

# A Rightful Place for Taiwan in this Planet

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Beijing, in the first two weeks of August, on top of conducting a war drill against Taiwan to protest the visit to the island by Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the United States House of Representatives, released a [White Paper](#) on the Taiwan issue to update its one China policy and its offer to Taiwan.

## One China Policy—which China?

Beijing tries its best to make the world believes that its one China policy only means:

- There is only one China in the world
- Taiwan belongs to China
- The sole representative government of China is the People's Republic of China (PRC)
- Taiwan belongs to the PRC

Taiwan challenged the third and the fourth point and we must be aware of its voice. Although the Kuomintang (KMT) regime had lost Mainland China to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949 and fled to Taiwan, its Republic of China (ROC) constitution has been continuously in force, hence its claim over Mainland China as well - hence the ROC is the sole legitimate representative government of China. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government (in power in 2000-2008 and again for two terms for 2016-2024) has adopted a pro-independence position in 1992 but has taken no step to implement it ever (see below).

## US's interpretation

As for the US, it "*acknowledges* (my emphasis) that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves." ([1972 Shanghai Communiqué](#))

The US deliberately used the word "acknowledge," not "recognize," while avoiding to name any

countries on either side here, making the statement “Taiwan is a part of China” vague enough to continue exploring its hidden, but developing, agenda then. At that point, it still recognized the ROC regime but was already beginning to explore closer relations with Beijing. In 1979, this would materialize in the establishment of formal diplomatic ties with the PRC at the expense of the ROC, who had already been excluded from the United Nation at the end of 1971. Beijing’s supporters would always try to create an impression that the PRC’s establishment of official diplomatic ties with the US implies that the latter also recognizes that Taiwan belongs to the PRC—but the 1972 Shanghai Communique never stated this. The US did oppose Taiwan independence (which would mean officially replacing the ROC with something like “Republic of Taiwan”), but it has been consistently unclear in the question of which ‘China’ does Taiwan belong to, the PRC or ROC. The US’s recognition of PRC in 1979 has not changed this either.<sup>[1]</sup>

On the other hand, one must also realise that Washington continues to recognise the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China, and continues to commit itself to discouraging Taiwan people’s right to self-determination. Washington has adjusted its approach to the cross strait relationship but has not yet changed in any substantial way its Taiwan policy.

### **The “1992 consensus”**

The White Paper attacks the DPP government in Taiwan for

*refus[ing] to recognize the one-China principle, and distort and deny the 1992 Consensus. They assert that Taiwan and the mainland should not be subordinate to each other, and proclaim a new “two states” theory.*

The “1992 Consensus” here refers to the conclusion of the talks between Beijing and Taipei’s KMT government in 1992, with a verbal agreement between the two that “both sides of the strait” belong to “China” but “agree to disagree” over the interpretation of “China” (PRC or ROC). Obviously this implies that, as a matter of fact, both sides of the strait do not subordinate to each other”.<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore it is odd to read the White paper accusing Taiwan for this. On top of this is that no matter what this or that head of state in Taiwan once spoke on the cross strait relationship and which annoyed Beijing, their government continue to uphold its ROC constitution, which implies that it has not breached its commitment to its “one China policy” at all. Beijing is simply muddling the water when it repents over what it had acknowledged in 1992.

Furthermore, the paper’s interpretation of the “1992 Consensus” contradicts what Beijing’s top leader once said to Bush. Back in 2008, when the Chinese and the U.S. presidents held telephone talks on Taiwan, then-Chinese president Hu Jintao

*said it is China’s consistent stand that the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan should restore consultation and talks on the basis of “the 1992 consensus,” which sees both sides recognize there is only one China, but agree to differ on its definition.*<sup>[3]</sup>

Beijing has to confuse the world is because it does not only oppose Taiwan independence, but is also keen on wiping out the ROC altogether so that it can rule over Taiwan people. Thirty years ago Beijing was less aggressive to Taiwan, when it was much less confident of itself than it is today – nowadays Xi Jinping no longer have the patience to wait for peaceful negotiation anymore. He may soon demand Taiwan to sit down for negotiation, accompanied by the threat of armed unification however. That is why Xi is increasingly being hard-line towards Taiwan. And this is why the White Paper could still promote its brazen “one country two systems” package to Taiwan even after this package has become politically bankrupt after Beijing’s crackdown on Hong Kong’s autonomy since

2020. It does not care about “winning over the heart of the Taiwan people” any more, it only wants to instil fear in the latter’s heart. This level of arrogance and aggression not only antagonises the 23 million Taiwanese people, denying their democratic rights to decide their own fate, but also increasingly condemn the KMT – the only big party in Taiwan that is soft to Beijing – to unpopularity back home, narrowing Beijing’s own options. If Beijing does not mind about this, it is only because it decides to bully Taiwan. To sum up, in the last ten years it has always been Xi’s hawkish position that has been creating more tension across the strait.

### **The DPP’s view**

The DPP’s 1991 program included the demand for an independent Taiwan republic through a referendum. It also attacked the ROC constitution’s claiming jurisdiction over Mainland as obsolete.

As a matter of fact, the DPP has won four ROC presidential election but none of its presidents ever moved to implement its program of holding a referendum for independence. In fact, the party has re-interpreted its Taiwan independence program multiple times to the effect that its leadership has long abandoned its Taiwan independence program – summed up in the term “*de jure* independence” – and adopted a “*de facto* independence” position instead, ie, accepting the ROC constitution, and maintaining the ROC as a separate political entity from the PRC. By doing this the DPP is making a compromise not only in response to Beijing’s pressure but first and foremost to Washington’s pressure. This is also practically a position of maintaining the status quo, which still has [the support](#) of more than half of the population (see below).

Beijing, obsessed with its mistaken idea of “Chinese nation” – that all Chinese speaking people must be unified into a single whole under its rule, and that the CCP is the natural representative of its version of “Chinese nation”, with no regard at all on the will of the people concerned – flatly refused to even talking to the DPP.

### **Beijing’s Imperial agenda**

The White Paper justifies its claim over Taiwan by citing the [1943 Cairo Declaration](#) issued by the KMT China, the US and the UK which stated that “all the territories Japan had stolen from China, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China.” The White Paper, in order to be politically correct, changed the names of the above mentioned territories to “Northeast China, Taiwan and the Penghu Islands” in its citation. But it has made itself very politically wrong to cite the document to justify its claim over Taiwan in the first place. Isn’t Beijing supposed to be a “socialist” regime? Why would it relies on the authority of an agreement signed between the imperialists Roosevelt and Churchill on one hand and Chiang Kai-Shek, the hangman of the CCP, on the other? What kind of socialist regime gives full respect to the imperialist powers who are dividing the world between themselves, even though they also agreed to return Japan’s occupied territory to Chiang just to goad the latter to fight the war harder? However, its incorrectness does not stop here at all. Implicit in the White Paper is a founding principle of the PRC which violates basic principle of socialism – that it sees itself as the natural successor of all the territories of the KMT regime – which in turn also did the same in relation to the Qing dynasty. This is nothing but the doctrine of empire building and imperialism, even when the KMT’s China was the victim of Western imperialism. No wonder back in the early 1940s the CCP already abandoned its original position (in line with the practice of the Bolsheviks) of supporting self-determination for the minorities in China like the Tibetans and the Uighurs. Beijing’s recent claim over the nine-dot line in the South China Sea follows the same logic – “we must succeed all the territorial claims of the KMT regime”, no

matter how fragile the KMT's claim was. This kind of reactionary position is enough to disqualify the CCP as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people. Before talking about the "holy task of unification of all Chinese" one should first talk about rebuilding a China that is fully democratic and respectful of the right of its minorities' right to self-determination. This is the only way to save China from an unnecessary war.

The above review of the history of the "one China" policy also helps us to understand one thing - that if Beijing's interpretation has been accepted by many governments in the world, this has been based on their political perception only, namely their recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate representative of China. But this in itself is not as solid as rock. That the PRC was admitted to the UN in 1971, at the expense of the ROC, was in turn merely the result of a change of UN member states' perception on the two republics. While Washington's position has been meant to serve its own imperial agenda, other governments adopting similar position by then might be out of a belief that the PRC is progressive (if not "socialist") and the ROC under KMT as reactionary. Fifty years has passed since then. While both republics has converged in terms of economic system since 1979 (as a result of Deng Xiaoping's capitalist reform), they diverged in terms of political institution and the space for protest movements. Beijing's autocracy only getting more rigid since then. On the other hand, Taiwan, because of the courageous resistance of the people there since the 1970s, have been able to transform the KMT's one party dictatorship into a liberal capitalism where lower classes have the right to organise, to protest and to vote. Although the Taiwan elite class still has immense power over the lower classes, the latter still has some right to resist if they choose to fight. In contrast, under the Beijing regime there is no such space at all. Now is the time for supporters of democracy around the world to re-assess the nature of both republics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to update their position accordingly.

### What does the Taiwan People Want?

The CCP did support the Taiwanese's right to self-determination, including the right to independence - up until 1949. This was also the founding principle of the Taiwan Communist Party. In 1927, the Third International instructed the Japanese Communist Party to help the founding of the Taiwan Communist Party, in 1928. The CCP also played a great role in this endeavour.[4] On 3 May 2022, the *Diplomat* carried [an article](#) reminding Beijing of the above history by quoting an interview in Edgar Snow's well known book *Red Star over China's* with Mao Zedong in 1937: "...we will extend them (the Koreans) our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies for Taiwan." It drew fire from Beijing's [State Council Office for Taiwan Affairs](#) but the latter carefully avoided mentioning Snow's interview - it could not, because it is an established fact.[5] This ruling party has betrayed its founding principle so radically that it simply cannot face its own past.

However, right now most Taiwanese do not aspire to fight for the right to *de jure* independence through a referendum. They are for maintaining the status quo (interpreted by some as *de facto* independence), as is shown in a June 2022 [opinion poll](#) on Taiwan's future (see below).

Position	1994	2022
For unification with Mainland China	20%	6.4%
For independence	11.1%	30.3%
For maintaining the status quo	48.3%	56.9%
No response	20.5%	5.2%

(Note: based on the figures given by the report)

## **Who were the Earliest Occupants of Taiwan?**

The main reason for the growth of the pro-independence poll, at the expense of those pro-unification and “no response”, is Beijing’s increasingly reactionary policy. Its [White Paper](#) on Taiwan is the most recent example of this. The White Paper claims that “Taiwan has belonged to China since ancient times”, and even gives the year of AD 230 when the first Chinese record of Taiwan appeared as proof. To say this is to write off, with a sleight of hand, the Taiwanese indigenous people, who have been there more than 6000 years ago, not to mention that an ancient Chinese record about Taiwan proves nothing! The language of the Taiwanese indigenous peoples belongs to the Austronesian language family, whose speakers inhabit islands of the Pacific Ocean and maritime Southeast Asia as well as Taiwan. They were the oldest inhabitants of the island, but they are not Chinese. The White Paper avoids discussion of this issue altogether by simply ignoring the indigenous people – the terms “indigenous Taiwanese” or “aboriginals” do not appear once in the 14,000-characters long paper!

The indigenous people account for a very small proportion of the population – 2.3 per cent. But Beijing is equally disrespectful of the major ethnicity there, namely the *benshengren* (descendants of Chinese immigrants dating back hundreds of years, mainly composed of Hoklo and Hakka, together they account for 86 per cent of the population). They are Han Chinese-speaking, but they have long lost connection with the Mainland and many see themselves as Taiwanese first – in contrast to the case of Hong Kong, where many people still have close family connections in the Mainland. As for the *waishengren* (or Mainlanders who only moved to Taiwan after 1949), their younger generation also increasingly identify themselves more as Taiwanese than Chinese, although this is relatively new. Also worth mentioning is that the choice of “Taiwanese” identity does not necessarily reject “Chinese” identity. In general, the Taiwanese people beginning to embrace *en masse* the “Taiwanese only” identity is a recent event – after Beijing’s 1996 war drill against Taiwan to warn the latter not to deviate a millimeter from its politically correct “one China” policy. A 1992 [opinion poll](#) showed that 46.4 per cent of interviewees chose “Chinese as well as Taiwanese” identity, while those who chose “Taiwanese” accounted for only 17.6 per cent. In 2021 the latter option had the support of 62.3 per cent, while the former had dropped to 31.7 percent.

## **Beijing is Promoting its Own Centrifugal Forces**

There is no necessary connection between the changing trend of the choice of identity and a movement for independence however. At present most Taiwanese wish to maintain the status quo, and even among the 30.3 per cent pro-independence population, only 5.1 per cent are for “independence as soon as possible”, while for the other 25.2 per cent the choice is for “maintain status quo, move towards independence”. The conclusion? Taiwan independence is not imminent at all, hence its “threat” to Beijing (and Washington as well) is not real. What is adding fuel to the tension across the Taiwan Strait comes less from diplomatic gestures such as Pelosi visiting Taiwan than from Beijing’s fundamental policy towards Taiwan – not content with stopping Taiwan from going independent, and its “red line” is quite arbitrary. Xi Jinping has overturned Deng Xiaoping’s more moderate approach in diplomacy in general and on Taiwan in particular, and has instead decided that he should unify Taiwan as soon as possible, by force if necessary, hence his hawkish approach. No wonder Beijing is now tearing up previous promises over Taiwan – its [White Paper](#) on Taiwan no longer includes the previous clause of allowing Taiwan, under its one country two systems vision, to keep its own army, and the promise not to dispatch its army there has also been dropped. We do need to prevent a war across the Strait, but this first and foremost requires a

correct understanding of the situation there – it is Beijing which, through its denial of basic rights of the people of Taiwan, is pushing a growing number of Taiwanese towards independence, not the US, at least not now. Merely putting pressure on Washington to defuse tension across the Strait is of no use.

Taiwan society under the KMT had four classes of “citizens”, with the indigenous people at the bottom. Taiwan *benshengren*, although they had higher status than the indigenous people, were harshly repressed by the KMT, and there was discrimination against their language – for instance *benshengren* children speaking their mother tongue in school could be punished. The *waishengren* constituted the original base for the KMT when it lost the Mainland to the CCP, but most of them were also repressed by the KMT. Only ruling party cadres make up the privileged “political class” on the island. The common Taiwanese were oppressed by, one after the other, the Qing dynasty, the Japanese, and then the KMT. Their decades-long heroic resistance finally won them a liberal democracy since early 1990s. Their (unfinished) journey to freedom has followed a very different historic path of modernization from the Mainland Chinese, and this gives them the natural right to self-determination in relation to their fate. Respecting the wish of the Taiwanese people is an important building block for any solution to the cross-Strait crisis. All democracy supporters need to remind Beijing that the basic principle for a democratic nation state to be formed among different parts of the people is their right to self-determination. The right to self-determination does not necessarily imply secession and the founding of multiple small states, rather it could open up the chance for a democratic and free re-union between neighboring nations and ethnicities, as the Bolshevik revolution has shown us.

In the eyes of Beijing all Chinese speaking people are its subjects who should kowtow only to it. Its tone is such that the Taiwanese are supposed to accept whatever Beijing dictates, or be ready for Beijing’s “re-education” (this was what [a Chinese diplomat](#) told a French television station, “after unification [with Taiwan], we’ll do re-education” there). This is the language of totalitarianism and colonialism. By flatly denying the rights of the Taiwanese. Beijing is re-enacting what Taiwan’s previous oppressors did. This policy is the surest way to reinforce the ever stronger centripetal forces in the periphery of Mainland China and across the Strait. Chinese nationalists should ask themselves these questions: If Xi insists on a policy which is counter-productive in winning over the heart of the Taiwanese, shouldn’t they dump him as a leader? Or is it because behind his nationalist propaganda he is hiding his own agenda to gain absolute power?

### **Is Washington the True Friend of Taiwan?**

Finally, a word about Washington. For the moment Beijing is on the offensive, which makes Washington seem to be the friend of Taiwan in the common cause of maintaining the status quo. But we must not forget that Washington, just like Beijing, has never endorsed Taiwan’s right to self-determination. If the movement for independence grows more rapidly, then a possible scenario where it clashes with Washington cannot be dismissed. Precisely because of this possible scenario, Washington has always been intervening, behind the scenes, in Taiwan elections and the formation of public opinion, so as to keep the independence movement in check. Regardless how far it succeeds, this exposes the truth that the present common ground between the people of Taiwan and Washington will be more fragile in the longer run. If, right now, Washington presents itself as a friend of Taiwan, it is only because this suits its own tactical agenda. Its strategic agenda of defending its empire does not always coincide with the wishes of the Taiwan people. Let us not forget the moment, in 1979, when the apocalyptic news descended on the Taiwanese that Washington was going to abandon Taiwan and recognize the PRC instead. To depict Washington as the true friend of Taiwan is thus a suspicious claim. An opposite scenario is also possible, however,

where Washington changes its one-China policy and opts for supporting Taiwan independence instead, so as to serve its new agenda, even when Taiwan is not yet ready for that. Either way spells great danger for the Taiwan people because they are the smaller player in this great contest, easily bullied or betrayed by either this or that super power. Precisely because of this the international left must ask themselves this question: Who should be our first concern in this triangular relationship between Beijing, Taipei and Washington? I argue that it is neither Beijing nor Washington, but the Taiwan people. Any leftist who refuses to give a hand to the most oppressed, or declines to acknowledge their rightful place in this planet, but prioritizes the “peace” between two super powers over the underdog in between instead, this person is not worthy of the name “left”.

27<sup>th</sup> October, 2022

**Au Loong-yu**

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<sup>[1]</sup> For instance, see <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-us-one-china-policy-and-why-does-it-matter>

<sup>[2]</sup> Note that while the English translation claims that the DDP is making a normative statement (“should not be”), the wording in the original Chinese shows that the DDP is simply illustrating [a positive statement of fact](#) reflecting the consensus (“both sides have different interpretation over the term “China”). Also in the English translation, the country titles of both sides disappear, and the attack on the DPP is slightly stronger.

<sup>[3]</sup> [Chinese, U.S. presidents hold telephone talks on Taiwan, Tibet\(03/26/08\) — Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America \(mfa.gov.cn\)](#)

[4] [1928—193219891137](#) (The History of the Taiwan Communist Party under Japanese Occupation, by Lu Xiuyi)

[5] *Red Star over China: The Classic Account of the Birth of Chinese Communism*, Edgar Snow, Bantam edition, 1978, Grove Press, New York, p. 90.

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