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Xiang Zhai and Ruping Xiao. "Shifting Political Calculation: The Secret Taiwan-Soviet Talks, 1963-1971." *Cold War History* 15:4 (2015): 533-551. DOI:

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Review by **Charles Kraus**, The George Washington University and The Wilson Center

Xiang Zhai and Ruping Xiao's article, "Shifting Political Calculation: The Secret Taiwan-Soviet Talks, 1963-1971," is an exceptionally detailed, blow-by-blow account of the Republic of China's (ROC) flirtations with the Soviet Union in the 1960s. Zhai and Xiao reconstruct how the leaders of Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) and his son Chiang Ching-kuo (Jiang Jingguo), orchestrated secret negotiations with Victor Louis, a Soviet newspaperman and (more importantly) a KGB operative, as the Sino-Soviet alliance unraveled and the United States concurrently changed its policies toward the ROC and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The talks were ultimately fruitless, but they were significant, according to Zhai and Xiao's research. The Chiang duo had hoped to forge a united front with the Soviet Union and confront the PRC on the international stage. They even mulled joint military interventions with the Soviet Union into the Mainland. The ROC, beginning to doubt the alliance commitment of its chief ally, the United States, also engaged the Soviet Union in a broader effort to shore up its security. The secret Soviet-Taiwan talks were thus wedded to Chiang Kai-shek's singular goals: the destruction of the Chinese Communist regime, the resurrection of his political rule on the Chinese Mainland, and the health and longevity of the Republic of China.

"Shifting Political Calculation" unfolds chronologically. The article charts the ROC's changing geopolitical views of the Soviet Union in the early to mid-1960s and then proceeds through the four rounds of negotiations between Victor Louis and Wei Jingmeng, a confidant of the Chiangs, held from 1968 through 1970. The article is bookended on one side by a comprehensive literature review related to the Soviet-Taiwan talks and, on the other, a discussion of why the negotiations failed but why they were nonetheless significant.

Concerning the motives behind and significance of the talks, some of the claims made by Zhao and Xiao are slightly out-of-sync with their evidence. They write that the talks were "Taiwan's attempt to heal the wound caused by the Sino-American rapprochement" (554), yet the bulk of the interactions between Taipei and Moscow which the authors review took place well before National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger's first secret visit to Beijing in July 1971 and President Richard Nixon's later visit in February 1972. The United

States' relations toward the ROC and the PRC were certainly changing during the period under study (and Zhai and Xiao marshal ample evidence demonstrating Taipei's extreme displeasure with this), but the most significant instances of Sino-American engagement were yet to come.¹

Zhai and Xiao are more convincing when they suggest that the inherent political contradictions between the ROC and the Soviet Union prevented Chiang Kai-shek from capitalizing on the talks as much as he would have liked. Having a common enemy in the PRC was not enough to paper over the differences in ideology and strategic thinking which separated Taipei and Moscow, nor was it enough to erode the elder Chiang's bitter memories of Soviet policy in the Chinese Civil War from 1945 through 1950. Taipei, according to Zhai and Xiao, remained highly suspicious of Moscow's territorial ambitions toward Greater China and paranoid that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would lend support to rival Chinese political factions if given the opportunity.

There is still more to be said about the ideological and strategic gulf between the two political entities. Zhai and Xiao's deep-dive into the Chiang Kai-shek's diaries reveals how the ROC perceived Soviet policy, but Soviet-era archival sources, if accessible, would reveal the actual motives underlying Moscow's decision making in the context of the talks. An international history of the Soviet-Taiwan relations, incorporating Russian and perhaps even American and Mainland Chinese sources, would likely add a few wrinkles to the narrative provided in "Shifting Political Calculation." This is not a criticism of this important work, only an observation of what research remains to be done on this subject in the future.

Zhai and Xiao provide readers with fascinating glimpses of Chiang Kai-shek's complicated geopolitical thinking through their deft and deep explorations of his diaries held at the Hoover Institution. These are not easy sources to read or interpret, and the authors are commended for making some of the most exciting diary entries accessible to a wide audience. However, because the article does not engage a wider-swathe of historiography, the preoccupation with primary sources and the surface-level narratives which these documents provide is also a shortcoming. The historiographical implications of this study should be much greater than merely contributing to the literature on the talks between two men (that is, Victor Louis and Wei Jingmeng). Zhai and Xiao's work elevates Taiwan role's in Cold War history, articulates the worldview of an anti-communist state in Asia, and demonstrates how junior partners in Cold War alliances asserted their own autonomy and independence. Although left unacknowledged by the authors, these three aspects of "Shifting Political Calculation," among others, fill important gaps in international history and suggest promising avenues for scholars working in Cold War international history.

Charles Kraus is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at The George Washington University and an Associate with the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program. Broadly interested in the international history of Asia in the twentieth century, Kraus has published on issues such as population resettlement and migration in Asia, China's foreign relations, North Korea's formative state-building years, and ethnic and national identity in China. He is the Editor of the Chinese Foreign Policy Database, accessible on the Wilson Center's Digital Archive.

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¹ Yafeng Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8:44 (Fall 2006): 3-28.