

## Past shows Taiwan is a homeland

Written by Jerome Keating  
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A key dividing line between Taiwanese and the more archaic members of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is found in how they answer two basic questions: “What do you consider to be your motherland?” and “Would you die to defend it?”

The topic of Taiwan and one’s motherland is problematic. It even came up in Chinese President Xi Jinping’s (习近平) address on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Xi declared that it was his “duty to restore Taiwan to the Chinese motherland.”

Xi could not be farther from the truth in what is Chinese and what is Taiwan’s motherland. Taiwan was never a part of any Chinese motherland.

This bears further examination.

Begin first by reviewing pre-World War II Taiwan and how the Japanese came to rule the island. Tracing back Taiwan’s history from this starting point, one sees how many other colonizers occupied and ruled at least parts of Taiwan.

In the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, the Japanese took control of Taiwan as one of the spoils of war in their victory over the Manchu Qing empire. Though the Manchus did not control the whole of Taiwan, this did not stop the Japanese from taking the whole island. Taiwan became Japan’s model colony, and they ruled it from 1895 to 1945.

Prior to that, the Manchus controlled western Taiwan from 1683 to 1895. They had come in pursuit of the defeated Ming loyalists who fled with their leader, Zheng Cheng-gong (鄭成功, aka Koxinga). Not wanting any Ming followers to even think of having a base from which to try to retake any part of their empire, the Manchus repatriated the Ming followers to the continent and occupied Taiwan.

Koxinga’s Ming followers had fled to Taiwan in 1662 and they ruled it briefly from until 1683,

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when the Manchus caught up with them. The Ming in turn had taken western Taiwan from the Dutch, who had colonized it from 1624 to 1662. The persistent Dutch returned and retook Keelung from the Ming Chinese for a few years, but when the Manchus refused to trade with them, they again abandoned it.

Trade was the reason that the Dutch were on Taiwan in the first place. Originally, they had wanted to trade with Ming China, so they tried — unsuccessfully — to dislodge the Portuguese in Macau. Failing that, they went to Penghu and fought with the Ming for a trading base there. Not wanting the Dutch that close, the Ming directed them to set up in Taiwan, which at that time was inhabited by Japanese, Korean and Chinese traders, and occasional pirates. Taiwan's Aborigines were also there, of course.

The Dutch therefore colonized and explored Taiwan from 1624 to 1662. During that time, they also drove out the Spanish, who from 1626 to 1643 had colonized northern Taiwan as a way station on their Manila to Acapulco trade route, and as a base to access and hopefully Christianize Japan.

Those were the key colonial settlements on Taiwan. If Taiwan was a motherland, it was only such for its many Aborigines, some of whom would contribute to the creation and development of the vast Austronesian empire that spread across the Pacific Ocean.

By tracing Taiwan's history through its many colonizers, one immediately sees how ludicrous Xi's claim is that he must restore Taiwan to some fictitious past Chinese motherland. If anyone had a claim to Taiwan, it might be the Manchus or the Japanese. The Manchu empire, which included Tibet, Mongolia, Xinjiang and China, was torn asunder in 1911 when Taiwan was a colony of Japan.

Xi's claims become more of an overreach given that the CCP is a relative newcomer, even to the warlord period of China. The CCP was formed in 1921, a decade after the revolution that took down the Manchu empire. The Marxist-Leninist CCP can hardly be considered any authority on what is or is not Chinese.

What then about the term "motherland"? It is often used to refer to the place of one's birth or sometimes one's ancestors' birth; it is a place to which one still feels emotionally linked.

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In the case of the mid-sized nation of Taiwan, this is found to be true. Of the many Taiwanese born in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial era, three stand out. One is the revolutionary fighter Su Beng (蘇炳), who had fought with CCP forces against Japan on the continent in World War II. Yet he refused to join the CCP. The other two are the Taiwan's former KMT president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and former DPP presidential candidate Peng Ming-min (彭明敏), who wrote the well-known work *A Taste of Freedom*. All three considered Taiwan to be their motherland.

What then developed in Taiwan from World War II onward? The war ended in 1945 with the defeat of Japan. In the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan ceded Taiwan, although the treaty, overseen by the US, did not state a recipient of Taiwan.

During that post-war period, the Chinese Civil War between the CCP and the KMT restarted and the KMT was defeated in 1949. The KMT then fled to Taiwan, bringing with them their 1947 Constitution of the Republic of China (ROC). On the continent, the CCP would claim victory and set up the People's Republic of China (PRC).

For the KMT of this period, the China that they had to leave was considered their motherland and they vowed to retake it. For this reason, some have perceived the KMT on Taiwan as a government in exile. Others have seen the KMT as refugees or a diaspora, or even as carpetbaggers.

It is true that in 1945, US general Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, had ordered the Japanese on Formosa (Taiwan) to surrender to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), but he had also ordered those Japanese in present-day Vietnam to do the same. The Japanese military was spread out over far too many locations to have it solely surrender to US forces.

The ROC of the KMT was given custodianship over Taiwan by the US at the end of World War II, but the San Francisco Peace Treaty never gave sovereignty over Taiwan to the same KMT.

The US has had trouble dealing with the Taiwan issue and any proper description of it from that time onward. The Cold War and other world affairs have made the US put the issue on the

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back burner and continually fudge whenever it speaks about Taiwan. Its official position remains “undetermined” after more than 75 years.

On the matter of Taiwan as a motherland, the US might learn from examining its own background. Spain, France, the Netherlands and Britain successively colonized the land that is now part of the US in the same time period that Taiwan was being colonized by the Spanish and Dutch. However, no US citizen ever speaks of any of these colonizing countries as the nation’s motherland.

The US might also review its wording in the Shanghai Communique of 1972, where it acknowledged that “all Chinese” on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but “one China.” While there are certainly some KMT Chinese on Taiwan’s side of the Strait, the US seems woefully ignorant that there are also many more Taiwanese on Taiwan’s side of the Strait than there are Chinese.

In a parody of some of these bland US statements, one might re-examine the 1781 Battle of Yorktown in Virginia. There, general George Washington’s colonial army had British general Charles Cornwallis and his forces trapped.

What would have happened if the French fleet and army, instead of assisting the colonials in their siege, had said: “We hope that the British on both sides of the Atlantic can settle these matters peacefully”?

The US still seems to remain on a learning curve as regards to the true history of Taiwan as a motherland. US Coordinator for Indo-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell would be well advised to speak with former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo, who better understood the reasons that Taiwan is not part of China.

Campbell can only mouth the nonsensical fudge statement that the US follows the “one China policy,” which simply means that the US acknowledges that whatever fantasies or claims China holds are simply only what China holds.

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Whenever the Three Joint Communiques of 1972 to 1982 are brought up, the US might also try to remember that their purpose was to forestall the hegemony of any nation (including the then-Soviet Union) in the Asia-Pacific region. As the PRC continues on its hegemonic bent in the South China Sea toward Taiwan, it is time to say that the three communiques are not worth the paper they were written on.

One exception regards the islands of Kinmen and Matsu. These were never part of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and have therefore remained an official part of China. For that reason, Taiwan should consider allowing all KMT members who still see China as their motherland to have the option of moving there and finally settling matters with the CCP — peacefully of course.

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