Dashing Lines and Faking History: The Complicated History of Taipei's Maritime Claims

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DEAN KARALEKAS, JUN 24 2022

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To understand Taiwan's claims in the South China Sea (SCS), one must first understand that Taiwan has no claims in the South China Sea. The student of history and geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region is perhaps better advised to conceptualize the issue thusly: The Republic of China (ROC) has various claims in the South China Sea – as well as the East China Sea (ECS) – and the ROC also has claims over the island called Taiwan. It is modern journalistic shorthand to conflate 'Taiwan' with 'the ROC' as the name of the nation, and this serves just fine in most usages. But it can lead to misperceptions when engaging in a deeper examination of issues, such as this one, in which a clear distinction must be made between the Republic of China – the government that came into being in 1912 after the overthrow of the Qing dynasty – and Taiwan, which was part of the Japanese Empire until 1945. Thus, for much of the formative part of its history, Taiwan was not even a part of the country for which it is today synonymous, and vice versa.[1]

Therefore, a usage note might be in order. In this chapter, the author will endeavour to be careful about referring to Taiwan and the Taiwanese as that island and peoples derived therefrom that are distinct to Formosa. Likewise, the term 'ROC' will be used in reference to the claims, laws, statutes, and other products of government that are properly the purview of the ROC administrative infrastructure now located on Taiwan, but which having been founded in China, are not necessarily Taiwanese. Of course, there is bound to be some overlap, but a distinction is essential to a proper understanding of the state of the ROC's maritime claims, their origins, and how they are seen today in Taiwan.

Identification as a Land Power

As a successor state to the Qing dynasty, the ROC departed little from its predecessor Chinese regime, at least in terms of culture and worldview. Part of the cultural identity of China has traditionally been that of a continental power, not a seafaring nation. Chinese emperors and bureaucrats have customarily exhibited a distrust of coastal inhabitants and seafaring peoples, and while there have been occasional dalliances with maritime expeditions during the long period of China's political history, such as the 15th century treasure ships of Admiral Zheng He, the pattern has been for the Chinese state to withdraw from these forays and resume an inward-focused, land-based orientation. This included the prevailing official opinion about Taiwan, with the Kangxi Emperor (reigned 1661–1722) famously opining that Taiwan was 'the size of a pellet; taking it is no gain; not taking it is no loss.' The island, considered 'a ball of mud beyond the sea, adding nothing to the breadth of China,' was not even depicted on imperial maps until parts of it were annexed by the Qing dynasty in 1683 (Nohara 2017; Calanca 1998; Teng 2004).

The designation of land power vs. sea power is not a trivial one. It has consequences not just for the cultural identity of the citizens, but for how that nation may be expected to behave in the international sphere. Military planners and security analysts must be especially attentive to such distinctions, as they are indicative of how the nation in question can be expected to react to crises. In the words of Napoleon Bonaparte, the policies of such states are inherent in

their geography. Sea powers tend to have a culture of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and risk-taking. Venice and Rome were the sea powers of the ancient world, and later Portugal, the Netherlands, and England would rule the oceans. The United States inherited the Royal Navy's control of the world's waterways, and is the primary sea power of the modern day. In contrast, land powers tend to exhibit the qualities of community and security, and have a collective identity and strong central control. France under Napoleon, Germany under Bismarck, and Russia under the czars are examples of continental powers. The last great global land power was the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding Beijing's current efforts to transform the People's Republic of China (PRC) into a sea power, China has always been a land power, and can therefore be expected to exhibit the cultural tendencies that are associated with that history (Dasym 2016; Blagden et al. 2011; Berlin 2010).

China's land-based identity continued well into the modern era, with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – another successor regime of dynastic China – relying on a vast conventional land force versed in guerrilla warfare tactics, and largely content to leave control over river systems and littoral areas to its enemies. Mao Zedong exhibited a strong continental focus in his emphasis on the population as his source of strategic power, evincing little interest in maritime matters beyond mere coastal defense. Chairman Mao even went so far as to opine that Taiwan was entitled to its independence, conceding that this was derived from its right to self-determination. Later, on 21 October 1975, in conversation with then US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Mao said of Taiwan: 'if you were to send it back to me now, I would not want it.' This historical disinterest in maritime expansion is but one facet of how China exhibits the cultural qualities analysts ascribe to continental – as opposed to sea – powers (Simon 2017; Castro 2016; Nohara 2017; Foreign Relations of the United States 2010).

Dashed Lines and Dashed Hopes

Even a culture with a long-time tendency toward tellurocracy must concede to the realities of geopolitics, however, and the events in the Pacific Theater of the Second World War highlighted the importance of control over the South China Sea islands, even to ROC leaders. The navies of France and Japan had been competing throughout the 1930s over control of the region's archipelagos, with French forces claiming the Spratly Islands and occupying some of them in 1933, as well as occupying the Paracel Islands in 1938. In the run-up to the war, the Japanese Empire effected a military occupation of the Pratas, Paracel, and Spratly Islands, *inter alia*. Recognizing the importance of extending control over the SCS islands, immediately after the war ended, the ROC began pressing claims in an attempt to assert sovereignty over them, as evidenced by a trove of archival files that date to 1946, and which were declassified in 2009. The most recognizable of these claims is the map feature that has come to be known as the 'nine-dash line.' Also known as the 'U-shaped line' or the 'cow's tongue,' the cartographic delineation started life as the '11-dash line,' or 'Location Sketch Map of the South China Sea Islands,' which was sketched in rough form in 1946 and informed an official version promulgated the following year. Two years later, in 1949, the newly formed PRC adopted the same line, with a few changes, to define its own SCS claims. It is worth noting that previous versions of this line have been found that date back to the 1910s, but none was officially endorsed (Dzurek 1996; Chen 2017).

The results of extensive archival research conducted by Chris Chung (2016) on declassified official documents show that establishing sovereignty over these islands was high on the government's post-war priority list. The sketch map referenced above was mentioned in the minutes of a 1946 meeting of ROC leaders, who gathered to decide what territories and SCS islands they would press to receive from Japan. Chung interprets the phrasing of the report as being reflective of the prevailing mindset among participants in the meeting that the Paracel (Xisha), Pratas (Dongsha) and Spratly (Nansha) Islands, and Macclesfield Bank (Zhongsha) – and not to the waters surrounding them – were considered salient (Chung 2016).

In other words, the purpose of the U-shaped line was not to lay claim over exclusive navigation and other maritime rights over the waters delineated by the line, but strictly as an island attribution line. Following the promulgation of these measures, records of ROC protests against foreign incursions show that there was a focus only on infringements of island territory, with passage through the surrounding waters being tolerated. This is an important distinction: It can be argued that this interpretation of what is claimed within the U-shaped line (to wit: only the land formations) would not be inconsistent with the current state of maritime rights according to the United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Chen 2018a; Chung 2016).

The actions taken to assert ROC sovereignty over the SCS islands in the months that followed Japan's defeat included building weather stations, conducting surveys, and deploying soldiers to Pratas (Dongsha) Island, Woody (Yongxing) Island, and Itu Aba (Taiping Island). In late 1946, a naval expedition led by Rear Admiral Lin Zun and Captain Yao Ruyu sailed to the islands in question to formally reclaim them from Japan in the name of the ROC. These steps were taken despite the pressures of the seemingly endless Chinese Civil War that had been raging since 1927, as well as of obstructionist efforts by the French colonial government in Vietnam, to say nothing of the northeast monsoon rains and rough seas that harried the men undertaking this storied mission (Chen 2017; Granados 2006; Chung 2016).

Historical Claims and Shady Evidence

As described above, the ROC government was desperate to establish a strong case for ownership over the islands of the SCS, both in the run-up to and in the immediate aftermath of the Second Sino-Japanese War, known in China as the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. This desperation led to actions and intentional misrepresentations that are still being unravelled today, and which illustrate one of the dangers of putting too much stock in territorial claims based solely on history.

Two historical incidents that illustrate this danger have been described by French geographer François-Xavier Bonnet, who conducted extensive archival research on this issue and who outlined his findings in a provocative conference presentation in 2015. The first such incident involved a secret mission to the Paracel Islands in June of 1937 undertaken by Huang Qiang, an ROC regional military commander. There had been intel that Japanese forces had been harrying the Paracel Islands, and Huang was dispatched to investigate the veracity of these reports. His other assignment was to secure ROC sovereignty over the territory, visiting several islands in the Amphitrite Group including the largest of the Paracels, Woody Island. In his *Confidential Report of 31 July 1937*, Huang describes loading 30 sovereignty markers aboard his ship in preparation for the voyage. Of these stone tablets, none was dated 1937: rather, most of the markers were dated either 1921 or 1912, as well as four that went back to the Qing dynasty. These latter were removed from the city of Guangdong by Huang's team and were dated 1902 (Bonnet 2015; Nery 2015).

Like salting a gold mine, Huang and his crew planted the antedated stone markers on various islands in the Paracels in order to bolster the ROC's claim, on historical grounds, to sovereignty over these features. The annex of his report, reprinted by the Committee of Place Names of the Guangdong Province (1987) contains Huang's detailed record of which markers were buried where. The following are excerpts from this record:

(1) One stone tablet can be found beside the old tree on the southern side of Shi Dao (Rocky Island) facing Lin Dao (Woody Island), which is 50 feet from shore. The tablet's base was buried at a depth of 1 foot. 'Commemorating the Inspection of 1911,' was carved on the tablet;…
(6) At the center of northern Lingzhou Dao (Lingzhou Island), a stone tablet can be found under the tree with the inscription 'Commemorating the Inspection of 1911' with its base buried 8 feet into the ground;…
(13) At the northern shore of Bei Dao (North Island), a tablet can be found with the inscription 'Commemorating the Inspection of 1902.' (Committee of Place 1987; Carpio 2016).

At least a dozen stone tablets were planted on the Paracel Islands during that 1937 voyage, all dated between 1902 and 1921. Owing to the clandestine nature of this mission, these markers were lost to time until being rediscovered by Chinese archaeologists and soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the mid to late 1970s, at which time they were leveraged to bolster the PRC's history-based claim over the archipelago (Bonnet 2015).

The second historical incident is similar to the first, though this tale begins in 1956, and ends 10 years earlier, in 1946. The story begins with Tomas Cloma, a Philippine national who made a personal claim to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands based on an interpretation of the law governing *terra nullius* (no-man's land). On 15 May 1956, Cloma issued a 'Notice to the Whole World' that his brother, Filemon Cloma, and a crew of 40 men had taken physical

possession of each of the islands in the Spratly archipelago, as was their right after Japan gave up ownership over the islands in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference. Cloma named his new micronation the 'Free Territory of Freedomland' (Raine and Le Mière 2013).

Records show that the ROC dispatched several patrols to these islands later that year in response to the Cloma claim. In addition to detaining Filemon and confiscating his weapons and navigational charts, the Chinese nationalist agents tried to force the captain and his officers to sign a statement recognizing Freedomland as ROC territory. It was during three voyages in late 1956 that ROC sailors landed on various islands in the Spratly group to conduct flag ceremonies, remove or destroy structures built by competing claimants, and erect antedated markers. Specifically, two markers (both dated December 1946) were planted: one on Nam Wei Dao (Spratly Island), and one on Xi Yue Dao (West York Island). For decades afterwards, the history books attributed the presence of these markers to a 1946 voyage led by Commander Mai Yun Yu, who in the mid-1970s would publicly admit that, while his expedition did indeed visit Taiping Dao (Itu Aba Island) in December 1946 on a mission to destroy the Japanese tablets there and plant two ROC sovereignty markers (in the north and south of the island), his team never set foot on Spratly island or West York island (Samuels 2013; Bonnet 2015; Carpio 2016).

While the ROC officially claims the islands encompassed by the aforementioned U-Shaped Line, it is in direct control of a total of 166 islands, though the vast majority of these are the islands surrounding Taiwan proper (Formosa Island; consisting of 22 islands) and Penghu (the Pescadores; 90 islands). The remainder form part of the geographical units referred to as the outlying islands of Kinmen (Quemoy; 14 islands, including Wūqiū) and Matsu (Mǎzǔ; 36 islands), as well as Nansha (consisting of Itu Aba [Taiping Island] and the adjacent Zhongzhou Reef) and Dongsha. And then there's the Senkakus.

East China Sea Claims

The Senkakus are a group of five uninhabited islands and three rocks located north of the south-western end of the Ryukyu Islands in the East China Sea. In Taiwan, they are known as the Tiaoyutai Islands; in China, as the Diaoyu Islands. They are claimed by the ROC, the PRC, and Japan, the latter of which is in effective control of the archipelago and therefore has the strongest claim. If nothing else, possession is still nine-tenths of the law – even international law.

The ROC's ECS claims are almost the inverse of its SCS claims, at least in terms of proximity and level of control exerted: Taiping Dao lies 1,600 km from Kaohsiung, and 1,150 km from ROC-controlled Pratas Island. In the event of an armed conflict, such great distances would make it difficult for Taipei to deploy military assets quickly enough to protect its claim, and hence the facilities and uniformed personnel stationed there. The Senkakus, on the other hand, remain uninhabited and undeveloped, yet lie just 102 nautical miles northeast of Keelung, in Taiwan's north (Chen 2011).

The root cause of the Senkakus dispute stems from two very different conceptions of what constitutes a valid sovereignty claim. On one side, the global order is informed by Western norms of sovereignty and international law in such matters, particularly UNCLOS. China, on the other, eschews this view and instead presses primarily for the use of historical arguments to determine sovereignty. The Chinese reasoning is salient here, as it rests, ironically enough, upon recognition of the Senkaku Islands as being under Taiwan administration: Despite the clear enmity between the PRC and the ROC, the two governments do agree on the view that the Senkakus are part of Toucheng Township, in Taiwan's Yilan County. With the Senkakus clearly belonging to Taiwan, the only real difference of opinion is on the question of to whom Taiwan belongs (Valencia 2014).

Historically, neither the Republic of China nor the People's Republic thereof had evinced any interest in claiming the Senkaku Islands, at least not until the late 1960s. In 1968, a geological survey revealed that there might be rich deposits of petroleum resources under the seabed there, and after the results of this survey were published, the ROC initiated its first territorial claim to the islands, with the PRC following suit soon thereafter. Both employed a historical-based argument, which posits that the first, albeit vague, mention of the Diaoyu Islands can be found in an ancient Chinese document dating back to the 15th century. By the 17th century, the boundary between the Diaoyu Islands

and the Ryukyus was being referred to in Chinese texts as the Black Water Trench, or *Heishuigou*. The islands are mentioned again by Xu Baoguang, a Chinese official who was dispatched in 1720 to confer robes of office upon the king of Ryukyu, which at the time was a vassal state of the Qing dynasty. Xu identified the western demarcation line of the Ryukyuan kingdom as being at Kume-jima, just south of the Black Water Trench, suggesting that the Senkaku Islands – and anything else situated to the west of Kume-jima – must belong to China. Tokyo was loath to put any credence in this historical claim to Chinese ownership – one predicated on the former Ryukyuan Kingdom having been a tributary state of Imperial China. Japanese leaders feared it was a slippery slope and could eventually lead to China claiming Okinawa – a step that hawkish Chinese academics and media commentators have been urging Beijing to take since 2013 (Smith 2013; Nakayama 2015; Perlez 2013).

From the Japanese perspective, the Ryukyus' tributary relationship to the Qing had been officially tolerated since 1655, because the Ryukyuan kings – unbeknownst to the Qing Emperor – had been simultaneously paying tribute to the Japanese Shōgun. Indeed, these kings were chosen in Japan, though the Qing still believed them to be loyal subjects. This tributary relationship came to an end in the mid-1870s, when the Japanese Home Ministry assumed full jurisdiction. In 1895, after the Chinese defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the Qing court dropped any remaining claims over the Ryukyus via the Treaty of Shimonoseki. This is the justification for their inclusion in Japan's territories as laid out in the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty (Economy 2017; Zhang and Li 2017).

At the end of the 19th century, agents of the Japanese government erected sovereignty markers on the Senkaku Islands, officially incorporating them as national territory via the laws governing *terra nullius* and the right to acquisition through occupation. In 1895, a Japanese businessman named Koga Tatsushirō built a settlement on the island, where about 200 residents operated a bonito processing facility. The enterprise was ultimately unsuccessful, however, and the islands have been uninhabited since the plant closed in 1940. The islands were administered by the US occupying forces from the end of the war until 1972, although the Americans did not equate this administration with actual US sovereignty. In light of this ambiguity, a resolution was passed by the Okinawa Legislative Assembly in 1970 declaring the Senkaku Islands to be Japanese territory. The Japanese, whose own claim is more consistent with the norms of international law, generally view the ROC and PRC historical-based counterclaims as being driven by a thirst for the oil in the seabed below (Pan 2007; Moteki 2010).

Officially, Taipei has been largely silent on the issue, and even the hard-line factions that demand a tough stance are marginal forces that are largely ineffectual. For example, in 2012, an activist from Taiwan, Huang Xilin, travelled to the Senkakus to raise the flag and demonstrate ROC sovereignty over the archipelago. Through a failure to pack properly for the voyage, Huang – who at the time was serving as president of a group calling itself the World Chinese Alliance in Defense of the Diaoyu Islands – arrived at the designated island and, rather than planting an ROC flag, unfurled the five-star red flag of the PRC. When interviewed later by Taiwan media, Huang claimed to have forgotten his ROC flag at home. Huang's misadventure may be comical, but it is indicative of a larger trend in Taiwan, wherein that part of the population most passionate about aggressively pressing the ROC's ECS claims tend also to be pro-China in their orientation (or, at the very least, tend to be supportive of some form of 'greater China' conceptualization, of which they see Taiwan a part). This hard-line stance over the islands is not reflected in Taipei's official policy. For one thing, there is no widespread support in Taiwan for launching a military effort to occupy the islands and taking them by force from Japan, a fellow democracy (Zhang 2015; Wang 2014).

Personal Connections and Policy

The manner in which the ROC government prosecutes its claims over the Senkaku Islands – as well as how it behaves in the South China Sea maritime territorial disputes – is greatly dependent upon which of Taiwan's two main political parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), is in power. Broadly speaking, due to what amounts to personal convictions on the part of certain party leaders, the DPP has a track record of showing greater concern with the South China Sea, while the KMT has focused more on the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

Chen Shui-bian

The DPP administration of President Chen Shui-bian, which ran from year 2000 to 2008, was marked by a focus on the South China Sea, and particularly Taiping Island. Chen – a maritime lawyer by trade – was elected amid a wave of pro-Taiwanese sentiment. He had been thrust into the public arena after representing anti-KMT dissidents in court in the days when Taiwan was still the KMT's one-party state. He became a political player after several attempts on his life, as well as the crippling of his wife (she was hit by a truck, which then backed up and ran over her two more times in what was officially deemed an accident and in no way politically motivated). These tragedies, and Chen's role in the struggle against authoritarianism, played no small part in the development of his worldview and hence the direction taken by his policies (Lynch 2006; Robinson 2000; Danielsen 2012).

The grand narrative of Chen's presidency was the 'Localization' (read: de-Sinicization) of Taiwan through a series of policies designed to erase the sense of 'shared Chineseness' that had been developing between the ROC and the PRC. Nowhere was this more important than in the handling of the respective governments' island claims. There had been a dalliance by the previous KMT administration with supporting PRC activities in the South China Sea, such as allowing PLA warships to resupply at Taiping Dao during China's 1988 skirmish with Vietnam over the Spratly Islands. Chen sought not just to end this cooperation on island claims, but to distinguish the claims of the ROC from those of China despite their several commonalities. Indeed, he paid the matter inordinate attention, even becoming the first ROC president ever to personally set foot on Taiping Dao (Danielsen 2012; Elleman 2013; Hsue 2007).

Chen engaged in a two-pronged approach to handling the island disputes. The first was to solidify the ROC sovereignty claims to the islands that it did control. He did this by initiating construction of a 1,150-meter-long runway on Itu Aba, for example, designed to increase the operational capabilities of the island as a potential forward-operating base. In an effort to placate Beijing as well as to demilitarize the situation to an extent, he also replaced the detachment of ROC Marines stationed on the island with members of the Coast Guard, a less threatening branch of the service. The second prong was a reconceptualization of the multiple and overlapping SCS claims (various ROC claims and those of the PRC are contested by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam) from an exercise in competition to one of cooperation. In early 2008, the Chen administration launched its Spratly Initiative, in which it reached out to other SCS claimants and entreated them to 'shelve sovereignty disputes and jointly explore resources based on the principle and spirit of the UN Charter, [UNCLOS] and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea' (MOFA 2008; Lin 2016).

Global warming and rising sea levels had become high-visibility issues, so the Chen administration began calling for cooperation on environmental protection, ecological preservation, and – most importantly – joint resource exploitation. The entire South China Sea should be designated a marine ecological sanctuary, where environmental scientists and protection groups from all claimant nations could cooperate on field research, according to the proposals. This multilateral approach was designed to create a 'united front' of sorts to counter China's unilateral actions in the SCS and frustrate Beijing's preferred method of using bilateral negotiations as a divide-and-conquer approach. Moreover, the purpose of this paradigm shift was not just to calm regional tensions: it was also to aid in the fight against China's diplomatic blockade and to raise Taiwan's profile in the regional and international fora that would be erected to discuss the SCS issue: Whether or not the ROC was a valid country, it was undeniably a valid claimant, and therefore any forum that excluded Taipei would lose all legitimacy. It was an elegant way to reframe the island disputes to Taipei's advantage and proved so popular that even the subsequent KMT administration would borrow from it (McManus et al. 2010; Song 2010).

Ma Ying-jeou

Upon assuming the ROC presidency in 2008, Ma Ying-jeou and his new KMT administration immediately set about repairing the relationship with China, primarily as a means of boosting the economy by hitching it to China's meteoric economic rise, but also in the hopes that the Beijing authorities would grant Taipei more international diplomatic space. He also managed to secure an implicit 'diplomatic truce' with the PRC, in which each side would stop trying to poach the other's diplomatic allies. Given this positioning, it was natural that the Ma administration went out of its way to avoid butting heads with Beijing over the SCS claims. Instead, it focused more on the East China Sea disputes with Japan. Ma himself had a strong personal connection to the Senkaku Islands issue, going back to his days as a student activist during the 1970s (Atkinson 2010).

On 17 June 1971, for example, Ma led students from National Taiwan University in a march on the US and Japanese embassies to deliver a list of demands concerning the Islands. He became affiliated with a protest movement called *Baodiao*, which is a portmanteau of *Baowei Diaoyutai*, meaning 'defend the Diaoyu Islands.' Ma's interest in the Senkaku issue extended to his academic work as well, it being the focus of his Doctor of Juridical Science dissertation at Harvard University. Titled 'Trouble Over Oily Waters: Legal Problems of Seabed Boundaries and Foreign Investments in the East China Sea,' the thesis identifies the key sovereignty issue as the dispute between China and Japan over the seabed boundary delimitation in the East China Sea. Examining this from an international law perspective, Ma argues in favour of treating the seabed issue as separate from the territorial dispute over the islands. Both the activism and the dissertation shed light on Ma's position vis-à-vis the Senkaku Islands, and undoubtedly influenced the direction his policy would take while serving as ROC president (Chen 2018b; Ogasawara 2015).

It would not take long for the Senkaku issue to dominate the agenda of the newly minted Ma administration. In June 2008, a private Taiwanese vessel called the *Lianhe Hao* sank after colliding with a Japanese Coast Guard patrol ship. Her three crewmembers and 13 passengers were rescued by Japanese Coast Guard, and subsequently held for territorial violations. In a rare display of Taiwanese belligerence, Ma demanded that Tokyo pay compensation for the sinking – an outcome that would be seen by some in Taiwan as a Japanese concession of ROC rights over the Senkakus (Wang 2010).

Despite the KMT administration's wider foreign policy goal of engineering a rapprochement with Beijing, and the concomitant distancing with other powers in the region, Ma showed considerable restraint in refusing Beijing's pressure to harmonize the ROC maritime claims with the PRC's, or indeed to engage in any sort of cooperation on the issue. Moreover, his administration completed a number of endeavours related to the SCS islands begun by his predecessor, including promoting the Pratas Islands as a center of maritime research, completion of a geological exploration and marine survey in the Pratas and Spratly Islands, and construction of a photovoltaic system in order to reduce carbon emissions in the Spratly Islands. Two of Ma's most remarkable triumphs on the maritime portfolio were unrelated to the Chinese claims. His high-profile proposal in 2012 of an East-China Sea Peace Initiative, for example, was received enthusiastically (by the global media, if not the policymakers of the region) for its promotion of such cooperative mechanisms as multilateral cooperation, preventive diplomacy, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Though Beijing ultimately put the kibosh on the effort, it painted Ma as a peacemaker and capable regional leader. Moreover, it raised Taiwan's international profile and showed that Taipei's interests in the region were, at least rhetorically, aligned with Washington's own (MOFA 2012; Souza and Karalekas 2015; Valencia 2014).

Ma scored another high-profile success with the April 2013 inking of a fisheries agreement with Japan. Negotiations over this agreement had been on-again, off-again for 17 long years, and it was only due to the increased tensions in the region that Washington put pressure on Taipei and Tokyo to finally close the deal. Following the spirit of the American political proverb that 'only Nixon could go to China,' it would seem that only Ma Ying-jeou, with his history of nationalistic activism and hardline stance on the Senkakus, could make peace with the Japanese over shared resources in the waters surrounding the contentious islands (MOFA 2013; Leng and Chang Liao 2016).

Tsai Ing-wen

In 2016, the DPP once again won at the ballot box, and President Tsai Ing-wen was inaugurated. Unlike Chen and Ma, Tsai had had no previous personal connections to maritime claims and counterclaims, and was not expected to devote much political capital to the issue given the party's Taiwan-centered orientation, as well as the perception that the new administration would be amenable to developing deeper Taiwan-Japan ties. It therefore came as somewhat of a surprise when Tsai responded with a tough stance against Tokyo over the Senkaku claims, after the city council of Okinawa's Ishigaki-shi approved legislation in 2020 to change the district name of the Senkaku Islands from *Tonoshiro* to *Tonoshiro Senkaku*. Tsai swiftly denounced the move and pledged to protect ROC sovereignty and fishing rights over the territory. In fact, the strong response speaks less to the importance of the Senkaku claims among the Taiwanese electorate and more to the horse-trading that characterizes domestic politics in Taiwan (South China Morning Post 2020).

Just weeks prior to the incident, on 4 June 2020, the Executive Yuan – the executive branch of the ROC government – released the country's first-ever Marine Policy White Paper. At the time, China had been aggressively militarizing the SCS islands over which it had wrested *de facto* control over the previous decade, and the maritime security environment in both the East and South China seas had become volatile (Taiwan News 2020).

The white paper was the next step in implementing a framework designed to streamline the country's ocean management, approved by the Legislative Yuan in November 2019. Known as the Basic Act For Ocean Affairs, the legislation was aimed at integrating the multitude of government agencies that shared purview over marine and maritime issues. Until this initiative, ocean-related matters in the ROC involved more than 15 different agencies with sometimes overlapping jurisdictions, ranging from ministry-level bodies to technical departments. As a result of these intersecting responsibilities, scopes, and structures, inter-agency rivalries developed, making coordination of the administration of maritime affairs a bureaucratic challenge. Compounding this Byzantine nightmare was domestic inertia and party rivalry, marked by inter-party conflicts over maritime ideology. Thus, for years Taipei had been hamstrung in efforts to respond swiftly and efficiently to its urgent marine and maritime challenges (Souza and Karalekas 2020; Shih 2020).

The Tsai administration therefore worked hard to implement more coherent and coordinated ocean policies through the white paper, and for this to succeed, it needed cooperation from the many government agencies that would be affected, as well as by both ends of Taiwan's unique political spectrum. Thus, a *modus vivendi* had to be found between the Blues and the Greens (Kuomintang and DPP) if the initiative was to move forward. With this in mind, Tsai's tough talk in response to Japan's redesignation of the Senkaku Islands makes more sense: it was likely conceived as an olive branch offered to the Pan-Blue coalition – not just the professional politicians, but the many career civil servants employed in the relevant ministries and departments known to have blue-leaning sympathies. This is a Herculean task. Not only is it necessary to unite political factions for the good of the nation's maritime endeavours, but the Tsai administration must, in a sense, unite disparate paradigms: the Pan-Green Camp's localized perspective, with its focus on an environmental-protection discourse viewing Taiwan as an island culture; and the Pan-Blue camp's terrestrial or land-oriented worldview, inherited from the Chinese tradition from which this party evolved. Tsai's willingness to take the concerns of this tellurocratic mentality into account in devising her response to the Japanese – despite that response being perhaps more assertive than it needed to be – is therefore heartening.

Conclusion

No matter which political party happens to be in power in Taipei, voters in Taiwan expect their leaders to safeguard their interests, especially when it comes to the country's maritime issues. Unfortunately, Taipei's arguments to support its claims of sovereignty suffer from the same deficiencies as those of China: to wit, they are predicated on historical sources, and shaky ones at that. As this chapter discusses, there are great many problems inherent in using a historical argument as the basis for claims over territorial sovereignty, not the least of which is the questionable reliability of so-called historical and archaeological evidence.

Like the PRC, the ROC inherited a cultural identity and worldview of a continental power, not a seafaring nation. Over the years of its exile on Taiwan, however, it has begun to incorporate aspects of the maritime identity of the islanders living there when the ROC arrived in 1949. It therefore behooves military and IR analysts to include a culturalist perspective when dealing with the complicated and overlapping island claims in the East and South China Seas, especially as these have become potential flashpoints that threaten regional peace and stability.

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[1] For an in-depth look at the history of Taiwan as a country, see Jonathan Manthorpe's (2016) Forbidden Nation.

About the author:

Dean Karalekas is a research fellow at the Centre of Austronesian Studies at the University of Central Lancashire, having earned his PhD from the International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies at Taiwan's National Chengchi University. He is the author of *The Men in No Man's Land: A Journey into Bir Tawil* and *Civil-Military Relations in Taiwan: Identity and Transformation*. He is also an ethnographic and narrative filmmaker, having produced, written and directed several award-winning films on a diversity of subjects, from the Canadian experience in World War II to indigenous mythology.