Role of Telecommunications in Cross-strait Economic Development
between China and Taiwan

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Abstract
The role of telecommunications and its contribution to the cross-strait relationship and economic development between China and Taiwan are identified. Correlations between cross-strait telephone traffic and economic activities, such as trading and investment, are statistically analyzed. Results show that cross-strait telephone traffic is significantly correlated with economic activities between China and Taiwan. This article concludes that reliable telephone services between China and Taiwan may reflect in the amount of cross-strait trading and economic activities.

1. Telecommunications and Economic Development

Telecommunications have been considered an engine of economic growth. Many studies find a positive relationship between the spread of telecommunication services and economic development (Chen & Tan, 2000; ITU, 1998; Saunders et al., 1994). A reliable telecommunications service not only saves business time, energy, and resources, but also constitutes a force that propels economic growth, facilitates commercial activities, and helps deliver interpersonal trust in the business world.

Since the 1960s, the role of telecommunications in economic development research has had an ITU (International Telecommunications Unit) focus. However, the contribution made by telecommunications in cross-border economic activities is not well understood. Researchers have evaluated how telecommunications infrastructure enhances the efficiency of economic activities by meeting the demand, providing services, and reducing costs. They have found that there is a strong positive correlation between the spread of telecommunication services and economic development at the national and local levels (Cronin et al., 1993; Saunders et al., 1994; ITU, 1998). The question that remains is: how do telecommunications contribute to international economic activities?

Previous studies reported on the correlations between telephone calling rates and other measures of economic activity, such as GDP, value of imports, and value of exports (Taylor, 1980; Drewer, 1973). The CCITT concluded that long-distance telephone traffic increased at roughly double the rate of increases in real GDP. International telephone traffic through time was most closely associated with changes in the volume of international trade (CCITT, 1976; 1968). Chen & Tan (2000) argued that effective information flow and communications across
borders can better support both to economic growth in a country and increased trading activity across borders.

This study temporally analyzes the role of telecommunications traffic with economic activities between China and Taiwan. During the last four centuries, Taiwan has been administered by different authorities -- China, Japan, and a couple western countries. The mutual hostility across the Taiwan Strait arose whenever the same authority did not rule both sides. In this paper, the relationships between telecommunications traffic and cross-strait trading are discussed in an attempt to identify possible contributions the telecommunication infrastructure can make to economic activities and development.

2. Cross-Strait Relationships between China and Taiwan

During the last four centuries, Taiwan has experienced several episodes of both unity with and separation from China. Before the seventeenth century, Taiwan was administered by Holland for thirty-eight years (1624-1661). Later, Cheng Cheng-kung, a Chinese general of Ming dynasty, defeated by the Ching dynasty, expelled Holland and occupied Taiwan for 22 years (1662-1683). During this period, Taiwan and China belong to two different authorities. In 1683, military from China expelled Cheng Cheng-kung, unifying two sides of the Taiwan Strait for 212 years (1683-1895). In 1895, the Ching dynasty in mainland China, defeated by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, ceded Taiwan to Japan as war compensation. Afterwards, Taiwan became Japan’s colony for 51 years (1895-1945). In 1945 Taiwan was returned to China when Japan surrendered to China at the end of World War II. Four years later, the civil war in China resulted in two nations divided across the Taiwan Strait. Since then, both China and Taiwan have administered their own separate political entities.

From 1949 to November 1987, there was no visible contact, negotiation, or economic activity between China and Taiwan. All cross-strait communication channels were blocked due to the governments’ mutual hostility. The antagonism between the two sides remained conspicuous and intense.

The tensions dropped slightly in 1979 when China launched several proposals to promote peace talks, contacts, and communications across the Taiwan Strait. However, no official or unofficial contacts between two governments ever took place. In November 1987, the Taiwan government allowed its citizens to visit their families in China, ending four decades of mutual isolation and initiating a period of people-to-people exchanges -- economic, cultural, and educational -- across the Taiwan Strait. Several non-governmental negotiations have been held to solve problems which have arisen after their initial contacts. According to the China Travel Service in Hong Kong and reports from Straits Exchange Foundation in Taiwan, 15.9 million China traveling visas have been approved for Taiwanese since 1987 to the end of April 2000 while 56.6 thousand Chinese have visited Taiwan.

3. Cross-Strait Economic Activities

Cross-strait economic activities have been significantly influenced by politics but individual businessmen were seldom disturbed by politics. Historical reference shows that no matter which authorities ruled both or either sides of the Taiwan Strait, cross-strait economic activities were always run by businessmen while restrictions issued by governments were
Taiwan’s businessmen always chose the best paths and the most efficient ways to make profits (Lin, 1994).

Cross-strait economic activities can be traced back to seventeen century when Holland ruled Taiwan, and the Ming dynasty ruled mainland China. Though the Ming dynasty implemented a sea-closed policy, which prohibited all ocean activities, cross-strait trading activities were still active, as Holland sneaked around Chinese restrictions. Later when Cheng Cheng-kung replaced Holland to rule Taiwan, the Ching dynasty, the authority in China, prohibited all cross-strait activities. Apparently, this restriction, which lasted for 23 years, did not slow down businessmen’s pursuit of profits, as smugglers filled the strait. During that time, Taiwan became the only open window of China and thus its goods distribution center to foreign countries (Chou, 1980).

Cross-strait economic activities were expected to be prosperous when the Cheng’s authority in Taiwan was extinguished in 1683 by the Ching Dynasty. But due to the needs of coastal defense, the Ching dynasty decided to control all trading activities with Taiwan by setting strict rules. The number of opened harbors was then set to a minimum and Taiwan could only do business at assigned harbors in China. Though these strict controls annoyed officers administering Taiwan, the policy remained until Japan ruled beginning in 1895 (Chou, 1980).

Cross-strait economic activities declined dramatically during the years when Japan ruled Taiwan. The Japanese created an island wide monopoly and explicitly expelled foreign and Chinese capital. Cross-strait economic activities faded. During the first few years of Japanese rule, exports to China constituted 60-70% of all exports. After 13 years, the ratio declined to less than 10%. On the other end, exports to Japan increased up to 90%. The total value of goods imported from China decreased from 50% in the first few years to around 10% as the total value imported from Japan increased to 70% (Chou, 1980).

Taiwan was returned to China in 1945 at the end of World War II. Four years later, the civil war in China, creating two divided countries, resulted in the extinguishing of cross-strait economic activities. It has been reported that Taiwanese businessmen in this period secretly invested in China through diverse channels, without the approval of the Taiwan government (Wu, 2000). However, not until 1987 did a new era between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait started.

In July 1988, the State Council of China issued "Regulations for Encouraging Investment by Taiwan People" to legalize the protection of the investment from Taiwan businessmen. The Chinese government further assigned several districts to be authorized Taiwanese investment areas. In 1991, the Taiwan government lifted the ban on indirect investment in China, though direct investment was still prohibited. In 1994, The National People's Congress of China adopted the "Law to Protect Investments by Taiwan Compatriots."

### Table 1.
Amount of Investment from Taiwan to China (1990-2000) Estimated by Taiwan  
Unit: Million US$

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of investment</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td>4,334</td>
<td>1,614</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>2607</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan

Table 2.
Amount of Investment from Taiwan to China (1991-2000) Estimated by China  Unit: Million US$

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of investment</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>3,139</td>
<td>3391</td>
<td>3162</td>
<td>3475</td>
<td>3289</td>
<td>2915</td>
<td>2599</td>
<td>2296</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, China

According to Taiwan estimates, the investment from Taiwanese businessmen reached its climax both in 1993 and in 1997. See Table 1 for the amount of investment approved by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan. See Table 2 for the amount calculated by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, China. In 1999, Taiwan, next to Hong Kong, became China's second largest source of investments. Due to hostility across the strait after 1994, the Taiwan government encouraged Taiwanese businessmen to invest in other Asia countries rather than in China. In 1996, the Taiwan government implemented a policy of “patience over haste, steady progress over a long term” to restrict the amount and items invested.

Though the cross-strait economic activities were abundant, all such activities were considered indirect. Currently no direct shipment is allowed. In the early ‘80s, all goods had to be transferred via Hong Kong or other countries. In the first half of the ‘90s, the transferring process was simplified into “transshipment” while the ship, not the goods, were transferred via Hong Kong. In the second half of the ‘90s, the process was further simplified into “cargo in transit” as the paperwork, not the ship or goods, was transferred via the third harbor.

Businessmen followed their own rules in deciding investment directions. The policy of “patience over haste, steady progress over a long term” did not significantly slow down businessmen’s pace. In 1999, Taiwan became China's second largest source of imports next to Japan, exceeding the United States and South Korea. From year 1990 to 2000, the total amount of cross-strait trading had reached 216.06 billion US dollars (the total amount calculated by China is 175.29 billion US dollars). In 2000 alone, cross-strait trading reached 31.3 billion US dollars. See Table 3 for details.

Table 3.
Cross-Strait Trading between China and Taiwan (1990-2000)  Unit: Million US$

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of trading</td>
<td>5159</td>
<td>8617</td>
<td>11666</td>
<td>15096</td>
<td>17880</td>
<td>22524</td>
<td>23786</td>
<td>26370</td>
<td>23950</td>
<td>25834</td>
<td>31252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports from Taiwan to China</td>
<td>4394</td>
<td>7493</td>
<td>10547</td>
<td>13993</td>
<td>16022</td>
<td>19433</td>
<td>20727</td>
<td>22455</td>
<td>19840</td>
<td>21312</td>
<td>25029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exports from China to Taiwan</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>1119</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>3915</td>
<td>4110</td>
<td>4522</td>
<td>4522</td>
<td>6123</td>
<td>6223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taiwan

The increased economic activity between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait resulted in increased reliance. Comparatively, Taiwan relies more on China, than China on Taiwan. See Table 4 for details. From an economic perspective, the increase of cross-strait reliance...
demonstrates the mutual dependency between China and Taiwan, as well as the existence of closer economic relationships (Mao, 2000).

Table 4. Share that Indirect Cross-Strait Trade Contributes to Taiwan Total Foreign Trade

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Export share</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>9.84</td>
<td>12.95</td>
<td>16.47</td>
<td>17.22</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>17.87</td>
<td>18.39</td>
<td>17.94</td>
<td>17.52</td>
<td>16.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import share</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total trade share</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>10.95</td>
<td>11.15</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>10.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: "Monthly Statistics of Exports and Imports, Taiwan Area", MOF, Taiwan.

3. Cross-Strait Telecommunications Development

Unlike many cross-strait economic activities that were directed by businessmen, rather than politicians, the development of cross-strait telecommunications services has been completely ruled by politics. Without authorities’ support, the building and the maintenance of cross-strait telecommunications infrastructure would not have been possible. Without governments’ approval, a cross-strait phone call could not be connected.

During the last 100 years, the telecommunications infrastructure was regarded as a tool for politics, not for economic development. In the late nineteenth century, the Ching dynasty already developed a cross-strait telecommunications service. In 1884, Taiwan Governor Liu Ming-Chuan found that without an island-wide telegram service Taiwan was difficult to defend. Two years later, a line was built to connect the north to the south of Taiwan. In 1887 this line crossed the Taiwan Strait connecting to Ba-Jiau Island in Fuzhou, China. Thus, the era of cross-strait telecommunications service started. Eight years later when Taiwan was ceded to Japan, the cross-strait connection was no longer supported. However, during Japanese rule, an undersea cable was built to connect with Taiwan to Japan.

Telecommunications between Taiwan and China were reconnected after World War II when Taiwan was returned to China. During those four years when the same authority administered both Taiwan and China, telegram services were supported. However, the civil war in 1949 separated China and Taiwan, with that came a separation of telecommunications services.

The cross-strait telecommunications services were not reconnected until 1989, forty years later. The China government in 1978 made the request for the reconnection but it was denied by the Taiwan government for reasons of national security and distrust. Even when the Taiwan government allowed its citizens to visit their relatives in China in 1987, phone connections between Taiwan and China were still prohibited.

Cross-strait telecommunication was reconnect, though relayed through third countries, in June 1989, a few days after the Tianamen Square incident, for political reasons. A few days after the incident, the Taiwan government believed that the China government attempted to conceal the truth, and that with a cross-strait telecommunications reconnection the truth could be revealed. This political reason, not economic development or cross-strait cooperation, helped to reconnect people on the both sides of the Taiwan Strait; eventually this reconnection contributed to economic development.

Even today, political considerations by the Taiwan government still cause it to prohibit direct "links" while it encourages all forms of indirect links between Taiwan and China. All phone calls must be relayed by a third country. However, even with this restriction, the
amount of phone calls still has been increasing by 10-15% each year. In 2000 alone, 206 million phone calls (two ways) and 583 million calling minutes (two ways) were relayed by other nations’ switches. See Table 5 and Table 6 for details of cross-strait phone calls.

Table 5.
Telephone Calls between China and Taiwan (1990-2000)  Unit: Million

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of calls</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>30.28</td>
<td>47.47</td>
<td>60.71</td>
<td>79.70</td>
<td>95.43</td>
<td>120.56</td>
<td>150.11</td>
<td>178.32</td>
<td>206.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From China to Taiwan</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>21.17</td>
<td>26.97</td>
<td>36.29</td>
<td>42.96</td>
<td>56.65</td>
<td>73.31</td>
<td>82.29</td>
<td>94.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Taiwan to China</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>8.72</td>
<td>15.97</td>
<td>26.30</td>
<td>33.74</td>
<td>43.41</td>
<td>52.47</td>
<td>63.91</td>
<td>76.80</td>
<td>96.03</td>
<td>111.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Taiwan

Table 6.
Telephone Calling Minutes between China and Taiwan (1990-2000) Unit: Million minutes

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total calling minutes</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>97.3</td>
<td>148.6</td>
<td>188.2</td>
<td>236.4</td>
<td>283.9</td>
<td>349.7</td>
<td>426.2</td>
<td>500.1</td>
<td>581.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From China to Taiwan</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>102.2</td>
<td>115.1</td>
<td>151.7</td>
<td>190.5</td>
<td>214.1</td>
<td>240.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Taiwan to China</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>106.0</td>
<td>134.1</td>
<td>168.7</td>
<td>198.0</td>
<td>235.6</td>
<td>286.0</td>
<td>342.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Taiwan

The cross-strait reconnections made in 1989 were relayed via a third country, mostly Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and the United States. During years before 1997, a phone call made from Taiwan side to China was sent first to an undersea cable connected to Kyushu, Japan. This phone call was then transmitted to a switch in Osaka and then sent back to Kyushu again. The same call was then transmitted to an undersea cable connected to Shanghai, China, and then sent to China's public phone switches.

In 1997, Taiwan government decided to use the hard patch in a third country to relay the phone calls. This decision not only improved the quality of calls but also saved 16 million US dollars each year for the Taiwan side, and .9 million for the China side (Lee, 1997). Though a telecommunications loop was completed between China and Taiwan, all phone calls were still patched by a third country.

In 1998, the Taiwan government stated that all connections other than those using direct lines linking China with Taiwan were considered indirect connections. Therefore, sending signals to satellites or undersea cables not owned by either side was still considered indirect linkage and, therefore, allowed.

The CH-US undersea cable which ten countries invested in, including China and Taiwan, lands in Funshan, Taiwan, and connects to Chongming Island, China on the north side and Shantou, China on the south side. This connection, though a physically direct link across the Taiwan Strait, was still considered an indirect link by the Taiwan government, since neither completely owns this undersea cable.

The obstacles confronting on the Taiwan Strait telecommunications connections resulted from politics, not from issues of technology. For example, the China government has been proposing direct connections between two close islands near the coast of China -- Xiamen and Kinmen, administered by China and Taiwan respectively. This proposal was
rejected by the Taiwan government, partly for political reasons, partly the bandwidth of the undersea cable connecting from Taiwan to Kinmen cannot accommodate the telecommunications traffic across the Taiwan Strait.

4. Correlations between Economic Activities and Telecommunications Traffic

A study of the correlation between telecommunications traffic and economic activities through time between China and Taiwan makes two important contributions. First, the results provide further evidence of conclusions made by CCITT. Second, the absence of visible contact, negotiation, or economic activity between China and Taiwan prior to November 1987 indicates that telecommunications traffic and economic activities started almost simultaneously, creating the possibility of correlations that have no real causal relationship. Since they both started at nearly the same time, both are likely to grow rapidly during the same years, regardless of their effects on each other.

Correlations between cross-strait economic activities and telecommunications traffic are high. Similar to the increasingly intensive economic activities between China and Taiwan, the telecommunications traffic also grew very quickly. See Table 7 for the results of correlations between cross-strait telephone calls and investment, values of import, values of export, and total amount of trading from 1990 to 2000.

Table 7.
Correlation Matrix between Telecommunications Traffic and Economic Activities from 1990 to 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Investment¹</th>
<th>Investment²</th>
<th>Trading</th>
<th>Exporting from Taiwan</th>
<th>Exporting from China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of calls</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td>.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of calls (China to Taiwan)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.92*</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of calls (Taiwan to China)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling minutes</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling minutes (China to Taiwan)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.89*</td>
<td>.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calling minutes (Taiwan to China)</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.93*</td>
<td>.90*</td>
<td>.98*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
1: Investment estimated from Taiwan  2: Investment estimated from China

The insignificant correlation ($r <= .5$) between phone calls and amount investment in China can be interpreted as the influence of non-economic factors, such as Taiwan-China policy and the strict restrictions of investment set by the Taiwan government, may determine the amount of investment approved by the Taiwan government. For example, the investment from Taiwan reached its climax in 1993 partly due to Taiwan and China attempted to be reconciled during that time. Investment decreased dramatically soon afterward while China launched missiles around the outside of Taiwan. On the contrary, the phone calls, once reconnected, were less influenced by politics and policies. Therefore, a stable correlation between investment and telephone traffic cannot be reached.

Results in Table 7 show that the value of trading activities rises with telecommunications traffic. The statistical correlations are around .9. These significant correlations reveal that telecommunications services, measured by the number of calling minutes and number of calls between China and Taiwan, are highly correlated with cross-strait economic activities, measured by the total value of goods imported and total value of goods exported. In general, data analysis suggests that the utility of telecommunications
services enhance commerce between China and Taiwan. Telephone calls and economic activities are highly correlated. The evidences showed here are not enough to assert a relationship of causality between cross-strait telecommunications traffic and economic activities, though in general it is believed that the telecommunication infrastructure broadly supports economics activities. Further research is needed to enhance the argument of causality.

For years, telecommunications infrastructure has been considered an important engine to promote economic development, since the benefits of telecommunications promote economic, commercial, and social activities (ITU, 1998). The coordination of diverse economic activities requires reliable telecommunications services to facilitate the "acquisition of supplies, recruitment and coordination of labor, control of stocks, processing of materials, billing, recordkeeping, delivery of goods to buyers, and general market search activities" (Saunders et al., 1994). For those countries interested in cross-border economic activities, or especially the global economy and trade, reliable international telecommunications service is a base for their participation. The results of this study verify this assertion as the amount of cross-strait trading increased with cross-strait telephone traffic.

Apparently, reliable telephone service between China and Taiwan may remove some physical obstacles, improve the effectiveness of communications, increase productivity between scheduling and management, and make it possible to adopt different structures and locations (Saunders et al., 1994). Reliable telephone service and telecommunications infrastructure between China and Taiwan can shorten market response time by transmitting information more quickly. Therefore, this reliable telecommunications service, which supports all possible commercial activities, is reflected in the amount of cross-strait telephone traffic.

7. References


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