

Africa's Place in the Diplomatic Competition Between Beijing and Taipei

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The diplomatic struggle between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan has been a consistent feature of the African landscape since the continent first embarked on the evolution to independence. For Taipei, Africa offers an area of operations for its attempts to break out of the diplomatic isolation forced upon it by Beijing. On its part, the PRC is determined not to allow Taipei international breathing space, for in its view such a raised profile would undermine its own legitimacy as the ruler of the Chinese people, and raise doubts regarding its unofficial claim to be the "leader" of the Third World. Furthermore, African nations have provided a large support constituency for China in its clashes with the West over human rights and democratization. Beijing can ill-afford to dispense with such support at international forums, yet Taipei has refused to submit to Chinese pressure and continues to have a presence in Africa. With this in mind, the diplomatic competition between the PRC and the ROC on the African continent is likely to continue.

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The switch in January 1998 from Taipei to Beijing by the Central African Republic, the establishment by Chad of official relations with Taipei in mid-August 1997, and South Africa's official change of recognition from Taipei to Beijing on January 1, 1998 have brought into sharp focus the two Chinas' foreign policies toward the African continent, particularly their bitter competition for international recognition.¹ This diplomatic struggle between the two Chinas has been a consistent—if low-key—feature of the African landscape since the continent first embarked on the evolution to independence.² Their competition for international legitimacy has also been a continuous feature of cross-Strait relations since 1949.³

While the diplomatic dual has ranged from the South Pacific to Central America, the purpose of this article is to look at contemporary developments in the struggle for diplomatic recognition between China and Taiwan in Africa, to examine how this may benefit the poorer and smaller states on the continent, and to outline why both Chinas see such competition as necessary in their foreign policy toward Africa and the wider world.

South Africa's Switch

South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad's trip to the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in June 1997 was intimately related to President Nelson Mandela's surprise announcement in November 1996 that it was to switch recognition

¹For consideration of this competition outside of Africa, see Thomas Biddick, "Diplomatic Rivalry in the South Pacific," *Asian Survey* 29, no. 8 (August 1989): 800-815.

²For an earlier treatment, see Wei Liang-tsai, *Peking Versus Taipei in Africa, 1960-1978* (Taipei: The Asia and World Institute, 1982). For a later examination, see Bih-jaw Lin, "The Republic of China and Africa," in *Foreign Policy of the Republic of China on Taiwan*, ed. Yu San Wang (New York: Praeger, 1990), 145-54.

³See Weiqun Gu, "The Battle for International Legitimation Between the PRC and the ROC," chapter 4 in *Conflicts of Divided Nations: The Cases of China and Korea* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995).

from Taipei to Beijing from January 1, 1998.⁴ This volte-face was a severe blow to the ROC, as South Africa was the largest remaining country in the pro-ROC camp; indeed, it was the only ROC supporter even approaching middle-power status.⁵

Pretoria's defection has now left nine countries in Africa that continue to officially recognize the Republic of China, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, and Swaziland. With this number of countries and their nature, it is axiomatic that the ROC is currently left with a cluster of rump states who have one thing in common: all of them are either tiny or impoverished, or frequently both.

The resolution by South Africa to switch relations and end its twenty-year relationship with the ROC came after continuous pressure from China to forsake what the PRC has attempted to portray as a "renegade province." Despite the fact that Taiwan has established over 620 trading companies in the country which employ 45,000 people and conduct two-way trade between Taipei and Pretoria worth US\$1.7 billion, the realpolitik of international relations effectively meant that South Africa could no longer afford to continue defying mainland China. Although a number of South African commentators urged a dual recognition policy (which Chad also attempted but failed),⁶ Beijing consistently rejects such a notion and Pretoria eventually caved in.⁷ The decision for South Africa to undergo the switch in recognition hinged around a number of political and economic considerations.

While trade between South Africa and Taiwan has been substantial,

⁴This decision provoked numerous commentaries. See for example, "A Friend in Need: South Africa Throws Taiwan's Diplomacy into Turmoil," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong), December 12, 1996.

⁵Following Saudi Arabia and South Korea's switch over to Beijing in recent years.

⁶For coverage of Chad's attempts at dual recognition, see the *Hong Kong Standard*, August 13, 1997, 10.

⁷For South African expositions of the dual recognition policy, see Deon Geldenhuys, *South Africa and the China Question: A Case for Dual Recognition* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1995); and Willie Breytenbach, "The Chinese Dilemma: Dual Recognition is the Ultimate Solution," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 2, no. 1 (1994): 50-61.

mainland China's trade with South Africa—if one includes goods transhipped through the recently returned Hong Kong—amounts to US\$3 billion.⁸ With Hong Kong's return to the PRC, Taiwan's competitive advantage vis-à-vis trade with South Africa has been effectively undermined. Furthermore, the South African consulate in Hong Kong has acted as an important information center for Hong Kong investors expressing interest in Africa. If South Africa had maintained diplomatic relations with Taipei, the possibility of Pretoria being allowed to continue its consular presence in Hong Kong would have been in doubt, as would the continued ability to attract Chinese investors from Hong Kong.⁹

South Africa also has international aspirations of its own—particularly with regard to the proposed enlargement of the United Nations Security Council.¹⁰ Maintaining recognition of the ROC would most certainly have provoked China's wrath and prevented South Africa from realizing these hopes, as the PRC is a permanent member of the Security Council and has shown that it is not shy about retaliating against states with diplomatic links to Taipei. China's much-criticized actions regarding the attempted scuttling of United Nations support for Guatemala's peace-building attempts and its warnings that it was prepared to veto extending the UN presence in Haiti (both countries recognize the ROC) bear witness to this. Nicaragua's recent participation in the campaign to have the ROC readmitted to the United Nations also brought forth a bitter attack from Beijing, which threatened that Managua would "ultimately pay the price."¹¹

Although the PRC characterizes official recognition of the ROC as interference in Chinese domestic affairs (with the usual accompanying hyperbole), it has exhibited no reluctance to indulge in identical behavior over the "two Chinas" question. Whether it be interfering in peace processes in the Americas, courting South Africa while it still maintained links with Tai-

⁸*Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), January 11, 1998, 5.

⁹See comments by South Africa's consul-general to Hong Kong, Mrs. de Villiers-Steenkamp, in *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), November 23, 1996.

¹⁰See "UN Scuffles Influenced Taiwan Decision," *Business Day* (Johannesburg), December 12, 1997, 6.

¹¹*Washington Post*, August 12, 1997, 2.

wan, or making unspecified threats against states such as Nicaragua, China has been more than ready to revel in the type of behavior that it so sternly criticizes when conducted by or involving the ROC. As one observer wryly commented, "Foreign 'interference' is all right if it's to Beijing's advantage."¹² If the minister of a country having official links with Beijing visited Taipei, rather than the reverse case of Aziz Pahad visiting China in late 1997, China would have volubly denounced the incident as an attempt to create a "two Chinas" situation.

Beijing is also not averse to exploiting its membership in various United Nations bodies. Thus, China's UN ambassador Qin Huasun attempted to influence members of the Central African Republic's government when he was sent to the country on a UN mission.¹³ Such behavior was inconsistent with his role as an international diplomat, but consistency in the competition for recognition between Beijing and Taipei is evidently not high on the list of priorities.

The PRC is able to get away with its dogmatic posturing because of its increasing economic and political power.¹⁴ In particular, Beijing's seat on the Security Council (and the veto power that goes with it) is the ultimate trump card that China holds and continually exploits against the ROC to render Taipei largely unable to secure diplomatic recognition from economically strong or ambitious nations. It is self-evident that no country wishes to be the first in line to challenge China and risk the almost inevitable economic and political fall-out that would certainly follow. The PRC has been known to react hysterically to any gestures of support—official or otherwise—to the ROC: note, for example, its melodramatics over ROC President Lee Teng-hui's 1995 trip to his alma mater in the United States. China's reactions have been particularly violent if visiting ROC ministers are perceived as making political capital out of nominal "private" visits. While such displays may appear as bizarre overreactions to casual ob-

¹²Frank Ching, "China Makes Its Own Rules," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 19, 1996, 36.

¹³"Government Accuses China of Sabotaging its Africa Ties," *Inside China Today*, October 27, 1997, at <http://www.insidechina.com/china/news/11.html>.

¹⁴Although the recent economic crisis in East Asia threatens to dampen this somewhat.

servers, in actuality China's behavior serves to give warning to others contemplating the cultivation of anything but unofficial links with the ROC. The message is clear: Beijing will not compromise over the question of which government represents the Chinese people.

Benefits Available to African Nations

At the same time, while the question of who or what represents the whole of China is largely irrelevant to most Africans, astute politicians on the continent have become aware that it is a competition that economically depressed countries in Africa can profit from if they are prepared to indulge in some Machiavellian politicking and play the two Chinas against each other. As a result, the diplomatic competition has meant a vital source of economic assistance and aid being available to some countries at a time when great-power interest in the continent has continued to decline, and Africa has largely lost the former bargaining position which it had taken advantage of to obtain concessions from the rival superpowers. In the post-Cold War era, rivalry between the two Chinas is perhaps the only political competition that Africa can hope to exploit in a manner similar to that during the Cold War.

As has been mentioned previously, large states are unlikely to risk antagonizing China and put at risk millions of dollars worth of trade deals and investments. This is likely to remain the case while the West, and in particular the United States, maintains its policy of engagement with the mainland. Yet, it is conceivable that if the developed world's attitude toward China changes to that of containment—a posture favored by the U.S. Congress but opposed by President Bill Clinton—then the number of countries willing to defy Beijing on the two Chinas issue would rise. At that point, Taipei's "dollar diplomacy" would be rendered redundant.

However, it is currently those nations which are too small or too poverty-stricken to figure on the international stage—such as São Tomé or Guinea-Bissau—which are the most ready to engage in relations with the ROC. With minimal—if existent—economic linkages with the PRC and political fall-out from such a move unlikely to harm the states' real interests,

a number of small islands in the South Pacific and Caribbean and economically depressed nations in Africa and Latin America have very little to lose by standing beside Taiwan in the "two Chinas" quarrel.¹⁵ The compensation in the form of economic and technical aid for such a stance is often most handsome for the countries concerned.

Despite the PRC's apparent potency and its veto power in the United Nations, the ROC has refused to give up the struggle for friends and allies in international society and has continued to persevere with a vigorous foreign policy of supporting and encouraging those nations which defy China and maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. In economically-depressed Africa, this frequently boils down to finance and aid and the ROC has not been tardy in recognizing this fact. This has prompted hostile (particularly Chinese) critics to censure the ROC's "dollar diplomacy"—the use of aid and grants to "buy" allies.¹⁶

As has been stated, Africa provides the most opportunities for this policy to be conducted because many of the states there are poverty-stricken, or even bankrupt. This does not mean, however, that African countries are merely reactive and prone-like. Indeed, the situation can be skillfully utilized to Africa's advantage. For example, in 1996 Senegal switched—for the third time—from Beijing to Taipei and in return was the recipient of a generous aid package.¹⁷ This had been the case each time a diplomatic switch was made. Similarly, when Gambia abandoned Beijing in July 1995, a US\$35 million aid package was waiting to reward Banjul for its behavior.¹⁸ It is reported that São Tomé stands to gain US\$30 million over three years for recognizing Taiwan—no small amount for a country

¹⁵Outside of Africa, the ROC currently has relations with the following countries: Belize, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and the Vatican City. The Bahamas recently defected to China from Taiwan, as did St. Lucia after receiving a reported grant of US\$1 million from Beijing.

¹⁶For a Taiwanese discussion and defense of the notion of "dollar diplomacy," see Tuan Y. Cheng, "Foreign Aid in ROC Diplomacy," *Issues & Studies* 28, no. 9 (September 1992): 67-84.

¹⁷For details, see *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 6, 1996, 22.

¹⁸*South China Morning Post*, May 9, 1996, 5.

with an annual GDP of only around US\$45 million.¹⁹

Problems for the Two Chinas

However, the dangers of "dollar diplomacy" for both Chinas are all too clear: African nations effectively holding both Beijing and Taipei to ransom and attempting to extract the maximum amount from them. While this can be advantageous for those being courted, it can be humiliating for Taipei and Beijing to indulge in such behavior, and increasing criticisms in Taiwan charge that the ROC is prostituting itself to undeserving and ungrateful nations which care little for its predicament, are churlish in their behavior, and are preoccupied with the possibility of financial rewards. Cases in point are Lesotho and Niger, both of which have dallied between the two Chinas in an obvious attempt to draw out extra money.²⁰

In June 1992, Niger initially agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, just before the ROC ambassador-designate was due to leave for Niamey, Niger suddenly went back on its plans and announced it was sticking with Beijing.²¹ However, on the next day Niger's Prime Minister Amadou Cheiffou contacted Taipei to contradict this. An ROC embassy was established in Niamey and the PRC departed, denouncing Niger's position.²² Taiwan immediately began funding medical and agricultural programs and assisted in developing the country's uranium deposits. However, this was not to be the end of the debacle, for in 1996 Niger switched back to the PRC, complaining that promised aid from the ROC had not materialized. For one of the most powerful and advanced economies in the world to be reduced to such a humiliating exercise as scrabbling for the favors of a state like Niger (per capita GNP of less than

¹⁹*Hong Kong Standard*, August 20, 1997, 10.

²⁰For the case of Lesotho, see Ian Taylor, "The 'Captive States' of Southern Africa and China: The PRC and Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 35, no. 2 (July 1997): 83-89.

²¹*Hong Kong Standard*, July 1, 1992, 10.

²²*Ibid.*, July 23, 1992, 9.

US\$300) illustrates Taiwan's frustrating lack of political power on the international stage. Correspondingly, such a case shows how successful China has been in isolating Taiwan and thus forcing it to act in this fashion.

As has been mentioned, financial inducements have often been the catalyst for states switching between Beijing and Taipei. Since 1988, the International Economic Cooperation and Development Fund (IECDF) has been in operation in the ROC.²³ The aim of this fund is to help the economic development of developing nations while also strengthening bilateral cooperation between Taiwan and states in the Third World. Perhaps more important is the fund's ability through the distribution of financial largesse to strengthen the ROC's political links and expand its foreign relations, marking Taiwan's "transformation from a recipient of aid to a donor of financial assistance" to the Third World.²⁴ Over one billion dollars has been set aside for the provision of soft loans and technical assistance, though only around a tenth of this has been disbursed. Nonetheless, Guinea-Bissau has received US\$20 million from the fund and the Central African Republic a generous US\$300 million.²⁵

In an example of Taipei's flexibility, any developing nation or country sympathetic to Taiwan may apply for assistance from the fund. Furthermore, projects receiving funding are not obliged to buy only from the ROC or even to give Taiwanese products preference.²⁶ This contrasts with much of China's foreign aid, which frequently attaches conditions to its aid agreements requiring exactly that.

While the ROC continues to operate this fund, however, Taiwan has increasingly become wary of the open exploitation by poor African states of the two Chinas' competition, and is now more circumspect in its dealings with prospective diplomatic partners. By this it is meant that those countries seeking a mere pay-out from Taipei in return for recognition are likely to be disappointed.

²³For information, see *Regulations and Administrative Guidelines of the International Economic Cooperation and Development Fund* (Taipei, 1989).

²⁴Central News Agency (CNA), Taipei, October 10, 1992, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: China-92-199* (October 14, 1992): 54.

²⁵*Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 14, 1991, 24.

²⁶See note 23 above.

Furthermore, the ROC is also currently examining its unofficial outposts in Africa—offices maintained in various capitals, which usually masquerade as trade or travel offices, but are Taiwan's de facto representation in the countries concerned. Taipei has decided to concentrate on those offices that serve a useful function, i.e., those that are economically profitable for Taiwan and politically useful. Countries where such offices have limited functions due to Taiwan's minimal trade with the state concerned or where the country is particularly close to the PRC are now likely to be closed. Thus, Taipei recently announced the closure of its unofficial offices in Congo-Brazzaville, Libya, and Nigeria.²⁷ More closures are likely to follow and are tacit admissions of defeat by Taiwan in its diplomatic competition with China over certain countries.

Nonetheless, it is likely that Taiwan will concentrate on wooing states in Africa where it believes it has the best chance of success, and continuing to court African states it already maintains relations with.²⁸ Such countries are invariably small and/or impoverished and so offer the best chance for Taiwan's more considered "dollar diplomacy" to operate. Interestingly, Taiwan is renowned in Africa for offering appropriate technological (particularly in the agricultural fields) assistance with little strings attached.²⁹ Furthermore, unlike the PRC, the ROC is not dogmatically inconsistent on rigid recognition formulas when it opens official relations with a nation.

Chinese Criticism

On its part, China has piously denounced Taiwan's so-called "dollar diplomacy" as "bribery" and has attempted to make political capital out of the latter's alleged use of its undoubted economic power in the recognition

²⁷*Inside China Today*, August 12, 1997, at <http://www.insidechina.com/china/news/11.html>.

²⁸Hence the ROC foreign minister's trip in January 1998 to visit Taiwan's remaining African allies. See "Envoy Starts African Damage Control," *Inside China Today*, January 6, 1998, at <http://www.insidechina.com/china/news/10.html>.

²⁹*Hong Kong Standard*, August 13, 1997, 11.

competition. Such criticism by the PRC is unconvincing, for while China lambasts Taiwan for deploying financial largesse, it is more than happy to pursue a policy by which it also financially rewards its friends. For example, US\$24 million worth of grants and interest-free loans to Tanzania and a US\$3.6 million grant to Zambia were among the more notable features of PRC Premier Li Peng's recent sojourn through six African states in May 1997. Further afield, China recently gave US\$1 million to the Caribbean island of St. Lucia in a successful attempt to influence it to switch from the ROC.³⁰

Furthermore, Beijing has little if any qualms as to whom it hands out its favors to, or for that matter, who it conducts business with. While the global community recently considered economic sanctions against Nigeria following the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, China was busy negotiating a US\$520 million deal to furnish the country with new locomotives and restore its crumbling rail system.³¹ Similarly, China's first ever below-market loan from its newly-established export-import bank went to Sudan—a state denounced in the West for its continued human rights abuses.³²

Taipei's Motivation

What is the motivation that inspires the two Chinas to indulge in courting relatively unimportant states for recognition, often at comparatively considerable expense? For Taipei it is elementary: to break out of the diplomatic stranglehold that Beijing has managed to place on the island. To this end, "dollar diplomacy" has been relatively successful as a lubricant in aiding the ROC raise its international profile.

Since the United Nations' diplomatic turnaround and decision in 1971 to switch official recognition from Taiwan to China, the ROC has been forced to witness its international status and profile slip to the point

³⁰CNA, Taipei, August 1, 1997.

³¹See note 17 above.

³²*South China Morning Post*, January 26, 1996, 10.

that presently, it maintains diplomatic relations with less than thirty small and impoverished countries, with no official recognition from any of the world's major nations. As one commentator noted, "No country's diplomatic status has been so out of step with its real power as that of the ROC."³³ This has resulted in an intensely frustrating situation for Taiwan, for while it possesses a powerful economy and huge foreign reserves, it does not exist in official diplomatic terms and remains an isolated state in real terms.³⁴

It is obvious that Taipei's international status is far below what it legitimately warrants and the ROC must struggle continuously to obtain and maintain what is granted automatically to every other country.³⁵ For example, despite possessing an extremely impressive economy (including the third largest foreign reserves in the world), Taiwan has only been granted observer status in the World Trade Organization, which defies logic. Taipei has thus been assiduous in its attempts to win back not only its UN seat but also its position in a whole host of international organizations, and has emerged as an important actor in international affairs.³⁶

These efforts were originally to be at the expense of the PRC, but with the reversal of Washington's position vis-à-vis the two Chinas, this policy increasingly became unrealistic and was finally largely abandoned after the death of ROC President Chiang Ching-kuo in 1988. Currently, Taipei pragmatically operates under the rubric of acknowledging "one China but two governments."³⁷ By adopting a non-ideological and flexible approach to its foreign policy, Taipei has been able to extend its international profile and enhance its global role, though it is still denied what it ultimately aspires

³³Chi Su, "The ROC's International Relations During the 1990s," *Issues & Studies* 29, no. 3 (September 1993): 1-21.

³⁴For a treatment of this, see Deon Geldenhuys, *Isolated States: A Comparative Analysis* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1990).

³⁵For a comment on the ROC's international position, see Hans Kuijper, "Is Taiwan a Part of China," in *The International Status of Taiwan in the New World Order*, ed. Jean-Marie Henckaerts (London: Kluwer Law International, 1996), 9-19.

³⁶See Robert G. Sutter, "Taiwan Rising," *Current History* 93, no. 584 (September 1994): 281-85.

³⁷See ROC Government Information Office press release, "Looking Beneath the Surface of the 'One China' Question" (February 1997).

to-official recognition.³⁸ This is unfortunate, in that membership in the United Nations would enable the question of the two Chinas to be negotiated in a politically neutral environment while at the same time affording the ROC political legitimization.³⁹

Since Lee Teng-hui's announcement to this effect in April 1993 and his stated aim of Taiwan's re-admittance to the General Assembly, the ROC has indulged in a campaign to rejoin the United Nations under the understanding that although there is theoretically one China, there are for all practical purposes currently two governments ruling the Chinese people. The ROC has argued that both should be allowed to participate fully in international society, and it is this formula that has regularly been promoted by Taiwan's allies in their attempts to have General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of October 1971 reviewed regarding the ROC's re-admission to the United Nations.⁴⁰

However, the ROC has been thwarted virtually everywhere it turns by an unyieldingly dogmatic insistence by Beijing that it is a "renegade province" and must "return" to the Chinese motherland.⁴¹ China has successfully mobilized support in the Third World to block initiatives aiming to put Taiwan's membership of the General Assembly on the agenda for discussion at UN sessions when Taiwan's partners bring the issue up.

It is only by procuring recognition from established states that the ROC can effectively maintain and promote its international profile as a political as well as economic entity.⁴² This is why Taiwan has sought allies wherever they may be and however small. After all, all sovereign nations possess one vote each in the United Nations; it is this realistic calculation that has spurred Taipei's efforts.

³⁸See, for example, Borislav Korkodelovic, "Taiwanese 'Elastic and Practical Diplomacy'," *Review of International Affairs* 41, no. 973 (October 1990): 6-8.

³⁹For an ROC view on this, see Frederick Chien, "The Republic of China on Taiwan: Active Partner in the Pacific Rim," *Comparative Strategy* 14, no. 1 (1995): 1-6.

⁴⁰For coverage of the last attempt, see the *Hong Kong Standard*, September 18, 1997, 10.

⁴¹See Deng-ker Lee, "Peking's Efforts to Isolate the Republic of China," *Issues & Studies* 28, no. 12 (December 1992): 97-111.

⁴²See Jiann-Jong Guo, "The Role of Taiwan in the Asia-Pacific Community," in *Politics of Economic Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region*, ed. Kuang-sheng Liao (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, 1992), 105-30.

At present, the membership of the pro-ROC fraternity has hovered around what can be called the "magic thirty" for a number of years, serving as an important psychological boost to the ROC and the people of Taiwan. In essence, the number of Taipei-recognizing nations serves as a litmus test for the ROC's international status—the quality of support is not as important as the numbers. If this number were to fall drastically, say to around twenty, then it is likely that a crisis of confidence would envelop the ROC and its government. Yet, if Taipei is able to maintain the pro-ROC club at a stable figure, or even expand it, then Taiwan's own profile would be seen as stable and secure within the parameters afforded it by Beijing's aggressive attempts at isolation. The psychological factor in the "dollar diplomacy" game should therefore not be discounted.

Furthermore, Taiwan is aware that it is increasingly popular in the international community. This has been particularly evident since the June 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square when China's image as a benign reforming state dramatically slipped.⁴³ Questions have increasingly been raised in the West regarding China's human rights and palpable lack of democracy, which fly in the face of the democratization process which has swept the globe since the late 1980s.

At the same time, the ROC has been busy embarking on its own democratization process. The international community cannot ignore the fact that Taiwan has a fully operational multiparty democracy, possessing a legitimate government representing the people. In contrast, China has not and does not, which has been a factor accounting for the fact that more and more nations are willing to hold and upgrade their unofficial ties with the ROC. Such links are profitable for the Taiwanese economy, lock in the island to the international community, and promote Taiwan's global profile. By closing its less active unofficial offices in Africa (and elsewhere), Taipei is signalling that such offices are not merely symbolic: they serve a purpose and need to pay their way.

⁴³For how this affected China's foreign policy, see George T. Yu, "Chinese Foreign Policy Since Tiananmen: The Search for Friends and Influence," in *China and World Political Developments and International Issues*, ed. Thomas Lee (Taipei: Cheng Chung Book Co., 1991), 29-43.

At present, it is evident that the ROC is operating a twin-track policy vis-à-vis enhancing its international status. On the one hand, it has promoted official ties with states willing to defy China and recognize Taiwan. This has limitations in that those countries with extensive economic ties with the mainland are not willing to jeopardize themselves by entering into official ties with the ROC. Taiwan is thus effectively limited to courting small and/or impoverished nations, particularly in Africa, through its "dollar diplomacy" tactics. On the other hand, it has supplemented this approach by promoting unofficial links with most countries in the world, and working hard to upgrade its ties while at the same time promoting its international stature.

Beijing's Motives for the Diplomatic Tug-of-War

On its part, Communist China has a number of motives for indulging in its antagonism with the ROC. First, the PRC's state constitution asserts that it is the legitimate government of *all* of China, including the island of Taiwan.⁴⁴ This zero-sum confrontation with Taipei has been a hallmark of Beijing's approach toward the ROC since 1949. To allow the ROC to gain political legitimacy and status as an independent republic or as an "alternative" government of China would be an unbearable loss of face for Beijing and provoke serious questions within China itself over the grip of the Communist Party over the Chinese people. For a government increasingly seen by the people as lacking the legitimacy to rule, this would present further troubles to the PRC elite.

Linked to the above is a second motivation for Beijing to indulge in diplomatic competition with Taipei. By isolating the ROC and actively trying to prevent the reemergence of Taiwan as an officially-recognized state, the PRC is attempting to force its own norms onto the international community. That is, it aggressively claims the right to force other nations

⁴⁴See Preamble to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, in *People's Republic of China Year Book, 1991/92* (Beijing: 1992), 1.

to accept its view on Taiwan's status. It could be forcefully argued that this in itself is interference by China into the affairs of other countries: it is an impingement on national sovereignty to demand that a state not recognize one country or another. Connected to this is the Beijing government's desire to unify Taiwan with the mainland. If the ROC has a broad international profile, forced integration by China is less likely, as it would draw in the global community. Yet, if China is successful in totally isolating Taiwan, the forced integration of the island into the PRC would be less problematic for Beijing. Thus, Beijing's competition for recognition has one eye fixed firmly on the stated policy of Taiwan's reunification with the mainland.

Third, China has attempted to posture itself as being of the Third World, if not its effective leader.⁴⁵ This projects China onto the global stage as a major player in its own right, but if this image is to be sustained and carried off, Beijing must maintain an active and visible interest in areas such as Africa. With Taiwan nipping at its heels, China has thus involved itself in the tug-of-war on the continent and providing funds and aid to African nations. Even though the amounts involved seem large, the loyalty of African states is relatively cheap for an increasingly economic buoyant China, serves to bolster its image, and helps project China as a "concerned" state involving itself in the economic rehabilitation of Africa.

Stemming from this is the fourth, perhaps more calculating, reason why China has indulged in competition with Taiwan for diplomatic recognition: the understanding that Third World nations provide a valuable support constituency to enable China to withstand criticism from the West over its continued human rights violations. As one commentator has remarked, "China has managed to piggyback on the Third World's power of numbers to escape international censure."⁴⁶ This reached added piquancy following the opprobrium heaped on Beijing after the Tiananmen Incident, as it did not go unnoticed that most African states either remained unmoved by the

⁴⁵For a critical review of this, see John F. Copper, "The PRC and the Third World: Rhetoric Versus Reality," *Issues & Studies* 22, no. 3 (March 1986): 107-25.

⁴⁶Samuel S. Kim, "China and the Third World in the Changing World Order," in *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, 3rd edition, ed. Samuel S. Kim (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 137.

West's reaction or actively expressed their support for the crackdown on what was perceived to be anarchic and anti-government elements in Chinese society.

Aware of their own tenuous grip on power, which has often been maintained by less than democratic means, many African leaders have sympathized with Beijing when its human rights record has been criticized in international forums. In return, it has been relatively simple for the PRC to play up to this constituency by turning the criticism into an issue of "interference" in state sovereignty and an example of Western neo-imperialism.⁴⁷ Such rhetorical constructs reach an appreciative audience in parts of the Third World. This explains why in April 1996, a motion by the United Nations Human Rights Commission to admonish China's human rights record was defeated by twenty-six votes—fourteen of them African.

Outlook and Conclusion

The African continent is the most fertile ground for the two Chinas to play out their "dollar diplomacy" and active wooing of states in the competition for diplomatic recognition. Geographically distant and economically weak, though potentially significant through their possession of voting rights in bodies such as the United Nations, African states remain at the center of the two Chinas' diplomatic competition.

Painfully aware of its political weakness, Taipei has skillfully used its economic muscle to encourage the granting of diplomatic recognition. In fact, both Chinas have used this tactic, thus rendering Beijing's loud criticism of it unconvincing. Of the twenty-nine states currently recognizing Taipei, nine are in Africa, and the continent is likely to continue to play host to diplomatic intrigue between Beijing and Taipei.

For the ROC, this suggests possible policy recommendations. The relatively steady membership of the pro-Taiwan club serves a useful pur-

⁴⁷See, for example, "China's Internal Affairs Brook No Interference," *Beijing Review*, July 31-August 6, 1989.

pose in offering psychological support to the people of Taiwan, and should be maintained and if possible, expanded upon. In Africa, there are no doubt a number of nations willing to switch relations. Better still, if Taiwan is able to break into Europe—particularly in the former Warsaw Pact countries or in the newly independent states—so much the better for its profile. But, as in Africa, the ROC should be more circumspect in its utilization of its economic strengths to win recognition. A careful balance should be made between using finance to woo states, and the rather humiliating spectacle of chasing after states blatantly interested only in finance. This is difficult, as it is true that most African nations have a limited interest in the two Chinas' situation. Nonetheless, research into who is or is not reliable and what benefits Taipei may receive should be made by ROC policymakers in Africa in this regard.

At the same time, Taiwan's cultivation of unofficial linkages should continue both in Africa and the wider world; this serves as an extremely valuable investment in the future, especially if engagement of China switches to containment. Furthermore, such links are financially worthwhile to Taipei, particularly if it is ruthless in closing down the more symbolic offices that serve little purpose. The twin-track policy of careful "dollar diplomacy" and unofficial linkages should thus remain the cornerstone of the ROC's African policy.

On its part, China has found in Africa a most useful constituency that can be mobilized relatively easy to rally to its defense. This has helped rationalize the PRC's willingness to indulge in a diplomatic competition with the ROC for recognition. With large countries such as South Africa, Beijing's economic and political clout effectively guarantees that it will always be the ultimate victor. However, with the smaller states, this factor is not so important: the willing provision of aid and economic assistance is. Beijing will thus likely to continue on its present course of attempting to thwart Taipei in Africa through the provision of aid and investment and the use of threats—although such posturing does bring with it the hidden danger of alienating those which China aims to court. Nonetheless, it is most probable that the diplomatic tug-of-war between the PRC and the ROC will continue to be a feature of Africa's international relations for the foreseeable future.