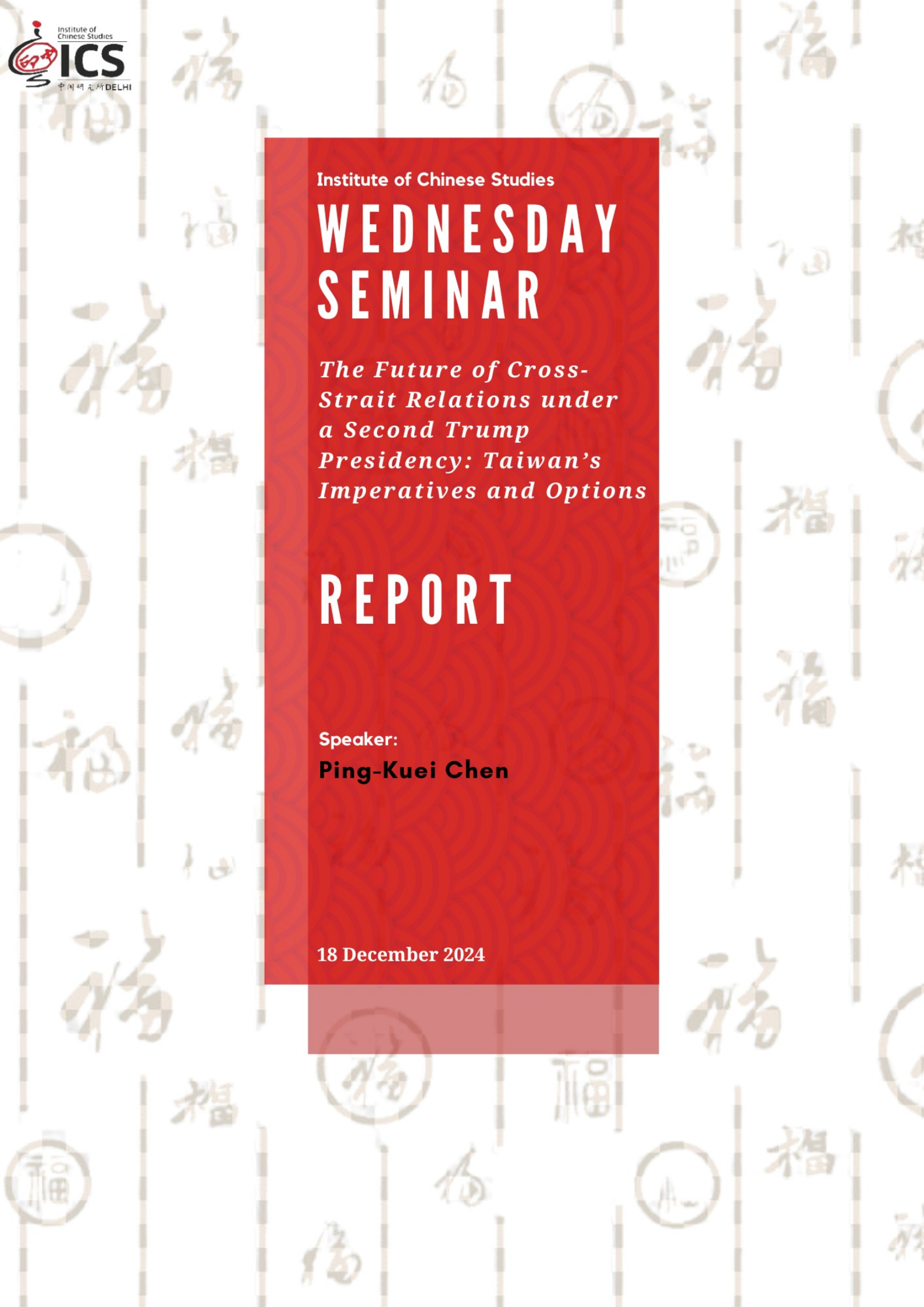




Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The Future of Cross-
Strait Relations under
a Second Trump
Presidency: Taiwan's
Imperatives and Options*

REPORT

Speaker:
Ping-Kuei Chen

18 December 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: Prof. Ping-kuei Chen, Professor, Department of Diplomacy, and Executive Director, In-Service Master Program on Strategy and International Affairs, National Chengchi University, Taiwan.

Chair: Dr. Raviprasad Narayanan, Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar explored the evolving dynamics of Cross-Strait relations and the Taiwan-US-China triangle, particularly in light of recent elections in Taiwan and the U.S. Dr. Raviprasad Narayanan argued that Taiwan should be considered a country due to its World Trade Organisation membership. Therefore, Taiwan's trade with China should not be viewed as a rebellious province trading with the mainland, but rather as two members of the WTO interacting economically.
- Prof. Chen Ping-kuei pointed out that in Beijing's view, without acceptance of the 1992 Consensus, there was no basis for dialogue. Meanwhile, Taipei continues to oppose the 1992 Consensus, emphasising the need for equal dignity and refusing dialogue unless this same is assured. As a result, official dialogue between Beijing and Taipei continues to be at a standstill. Taipei is also limiting official interactions with China, as shown by attempts to block a recent twin-city forum with Shanghai. Taiwan's channels of communication with China are getting restricted, while its security concerns are rising, leaving it to depend primarily on the US or its own resources for support.
- During the Biden administration, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) partnered with the Democrats for the first time, driven by liberal progressive ideology, which in turn strengthened their relations. With Trump securing a second term at the White House, the DPP will have to partner with the Republicans. Key figures nominated for office under the second Trump administration have shown support for

Taiwan and its security. In Trump's first presidency, high-level support had translated into pro-Taiwan policies, suggesting that a second term might not be bad for Taiwan, and could even lead to the adoption of a more pro-Taiwan policy.

- Prof. Chen argued that Donald Trump views Taiwan primarily through the lens of economics, placing less value on its democratic values or strategic importance. Trump's priority is largely centred on how Taiwan can contribute to US interests. Despite his unpredictability, one consistent aspect is his reluctance to commit. His telephonic conversation with Xi Jinping notably omitted Taiwan, further highlighting a deepening sense of uncertainty.
- Taiwan hopes that the US will demonstrate that the ROC has the highest priority in the United States' calculations. Lai Ching-te's administration is trying to convey his administration's willingness to pay the costs for US support. and Taiwan is presently negotiating a trade initiative with the US and is prepared to make the necessary commitments, but they remain unsure as to how much the US expects from them. Taiwan also remains concerned whether the US will honour its commitments in their hour of need.
- The US is faced with numerous global issues, such as the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, European affairs, and the security of South Korea and Japan. As a result, many countries are competing for the Trump administration's attention. Taiwan needs to determine how much it needs to pay to gain that attention and how much contribution would be enough. This dynamic will likely be a significant challenge for all US allies and partners, who are competing for the attention of a highly transactional American government. . Taiwan's options remain limited, and it will have to make a substantial financial commitment in order to draw Trump's favour.
- Prof. Chen concluded that American signals to Taiwan will remain ambiguous. While the US has been consistent in its position — remaining ambiguous about Taiwan's sovereignty as long as peace is maintained — it has always been clear in opposing any changes to the status quo by either Taipei or Beijing. This has created a challenge, as on the one hand, the US emphasises Taiwan's importance and remains committed

to its security, while on the other hand, it may discuss Taiwan as part of broader negotiations, potentially using it as a bargaining chip, within the ambit of the US-China rivalry.

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