peace.

In the four Major Issue Areas, as I mentioned before, number one is to establish a mechanism for negotiation. Number two, to conduct negotiations based on equality and reciprocity. Three is to establish political relations. Number four is to prevent any sort of military conflict. Of course, among these four major issues, this includes the issue of the three links, direct links that are of major importance to our economy and trade across the strait.

And in terms of maintaining stability across the strait, our highest goal is to maintain peace across the Taiwan Strait, and to maintain stability and security of the Asia Pacific region. Therefore, in the future, when we proceed with our major reform process we will do so upon the principle of maintaining the status quo and not

changing the status quo.

Take for example the peace referendum held on March 20. It is very clear that I have honored my pledges and commitments. We hold steadfast to our commitments and we have not violated the "five no's" that I pledged in my inauguration speech. This peace referendum has no bearing on the issue of unification and independence.

Therefore, in the year 2006, we will hasten the birth of a new constitution for Taiwan, and in 2008, we intend to enact this new constitution, a tailor-made, efficient constitution that is suitable for Taiwan. And this is just a timetable for our constitutional reform. It is not a timetable for independence or any attempt to change our status quo.

In other words, our future efforts at re-engineering our constitution and constitutional reforms will only be done on the principle of not changing the status quo and maintaining the status quo.

Let me give you some examples to explain. In order to reach and establish effective governance, there is a need for us to engineer this constitutional reform. For example, in our constitutional reform efforts, we will try to deal with whether to adopt the presidential system in use in the U.S. or the Japanese cabinet system. We will also deal with the issue of having a five-branch government for division of power or a three-branch government. We will also deal with the issue of legislature reform, introducing a single-district, two-vote system, and also cutting the number of legislative seats in half. We also intend to deal with the government system by having a two-tier government system instead of the existing three-tier system, especially because the provincial government has been temporarily suspended. There is an urgency to deal with this question. In our new constitution, we will also lower the voting age from 20-years-old to 18-years-old. And also, we will gradually change military service. A new constitution would also incorporate the protection of basic human rights. For example, the right to peace, and also incorporating the three laws related to labor rights, including solidarity rights, justice rights and also the right to negotiation. In the new constitution, we will also dedicate one chapter to the issue of the indigenous people's rights, because we believe that the relationship between the government and the indigenous ethnic groups is a relationship of a new partnership and a relationship of quasi-country-to-country relations. Namely, there is one country within a country.

These issues do not have any bearing on the independence or unification issue, nor will the constitutional reform effort violate our "five no's" commitment and pledge.

Q: Is there any way you could think of to define "one China" that would be acceptable to the people of Taiwan? For example, what if "one China" were a federation in which the People's Republic of China and Taiwan were equal members? Would that be acceptable to the people of Taiwan possibly?

A: The "one China" principle defined by the Beijing authorities is that of peaceful unification, and the "one country, two systems" formula. And their emphasis is that after unification there will be "one country, two systems," and the core of the emphasis lies in "one country."

Under this principle, the so-called "one country" actually is "one China," and the People's Republic of China is the sole representative of the "one China." So the so-called "one country" is "one China," which means the People's Republic of China. Under such a principle, Taiwan becomes part of the People's Republic of China. And the Beijing authorities see Taiwan's presidential election this time as one of its local elections.

That is why the vast majority of the 23 million people of Taiwan cannot accept the definition laid out by the Beijing authorities regarding the "one China" principle. Nor is it acceptable to our people when we see actions taken by the Beijing authorities in support of their "one China" principle.

That is why in my inaugural speech in 2000, I especially said both sides of the strait should face and deal with the issue of a future one China together.

In other words, for us, "one China" is an issue. This issue can be discussed. But the so-called "one China" does not exist now. Perhaps it will in the future. So we should all be able to sit together and deal with the future one China issue together. But in the short term, I don't think there can be an answer to this issue.

For the 23 million people of Taiwan, whether our country is called Taiwan or the Republic of China, it doesn't change the fact that we are an independent, sovereign country. We are not a local government of another country.

So this is the status quo. We want to maintain this kind of status quo. We certainly

don't want Taiwan's current status quo to be changed unilaterally.

I believe Taiwan or the Republic of China is an independent, sovereign country. Even Mr. Lien and Mr. Soong in this campaign did not dare deny it. They don't dare say we are not a country. I think we have reached an internal consensus that insists on Taiwan being an independent, sovereign country. I think only Beijing cannot accept the fact that the Republic of China or Taiwan is an independent country.

I have observed a very interesting phenomenon. The Beijing authorities refuse to recognize the existence of the Republic of China. However, they dread that we may one day change our name. I see a great inconsistency in this phenomenon.

Q: You've mentioned the "one country, two systems" formula in regards to Taiwan several times. What lessons do you draw from the recent moves of the Beijing government toward Hong Kong?

A: As we have observed the events in Hong Kong over the past year, I think our observation only further strengthens the conviction of the 23 million people of Taiwan in rejecting the "one country, two systems" formula. We have observed major problems with "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong. For example, 500,000 people took to the street in protest of Article 23 of the Basic Law in Hong Kong because they felt their freedom and democracy had been infringed upon. In Taiwan, we have full democracy, and our freedom and democracy are fully protected. We do not wish to return to the era of authoritarianism. We don't want our freedoms to be restricted or taken away. It is impossible for us to envision going backward. We do not want to lose the freedom and democracy that have been hard won by our people.

For example, people in Taiwan nowadays can freely elect, directly elect the leader of this country, their president. But it is unthinkable for people in Hong Kong to elect directly their chief executive.

Let me give you another example. On March 20, the people of Taiwan enjoyed for the first time in history, and exercised, the right to referendum. However, people in Hong Kong are deprived of this universal right, this basic human right.

Right now, the people of Hong Kong are fighting for direct elections for their chief executive and general elections for the entire legislature, but the Beijing authorities are unable to consent. They even say, "Wait another 30 years and we'll see." I think this is

very ridiculous. They even said to the Hong Kong people, "You have to understand that in the so-called 'one country, two systems' formula, the emphasis is not on 'two systems' but on 'one country.'" So even though the Beijing authorities promised not to change anything for 50 years, it is very clear that even within five years, a lot of things have changed. For the 23 million people of Taiwan, this is the greatest warning, and also the clearest signal. "One country, two systems" is totally unattractive to the Taiwan people. What has happened in Hong Kong has shown that this system, this formula, is a total failure, which is unacceptable to us.

So maybe we can put it this way: The failure of "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong has contributed to the rise of Taiwan identity and the rise of Taiwan awareness. That is why I was given the privilege of being elected in 2000 and reelected for a second term this year.

Q: You have pointed out that China has been steadily increasing its military capabilities. What do you intend to do to reduce that threat from China? Do you think Taiwan can keep up financially in an arms race with China?

A: We will certainly not engage in an arms race with China. What we want is to avoid war and to achieve permanent peace in the Taiwan Strait. That is why I have emphasized again and again that it is of crucial importance for my second term to establish a peace and stability framework for cross-strait interactions and to maintain stability across the strait.

In the face of a military build-up and an expansion of military expenditure and continuance of deployment of missiles from China, we are of course not happy to see such a development, but our major concern is to avoid war and avoid the military balance across the straits to tilt to China's favor. Therefore, we have worked strenuously to strengthen our military capabilities and to expand and increase our defense capabilities and our principle and our goal is to have effective counter-strike capabilities and to have built a solid defense to protect peace and maintain the status quo.

I think democracy, and by insisting on having a democratic Taiwan, are the greatest defense and the best arms that we have in the face of China's military threat. I think democracy is our best TMD in the face of China's military threat. TMD meaning theatre missile defense.

Q: To follow up, do you feel that Taiwan needs an offensive capability to meet the threat from China?

A: It is certainly not our strategic goal to engage in an arms race with China. I am personally not in favor of this, and I see no necessity for it and I think it is impossible. As I have said, solidifying and deepening Taiwan's democracy is our best TMD. As I have said, our goal is to avoid war, to seek peace and to deepen our democracy. Therefore, it is very important that we maintain an effective capability to defend ourselves, and it is important that we strengthen our effective counter-strike capability and also a solid defense. Therefore, we are not in favor of strengthening our offensive capabilities, instead we are in favor of strengthening our counter-strike capabilities and making it very effective. Only by strengthening our capability for effective counter-strike and solid defense can we ensure the fruits of our hard-won democracy.

Q: President Chen, you campaigned very hard to pass the referendum this month, and you said if it failed it would be a victory for China. What lesson do you take from this vote, and do you think you may have gone too far? And do you anticipate trying again to pass a referendum?

A: If we look at this peace referendum from a broader perspective, it is our first time in history to hold a referendum and the first step has been smooth and we can say that in certain regard it shouldn't be seen as a failure. Because we had more than 7.4 million people cast their ballots in this peace referendum, much more than the 6.47 million votes that I garnered. So I think in this regard it is rather a success than a failure. The reason why this referendum did not pass is that there is a high threshold for its validation, namely more than 50 percent of the eligible voters need to cast their vote in this referendum in order to have it pass. I think if we had adopted the presidential election system to apply to this referendum, the result of this referendum would be valid. Those who have cast their votes in this referendum far outnumber the votes I garnered in this presidential election, and moreover those who have voted in favor of the two items in this referendum outnumber the votes that I have garnered. Namely, there are many more people than those people who voted for me who are in support of this referendum and who are supportive of the two items listed in this referendum.

So if we look at the substantive content of the outcome of this referendum vote, then it will be more significant than just looking at whether it passed the nominal threshold or not. And moreover, back in February, in our legislature, we had bipartisan support in

passing a resolution in support of the two issues listed in the referendum. The reason why there were disputes and questions over the referendum mainly come from sabotage of opposition parties and also this intimidation from China and also the fact that during the election process, the voting process, the voters received the ballots separately. They cast a presidential ballot first, and then received the referendum ballot, and cast the referendum ballot, so such an arrangement might have been confusing for some people and they forgot to cast their referendum ballots.

It was the first time ever in Taiwan's history to have a referendum, so the whole world was watching, and we are pleased to see a smooth completion of the entire process from the casting of the ballots of the referendum to the counting of the votes of the referendum, and we understand that this time this issue of the referendum may have been overly politicized, where some people have interpreted this referendum according to different ideologies. However, we believe that in the future, when we hold other referendums, such problems would not arise again, and no one would attempt to sabotage this referendum, and I am still very proud to say that it is quite an honor and success for Taiwan to hold this first referendum in our history.

Q: Mr. President, on the question of elections, you were elected by a very narrow margin. Your opponents have accused you of election fraud or even staging the shooting on Friday. Taiwanese society seems very divided. How do you plan to address these opponents and criticisms, and heal the differences?

A: I can fully understand their feelings and sentiments because it is not easy to accept your own failure, and I have personally experienced election defeat twice before. I understand the opposition parties - the pan-blue alliance - were fully confident in winning this election because the two presidential candidates from four years ago decided to cooperate and they thought by cooperation they would garner enough votes to be elected as president and vice president. However, the result is not what they had expected and it is only normal for them to have such strong sentiments and find it difficult to accept their defeat. We have certainly not rigged the vote nor have we staged this assassination attempt. However, we shall wait until the judicial investigation has reached a final result and it is publicized. Now the March 20 election is over. We cannot afford to freeze our time on the day of March 20 or freeze our time before the election. We must look forward and move forward, and the election has come to an end. We must accept the result of a democratic election. Even if you just win by one vote, you still win. And even if you lose by one vote, you still lose, and everybody must accept such a result.

For me personally, I have just completed the last election of my lifetime. The day before the election, I also trod the fine line of death. And that had a great impact on my life philosophy and my attitude toward my political career. I will not be knocked down or defeated so easily. Even if I personally will be knocked down, I think the 23 million people of Taiwan will never be defeated in their conviction in the pursuit of democracy and freedom. Our solidarity, our collective will can never be defeated. The strength of an individual, my own strength, may be like a branch of a tree that may be easily bent or broken easily, however the power of the people is as strong as a forest and it could never be bent so easily. When we conduct this election, whoever wins or loses, should not lose Taiwan. This time I won the election. Even if I won the election, if I lose Taiwan, I wouldn't be happy to see the result. And for the party who lost the election, they should be careful not to lose Taiwan. I believe the noises and dispute will soon be over and settled after the election, because we have great confidence in Taiwan's democracy and the people of Taiwan. I have laid a calligraphy in my office that also serves as my motto: "Compassion has no enemy and wisdom has no trouble or worry." I know that it is impossible for me to obtain the highest wisdom, however I hope and I will bear in mind that in the next four years I will make sure I have no enemy in my heart.

Q: President Chen, you mentioned the new constitution, I wonder if you could tell us how the new constitution would define the territory of the Republic of China. And also you talked about the rising vote [for you] from 39 percent to 50 percent. Do you see that as a mandate, and what is it a mandate for, in relation to mainland China?

A: Firstly, I have said before that in our future efforts in re-engineering the constitution, we will only do so based upon the principle of maintaining the status quo and not changing the status quo. I believe those articles relating to the territory in our constitution will not be the core of emphasis in our constitutional reform project. I think there is no problem with the content of Article 4 in our constitution. The question lies in how to define it, and interpret it.

In this election, we have garnered more than 50 percent of the vote, compared with 39.3 percent four years ago. Even though we have just won by a slim margin, I think it does bear some significance. It is significant that within such a short time span of four years, the people who support me have increased by 1.5 million votes, and I think such a change in trend should be taken very seriously by the Beijing authorities as well as by the international community. It was rightly pointed out by one of the media reports

before the election that they have observed a very clear trend in the rise of Taiwan identity and Taiwan awareness, and I think this should never be taken lightly. The reason why we won this election is because we have chosen to stand with the mainstream values of the people and we have chosen to stand on the right side of history. And I think this election is a choice between love and hatred. On Feb. 28, the hand-in-hand rally demonstrated that our love for this land and also for other people. The Feb. 28 hand-in-hand rally aimed to unite Taiwan and the people of Taiwan. Quite on the contrary, the March 13 rally staged by the pan-blue alliance was a rally of hatred aimed at dividing Taiwan and dividing the people of Taiwan. They have created conflict and generated much anger and that's why at this election they have become the minority. I think this trend and phenomenon should be taken very seriously and is worth observing. However, we will not be over-satisfied with the election results. We will remain humble and continue our reflection and self-examination because we want to do better and do more for our people.