

## Mainland Struggle for Taiwan

With Russia's advance on Ukraine taking place in the recent months, questions of whether or not Russia is entitled to the area have been circulating. With those events taking place, there is another conflict that has been going on for the last 150 years in the east. The question of "What is China?" would get mixed responses in east Asia. The Taiwanese would say that they are the true Republic of China, and that they control the mainland. The Chinese would say that the mainland controls China and Taiwan is part of China. Both answers have the same idea for what territory is controlled by China, but each of them have a drastically different idea of the nature of who controls China. Taiwan, functionally, is separate from mainland China, but legally, they are not separate from China. This is due to several factors.

Taiwan has a deep history and has gone through many changes throughout the years of the island's existence, both politically and culturally. During the 16th century, Portuguese explorers sailed upon the island, but did not land, and named it "Formosa"; the Dutch were given a trading post on the island by the Chinese, and after putting down the Spanish and Chinese rebellions on the island, the Dutch controlled the entire island.<sup>1</sup> The Dutch ended up surrendering and leaving the island in 1662; Taiwan was now a Fujian province, but not as its own province.<sup>2</sup> After the Sino-French war (1883-5) Taiwan was made a province of China by Liu Mingchuan.<sup>3</sup> The Japanese went to war with China in 1894 over the area of Korea, and in the Treaty of Shimonoseki (signed in 1895) gave Japan the area of Taiwan; China did not see this treaty as legally binding, like the West, and thought they were forced to sign Taiwan over to the Japanese.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John C Cooper and Stanley J Buckman, "Taiwan," *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed May 3, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan/Sports-and-recreation#ref214552>.

<sup>2</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

Though Japan helped to improve Taiwan through infrastructure planning and agricultural exports, Japan governed the island strictly and wanted to enforce Japanese culture on the island.<sup>5</sup>

The first reason why Taiwan is legally part of China, but functionally separate would be the legal binding of Taiwan's statehood status. A document that is from the Cairo Conference from 1943 states, "that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and The Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China (Cairo Conference Document)." From this quote of the document it is clear that Taiwan is given back to the Republic of China. The Republic of China is not to be confused with Mao's communist party of China. The island was given to the Chinese nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>6</sup> In 1949, Mao Zhedong's communist regime knocked off Chiang's nationalist forces, and Chiang retreated to Taiwan where he continued to advocate for his Republic of China.<sup>7</sup> The question of "what is China?" comes from this event. Is Mao's communist regime the inheritors of China and Taiwan? Or, is Chiang's nationalist party still the rightful owners of China and Taiwan?

Taiwan's politics have been operating independently of China. In 1935, while still under Japanese control, Taiwan held its first election; following the election, however, Japan went back to governing by military control.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, Taiwan started to make strides in their democracy. In 1980, Taiwan saw its first competitive election for president, and six years later, Taiwan had its first two-party election.<sup>9</sup>

The final reason why Taiwan is functionally separate, but legally part of China is because throughout Taiwan's history under Chinese control, they have wanted to be considered the 'true China' and not separate. After Chiang Kai-shek and his nationalists fled to Taiwan when Mao

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>7</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>8</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>9</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

took over mainland China, he still planned to retake the mainland.<sup>10</sup> In 1982, Taiwan's president at the time, Chiang Ching-kuo, rejected China's proposal to allow Taiwan and China to be ruled as one country together but under two systems of government, similar to Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> In 2000, Chen Shui-bian ran for the presidency of Taiwan and advocated for Taiwan becoming legally separate from China; Chen won the presidency, but was not successful in separating from mainland China.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout Taiwan's history, they have operated relatively autonomously from their 'rulers.' They have held separate elections with separate political philosophies when under Japanese rule and under Chinese rule. Taiwan has not become legally separate from China because during the second half of the 20th century, the Chinese Nationalist leaders of Taiwan still had hopes of reclaiming mainland China and putting it back under the PRC rule.

The tensions between China and Taiwan continue to this day. China has been intimidating Taiwan with their military; they have sent multiple planes over Taiwan airspace, which has threatened air security.<sup>13</sup> Even under pressure from the United States with threats of tariffs, China is not phased and will not back down.<sup>14</sup> China has said that the US has not cared about Ukraine and is only using the situation to pressure Russia.<sup>15</sup> Taiwan's officials are not concerned about an invasion even though China has been building up their military and flexing their strength toward

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<sup>10</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>11</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>12</sup> Cooper and Buckman, "Taiwan."

<sup>13</sup> Al Jazeera, "China Makes Second Largest Incursion into Taiwan Air Defence[sic] Zone," News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, May 6, 2022),

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/6/china-makes-second-largest-incursion-into-taiwan-air-defence-zone>.

<sup>14</sup> "China Tells Us It Will Not Be Scared off by Sanctions over Taiwan," Yahoo! Finance (Yahoo!), accessed May 7, 2022,

[https://finance.yahoo.com/news/china-tells-us-not-scared-093000319.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAGh9AxB6GwHmBHst-1c8mvJVM928Jj0-9hfNUiXAYSMkf\\_a3tENK6ODVuoXGNc5KItdytrSgZ5w4rMMb2f2Bt3GBeyV\\_84IGMBCJCCSqs5urZ\\_t0iEzEJliaDrpJ77p80TbzUP1X-32OjKfpY6CXmDMLIJOrYwYldOyQEIJ](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/china-tells-us-not-scared-093000319.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGh9AxB6GwHmBHst-1c8mvJVM928Jj0-9hfNUiXAYSMkf_a3tENK6ODVuoXGNc5KItdytrSgZ5w4rMMb2f2Bt3GBeyV_84IGMBCJCCSqs5urZ_t0iEzEJliaDrpJ77p80TbzUP1X-32OjKfpY6CXmDMLIJOrYwYldOyQEIJ).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Taiwan.<sup>16</sup> Taiwan is severely outnumbered if an attack were to take place with China having a little over 2 million total troops compared to Taiwans 163,000.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps in the coming years, more leaders of Taiwan will become less attached to the old nationalist philosophy and will look for ways to become legally separate from China.

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<sup>16</sup> John Feng, "China Suggests Attack on Taiwan Can't Be Called 'Invasion,'" *Newsweek*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-taiwan-military-invasion-international-law-1701424>.

<sup>17</sup> David Brown, "China and Taiwan: A Really Simple Guide to a Growing Conflict," *BBC News* (BBC, January 12, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59900139>.

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[https://finance.yahoo.com/news/china-tells-us-not-scared-093000319.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAGh9AxB6GwHmBHst-1c8mvJVM928Jj0-9hfNUiXAYSMkf\\_a3tENK6ODVu eoXGNc5KItdytrSgZ5w4rrMMb2f2Bt3GB eYV\\_84IGMBCJCCSqs5urZ\\_t0iEzEJliaDr pJ77p80TbzUP1X-32OjkfpY6CXmDMLIJOrYwYldOyQEIJ](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/china-tells-us-not-scared-093000319.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAGh9AxB6GwHmBHst-1c8mvJVM928Jj0-9hfNUiXAYSMkf_a3tENK6ODVu eoXGNc5KItdytrSgZ5w4rrMMb2f2Bt3GB eYV_84IGMBCJCCSqs5urZ_t0iEzEJliaDr pJ77p80TbzUP1X-32OjkfpY6CXmDMLIJOrYwYldOyQEIJ).
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