

Beijing twists history to its own end

Written by Gerritvan der Wees
Saturday, 13 August 2022 04:47

The People's Republic of China's Taiwan Affairs Office on Wednesday published a white paper titled The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mainland Affairs Council responded strongly to a number of important fallacies in this paper, as it seriously distorts history.

As "evidence" that Taiwan "belonged to China since ancient times," it describes how the Sui Dynasty sent three expeditions east. Whether "east" was "Taiwan" is not clear, as they discuss "Liu Qiu," which might refer to Okinawa.

In any case, this took place from 605 to 607. The first was a friendly encounter, but the subsequent ones ended in fierce battles with the indigenous people, in which a number of Chinese soldiers lost their heads, literally. Not much evidence of administrative control.

Also, when the Dutch arrived in Anping in 1624, they found no evidence of any officialdom from China, let alone any administrative control. In 1622 and 1623, the Ming Dynasty emperor Tianqi (天启) had even told the Dutch to go "beyond our territory." So the Dutch went to Taiwan, where they built Fort Zeelandia and established administrative control in the area surrounding Tainan, which lasted until 1662. It certainly was not "part of China" during those days.

And in 1683, the new Manchu emperor was not interested in the island at all. His main goal was to defeat the last remnants of the Ming Dynasty. Emperor Kangxi (康熙) even said: "Taiwan is outside our empire and of no great consequence." He offered to let the Dutch buy it back. Somehow, the white paper overlooks this important statement by a Chinese emperor.

Another important moment in Taiwan's history, which is not even mentioned in the paper, is when after the Qing and Manchu ceded sovereignty over Taiwan to Japan in perpetuity at the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, local officials and Taiwanese leaders declared the Republic of Formosa, one of Asia's first independent republics. Unfortunately, the new republic was crushed under Japan's military power, but it is another example of how Taiwan existed outside the reach of China's control.

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The most hilarious statement in the paper is the reference to an article by US journalist Nym Wales, who is supposed to have quoted Mao Zedong (毛泽东) as saying that “China’s goal was to achieve a final victory in the war and secure the liberation of Taiwan.”

In fact, “Nym Wales” is the pen name for Helen F. Snow, the wife of journalist Edgar Snow, who quoted Mao as saying: “we will extend them [the Koreans] our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies for Taiwan.”

This position was reiterated in subsequent years by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) luminaries such as former Chinese premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来). For some reason the white paper fails to mention this.

The paper also commits a number of serious distortions in its discussion of events in the 1940s, such as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Declaration, which are referred to as “international legal documents,” which they were not. Legally speaking, they were simply news releases at the end of high-level meetings.

The paper inexplicably refers to the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty as “illegal and invalid,” even though it is the only formal treaty dealing with the status of Taiwan in the 20th century, as under its provisions, Japan ceded sovereignty over the island, but it was not decided to whom.

Finally, the paper says: “The important principles of respecting state sovereignty and territorial integrity as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations are the cornerstones of modern international law and basic norms of international relations.”

Beijing should respect these principles, as under international law — the 1933 Montevideo Convention — Taiwan is a nation-state that has the right to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In this context, it is important to remind Beijing that Article 1.2 of the UN Charter says that it is

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the purpose of the UN “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.”

Peace and stability can only be achieved if China accepts and respects Taiwan as a friendly neighbor.

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Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2022/08/13](#)