

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND PERSONAL BELIEFS IN TAIWAN'S TERRITORIAL CLAIMS: THE DIFFERING APPROACHES OF CHEN SHUI-BIAN AND MA YING-JEOU

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Introduction

Among international relations analysts, one of the most common assumptions is the axiomatic affirmation that the domestic environment influences, and is influenced by, international politics, with the state's foreign-policy prerogatives representing the ultimate result of this interaction. In fact, the internal dynamics originated by political struggles, economic groups' lobbying efforts, media and civil-society demands, electoral calculations, and other elements, are all channeled in the form of foreign-policy goals. At the same time, in the highly integrated global economy, all these elements are also equally influenced by the dynamics of the international environment. This mutual exchange has shaped the behavior of states in the international arena, but it also has determined the extent of states' power-projection capabilities to work in favor of national interests in the board game of international relations. Despite the limited diplomatic space afforded it in the global community of nations, the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan has not been any different in this regard.

The internal determinants of the behavior of the state's international politics have been widely discussed in the international relations (IR) literature. Domestic realities as drivers and influencers of the behavior of states were addressed in the classic works of Waltz (1954), Gourevitch (1978), Putnam (1988), and later Hill (2003), and by many other authors. Finally, Milner and Tingley (2012, 1-3) have noted that there is little space to believe that "politics stops at the water's edge." This way, it is natural to expect that "foreign policy looks similar to domestic policy" and it is often difficult to draw a "clear dividing line between foreign policy and domestic policy." Additionally, it is important to highlight that, typically, leaders of democratic states tend to use the diplomatic front as an escape valve of sorts for domestic pressure. Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) authors such as Rosenau (1961), Morgenthau (1967), Wittkopf (1990), Vertzberger (1990), Russett (1990), and Holsti (1996) have widely provided substantial data in this regard. Finally, the role of individual leaders and their character is discussed by Hudson (2007), who argues that these individuals are constrained by a series of variables such as expertise, regime type, leadership style and personal character.

The common feature in all these authors' analyses is the constant and uninterrupted channel of mutual interplay between the internal and external spheres of the state in such a way that any model of international insertion is fundamentally a product of this

dynamic. Consequently, the very formulation of foreign policy becomes the most concrete manifestation of this phenomenon.

One familiar with the domestic politics of Taiwan would be hard pressed to refute these theoretical assumptions. The historical consequences of the establishment of the Republic of China on Taiwanese soil resulted in a very peculiar political entity with unique characteristics in world affairs. The very cross-strait question that so consumes China hands and IR analysts, and the whole debate about Taiwan's identity and its international diplomatic status, are sufficient elements to support the assertion that Taiwan is indeed a unique occurrence. Along with these features, a fierce and seemingly irrevocable power dispute has taken root between the two major political camps in the country. Since the establishment—in more than just name—of democracy in the ROC, beginning with the lifting of martial law in 1987 and culminating in the holding of free and regular elections starting in 1996, the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have contributed to the stark polarization of Taiwan's political scene even as they alternated in holding national leadership positions and, with them, the purview for conducting international affairs. Despite the presence of more than 250 registered political parties in Taiwan, most have ideologically accreted around one of the two extremes on Taiwan's unique political spectrum, with the KMT being the standard-bearer for the *pan-blue* camp and the DPP leading the *pan-green* camp (Taipei Times 2014).

The next level of analysis brings the very personalities of the leaders themselves under scrutiny, and assesses how individual perceptions of their role and aspirations for the future of Taiwan have influenced their approach to leadership, especially as regards the island disputes. As we shall explore in this article, the DPP period (2000-2008) saw the focus on the South China Sea, and particularly Itu Aba (Taiping Island) for reasons that were influenced by President Chen Shui-bian's perception of the China threat, as well as his (and his party's) conception of Taiwan as a *de facto* independent nation. During the latter KMT period and the tenure of President Ma Ying-jeou, the focus has shifted to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands for reason that include Ma's aspirations for closer Taiwan/China ties and his conception of Taiwan's identity as part of a larger China, and therefore one with a historical animosity with Japan. Both men are experts in law—Chen a maritime lawyer, and Ma a constitutional lawyer—and both largely led policymaking by dint of personality, as is the norm for ROC presidents since the days of Chiang Kai-shek. This study is therefore illustrative of the role of leaders' personal idiosyncrasies in making policy, as much as or more so than the official position of their respective parties on such foreign-policy issues as maritime disputes.

The characteristics of Taiwan's claims: East and South China Seas

To put this inquiry into context, it is important to first establish a baseline, and to examine the limits as well as the prerogatives of policymaking on Taipei's maritime claims—claims predicated largely on historical assertions. Based on the extent of its territory as originally stipulated by its Constitution, the ROC demands sovereignty rights

over almost the totality of the South China Sea. The core of its claims is concentrated on the Spratly Islands (Nansha), Pratas Islands, Macclesfield Bank, and the Paracel Islands (Xisha). The ROC claims to be the first nation in the twentieth century to have declared its sovereignty over these islands (Wang 2010, 243). Essentially, the ROC's claims are based on a number of historical sources, though not without controversy.

While it is known that fishermen from Hainan Island have been visiting the SCS islands for hundreds of years in the course of practicing their profession, the official Chinese claims cite records of naval expeditions having visited the islands during the Han Dynasty in 110 AD and the Ming Dynasty from 1403-1433 AD. Evidence is scant, however, and many researchers hold—or rather, held—that the first official expeditions from China are variously dated to 1902 or 1909, and are based on archaeological evidence unearthed on the Paracel Islands themselves. No official records have been unearthed, however, to substantiate the veracity of these expeditions. Rather, evidence has surfaced of a secret expedition carried out in June of 1937, in which Huang Qiang, the head of Chinese military region No. 9, was sent to the Paracels to assert Chinese (in this case, the Republic of China) sovereignty and to check on Japanese activity there. Records show that the ship was loaded with 30 sovereignty markers; four dating to the Qing dynasty, and the rest to 1912. Huang's team buried the markers on the islands of the Amphitrite Group (Woody, Rocky, Ling Zhou, and Bei islands), making note of their locations for future discovery. This tactic of planting false archaeological evidence as a means of supporting sovereignty claims was likewise conducted on the Spratly islands, with evidence suggesting that sovereignty markers dated to 1946 were, in fact, put there a full decade later (Bonnet 2015, 3-5).

The contemporary version of the Chinese nationalist government's assertiveness pertaining to the South China Sea was in response to French actions in the area. France claimed the Spratly Islands and occupied some of the islands in 1933, and in 1938, French forces also occupied the Paracel Islands. Much of the French actions in this regard were on behalf of its colony of Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Kuomintang government had been mired in an endless civil war since 1927, and was also hampered by the occupation of Chinese soil by the Imperial Japanese army, and as such was not in any condition to respond to these occupations. Following the end of the Second World War, the Kuomintang government transferred the jurisdiction from Kwangtung provincial government to the ROC Navy by virtue of a map, produced in 1947, on which 11 dashed lines delineated a U-shaped territory covering almost the entirety of the South China Sea and claiming it in the name of the ROC. Later, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek aimed to establish ROC sovereignty over the area and in 1949, the ROC Navy transferred the jurisdiction of Spratly Islands to the provincial government of Hainan (Wang 2010, 243-244).

With the victory of the Chinese Communists and the Republic of China's consequent retreat to Taiwan, Chiang's cabinet maintained the ROC claims over the SCS islands—as it did over the entire Chinese mainland—and very similar versions of the 1947 “cow's tongue” map were adopted by both sides in the conflict, the ROC and the newly formed People's Republic of China (PRC). Thus it happened that the PRC essentially inherited the claims originally formulated by the Kuomintang, by this time administering

“Free China” from the new capital of Taipei. The ROC government in Taiwan made it the island’s claims as well, making both sides of the strait support their arguments on the same historical basis and arguments (Tønnesson 2002, 9-11). In practice, these similarities have led different specialists to consider the ROC and PRC claims as identical, and sometimes even “*understood as one*” (Emmers & Tan 2011); (Joyner 1998).

Taipei’s arguments to support its claims of sovereignty suffer from the same deficiencies as those of China, to wit, that they are predicated on historical sources. As classically discussed by Burghardt, international law has traditionally considered four modes by which a nation-state can claim sovereignty over a territory: 1) occupation, when a state establishes control over the territory that was not at that moment administered by any other state (*terra nullius* or *res nullius*); 2) prescription or the maintenance of effective control for a considerably long period of time; 3) cession, or transfer by treaty; and 4) accretion or growth of territory “through acts of nature” (Burghardt 1973, 226). Neither the ROC nor the PRC claims convincingly comply with any of these modes.

Regarding the disputes in the East China Sea, the ROC has been more confidently assertive, principally due to Taiwan’s closer proximity to the claimed territories. This question of proximity has important implications for two basic reasons: the first is the claimant’s greater capability to project power over the territory in question; and the second revolves around the fact that closeness can assure a stronger cultural and social connection to territories in dispute, which also can be an important asset in case of international arbitration or mediation. What the ROC completely lacks in the South China Sea, it has in the case of the East China Sea. Taiping Dao, despite its strategic importance, is 1,600 km from the southern city of Kaohsiung, and 1,150 km distant from the ROC-administered Pratas Islands. In the event of an armed conflict, such great distances would render the ROC (or any other claimant) incapable of properly protecting its claims, unless air and naval reinforcements can be provided in a timely fashion (Chen 2011, 5). In contrast, the Diaoyutai Islands are located a mere 102 nautical miles northeast of Keelung, the largest port city in Taiwan’s north. This proximity, according to ROC official sources (MOFA 2013), has made ...[t]he waters surrounding the Diaoyutai Islands abound with bonito making it a popular fishing spot for fishermen from northeastern Taiwan (Taipei, Keelung and Suao). Due to its proximity and favorable climate, this area was also popular among fishermen who sought shelter on these islands during storms and repaired boats and equipment on their shores as well. In addition, the Chinese used to gather medicinal herbs on these islands, and salvage sunken boats in neighboring waters and then dismantle them on Diaoyutai Island, demonstrating China’s traditional use of the islands.

Arguably, as the Senkakus appertained to the territory of Taiwan, they were ceded to Japan by the Qing court in 1895 as per the stipulations of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, after Japan defeated China in the First Sino-Japanese War. According to this argument, the islands should have been turned over to the allies following Japan’s surrender in World War II, and occupied by the ROC as Taiwan proper had been. In practice, however, the Japanese continued to administer the islands—including, for a period, with hundreds of Japanese citizens living and working there, collecting coral, raising cattle, and manufacturing dried

bonito and canned goods—on the legal basis that Japan discovered and annexed them as *terra nullius* in 1895, before the Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed.

In brief, the position of the Japanese government is that the Senkaku Islands were incorporated into Japan's territory by acquisition through occupation, and have since remained as an integral part of the Nansei Shoto Islands; that the islands were placed under US administration under the San Francisco Peace Treaty; and that today the area has been under Japan's administration in accordance with the 1971 Agreement between Japan and the United States of America Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands (Mote-ki 2010, 22).

Neither China nor Taiwan showed much interest in the Diaoyutai Islands until the late 1960s, when the islands were under the administration of the United States, as they had been since 1945, and neither of the governments on the opposing sides of the Taiwan Strait pressed any claims to them dating before the publication of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Far East (ECAFE) report suggesting that the islands might be sitting atop a potent reservoir of oil (Smith 2013). This spurred a "Diaoyutai movement" in Taipei in 1970, in which the ROC suddenly became interested in claiming the islands.

DPP approach to territorial claims during the Chen Shui-bian era (2000-2008)

As mentioned previously, the DPP administration from 2000 to 2008 paid more attention to the South China Sea question than that of Diaoyutai islands. While this may initially seem counterintuitive—if the DPP administration is pro-Taiwan Independence, why would it support ROC claims over a faraway island with no connection to Taiwan or her people, and which is only held under the auspices of a flawed and anachronistic ROC Constitution? In fact, as we shall see, the Chen administration's focus on managing the SCS sovereignty issue fits well with the party's anti-KMT position. Moreover, the DPP does not share the KMT's conception of ethnic Chinese identity, and hence does not share its animosity toward the Japanese, so it is hardly surprising that there were so few flare-ups or tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands.

It is important to highlight some personal aspects related to Chen's way of dealing with the Spratly question. His election in 2000 crystalized an increasing sense of assertion of a "Taiwanese identity," initiated during Lee Teng-hui's time in office. In his inaugural address, Chen referred to himself as essentially "huaren," understood as a term that encompasses all the people in Taiwan who have Chinese ethnicity independent of their background (Danielsen 2012, 140). Chen promoted a "Name Rectification Campaign" to localize names of companies and offices which had China or KMT in their title—the postal service, for example, changed from Chunhwa Post to Taiwan Post, and the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall was renamed the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall. Both, it should be noted, were swiftly changed back after the KMT regained power in 2008.

Again, Chen was a maritime lawyer, but he made his political mark representing anti-KMT dissidents, and had worked to support democratization and an end to the

KMT's one-party state. Years of political strife, a series of assassination attempts, and the crippling of his wife, forcing her to be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life in an accident that many suspected was politically motivated (she was hit by a truck and then run over three times) no doubt only contributed to Chen's anti-KMT worldview, and this ideological crusade also was present in the South China Sea question.

In 1988, the KMT had tacitly and explicitly allowed warships of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to anchor for a week at Taiping Dao to receive food supplies during China's conflict with Vietnamese forces known as the Johnson South Reef Skirmish (Danielsen 2012, 256). This situation led the former Minister of Defense Cheng Wei-yuan to openly state that the ROC military would, if asked, cooperate with the PLAN in the advent of another conflict over the Spratly Islands (Elleman 2013, 277). This arrangement was supposedly designed to preserve "Chinese" sovereignty over the Spratlys (Danielsen 2012, 257). Thus the South China Sea question was double-edged sword in President Chen's hands: he could not only end this avenue of cooperation with Beijing predicated on a shared "Chineseness," but use the issue to promote a sense of Taiwanese identity and at the same time reinforce a clear-cut assertion of ROC sovereignty over those territories, in opposition to the Chinese claims, instead of just those of other nations. The symbolism was elevated to the next level when Chen himself became the first ROC president to personally set foot on Taiping Dao.

Chen's cabinet initiated a series of bold tactical moves during the DPP leader's second term from 2004 to 2008 designed to calm regional tensions while exercising ROC sovereignty. Most remarkable were those that were concluded or implemented at the very dawn of Chen's second term, including the replacement of the Marine Corps detachment stationed on Taiping Island with members of the ROC Coast Guard, and the construction of a 1,150 meter-long runway on the island (Lin 2000).

Moreover, in early 2008, the Chen administration launched a Spratly Initiative that, while reiterating ROC claims to the islands, called on neighboring countries in the South China Sea to "shelve sovereignty disputes and jointly explore resources based on the principle and spirit of the UN Charter, the UN Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea" (MOFA 2008). The initiative sent the signal to the other claimant nations that Taipei was open to negotiation and dialogue as a means of peacefully resolving disputes. The proposals called for the substitution of the sovereignty issue with that of environmental protection and ecological preservation vis-à-vis resource exploitation, citing the threats posed by global warming and rising sea levels, and calling for the South China Sea to be designated as a marine ecological sanctuary, where environmental scientists and protection groups could conduct field research. Chen called on all claimant nations to cooperate in the realization of this vision.

Thus, even while acknowledging the important geostrategic considerations regarding the South China Sea and the ROC's claims there, with more than 70 percent of the population expressing disapproval of his administration, Chen Shui-bian attempted to leverage the issue in order to bolster his image as a peacemaker, rather than a trouble-

maker, b) a leader who would protect the nation's sovereignty, and c) someone who could raise Taiwan's international profile and develop ties abroad, notwithstanding the Chinese diplomatic blockade. Naturally, the administration could find some political shelter in the Spratly Islands issue, offering some spectacle to the public at home (Hsue 2007, 20). Or, as the *Washington Post* editorialized in its coverage of his 2008 trip to Taiping Island, Chen's "one-day round-trip voyage was designed to dramatize Taiwan's claim to the string of islands..."; dramatization fits well the description given to the military logistics involved in such an endeavor (Washington Post 2008).

Media reports at the time indicate that almost half of the ROC Navy's warships were utilized during the trip. Besides the Air Force C-130 transport plane which ferried Chen to Itu Aba, two submarines and two fleets of warships participated, using the AEGIS radar of the ROC's Kidd-class destroyers, which has a range of more than 400 km, to gather signals intelligence on the surrounding waters. Indeed, a combined intelligence task force with allied countries was developed in order to create an air corridor for the safety of Chen's travel (Taipei Times 2008).

The trip traces the final contours of a contradictory diplomatic line of action on the part of DPP leaders. Compared to other claimant-states, ROC policies toward the South China Sea disputes from the 1970s to the 1990s can be characterized as "self-restrained and moderated" (Lin 2008). However, during the DPP administration, it was rather more paradoxical. It starts with the decision to transfer responsibility for manning Taiping to the Coast Guard Administration instead of the Ministry of National Defense—a move that was interpreted at the time as a fig leaf being offered to Beijing, as well as to the other powers in the region. What could be seen as a demonstration of easing tensions was swiftly followed by the construction of a runway designed to increase the operational capabilities of the island as a potential forward-operating base, sparking widespread criticism among the other claimants, principally Vietnam. To complete the paradox, after his controversial visit, Chen proposed the Spratly Initiative aimed ostensibly to achieve multinational collaboration in exploring the resources of the South China Sea, and yet this invitation for joint exploration and ecological stewardship was preceded in its introduction by a classic, strongly worded reaffirmation of ROC sovereignty over the island territories. For an initiative aimed at shifting the focus from a "sovereignty trap" to environmentally sympathetic speech, and to easing tensions after the presidential visit and airstrip construction, it was contradictory at best. Consequently, there is little wonder that it gathered few supporters (Lin 2008).

Grandstanding or not, the importance Chen placed on the trip and on the Spratly issue in general illustrates how he was able to leverage the SCS claims (even though they were not beset by the high degree of tensions back then as they are today) into meeting his aims of promoting Taiwan sovereignty, attempting to engage China in dialogue, and of course shoring up political support back home.

KMT approach to territorial claims: Ma Ying-jeou (2008-2014)

Succeeding Chen Shui-bian as ROC president, Ma Ying-jeou and his new KMT administration in 2008 immediately set out to try to ease tensions with Beijing. Under the idea of “flexible diplomacy” (also sometimes called “viable” or “pragmatic” diplomacy), Ma’s cabinet wanted to make the country’s foreign affairs and diplomatic guidelines the very extension of the ROC’s domestic affairs, as interpreted by KMT ideology. In the perspective of Ma’s diplomatic body, an improvement in cross-strait relations was the only way for Taiwan to realize its economic potential and, at the same time, obtain permission from Beijing to stake out some international diplomatic space. Without having to cope with Beijing’s heavy-handed blocking of ROC diplomatic initiatives, and consequently eliminating the pressure from Washington not to threaten the *status quo*, Ma’s cabinet intended to focus on other diplomatic frontiers, which Taipei could explore to its own benefit (Anlin 2010, 6).

For this, Ma hammered out a “diplomatic truce” with the PRC, in which both sides tacitly agreed to stop trying to poach one another’s diplomatic allies. Ma intended to use the experience and gains accumulated with stable cross-strait relations to promote another pillar of his foreign policy, “proactive diplomacy”. According to this concept, the ROC should be “refocusing its resources to strengthen relations with its diplomatic allies, upgrade the level of contact with major countries in each region and integrate itself into the Asia-Pacific regional economy” (MOFA, 2008).

Regarding the territorial disputes, Ma focused more on the East China Sea disputes with Japan rather than the South China Sea disputes that so concerned Chen. Even though, in a speech in 2014, Ma listed a series of non-military facilities that had been developed on Taiping Dao and adjacent islands, many of which were planned or initiated during Chen’s tenure. These included: a) opening of an administrative office on Dongsha Atoll National Park in 2010 to promote the Pratas Islands as a center of maritime research; b) completion in 2011 of a geological exploration and marine survey in the Pratas and Spratly Islands; c) construction of photovoltaic system in order to reduce carbon emissions in the Spratly Islands; d) finalization of the construction of a communications network on Taiping Island, and the still ongoing improvements on transportation infrastructure (Want China Times 2014). However, undoubtedly the most concrete results have been achieved on the Diaoyutai Islands with Japan. The importance accorded to these islands by Ma and his cabinet has two dimensions: First, Ma’s personal feelings towards the disputes. The second involves a mix political-historical perceptions and the geostrategic importance of the territory.

The personal dimension has to do with Ma’s activism during the 1970s while a student in the United States. There, Ma was an active member of the Baodiao Movement (Protecting Diaoyutai Movement), a group created by Chinese and Chinese-American students at Princeton University that rapidly spread to other campuses, including Harvard School of Law where Ma was pursuing his PhD. The Baodiao developed an intense

campaign against the Japanese presence in the Diaoyutai islands in the form of manifestos, pamphlets (one titled “What you need to know about Diaoyutai”) in which they advocated: 1) Opposition to the revival of Japanese militarism; 2) Safeguarding China’s sovereignty over the Diaoyutai islands; 3) Opposition to the American support of the Japanese claims; and 4) Opposition to any joint development in the area before China’s sovereignty over these islands is recognized.

During this period, Ma was a persistent activist, even if not necessarily endorsing the Chinese claims, he developed an intense sensibility regarding Japan’s actions over the territories. A good example of this over-sensitivity took place in 2008 when the Taiwanese fishing vessel *Lianhe Hao* collided with a Japanese Coast Guard patrol ship, and subsequently sank. The *Lianhe Hao*’s three crewmembers and 13 passengers were rescued, and subsequently held by the Japanese Coast Guard for territorial violations. In a rare display of Taiwanese belligerence, Ma and KMT members of parliament emphasized their disposition to pay the “costs of war” to reassure the Taiwanese rights over Diaoyutai (Sahashi 2014, 239). The strong reaction to this incident illustrates the change in perception from the Chen to the Ma administration with regards to foreign policy, especially coming so early in Ma’s first term. While Chen tried to leverage the disputes in the South China Sea to answer calls for him to raise Taiwan’s international profile and display ROC strength to China, Ma has made the island disputes a factor in his larger foreign policy goal (designed to appeal to his political base) of rapprochement with Beijing, and the concomitant distancing with other powers in the region: in this case, Japan.

Despite the efforts made by the Ma administration to ameliorate ties with China, there was, after an initial ambiguity on the issue, a refusal on the part of Taipei to harmonize its South and East China Sea claims with those of Beijing, or to cooperate in any way on the issue, as has been pushed by the PRC. Indeed, two of the Ma administration’s most high-profile successes on the issue have been unrelated to the Chinese claims. First, in August 2012, Ma proposed an East-China Sea Peace Initiative, promoting such concepts as confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation on the peaceful settlement of disputes (MOFA 2012). This effort, notwithstanding the fact that it was destined to be quashed by Beijing, was covered in the international media and shone a positive light on the administration, and domestic audiences were receptive. It also offered analysts a glimpse into some of the administration’s priorities. In addition to the aforementioned decision not to harmonize efforts on the island disputes with China, it revealed a desire to raise Taiwan’s international profile and align Taipei with Washington’s security interests in the Asia-Pacific.

Moreover, it boosted Taipei’s bargaining position in the negotiations for what would become the Ma administration’s second high-profile success after the peace initiative: a fisheries agreement signed with Japan in April 2013 (MOFA 2013). This agreement – which had been under negotiation for 17 years, and was inked only after pressure was exerted by Washington – likewise contributed to the administration’s priorities as described above, as well as playing well with the domestic audience, being as it is an international agreement of the type ROC citizens crave from their leaders, given the diplomatic block-

ade by China.

Conclusion

It is important to highlight that, unlike the South China Sea islands, Taiwan's sense of territoriality is more developed due to the proximity with the Diaoyutai Islands. Taiwanese fishermen have long plied their trade in these waters – the very name Diaoyutai means “fishing terrace” (Eto 1980, 726) – with the Japanese Diet granting fishing rights to Taiwan in the waters of the Senkakus and Yonaguni Island in recognition of the geographic and cultural proximity with Hualien (Moteki 2010, 22). This closeness not only saw the Yonaguni islanders share a time zone with Taipei, but in 1947 it witnessed a mayoral candidate run on a platform that included that island officially becoming part of Taiwan (Kurokawa 2013, 41). Generation after generation have created a strong sense of identity with that territory, and hence, the very potential of the area as fishery sanctuary and its energy potential has added to the disputes a mix of social and geostrategic importance (Hsu 2009, 6).

Ma, with his strong sympathy towards his Han Chinese ancestry, takes these perceptions to the next level being the leader of the KMT, which has the added baggage of once having been the ruling party of all of China; having fought the Japanese aggression in the Second Sino-Japanese War (known in the West as the Pacific Theatre of World War II); and carrying a lingering anti-Japanese sentiment as a result. In contrast, the DPP, which advocates a local Taiwanese identity and has often been called a pro-independence party, does not share this anti-Japanese sentiment. On the contrary, Chen Shui-bian alongside many DPP supporters views the ROC (via the KMT) as an occupying power, and one that is less benevolent than how they remember the Japanese behaving during that country's colonization of the island from 1895 to 1945.

Given these two almost diametrically opposed ideologies, it is instructive to view how the respective administrations of the KMT and the DPP made foreign policy that was driven by domestic concerns and personal beliefs on the issue of the littoral disputes. What is surprising is the level of congruence of these policies, leading to the conclusion that despite the ideological bent of the party in power, the Taiwanese electorate has certain well-defined concerns and expectations from their leaders: promote Taiwan's international profile; demonstrate independence (especially with regards to China) on issues of sovereignty; and protect the economic rights of the island's fishermen. While variances can be seen in the way these goals are achieved, the issues themselves remain the same across political administrations.

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