

# Taiwan's Independence Plot

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*An accurate understanding of CCP policies and their roots in a particular interpretation of the national interest and ruling group interests just might make preserving the peace between China and Taiwan a tad easier and somewhat more likely. Hence, this article aims simply at making transparent the CCP's self-serving misunderstanding of Taiwan which reflects politics inside the CCP. There is no Taiwan plot which can establish a de jure Taiwan independence so as to force the CCP to resort to force if that did not seem momentarily in the interest of Chinese ruling groups for quite different reasons.*

**KEYWORDS:** 1989-91 CCP crisis; the politics of CCP nationalist legitimization; undermining Taiwan's *de facto* independence; international acceptance of the CCP myth; China; regional goals.

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## The Mainstream Consensus



Little Taiwan, an island the size of Massachusetts in the western Pacific, situated north of the Philippine island chain and south of Japan's Ryukyu island chain, is portrayed by most mainstream American analysts of China as a threat to world peace, as provocative.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Specialists focused on Taiwan, such as Shelly Rigger and Richard Bush, find otherwise.

A discourse constructed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to serve its political purposes has been accepted by observers of China elsewhere, too. In this mainstream narrative, a risky and irrational Taiwanese quest for independence is said to endanger the peaceful status quo. China's threats against Taiwan are then portrayed as a deterrent to maintain a peaceful status quo.<sup>2</sup>

The basic misunderstanding about Taiwan and its policies among China specialists is that Taiwan's democratically elected presidents—first the Kuomintang's (KMT, 國民黨) Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and then the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP, 民進黨) Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁)—have been undermining a fragile peace in the Taiwan Strait region by irresponsible actions. They are said to be moving toward declaring independence, allegedly a war-prone agenda. Stopping "Taiwan's movement toward creeping independence (enabled by democratization and a growing sense of a separate Taiwan identity)"<sup>3</sup> is said to require a reining in of pro-independence forces on Taiwan. Otherwise Taiwan's destabilizing actions will force China's rulers, who would prefer to focus on their top priority—economic modernization—to instead contemplate the use of armed force against a Taiwan that is portrayed as having gone crazy since democratization in 1988.

The dominant interpretation among China-watchers presents one with a puzzle. What has driven Taiwanese to lose their self-interested common sense? In the words of the Beijing University international relations specialist Jia Qingguo (賈慶國): "If the Taiwan authorities continue to push for independence, it could make it politically necessary for the Chinese government to use force to defend China's territorial integrity and sovereignty."<sup>4</sup> A peace-loving China, in the hegemonic narrative, is

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Ross, "Comparative Deterrence," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), chap. 2 is typical.

<sup>3</sup>Phillip C. Saunders, "Long-Term Trends in China-Taiwan Relations: Implications for U.S. Taiwan Policy," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 989.

<sup>4</sup>Jia Qingguo, "Learning to Live with the Hegemon: Evolution of China's Policy toward the U.S. since the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 44 (August 2005): 407.

being pushed, reluctantly, into an unwanted war by an out-of-control democracy on Taiwan. "China," the *New York Times* reports, "is determined to deter Taiwan from declaring independence, an act that it has said will lead to war."<sup>5</sup> American columnist Robert Novak wrote from Beijing that "the [CCP] regime actually is not eager to incorporate Taiwan as long as it does not move to independence."<sup>6</sup>

Wang Jisi (王緝思), director of the Institute of International and Strategic Studies at the Central Party School in Beijing, explains China's threat to go to war: "Some people in Taiwan ... supported by outsiders ... parts of the U.S. defense establishment and certain members of the U.S. Congress ... stubbornly ... push for independence. ... If a clash occurs, these parties will be responsible."<sup>7</sup> Singapore's international affairs specialist, Kishore Mahbubani, agrees that Taiwan threatens world peace. Mahbubani concludes that "Beijing makes it clear that it will declare war if Taiwan moves toward independence, regardless of the costs."<sup>8</sup> "[P]reventing Taiwan ... from becoming independent" is said to be a core interest of the CCP.<sup>9</sup> As China's President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) said to America's President George W. Bush in Beijing in November 2005: "We will by no means tolerate Taiwan independence."

The editor of *Foreign Affairs* likewise concludes that what Taiwan is doing is destabilizing. Taiwan is "creeping toward outright independence. ... If Taiwan oversteps the line between provisional autonomy and independence the region could explode."<sup>10</sup> This rendition of reality leaves Taiwan or its president as the sole cause of war. As for the CCP leaders,

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<sup>5</sup>Roger Cohen, "Shaping China's Future Power," *New York Times*, June 12, 2005.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Novak, "Is China Really a Threat?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 27, 2005.

<sup>7</sup>Wang Jisi, "China's Search for Stability with America," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 46.

<sup>8</sup>Kishore Mahbubani, "Understanding China," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 55.

<sup>9</sup>Zhiqun Zhu, "Power Transition and U.S.-China Relations: Is War Inevitable?" *Journal of International and Area Studies* 12, no. 1 (June 2005): 6.

<sup>10</sup>James F. Hoge, Jr., "A Global Power Shift in the Making," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no.4 (July/August 2004): 4.

American China-watcher David Shambaugh finds, "They do not wish to use force. ... That is not their preferred course of action. But they are prepared for worst-case scenarios."<sup>11</sup> According to a top business consultant, "Uppity Taiwan may push China to war."<sup>12</sup> If that happens, and if America intervenes, then, according to the dean of China's National Defense University: "Americans will have to be prepared that hundreds of cities will be destroyed by the Chinese."<sup>13</sup> James Pinkerton, writing in *The American Conservative*, concludes that "Beijing will eventually recover Taipei for the simple reason that it's clearly within its sphere of influence. ... Americans will not risk mass annihilation in return for Taipei's independence. ... The U.S. should tell Taipei that its optimum course is a peaceful Hong Kong/Macau-like return to the motherland."<sup>14</sup>

In this constructed narrative of the CCP, there are only two viable possibilities, either Taiwan provokes war with China by seeking a legitimate international voice or it surrenders to China which treats the continuation of a separate Taiwan as a provocation. This article will show that this Hobson's dilemma for Taiwan—lose your democratic autonomy by either war or peace—is a historically comprehensible construction of the CCP which serves particular CCP interests at a certain historical moment.

The dominant narrative on why war is or is not inevitable puts the onus on Taiwan. Peace is said to remain possible only because Washington has joined with Beijing to rein in Taipei. "Beijing knows that the [Bush] administration has adopted consistent and ... steadfast opposition to unilateral Taiwanese assertions of sovereign independence,"<sup>15</sup> notes Thomas

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<sup>11</sup>Benjamin Kang Lim, "China Gears Up for Showdown, Ball in Taiwan's Court," Reuters, July 5, 2005.

<sup>12</sup>Ted Fishman, "The Chinese Century," *New York Times Magazine*, July 4, 2004.

<sup>13</sup>James Pinkerton, "Superpower Showdown," *The American Conservative*, November 7, 2005.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Actually the history of Hong Kong and Taiwan is quite different. Hong Kong was leased to the British. Taiwan was ceded in perpetuity to the Meiji by the Manchu. The Qing dynasty geographer Wei Yuan did not consider Taiwan to be part of China.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas Christensen, "Looking Beyond the Nuclear Bluster: Recent Progress and Remaining Problems in PRC Security Policy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 15 (Summer 2005): 4.

Christensen. Nonetheless, gossip in Beijing has it that CCP ruling groups are worried that Taiwan will seize the opportunity of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a period when China cannot afford to be war-like, to declare itself an independent Republic of Taiwan. In any case, John Copper concludes, "Taiwan's ruling administration has been provoking China ... and might drag the United States into a conflict it [the United States] doesn't want."<sup>16</sup> While others may worry, the Formosa Foundation proudly boasts that "the move for independence in Taiwan ... has gained momentum since the election of [President] Chen in 2000 and the subsequent passage of Taiwan's referendum law."<sup>17</sup> Whether or not President Chen is an out-of-control war-monger, many diverse voices agree that he is successfully establishing Taiwan's *de jure* independence.

While finding that President Chen, ever since he took office in May 2000, "encouraged loyalists' hopes that he would one day turn Taiwan ... into a fully independent country," the *Washington Post* reported in spring 2005 that Chen had recently been compelled "to reconsider his long-standing drive for Taiwanese independence."<sup>18</sup> Because Chen's drive for independence is said to have weakened, the *Christian Science Monitor* notes, there are "cooled emotions in Beijing."<sup>19</sup> American conservative Arthur Waldron ruefully reports that "Beijing's attempts to stifle, isolate, and divide [Taiwan] are ... enjoying some success."<sup>20</sup> President Chen has been suddenly sobered by the combined weight of Beijing, Washington, and the people of Taiwan. Whether or not one shares the conclusion of American conservatives that an expansive China is succeeding in blocking Taiwan's independence drive, the mainstream consensus of China-watchers is

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<sup>16</sup>John F. Copper, "U.S. China Policy: Is the Neocon Perspective Fading?" (Unpublished paper).

<sup>17</sup>Formosa Foundation, press release, "Brown University to Host Innovative China-U.S.-Taiwan Conference" (October 31, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>Peter Goodman, "Chen Tests Patience of Loyalists," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, May 9, 2005, A17.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Marquardt, "China Reaches Deeper into Taiwan Politics," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 2005.

<sup>20</sup>Arthur Waldron, "China's Rise and World Democracy," *Taipei Times*, September 21, 2005, 8.

crystal clear. The sources cited above are but the tip of a weighty iceberg of data spelling out the CCP's patriotic narrative; to wit, an irresponsible Taiwan has provoked patriotic Chinese, peace-loving people who would prefer to concentrate on meeting awesome domestic challenges inside of China. The mainstream consensus portrays a peace-loving, but emotionally involved China, being forced against its will toward a war with Taiwan because Taiwan's democratically elected presidents have chosen to upset the peaceful status quo with an all-out drive for independence, a project which could, hopefully, in the hegemonic and constructed narrative, yet be deflected by people of goodwill in China, America, and Taiwan. The world's choice is said to be between peace-prone leaders in China and war-prone ones in Taiwan.

This constructed interpretation actually misconstrues Taiwanese reality. What is worthy of further explanation is why so many hard-headed and independent international analysts of China treat an invented and self-serving CCP narrative as an accurate comprehension of international or Taiwanese reality.

### **Politically Deconstructing a Constructed Narrative**

Despite the mainstream consensus just sketched, a consensus including CCP propagandists, the pan-KMT camp, Taiwanese associated with former President Lee's Taiwan Solidarity Union (台灣團結聯盟), and respected international observers of China—in fact, every major claim in this narrative—is questionable. This essay will attempt to explain why key facts are ignored to the benefit of the CCP agenda. This deconstruction of the hegemonic narrative requires some political analysis and some sociology of knowledge.

Euphoria pervaded Taiwan in the early 1990s. The ruling KMT had negotiated a peaceful transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The CCP regime, one hundred miles away, far across the Taiwan Strait, meanwhile, was the international target of economic sanctions following Deng Xiaoping's (鄧小平) ordering of a massacre of democracy supporters on

June 4, 1989. The Soviet bloc of communist party regimes and the Soviet Union itself imploded. On Taiwan, thinking of himself as similar to South Africa's democratization champion Nelson Mandela and imagining his country of Taiwan (the Republic of China, ROC) as similar to West Germany, President Lee Teng-hui saw Deng's China, where liberal reformers had been purged, as similar to Honnicker's East German regime, a dinosaur unsuited for the modern world. East Germany had shot and killed nationals trying to flee to democratic West Germany. The PRC does the same to fleeing Tibetans. China seemed stuck in a rut of slaughter and decline. Taiwanese visitors to kith and kin on the mainland in the early 1990s reported that China was poor, stagnant, and corrupt. Taiwan's democracy was on the right side of history. The CCP "butchers of Beijing," like those in East Berlin, were not.

President Lee felt that, like Mandela in South Africa, he could end a newly democratic Taiwan's extreme isolation in the international community and, through democratization, make Taiwan a respected and contributing member of the international community. As with post-apartheid and previously isolated South Africa, Taiwan, as a part of Sinic civilization, could inspire Chinese in the PRC to move toward respecting basic human rights. In 1993 President Lee resumed efforts to gain a place for the island in the United Nations, promising success in three years. In 1994 he pressed the U.S. Congress to get President Bill Clinton to reverse the American policy, which went back to Richard Nixon's opening to Mao in 1972, of only having unofficial relations with Taiwan such that the president of Taiwan was not officially welcome in the United States. With China an outcaste after the June 4, 1989 massacre, Lee saw the time as ripe for action to end Taiwan's outcaste status.

By 1999, it was clear to President Lee that both of his initiatives had backfired. Not only was Taiwan not winning votes for some kind of relinkage with the U.N. system but even Taiwan's dollar diplomacy—using money to court official recognition from smaller and poorer countries—was losing its effectiveness. China, a newly risen world power suddenly endowed with great economic clout, could outbid Taiwan in dollar diplomacy. The number of nations recognizing Taiwan as a legally sovereign

(*de jure* independent) entity actually shrank despite the massacre of June 4. Indeed, there is nothing to stop the number of governments officially recognizing Taiwan from eventually shriveling virtually to zero. In an amoral world which respects the global weight of power, no major nation was going to risk losing normal relations with great power China by antagonizing the CCP rulers through the establishment of official state-to-state ties with little Taiwan. Taiwan was powerless to change the status quo in the direction of *de jure* independence for the ROC on Taiwan. What mattered for the nations of the world was not the words uttered by Taiwan's presidents, no matter how robust was Taiwan's democracy, but how the rulers of China publicly interpreted words and deeds.

This should have been obvious to President Lee by the mid-1990s when newly democratic South Korea, conservative and anti-communist Saudi Arabia, and Mandela's post-apartheid South Africa all switched their recognition from the Republic of China on Taiwan to the People's Republic of China. The South African switch smarted in Taipei where the ruling KMT had funded Mandela's party, the African National Congress. Taiwan was more isolated than ever.

Given the rise of China to great power status, there simply is nothing that Taiwan's people or elected representatives can do among the nations of the world to win Taiwan official international recognition, so-called *de jure* independence. As long as a strong and united CCP regime opposes Taiwan's *de jure* independence, no major country will choose to rile Beijing by establishing official diplomatic relations with Taipei. Yet, as a matter of faith, many of President Chen's allies still insist that Chen, who succeeded President Lee in 2000, go through the motions each year of trying to put the issue of Taiwan's official international status on the U.N. agenda. The Taiwan president may feel a political need to play to his base. As a robust democracy, a major global exporter, and a world-class competitor in information technology, it seems right to most Taiwanese that the world treat Taiwan with dignity.

The pan-KMT camp on Taiwan denounces this empty gesture at the United Nations as an unnecessary provocation that causes China to build up its military might to threaten Taiwan. Actually, the CCP decided to



acquire missiles to threaten Taiwan before President Lee began to raise the issue of Taiwan's status at the United Nations. However, to the KMT, trying to legitimize a return to presidential power, the real threat to Taiwan's autonomous democracy is less the supposedly peaceful CCP regime across the Taiwan Strait than the purportedly provocative Chen regime right on Taiwan.

Yet, KMT leaders increasingly feel compelled to try to position themselves so as not to alienate the ever larger number of voters who identify as Taiwanese and not Chinese. Even KMT members increasingly accept *de jure* independence as a legitimate possible future for Taiwan. Since significantly more, ever more, Taiwanese identify themselves as Taiwanese, far more than just the number that vote for the DPP, the KMT has to appeal to Taiwan-identified voters.<sup>21</sup> However, the KMT leaders also do not want to lose the support of their base, an ever-shrinking mainlander minority which hates the notion of a separate Taiwanese culture. Increasingly the target of the identity issue is the Taiwanese voter. China's actions and threats concerning the identity issue involve the CCP inside of Taiwan politics.

The maneuvering for domestic political advantage on Taiwan obscures a basic fact about possible *de jure* independence for the island. Taiwan is absolutely powerless to advance its goal of *de jure* independence. The international community heeds China's preferences and ignores little Taiwan's. Yet Taiwanese associated with former President Lee's Taiwan Solidarity Union tend somehow to believe that if the Taiwanese only change their governmental name to "Republic of Taiwan," then Taiwan will be welcome back into the U.N. family. In addition, the creation of a mechanism (three-fourths of the legislature plus the majority of the eligible electorate) for passing a constitutional amendment is seen by these people as providing a legal mechanism to establish Taiwan's *de jure* independence.

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<sup>21</sup>In China, the *People's Daily's* Cross-Straits Forum (兩岸論壇, *liang' an luntan*) was closed on December 14, 2006, after postings disagreeing with criticisms of the KMT camp and its leader for not hewing to the CCP line, postings pointing out that "on Taiwan the market for the idea of Taiwan independence was very large."



In fact, the rules of the game mean Taiwan cannot change constitutionally without KMT support.

The words and gestures of a Taiwan-identified president cannot, by themselves, win Taiwan *de jure* independence. So what if Taiwanese re-write their history books so the texts are not Sino-centric or if the majority Hokkienese (閩南人) make their mother tongue, Taigi (台語), an official language? No major nation is going to respond to such internal changes in Taiwan by changing recognition from Beijing to Taipei and incurring the wrath of China. *De jure* Taiwan independence is going nowhere.

In fact, identity changes inside of Taiwan culture and politics need have nothing to do with international politics, except that the CCP makes them an issue. Far from persuading the CCP to welcome Taiwan, legally, into the family of nations, these internal Taiwan maneuvers compel less hawkish forces in Beijing to show that they are not soft on Taiwan. That is, these readily understood maneuvers in Taiwan politics endanger Taiwan's security because of how ruling groups in Beijing mobilize a constructed Chinese nationalism. For Taiwan both to ignore those forces in Beijing and to ignore American and Asian governments which want to help Taiwan but do not wish to see a roiling of hawks in Beijing is not, in my judgment, in the best interests of the survival of an autonomous democracy on Taiwan.

If internal politics on Taiwan is merely a tempest in a teapot, what explains the CCP fixation on an alleged ongoing Taiwan plot to win *de jure* recognition in the international community? Surely CCP leaders are aware of little Taiwan's weakness. That there is, in fact, nothing for the PRC to be afraid of. Events establish that Taiwan is powerless to advance the cause of *de jure* recognition. That would require governments to thumb their noses at China. Therefore, the reason the CCP calls attention to an alleged plot to establish Taiwan's *de jure* independence has to dwell inside of Chinese domestic politics because, far from being frightened of Taiwan, China's leaders quietly debate at what point the power gap between China and Taiwan will be so great that Taiwan will have to concede to China. The notion that rulers in Beijing would be overthrown if they made a fair deal with Taiwan has as little basis as the contention that hatred for Japan—

which in contrast to a constructed reality vis-à-vis Taiwan, actually has an experiential and emotional basis in China—kept the Chinese president from self-interested dealings with that country. Race riots against Japanese in 2005 did not block overtures to Japan in 2006.

Wanting to incorporate Taiwan without fighting a war, political elites in China have made Taiwan a political football. Chinese military leaders "have used the Taiwan issue to press for higher military budgets." According to Phillip Saunders, hard-liners such as Li Peng [李鵬] "reportedly used accusations that senior leaders were soft on Taiwan to reduce the[ir] influence"; "China's political environment" privileges "the harshest forms of nationalist criticism" while "liberal views toward Taiwan are often suppressed. This nationalist policy environment makes creative thinking risky."<sup>22</sup> High Party intellectual Zheng Bijian (鄭必堅) who argued for a peaceful CCP foreign policy was forced to eat his words and argue that "a Chinese invasion of Taiwan should certainly not be understood as an invasion."<sup>23</sup> The real threat to peace in cross-Strait relations therefore lies in the nationalism and politics of the CCP in the PRC.

Taiwan is actually ever more internationally isolated and has no way of changing the peaceful status quo in its favor.<sup>24</sup> China's rulers know it. In the 1950s Mao made nationalistic propaganda in China about an Eisenhower administration supposedly preparing to unleash Chiang Kai-shek's (蔣介石) military against China when he well knew and privately averred that President Dwight Eisenhower had actually leashed Chiang to prevent him from provocative actions. Then, as now, the big question was, what is the political logic behind a CCP propaganda campaign which turns the truth on its head? Why does the CCP treat a relatively weak Taiwan as if it were about to get international recognition of its *de jure* independence, and why do international observers not see through the CCP propaganda

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<sup>22</sup>Saunders, "Long-Term Trends in China-Taiwan Relations."

<sup>23</sup>Zheng Bijian, *China's Peaceful Rise* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2005), 41.

<sup>24</sup>Chien-min Chao and Chih-chia Hsu, "China Isolates Taiwan," in *China's Rise, Taiwan's Dilemmas, and International Peace*, ed. Edward Friedman (London: Routledge, 2006), 41-67.

to the core reality of politics in Beijing?

### **The Unreality of a *de Jure* Independent Taiwan**

Taiwan is, of course, in fact independent. It has been independent for a long, long time. For the KMT, which imagines democratic Taiwan's lineage in terms of Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) 1911 Republic of China (ROC), the government of Taiwan is a continuation of the long sovereign ROC, which is now on Taiwan. It moved to Taiwan after the end of World War II when Mao's Red Army conquered the mainland of China.

For President Chen's camp, a sovereign Taiwan has been a fact ever since an American-led World War II coalition defeated Hirohito's imperial military and freed the Taiwanese people from a colonial occupation by Japan. The consensus of mainstream parties in Taiwan is that the government on Taiwan has long been *de facto* independent. This reality is spoken about on Taiwan day after day by political leaders. Every day, Taiwanese across the political spectrum declare Taiwan's *de facto* independence.

In short, there is no ambiguity about Taiwan's status. Taiwan is in fact independent. It elects its leaders, makes its laws, runs its own foreign policy, prints its own currency, and has its own military. Virtually all major nations, including the PRC, seek to benefit from robust non-official relations with this independent Taiwan which is an economic powerhouse. The government of China, as others, treats Taiwan as if it were independent.

Yet, as just shown, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that the government of Taiwan can do to win *de jure* independence. Even if, in 2008, the year of the Beijing Olympics, the Taiwan president, after a popular referendum, announced to the world, "I now declare the existence of a sovereign Republic of Taiwan and ask the world community to establish full diplomatic relations with the Republic of Taiwan," so what? Not only would no major nation change its policy from *de facto* recognition and suddenly afford Taiwan official recognition, *de jure* independence, but, in addition, many lesser nations, Taiwan's few remaining small diplomatic partners, might flee from Taiwan on hearing strong denunciations from

Beijing, fearful of an angry Chinese military response to the attempted change of Taiwan's status. No major government would choose to antagonize China. Taiwan, therefore, is powerless to change the status quo.

Taiwan is *de facto* independent. It is powerless to advance the cause of *de jure* independence no matter how much it re-names institutions or re-writes history. So why is there a focus on a fiction, "salami slicing tactics to move Taiwan toward independence"?<sup>25</sup> There is not a scintilla of data to buttress the claim that any or all of these actions by elected Taiwan presidents is increasing the number of nations with diplomatic relations with Taiwan, treating it as *de jure* independent. There is and cannot be a Taiwan slowly creeping toward independence.

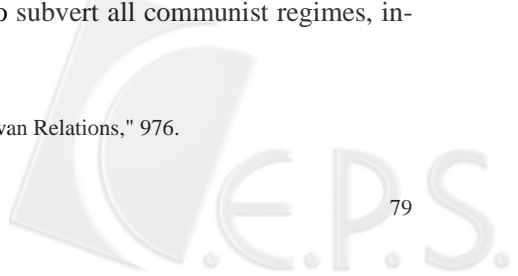
### **The CCP's Core Interests**

What then is the CCP really doing in inventing an alleged threat to the peace from inside of Taiwanese politics? Why does the CCP falsely insist that there is a worrisome plot by Taiwan's presidents which is on its way to making Taiwan *de jure* independent? No such increase in recognition is occurring. The CCP is engaged in a sleight of hand, trying to call attention away from the PRC's actual policy toward Taiwan of subverting Taiwan's *de facto* independence. It is the CCP's publicly proclaimed goal to reduce Taiwan to the status of Hong Kong or Macau or Tibet. It is a Chinese plot against Taiwan's *de facto* independence that actually needs to be focused on and understood.

Taiwan's *de facto* independence has been experienced since 1991 in Zhongnanhai (中南海) as an obstacle to two core CCP interests—regime survival and a return to international glory. In the wake of the traumatic events of 1989-91, shocks in China, the Soviet bloc, and the USSR, CCP leaders concluded that newly democratic, multicultural Taiwan was part of an American government CIA plot to subvert all communist regimes, in-

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<sup>25</sup>Saunders, "Long-Term Trends in China-Taiwan Relations," 976.



cluding, high on the list, China, and to replace them with weak and divided democracies which would be dependent on America. A democratic Taiwan, understood as a threat to both the survival of the CCP and also to China's return to greatness, could not be permitted to flourish. This CCP analysis was reinforced in 2005 in response to the so-called "color revolutions" to China's west.<sup>26</sup> In its region, the CCP helped authoritarian regimes and worked against the spread of democracy.

For CCP conservatives who have constrained if not dominated Chinese politics since the purges of more politically reformist sympathizers of China's 1989 democracy movement, the CCP leadership could not be too zealous in preemptively striking down all potential threats to the CCP's continuing monopoly on power. In 1991, Taiwanese foreign direct investment (FDI) was pouring into China heedless of the OECD post-June 4 massacre economic sanctions, and President Lee was refusing requests for major help from Chinese democrats in exile (and even today Taiwan does not overly welcome asylum seekers from CCP repression).<sup>27</sup> This was a time when Taiwan lobbyists in America were arguing *for* extending most-favored-nation (MFN) trading status to the PRC, yet the CCP, disregarding Taiwan's actual behavior, still opted in 1991-92 to begin building missiles to deploy across the Taiwan Strait starting in 1994 to coerce Taiwan into accepting China's terms for the surrender of its *de facto* independence.

Saunders is typical of top international analysts of China who reverse historical cause and effect and describe the PRC's threatening military build-up as an "important response to increasing U.S.-Taiwan security cooperation,"<sup>28</sup> when, in fact, that cooperation began only after the China-initiated Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996; that is, long after the CCP decided to build a military threat against Taiwan. China was not militarily reactive. It was the initiator. Taiwan is wrongly treated as the cause of war-prone

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<sup>26</sup>See Edward Friedman "China's Rise, Asia's Future," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 6 (2006): 289-303.

<sup>27</sup>Caroline Gluck, "Taiwan Struggles with Chinese Dissidents," BBC News, Taipei, August 17, 2005.

<sup>28</sup>Saunders, "Long-Term Trends in China-Taiwan Relations," 983.

destabilization when it is actually the target of those forces which inform and dynamize CCP jockeying for power.

Making believe there is a threat from Taiwan which could achieve *de jure* independence is a tactic of the CCP to obscure its real goal—undermining Taiwan's *de facto* independence. Since the CCP's policy purpose is not just a matter of natural Chinese patriotic passions,<sup>29</sup> one must ask what core state interest is served by China's building military might that could be used against Taiwan to end Taiwan's *de facto* independence and to incorporate Taiwan into the PRC? Whatever those interests are, they are obscured by analysts of China who characterize China's threatening military posture merely as "military modernization" and who hide the danger of a war initiated by China by characterizing China's war option as "a carefully limited use of force."<sup>30</sup> While the dominant trend in Chinese politics has surely been to seek Taiwan's incorporation by peaceful means, a credible ability to use force is seen in Beijing as one of those peaceful means.

Chinese who oppose using military force against Taiwan, Chinese who fear the consequences of China's taking the path of imperial Germany, imperial Japan, and Leonid Brezhnev's Soviet Union, who fear that China instigating a war with Taiwan could have consequences similar to Brezhnev's invasion of Afghanistan, these Chinese promote China's "peaceful emergence." "The slogan of the 'peaceful rise' is challenged by Chinese nationalists ... who argue that it [peace] encourages Taiwan to bid for independence."<sup>31</sup> However, since Taiwan in fact has no way to bid for *de jure* independence, what is it that CCP leaders actually fear and actually seek? That is, what is so important to the CCP regime that it plays with the possibility of initiating a war with potentially catastrophic consequences? Whatever it is, it is sufficiently consequential to China's rulers that, as

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<sup>29</sup>As is well-known, the CCP treated colonial Taiwan as similar to colonial Korea and supported a Taiwanese independence struggle until around 1942, when the American victory over Japan in the Battle of Midway led Chinese to begin to imagine America as going to be in a position to decide the fate of colonial Taiwan.

<sup>30</sup>Saunders, "Long-Term Trends in China-Taiwan Relations," 988-99.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Skidelsky, "The Chinese Shadow," *The New York Review*, November 17, 2005, 30.

mentioned above, the leading proponent of China's peaceful rise, Zheng Bijian, was compelled to back down and agree that a war to grab territory that the CCP claims as its own is not a war. Fighting "to safeguard national unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity ... is definitely not an act of invasion or expansion."<sup>32</sup> In an Orwellian way, the CCP argues that war is peace.

One might ask why the CCP uses an Orwellian discourse about a peaceful rise when the CCP actually legitimizes military action to incorporate the East China Sea and the Senkakus (釣魚台列嶼), Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and the Spratly Islands (南沙群島). The reason, international relations analyst William Callahan explains, is that, within this discourse about a peaceful China, for others to reject a CCP demand would back-foot them, make them seem against a peaceful China. If you insist that the PRC's demands on your territory prove China is not peaceful, you thereby reveal yourself to be China's enemy. China therefore must act against you to defend itself. There can be no Chinese threat to anything or any one. America, Japan, and India, Callahan shows, are presented by the CCP with the same Catch-22 choice as Taiwan; that is, surrender or we will have to resort to all means against you to defend ourselves. China is by definition, not by behavior, defensive. What Callahan establishes is that China, in a "bellicose" way, sees the CCP discourse making "madness" appear as the disease of all who do not surrender to CCP demands.<sup>33</sup> Madness is not just the disease of President Chen of Taiwan. However, it is Taiwan that, beginning in the 1990s, has been in the PRC's cross-hairs.

Only China can initiate a war across the Taiwan Strait. No other party could even imagine initiating hostilities. Surely Taiwan, with its declining military budgets for over a decade and an aversion against wasting money on expensive American weapons, has zero interest in going to war. Taiwanese just seek to benefit from peaceful exchanges with the people of

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<sup>32</sup>Zheng, *China's Peaceful Rise*, 64.

<sup>33</sup>William Callahan, "How to Understand China," *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): 701-14.



China. For Taiwanese, peace is an absolute imperative. There is no war-prone Taiwan for China to deter or defend against.

However, the CCP sees Taiwan as an obstacle to China's establishing itself as the predominant power in Asia. Data for this core interest is detailed and explored both in my recent book, *China's Rise, Taiwan's Dilemmas, and International Peace* (Routledge, 2006), and in Alan Wachman's magnificent forthcoming volume from Stanford University Press. In that work, *Why Taiwan? A Geostrategic Perspective on the PRC's Quest for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity*, Wachman quotes numerous Chinese military sources on the core Chinese interest of becoming the predominant power in the region. Here is but one very representative quote from numerous translations of PRC military sources.

Taiwan represents China's forward base into the Pacific Ocean and a means of realizing its [China's] sea power interests. If Taiwan were reunified [into China], China would completely break the island chain [of the Philippines, Taiwan, the Senkakus, Japan, etc.] that America constructed to block China in the West Pacific, which has an even greater significance than America's seizure of Hawaii. If Taiwan were reunified, China could check Japan's designs on its [China's] northeast portion. In the south ... protection of the islands in the South [China] Sea can be formed together with Hainan Island [海南島] and provide an effective guarantee to China's ships passing through the Malacca Strait [securing energy and safe passage].... In addition, China's reunification progress coincides with the progress of realizing China's sea power, for which reunification of Taiwan is particularly crucial. Without Taiwan, the Nansha [Spratly] islands cannot be protected [in the South China Sea]. It is said that the geopolitical key to the South China Sea is the Malacca Strait, then the islands of Nansha within China's sovereign sphere is the key for China to realize its sea power interests in the South China Sea. As a big power, China will inevitably have its own sea base. If the Diaoyu [Senkaku] [which are part of Japan] islands and Taiwan come back to China, the security interest of China in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia will be guaranteed. (chap. 7)

The goal of the CCP is to expand Chinese power throughout the region of the Asia-Pacific, to establish the PRC as a regional hegemon.<sup>34</sup> To achieve that goal, the CCP wishes to end Taiwan's *de facto* independ-

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<sup>34</sup>Two scholarly works which establish the PRC's hegemonic goal are Reinhard Dritte, *Japan's Security Relations with China Since 1989* (London, Routledge Curzon, 2003); and Willem van Kemanade, *China and Japan* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations, November 2006).

ence. The alternative to that goal—peace in the region which preserves the status quo of a *de facto* independent Taiwan—requires negotiations between Beijing and Taipei. So far, however, the CCP will not enter into a dialogue about respecting Taiwan's democratic autonomy. Since the 1989 conservative ascendancy in Beijing attendant to the June 4 massacre and the beginning of the implosion of the Soviet bloc, the CCP's newly constructed core interests of both surviving and also becoming a regional hegemon have been imagined as requiring the rolling back of democracy in the region, including undermining Taiwan's *de facto* independence.<sup>35</sup> Taiwan has been targeted by the CCP to serve two core regime interests: perpetuating CCP power and furthering China's becoming the predominant power in Asia. The discourse emanating from China about a Taiwan independence plot that threatens the peace of the region is a smokescreen to camouflage actual CCP policy ambitions. Like the humiliated and vengeful Goujian (勾踐), the CCP has been patient.<sup>36</sup> Its objective is not a secret, however.

### A Sociology-of-Knowledge Approach to China's Taiwan Policy

Discussing cross-Strait relations for a radio show, "The World Today," on October 7, 2005, Paul Monk, former head of China analysis for the Australian Defense Intelligence Organization, expanded on a thesis in his new book, *Thunder from the Silent Zone*. Monk argued that, at one and the same time, "the status quo ... in which Taiwan is *de facto* independent and China ... does not use force" is both stable and yet, at the same time, "inherently dangerous," possibly leading to "a bloody cross-Strait conflict." Dr. Monk found that while we might hope that the status

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<sup>35</sup>Edward Friedman, "Authoritarian China as a World Power: Democracy in the Balance," in *Evolving State-Society Relations in Transitional China*, ed. Zhang Wei (under review).

<sup>36</sup>Paul Cohen, "The Goujian Story in Twentieth Century China" (Paper presented at the International Conference on the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Birth of Professor Benjamin Schwartz, Shanghai, December 18, 2006).

quo will persist, political forces in China make it ever more likely that a military action will be launched against Taiwan by the PRC government unless leading political groups in China reframe how they imagine Taiwan, unless the CCP leadership can imagine, say, that an independent Taiwan linked to China is similar to an independent Australia's ties to its former mother country, Great Britain. That is, an autonomous democratic Taiwan is not a bad thing for China, not a humiliation and not a threat. China could settle with Taiwan and flourish as England did with Ireland, Russia with Finland, and Indonesia with East Timor. Indeed, the Chinese people would do even better on matters such as information technology progress if Taiwan was befriended and Taiwanese were not afraid of the political consequences of yet deeper economic interactions with China.

Dr. Monk is right that a CCP reframing of its thinking about Taiwan could institutionalize peace in the region and make the persistence of prosperity for all peoples in the Asia-Pacific far more likely. Peace requires a reframing of Taiwan in China's politics and its nationalism because today's Chinese perceptions of Taiwan and of cross-Strait relations can become war-prone. The dangerous misperception that persists in the international community about a provocative Taiwan independence plot facilitates the CCP policy of subverting Taiwan's *de facto* independence and legitimizes the CCP's expansive claim that there is only one China, that its capital is in Beijing, and that Taiwan is part of that one China. In that CCP framing, today's peaceful status quo in which Taiwan is, and has long been, *de facto* independent, seems illegitimate, a challenge to patriotic Chinese. From the perspective of perpetuating the peace, the CCP's constructed understanding of Taiwan around 1991 keeps forces favoring military action aboil inside of Chinese politics. This misleading framing of Taiwan has obscured the CCP's core interests and real purposes since that time, both of which were just sketched above. Taiwan is scapegoated to obscure actual CCP policy goals.

Yet reports from China accurately describe patriotic Chinese as raging at the pro-independence policies of Taiwan's two democratically elected presidents. So do Chinese soldiers. The conventional wisdom among China-watchers is that any CCP leader who tries to ignore these

patriotic Chinese passions will be damned for selling out the nation, a new and traitorous Li Hongzhang (李鴻章), a reincarnation of evil Wang Jingwei (汪精衛). The CCP leaders have created a narrative which they treat as holy scripture.

Perhaps it is true that China is trapped by its own post-1989 reconstruction of Chinese national identity, hoisted on its own petard. Perhaps the CCP has chosen to jump on the back of a man-eating tiger and now cannot dismount and back off without risking being eaten alive. Perhaps. However, the key point is that the source of the threat to the peace lies in Beijing and not in Taipei. However much an annexation policy agenda toward Taiwan has, for the moment, been embedded in Chinese nationalism, that is a construction with a recent history. It is not some deep Chinese cultural essence.

In addition, before one concedes that CCP leaders are permanently trapped and have no alternative but to continue to heed a passionate Chinese nationalism requiring Taiwan's incorporation into a CCP-ruled PRC, one should not forget the lesson of the change in China-Russia relations that accompanied the leadership transition from Mao to Deng. Under Mao, Russia had been portrayed as a threat and a humiliation. The new tsars became public enemy number one. Russia had seized the most territory from China (actually, from an expansionist Manchu empire which conflicted with an expansionist tsarist empire). It was a patriot's duty to recover that supposedly stolen soil. Chinese learned to hate Russians and to insist on action against the new tsars. From 1858 to 1864, tsarist Russia took Manchu empire real estate that "exceeded the size of Japan and included the only arable land in the Russian Far East."<sup>37</sup> Chinese people volunteered to go to the border to defeat the new tsars and to liberate sacred Chinese territory. Patriots risked physical violence to challenge the new tsars even inside the Soviet Union. Chinese popular patriotism purportedly required a protracted battle with Russia.

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<sup>37</sup>S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32.

As with Chinese claims about Taiwan since 1991, leaders in Beijing seemed trapped by a narrative they had created. Chinese patriots would fight on behalf of this just cause for millennia if need be. Patriotic passions naturally were riled against evil and cruel Russians. At least, that was the CCP propaganda line that people in China sincerely and deeply believed. The Chinese were patriotic 110 percenters, more Maoist than Mao. What is said to be true today about anti-Taiwan nationalism in China was taken to be true then for anti-Russian nationalism. It was seen by China-watchers as a powerful and persistent part of Chinese politics.

However, Mao died and Deng rose to power. Deng saw that it was Mao who had actually caused the tensions with Nikita Khrushchev. Deng dropped Mao's war-prone, anti-Russian policies. China then signed away claims to some territories that yesterday had been claimed as the sacred birthright of the supposedly victimized Chinese people. Almost no Chinese protested. Instead, the CCP brags about how China benefits from very good relations with Russia. It seems worth pondering how the apparently deepest patriotic passions turned out to be mere fleeting feelings, a fever of the moment which, when gone, left behind a healthier body politic in China. The passions of the people were actually a product of the policies of the ruling party and its potent propaganda.

What was once true (that is, false) about the power of Chinese public opinion to oppose any change in an anti-Russian policy was repeated in 2005 as true about Chinese public passions against a supposedly evil Japan, after the anti-Japan race riots in April. In 2006, however, the Chinese president decided to renormalize relations with Japan. President Hu was not run out of Zhongnanhai for the switch. The capacity of the CCP leadership to define and redefine China's most vital interests should not be underestimated.

Why cannot a leadership transition in Beijing do to policy on Taiwan what Deng did, after a leadership transition brought him to power, to policy on Russia? Or as Hu did on Japan in 2006? However sincere is the rage of patriots now against Taiwan, as it was back then against Russia or Japan, war or peace actually rests on a constructed narrative of the CCP and on policy decisions made by leading groups holding power in the CCP. What

seems permanent and passionate to observers overwhelmed by CCP propaganda need not remain so if politics in China change. Is it inconceivable that different CCP leaders would be capable of taking advantage of mutually beneficial ties with a Taiwanese people previously portrayed as beyond the pale? China's burgeoning information technology industry would not be growing by leaps and bounds were it not for Chinese ties with a *de facto* independent Taiwan. Is it impossible that future Chinese leaders could choose to benefit even more from unfettered economic, technical, and scientific cooperation with Taiwan? In the context of today's anti-Taiwan nationalism, such a switch, of course, seems impossible. However, the real defining force, as shown by prior switches with Russia and Japan, is politics in Beijing.

The social science literature on public opinion and foreign policy finds that electorates focus on domestic issues. They are ill-informed about international affairs. Consequently, they are easily led or misled, until a persistent disaster focuses their interest and attention. There is no reason to suspect that people living under an authoritarian regime are better informed. As shown by the ease of CCP policy switches on Russia and Japan, ruling groups in China have far more leeway on Taiwan policy than is held to be the case by the conventional wisdom which, with no factual base, finds CCP rulers constrained on policy to Taiwan by outraged public opinion. In fact, policy is decided by the interests, ideology, and clashes among CCP ruling groups.

War or peace, therefore, is not about politics in Taipei. There is no Taiwan plot which threatens to end the mutually beneficial Taipei-Beijing relationship. Taiwan is ever more economically integrated into the Chinese economy. Rather, the threat to the peace is about politics and policy in Beijing. That is why it is important to see how, in the post-1989-91 era, a certain ruling group in Beijing redefined patriotism to serve its core purposes—monopolizing domestic power and expanding international power. The invention and construction of a Taiwan independence plot by the CCP as part of a new nationalism in China could, however, be reinterpreted by future Chinese leaders as not in the interests of the Chinese people. That it seems inconceivable today need not mean that it is undoable tomorrow.

Surely that is an indisputable lesson of recent Chinese historical shifts on America, Russia, and Japan, as well as India and Vietnam.

This essay has analyzed the political events which have produced the PRC narrative about a CCP regime supposedly fixated on economic growth but unhappily distracted from that peaceful preoccupation by war-prone Taiwan policies. That constructed narrative, Dr. Monk finds, is actually central to war-prone tendencies in China. Hawkish tendencies in the CCP are legitimized and obscured by imagined provocations from a purportedly high-risk Taiwan. What really happens is that a myth is embraced popularly in China and elsewhere by China-watchers which legitimizes a CCP agenda of undermining Taiwan's *de facto* independence and incorporating Taiwan, by armed coercion if nothing else works. Should a political switch occur in China bringing to power a ruling group that was not irredentist, then Beijing could abandon a policy toward Taiwan that was war-prone and could benefit greatly from the switch.

Why then do so many informed outside observers accept the CCP's self-serving mythic construction about a dangerous Taiwan and ignore the actual behavior and clear policy goals of the CCP regime which is set on snuffing out Taiwan's autonomous democracy and establishing the PRC's regional hegemony? Given how the nationalist constructions on Russia and Japan were once treated incorrectly as deep cultural truths, the question is how come more people do not focus on the domestic politics that lie behind the stirred-up passions. Answering that question for China-Taiwan relations requires a sociology-of-knowledge approach. First, Chinese people who rage against supposed Taiwanese irrationality are actually ignoring many realities in China-Taiwan relations. Critical of numerous domestic horrors inside of China, Chinese prove their loyalty by parading as super-patriots, whether the target is America, Russia, Japan, or whoever. They tend to remember an inspiring Mao who stood up to China's enemies. This is said to contrast with today's CCP leaders, portrayed as lacking backbone. Patriotic Chinese therefore urge their leaders to stop coddling Taiwanese. Authoritarian politics leads them to be 110 percenters.

However, these Chinese have never heard about the Qiandaohu (千島湖) incident in China when Taiwanese tourists on a lake were robbed and

murdered by a Chinese gang linked to the Chinese military. They do not know how grieving Taiwanese family members were then cruelly mistreated when they went to China to reclaim the bodies of victimized loved ones. In contrast to Taiwanese, Chinese are not fixated on how the CCP blocked Red Cross relief to Taiwan after an earthquake or medical aid to Taiwan in response to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) emergency. Patriotic Chinese therefore cannot empathize with Taiwanese who see China as not caring if Taiwanese live or die. It is hard to exaggerate how out of touch Chinese are with the Taiwanese experience of China-Taiwan relations going back to the February 28, 1947 massacre of Taiwanese perpetrated by the mainlander military of the KMT.<sup>38</sup>

Chinese instead learn how the fraternal and caring CCP promised visitors from the KMT camp in 2005 that the PRC would restore Taiwan's dignity at the World Health Assembly (WHA). However, these Chinese patriots do not know that when the WHA next met, the PRC not only did nothing for Taiwan, but, in addition, dismissed Taiwan complaints, saying "Who cares about you?" Such alienating events are stories in the Taiwan media, experienced as part of a series of continuous and gratuitous Chinese insults that strengthen a proud and separate Taiwan identity, which is not the creation of a couple of omnipotent and malevolent, elected Taiwanese presidents, as the dominant CCP discourse on Taiwan, accepted by so many outside observers of China, wrongly has it. Indeed, ever more KMT voters share this separate Taiwanese identity.

With Taiwan's separate identity psychologically deep and historically real, peace between China and Taiwan requires that "Beijing will have to recognize that the [PRC's] Hong Kong-Macao model [of incorporation into the PRC] will not work with Taiwan." This is because, analysts Carol Hamrin and Zhang Wang find, "no Taiwanese political leader will be able to compromise Taiwan's identity and sovereignty."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>It is that invisible reality that is made manifest in Friedman, *China's Rise, Taiwan's Dilemmas, and International Peace*.

<sup>39</sup>Carol Lee Hamrin and Zhang Wang, "The Floating Island: Change of Paradigm on the Taiwan Question," *Journal of Contemporary China* 13, no. 39 (May 2004): 346, 347.



Has the CCP's anti-Taiwan narrative created forces in China which preclude a change of thinking and narrative in Beijing? Call it "group think" or a "herd mentality" or "information cascading" and "availability bias," in any case, to Chinese patriots, little brother Taiwan is irrational and in need of a good spanking by the senior household male. Or, as with anti-Russian Chinese emotions in the Mao era, despite the seeming depth of sincerely felt passions, could a new leader with a conciliatory policy toward Taiwan be capable of curing the Chinese patriotic fever vis-à-vis Taiwan, as Deng did vis-à-vis Russia? Social science literature tells us that the regime has much room for independent action.

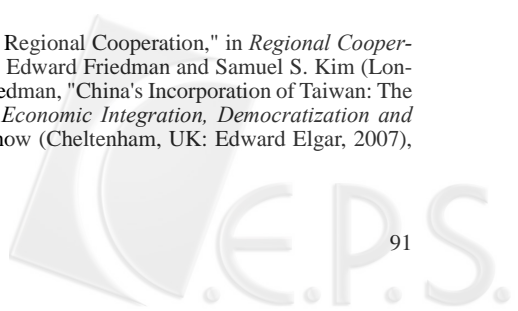
Outside observers should be aware of this literature and these events, passions, and changes. International specialists have open access to information and to Taiwan. Why do so many China-watchers then accept China's narrative on cross-Strait relations? Why cannot they comprehend CCP interests and the Taiwanese experience?

A host of socializing factors leads informed observers to privilege CCP official accounts of cross-Strait dynamics. These international observers of China tend to learn their Chinese in China. They live and work in China. They run into angry Chinese passions about Taiwan. They hear the Chinese narrative all the time. If they parachute into Taiwan, they, unknowingly, because of the continuing institutional impact of policies from Taiwan's authoritarian era which privileged loyal mainlander intellectuals, tend to talk mainly with English-speaking, pan-KMT camp intellectuals who echo the CCP narrative of an irresponsible Taiwan president who endangers cross-Strait relations.<sup>40</sup>

These foreign observers do not want an unnecessary war with China. Who does? International analysts already see so many tensions in America-China relations. They wish to avoid unnecessary complications.

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<sup>40</sup>Edward Friedman, "The Fragility of China's Regional Cooperation," in *Regional Cooperation and Its Enemies in Northeast Asia*, ed. Edward Friedman and Samuel S. Kim (London: Curzon, 2006), 125-42; and Edward Friedman, "China's Incorporation of Taiwan: The Manipulation of Community Tensions," in *Economic Integration, Democratization and National Security in East Asia*, ed. Peter Chow (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2007), 29-55.



So does this author. We should all, of course, prefer peace to war in America-China relations. Cooperation between the two global powers, China and America, is required to resolve so many crucial issues—from missile proliferation to currency valuations to a nuclear crisis in North Korea. In contrast to the Chinese, Taiwanese, like Kurds or Jews, seem to be an "inconvenient people." From this vantage point, almost any autonomous Taiwanese politics seems, because of how the CCP has come to define its vital interests, to be the enemy of peace and cooperation on so many big and important issues.

To realists, an inconvenient people, say the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey and Iran, or the Jews in the Middle East, is almost inherently a war-prone obstacle to realistic compromises among more major nations. Their persistent existence seems a provocation. The world would seem to be safer and simpler without inconvenient peoples. So it seems, to realists among China-watchers, with regard to Taiwan, too.

In short, there is no anti-Taiwan conspiracy among informed observers. However, it is rather that a set of understandable and intractable factors socialize international observers to not hear or see either Taiwan's legitimate cries of pain or its quest for peace.<sup>41</sup> Taiwan actually is a vibrant democracy with a flourishing economy that seeks deep interactions with China that are mutually beneficial. However, not only do most international analysts not hear the legitimate voice of Taiwan, they also tend not to hear or not to focus on—or to easily forget—the many peace-prone overtures of Taiwan's presidents to China. These overtures have been dismissively ignored by CCP ruling groups whose core interests require CCP authoritarian control and regional PRC predominance.

With knowledge so framed, little, innocuous Taiwan is painted as, and presumed to be, a risky actor. However much I might wish President Lee had not worked to get to Cornell or that President Chen had not played politics with nationwide referenda, considering its actual behavior toward

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<sup>41</sup>Taiwan President Chen portrays Taiwan as a little rabbit scurrying to survive. Every time it cries out that it is in danger, China, an elephant, tries to stomp on it.

China, Taiwan is not only not provocative, but it has no chance of becoming a threat to peace. Taiwan's impossible attempts to move from *de facto* to *de jure* independence are, I have argued above, a sad joke reflecting Taiwanese domestic political imperatives.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, China's efforts to undermine Taiwan's *de facto* independence are not laughing matters.

Thomas Christensen worries about war-prone tendencies in the CCP posture.<sup>43</sup> What worries China's rulers, in contrast, is the strengthening of a Taiwan identity among residents of the island and a weakening of Chinese identity on the island. The status quo that the CCP embraces is a status quo ante. It is the era of KMT authoritarianism when natural emanations of Taiwan identity were repressed and Chinese identity was privileged and promoted. Taiwan's democratization has let free the separate Taiwan identity that authoritarianism suppressed. The number of Taiwanese who identify only with China is shrinking, in the democratic era, toward zero. Beijing can conclude that the window is therefore shutting on any voluntary reunification of Taiwanese with Chinese. That is, the American-preferred status quo, a *de facto* independent Taiwan, and a China which refrains from igniting a war, is interpreted in Beijing as an ongoing change against China's basic interests. Therefore, unless patriots in the CCP change their policies and re-imagine their nationalism, this is a situation—a definition of reality, Christensen finds—that time and again has led CCP rulers to opt for military action.

In sum, the reality underlying China's misunderstanding of Taiwan can be unearthed and examined. Its consequences can be sketched. It is very much worth trying to analyze and comprehend why Taiwan identity is scapegoated and CCP great power purposes are apologized for by China-watchers. That is what this article has attempted. An accurate understanding of CCP policies and their roots in a particular interpretation of the national interest and ruling group interests just might make preserving

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<sup>42</sup>Personally, I find President Chen's pandering to his base on *de jure* independence counter to Taiwan's most basic interest, the survival of its democratic autonomy. President Chen's words and deeds allow the CCP to obscure its expansionist agenda.

<sup>43</sup>Johnston and Ross, *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, chap. 3.

the peace a tad easier and somewhat more likely. Hence this article, which is aimed simply at making transparent the CCP's self-serving misunderstanding of Taiwan and how it reflects politics inside the CCP. There is no Taiwan plot which can establish *de jure* Taiwan independence and which will compel the CCP to resort to force. The CCP will not go to war against Taiwan unless an attack seems to be momentarily in the interest of Chinese ruling groups for quite different reasons.

Yet that discourse which undermines Taiwan's *de facto* independence and legitimizes a PRC-initiated war against little Taiwan as rational and defensive has become virtually hegemonic. This article recounts the rise of that discourse and why it is wrong to treat it as a deep historical given in Chinese culture and politics. What is at stake is the autonomy not only of Taiwan but of all nations in the region, none of which would benefit from the achievement of the CCP's hegemonic goals.

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