

In a recent interview with commentator Hugh Hewitt, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo dropped a bomb. It was simple, direct and succinct, and it was one that has been long overdue.

When Hewitt asked him about Taiwan, Pompeo wasted no words.

He stressed how important it is “to get the language right.”

Then, with no further comment, he went on to say: “Taiwan has not been a part of China.”

In that one brief statement, Pompeo blew the US’ longstanding, official, 75-year-old “undecided” position on Taiwan out of the water and definitely put the US on a new track.

There was more. In doing this, Pompeo accomplished two other things:

First, he helped other nations resolve a different longstanding dilemma that they have faced: the dilemma of the “one China” policy that Beijing requires of a nation if it does not buy into and accept the “one China” principle.

The US, like many nations, has always had a “one China” policy — it still does — but few can really spell out what that means in a practical sense.

Pompeo’s remarks cleared the air and demonstrated that there is no conflict between having such a policy and admitting that Taiwan is not part of China.

Having a “one China” policy simply means that a nation accepts that what China says is included in “one China” is only what China believes, but their acceptance does not necessarily

mean that the nations believes this.

Thus, China might believe that the moon is part of “one China” and belongs to it. Other nations would agree that this is China’s belief on “one China,” but it is not what they believe.

Pompeo settled that dilemma once and for all. He could easily admit that the US has had a longstanding “one China” policy and that, under that policy, the US admits that China thinks Taiwan belongs to it.

However, as Pompeo purposely continued with: “Taiwan has not been a part of China,” other nations can follow suit and openly state the same if they choose.

What points followed? Pompeo finally pushed down the road the issue of the ambiguity of the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty.

To sum up that ambiguity, the treaty states that Japan would give up Taiwan as its colony, but never states to whom it should give that colony. That question was never resolved or answered.

Of course, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) claimed Taiwan, as did the Republic of China (ROC), but neither were signatories to the treaty.

The US, as the chief military victor in the war with Japan, governed all and has maintained its “undecided” position on Taiwan ever since.

As Pompeo’s remarks say that Taiwan is not part of China, the question of who Taiwan belongs to is still left open.

The third possibility — one that has always been there, but that few mention — is that Japan could give Taiwan to the people of Taiwan under the principle of self-determination, as held by the UN and applied to most colonies after the end of World War II.

Additional conclusions would come from this. As Taiwanese in the ROC finally threw off the one-party state imposed on them by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and they democratically elected their own president and legislature in 1996, a democratic Taiwan could be named the recipient.

However, Pompeo's remarks also indicate a necessary further step or direction on the part of Taiwan: Taiwanese cannot claim to be "China" and they certainly would need to redraw the ROC Constitution that was brought here by the KMT — although amended several times, it is the one that they operate under.

They would also need to change their nation's official name.

The need for a new constitution is something that Taiwanese have long considered and dealt with in a haphazard way through numerous amendments.

As for a name change, many use the name Taiwan and that is, of course, the name that the US uses in all of its dealings with Taipei. The US does not use the name "ROC." It instead has its American Institute in Taiwan, the Taiwan Relations Act, the Taiwan Travel Act, etc.

This all flows from Pompeo's remark that for the US, "Taiwan is not part of China."

What else can be drawn from Pompeo's remarks? Was there more that he was suggesting or pointing to when he stated that it is important to "get the language right"?

Pompeo knows that Taiwan is a democracy and he was clearly supporting that democracy. It is a democracy that is "not part of China."

Taiwan's democracy is plain to see as a result of what political scientist Benedict Anderson would call the growing and developing "imagined community" found here.

National polls showing continued growth in the number of citizens who identify as Taiwanese certainly supports this.

A natural next step for all would be to examine how Taiwan and China have different "imagined communities" and different paradigms that each follows.

People live in many paradigmatic worlds. People have the realm of physics or science. Physics determines the causes that occur under given circumstances, but physics tells us nothing about teleology and the meaning of life.

To find purpose, teleology and meaning in life, people must move to different realms: metaphysics, with the multiple communities that it holds; and phenomenology, people's personal and individual perceptions.

People's focus must be on the realm of metaphysics and multiple communities. The communities can be political, ideological, religious, sociological and ethnic, among others. They are not mutually exclusive.

This is where Anderson's nation state and the imagined community fits in.

Within nations, communities form and develop — they are always in process.

The imagined community of democratic Taiwan has been developing over the years. So, too, has the imagined community that makes up the PRC. Both are in process and moving in different directions.

The same can also be said for many of the “imagined communities” in other nations around the world.

Although there are many examples, only one is needed to clearly illustrate the differences between Taiwan and China: their treatment of other communities that exist within the nation’s imagined community.

In Taiwan’s democratic imagined community, the nation tolerates multiple religious communities and gives them freedom: Falun Gong members are not persecuted; Muslims are not in concentration camps; the state does not seek to select the Panchen Lama or Dalai Lama, nor does it seek to select bishops in the Catholic Church. China on the other hand does.

For Taiwanese and other nations, the key takeaway points from Pompeo’s remarks remain: It is important to “get the language right” and “Taiwan is not part of China.”

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