

In 1871, 142 years ago, 54 sailors from the Ryukyu Kingdom were shipwrecked on the southern tip of Taiwan and beheaded by Aborigines. Japan took the matter up with the Qing court in China, on the pretext of wanting to protect the civilians of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The Manchu government in Beijing had little experience with international affairs and agreed to allow the Japanese to launch a punitive expedition to Taiwan to “discipline the unsubjected foreigners” in retaliation for the killings.

This led to the Japanese invasion of Taiwan that we now refer to as the Mudan Incident of 1874. The matter was eventually settled by the governments of Japan and China: The Japanese forces left Taiwan, but the Japanese made the Manchu Qing concede that, in their invasion of Taiwan, they had acted in the interests of the subjects of Ryukyu. This would later become the basis for Japan’s claim to the Ryukyu Islands and their incorporation into Japan’s territory as Okinawa Prefecture, following the fall of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Siaoliuciou (小琉球), or “Lesser Ryukyu,” is controlled by Taiwan, administered as Liuciou Township (琉球鄉) in Pingtung County. The fishing boat fired upon by a Philippine coast guard vessel on May 9, killing one of the fishermen on board, is registered in Siaoliuciou. This is an incident involving Taiwan and the Philippines, but China has also seized it as an opportunity to protest to the Philippine government, ostensibly in the interest of “protecting its civilians.”

Of course, Beijing’s intervention is predicated on its “one China” stance, wherein it holds that Taiwan is a part of China. Otherwise, it would not have had the audacity to get involved. Should China take this further and choose to deal with the troublesome Philippine “foreigners” in the “interests of the civilians” of Taiwan, who is to say that Taiwan — to all intents and purposes an independent country — would not go the way of the Ryukyu Kingdom?

It is only natural that the shooting by an official Philippine vessel of a Taiwanese national — the sort of behavior one would expect of pirates — has caused much anger in Taiwan. Still, the government’s dissatisfaction with the way the Philippine government has framed its apology left me wondering whether I should laugh or cry. Do President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and his buddies not hold that there is only “one China” and that Taiwan is a part of China? So when the Philippines offer an apology in line with its observation of the “one China” formula, does this not also comply with Ma’s “one China” principle?

'One China' against the Philippines

Written by Lee Hsiao-feng 李蕭鋒

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Perhaps Ma would like to qualify his umbrage with "when we say 'one China,' we mean the Republic of China [ROC]." Ha! Dream on, Ma. Tell me: Does the Philippines have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan under the utterly meaningless name the "ROC"? Its formal diplomatic relations are with the "one China" of the People's Republic of China (PRC), represented by the government in Beijing. Based on Manila's interpretation of "one China," it is only reasonable that the job of apologizing to the Taiwanese falls to the personal representative of the president. Ma should be privately ecstatic that the Philippines made no official inter-governmental, state-to-state apology to the PRC, which it recognizes as the "one China." Neither Ma, nor his entourage — all of whom advocate "one China" — nor the just less than 7 million people who voted for Ma in last year's presidential election and therefore implicitly support "one China," have a leg to stand on in complaining about how the Philippines apologized.

Ma's fabricated "one China" will only make it more likely that the real, internationally recognized "one China" will annex Taiwan. Taiwan was able to impose 11 sanctions on the Philippines because of its de facto status as an independent nation; it had nothing to do with the idea of "one China."

I recently heard of a rather worrying, reactionary idea, that if our own government lacks the wherewithal to protect our fishermen, then we may as well unify with "the mainland" and let Beijing take care of things. This is the kind of ignorant and scary idea that the psychologist and social theorist Erich Fromm wrote about in his book *Escape from Freedom*. People, unable to bear their own helplessness, would rather cede their liberty and rights to an overarching power. This is the kind of mentality that enables despots and dictators to rule.

Are these people unaware of the relentless suppression and violence visited upon Tibetans and the secessionist Uighur group the East Turkestan Liberation Organization, under the dictatorial regime in China? Within this context, the barbaric action of the Philippine vessel pales in comparison. And did they not see how the authorities in Beijing recently issued an order prohibiting university professors from teaching the universal values of freedom and democracy? Only those with a slave mentality would want to live in a country like that.

The other day China made noises to the effect that the combined forces of the People's Liberation Army and the Taiwanese military would be sufficient to shock and awe the Philippines. I dare say that if China and Taiwan establish formal diplomatic relations and combine their armed forces they would not only overwhelm the Philippines, they could even take on the US. Is that possible? I wonder if China would like to find out.

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