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Taiwan's Future: Mongolia or Tibet?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how Taiwan's future political intercourse with the People's Republic of China (PRC) might look like, by presenting two scenarios – one with Taiwan moving toward formal independence from China, just as Mongolia had done, and the other with Taiwan being forcefully integrated into China, as in the case of Tibet. Considering the Taiwanese authorities' unenthusiastic response so far to negotiating reunification with the PRC on its "One China" principle, and the ever-shortening patience of the PRC leadership, these two scenarios may not be as far-fetched as was once imagined to be. The different yet related developments of the PRC's relations with Taiwan, Mongolia and Tibet, and their possible international implications, are also explored in the paper.

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## **TAIWAN'S FUTURE: MONGOLIA OR TIBET ?**

### **Introduction**

The “Taiwan Question” as an issue has lasted half a century, since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on mainland China drove the Kuomintang (KMT) regime of Chiang Kaishek to the island of Taiwan. The issue has been brought into sharp international focus again by the election of Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) as president of Taiwan. Chen has in the past argued against considering Taiwan a part of China, and has advocated declaring independence for the island. In the last few weeks of the presidential campaign, in an attempt to forestall his election, the CCP leadership threatened to invade Taiwan if the Taiwanese authorities refused indefinitely to negotiate with their mainland counterparts. The mainland’s People’s Republic of China (PRC) had already made known two other conditions in the event of which it would attack Taiwan – if the island declares independence, or if it is occupied by a third country. By comparing Taiwan’s relations with the mainland, which are now at the crossroads, in the light of two events and one non-event in the Chinese political calendar of 1950, we may ponder two seemingly improbable but not impossible political futures for the people of Taiwan – that they will eventually go the way of Mongolia and achieve complete independence, which I believe, is the preferred choice of most Taiwanese, or risk having to follow the path of Tibet, and be forcibly integrated into the PRC, which I think, is to the least of their liking.

In February 1950, Mao Zedong and the PRC leadership recognized the independence of Mongolia from China, and began to establish state relations with the Mongolian People’s Republic, as it was then called. In October of the same year, units of the People’s Liberation

Army (PLA) entered Tibet, and the Tibetan leadership in Lhasa under the Dalai Lama signed a seventeen-point agreement with the CCP leadership in Beijing the following May to integrate the hitherto self-governing Tibet into the PRC. Those two events occurred in the political landscape of China in the year 1950. What was scheduled for the latter half of 1950 but failed to take place was the sea-borne invasion of Taiwan, because war had broken out on the Korean peninsula, and the United States (U.S.) Seventh Fleet had sailed into the Taiwan Straits and interposed itself between Taiwan and the mainland to prevent a Communist attack on the island.

### **MONGOLIA: TAIWAN'S DESIRE, CHINA'S FEAR ?**

Mongolia, like Tibet, was part of the Manchu Qing dynasty until its collapse in 1911.<sup>1</sup> Soon after the Republic of China (ROC) was proclaimed the following year, Mongolia declared independence, with the Bogd Khan Javzandamba, third highest ranking figure in the Tibetan Lamaist tradition which the Mongols subscribed to, as theocratic Head of State. The Chinese government did not recognize the independence of Mongolia, and in 1919, sent troops to reoccupy it. The Chinese army was removed by White Russian forces, who were in turn evicted from Mongolia in 1921 by the Mongolian nationalist Sukhbaatar, with the support of his Soviet Russian allies. In 1924, the socialist Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) was officially established, and the capital city of Urga was renamed Ulaanbaatar (Red Hero).

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<sup>1</sup> . For Mongolia's political history, see Charles R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989); William A. Brown and Urgunge Onon, *History of the Mongolian People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Robert A. Rupen, *How Mongolia Is Really Ruled – A Political History of the Mongolian People's Republic 1900-1978* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979).

For twenty-five years, from 1921 to 1946, only the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) recognized what became the MPR, which was not surprising given that the MPR was established under the auspices of the Soviet Union. The ROC government steadfastly refused to accept the independence of Mongolia, until it was forced to allow the Mongolian authorities to hold a plebiscite for independence to secure the withdrawal of the Soviet Red Army from Chinese Manchuria at the end of World War Two. Having agreed beforehand to accept the result of the plebiscite, which produced a unanimous vote in favor of independence,<sup>2</sup> the ROC government extended diplomatic recognition to the MPR in 1946, only to withdraw it three years later when the MPR recognized the establishment of the PRC.

PRC recognition of the MPR was made a condition for the conclusion of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Mutual Assistance in February 1950 by Stalin, much to the chagrin of Mao and his colleagues in the CCP, who considered Mongolia a part of China that had broken away and should be reclaimed by the PRC.<sup>3</sup> Undaunted, Premier Zhou Enlai raised the issue of the return of Mongolia with Nikita Khrushchev during the visits of the Soviet leader to the PRC in 1954 and 1958, only to be turned down both times.<sup>4</sup> Hoping to drive a wedge between the MPR and the USSR as Beijing's relations with Moscow soured, the PRC proposed to the MPR to fix and demarcate the two countries' largely undefined, or non-delineated, common border as of 1962. While border posts were being erected, Mao accused the USSR of placing Mongolia under its domination, and added that "we have yet to present

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<sup>2</sup> . Thomas E. Stolper, *China, Taiwan and the Offshore Islands – Together with an implication for both Mongolia and Sino-Soviet relations* (Armonk, New York & London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), 143.

<sup>3</sup> . Stolper, 144. See also Tai-sung An, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973), 64-65.

<sup>4</sup> . Stolper, 144.

our account” for areas east of Lake Baikal that had become Russian territory a century before.<sup>5</sup> This led to the deployment of Soviet forces in the MPR in 1966, for the first time in ten years.

The MPR finally joined the United Nations (UN) in 1961 after the ROC on Taiwan dropped its objection to Mongolia’s entry in hopes of obtaining continued U.S. support to maintain its seat in the UN.<sup>6</sup> Although failure to enter the UN had not stop the MPR from establishing diplomatic relations with a handful of socialist or third-world countries since 1950, it was recognition by the UN that led to general acceptance of Mongolia as a sovereign, independent state by the world community. In contrast, the ROC on Taiwan started on its long road away from recognition by, and participating in, the international community of states when it resigned its seat in the UN, to be replaced by the PRC in October 1971.

When the PRC decided to recognize the independence of Mongolia from China in 1950, it gave two reasons – the spirit of “socialist fraternity,” which made the re-absorption of Mongolia into the PRC unnecessary, and “acknowledging reality” (*chengren shishi*) of Mongolia’s past recognition as an independent country by the ROC authorities. However, in 1990, the MPR officially dropped socialism as its governing ideology in favor of a political system of multiparty democracy and changed its name to the State of Mongolia. The changed status of Mongolia vis-a-vis China has unexplored implications for China’s relationship with Taiwan. Now that no more spirit of “socialist fraternity” flows between Mongolia and the PRC, why

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<sup>5</sup> . Dennis J. Doolin, *Territorial Claims in the Sino-Soviet Conflict: Documents and Analysis* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1965), 43-44.

<sup>6</sup> . The proposal before the UN in 1961 was to admit Mongolia and Mauritania simultaneously. Taipei did not want to anger countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab World, and the Western bloc by invoking the veto as a then-permanent member of the Security Council against Mongolia, a move that would have led to the retaliatory

should the PRC continue to recognize the independence of the State of Mongolia, when such recognition undercuts the PRC's rationale for rejecting an independent democratic state on Taiwan? If the PRC has recognized the MPR and its successor State of Mongolia on the basis of "acknowledging reality," why not also acknowledge the reality of Taiwan's existence as a separate regime, based on historical developments? If statehood long-professed and not openly challenged somehow legitimized this status for Mongolia in the eyes of the international community, should Taiwan expect the PRC to take action soon to end its half-century of separation from the Chinese mainland, before this state of affair becomes permanent? On the other hand, if the PRC achieves reunification with Taiwan, peacefully or otherwise, is Mongolia next on the list, as Tibet was in the fall of 1950?

### **Tibet: Taiwan's Apprehension, China's Option ?**

While Mongolia successfully left the fold of the Chinese state in fact and finally in name, Tibet provided the only example to date of a part of China that broke away after the fall of the Qing dynasty to be recovered by, and reintegrated into, the Chinese polity established by the PRC.<sup>7</sup> After its declaration of independence from China in 1912, the autonomous Lamaist State of Tibet was recognized by the United Kingdom as being under Chinese "suzerainty" but not "sovereignty" under the terms of the Simla Convention of 1914. The convention was organized by the British to divide the existing territory of Tibet into two parts – a British zone of influence consisting largely of U-tsang (central and western Tibet), over which the Chinese government would have titular "suzerainty," and a zone under Chinese

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exclusion of Mauritania from the world body by the Soviet Union as a fellow permanent Council member. See John F. Copper, *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province*, 3d. ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 184-185.

<sup>7</sup> . For Tibet's political history, see Tom A. Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, rev. ed. (Armonk, New York & London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996); Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet 1913-1951 – The Demise of the*



“sovereignty” consisting of Kham (eastern Tibet) and the Tibetan Khamba and Ganze border districts of the Chinese province of Sichuan. Representatives from British India, Tibet and the Republic of China participated in the convention and its signing, but the Chinese government subsequently refused to ratify the agreement. In a military offensive against the Chinese undertaken in 1918, Lhasa captured Kham all the way to the western bank of the Yangtze river, which became the de facto boundary between Tibet and Chinese Sichuan until the Lamaist State was overwhelmed by the advancing PLA in late 1950.

Following the “peaceful liberation” of Tibet, which began in October 1950, Beijing and Lhasa signed a seventeen-point agreement in May 1951 that promised the Tibetan people that the Buddhist religion and their traditional lifestyle would be preserved, that their traditional polity headed by the Dalai Lama and his Cabinet of Ministers, or *Kashag*, would continue to exercise authority, and that socialism would be introduced in Tibet only on demand by the local authorities.<sup>8</sup> As late as 1957, Mao was saying that it would still be too early to attempt land reforms and socialist reconstruction in Tibet during the next five-year plan, “for conditions are not yet ripe.”<sup>9</sup> Barely two years later in 1959, after the Tibetan revolt had been crushed, and the Dalai Lama had fled to India and denounced the seventeen-point agreement, the PRC authorities rearranged the *Kashag* and made possible the immediate introduction of “democratic reforms” on local demands. It was the success of socialist transformation in Tibet as judged by the CCP leadership in Beijing that merited its being granted the status of an ethnic “autonomous region.” This, in reality, marked the demise of the

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*Lamaist State* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: The University of California Press, 1989); and Warren W. Smith, Jr., *Tibet Nation – A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> . See Appendix 1 – “The Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet in Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet,” in Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows – A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 449-452.

<sup>9</sup> . Smith, 415.

PRC's first experiment with the concept of "One Country, Two Systems," which most people believed, was introduced only on July 1, 1997 in Hong Kong.

Will Tibet's fate be Taiwan's, if the PLA overruns it? Irrespective whether Tibet should have been considered an independent country prior to 1950, or as having a special status in the Chinese polity before 1959, the territory and its people have been increasingly integrated into the political, economic, military and demographic framework of the PRC for the last four decades, through the influx of CCP cadres, technical personnel, PLA soldiers, and Han Chinese settlers. Although Tibetan culture and religion have experienced a limited revival since 1980, and sporadic contacts have been made between Beijing and personal emissaries from the Dalai Lama, monastic activities and religious worship in Tibet are closely monitored and regulated by the CCP through its local organs, and political expression in support of Tibetan independence or the exiled Dalai Lama are strictly forbidden. The people of Taiwan may have to resign themselves to similar restrictions on the organization of their religious and political life should they have to live under mainland rule.<sup>10</sup>

### **Taiwan: *De Facto* Independence or *de Jure* Unification ?**

Suppose Taiwan abandoned the "Two-States Theory" proposed by President Lee Teng-hui and endorsed in various forms by four of the five candidates in the presidential

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<sup>10</sup> . Aside from apprehending and imprisoning Tibetans who displayed pictures of the Dalai Lama and unfurled the pre-1950 "Snow Lion" flag of Tibet in public, PRC authorities have in recent years refused to register the "China Democracy Party" and instead arrested its activists, banned the Buddho-Taoist "Falun Gong" or "Falun Dafa" calisthenics - cum - meditation sect and forced its adherents to abandon their practices or face incarceration, and took into public security custody preachers and followers of the Christian and Muslim faiths found worshipping at religious gatherings not officially sanctioned by Beijing.

election of March 18, 2000,<sup>11</sup> and began reunification talks with the PRC on the premise of Beijing's "One Country, Two Systems" model, first proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1982 as the framework to recover Hong Kong from the British. What would Taiwan stand to gain or lose?

Commercial, communication, and personal links across the Taiwan Straits would undoubtedly become stronger with reunification. However, irrespective whether Taiwan joins the PRC as a province or "special administrative region," under whatever official name or national flag, the locus of power would in all likelihood still reside with the CCP's Politburo and the Central Military Commission where decisions of national importance are made, unless the CCP dissolves or completely reconstructs itself. PRC President Jiang Zemin promised in an eight-point statement on relations with Taiwan, delivered on January 30, 1995, that the Taiwanese would have a right under "One Country, Two Systems" to seek public office on the mainland, while people from the mainland would not have a corresponding right in Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, even if a Taiwanese were to become vice president or foreign minister in a reunified China, he or she would have little say in the administration of the country. For all intents and purposes, Beijing would remain the central government of a future united China. Thus, even if Taiwan were granted special constitutional status entailing a promise from Jiang that Taiwan could retain its own army, navy and air force,<sup>13</sup> what country could intervene on Taiwan's behalf, in the event that the CCP overrode its own stated position and send troops to

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<sup>11</sup> . According to the current Chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council, Tsai Ing-wen, the Chen Shui-bian administration would refrain from mentioning the "Two-States Theory," as a gesture of goodwill toward China, "but it was a term to describe the reality of the situation. There was no change in the substantive position of Taiwan with regard to the theory." *Straits Times* (Singapore), 12 June 2000, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> . John W. Garver, *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan's Democratization* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), 41.

the island on the pretext of “national emergency” or preparing for some “foreign threat”? There is no principle in state theory or international law which says that the central government of a state may not lawfully send troops to a locality of the same country! At least as the Republic of China, Taiwan still has official ties with some twenty-nine countries, most of them member states of the UN, who might speak up for it in the world body, or help rally world sympathy, in the event of a PRC invasion, missile attack, or economic blockade directed at Taiwan, assuming the absence of a provocative unilateral declaration of independence on the part of the Taiwanese, which Chen has promised not to do.<sup>14</sup>

It is most unlikely that the CCP would allow Taiwan as a special administrative region to maintain any more official diplomatic relations with any other state, or even to take part as a unit or delegation in any international forum where only states are represented. It is also doubtful whether the CCP would continue to honor the Taiwan Relations Act, under which the PRC agreed that the US could continue supplying Taiwan with weapons for defense after the establishment of US - PRC diplomatic relations in 1979. Beijing will certainly not permit the Dalai Lama, or any other member of his government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India, to accept invitations from Buddhist organizations in Taiwan to visit the island after reunification. The PRC legislature, the National People’s Congress (NPC), upheld a ruling by the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal in 1998 that the NPC alone exercised the right to interpret Hong Kong’s post-1997 Basic Law which governs the territory; and in 1999, the NPC passed legislation to overrule the same Court, (which is seen by many people as a corner-stone of “One Country, Two Systems,” ) over the right of abode for children of mainland Chinese in

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<sup>13</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> . Republic of China, Office of the President, *President Chen Shui-bian’s inauguration speech* (May 20, 2000).

Hong Kong.<sup>15</sup> These two decisions by the PRC's highest law-making body, which will limit the constitutional and judicial autonomy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, can only discourage the Taiwanese from adhering to Beijing's call for reunification on some modification of the "One Country, Two Systems" formulation.

Most Taiwanese have grown accustomed to a feisty political system of democratic contestation. Even if they were to agree to a special status for Taiwan as part of "One China," as defined by the PRC, they will have to ask themselves if this status could be summarily revoked by their brethren across the Taiwan Straits if public disturbances occurred, or if pro-independence activities continued or increased on Taiwan. They will recall that the seventeen-point agreement with Tibet was annulled by the PRC central authorities in response to an uprising of alleged anti-Communist Tibetan separatists in 1959. The Taiwanese will also have to consider the consequences of establishing direct air and sea links between both sides of the Straits, before or after reunification, with the opening of direct shipping links between the mainland and the Taipei-held offshore islands of Kinmen and Matsu.<sup>16</sup> Might spies and agent-provocateurs from the PRC not infiltrate Taiwan to precipitate change in the island's political character in a direction more to Beijing's preference? Taiwanese are understandably concerned.

The PRC leadership under Jiang has throughout much of 2000 been rather fixated on hurrying talks with the Taiwanese to effect "symbolic reunification" as soon as possible,

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<sup>15</sup> . Albert H.Y. Chen, "Hong Kong's Legal System Transition: 1997-99" in Wang Gungwu and John Wong, *Hong Kong in China* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1999), 299-308.

<sup>16</sup> . According to Tsai Ing-wen, the current Chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council, direct trade, mail and shipping links between Kinmen and China's Xiamen will be inaugurated on January 1, 2001, with the implementation of the "small three links" between Matsu and selective mainland Chinese ports to follow. See "No turning back on 'small three links,' Tsai says" in *Taipei Times*, November 18, 2000, <http://taipeitimes.com/news/2000/11/18/story/0000061964>. The links have since been implemented.

probably to retain the momentum and popular support generated at home by the recovery of Hong Kong in 1997 and Macao in 1999. A less widely perceived explanation is fear on Beijing's part that, in the event of a rupture in relations with the US, or more likely, serious domestic disturbances arising from difficult political, economic or social circumstances beyond the control of the CCP leadership, Taiwan will multiply its efforts to further expand its "activity space" by cultivating relations with other countries and inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations,<sup>17</sup> and thus achieve legal independence through stealth, much as Mongolia did, under the sway of a superpower. It was to forestall such an eventuality that the PRC issued a "White Paper" on "The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue," in which the PRC threatened the use of force "if the Taiwan authorities refuse, sine die, the peaceful settlement of cross-Straits reunification through negotiations."<sup>18</sup> However, the "White Paper" also emphasized the point that any issue may be discussed as long as Taiwan accepts the "One China Principle."

Perhaps Beijing worries too much, since declaring Taiwan independent would likely call into question the constitutional basis of Chen Shui-bian's own election as president of the ROC. Still, PRC leaders have lately sought to pressure Chen into making concessions to

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<sup>17</sup> . Taiwan's Vice President-elect Annette Lu of the DPP has always been an active campaigner for Taiwan's re-entry into the UN. See "Taiwan's new V-P slammed by Beijing as 'scum'," *Straits Times* (Singapore), 9 April 2000, p. 16. See also, *DPP White Paper on Foreign Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (November 1999), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) English Homepage Website, <http://www.dpp.org.tw/English/foreign%20policy/frpolicy.htm>. Taiwan is also seeking to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO), and other international organizations in which entities other than states are also represented. For a detailed exposition of the international politics involved in Taiwan's campaign to join the WHO, see Dennis V. Hickey, "Taiwan and the World Health Organization: Good Health for All or Some?" *Issues & Studies* 36, no. 5 (September/October 2000): 41-60. More recently, Taipei has sought to become a full economic dialogue partner of the ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). See "Taiwan Asks to be Economic Dialogue Partner of ASEAN," Kyodo News Service, Japan Economic Newswire, November 16, 1998, in *Lexis/Nexis*.

<sup>18</sup> . People's Republic of China, Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council, *The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (February 21, 2000), Section III, Paragraph 9.

Beijing by actively encouraging anti-independence politicians to visit the mainland and wooing Taiwanese businessmen to increase investment in the PRC.<sup>19</sup> Beijing judges Chen to be a weak leader constrained by political opponents from within his own party and from the opposition, and blames the island's slow economic growth, rising unemployment, and stock market instability largely on Chen's unwillingness to proceed with direct links across the Taiwan Straits.<sup>20</sup> In doing so, the PRC leadership fails to comprehend the adverse role played by the downturn in the global market for Taiwan's high-technology products, and also underestimates the abiding grass-root support for the DPP among the Taiwanese.<sup>21</sup>

### **Taiwan's Future: Mongolia, Tibet, or Something Between?**

Taiwanese leaders have always claimed that their Republic of China has existed continuously as an independent, sovereign state since its founding in 1912, and was in no way extinguished or superseded by the establishment of the People's Republic of China on the Chinese mainland in 1949. Taiwan, of course, was retroceded to the Republic of China in 1945 by Japan, after a fifty-year occupation, following Japan's defeat in World War II. Thus, the reasoning goes, there is no need for Taiwan to declare itself independent, for it already is. This is a clever argument, but not for the reason given in the first sentence of this paragraph.

Indeed, the official name of the state, the Republic of China, dated all the way back to its establishment in 1912, in the aftermath of the October Tenth Revolution of 1911. However, the current national flag of Taiwan, as the ROC, popularly referred to as the "white

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<sup>19</sup> . Bonnie S. Glaser, "Beijing Fears about Chen Shui-bian Subside as Taiwan's Political and Economic Troubles Mount," *PacNet 5, February 2, 2001*, Pacific Forum CSIS, [[SMTP:pacforum@lava.net](mailto:SMTP:pacforum@lava.net)].

<sup>20</sup> . Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> . Ibid.

sun on the green sky over the crimson ground,” and the national anthem still sung by schoolchildren there, the *San Min Chu I*, were only adopted by the KMT government shortly after the completion of the (“Northern Expedition”) reunification campaign in 1928, led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The National Assembly which ratified the existing Constitution of the Republic of China and elected Chiang president in Nanking met only in 1947, but its members would continue to hold office after moving to Taipei until its replacement by another National Assembly elected entirely by the people of Taiwan in 1992, reflecting the tide of rising local Taiwanese political consciousness which culminated in the election in 2000 of Taiwan-born Chen Shui-bian as president.

In March 1950, Chiang decided to “reclaim” the presidency of the Republic of China following his resignation from that position the year before in favor of his vice president, who did not proceed to Taiwan when the mainland fell to the Communists. Chiang’s return as president had no constitutional basis whatsoever, so it could be argued that his decision was in no way less “revolutionary” an undertaking as the “liberation” of the Chinese mainland by the CCP. Even more “revolutionary” was the decision in 1991 to begin a series of constitutional amendments which would provide for the direct election of a new National Assembly the following year and the presidency in 1996 by Taiwanese voters representing only Taiwan’s interests. How else, but truly “revolutionary,” can the election of the DPP’s Chen and the defeat of the KMT in the May 2000 Taiwanese presidential polls be described as? Can sympathizers therefore argue that Taiwan, as the Republic of China, is an independent state entity not because it has been in existence since 1912, but because, given the structural breaks in its polity, it had in reality become a new regime or “republic” (as in the various “republics” of France or South Korea) in 2000 or 1991, if not earlier in 1950?



Since 1950, the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC is akin to that of the MPR vis-à-vis China from 1921 up to about 1958, when China still periodically asked for the return of Mongolia. Likewise, the isolated position of Taipei in the international state system since it left the UN in 1971 resembles that of Ulaanbaatar from the time of the MPR's earliest beginnings in 1921, to the time it was admitted into the UN in 1961, forty years later. Yet Mongolia escaped China's bonds.

The Taipei government understands, as should any historian of contemporary China, that the reason Mongolia was able to retain its autonomy from the PRC, and even moved from *de facto* to *de jure* independence within the international system of sovereign states, was the steadfast military, economic and rhetorical buttress provided by the Soviet Union to sustain Mongolia as its client socialist state from 1921 to 1990. By 1990, Mongolia was already fully accepted by the world community as a sovereign independent state. Taiwan also realizes that the reason why Tibet was absorbed into the PRC in 1950 was because Tibet neglected to seek diplomatic recognition of its independence and military assistance from foreign powers until the PLA was well on its way to conquering all of China and the CCP began announcing its intention to "liberate" Tibet from "imperialism." By then, it was too late. Hence Taiwan's active engagement in conducting "substantive" or "check-book" diplomacy to win foreign friends, aligning its political values with the democratic West, maintaining a large and well-funded lobby in Washington, DC, the capital city of its ultimate protector, acquiring the Aegis battle management system from the Americans, and expressing interest in a prospective Theater Missile Defense (TMD) project involving the U.S. and Japan.

While the MPR leadership never compromised or negotiated on their country's position with the Chinese authorities of any regime, the Dalai Lama and his government had to accept the reality of a PLA presence in his country and conclude an agreement with Beijing within two months in 1951, essentially acknowledging that Tibet was, and would thenceforth be, a part of China. Hence it is understandable that Taiwan has steadfastly refused to negotiate on the question of its sovereignty under the "One Country, Two Systems" formula. It has gone only as far as to agree vaguely to "one China, [each according to its] own definition" (*yige Zhongguo, gezi biaoshu*) as a working credo in exploratory unification talks with the PRC held in quasi-formal meetings organized by Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the PRC's Association of Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS).<sup>22</sup> Chen Shui-bian has tried to interest the PRC leadership in a vague notion of "integration" (*tonghe*) as a basis for political negotiations between both sides of the Taiwan Straits, but Beijing has yet to officially react to his proposal.<sup>23</sup>

Since near the end of the Cold War, the political leadership of Mongolia, the Tibetan government-in-exile, and Taiwan have adopted a conscious strategy of promoting democracy and human welfare to attract external (Western) recognition and support in circumventing Beijing's growing influence in world affairs. With the unraveling of the Soviet bloc, of which Mongolia was a part, the Mongolian government carried out the country's first free elections in April 1990. It has since pursued a policy of non-alignment and balanced relations with its two

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<sup>22</sup> . Taking his cue from the historic summit between the leaders of North and South Korea, Chen Shui-bian invited Jiang Zemin to a summit meeting on June 20, 2000, but was turned down by PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao, who reiterated that Taiwan's leadership must accept the principle of one China and that Taiwan is a part of China before talks can begin. See *Washington Post*, June 21, 2000, A16.

<sup>23</sup> . Taiwan's *CTN Channel* news broadcast at 11p.m. (Taipei time) on January 1, 2001, quoting Chen Shui-bian's New Year's Day Message to his country.

immediate neighbors, Russia and the PRC; cultivated military ties with the US; promoted trade, investment, and aid from Japan and South Korea; and participated in regional institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) to advance confidence-building measures and curb nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia.<sup>24</sup> As for the Tibetan government-in exile, emissaries from the Dalai Lama have since 1978 held intermittent political discussions with representatives of the PRC government; and in his address to the Strasbourg Parliament in June 1988, the Dalai Lama signaled his willingness to accept PRC control over the defense and foreign relations of Tibet in exchange for a guarantee of basic human rights and genuine autonomy for the territory's people.<sup>25</sup> However, talks between the two sides floundered, either because Beijing did not respond to the Dalai Lama's proposals, or because it insisted that he recant his assertion that Tibet was once independent.<sup>26</sup> Taiwan embarked on the path of democratization when President Chiang Ching-kuo (CCK) legalized the formation of the DPP and other opposition parties in 1986 and lifted martial law in July 1987, to ameliorate political discontent on the part of the middle-class and help Taiwan break out of its increasing isolation after its exit from the UN and the normalization of US – PRC relations.<sup>27</sup> To win international

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<sup>24</sup> . T Bayarmagnai, "Regional CBMs and Mongolia," *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia* 6, 5-11; S. Galsanjants, "Mongolia and Alliance Relationship in Asia Pacific Region," *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia* 6, 12-17; and Ralph A. Cossa, "Assuring Mongolia's Independence, Economic Security, and Economic Balance," *Regional Security Issues and Mongolia* 7, 12-20.

<sup>25</sup> . "Strasbourg Proposal (1988)," and "Strasbourg Proposal No Longer Binding (1991)," *Legal Materials on Tibet* (2<sup>nd</sup>, May 1997), International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, <http://www.tibetictl.org/materials/tibet/> .

<sup>26</sup> . "The Tibetan government's position on negotiations with China," *World Tibet Network News*, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala, India (Issued: April 23, 1997. Posted: April 28, 1997) [http://www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive/1997/4/28-2\\_1.html](http://www.tibet.ca/wtnarchive/1997/4/28-2_1.html).

<sup>27</sup> . Peter R. Moody, Jr., *Political Change on Taiwan: A Study of Ruling Party Adaptability* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 186-187; and Ya-li Lu, "Lee Teng-hui's Role in Taiwan's Democratization: A Preliminary Assessment," in *President Lee Teng-hui's Legacy – Formation and Implications: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Taipei, May 12-13, 2000*, by the Sun Yet-sen Graduate Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities (Taipei: National Chengchi University, 2000).

support in standing up to the PRC, Lee Teng-hui, CCK's successor, consolidated the democratization process in Taiwan through constitutional changes made after CCK's death in January 1988.

To counteract the encroachment of mainstream Chinese culture and the pull of an increasingly materialistic world, the elite of Taiwan, Mongolia, and the exiled Tibetans have been actively promoting local / native / national consciousness in their communities. Post-socialist Mongolia has seen a revival of its traditional Tibetan Lamaist faith, and of reverence for Genghis Khan as the founder-hero of the Mongol nation.<sup>28</sup> A major motivation for the preservation of a Tibetan identity among exiles is the fear that Tibetan culture and religion in Tibet will be obliterated by Chinese immigration. To keep alive their identity and their hopes of returning to Tibet under freer conditions, Tibetans in exile, together with Western supporters, have in recent years taken to internationalizing the Tibet issue. They have participated in the production of Hollywood movies about Tibet; promoted the publication of books on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism; organized fundraising events like the "Concert for a Free Tibet;" lobbied for the Dalai Lama for meetings with European parliamentarians, U.S. presidents, congressional leaders, and senators; and encouraged civil disobedience in Tibet.<sup>29</sup> As Taiwan's newly-elected president from a major anti-unification party, Chen Shui-bian has stressed that Taiwanese culture should be considered not a frontier Chinese culture, but as the "root of Oceanic culture," having its own "pluralist, indigenous, and international"

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<sup>28</sup> . Anthony Spaeth, "Mongolian Rhapsody" in *Time* (Asia Edition), September 1, 1997, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/1997/int/970901/asia.mongolia.html> .

<sup>29</sup> . Barry Sautman, "The Tibet Issue in Post-Summit Sino-American Relations," *Pacific Affairs*, vol.72, no.1 (Spring 1999), 8-11.

characteristics.<sup>30</sup> He advocated that the teaching of local Taiwanese languages in elementary school be increased, and that Chinese history be taught as a foreign subject. In gestures full of cultural symbolism, a singer of aboriginal descent was invited to sing the country's anthem at Chen's inauguration, and Taiwanese food, including the ubiquitous sweet porridge, was served at the evening banquet.<sup>31</sup>

Taiwanese awareness developed and strengthened during KMT rule over Taiwan as a reaction to the massacre of Taiwanese demonstrators by KMT troops in 1947 and the subsequent efforts of the mainlander-dominated government to forestall the rise of Taiwanese consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Those efforts included forbidding the use of local (Minnan, Hakka, and Aboriginal) languages in schools, and the showing of movies in any other languages but the official Mandarin Chinese. The political program of Chen's party, the DPP, is based on the mobilization of Taiwanese consciousness. In that, he has been helped by Lee Teng-hui's popularization of the concept of the 'New Taiwanese' in the last two years of his presidency.

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<sup>30</sup> . Goh Sui Noi, "Its Taiwan culture," *Straits Times* (Singapore), August 5, 2000, p.19.

<sup>31</sup> . Taiwan's *CTN Channel* news broadcast at 11p.m. (Taipei time) on May 20, 2000. Chen Shui-bian's people extended an invitation to the Dalai Lama to attend the inauguration of his presidency, who declined, ostensibly because of prior commitments, but actually, according to a source in Taiwan's National Security Bureau, to avoid provoking Beijing's ire. The same source also intimated that the possibility of establishing bilateral diplomatic relations between Taipei and Dharamsala was raised by the Taiwanese during the visit of the Dalai Lama to Taiwan in March 1997, but both sides decided to shelve the matter for fear that the PRC authorities would accuse them of "cooperating in activities to split the Chinese motherland".

<sup>32</sup> . The primary ethnic distinction in Taiwan is that between the "native Taiwanese" (*benshengren*) – people whose ancestors arrived from China prior to the Japanese occupation in 1895 – and the "mainlanders" (*waishengren*), those who arrived after the recovery of Taiwan in 1945 and their offspring. Although *benshengren* are primarily Southern Fujianese in origin and often distinguish themselves from *waishengren* by the use of the Minnan dialect, *benshengren* also include a significant minority of Hakka, who generally do not consider themselves to share an identity with the Southern Fujianese. Similarly, *waishengren*, if they do not describe themselves as Taiwanese - and many of those who crossed over from mainland China do not identify with Taiwan - will invariably identify themselves as Chinese, rather than in terms of a sub-Chinese ethnic group that includes only part of the population of both Taiwan and mainland China. The aboriginal peoples, who make up about 1.7% of Taiwan's population, constitute an additional ethnic group. See Roger Cliff, "Taiwan: In the Dragon's Shadow," in *Asian Security Practice*, ed. Mathiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 288, 297-298.

Lee wanted to create a common identity transcending the traditional divide between the native Taiwanese and the mainlanders by having people identify with Taiwan. More importantly, the 'New Taiwanese' concept underlines the emergence of a Taiwan identity separate from that of China, and closely associated with Taiwan's home-grown democratic system. That association is reinforced by Taipei's insistence in talks with the PRC that Taiwan's democratic system is not negotiable as it is a fundamental part of Taiwan's identity.<sup>33</sup> The process of building a collective Taiwanese identity has only accelerated under the Chen Shui-bian administration, leading to the Taipei Foreign Ministry's replacement of Taiwan's emblem, which resembles the opposition KMT party logo, with a more neutral-looking plum blossom in its overseas missions; the supplanting of mainland-born members of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission with Taiwan-born ones; and a public debate on the relative merits of adopting the PRC-originated Hanyu Pinyin system or the locally-devised Tongyong Pinyin system, (pitched by supporters as being able to reflect more accurately Taiwan's linguistic idiosyncracies,) for the purpose of Romanizing spoken Mandarin in Taiwan.<sup>34</sup>

To consolidate the argument long held by the DPP that Taipei should drop sovereignty claims to mainland China even in name, Chen Shui-bian acknowledged Mongolia as a separate state entity in a welcoming address to its former Prime Minister, Janlaviin Narantsatsralt, in October 2000. Narantsatsralt was on a "private" visit to Taiwan with a

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<sup>33</sup> . Julian Baum and Andrew Sherry, "Identity Crisis," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 4, 1999, [http://www.feer.com/9903\\_04/p21taiwan.html](http://www.feer.com/9903_04/p21taiwan.html).

<sup>34</sup> . Lawrence Chung, "A quiet change comes over Taiwan's emblem" in *Straits Times* (Singapore), December 5, 2000, <http://www.straitstimes.com/0,1870,8075-976053540,00.html>; Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan panel rapped for anti-China stance" in *Straits Times* (Singapore), December 8, 2000, <http://www.straitstimes.com/0,1870,8879-976312740,00.html>; Lin Mei-chun, "Tongyong Pinyin backers threaten signature drive" in *Taipei Times*, November 29, 2000, <http://taipeitimes.com/news/2000/11/29/story/0000063411>; and Ann Heylen, "Romanization: looking to the past" in *Taipei Times*, November 27, 2000, <http://taipeitimes.com/news/2000/11/27/story/0000063168>.

delegation of former parliamentarians and diplomats, to return Chen's two visits to Mongolia before assuming the presidency, and to strengthen bilateral cultural, educational, and economic ties between Taiwan and Mongolia.<sup>35</sup> Chen also appeared ready to welcome another distinguished visitor, the Dalai Lama, on his second visit to Taiwan, reportedly to give Buddhist teachings, and be received by Chen in the Presidential Office, "as a state guest in order to acknowledge Tibet as an independent sovereign state."<sup>36</sup> Perhaps Chen and his DPP administration believe that welcoming "state" guests on such "unofficial" visits would allow Taipei to demonstrate to itself and the world its independent identity, and, at the same time, diffuse the PRC's steely gaze on Taiwan by forcing the Chinese leadership to pay more attention to possible motives actions on the part of political actors in the countries surrounding China. However, "by engaging in activities to split the Chinese motherland," as PRC officials are wont to admonish, Taipei may have succeeded only in deepening Beijing's mistrust and stoking its ire toward the island.

Needless to say, if Taiwan were to declare independence as a nation-state, a situation could conceivably develop across the Taiwan Straits which might result in extreme instability for the entire Western Pacific region. On the other hand, reunification between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan may not be an unmixed blessing for countries in the neighborhood. Two-way trade and investment between Taiwan and the mainland would certainly increase, but possibly at the expense of existing and future Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asian

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<sup>35</sup> . Joyce Huang, "Chen welcomes Mongolian visitors" in *Taipei Times*, October 8, 2000, <http://taipeitimes.com/news/2000/10/08/story/0000056469>.

<sup>36</sup> . Joyce Huang, "Report points to November visit by Dalai Lama" in *Taipei Times*, October 10, 2000, <http://taipeitimes.com/news/2000/10/10/story/0000056700>. The Dalai Lama's visit, scheduled for the end of the year 2000, had since been postponed.

countries, which will likely face keener competition for exports to third countries as many more Taiwanese companies will be able to use the mainland as a low-cost export platform after reunification. There is also a greater likelihood that an enlarged China may attempt to settle, on its own terms, territorial disputes over the South China Sea islands with claimant Southeast Asian countries, the Diaoyutai islands with Japan, the Himalayan frontier and Aksai Chin with India, and stretches of the border with Russia in the Far East. A reunified and hegemonic China may appear so threatening to the Japanese that they may feel compelled to abrogate Article 9 of Japan's Constitution prohibiting the use of force in collective self-defense, or to deploy the TMD system, thus further destabilizing the region. The sea lanes of communication for commercial and security purposes that pass through the Taiwan Straits linking Southeast Asia with Japan and the Korean peninsula could be subjected to possible dominance or control by a future China under one central administration. It is thus little wonder that major powers and regional countries would want to maintain most aspects of non-diplomatic ties with Taiwan, that the U.S. would continue to supply Taiwan with advanced weaponry systems to defend itself against a possible PRC attack, and that the European Parliament would pass legislation in 1996 in support of Taiwan's admission into international organizations in which statehood is not an absolute requirement, for it is to their advantage to keep the status quo across the Taiwan Straits.

### **Conclusion**

For the foreseeable future, Taiwan will not likely achieve *de jure* independence *a la* Mongolia, for states which recognizes the ROC do not have enough votes in the UN to push for its re-admission as a member state of that world body, under any guise; and despite their occasional tiffs, the United States is not about to forsake diplomatic relations with the PRC to



recognize Taipei. However, the PRC will not be able to apply the Tibet solution and forcibly integrate Taiwan into the mainland's political, social, economic and military structure, because the PRC lacks the military capability to invade Taiwan now or in the near future, even without, but more likely with, American intervention.<sup>37</sup> To date, the Taiwanese are not interested in uniting with the PRC under "One Country, Two Systems," Jiang's eight point proposal, or for that matter, any other formula floated by Beijing.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the Taiwanese will be more accepting of a confederate China in the future that incorporates the mainland, Taiwan, Mongolia, Tibet, and Hong Kong in a democratic structure with some common foreign, defense, and economic policies, but with complete internal autonomy and separately elected governments. It would be no small wonder, however, for such an enlarged China, with autonomous parts on so many (ethnic, socio-economic, or politico-military) dimensions, to still regard itself as an integrated state entity, and to function like one. For the time being, while Taiwan searches for ways to coexist with the PRC, its status in the international state system will be very much like that of Mongolia or Tibet from 1912 to 1950: ambiguous at best, but definitely full of hazard and potential.

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<sup>37</sup> . "Taiwan's military – Assessing strengths and weaknesses," *IJSS Strategic Comments*, Volume 6, Issue 4, May 2000.

<sup>38</sup> . A Taiwanese gallop poll from October 18-19, 1998 showed that only 5.3% of the population identified with the PRC's "One China" policy.

The questionnaire contained the following: what definition of "One China" would you accept?

- "One China" means ROC (Republic of China) - 41.4%
- "One China" means "One China," not the PRC or the ROC - 33.3%
- "One China" means the PRC - 5.3%
- I do not accept "One China" as applied to Taiwan - 6.2%
- No Opinion - 13.8%

Source: Gallop Taiwan, conducted this survey for 1105 adults in Taiwan. See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 29, 1998, 25.