

In September 2012, at a time of Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands (釣台) crisis, I led an Australian delegation to Taiwan. Our first visit was with the then-foreign minister, Timothy Jin-tien Yang (楊), an old friend who had served as Taiwan's representative in Australia. My first question concerned the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands and Yang criticized me for not knowing that "Diaoyutai" was the proper name for the islands. I was surprised by the sharpness of his response, but he may have been preparing himself for his meeting with the Japanese representative that afternoon.

Since then, I have done considerable research on the histories of the South and East China seas and concluded that China's historical claims to these areas lack merit (see www.aei.org/papers/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/asia/chinas-frail-historical-claims-to-the-south-china-and-east-china-seas). Thus, there is no value in Taiwan using its status as the Republic of China (ROC) to claim islands in these areas. Rather, Taiwan can gain much more through its history as Taiwan rather than as China.

Except for the four years of the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), Taiwan has never been part of China. When the Dutch arrived in 1624, there were no permanent Han communities in Taiwan and the Ming Dynasty treated Taiwan as a foreign country. Han traders, fishermen and pirates only came to Taiwan temporarily, then returned to China.

Under the Qing Dynasty (1683-1895), Taiwan was a colony of the Manchu Empire. China too was a colony of the Manchu Empire and did not exist as an independent state. In at least some aspects, the Manchus administered Taiwan and China differently.

My above cited article makes clear that China's historical claims to the Senkaku Islands have no validity and that both China under Mao Zedong (毛) and Taiwan under Chiang Kai-shek (蔣) only became interested in the islands when surveys showed potential oil reserves in the late 1960s. Before then, both Chinese and official ROC maps made clear that the islands belonged to Japan. In addition, the Senkaku Islands were always administered as part of the Ryukyu Islands and were never administered as part of Japan's Taiwan colony.

Thus, President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬) East China Sea peace initiative of Aug. 5, 2012, which puts aside the sovereignty issue and calls for joint management of the resources, has actually improved Taiwan's status on the issue as Japan has responded positively. Fisheries, the key

resource at present, are being shared between Japan and Taiwan.

The South China Sea situation is very different. Itu Aba (Taiping Island, 太平島) and several other South China Sea islands were administered by the Japanese as part of Kaohsiung Prefecture, beginning in 1932. Thus, these islands have a long history as a part of Taiwan. Japan renounced these islands in the peace treaties following World War II, but Taiwan can easily claim them as the successor regime. As shown in my article, China's so-called "nine-dash line" has no historical validity and thus is worthless for territorial claims.

Ma has a long history of involvement with the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) Islands issue. He became politically active in the Diaoyutai Movement of the early 1970s and wrote his doctoral dissertation, published as a monograph in 1984, on Legal Problems of Seabed Boundary Delimitation in the East China Sea. In fact, Ma's thesis says very little about sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands and concentrates on issues of potential oil concessions. For history, he cites a 1974 article by Cheng Tao (鄭濤) published in the Virginia Journal of International Law, which is mainly about international law, but which does raise some "history" that my article demonstrates lacks validity.

Ma has clearly been leading Taiwan's policy on the Senkaku Islands. His peace initiative showed some flexibility. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web site no longer asserts that Chinese claims to the islands go back to the early Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Such pragmatic stances help Taiwan internationally. Defining Taiwan as the Republic of China does not win recognition from any major power, including China. In some aspects, such as the South and East China seas, the emphasis on the ROC name makes Taiwan appear to be working closely with China rather than with its democratic allies like the US, Japan and Australia.

Maintaining that Taiwan is the ROC disrupts relations with places like Mongolia, which the ROC under Chiang also claimed.

In the South and East China seas as well as more generally, a Taiwan that declares it is Taiwan rather than a Republic of China will have much smoother international relations.

China's territorial claims are weak

Written by Bruce Jacobs 刚刚
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Bruce Jacobs is an emeritus professor of Asian languages and studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

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