

Chinese government White Paper corrects the record on Taiwan

16 Aug.—Since US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s provocative visit to Taiwan two weeks ago, Australia’s mainstream media has been on a crusade to paint the Chinese government’s every act and utterance as a threat to “invade” the island and reunify it with the mainland by force. Whilst the Albanese government has officially re-stated Canberra’s long-standing “one China” policy that recognises Taiwan as a province of China, senior cabinet ministers continue nonetheless to parrot the US government’s rhetoric about the supposed need to preserve Taiwan’s “democracy” against Beijing’s alleged aggression. Leaving aside for the moment that international law would in fact hold the USA et al. to be the aggressors were they to intervene in any conflict over control of Taiwan, according to [a White Paper published 10 August](#) by the Chinese government, titled “The Taiwan Question and China’s Reunification in the New Era”, their pretext for doing so is in any case irrelevant, since not only will Beijing not use force unless given no choice, but it does not intend to change Taiwan’s internal systems of governance anyway. The paper also handily demolishes the arguments put forward by the Anglo-American empire’s propagandists to imply that Taiwan was not historically part of China, when in fact it has been so, with but brief exceptions, for several times longer than either Australia or the USA has existed.



1820 Qing Dynasty map of China showing Taiwan as part of China’s Fujian province. It was upgraded to full province status in 1895. Photo: [Wikipedia](#)

There is a universal habit among such creatures of starting their historical narrative at an arbitrary point suitable to their purposes, whose conditions the reader is left to assume had been the *status quo ante* since the beginning of time. On 12 August, for example, in response to Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian’s remark the previous day that as an integral part of China, Taiwan’s status would be decided by all 1.4 billion Chinese people and not just its residents (p. 3), the *Australian* newspaper’s Taiwan-based correspondent Will Glasgow accused Beijing of “[refusing] to accept the agency of Taiwan’s 23 million people”, and declared: “Not enough people understand that Taiwan is not universally recognised as an independent country only because for decades Beijing has threatened to go to war with it if it declares itself independent.”

First, it would seem that even fewer people, and Mr Glasgow apparently not among them, understand that today’s “self-governed” Taiwan exists only because when the Kuomintang (KMT, a.k.a. Nationalist Party) government of the former Republic of China (ROC) lost the Chinese Civil War to the Communist Party in 1949, the US military evacuated them to Taiwan and *threatened to nuke Beijing and other mainland cities* if the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) followed them across the strait to finish the job. To this day the government of Taiwan still officially calls itself the ROC and claims sovereignty over all of China, which by its definition includes the whole of Mongolia, chunks of Russia, India and other countries, and more of the South China Sea than is claimed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) government in Beijing. And whilst the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which leads the current coalition government of Taiwan might make noises about independence, it has never dared attempt to secede—not only for fear of reprisals from Beijing, but because neither the rest of Taiwan’s political establishment nor the majority of its population supports such a move. Whatever their current political differences with the mainland, Taiwan remains culturally Chinese, and has been for a good 1,800 years; and before its annexation by Imperial Japan in 1895 it had been under direct administration by the Chinese mainland for over a millennium.

Part of China ‘since ancient times’

The USA, the UK and their hangers-on such as Australia like to talk about their “rules-based order”—a

euphemism for global Anglo-American economic and military hegemony—as though it were the natural order of the world, instead of a brief ripple in history enabled by the outcome of World War II less than 80 years ago. Meanwhile, as the Taiwan White Paper notes, “Taiwan has belonged to China since ancient times. This statement has a sound basis in history and jurisprudence. ... The earliest references to this effect are to be found, among others, in [the] *Seaboard Geographic Gazetteer* compiled in the year 230 by Shen Ying of the State of Wu during the Three Kingdoms Period.” Starting from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the paper continues, “the imperial central governments of China all set up administrative bodies to exercise jurisdiction over Penghu and Taiwan.” (Penghu is an archipelago of some 90 islands in the Taiwan Strait.)

Dutch colonialists invaded and occupied southern Taiwan in 1624 and were expelled in 1662, after which “the Qing [dynasty, 1644-1911] court gradually set up more administrative bodies in Taiwan. In 1684, a Taiwan prefecture administration was set up under the jurisdiction of Fujian Province. In 1885, Taiwan’s status was upgraded and it became the 20th province of China.” Attacked in 1894 by the Japanese, the defeated Qing government was forced to cede Taiwan and the Penghu Islands in a treaty imposed upon it the following year. On 9 December 1941, however, “the Chinese government issued a declaration of war against Japan, and proclaimed that all treaties, conventions, agreements, and contracts regarding relations between China and Japan had been abrogated, and that China would recover Taiwan and the Penghu Islands.” And it was supported in doing so by its wartime allies the USA and Britain, the two countries that now cry the loudest about Taiwan’s supposed “sovereignty”. The White Paper summarises the postWWII disposition of Chinese territories liberated from Japanese conquest as follows:

“The Cairo Declaration issued by China, the United States and the United Kingdom on 1 December 1943 stated that it was the purpose of the three allies that all the territories Japan had stolen from China, such as Northeast China, Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, should be restored to China.



Chief Executive of Taiwan Province Chen Yi (right) accepting the receipt of Order No. 1 signed by Rikichi Ando (left), the last Japanese Governor-General of Taiwan, on behalf of the Republic of China Armed Forces at Taipei City Hall, on 25 October 1945, which is observed annually in Taiwan as Retrocession Day (retrocession means the action of ceding territory back to a country or government). From that day, Taiwan was again part of One China. Photo: Wikipedia

“The Potsdam Proclamation was signed by China, the United States and the United Kingdom on 26 July 1945, and subsequently recognised by the Soviet Union. It reiterated: ‘The terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out.’ In September of the same year, Japan signed the instrument of surrender, in which it promised that it would faithfully fulfill the obligations laid down in the Potsdam Proclamation. On 25 October the Chinese government announced that it was resuming the exercise of sovereignty over Taiwan, and the ceremony to accept Japan’s surrender in Taiwan Province of the China war theatre of the Allied powers was held in Taibei (Taipei). From that point forward, China had recovered Taiwan *de jure* and *de facto* through a host of documents with international legal effect.”

As noted above, the PRC was established on 1 October 1949 after the Communist Party of China (CPC) had defeated the KMT. As the White Paper puts it, “The new government replaced the previous KMT regime in a situation where China, as a subject under international law, did not change and China’s sovereignty and inherent territory did not change.” The United Nations subsequently recognised the PRC on exactly those terms, and transferred China’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) from the ROC to the PRC in 1971. Of the current 193 UN member states, only 13 (plus the Vatican) maintain diplomatic relations with the ROC— but as the representative of China, not as a separate country. And neither the United States nor Australia are on that list, having themselves switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1972 and 1979 respectively; thus neither has any legal leg to stand on when they openly contemplate a military defence of Taiwan’s non-existent sovereignty. As former Australian Defence Department official Mike Scrafton [pointed out](#) 16 August in the online public policy journal *Pearls and Irritations*, “Article 2(4) of the UN Charter expressly prohibits a state’s threat to use armed force against another state. China is recognised as having sovereignty over Taiwan; a sovereignty that legally cannot be affected or diminished by the policies and interests of external actors. ... Arguing that Australia should go to war over any attempt by China to recover control over its own territory would be intervening in China’s internal domestic affairs, and

advocating a crime against international law; the [crime of aggression](#).” That crime—attacking another nation with neither the justification of selfdefence nor authorisation from the UNSC—is one Australia already committed against Iraq in 2003, resulting in unmitigated disaster. To repeat it against a superpower like China would be suicidal.

‘One country, two systems’ was made for Taiwan

None of which need ever be on the cards, even on the West’s own terms, since as the White Paper makes clear, left to its own devices the PRC has no intention of forcibly reincorporating Taiwan in the first place, except in the event of a declaration of independence, militant separatist insurgency and/or foreign military interference.

As the *Australian Alert Service* reported at the time, in January 2019 Chinese President Xi Jinping used the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of hostilities with the ROC government to reiterate Beijing’s longstanding commitment to reunification under the “one country, two systems” model first proposed for Taiwan by the PRC’s great reformist leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s (and applied to Hong Kong and Macao upon their return to China by Britain and Portugal in 1997 and 1999), which would see Taiwan retain its social system and a large degree of political autonomy.^{[1](#)} Under the heading “Upholding the Basic Principles of Peaceful Reunification and One Country, Two Systems”, the White Paper elaborates:

“National reunification by peaceful means is the first choice of the CPC and the Chinese government in resolving the Taiwan question, as it best serves the interests of the Chinese nation as a whole, including our compatriots in Taiwan, and it works best for the long-term stability and development of China. ... We maintain that after peaceful reunification, Taiwan may continue its current social system and enjoy a high degree of autonomy in accordance with the law. The two social systems will develop side by side for a long time to come.”

(Economically, Taiwan is all but integrated with the PRC already: “The volume of cross-Straits trade was only US\$46 million in 1978. It rose to US\$328.34 billion in 2021, up by a factor of more than 7,000. The mainland has been Taiwan’s largest export market for the last 21 years ... [and] is also the largest destination for Taiwan’s off-island investment. By the end of 2021 Taiwan businesses had invested in almost 124,000 projects on the mainland, to a total value of US\$71.34 billion.”)

To the separatist DPP and its backers in the USA, Australia and other would-be defenders of “democracy”, however, the White Paper warns bluntly: “We are ready to create vast space for peaceful reunification; but we will leave no room for separatist activities in any form. We Chinese will decide our own affairs. The Taiwan question is an internal affair that involves China’s core interests ... and no external interference will be tolerated.” Thus whilst the CPC will “exert our utmost efforts to achieve peaceful reunification ... we will not renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all necessary measures.”

It was for reiterating this longstanding position of the government he represents, as all diplomats must—and only under coordinated, hostile questioning by Australian journalists, at that—that Ambassador Xiao was attacked in the press as having threatened Taiwan with “invasion” (a *non sequitur*, as Mike Scrafton noted; Taiwan is China, and a country cannot invade itself), exactly as President Xi had been three and a half years earlier. Thus it can be seen that contrary to the Australian government and media’s constant refrain that China has “changed” and taken an “authoritarian turn” under Xi’s leadership, in fact its core policy—including as regards Taiwan— has not changed a jot in 50 years. Sadly the same cannot be said of Canberra.

Footnotes

[1.](#) “Xi’s Taiwan ‘invasion threat’ is just more Western hype”, AAS, 16 Jan. 2019.

By Richard Bardon, AAS, 17 August 2022