

THE CHINA IMPASSE
A FORMOSAN VIEW

By Lí Thian-hok

Reprinted from

FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

AN AMERICAN QUARTERLY REVIEW



April 1958

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The Editors.

THE CHINA IMPASSE

A Formosan View

By Li Thian-hok

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The present tacit moratorium on the Formosan problem does not give hope that the question will simply resolve itself by the passage of time; it does provide an opportunity to ponder a solution of one of the major foreign policy dilemmas facing the United States. Before pressure to admit Communist China to the United Nations becomes irresistible, the United States should relieve itself of the anomaly of supporting a government which is held to be sovereign where it exerts no authority and which lacks sovereignty where it does.

For it must be remembered that the United States holds the legal status of Formosa to be in abeyance. It maintains that neither the Cairo Declaration nor the Peace Treaty with Japan has operated to make Formosa and the Pescadores formally part of China. To endorse the Chinese claim of sovereignty over Formosa was thought unwise, presumably because to do so would automatically link the question with that of representation of the two rival Chinese regimes, and thereby give legitimate title to whichever regime was victorious in the civil strife.

Both Chinese Governments, of course, claim Formosa and the Pescadores as Chinese soil on the basis of ancient historical connection, the predominantly "Chinese" ethnic origin of the population, and the Cairo Declaration, which stipulated that "Formosa and the Pescadores shall be restored to the Republic of China." As a result, the Nationalists are mistrustful of the United States and the Communists are enraged. The United States has also been placed on the defensive in the war of propaganda. For if Formosa is Chinese territory, then disputes between the People's Republic of China and Chiang Kai-shek groups in Taiwan represent a civil war and any foreign attempt to obstruct the liberation constitutes intervention in China's domestic affair.

But what if Formosa is not Chinese territory? It has wisely been said that nationality is what a people think it is, and Formosans think of themselves as quite distinct from the Chinese. Far from accepting the premise that Formosa belongs to China, a majority of the 8,000,000 Formosans are anxious for independence--a fact of which Americans seem hardly aware. And this is the more strange because the principle offers the United States an honorable way out of its present policy predicament. The parties to the Japanese Peace Treaty, most of whom are members of the United Nations, are free under the Charter (which would legally prevail over the Cairo Declaration, according to Article 103) to dispose of Formosa and the Pescadores according to the principle of self-determination rather than to restore them to China.¹

Yet the United States so far has only said that Formosa's status is undecided; it does not say that Formosa is not China's territory. Hence, it cannot repudiate the Communist claim of the right to "liberate Taiwan." Thus, by deliberately choosing the policy of non-commitment and ambiguity the United States has forced itself into an untenable position, and has supplied the Communists with a great leverage in the propaganda war. For they can readily persuade Asian neutrals that the United States is occupying China's own territory.

American policy has also been greatly weakened by the fact that the United States has retained *de jure* recognition of the Nationalist Government on Formosa. The United States has repeatedly declared that it recognizes the Nationalist regime as the sole and legitimate government of China. Since it is a fact that the Nationalists control only Formosa and the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, the *de jure* recognition of that regime is easily construed as recognition of Formosa as Chinese territory. The American position is further worsened because of the Nationalist insistence that Formosa is a province of China. In order not to demoralize the Nationalist Government, the United States has been compelled to acquiesce in this interpretation, which has been so skillfully exploited by Communist propaganda.

To summarize, the inflexible policy of supporting the belligerent Nationalist Government has placed the United States in uncomfortable dilemmas. The United States does not want war, yet it cannot make peace. It has been dangerously gagging itself, while the Communists accuse it of interfering in the domestic affairs of China, the "liberation of Taiwan." It has aroused the displeasure of all parties concerned, the Nationalists, the Communists and the Formosans. It has estranged the free Asian countries and its own allies. It finds itself increasingly isolated in the Formosa Strait.

II

As a way out of the Formosa impasse the so-called "Two Chinas" doctrine has been informally suggested. The fact that this policy has never been articulated by any responsible government spokesman makes it difficult to say exactly what it is. As far as one can gather, the policy involves the recognition of two separate independent nations: mainland China and Formosa China, each with representation in the United Nations. In a press conference held on January 20, 1955, President Eisenhower said that the Two Chinas idea was one of the possibilities that was constantly studied, but that both parties might be very reluctant to have it seriously considered.

This was an understatement. Both Chinese Governments have vehemently denounced the idea of Two China as un-Chinese. The Communist leaders have staked their prestige to the very hilt by repeated promises to "liberate Taiwan." They seem confident that the Chinese on Formosa will not settle down permanently as exiles but will eventually come to terms with the mainland Chinese as repentant sinners. As for the Nationalist Government, to acquiesce in the Two Chinas concept means political suicide. It would be a grave mistake to regard the "Restoration of the Mainland" as a mere slogan for stirring up the flagging morale of the Nationalist armed forces and for attracting the loyalty of the overseas Chinese. A strong case can be made that conquest of the Chinese mainland is indispensable to the survival of the Nationalist Government. In order that the Nationalist regime may continue its claim to be the sole, legitimate government of China, it must keep insisting that conquest of the mainland is still possible and in preparation.

The myth of the "Restoration" is important also in justifying the dual structure of government by which the Chinese minority manages to retain political control of Formosa. The Formosans dominate all legislative bodies at the provincial level and below, and while the provincial governments run the day-to-day administration, they have no power to make any important policy decisions. These are made by the Central Government, which is built on the hypothesis that it still controls the whole of China. It is almost exclusively under the control of the mainland Chinese. The extent of this domination is illustrated by the fact that there are only

18 Formosans in the National Assembly of more than 1,500 members, and the proportion is about the same in the Legislative Yuan and the Control Yuan--the other important branches of the Central Government filled by "popular election." This disproportion in a country of 8,000,000 Formosans and approximately 1,500,000 mainland Chinese has of course been justified on the grounds that it is a transitional measure that will be adjusted automatically when the "Restoration of the Mainland" is achieved. Deprived of that possibility, the Central Government would have no *raison d'être*.

Yet the firm rejection of the Two Chinas idea by both Chinese Governments has not put an end to speculation on this solution. Especially in America, there are those who support the Two Chinas concept with the claim that Formosa's independence has been a fact for the past eight years and that the status quo is likely to continue. They also argue that the Nationalist regime on Formosa is based on "popular self-determination," and is hence legally and morally defensible. But the situation inside Formosa is not so stable and static as some of these have been led to believe. There are many factors at work which threaten the Nationalist regime; and the interplay of these factors may well, within the foreseeable future, free American policy from the dilemma of the Two Chinas.

III

It has been fervently asserted by many Chinese Nationalists and their supporters in the United States that the Chiang Kai-shek government on Formosa has now turned over a new leaf and that earlier defects are rapidly being corrected. A survey of the political and military aspects of Formosa today, however, does not seem to warrant this optimism.

Chiang Kai-shek maintains government control through two major instruments: the Nationalist Party and the secret police.² The Nationalist Party is financed, not by its own members, but from the government treasury. The party can, and invariably does, interfere directly with the official duties of party members in legislative assemblies and administrative offices. Its aims and methods are devoted to the perpetuation of its own power. The party, in turn, is controlled by Chiang Kai-shek, who has always made personal loyalty rather than ability or devotion to any particular political program the first requirement for his support of a subordinate. Individuals and groups with divergent ideas about national policy naturally gravitate into rival cliques. Instead of giving supreme leadership to any one of these factions, Chiang has used them to check one another, thus preserving his personal supremacy. The party, and consequently the government, is Chiang's personal instrument and, despite much talk of reform after the fall of China in 1949, the essential character of the party has not changed. On the contrary, it tends to be more authoritarian than ever.

The second and more powerful apparatus of control is the elaborate secret police network under Chiang Cheng-kuo, the Generalissimo's eldest son. Chiang Cheng-kuo is Russian-trained. His experiences during his long years in the Soviet Union explain why the method with which he now tackles the so-called "Communists" is so carefully modeled upon the Communists' own pattern. According to reputable American experts, the Nationalist Government is employing 25,000 "political commissars" in the army alone. These political officers are responsible only to the Ministry of National Defense, to which they report directly. They undermine authority and efficiency within the armed forces and generate mutual suspicion and intrigue. To the Ministry of National Defense come not only the reports of the political officers but also information from the municipal police, the military police and the Peace

Preservation Corps, an organization of picked members of the party. The secret police has its own agents (answerable only to their chief) established in all of the police forces, schools, and public and private business organization. It has complete power to arrest, detain and “interrogate” suspects.

The fearful feature of this situation is, of course, the lack of legal protection for the ordinary citizen. He can be arrested at night by a squad of secret police, tried by a military court-martial and sentenced, with little opportunity for appeal. Once taken into custody, the ordinary citizen is, in effect, at the mercy of the garrison headquarters. A person may be arrested because he actually is subversive; he can also be picked up because someone who wants his job or property has denounced him as a Communist. Reliance on terror has bred insecurity and intense resentment, not only among the Formosans but among the Chinese as well. Behind the mask of ritualized loyalty there lies a seething undercurrent of pent-up frustrations and discontent.

Yet the relative inefficiency of Chiang’s police controls, combined with social and economic changes beyond the power of the Chinese to control, make the Nationalists’ position increasingly insecure. Of the island’s 10,000,000 people, less than one-fifth come from the mainland, and these are predominantly single males and older couples. Given the high birth rate among the Formosans and the Nationalist ban on migration from refugee centers in Macao and Hong Kong, the Chinese face the future as a declining proportion of the island’s population. Formosans now comprise more than 35 percent of the 600,000-man military force, and form the core of combat effectives. They are gradually moving up into higher echelons and, as the years go on, the armed forces will eventually become predominantly Formosan.

The gradually improving power position of the Formosans also owes much to the growing number of Americans scattered throughout the political, economic and military sectors of the population. The freedom of association granted to 8,000 or more Americans who roam the island in Buicks or on bicycles inevitably opens the door to uncontrolled communication between Formosans and outsiders. “Today it is not unusual for groups of Formosan students or professionals to visit American homes, speaking freely about police controls, requesting intercession against police oppression and criticizing Nationalist theory and practice.”³ More important, perhaps, the United States aid program is undercutting the complete political and economic dominance of the Chinese. Already highly literate, the Formosans are receiving managerial training, denied them by the Japanese, which makes them capable of taking over virtually all major operations. And Formosan capital controls most of the local enterprises.

There are, however, impressive obstacles preventing the Formosans from becoming politically articulate. There are no independent Formosan newspapers, no recognized Formosan political organization. Practically all active Formosans are forced to enter the Nationalist Party. In external affairs the island’s representatives are exclusively Chinese. These checks have so far prevented organized opposition from coming into the open. Yet there are dynamic forces at work under the deceptively calm surface of the political scene. So slow and subtle has this process been, it easily escapes the notice of V.I.P.s who regularly drop down on Pine Hill airport for a “fact-finding” tour.

Another important factor, of course, is the morale of the Nationalist armed forces, which is largely sustained by the conviction that they are preparing for an imminent return to the mainland and their homes and families. “Were they to be told that their main function was to defend the island in which they live as strangers, the effect on morale might be such as to make even this relatively limited task impossible.”⁴ The question may well be asked how long the false hope can be kept alive before disastrous convulsions shake the regime.

While hope of recovery of the mainland appears to recede ever farther into the future, Chiang Kai-shek maintains about 800 generals and admirals on full pay waiting for commands, a skeleton officialdom for the provinces, and the Central Government of China. Many of these leaders, and other Chinese, are beginning to realize that Chiang's military and political ambitions are untenable. Early in 1950 the morale of Chiang's followers dropped almost to the vanishing point. General Wu Shieh, deputy chief of staff, almost brought off a *coup d'etat*, supported by a considerable number of professional army officers and bureaucrats. The Nationalist Government initiated massive executions to discourage further conspiracies. But the chief reason why the Government did not collapse was the renewal of hope, inspired by the outbreak of the Korean War, that the Generalissimo and his supporters could go home with American help. Now that the hope of reconquest of the mainland is again diminishing, the possibility of defections cannot be lightly dismissed. Only recently General Sun Li-jen, Chiang's former chief of staff, was dismissed and put under house arrest when it was disclosed that his aide and a large group of young army officers were plotting a *coup d'etat*.

The Chinese Communist regime has adopted more subtle tactics since the Bandung Conference and now calls for the "peaceful liberation of Taiwan." While maintaining powerful bases and armies across the Formosa Channel, it subordinates hostile military gestures to undermining propaganda efforts. Relatives of distinguished Nationalists, summoned to Radio Peking, invite the émigrés home. In a statement issued in June 1956, Premier Chou En-lai offered to "negotiate with the Taiwan authorities on specific steps and conditions for the peaceful liberation of Taiwan," promised amnesty for past offenses, rewards for "meritorious services," and even invited the Nationalists to return to the mainland for short visits to their relatives and friends. Such tactics are likely to prove far more effective than the threat and bluster of an earlier period.

Under these circumstances, with Chinese morale declining and Formosan hostility increasing, what does the future hold for this island, sustained by the military and economic forces of the United States? The aging Chiang holds together a precarious regime, but how much longer can the status quo be maintained?

IV

Two distinct features run through the modern history of Formosa.⁵ One is the continuous struggle for liberty against unwanted intruders; the other is the long periods of separation from China.

Throughout most of its history Formosa has been separated from China politically, by virtue either of Dutch or Japanese colonization, Chinese civil wars, independence, or lack of concern on the part of China. During its nominal reign over Formosa, the Manchu authority never succeeded in completely pacifying the island; nor was there any indication that the central government in Peking considered Formosa an integral part of China. This is borne out by the hands-off attitude of the Chinese Government in the face of a series of foreign expeditions to Formosa in the last century. In June 1867, an American naval expedition under the command of Captain Belknap made an ineffectual attempt to take punitive measures against the Formosan aborigines who had often inflicted outrageous acts on the survivors of American and other foreign vessels wrecked off the shores of Formosa. In 1871, a Ryukyu (Okinawa) vessel was wrecked on the south coast of Formosa, and 54 members of its crew were murdered by Botan tribesmen. The Japanese Government presented an official protest to Peking and, unable to get

satisfaction there, dispatched the famed expedition under the command of General Saigo in 1874. In both of these cases the reply of the Chinese Government was that it could not assume responsibility, because the outrage had been committed outside its jurisdiction.

From the beginning, Formosa was destined to become a spot for racial contact and conflict. Tension developed between the Dutch authorities and the Chinese settlers, and their descendants mixed with other elements. Unlike the aborigines, the Chinese Formosans wanted land ownership, which the Dutch refused. They wanted to grow rice more than sugar cane, but the Dutch preferred sugar to rice. In 1651, the Dutch began to collect a poll tax from every Formosan of Chinese extraction above six years of age. Unable to bear taxation and oppression, the Formosans in 1652 launched an open rebellion. It was crushed immediately, and more than 4,000 men, women and children were massacred. Under the Manchus also the Formosans were constantly turbulent. Partly because of the inefficiency and corruption of the Chinese officials and partly because of the frontier conditions, where no fixed pattern of life had been set and where heterogeneous social, cultural and racial groups had been brought together, the islanders continued to defy the suzerainty of the Chinese by "launching one disturbance every three years and one rebellion every five years." In 1895, after China ceded the island to Japan, the Formosans set up an independent republic and fought a desperate war of independence against the superior Japanese army. Even after organized resistance came to an end, the Formosans continued their struggle for liberation by resorting to guerrilla tactics and by launching 15 armed uprisings within half a century.

In February 1947, reacting against what they considered Chinese Nationalist maladministration and plunder, the Formosans again rose. By March 6 most of the island was in the hands of Formosan leaders headed by a Settlement Committee. The Committee presented demands for political and economic reform, including local autonomy and cessation of the "squeeze." The Chinese Governor accepted the demands in principle and then secretly sent for reinforcements from the mainland. The arrival of these reinforcements on March 8 set off the "March massacres," in which, according to first-hand reports of foreign observers, some 10,000 unarmed Formosans died. Some of the leaders who fled the island and many others have been active in the Formosan independence movement ever since.

This brief review will suffice to suggest that Formosa's past struggles and manifest sense of identity give her the right to claim nationality separate from that of China. Moreover, her desire for independence is real and offers a way out of the China impasse that is in the interests of the world community.

This has been recognized by several Asian countries and, in April 1955, Sir John Kotelawala, then Ceylon's Prime Minister, called for an Eight-Power Conference on Formosa, to include the prime ministers of the Colombo Powers (Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan), Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, Chou En-lai, and Prince Wan Waithayakon of Thailand. It was reported that Ceylon was planning to propose that Communist China renounce all rights to Formosa and that in return Nationalist China's sovereignty over the island would also end. According to *The New York Times*: "The Ceylonese leader's plan calls for a five-year trusteeship by either the United Nations or the Colombo Powers over the island to replace its present administration. After five years the Formosans would vote in a plebiscite to determine their future form of government."⁶

The establishment of a free, independent state of Formosa as a solution has many advantages and justifications. The strategic, political and psychological importance of Formosa is such that the United States cannot lose the island to the Communists without suffering a severe

blow to its prestige and presumably to its security. But if Formosa is to be kept in friendly hands permanently, rather than until such time as it may be abandoned with a modicum of grace, then a final settlement of the island's legal status appears necessary. An independent Formosa can rid the United States of the dilemmas arising out of its support of Chiang Kai-shek. The United States need no longer commit itself to the all-or-nothing proposition that Formosa must either conquer China or perish. There will be no problem of sustaining the morale of the people and the armed forces, since the Formosans have a healthy distaste for any Chinese rule, and will eagerly defend their native soil against aggression. By relieving the Chinese Communists of a constant threat of counterattack by the Nationalist regime, and at the same time depriving them of a "legal" pretext for the so-called "liberation of Taiwan," tension across the Formosa Strait may be materially relaxed. Though in all likelihood Communist China will continue to claim Formosa as Chinese territory, its case will be greatly weakened, for it cannot oppose the principle of self-determination without considerable embarrassment.

By separating Formosa from the issues of Chinese representation in the United Nations and recognition of the Chinese Communist regime, the United States can recover freedom of action. If Formosa were independent and an ally, the United States would have every legal and moral justification for defending the island, and allies of the United States, the uncommitted nations of Asia and countries which recognize Communist China would be able to support such efforts.

There is also a strong moral argument for a free and independent Formosa. The Cairo Conference handed Formosa to China without consulting the Formosan people, and thus was in violation of the Atlantic Charter and the spirit of the United Nations Charter. Like other peoples who have sought freedom, Formosans look to the United States for defense of these principles. To the Formosan people the United States is the symbol of democracy and freedom, and the indispensable ally in their struggle for independence. Rightly or wrongly, they believe that the United States has a moral obligation to support their aspirations, because it is the country which has largely given them such hopes and ideals, but also because the United States was primarily responsible for the Cairo decision, which denied the Formosan people their basic human rights, brought them insecurity of life and livelihood, and compelled them against their wishes to become involved in a civil war in what to them is an alien country. Support of Formosan independence would thus serve a broad moral purpose as well as particular political and strategic purposes. It would show that the United States is truly committed to supporting free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressure.

Some staunch supporter of the Nationalist regime have maintained that the existence of "Free China" is essential to keep alive aspirations for freedom among the Chinese on the mainland, and to attract the loyalty of the 12,000,000 Chinese in Southeast Asia. But "Free China" is not free and Chiang has very little credit on the mainland or among overseas Chinese. And even if the Communists were overthrown because they too had forfeited the Mandate of Heaven, it is most unlikely that they would be succeeded by Chiang Kai-shek or his successors. As for the overseas Chinese, it is a hopelessly long-odds gamble to try to build up Chiang Kai-shek as a symbol for their future. Their latent threat to the stability of the region can best be minimized by encouraging them to take part as normal citizens in the communities where they reside.

The Chinese, both Nationalists and Communists, will object to an independent Formosa on the ground that Formosa is a Chinese territory and that the Formosans are "Chinese." But legally Formosa is not Chinese. Historical evidence does not support the theory

that Formosa has always been an integral part of China. If title can be claimed on the basis of past colonization, perhaps the Dutch are more qualified to claim the island. Although the Formosans are predominantly of Chinese extraction, this in itself does not make them "Chinese." The fact is that they have come to regard themselves as a distinct nationality group due to their common historical experience, the modifying influence of geographical environment, and from sharing a way of life, a set of values and mores, and a common attachment to their native land. The sense of nationality, as distinct from race, is not biological but spiritual. As Renan has put it: "What constitutes a nation is not speaking the same tongue or belonging to the same ethnic groups, but having accomplished great things in common in the past and the wish to accomplish them in the future."

In population and industry Formosa is comparable to the majority of the independent nations of the world; in cultural advancement (90 percent literacy) and social organization (law abiding and public-spirited) the Formosans are highly qualified to manage their own affairs. If the destiny of 8,000,000 Formosans is given into their own hands, a dynamic and constructive society may gradually emerge out of the present maze of confusion and bitterness. Formosa could become another outpost of democracy in the Far East.

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1. Quincy Wright, "The Chinese Recognition Problem," *American Journal of International Law*, July 1955, p.333
 2. Substantiation of the assertions made in this section may be found in: Fred W. Riggs, "Formosa Under Chinese Nationalist Rule," New York: Macmillan, 1952; H.M. Bate, "Report from Formosa," New York: Dutton, 1952; "Sorrowful Advice," *Time*, March 22, 1954, p.63
 3. Allen S. Whiting, "Formosa's Future: Neither China?" *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, September 15, 1956, p.7.
 4. Riggs, *op. cit.*, p.28
 5. The island's history may be divided roughly into the following periods: 1590, Western discovery by the Portuguese; 1624-1661, Dutch colonial rule; 1662-1683, the Koxinga Kingdom; 1684-1874, a "protectorate" of the Manchu dynasty; 1875-1894, a province of the Manchu dynasty; 1895, Formosa Democratic Republic; 1896-1945, Japanese colonial rule; 1945 to the present, Chinese Nationalist rule.
 6. *The New York Times*, April 22, 1955. Similar proposals have been advanced by Clement Attlee, Adlai Stevenson, Chester Bowles, Walter Lippmann, Eleanor Roosevelt, Professor Allen S. Whiting, and others. The Formosan Democratic Independence Party also advocates the trusteeship-plebiscite-independence formula.