

FIVE TURTLES IN A FLASK:
FOR TAIWAN'S OUTER ISLANDS,
AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE HOLDS A CERTAIN FATE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

ASIAN STUDIES

MAY 2018

By

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Keywords: Taiwan independence, offshore islands, strait crisis, military intervention

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I. Introduction

“But those damn little offshore islands...sometimes I wish they’d sink.”

– Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 16, 1955¹

Ike was referring to two small island chains, Quemoy and Matsu, located a few miles off the coast of Mainland China, across from Xiamen and Fuzhou, respectively. Since the entire length of the Chinese coast is littered with thousands of such islands, the President’s bitterness might seem unwarranted, but Quemoy and Matsu were nothing like the other islands. Despite their proximity to Mainland China—both lie almost entirely within the Mainland’s twelve nautical mile (NM) territorial waters, and a mere 1,000 yards separate Quemoy and Xiamen at their nearest points²—these two island chains have remained under the administration of Taiwan since the Nationalist defeat in 1949.

Throughout the 1950s, the offshores repeatedly came under siege by the PRC, inspiring heated international debates about their legal status, and the appropriateness of foreign intervention in their defense. Several world leaders weighed in with their opinions, including Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Japanese Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama, and French Prime Minister Edgar Faure. Canadian Foreign Minister Lester Pearson asked, “Are any of us really willing to go to war to help repel an attack on these ‘offshore’ islands?”³ U.S. Navy Admiral Harry Yarnell declared that “these islands are not worth the bones of a single American.”⁴ And in 1960, John F. Kennedy publicly questioned the logic of defending Quemoy

¹ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands* (1985), 102

² Lewis, “Quemoy and American China Policy” (1962), 13

³ Clubb, “Formosa and Offshore Islands” (1959), 527, 531

⁴ John F. Kennedy. “October 13, 1960 Debate Transcript”

and Matsu, suggesting that the U.S. “line should be drawn in the sea around the island [Formosa] itself.”⁵ Nevertheless, despite the divergent polemics, the offshores became the proximate cause of both the First (1954-55) and Second (1958) Taiwan Strait Crises, during which the Chiang regime buffaloes the Eisenhower administration into not only providing combat and materiel support to Nationalist forces on the islands, but even flirting with the possibility of nuclear war.⁶

After a brief “invasion scare” in 1962, the offshore islands began to fade from the public view. A keyword search of “Quemoy” and “Matsu” in the *New York Times* archives shows that islands graced the pages of the newspaper no less than 1,000 times in separate articles from 1954-1962, roughly equivalent to an article every three days. By contrast, during the years 1985-2017, the same search yields just over 100 results, or about three appearances per year.⁷ The islands’ stark transformation, from household name and geopolitical epicenter to a mere historical footnote, is all the more astounding when one considers that the realities of the situation have changed very little. Certainly, the artillery has stopped firing, and fighter planes no longer darken the skies in their duel for air superiority, but when the fog of war had lifted, nothing had actually been resolved. The islands remain under Taiwan administration; the U.S. still maintains its dubious commitment to Taiwan’s defense, and its perennially ambiguous position on the offshores; and the PRC still unwaveringly asserts its determination to complete

⁵ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands* (1985), 132

⁶ The U.S. management of the 1st and 2nd Strait Crises, as well as the 1962 Invasion Scare, will be covered in some length in a later section.

⁷ The number of articles during the period from 1954-1962 is likely much higher than 1,000, but the author discontinued his search after reaching that number, since it adequately demonstrated a disproportionately high volume of reporting when compared with the time block from 1985-2017. In the latter period, search parameters were even expanded to include the terms “Kinmen”/“Jinmen” and “Mazu,” alternative transliterations of the Mandarin pronunciation of the islands’ Chinese names, 金门 and 马祖, respectively. (The relative usage of “Quemoy,” an early adaption from local Fujianese, has decreased over the last several decades.) The year 1985 was chosen as the left limit, since that is when Thomas Stolper observed the sharp decline in public interest. There was only one article published in 2016, and none so far in 2017. All search results obtained at <https://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch/>.

the reunification of China, with force if necessary. The U.S., PRC, and Taiwan have all been content to kick the can down the road while cross-strait relations remain frozen in an unstable and brittle status-quo. However, what if the status quo changes? Have we heard the last of “those damn little offshore islands?” That is precisely the question this paper will attempt to answer.

The government of Taiwan currently administers at least eight inhabited islands, rocks, or reefs distinct from the main island of Taiwan, and claims sovereignty over the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu rocks in the East China Sea. This paper concludes that five of these features, i.e. the Quemoy and Matsu chains, Itu Aba, Pratas, and the Pescadores (hereafter, The Five Islands), will retrocede to the Mainland in the future, regardless of Taiwan’s status apropos of independence, and therefore cautions the U.S. Government against repeating the mistakes of previous Strait Crises, especially regarding military intervention.

The inclusion of the latter three islands—Itu Aba, Pratas and the Pescadores—is the most controversial aspect of this discussion. For seasoned China hands, a discourse confined purely to the Offshore Islands (Quemoy and Matsu) might appear wholly unoriginal, at least initially, since there is already a substantial and diverse body of literature on both, especially Quemoy.

For example, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, when PRC aggression ushered the Offshores to forefront of global attention and reshaped them from a rural backwater into a Cold War battleground, scholars and foreign policy experts like John Wilson Lewis, Don E. Kash, Stanley Hornbeck and O. Edmund Clubb wrote extensively about U.S. policy on the Offshores and its implications for regional and global security. As mentioned, the Offshores were often front-page news during this period; nor were they strangers to political commentary and debate. However, nearly all the resulting theory, analysis and opinion suffered from the same two

blameless yet serious misapprehensions: 1) it believed that fighting on the offshores was a military operation with military objectives, rather than military *theater* with *political* objectives⁸; and, 2) it failed to predict the imminent PRC-U.S. rapprochement.

After the U.S. normalized relations with the PRC in 1979, experts had achieved enough distance from the 1st and 2nd Strait Crises to undertake the project of historical revisionism. Through the benefit of hindsight and an emerging body of evidence, scholars such as Thomas Stolper, Gordan H. Chang and the PRC academic He Di have shown that both Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-Shek regarded the Offshores as strategically important but minimized their importance as operational or tactical objectives. In fact, these experts suggest that the Offshores were more of a “hot potato” than a prize, and that both regimes were determined that the specific sovereignty of the islands remain an open question, indistinct from the more general question of political sovereignty over all of China, including Taiwan. The late Nancy Bernkopf-Tucker’s exhaustive interviews with contemporary diplomats and policy advisors have also proven invaluable in uncovering additional evidence to support this view.

In his landmark 2008 study, *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*, Michael Szonyi explores the human dimension of conflict on Quemoy and how the protracted “state of exception” there justified an oppressive regime exercising a nearly perfect form of “biopolitical” power over its citizens. Spanning nearly forty years, the KMT-led process of “militarized modernization” on Quemoy and Matsu produced “local inflections” of “geopolitical forces” that set life on the Offshores apart from elsewhere in the “Republic of China,” and left an indelible mark on the local economy and society. The unique historical experiences on Quemoy and Matsu have therefore resulted in the emergence of distinct political and cultural identities among

⁸ This concept of “military theater with political objectives” will be developed more fully in the sections that follow, particularly in Section V.1.B.

their residents, a subject examined in depth by Taiwan researchers Wei Jiansheng and Chen Caineng, who have undertaken important studies of local identity on Quemoy and Matsu, respectively.

All of these studies serve as valuable sources of information, and most of them will be cited again at some length below. However, while Quemoy and Matsu factor heavily their discussions, there are only scattered references to the Pescadores, and no mention at all of Itu Aba and Pratas. Of course, the Pescadores feature prominently during various episodes of Chinese history but have lain dormant—as a subject of geopolitical discourse—since 1949. Itu Aba and Pratas often appear in news reports within the context of the South China Sea dispute, but that issue involves multiple state actors and typically does not focus on Itu Aba and Pratas through the narrower of lens of Mainland-Taiwan bilateral relations. Most significantly, the present author’s research has failed to yield a single source which links the territorial status, strategic function and political future of The Five Islands in any meaningful way, or even poses the question of a post-independence environment for them. This paper argues that it is important to do both. Quemoy’s and Matsu’s strategic function in cross-strait relations has migrated and evolved along with the PLA’s operational reach and war-fighting capacity, and the enlargement of China’s comprehensive power and foreign policy experience. It is essential to extend the boundaries of the discussion, lest the U.S. find itself again caught unawares in a potential, and perhaps inevitable, “Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis.”

II. Scope and Organization

If past is prologue and history repeats itself—or at least rhymes—an assessment of history is a logical starting point for predicting the future of Taiwan’s outer islands. It is certainly possible, even likely, that the PRC has included island contingencies in its calculus of cross-strait military options, but such plans, if they exist, are undoubtedly classified. Until a traitor or spy posts them on WikiLeaks, they are pure speculation. Governments are often quick to outline broad strategic goals, but reluctant to detail specific policies or courses of action. For example, in Article 8 of the 2004 Anti-Secession Law, China reserves the right to “employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures” to prevent the formal separation of Taiwan,⁹ but it does not elaborate on which substantive “means” or “measures” it might “employ.” Similarly, through Section 2, paragraph 6 of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. government affirms a policy “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”¹⁰ This language is equally ambiguous. Does “capacity” equal commitment? Does “resist” imply military resistance, or economic sanctions, or simply a firm protest lodged through the U.N.?

The PRC has never officially aired an intention to seize one of Taiwan’s outer islands by force as a symbolic “shot over the bow,” just as the Taiwan authorities have never publicly acknowledged that a formal declaration of independence entails the sacrifice of the offshore islands (Quemoy and Matsu), and the U.S. has never yet categorically established “red lines” for Chinese coercion in the Taiwan Strait; that does not mean that these eventualities are any less

⁹ Chinese Embassy, “Anti-secession Law,” <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, “Taiwan Relations Act” (1979), <https://www.ait.org.tw/en/taiwan-relations-act.html>

possible, or less probable. Therefore, this paper draws inferences from historical events and facts, and interprets historical policies and documents, to form a conclusion that is admittedly hypothetical. Then again, when is the future ever factual? It is left to the reader to judge the strength of the arguments which follow.

This paper is organized into six remaining sections. The next section will introduce the five island features in question, i.e. Quemoy, Matsu, the Pescadores, Itu Aba, and Pratas, and provide a general overview of their geography, demographics, economy, culture and history. This treatment is necessarily brief, and includes only that information which is germane to the central themes of this paper. Physical location, ethnic identity, and history are particularly important, as these often aggregate to form assumptions which underwrite sovereignty claims and irredentist ambitions.

The second section explores the basis of each sides' (the PRC and Taiwan) sovereignty claims, with special attention to relevant history, formal declarations, treaty language, and expert global opinion. Legitimacy is crucial, not only to justify an aggressor's violent actions, but to induce passivity in neutral or invested bystanders. A sufficiently strong sovereignty claim might restrain a bystander nation poised on the cusp of intervention, and convince it to redraw its red lines, not because the aggressor nation's rationale is so compelling, but because it lets the bystander "off the hook."

The third section examines the evolving tactical and/or strategic value of each outer island in turn. The geopolitical landscape has morphed considerably in the 55 years since the last offshore crisis in 1962—so has the U.S.-Taiwan-PRC military balance. Understanding how and why the islands have been important to both sides of the strait is key to understanding the armed conflicts of the 1950s and for demystifying the relative peace of the last five decades.

The fourth section takes stock of PRC, U.S., and Taiwan public opinion and political trends regarding the islands. Taiwan opinion suggests a tacit admission that Quemoy and Matsu cannot survive as part of Taiwan indefinitely, but the same assumption does not hold true for the other three island features in question. The failure to correlate their fates contributes to the likelihood that the U.S. and Taiwan might make the same mistake Eisenhower and Chiang made in the 1950s; that is, they could conflate the destiny of the outer islands with the destiny of Taiwan itself. This section will also examine the possibility of a local or general referenda relinquishing Taiwan's sovereignty over Quemoy and Matsu.

The fifth section analyzes U.S. policy decisions during the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises. While significant institutional learning has occurred since 1958, the incidents are nevertheless excellent case studies and potential blueprints for U.S policy in future strait crises. This is especially true if the U.S. government does not anticipate the involvement of Itu Aba, Pratas, and the Pescadores in a future scenario. When comparing apples with oranges, governments sometimes forget that both are still fruit.

The sixth section enumerates three plausible scenarios for an altered status quo in cross-strait relations, and illustrates how all of them lead inexorably to retrocession. Finally, the paper concludes with a policy recommendation for the U.S. government.

Before proceeding with the analysis, a brief note should be made regarding naming conventions. This paper does not depart from the historical usage of Quemoy, Matsu, the Pescadores, Itu Aba, and Pratas, although the current preferred transliterations for these five features are Jinmen, Mazu, Penghu, Taiping Island, and Dongsha Island, respectively. The author abides by the traditional convention for two reasons. First, it establishes continuity with the bulk of Western literature and commentary, and therefore minimizes confusion. Second, it

avoids affording nominal “island status” to Itu Aba and Pratas, a politically charged subject following the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague last summer.¹¹ Lastly, the names Quemoy, Matsu, the Pescadores, Itu Aba, and Pratas will be used to refer to all greater and lesser islands within their respective chains. Hereafter, if a feature is referred to as an island, it does not reflect the author’s endorsement of that feature as an island in the legal sense.

III. Dramatis Personae: The Five Islands

This paper conspicuously ignores many of Taiwan’s other outer islands. As mentioned above, Taiwan citizens inhabit at least four others, and Taiwan claims a fifth uninhabited group. There are also dozens of small offshore islands dotting the near coastal waters of Taiwan. Why have these other islands been omitted from this analysis? In any reunification scenario, whether peaceful or otherwise, it is quite certain that all of Taiwan’s islands would be restored to the Mainland, along with Taiwan itself. However, this paper contends that Quemoy, Matsu, the Pescadores, Itu Aba and Pratas *specifically* will retrocede to the Mainland *even if* Taiwan achieves de jure independence. A successful bid for independence implies that the PRC is either unwilling or has failed to reincorporate Taiwan by force, and will therefore opt for a more limited form of coercion and/or retaliation, of which outer islands seizures represent one component.

The paper established three selection criteria for predicting which outer islands the PRC will attempt to recover:

¹¹ Permanent Court of Arbitration, “PCA Case N° 2013-19” (2016), 259-260

1) They must be located outside the rough line formed by the 12NM territorial boundary of Taiwan's west coast; that is, sufficiently distant from Taiwan to allow bystander nations to reasonably differentiate between military actions against that island and a more general attack on Taiwan itself.

2) The PRC must possess a historical title to the island which is distinct from its sovereignty claims over Taiwan itself. In this regard, the importance of legitimacy was already introduced in Section II above.

3) Seizure of the island must not unduly provoke any third-party claimants. For example, Japan joins China and Taiwan in claiming ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. A Japanese military officer explained that neither China nor Japan dared to deploy troops onto the islands because the results were so potentially explosive.¹² The situation might be different if Taiwan had already stationed troops there, and Japan were accustomed to their presence. However, since that is not the case, Chinese occupation would risk a military confrontation with Japan which could easily get out of hand. In contrast, Vietnam and the Philippines also claim Itu Aba,¹³ but Taiwan has occupied the island since 1956.¹⁴ Vietnam and the Philippines may not welcome or condone a PRC assault on the island, but they are unlikely to view the development as anything more than an internal affair between Taiwan and China. After all, both countries adhere to a "One China" policy, and neither extends official diplomatic recognition to Taiwan. The chart (Table 1) below demonstrates that only The Five Islands meet all three criteria outlined above.

¹² Interview between the author and personnel from the G-1, Western Regional Army, JGSDF, conducted on April 4, 2016 in Kumamoto, JP.

¹³ Ford, "Itu Aba Might be the Key," *The Diplomat* (April 30, 2016)

¹⁴ Katchen, "The Spratly Islands," *Asian Survey* (1977), 1179

Island Feature	Criteria		
	12NM Distance	Historic Title	No 3 rd Party
Agincourt			X
Green Island			X
Itu Aba	X	X	X
Matsu	X	X	X
Orchid Island			X
Pescadores	X	X	X
Pratas	X	X	X
Quemoy	X	X	X
Senkakus/Diaoyu		X	

Table 1 – Criteria for inclusion in study. (Source: The Author)

III.1. Itu Aba.

Chinese, including Taiwans,¹⁵ prefer to call this feature “Taiping Island” (太平島, *tai ping dao*), although this title became controversial after The Hague’s ruling last summer, when U.S. diplomats, and perhaps other countries’ as well, were instructed to avoid using the term “island” in connection with Itu Aba. Acceptable alternatives were Taiping, Taiping Reef (太平礁, *tai ping jiao*)—moderately offensive to Chinese or Taiwan officials—or Itu Aba.¹⁶ Situated at 114° 22'E and 10° 23'N, Itu Aba is much closer to Hainan Province (539.6 mi.) than it is to Taiwan (700 mi.), and is centrally located within the Spratly formation. With an area of 0.43 km², it is the largest natural feature in the Spratlys (南砂群島, *nan sha qun dao*).

Itu Aba has no history of permanent settlement. There is, however, a substantial record of intermittent visitation and temporary residence. The Chinese claim to have been the first to

¹⁵ Throughout this paper, in accordance with State Department policy, “Taiwans” will be used to denote citizens of the so-called “Republic of China,” while “Taiwanese” denotes Taiwan natives or overseas Chinese who trace their lineage back to Taiwan in the pre-1949 era, to include aboriginals. This distinction is equivalent to the difference in Chinese between *guomin*/国民 (Taiwans) and *benshengren*/本省人 (Taiwanese).

¹⁶ The author was working at the American Institute in Taiwan when the PCA was published on July 12, 2016.

officially discover it during the Yuan Dynasty in 1282 C.E.¹⁷ Later, there is some evidence to suggest Admiral Zheng He traveled there during his famous “Seven Voyages” between 1405-1433.¹⁸ The Chinese Sea Directory (1868) and the Manual of Sea Routes (更路簿, *geng lu bu*) both record extensive use of Itu Aba as a semi-permanent base for Hainan fishermen up until the 1930s.¹⁹ Guano mining was undertaken there in earnest during the 1920s by a Japanese mining company, with as many as 600 personnel living and working there for several years.²⁰ During the Pacific War (1937-1945), Itu Aba served as a Japanese Naval Base, and was bombed by the U.S. Air Force.²¹ The Taiwan military occupied the island in 1956, and has never left.²²

Currently, the island is garrisoned by some 200 Taiwan Coast Guard personnel. Infrastructure has been thoroughly developed, and the island boasts a runway capable of landing a C-130 cargo aircraft, a port facility, a 1-km highway, radar station, meteorological center, power plant, library, and activities center.²³ Military personnel are equipped with medium to heavy weapons, including anti-aircraft guns and mortars,²⁴ and the island, according to Taiwan Defense Minister Feng Shikuan, “has a strong defensive capability.”²⁵ Although the surrounding waters support abundant marine life, and rich oil deposits have been discovered under much of the South China Sea (SCS) seabed, the island has no economy to speak of and the personnel

¹⁷ Katchen, “The Spratly Islands,” *Asian Survey* (1977), 1178

¹⁸ Gao et al., “The Nine-Dash Line,” *American Journal of International Law* (2013), 100-101.

¹⁹ PCA, “PCA Case N^o 2013-19” (2016), 245

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 248

²¹ *Ibid.*, 249

²² Katchen, “The Spratly Islands,” *Asian Survey* (1977), 1179

²³ PCA, “PCA Case N^o 2013-19” (2016), 179; Pike, “Taiping Island,” *Federation of American Scientists* (2000), <https://fas.org/irp/world/taiwan/facility/taiping.htm>

²⁴ Cole, “Neutralizing Contention,” *The Diplomat* (June 13, 2014)

²⁵ Chung, “New Facilities on Taiping Island,” *The Diplomat* (September 20, 2016)

there are completely dependent upon supplies from Taiwan.²⁶ The PCA ruled that activities on Itu Aba are “entirely governmental in nature.”²⁷

III.2. Matsu.

Located at 26° 09’N and 119° 55’E, the Matsu (马祖, *ma zu*) chain is much closer to the Mainland than Taiwan, in what the PRC identifies as its “inland waters.”²⁸ While over 100 miles of open water separate the tiny island from Taiwan, the Fujian port city of Fuzhou lies only 33 miles away, and the Chinese coastal town of Huangqizhen is less than six miles from one of Matsu’s smaller islets.

Like Itu Aba, Matsu first appears in the historical record during the Yuan Dynasty, when fishermen migrated there from Fuzhou with their families. However, during the chaotic transition between Ming and Qing rule, Japanese pirates dominated the islands. With the ascendancy of the Qing Dynasty in the 17th Century, and a subsequent crackdown on piracy, Fujianese fishing settlements returned permanently. In 1949, retreating Nationalists troops occupied Matsu in force and instituted strict martial law, or Battle Field Administration (BFA). During the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises, and throughout the Odd Days War (1958-1979), Matsu, like Quemoy, was regularly bombarded by PLA artillery. There is still a significant Taiwan military presence on the island, but its size, composition and strength are not clear. Unlike the rest of Taiwan, where martial law was lifted in 1987, the BFA remained in effect in both Matsu and Quemoy until November 7, 1992.²⁹ While fishing still plays a pivotal role in the

²⁶ PCA, “PCA Case N^o 2013-19” (2016), 188

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 251

²⁸ PCA, “PCA Case N^o 2013-19” (2016), 68

²⁹ Lianchiang County Council, “Introduction to Matsu,” <http://www.mtcc.gov.tw/en/matsu.html>

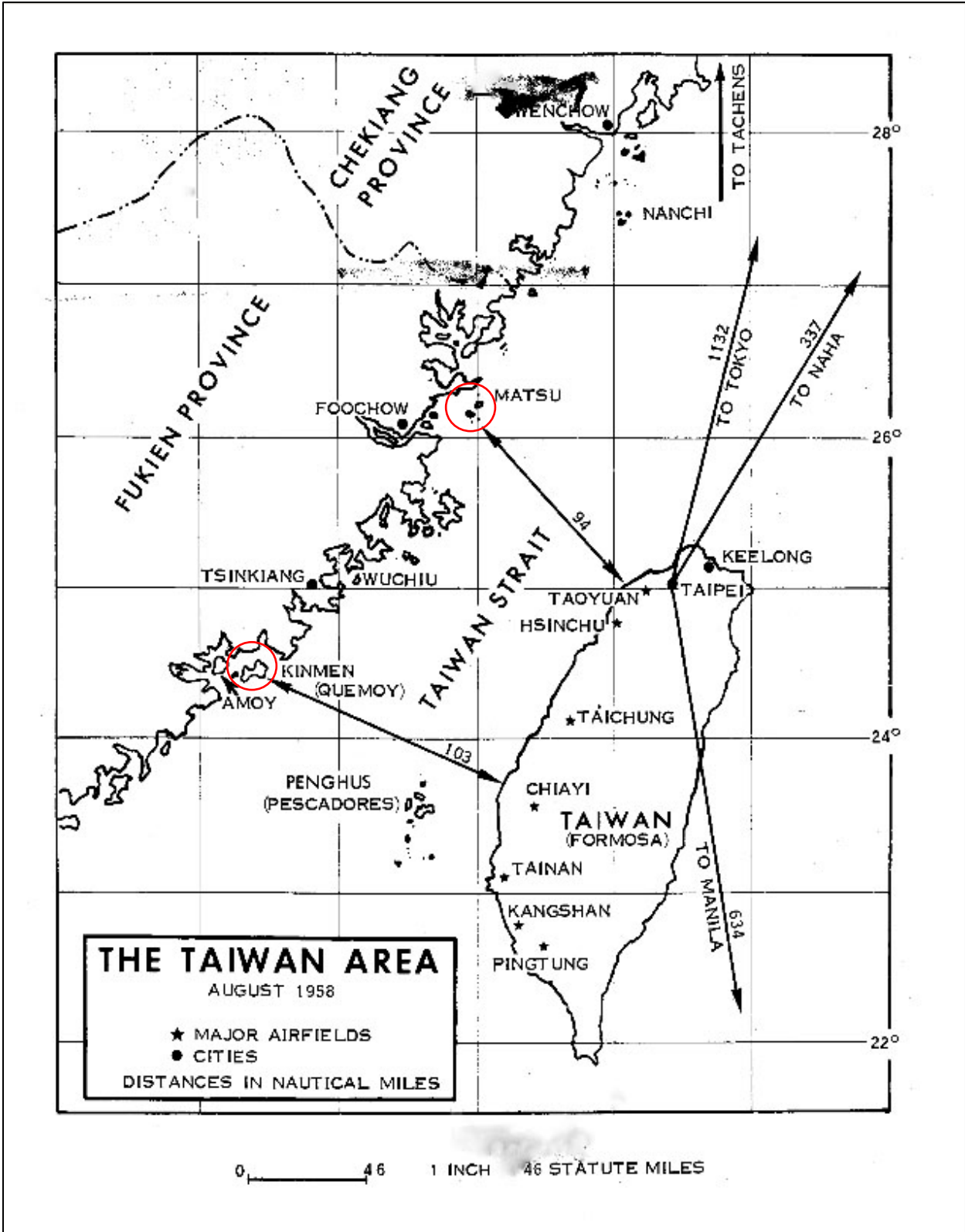


Figure 2 – Quemoy, Matsu and the Pescadores (Source: Taipei Air Station, “Chiayi Air Base 1958,” accessed May 1, 2017, <http://taipeiairstation.blogspot.com/2013/03/chiayi-air-base-1958.html>) (red markings added by author)

Matsu economy, tourism has become increasingly important. Statistics indicate that Matsu hosted 108,485 visitors in 2014. Nearly 10% of those were from the Mainland.³⁰

For Matsu's population of over 12,000,³¹ their language and culture has more in common with neighboring Fujian Province than Taiwan. In Taiwan, distinct local cultures, languages and ethnicities are represented by aboriginal (原住民 *yuan zhu min*), Hakka (客家, *ke jia*), and especially Hokkien (閩南, *min nan*) communities. Matsu, by contrast, is primarily East Fujianese (閩東, *min dong*). In fact, Matsu is one of only two counties in Taiwan where *min dong hua* is the primary language, and is even spoken with a *chang le*—that is, a Mainland—accent. The other county is Kinmen County, i.e. Quemoy.³²

III.3. The Pescadores.

The Pescadores (澎湖, *peng hu*) are an extensive archipelago containing nearly 100 distinct islands or islets, of which 20 are inhabited. The islands occupy a strategic position roughly midway between the Mainland and Taiwan at 23° 34'N and 119° 33'E, although they are indisputably closer to Taiwan (30 mi.)—the nearest point on the Mainland is almost 80 mi. away. With a surface area of over 127 km²,³³ the Pescadores are the second largest of Taiwan's outer islands. Fishing is the most important industry, followed by agriculture (peanuts and

³⁰ “馬祖地區截至 103 年 12 月份遊客人次,” <https://www.matsu-nsa.gov.tw/gov/article.aspx?a=757&preview=y>

³¹ “截至去年 12/31 地區總人口 12165 人,” *Matsu Daily*, January 3, 2014

³² E-mail correspondence with a research fellow at National Taiwan University, who is both native of Matsu and a specialist in Matsu culture.

³³ Penghu County Government, “Measure of the Area” (2012), <http://www.penghu.gov.tw/en/home.jsp?serno=201111070003&mserno=201111070001&contlink=content/area.jsp&level3=Y&serno3=201111070004>

indigenous fruits), mining (agates)³⁴ and tourism. Tourism has become especially vital to the economy in recent years. In 2016, 1,082,156 tourists—some 7% came from the Mainland³⁵—disembarked on Penghu, a nearly 10% increase from visitation the previous year (972,968).³⁶ A 2015 census pegged the permanent resident population at 102,304.³⁷

The Pescadores' history is particularly fascinating, especially because of the unique role they played as an entrepôt for commercial and cultural intercourse between the peoples of the Mainland and Taiwan, but also as a battleground for major power struggles. The Pescadores have often been the first stop on the way to Taiwan. It is important in this context to note that there is no evidence of a native population on the Pescadores distinct from the documented migration of Mainlanders after the 6th Century. There is reason to believe that Chinese fishermen discovered them as early as 590 C.E. during the Sui Dynasty.³⁸ The annals of history are quiet until 806, when a Zhejiang poet settled there and regularly exchanged written correspondence with associates on the Mainland. During the Song Dynasty, Fujian Province ostensibly administered the Pescadores, and their records testify to frequent, often catastrophic raids on the islands by “island barbarians” (aboriginals) from Taiwan. Yuan emperors stationed a military garrison there which was withdrawn in 1387 by the Ming emperor under pressure from Japanese pirates, or Wakou. During this period, the Pescadores became a “haven” for Chinese-led pirate fleets. Ming Admiral Yu Tayu defeated a powerful pirate chieftain named Lin

³⁴ “Penghu Resource Features,” Penghu Tour Web Site (2016),

<http://tour.penghu.gov.tw/en/Discover/index.aspx?item=3&mno=guxOXTYeG5o%3d&id=hJg!0!gDX5Z!1!Q%3d>

³⁵ Gao, “澎湖大陆游客不及去年 3 成,” 中国台湾网 (August 17, 2016)

³⁶ Penghu County Government, “105 年度澎湖縣觀光人數統計總表” (2017),

http://www.penghu.gov.tw/tourism/home.jsp?mserno=201307260001&serno=201307260001&contlink=ap\\un it1_view.jsp&dataserno=201701090002

³⁷ *Ibid.*, “Population” (2016),

<http://www.penghu.gov.tw/en/home.jsp?serno=201111070015&mserno=201111070001&contlink=content/2011 1229163334.jsp>

³⁸ Chen, “The Pescadores,” *Geographical Review* (1953), 77

Taochen in a spectacular naval engagement near the islands in 1562, whereupon the Ming garrison was reestablished.³⁹

The Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) dropped anchor in the Pescadores in 1604 and again in 1624 but were induced to “evacuate these islands (which were Chinese territory) and in return to accept the cession of Formosa [Taiwan] (which was not).”⁴⁰ The Chinese were “violently opposed” to the Dutch presence on the Pescadores, “which were regarded as sovereign Chinese territory.”⁴¹ To reiterate, the Chinese authorities in the 17th Century claimed direct sovereignty over the Pescadores, *but not* Taiwan.

Hereafter emerges one of the most intriguing characters in Chinese history, the pirate-cum-emperor Koxinga (郑成功, Zheng Chenggong) who received a Ming imperial commission to harass Qing shipping and coastal settlements and who later launched a full-scale inland campaign in support of the Ming insurrection. He embarked from his base at Quemoy in 1650, to which he returned in 1659 after a devastating defeat at Nanjing. In Quemoy, he organized a massive invasion force and sailed for Taiwan in 1661, stopping in the Pescadores en route. The same year, he defeated the Dutch at Fort Zeelandia and expelled the VOC from Taiwan permanently. In southwestern Taiwan, he installed his own dynasty, the kingdom of Tungning (东宁, *dong ning*), and planned to build his army’s strength for a second grand campaign to defeat the Qing and restore the rightful Ming emperor to the throne. One year later, Koxinga died, and 21 years after that, his grandson was soundly defeated in a great naval battle in the Pescadores in 1683.⁴²

³⁹ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005), 35-50

⁴⁰ De Bunsen, “Formosa,” *The Geographic Journal* (1927), 268

⁴¹ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005), 50

⁴² *Ibid.*, 51-109

The parallels which can be drawn between Koxinga and Chiang Kai-Shek are startling and adumbrative, and it is therefore not surprising that Chiang decided to coopt the Koxinga myth as both an archetype for his own quest to return to the Mainland and stamp out the Communists, and as an important symbol for legitimating his regime. The image chosen for the first set of definitives (postal stamps) issued in Taiwan after the Nationalist retreat in 1949, was the figure of Koxinga. The next set of definitives presented Chiang in a similar style.⁴³ On the other side of the strait, the PRC equally exalts Koxinga as “the man who firmly and irrefutably made the island of Taiwan an inalienable part of China,” and exhorts the PLA to “adopt the ‘Koxinga spirit’”; that is, to follow his glorious military example in the liberation of Taiwan.⁴⁴

After 1683, the Pescadores remained firmly within the Qing sphere of influence until they were ceded to Japan in 1895 through Article 2.c. of the Treaty of Shimonoseki.⁴⁵ The Japanese Instrument of Surrender, signed on September 2, obligated the Japanese to abide by the conditions enumerated in the 1945 Potsdam Declaration. Article 8 of the Potsdam Declaration upheld the Cairo Agreement of 1943, which demanded that Japan restore the Pescadores to China. Also on September 2, General Douglas MacArthur issued his General Order No.1, directing the Japanese forces to “surrender [the Pescadores] to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek.”⁴⁶ KMT General Chen Yi arrived in Taiwan on October 25 to receive the Japanese surrender.⁴⁷ The Taiwan authorities have administered the Pescadores ever since. The islands were not directly involved in any of the Strait Crises, and the PRC has never yet engaged the islands militarily, unlike Matsu and Quemoy. Nevertheless, a significant military presence

⁴³ Deans, “Isolation, Identity, and Taiwanese Stamps,” *East Asia* (Summer 2005), 12

⁴⁴ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005), 84, 88

⁴⁵ “Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1895,” USC US-China Institute, <http://china.usc.edu/treaty-shimonoseki-1895>

⁴⁶ “Retrocession of Taiwan,” National Palace Museum, https://www.npm.gov.tw/exh100/diplomatic/page_en04.html

⁴⁷ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005), 188-189

remains, but, as with all Taiwan troop deployments, their exact composition, disposition and strength is a matter of national security, and is therefore unclear.⁴⁸

III.4. Pratas.

At approximately 20° 40'N and 116° 48'E, Pratas is 100NM closer to the Mainland than to Taiwan, and is ensconced well outside the highly contested waters around the Spratlys and Paracels. With a surface area of 2.4 km², Pratas is nearly six times larger than Itu Aba, and sports an airstrip measuring nearly one mile in length. The island is also equipped with a hospital, power station, fisherman's service center, and three jetties.⁴⁹ There is also a Taiwan military garrison, consisting of approximately 200 personnel from the Coast Guard and Air Force. Like Itu Aba, the military forces on Pratas have substantial defensive weaponry, including anti-aircraft artillery.⁵⁰

As with Itu Aba, there is decent evidence, e.g. the *Manual of Sea Routes*, to suggest that Chinese fisherman frequented Pratas as early as the Ming Dynasty, by which time the surrounding waters had become their "fixed fishing grounds."⁵¹ However, like the rest of the island features in the South China Sea, it was not capable of sustaining permanent settlements without resupply. Instead, it was used for harboring fishing vessels during inclement weather or shore rest. In 1907, a Japanese merchant caused a contretemps between the Qing and Meiji

⁴⁸ In a February 2016 trip to Quemoy, Matsu, and the Pescadores, the author observed multiple active military units and bases on all three islands. Access was, of course, prohibited. A 2001 article in the *Naval War College Review* estimated the total garrison at approximately 60,000, but it is unclear how this number was obtained, or whether it is still accurate.

⁴⁹ Pike, "Pratas Island Airfield," Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/irp/world/taiwan/facility/pratas.htm>

⁵⁰ Tkacik, Jr., "Removing the Taiwan Stone from Asia's Great 'Gō' Game," *Chinese Business Intelligence* (February 28, 2012),

⁵¹ Li et al. "Ancient Book 'Provides Ironclad Proof,'" *China Daily* (May 24, 2016)

governments when he established a guano mine on the island. The Qing sent a survey team to investigate, and concluded the affair by negotiating the purchase of his mining enterprise, and his departure from the island. During the Pacific War, Japanese naval forces occupied the island. Then, in 1946, the Taiwan authorities installed a military garrison there, which remains to this day.⁵² Although Pratas was designated as a national park in 2009, it remains closed to the general public, except for academic research.⁵³

III.5. Quemoy.

Quemoy's (金門, *jin men*) proximity to the Mainland has already been noted above. It is certainly the closest of Taiwan's outer islands at 24° 26'N and 118° 22'E. It is also the largest, with a surface of over 150 km². The archipelago contains the main islands of Kinmen (金門, *jin men*) and Little Kinmen (列嶼, *lie yu*), as well as 10 smaller islets, some of which are less than a mile from the Chinese coast.⁵⁴

Local industry is limited, and generally confined to agriculture (sorghum, barley, soybeans, peanuts, etc.), livestock (cattle, pigs, and chickens), fishing, and, increasingly, tourism. One of the most lucrative enterprises is the state-owned Kinmen Gaoliang (sorghum) Liquor, which regularly generates over ¥9 billion in sales annually. This constitutes a significant portion of county revenue, which often runs an annual budget deficit of ¥2 billion, covered through

⁵² Ma, “美哉海洋國家公園：東沙島歷史寫真簿,” 档案乐活情报 (October 16, 2012)

⁵³ Staff Writer, “Living on the disputed Dongsha Islands,” *Taipei Times* (September 18, 2010)

⁵⁴ Kinmen County Government, “Kinmen Awareness,”

http://web.kinmen.gov.tw/Layout/main_en/AllInOne_en_Show.aspx?path=5709&guid=f40cd06f-a797-4e45-9164-5bbc3399e1aa&lang=en-us

central government subsidies and aid.⁵⁵ Tourism has become vitally important to the local economy: 1,553,251 tourists visited Quemoy in 2016, compared with 1,162,534 in 2011—an enormous increase.⁵⁶ A significant share of these tourists come from the Mainland; in fact, over half as many Mainland Chinese (339,833) visited Quemoy in 2015 as did Taiwans (519,296).⁵⁷ As of February 2017, the permanent resident population of the island was 135,235, although this number does not include military personnel.⁵⁸ Quemoy has a history of heavy troop deployments, and, while the numbers have certainly been reduced in recent decades,⁵⁹ at various times has hosted as many as 100,000 Taiwan soldiers (in 1958)⁶⁰ or roughly 1/3 of the entire Taiwan military (in 1962).⁶¹

The first waves of Mainland Chinese migration swept over Quemoy during the Tang Dynasty under an official named Chen Yuan. The Song Confucian scholar Zhu Xi is known to have lectured students there in the 12th Century. In the Ming and Qing era, many high ranking Chinese officials had studied for, taken and passed their imperial examinations on Quemoy.⁶² This paper has already alluded to the island's connection with the history of the “pirate king,” Koxinga. Quemoy has long served as a gateway between Taiwan and the Mainland; hence its

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kinmen Country Tourism Department, “观光人次统计表—105 年,”

http://web.kinmen.gov.tw/Layout/sub_D/NodeTree.aspx?path=2285

⁵⁷ National Immigration Agency, “表 17 金門地區歷年小三通人數統計,”

http://www.mac.gov.tw/public/MMO/MAC/283_17.pdf

⁵⁸ Kinmen Country Civil Affairs Department, “金門縣 106 年 2 月份人口數統計表,”

http://web.kinmen.gov.tw/Layout/sub_A/AllInOne_Show.aspx?path=16899&guid=353768fe-d9c2-4b2a-bff5-b9e627b30821&lang=zh-tw

⁵⁹ Michael Szonyi pegs the figure at a very precise 10,709 in 2004, based on information obtained through a contact at the Jinmen Defense Headquarters (JDHQ). See Szonyi, Michael. *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 257. Although it has been fourteen years since this number was recorded, it accords well with the author's own observations and stands as a fair approximation.

⁶⁰ Hornbeck, “The A,B,C's of 'Quemoy' and Formosa,” *World Affairs* (Winter 1958), 106

⁶¹ Lewis, “Quemoy and American China Policy,” *Asian Survey* (1962), 14

⁶² Kinmen County Government, “Kinmen Awareness,”

http://web.kinmen.gov.tw/Layout/main_en/AllInOne_en_Show.aspx?path=5709&guid=f40cd06f-a797-4e45-9164-5bbc3399e1aa&lang=en-us

name, which means the “golden door.” Parenthetically, Koxinga’s son and successor, Cheng Ching (郑经, *zheng jing*)—the same Ching which forms part of the name of Chiang Kai-Shek’s own son, Chiang Ching-Kuo (蒋经国, *jiang jing guo*)—retained substantial possessions on the Mainland in the vicinity of Xiamen and Quemoy, where he held court while his chief minister, Chen Yung-Hua, administered Taiwan during his nearly 16-year absence. This arrangement survived until March 28, 1680, when overwhelming Qing military pressure compelled him to definitely abandon all of his holdings on the Mainland and withdraw all remaining troops and subjects to Taiwan, where, like his father, he perished a year later.⁶³ Nationalist forces on Quemoy executed a disciplined defense of the island in October 1949, decisively defeating a PLA amphibious assault. This was the last time the PRC attempted a ground force invasion of Quemoy, and Taiwan has administered the island ever since. Quemoy, like Matsu, was embroiled in the 1st and 2nd Strait Crises, and the “Invasion Scare” of 1962, but more will be written on these episodes below.

IV. Looking for the Exits: Historic Title and Legal Precedent

The foregoing histories, albeit brief, should at least suffice to demonstrate that there is no historical evidence—as opposed to archaeological evidence, which is not explored in this paper, but which is experiencing an enlargement of its role in prosecuting maritime sovereignty claims⁶⁴—of non-Chinese habitation on The Five Islands which *pre-dates* Chinese settlement. It

⁶³ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005), 95-106

⁶⁴ Bond et al., “Archaeology and the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, July 20, 2015; China’s extensive efforts to unearth archaeological evidence of Chinese occupation in the South China Sea underscore its confidence in its claims. By contrast, the relative paucity of reporting on rival claimants’ archaeological activities could indicate any number of possibilities, e.g. poor publicity, lack of interest, insufficient funding, low confidence in outcomes, etc.

is also crucial to note that the Chinese migrants who first appear in the histories of the islands come from the Mainland, not Taiwan. This section will synthesize and conceptualize these histories, and analyze the contents of various legal documents, to draw inferences about the nature and respective merits of the PRC and Taiwan positions. It finds that these positions fall into two categories: 1) congruent and 2) opposing. *Congruency* refers to sovereignty claims predicated upon a shared “One China” principle, wherein both sides of the strait generally agree on China’s geographic boundaries, but disagree on which political system should dominate within those boundaries. *Opposition*, on the other hand, refers to claims based on distinct or competing interpretations of history or legal precedence, or contending assumptions about the prerequisites for sovereignty. There is, of course, a possible third category, where aspects of both congruency and opposition might be invoked to support a claim. The Five Islands fall into these categories as follows:

1. *Congruent*

- a. Itu Aba
- b. Matsu
- c. Pratas
- d. Quemoy

2. *Opposing*

- a. Pescadores

The concepts of congruency and opposition will be developed more fully below. At this juncture, however, it would be instructive to introduce a second taxonomic framework, “Castles

Regardless, it would certainly be embarrassing for the Philippines, for example, if its own archaeological efforts only succeeded in uncovering Chinese artifacts.

and Kingdoms.” *Castles* are centers and symbols of political and military power. Within the walls of the castle, there are certainly limited forms of community and economy, but the castle’s *raison d’être* is “entirely governmental in nature.” *Kingdoms*, on the other hand, certainly contain castles within their boundaries, but they also contain metaphysically autonomous societies, which are much larger and more permanent. The castle still serves as the organ of administrative power and political identity, but it exists to serve a society of subjects, at least in principle. The social inhabitants of kingdoms often survive regime change. The political inhabitants of castles do not. The castle itself is often razed or relocated. For example, the imperial seat of China has frequently moved, and the ruling dynasty has frequently changed, but the Chinese people have more or less remained.

The “Castles and Kingdoms” paradigm is relevant to understanding The Five Islands because the presence of “societies” on *kingdom* islands creates complications for Chinese offensive operations directed against them. The presence of “subjects” outside the castle’s walls increases the likelihood of collateral damage and bystander outrage during a military conflict, and significantly elevates the risk of native insurgency and political resistance in the post-conflict environment. Assaults on *castle* islands, however, do not entail these “moral hazards” or strategic risks. In this regard, an attack on a castle island is tantamount to destroying an enemy’s naval vessel at sea. An attack on a kingdom island is like destroying the same vessel in the harbor, along with the surrounding community. Both attacks might constitute an act of war, but the latter carries more strategic risk.

The paradigm is also important for highlighting that some islands contain civilian populations with a political will or cultural identity which may or may not closely align with governments on either side of the Taiwan Strait. The will of the “subjects” on kingdom islands

could play a decisive role in shaping outcomes. For example, if the citizens of Quemoy voted to retrocede to the Mainland, it could make it politically safer for the PRC to intervene in the event of a Taiwan military crackdown—reminiscent of Russia’s intervention in the Crimea incident—or it could make it politically safer for the DPP to abandon the island.⁶⁵ On castle islands, there is no such possibility, since all of the inhabitants are “drones” of the governmental “mother ship.” If the military garrison on Itu Aba held a referendum to decide the island’s future, it would be tantamount to mutiny, and it would be utterly astonishing.

There is no need to elaborate on this concept any further. It is sufficient to note that indigenous populations on islands necessitate special political and military considerations. The terms “castle” and “kingdom” will be used repeatedly throughout the remainder of this paper to group the islands into their corresponding categories. Predictably, The Five Islands can be classified as follows:

1. *Castle Islands*

- a. Itu Aba
- b. Pratas

2. *Kingdom Islands*

- a. Quemoy
- b. Matsu
- c. Pescadores

⁶⁵ The DPP’s ambivalent position on the offshore islands will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

IV.1. The Baby and the Bathwater: Taiwan's Congruent Sovereignty Claims

“Within the landscape of Taiwan’s [400 year] political history, you could almost say that Matsu was a foreign country.”⁶⁶

For nearly 40 years (1949-1989), Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan was dominated by its “senior representatives,” those regional delegates who were elected to office on the Mainland in 1947 and 1948 and continued to represent Mainland provinces after 1949. In the late 1980s, DPP and other opposition party supporters called them “old bandits” because they were never entirely accountable to the Taiwan people and effectively “stole” seats in the various representative organs of the government, to which they were habitually re-appointed, rather than re-elected. Until 1966, Taiwans could only cast their ballots in local elections, or for Taiwan Province’s limited seats in the national Yuan. Even in 1966, when Taiwans began voting in supplementary elections—intended to flesh out the Yuan’s dwindling ranks as the “old line ward bosses” died or retired from office—Taiwan delegates still filled only 3% of the seats.⁶⁷ It was not until 1989, when the Supreme Court forced the senior representatives to relinquish all of their seats that the system of undemocratic appointments was abolished, and the Taiwan constituency was finally responsible for electing all members of the Yuan.⁶⁸ In other words, for four decades after the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan, the majority of national leaders represented constituencies and interests in Mainland China, not Taiwan. The reader will recall that it was during the early part of these decades that the Nationalists began occupying and administering the islands of Quemoy, Matsu, Itu Aba, and Pratas.

⁶⁶ Translated from 陈财能, “马祖: 正经边缘的认同游移,” 世新大學社會發展研究所碩士論文: 7; Original research paper obtained through correspondence with a research fellow at National Taiwan University.

⁶⁷ Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters* (2014): 78

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 79

In August of 1953, approximately seventeen months before Chiang Kai-Shek withdrew from the Dachen Islands altogether, KMT General Hu Zongnan returned to Taiwan to take up a post at the National Defense University.⁶⁹ The Dachens had served as the post-1949 Zhejiang provincial capital, and Hu had been Zhejiang's last ROC military governor. After 1955, the provincial administration was disbanded, leaving the KMT in physical control of only two provinces: Taiwan and Fujian, an arrangement which exists to this day.⁷⁰ Many Westerners are surprised to learn that Taiwan still maintains these two separate provincial governments. Taiwan's Fujian Province consists of Kinmen and Lianchang counties—that is, Quemoy and Matsu—and nothing else. By contrast, Taiwan Province consists of *everything* else under the direct control of the Taiwan (or ROC) authorities. This is an extremely important point: Not even the *current* Taiwan authorities consider Quemoy and Matsu to be a part of Taiwan Province.⁷¹

In 1935, the Chinese Nationalist Government—that is, the KMT under Chiang Kai-Shek—established a commission to evaluate Chinese sovereignty claims in the South China Sea (SCS). The commission studied a variety of private historical sources, e.g. the *Chinese Sea Directory* and the *Manual of Sea Routes*, and published an atlas naming 132 features. After the Japanese surrender, Chiang dispatched naval ships to the larger features in order to conduct surveys and erect Chinese markers. Then, in 1947, the KMT circulated maps containing the now infamous eleven dash line—the PRC later lopped off two dashes in deference to Vietnam—and placed the Paracels, Spratlys, Macclesfield Bank and Pratas under the jurisdiction of Hainan

⁶⁹ Hua, Yi. “胡宗南的最后人生,” *人民文摘* (2009): 50-51

⁷⁰ “國民政府的福建省與浙江省,” <http://www.aiplus.idv.tw/soviet/LROCFKCK.HTM>

⁷¹ See the ROC Fujian Province government website at www.fkpg.gov.tw.

District, Guangdong Province.⁷² To be clear, Taiwan's historic title to the islands in the SCS, including Itu Aba and Pratas, is identical to the PRC's, and Chiang Kai-Shek himself placed the islands under the jurisdiction of Hainan, not Taiwan. This latter decision is eminently logical, considering the islands' early and frequent association with Hainan fishermen, discussed earlier in this paper.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki, Cairo Declaration, Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, and the Taiwan Relations Act all explicitly mention the Pescadores, but none of them names any of the four islands comprising Taiwan's congruent claims, although the Spratly formation is mentioned in Chapter II, Article 2f of the 1951 San Francisco Treaty.⁷³ How do we explain this omission? For the two "castle islands," the answer is fairly straightforward: they were not regarded as China's natural territory and were therefore outside of the equation.⁷⁴ For the "kingdom islands," a sympathetic observer might argue that size was a decisive factor. However, it should be remembered that Quemoy, Matsu, and the Pescadores are quite similar in size. In fact, Quemoy is the largest, and the islands in the Matsu archipelago are still large enough to support a permanent population of over 10,000 residents. In the case of Quemoy and Matsu, a more compelling argument is distance, but this concedes a geographic superiority to the Mainland's claim.⁷⁵ Likewise, an argument based on the islands' different experiences during the war with Japan also weakens Taiwan's claims. Japan annexed Taiwan and the Pescadores after the 1st Sino-Japanese War (1895), but waited until the 2nd Sino-Japanese War (1937) to

⁷² Gao et al. "The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea," *The American Journal of International Law* (2013): 100-103

⁷³ Curiously, the San Francisco Treaty declines to mention Pratas, which was the only SCS island occupied by the ROC in 1951. Treaty texts will be cited in a later section. The Spratlys are also mentioned in the 1952 Treaty of Taipei.

⁷⁴ Recall the PCA award mentioned earlier in this paper, which rejected the legitimacy of China's Nine-Dash Line.

⁷⁵ See island descriptions in Section III of this paper.

seize and occupy the other islands. If Quemoy and Matsu have an existential or territorial connection with Taiwan, why did Japan neglect to add them to the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki? The answer is simple: Neither Japan, the U.S., PRC, nor Taiwan itself has ever regarded Quemoy and Matsu as anything other than an inalienable part of the Mainland.

Chiang Kai-Shek is said to have scrawled the Chinese characters for “redemption” (雪耻, *xue chi*) in the upper corner of his diary every day for twenty years, a quiet and private expression of his very public commitment to expunge the shame of China’s “Century of Humiliation” (百年国耻, *bai nian guo chi*).⁷⁶ He never abjured his quest to retake the Mainland, and never regarded his sojourn in Taiwan as anything more than a temporary exile, a fact evinced by his fondness for the Chinese expression, “Never forget that you are in Chu” (毋忘在莒, *wu wang zai ju*), which refers to a Warring States era tale of a ruler who withstood a siege at his last remaining stronghold in the city of Chu, and was subsequently able to recover the entire kingdom of Qi.⁷⁷ Consequently, the KMT never acknowledged Taiwan’s independent claim to Quemoy, Matsu, Itu Aba or Pratas; rather, the ROC’s claim to these islands is indistinguishable and inseparable from its claims to *all* of China. It was for this obvious reason that so many foreign observers scratched their heads and wrung their hands when it appeared that the U.S. might be willing to go to war with the PRC to prevent Quemoy’s and Matsu’s retrocession to the

⁷⁶ Wang, Zheng. *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*. (2014): 80

⁷⁷ 张建腾, “毋「忘」在莒誤編成毋「望」在莒,” 金门日报社, August 23, 2012, http://web.kinmen.gov.tw/Layout/main_ch/News_NewsContent.aspx?NewsID=100166&frame=102&LanguageType=1; There is a stone marker on Quemoy’s highest peak, Taiwushan (太武山), bearing this inscription in Chiang’s own hand. The editorial cited here examines a curious mistake in a Taiwan school textbook, revised and published by the Ministry of Education, which replaced the character for “forget” with the character for “hope,” effectively changing the meaning from “Never forget that you are in Chu” to “Do not dare to hope while you are in Chu.” In Chinese, the characters are exact homophones, but do not resemble each other in writing. The author of this particular article points out that the Ministry of Education hasn’t bothered to address the mistake in over 15 years, but also notes that the realities of cross-strait relations suggest that the “mistake” might be nearer to the truth.

Mainland. India, Canada, Japan and Great Britain all favored Nationalist withdrawal from the islands in the early months of the 1st Taiwan Strait Crisis, and Britain even attempted to lobby within the UN for a resolution to that effect; had it not been for U.S. opposition, such a resolution was liable to secure widespread international support.⁷⁸ Nehru snorted that the offshore islands were “obviously” a part of Mainland China, and the Japanese flatly declared that they didn’t “want a war started over those islands.”⁷⁹

Even within the U.S., expert opinion was divided. There were several generals and politicians who openly challenged the U.S. decision to support the Nationalist defense of Quemoy and Matsu in 1955 and 1958. After all, the U.S. had not swooped in to help Taiwan when the PLA overran Hainan in 1950, nor when PRC troops swarmed over the Dongshan or Zhoushan islands in 1955.⁸⁰ The U.S. also maintained an inflexible position on the Yushan, Pishan, and Nanchi Islands.⁸¹ Nor should it be forgotten that the U.S. military did not help the Nationalists defend the Dachens after the PLA seized Yijiangshan in January 1955; instead, they merely assisted in the wholesale evacuation of Nationalist forces and civilian residents.⁸² These stark realities led some observers to ask: Why Quemoy and Matsu? A fair question. In the 1950s, did the ROC have any more credible a claim to Quemoy and Matsu than it had for the Dachens, Nanchis, Hainan, or all of greater China for that matter? The Senate Armed Services Committee’s 1959 “Conlon Report” seemed to reply in the negative when it recommended the discontinuation of U.S. support for the offshores, and the immediate withdrawal of Nationalist troops.⁸³ Some scholars have argued that Quemoy and Matsu were more defensible than the

⁷⁸ Clubb, “Formosa and Offshore Islands,” *Political Science Quarterly* (1959): 525

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 527

⁸⁰ Huebner, “The Abortive Liberation of Taiwan.” *The China Quarterly* (1987): 266

⁸¹ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 126

⁸² Chang et al. “The Absence of War,” *The American Historical Review* (1993): 1514

⁸³ Lewis, John Wilson. “Quemoy and American China Policy.” *Asian Survey* 2, no. 1 (1962): 15.

other islands due to their proximity to Taiwan,⁸⁴ but this rationale does not constitute a legitimate title.

The historical episodes described above are crucial to understanding the basis of Taiwan's *congruent* claims. Neither Chiang Kai-Shek, nor his son and successor, Chiang Ching-Kuo, nor in fact any Taiwan administration since, has ever proposed a *separate* sovereignty claim over Quemoy, Matsu, Itu Aba, or Pratas; that is, one which is distinct from the ROC's more general claim to sovereignty over all of China. Therefore, any bid for Taiwan independence will face the considerable challenge of justifying its continued occupation and administration of these islands. When he visited Itu Aba on January 29, 2016, Taiwan President Ma Ying-Jeou delivered a speech in which he said:

“Whether from the perspective of history, geography, or international law, the Nansha (Spratly) Islands, Shisha (Paracel) Islands, Chungsha (Macclesfield Bank) Islands, and Tungsha (Pratas) Islands, as well as their surrounding waters, are an inherent part of ROC territory and waters... This is indisputable.”⁸⁵

Later that year, PRC President Xi Jinping made the following statement in a press conference responding to the PCA award:

“China has sovereignty over Nansha Zhudao [the South China Sea Islands], consisting of Dongsha Qundao [the Pratas Islands], Xisha Qundao [the Paracel Islands], Zhongsha Qundao [including Macclesfield Bank and Scarborough Shoal], and Nansha Qundao [the Spratly Islands].”⁸⁶

The congruity of their statements drives the point home. If President Tsai Ing-Wen declares independence, will she revise Taiwan's position to include only Itu Aba and Pratas? Or will she still claim all of the Spratlys and Pratas, but exclude the other two formations? Or will Taiwan

⁸⁴ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 101

⁸⁵ Tiezzi, "From South China Sea Island, Taiwan's President Presents 'Roadmap' for Peace," *The Diplomat*, January 29, 2016

⁸⁶ Tiezzi, "China: Tribunal Ruling 'Null and Void', Will Not Affect South China Sea Claims," *The Diplomat*, July 12, 2016

persist in claiming all maritime domains within the eleven-dash line, and merely forswear claims to continental China? What about Hainan? There is a farcical tautology in this line of inquiry which illustrates how a formal declaration of independence may very well impel Taiwan to throw out the baby with the bathwater, lest they risk contorting the reality of independence into a logical absurdity. This is why, in his 1971 *Foreign Affairs* essay, Earl Ravenal wrote that a “One China and One Taiwan” policy “implies that Taiwan must relinquish the Offshore Islands since they are not part of the province.”⁸⁷

None of the points above, however, are meant to suggest that it would be *impossible* for Taiwan to rewrite its congruent sovereignty claims. The scholar George G. Wilson points out that “title to domain may be acquired by prescription through uninterrupted and uncontested possession going beyond memory.”⁸⁸ This perspective presents its own challenges, however, since Taiwan’s possession is neither uncontested nor uninterrupted. Possession may be nine-tenths of the law, but the missing tenth is the *legal* part. Russia’s sixty-year-long occupation of the Kuril Islands has not won international legal opinion over to its cause, nor has China’s ongoing land-reclamation/island-building (填海造岛, *tian hai zao dao*) activities and its nearly exclusive history of occupation in the South China Sea succeeded in settling related legal disputes in its favor.

For the “kingdom islands” of Quemoy and Matsu, the Taiwan government could invoke the principle of self-determination, established in the UN Charter and Resolutions 1514 and 1541. As will become evident in a later section of this paper, there is ample reason to believe that the citizens of Quemoy and Matsu would choose to remain part of Taiwan if given the

⁸⁷ Ravenal, “Approaching China, Defending Taiwan,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1971

⁸⁸ Chai, “The Future of Taiwan.” *Asian Survey* (1986): 1316

opportunity. However, in practice, international support for self-determination has been patchy and unpredictable. Article 6 of Resolution 1514 states:

Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.⁸⁹

International law scholars like Michael Gunther, Allen Buchanan, and A. Rigo Sureda have all written extensively about the resulting tension between territorial integrity and self-determination, and the historically uneven application of the principles outlined in the Charter and subsequent declarations.⁹⁰ Consider the cases of the Falkland Islands, Western Sahara, South Ossetia, or Crimea,⁹¹ to name just a few. Sureda further demonstrates that colonial enclaves—e.g., Ifni, Goa and Gibraltar—have likewise been denied the right to self-determination.⁹² To this list could be added Macau and Hong Kong. James Crawford elaborates, “colonial enclaves constitute in effect an exception to the self-determination rule, and that the only option is for the administering authority to transfer the enclave to the enclaving State. The wishes of the enclave are not regarded as relevant.”⁹³ Relevant to whom? To the court of international legal opinion, embodied in the UN system. In the case of Taiwan’s offshore islands, China can certainly articulate a stronger argument for territorial integrity and national unity, and Quemoy and Matsu are certainly enclaves, if not colonial ones. This does not mean it

⁸⁹ UN General Assembly, “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” adopted December 14, 1960, UN Website, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml>

⁹⁰ The literature on this subject is seemingly inexhaustible. See Buchanan, Allen, “Theories of Secession,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1. (Winter, 1997), pp. 31-61; Gunter, Michael M., “Self—Determination or Territorial Integrity: The United Nations in Confusion.” *World Affairs* 141, no. 3 (1979): 203-16; Rigo Sureda, Andrés, *The Evolution of the Right of Self-determination: A Study of United Nations Practice* (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1973);

⁹¹ In the case of Crimea, the UN General Assembly explicitly and unabashedly rejected the residents’ right to self-determination in an official declaration. See “General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region,” UN Press Release, March 27, 2014, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>

⁹² R. Sureda, *The Evolution of the Right to Self-Determination* (1973): 101

⁹³ Crawford, James. *The Creation of States in International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 348

would be impossible for Taiwan to win over international support for self-determination on the offshores, but history suggests it would an uphill battle.

Regardless of which rationale, or combination of rationales, Taiwan might adopt to revise its post-independence congruent claims to Quemoy, Matsu, Itu Aba, and Pratas, the transition period that follows as the world adjusts to Taiwan's new logic will provide a strategic opportunity for China to strike.

IV.2. A Horse of a Different Color: Taiwan's Opposing Sovereignty Claim

The concept of congruity is equally applicable to Taiwan's claims over the Pescadores, insofar as the Taiwan authorities' assertions of universal Chinese sovereignty do not exclude them, but there are several unique aspects of Taiwan's connection with the islands which seem to bestow a modern and legal character to its *opposing* claim over them, even though the Taiwan authorities have never officially articulated it.⁹⁴ As a result, the Pescadores do indeed appear to be a horse of a different color, which makes assertions about the inevitability of their retrocession particularly controversial. The foundations underlying the special nature of the Pescadores is twofold, including both historical and documentary components.

There are at least two features of the Pescadores' history which sets them apart from the rest of The Five Islands. First, from the fall of Tungning (the Koxinga Dynasty) in 1683 until 1887, when the protracted Sino-French war weakly dissolved into a dubious Chinese victory, Taiwan and the Pescadores had been administered as Qing prefectures of Fujian Province.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The author has been unable to discover any official (or unofficial, for that matter) support for the idea of an opposing sovereignty claim to the Pescadores. If such support does in fact exist, it only strengthens the author's argument by proving that there is the potential for wider acceptance of his premise.

⁹⁵ Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation* (2005): 112

During this period, it was the Pescadores, not Taiwan, which the Qing deemed strategically important. As one official wrote to the emperor in the late 17th Century:

“Taiwan is nothing but an isolated island on the sea far away from China, it has long since been a hideout of pirates, escaped convicts, deserters and ruffians, therefore, there is nothing to gain from retaining it. On the other hand, the [Pescadores], being an important military strongpoint, need to be retained and used as a front base in the eastern China Sea.”⁹⁶

In 1887, however, the victorious Chinese general, Liu Mingchuan, became the first governor of a semi-autonomous Taiwan Province, which also exercised jurisdiction over the Pescadores.⁹⁷ It could be argued, therefore, that the Qing emperor himself considered the Pescadores to be a complementary part of Taiwan.

Second, the Japanese appeared to accept the Qing interpretation of complementarity in 1895 when they demanded the simultaneous annexation of both the Pescadores and Taiwan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Thereafter, both islands were subjected to Japanese colonial rule until the Japanese surrender in 1945. There is a case to be made, therefore, that the Pescadores and Taiwan were drawn closer together—and thus further from the Mainland—by their shared experience during the first half of the 20th Century.

While these two historical phenomena present an undeniable logic, it is far from compelling because it relies on a temporary arrangement externally imposed by a corrupt and imminently defunct regime in the first case, and on a speculative psycho-emotional solidarity resulting from foreign aggression and occupation in the second case. Furthermore, there is a certain degree of intellectual risk in founding sovereignty claims on the historical policies of a rival’s predecessor. After all, the PRC holds China’s seat in the UN, and is therefore

⁹⁶ Ibid., 111

⁹⁷ Ibid., 144-146; some sources put the date closer to 1885

internationally recognized as the legitimate successor of the Qing. In other words, China giveth and China taketh away.

The documentary component of Taiwan's opposing claims over the Pescadores is slightly more authoritative. In several legal and binding documents since 1895, Taiwan and the Pescadores exhibit a consistent and close association which indicates a definite prejudice among the signatories.

The 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki dictated the following conditions in Article 2:

“China cedes to Japan in perpetuity and full sovereignty the following territories, together with all fortifications, arsenals, and public property thereon:

(b) The island of Formosa [**Taiwan**], together with all islands appertaining or belonging to the said island of Formosa.

(c) The **Pescadores** Group, that is to say, all islands lying between the 119th and 120th degrees of longitude east of Greenwich and the 23rd and 24th degrees of north latitude.”⁹⁸

The 1943 Cairo Declaration professed the following intention of the “Three Great Allies”:

“It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the First World War in 1914, and that all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [**Taiwan**], and the **Pescadores**, shall be restored to the Republic of China.”

In Chapter II, Article 2b of the 1951 San Francisco Treaty, “Japan renounces all right, title and claim to Formosa [**Taiwan**] and the **Pescadores**.”⁹⁹

Article 2 of the 1952 Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty reiterated that “Japan has renounced all right, title, and claim to **Taiwan** and the **Pescadores** as well as the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands.”¹⁰⁰ Parenthetically, some scholars have emphasized that “renouncing” is not equivalent to “returning,” and that this treaty does not necessarily cede Taiwan and the

⁹⁸ “Treaty of Shimonoseki,” April 17, 1895, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/shimonoseki01.htm>

⁹⁹ “Treaty of Peace with Japan,” September 8, 1951, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/sanfrancisco01.htm>

¹⁰⁰ “Treaty of Peace between the Republic of China and Japan,” April 28, 1952, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/taipei01.htm>

Pescadores back to *China*, strengthening the case for an opposing claim. As late as 1955, Prime Minister Anthony Eden concluded that ““Formosa and the Pescadores are . . . in the view of Her Majesty's Government, territory the de jure sovereignty of which is uncertain or undetermined.”¹⁰¹

In Article 6 of the 1954 Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty (MDF), the U.S. strictly defined the territorial parameters of its commitment:

“For the purposes of Articles 2 and 5, the terms "territorial" and "territories" shall mean in respect of the Republic of China, **Taiwan** and the **Pescadores**.”¹⁰²

Lastly, Section 15, paragraph 2 of the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) similarly defines Taiwan’s territory:

“The term "Taiwan" includes, as the context may require, the islands of **Taiwan** and the **Pescadores**, the people on those islands, corporations and other entities and associations created or organized under the laws applied on those islands, and the governing authorities on Taiwan recognized by the United States as the Republic of China prior to January 1, 1979, and any successor governing authorities (including political subdivisions, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof).”¹⁰³

Of all of the documents, the TRA establishes the most direct link between Taiwan and the Pescadores by using them both to jointly *define* the word “Taiwan.” There is an explicit assumption, therefore, that the Pescadores are an integral part of Taiwan.

These official texts suggest a special relationship between Taiwan and the Pescadores which has only gathered strength with the passage of time. However, a close analysis of the language in all cases discerns a distinct separation between the two islands. For example, in the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Article 2b cedes Taiwan, *including* all islands belonging to it. If the Pescadores “belonged” to Taiwan, why was it necessary to cede them separately in Article 2c?

¹⁰¹ Clubb, “Formosa and Offshore Islands,” *Political Science Quarterly* (1959): 518

¹⁰² “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China,” December 2, 1954, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/mutual01.htm>

¹⁰³ “Taiwan Relations Act,” January 1, 1979, <https://www.ait.org.tw/en/taiwan-relations-act.html>

The Cairo Conference, to which Chiang Kai-Shek himself was a party, lists the Pescadores in a three-part series, “such as Manchuria, Taiwan, *and* the Pescadores.”¹⁰⁴ Typically, series should be formed of qualitatively equal parts. If the drafters of the Cairo Declaration believed that the Pescadores were a subordinate part of Taiwan, this phrasing is semantically equivalent to, “such as California, Colorado, *and* Denver.” Similarly, the remaining four documents cited above, including the TRA, all explicitly reference Taiwan and the Pescadores, but make no mention of Taiwan’s other islands, such as Green Island or Orchid Island. If it is already understood that the Pescadores are an integral part of Taiwan, why is it necessary to enumerate them separately?¹⁰⁵ The histories recounted thus far in this paper should suffice to answer that question. Even if there is a gradually developing awareness of Taiwan’s *opposing* sovereignty over the Pescadores, the fact remains that for most of China and Taiwan’s history, they were not regarded as part of Taiwan.

V. From Cutting to Binding: Evolutions in The Five Islands’ Strategic Value

The PLA has come a long way since its ignominious defeat at the Battle of Gunningtou in 1949. In its 2016 annual report to Congress on Chinese military development, the U.S.

Department of Defense (DOD) made the following assessment:

“With few overt military preparations beyond routine training, China could launch an invasion of small Taiwan-held islands in the South China Sea such as Pratas or Itu Aba. A PLA invasion of a medium-sized, better-defended island such as Matsu or Jinmen is within China’s capabilities.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵ Consider the equivalent implication in the following analogy: “The Jones’ family is cordially invited to the community Christmas party. Mr. Jones is also invited.”

¹⁰⁶ “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2016,” <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2016%20China%20Military%20Power%20Report.pdf>

If the PLA has the capacity to invade the islands, what is China waiting for?

It was already revealed in Section III of this paper that Quemoy operates at a ¥2 billion annual budget deficit, which falls on the shoulders of the “national” government. Together, Quemoy and Matsu have represented Taiwan’s most immediate military vulnerability for over sixty years, and have been the sole battleground for cross-strait air and surface warfare since 1955. Yet, despite the PLA’s rapidly improving capabilities, Taiwan continues to downgrade the islands’ physical defenses. Coastal pillboxes and firing positions are empty, dilapidated and open to the public, as are Quemoy’s extensive network of subterranean tunnels. The Taiwan Ministry of Defense has incrementally opened many of Quemoy’s and Matsu’s previously secret or restricted military zones in order to improve the tourism market on the islands.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, Mainland Chinese tourists can be seen everywhere, snapping selfies in front of derelict fortifications, rusted hunks of decommissioned armored vehicles, or pristine beaches littered with corroding, anti-amphibious landing obstacles.¹⁰⁸ Is Taiwan no longer worried about the prospect of a Mainland military assault on the islands? If so, why not? For that matter, why does Taiwan even bother garrisoning troops on the islands or propping up the lackluster local economies? The previous section demonstrated that Taiwan’s sovereignty claims over the islands are tenuous at best. Why then does Taiwan insist on retaining them? Why was the U.S. willing to entertain the possibility of war with China just to defend “those damn little offshore islands?”

This section examines the question of The Five Islands’ strategic value, from both PRC and Taiwan perspectives.¹⁰⁹ It finds it useful to divide the islands into two categories: 1) *front*

¹⁰⁷ Wren, “Matsu Takes Aim at Military Tourism Market,” *Taiwan Today*, September 24, 2011

¹⁰⁸ The author visited all the “front line” islands in February 2016.

¹⁰⁹ The U.S. perspective will be examined in the penultimate section of this paper.

line islands (Quemoy, Matsu and the Pescadores), and 2) *sideline* islands (Itu Aba and Pratas.) This grouping corresponds exactly to the islands’ classification as *castle* or *kingdom* islands, but this is quite by accident. The front line islands—especially Quemoy and Matsu—have performed a unique role in shaping cross-strait relations, and their strategic value has evolved in three distinct phases, to be discussed at length below. This role is largely immaterial to their dual status as kingdom islands, except insofar as their populations have constructed a sort of “cultural bridge” between the Mainland and Taiwan during the third phase. The sideline islands, as the name suggests, were too distant to play any part in this unfolding drama. Their value too has mutated slightly over the last few decades, but along an entirely different vector. Therefore, the following subsections will deal with the front line islands and sideline islands separately, and in turn.

V.1. Front Line Islands

V.1.A. Offensive Lodgments and Defensive Bulwarks

“[Quemoy] is in Xiamen harbor, and it is like holding Manhattan against the United States Army.”¹¹⁰

In 2016, a U.S. military liaison in Taipei described the offshore islands as “tactically worthless.”¹¹¹ He was not alone in this view. Admiral Yarnell’s dim appraisal of the islands has already been noted. “General J. Lawton Collins and Admiral Raymond A. Spruance both

¹¹⁰ Ralph Kartosh, member of the U.S. Military Assistance Group (USMAG) in Taipei during 1950-51. Quoted here in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 124

¹¹¹ Discussion between the author and a U.S. Marine officer in the American Institute in Taiwan’s (AIT) Liaison Affairs Section, to which the author was assigned during the entire year of 2016.

deemed Matsu and Quemoy to be *strategically valueless*,¹¹² and Don Kash wrote in 1963 that “military men are in almost universal agreement that Quemoy and Matsu, like the Tachen [Dachen] Islands which were evacuated early in 1955, have little or no military value for the defense of Taiwan.”¹¹³ Kash also argued that resources spent securing the offshores would be put to better use defending Taiwan and the Pescadores. The reader will recall that as much as 1/3 of Taiwan’s military strength was concentrated on Quemoy in 1962. Had the PRC the will and capacity to launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan during that time, Chiang would have made the PLA’s job that much easier by taking so many of his troops out of the fight.

Of course, Chiang Kai-Shek staunchly disagreed. He obstinately maintained that Quemoy and Matsu were not only critically important to Taiwan’s air-defense architecture, but were also crucial for establishing lodgments near the Mainland coastline in support of future offensive operations.¹¹⁴ Regardless of how specious such tactical justifications might have been, there is no question that Taiwan’s military forces on Quemoy, Matsu, and even the Pescadores, pose a clear and present danger to the coastal areas of Fujian. Xiamen is well within the range of conventional artillery located on Quemoy,¹¹⁵ and a vehicle-mounted multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) would place Fuzhou within striking distance for units on Matsu. Taiwan’s limited arsenal of HF-2E and HF-3 land attack cruise missiles (LACM) would normally have trouble ranging targets on the Mainland, but their deployment on the front line islands could extend their maximum effective range by 50-150 kilometers.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Clubb, “Formosa and Offshore Islands,” *Political Science Quarterly* (1959): 529 (italics added)

¹¹³ Kash, “United States Policy for Quemoy and Matsu,” *The Western Political Quarterly* (1963): 913

¹¹⁴ Lewis, “Quemoy and American China Policy.” *Asian Survey* (1962): 15

¹¹⁵ Tong, “台湾五大防线,” 党政干部文稿 (July 2000)

¹¹⁶ Minnick, “Taiwan Anti-Ship Missile Destroys Fishing Boat,” *Defense News*, July 1, 2016

The preponderance of evidence now suggests that Mao never intended to take Quemoy or Matsu during the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises, nor during the 1962 Invasion Scare.¹¹⁷ This certainly was not the case on October 25, 1949, however, when over 9,000 PLA troops aboard 300 or more fishing craft amphibiously assaulted Quemoy under cover of darkness. They met with catastrophic defeat at the hands of a 20,000 strong Nationalist force, who were dug in and waiting for them; the entire invasion force was either killed or captured. The win was a much needed salve for the bruised egos and crippled morale of Chiang and his Nationalists.¹¹⁸ They had won few battles in the preceding months, and this unqualified victory on Quemoy may at least partially explain Chiang's intractable position on the island. In 1955, he ignored American pleas to abandon the offshores, even after Eisenhower and Dulles withdrew their "secret pledge" to defend them, and tried to entice him with the promise of a 500 mile naval blockade of the Chinese coastline and the deployment of nuclear weapons on Taiwan.¹¹⁹

Even if American tacticians scoffed at the offshores' feasibility as offensive lodgments—"As Chiang's command staff on Quemoy admits, establishing a beachhead or even landing a small party on the rugged, well-defended Fukien coast would be next to impossible."¹²⁰—Mao should be forgiven for his caution. After all, the U.S. decided to "de-neutralize" the Taiwan Strait and "unleash" Chiang in February 1953, one month after Chiang himself announced that

¹¹⁷ Some of this evidence, supplemented with scholarly interpretation of Mao's real intentions, will be explored in the following sections, especially in Section V.1.B. For the present, consider Mao's own words on the subject: "All we wanted to do was show our potential. We don't want Chiang to be too far away from us. We want to keep him within our reach. Having him [on Quemoy and Matsu] means we can get at him with our shore batteries as well as our air force. If we'd occupied the islands, we would have lost the ability to cause him discomfort any time we want." Quoted in Gurtov, Melvin. "The Taiwan Strait Crisis Revisited: Politics and Foreign Policy in Chinese Motives." *Modern China* 2, no. 1 (1976): 93

¹¹⁸ For more on the Battle of Gunningtou, see Yu, Maochun Miles. "The Battle of Quemoy," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2016, Vol. 69, No. 2

¹¹⁹ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 114-115

¹²⁰ Wilson, "Quemoy and American China Policy," *Asian Survey* (1962): 15

1953 would be the “last year of preparation for the counter offensive.”¹²¹ The Communists were accustomed to such rhetoric, but the Nationalists subsequently undertook a massive buildup of forces on Quemoy and Matsu, augmented by “hundreds of landing craft...with American engines.”¹²² The futility of a Nationalist invasion appears less assured when supported by U.S. naval artillery, air support, and tactical nuclear strikes against Mainland fuel dumps and airfields; none of these options were ever completely off the table.¹²³ If securing a beachhead on the Fujian coastline was “all but impossible,” why did the PRC amass so many forces there in 1962, generating a military signature large enough to prompt U.S. concerns about an imminent Communist invasion of Taiwan?¹²⁴ In 1962, China was “down and out” after the disastrous failures of the Great Leap Forward. Mao and his staff clearly believed that a Nationalist invasion was not beyond the realm of possibility.

Aside from their implausible tactical value as bulwarks for the defense of Taiwan or as lodgments for major offensive operations on the Mainland, there is no denying that Quemoy and Matsu served as bases for an unremitting harassment campaign against Communist positions and shipping along the Fujian coast throughout the 1950s. Due to their proximity to Xiamen and Fuzhou, respectively, they were ideal platforms for frequent Nationalist air raids and commando infiltrations,¹²⁵ and for the enforcement of an effective naval and artillery blockade of both harbors.¹²⁶ These activities must have been a considerable source of annoyance for the CCP, and

¹²¹ Clubb, “Formosa and Offshore Islands,” *Political Science Quarterly* (1959): 518

¹²² “Chiang Predicts Mainland Attack,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1954

¹²³ U.S. responses and crisis management will be examined in Section VII of this paper.

¹²⁴ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 132

¹²⁵ For a colorful infotainment piece on contemporaneous commando (or “frogmen”) operations, see “Commando - Guerrilla Offensive,” *Taiwan Today*, January 01, 1965, <https://taiwantoday.tw/news.php?unit=4&post=6977>

¹²⁶ Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 124-125

at least partially motivated the inexorable succession of offshore island seizures in 1950-1955, already noted earlier in this paper.

This section has assessed the tactical value of the front line islands, particularly Quemoy and Matsu, but it has not adequately answered the question: Why these islands? What makes Quemoy, Matsu and the Pescadores more tactically valuable than Dengbu, Pishan, Yushan, Zhoushan, Dachen, Nanchi, Hainan or *any* other of the offshore islands Chiang surrendered after 1949? As for the Pescadores, the answer is fairly straightforward: They widened operational windows for combat aircraft and extend the effective ranges of LACMs by decreasing the distance between Taiwan and the Mainland, while still remaining safely out of reach for much of the PLA's combat power. For Quemoy and Matsu, however, the question is harder to answer. Certainly, Xiamen and Fuzhou are both important Chinese ports, but were they more important than Shanghai, which the Nationalists were able to cover from the Dachens?¹²⁷ Miles Yu contends that Xiamen is the most likely port of embarkation for a seaborne invasion of Taiwan.¹²⁸ Fuzhou, arguably, is a close second. This explanation is eminently reasonable, and is supported by the historical record.¹²⁹ Quemoy's and Matsu's association with the Koxinga myth and the Mazu cult,¹³⁰ respectively, offer additional explanations. Furthermore, the Nationalists may have become psychologically invested in Quemoy after their overwhelming victory in the Battle of Gunningtou. It is also possible that neither Quemoy nor Matsu had any greater tactical value than the other islands, but were simply the last two remaining Nationalist outposts in the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Yu, "The Battle of Quemoy," *Naval War College Review*, Spring 2016, 92

¹²⁹ Recall that Lin Taochen, Koxinga, and Shi Lang all sailed eastward to the Pescadores and Taiwan from Xiamen.

¹³⁰ For more information on the Mazu cult, see Sangren, P. Steven. "History and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy: The Ma Tsu Cult of Taiwan." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 4 (1988): 674-97. According to legend, Mazipo, the devoted daughter of a Fuzhou fisherman, once used her spiritual powers to save her parents from a violent storm and was later apotheosized and worshiped as a Chinese goddess. Today, Matsu is still an important pilgrimage destination for her followers on Taiwan and the Mainland.

offshore area. Freed from commitments on the other islands, Chiang may have felt more confident in his ability to retain them.

V.I.B. Keeping it in the Ring: China's DMZ

The PLA's defeat at Guningtou exposed severe shortcomings in its naval and amphibious capabilities, but their subsequent victories at Hainan, the Zhoushans and Dachens all demonstrated marked improvements. Why then did the PLA never venture a second assault on Quemoy? For that matter, why have they *never* attempted to seize Matsu? If we are to believe the bulk of official and expert opinion, the mutual bombardments and dogfights of the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises should not be interpreted as preludes to invasion. A senior policy planner with the U.S. State Department serving in Taiwan during the 1st Strait Crisis recalled that "our judgments were that they, in fact, did not intend to seize the island [Quemoy]."¹³¹ Chinese officials have similarly maintained that the PLA only ever intended to seize the Dachens in the early months of 1955; declassified CIA reports corroborate this claim.¹³² This still does not answer the central question: Why not? Why seize one, but decline to move against the other?

The PLA learned in 1949 that Quemoy is a hard target; its defensive capacity improved steadily through the 50s and 60s. As Ravenal observed in 1971:

"[Quemoy] presents the prospect of a bloodbath for an attacking communist force. The nationalists have 65,000 troops on Quemoy and Little Quemoy and have spent the 17 years since the communist bombardment of 1954-55 digging in to indestructible positions, with landing areas thickly protected and armored forces in reserve to defeat attempts to establish a beachhead."¹³³

¹³¹ Paul Kreisberg, quoted in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 130

¹³² Chang et al. "The Absence of War," *The American Historical Review* (1993): 1507

¹³³ Ravenal, "Approaching China, Defending Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1971

Quemoy's supposed impregnability does not apply to the loosely scattered islands of Matsu, however, which currently have only one third as many ROC forces (5,000)¹³⁴ as the U.S. helped evacuate from the Dachens (15,000) in 1955.¹³⁵

There was no small threat of U.S. intervention during the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crisis; indeed, that threat undoubtedly remains a key variable in the PRC's strategic calculations vis-à-vis Taiwan to the present day. Mao reportedly wanted to avoid U.S. combat involvement in the offshores, which is why he forbade his commanders to attack the Dachens if U.S. forces were present.¹³⁶ If that was true, however, the PLA's intelligence was woefully incomplete. In fact, there *were* U.S. forces in the vicinity of the Dachens when Mao attacked Yijiangshan in January 1955, and they remained long enough cover the Nationalists' evacuation. What is more, eight U.S. servicemen were among the 1,000 Nationalist ground forces on Yijiangshan when PLA amphibious forces overwhelmed the defenders on January 18, 1955.¹³⁷ Likewise, the presence of U.S. forces on Quemoy and Matsu had not prevented the Communists from shelling both islands in September 1954, killing two U.S. servicemembers.¹³⁸ Furthermore, if Mao truly believed that the Dachens posed a greater threat to Mainland security than either Quemoy or Matsu, as some scholars suggest, then he would not have failed to assume that the U.S. and Chiang agreed.¹³⁹ If his greatest concern was to prevent U.S. intervention in the conflict, it makes little sense to attack the most strategically important target first. It would have been far safer to assault an island of lesser value, and then gauge the U.S. response before escalating the situation. The truth is that

¹³⁴ Wren, "Matsu Takes Aim at Military Tourism Market," *Taiwan Today*, September 24, 2011

¹³⁵ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 66

¹³⁶ Chang et al. "The Absence of War," *The American Historical Review* (1993): 1510

¹³⁷ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 101. According to Chang, seven of the eight were evacuated before the PLA was able to seize the entire island. The fate of the remaining soldier is unclear.

¹³⁸ Chang et al. "The Absence of War," *The American Historical Review* (1993): 1505

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1510

Mao was already playing an extremely dangerous game, and while he no doubt was gravely concerned with U.S. policy and potential U.S. reactions to his provocations, the fear of intervention alone is not sufficient to explain his restraint regarding Quemoy and Matsu.

A consensus was already developing among scholars, officials and experts in the 1950s that Mao was reluctant to take Quemoy and Matsu for the same reason that Chiang was so determined to keep them. Both leaders were worried about the consequences if the Nationalists disengaged from the offshores and withdrew completely across the Taiwan Strait.

“Politically, if there had been a severance of the offshore islands from Taiwan, it would probably have intensified the probability of a political separation of Taiwan from the mainland. What the islands represented was the link of China with Taiwan.”¹⁴⁰

American journalist Anna Louise Strong wrote the following in a Moscow-based news publication in 1958:

“It is clear to anyone in China that Peking could have taken Tsinmentao [Quemoy] by warfare or got it by bargaining with Dulles. To take Tsinmentao at present, without taking Taiwan, would isolate Taiwan and thus assist Dulles in his policy of building 'two Chinas.'”¹⁴¹

Neither side wanted an American trusteeship on Taiwan; nor were they eager to defenestrate their plans for reunification. Former U.S. diplomat and sinologist George Kerr drove the point home in his imperishable and controversial memoir, *Formosa Betrayed*:

“If the Communists succeeded in taking Quemoy they would be faced with the need to make good promises to take Formosa as well and that endeavor would certainly mean the quick destruction of Chinese cities and industrial concentrations everywhere in China.”¹⁴²

The PLA had been so successful in forcing the Nationalists off of their numerous “outposts” along the Chinese coast that they had very nearly driven them entirely out of reach forever. Before June 1950, several U.S. officials believed that a Communist invasion of Taiwan

¹⁴⁰ Paul Kreisberg, quoted in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 130

¹⁴¹ Lewis, "Quemoy and American China Policy," *Asian Survey* (1962): 12-13

¹⁴² Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (1992): 430-431

was not only imminent, but almost guaranteed to succeed,¹⁴³ such was the wretched state of Nationalist morale and the hostile political environment of Taiwan, where the Nationalists were resented every bit as much as the Japanese. After Kim Il-Sung and his army poured across the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950, however, Truman moved the 7th Fleet into the Strait, and forced China to postpone the liberation of Taiwan indefinitely. With the U.S. joining the fray, China would require an advanced navy and air force if it hoped to stage a successful invasion of Taiwan.¹⁴⁴ In 1950, the CCP had nothing of the sort, and one U.S. analyst estimated that a “single American aircraft carrier accompanied by a modest cruiser and destroyer force would have been adequate to crush any invasion attempt.”¹⁴⁵

Mao needed a way to impose measurable and highly visible military costs on the Nationalists, which he could then feed to the Chinese public through the state-controlled media and thus keep them mentally focused and emotionally invested in the ultimate liberation of Taiwan. Quemoy and Matsu provided the perfect setting for these “information operations.” Chiang required a similar vehicle for elevating the state of readiness domestically, and for drumming up support internationally. It would have been politically awkward for U.S. leaders to downgrade military support for Taiwan while Nationalist forces were actively engaged on the offshores. Whenever PLA artillery pummeled Quemoy and Matsu from 1954-1979, Nationalist troops would later emerge from their bunkers to “count shells.” The Taiwan media would then frantically wire the final tallies to press offices all over the world for global dissemination.¹⁴⁶ Foreign delegations to Taipei were often hurried over to Quemoy and Matsu for the grand tour of

¹⁴³ Huebner, "The Abortive Liberation of Taiwan." *The China Quarterly* (1987): 268

¹⁴⁴ Chang et al. "The Absence of War," *The American Historical Review* (1993): 1510

¹⁴⁵ Huebner, "The Abortive Liberation of Taiwan." *The China Quarterly* (1987): 275

¹⁴⁶ Lewis, "Quemoy and American China Policy," *Asian Survey* (1962): 14

their impressive fortifications, or to experience the thrill of a Communist barrage, giving rise to derisive appellations for the offshores like “Chiang’s Quemoy-Matsu National Park.”¹⁴⁷

The CCP and KMT labored jointly, therefore, to transform the front line islands into a Chinese version of the Korean Peninsula’s DMZ. Quemoy and Matsu became a faux battleground and quasi-diplomatic forum, where both sides could engage in aggressive behavior completely divorced from actual intentions of war. Military confrontations substituted for diplomatic engagement, which was nonexistent. For example, it is widely acknowledged now that Mao started shelling Quemoy and Matsu in September 1954, precipitating the 1st Taiwan Strait Crisis, in order to prevent the U.S. from signing a mutual defense treaty (MDF) with Taiwan.¹⁴⁸ Mao could not have failed to notice that the U.S. had balked at signing a MDF with South Korea until after the armistice, and he decided to test the hypothesis on the offshores.¹⁴⁹ In addition, from 1958-1979, the Communists and Nationalists exchanged artillery fire—typically propaganda rounds—on alternate days; that is, the CCP would fire on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while the KMT fired on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, with an inexplicable truce every Sunday.¹⁵⁰ This absurd ritual continued unfailingly until January 1, 1979, when the U.S. normalized relations with the PRC, whereupon the cannons abruptly went silent.¹⁵¹ Clearly, the “Odd Days War,” as the phenomenon came to be known, had been little more than a diplomatic signal to the U.S. A final example of this “crisis diplomacy” occurred on June 18, 1960, when PLA cannons rocked Quemoy with a record-breaking 86,000 rounds to

¹⁴⁷ Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (1992): 431

¹⁴⁸ Of course, these efforts were unsuccessful, if not counterproductive, as the U.S. signed an MDF with on December 2, 1954, and went into effect on March 3, 1955.

¹⁴⁹ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 24-25

¹⁵⁰ Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (1992): 431

¹⁵¹ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 140

protest Eisenhower's visit to Taipei. The PRC punctuated its displeasure with a valedictory stonk on the following day, just as Eisenhower was boarding his plane for departure.¹⁵²

V.I.C. A Toe in the Water: The Three Mini-Links

On October 2, 2000, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council¹⁵³ published the results of its impact study for a proposed "Three Mini-Links" (TML) policy which would effectively end a 50 year ban on direct trade, travel and communication between the two sides of the strait. The PRC should have been elated and highly receptive to the proposal. After all, they had been promulgating their own "Three Direct Links" (TDL) concept since December 1979, when the People's Congress called for "starting postal and air and shipping services across the Straits as soon as possible," and "developing trade, supplying each other's needs, and conducting economic exchanges."¹⁵⁴ There was a catch, however. Taiwan's TML would only involve the trial resumption of direct links between the front line islands and cities on the Fujian coastline. Furthermore, the policy would chiefly apply only to Quemoy and Matsu; the Pescadores would only establish links on a case-by-case basis. The MAC study stated that the "aim of the exercise is [to] strengthen and stimulate economic growth and development of these off-shore islands."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 131

¹⁵³ The MAC is the Taiwan governmental organ responsible for formulating, recommending, and implementing cross-strait policy. The equivalent on the Mainland is the Taiwan Affairs Office. The two councils, however, do not communicate directly, since there is still no direct "state-to-state" contact. Instead, they work through semi-private organizations which serve as go-betweens. For Taiwan, it is the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF). For China, it is the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS). The author visited the MAC and SEF several times while working in Taiwan during 2016.

¹⁵⁴ "Actively and Realistically Promote 'Three Direct Links,'" Taiwan Affairs Office, December 17, 2003, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/twwt/t56495.htm>

¹⁵⁵ "Report on the Preliminary Impact Study of the 'Three Mini-links,'" Mainland Affairs Council, October 2, 200, <http://www.mac.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=56792&ctNode=6148&mp=3>

The PRC was not particularly pleased, but grudgingly agreed to play along. In an official press statement, Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) spokesman Zhang Mingqing objected that “these are not the three direct links of trade, mail and air and shipping services across the straits, known as the ‘three direct links,’ in a genuine sense and could not meet the demands of cross-straits exchange.” He added, however, “We are willing to support the so-called three ‘mini links’, but we still hope the Taiwan authorities would give a go-ahead for the ‘three direct links’ across the straits as early as possible.”¹⁵⁶ Taiwan unilaterally implemented the TML on January 1, 2001, and commercial cross-strait activity grew steadily year on year despite the “diplomatic freeze” during Chen Shuibian’s presidency (2000-2008). This was especially true for transportation. For example, the total number of individual trips between Taiwan and the Mainland through the TML increased from a mere 25,469 in 2001 to 1,041,386 in 2008.¹⁵⁷ During Ma Ying-Jeou’s presidency (2008-2016), the TML made meaningful progress toward a true TDL. The Pescadores were nearly fully integrated into the TML framework in mid-2007,¹⁵⁸ and direct flights from Taiwan to the Mainland started in 2008.¹⁵⁹

The benefits of the TML for the tourist economies of the front line islands were already highlighted in Section III of this paper. On balance, the effects of the islands’ “special relationship” with the Mainland have been overwhelmingly positive. Li Woshi, a Kinmen County magistrate, likely spoke for all of the front line islands when he said that the “outlying island[s] should not be seen just as a hub for travel between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait,

¹⁵⁶ “Necessary Revision of Textbooks Attempting to Separate China,” Taiwan Affairs Office, December 26, 2001, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t36749.htm>

¹⁵⁷ “金馬「小三通」人員往來統計表,” Mainland Affairs Council (2008), <http://www.mac.gov.tw/public/Data/97111275171.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ “‘Three Mini-Links’ Project Includes Penghu,” *China Plus*, English site, April 2, 2007

¹⁵⁹ “‘Mini links’ Improve Cross-Strait Relations,” *The China Post*, January 6, 2011

but also as a testing ground for other policies.”¹⁶⁰ The current section of this paper deals with the evolving *strategic value* of the front line islands. The TML, therefore, illustrates a modern, non-military function for the islands, which nevertheless remain a type of test bed and proving ground for cross-strait policy and power plays. More importantly, the TML constitutes yet another tacit admission that these three islands are politically distinct from Taiwan. In support of this point, consider that multiple-entry landing visas issued to Mainlanders visiting the front line islands are not valid for entry to the main island of Taiwan.¹⁶¹ The Taiwan authorities’ willingness to expose the islands to exploratory risk, as a person dips a toe into uncertain waters, implies that they are “something else” altogether, or at least that they are expendable.

V.2. Riding the Bench: Sideline Islands

“Taiwan is not much concerned about an invasion of Taiping Island by the PRC... unless there is a serious deterioration in cross-strait relations, Beijing could hardly justify taking military action against Taiping.”¹⁶²

Although Taiwan military garrisons have occupied Pratas and Itu Aba since 1946 and 1956, respectively, the tyranny of distance effectively removed them from the grand spectacle of the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises. After 1970, however, as Quemoy and Matsu bowed off the stage, the islands of the South China Sea (SCS) emerged on the scene and drew world attention.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Chinese May Soon Visit Taiwan via Isles,” *The China Post*, September 5, 2008; Similarly, entry permits to Hong Kong and Macau are not valid for entry into Mainland China, but there is at least one important difference. The unique visa requirements in Hong Kong and Macau have been in place since their retrocession, and are part of the “one country, two systems” approach implemented to ease their political and economic transition from colonial outpost to full integration with the PRC. In contrast, the Taiwan authorities implemented the TML visa policy without any change in the islands’ legal/territorial status. In other words, the PRC has been gradually moving from separation to integration, while the Taiwan authorities have suddenly moved in the opposite direction, without external pressure.

¹⁶² Lin, Cheng-yi. “Taiwan’s South China Sea Policy.” *Asian Survey* 37 (1997): 323-39

The PLA Navy (PLAN) had not been active in the SCS before January 1974, when it clashed with Vietnamese vessels in the vicinity of the Paracels. A similar naval skirmish occurred in 1988 near Johnson Reef, in the Spratly Formation.¹⁶³ Later, in 2012, a standoff between the PLAN and a Philippine warship grabbed international headlines.¹⁶⁴ Since 2013, the PRC's aggressive land reclamation and island-building (填海造岛, *tian hai zao dao*) activities have redefined the SCS as a focal point for global media, security professionals, and academics alike. To the present date, however, the PRC has never directly threatened Itu Aba or Pratas, nor have they scuffled with Taiwan naval ships in the SCS—although there is a history of PRC interdiction, boarding and inspection of Taiwan fishing vessels.¹⁶⁵ In fact, their joint occupation of islands in the SCS is an area of common ground, neatly circumscribed by the enigmatic U-shaped line. The increasing usage of the term, “U-shaped line” (‘U’型线, ‘U’*xing xian*), as opposed to other formulations like the 9-dash line, 10-dash line, or 11-dash line (九/十/十一段线, *jiu/shi/shi yi duan xian*), highlights the congruity of the PRC's and Taiwan's claims. One could almost say that the shape traces a “smile” on cross-strait relations.

For the PRC, Itu Aba and Pratas are strategically valuable *because* Taiwan claims and defends them. There can be little doubt that China would quickly occupy them if Taiwan withdrew, lest it face the prospect of forcibly removing another country's military, e.g. the Philippines or Vietnam. The islands also have intrinsic value due to their size and advanced infrastructure, along with their advantageous position, which enlarges an occupier's territorial waters—and potential EEZ, if the PCA award is ever appealed or overturned. In addition, this

¹⁶³ Yoshihara, Toshi. “The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle: A Campaign Appraisal,” *Naval War College Review* (Spring 2016)

¹⁶⁴ Miks, Jason. “China, Philippines in Standoff,” *The Diplomat*, April 11, 2012

¹⁶⁵ Lin, “Taiwan's South China Sea Policy,” *Asian Survey* (1997): 323-39

paper argues that China would move against the islands if Taiwan achieved de jure independence. Until that happens, however, Taiwan's presence on the islands inestimably strengthens Beijing's own position in the SCS, for several reasons.

First, Taiwan has helped the PRC downgrade Itu Aba and Pratas to an "economy of force" mission; that is, Taiwan spends energy and resources developing and defending the islands, so China is free to focus their efforts elsewhere.¹⁶⁶ Taiwan's stewardship of the islands ensures that they will not fall into the hands of another regional power. Meanwhile, all of China's rival claimants in the SCS maintain a "One China" policy, meaning that they legally view Taiwan as a political extension of Beijing in the SCS. This is at least one of the reasons why Taiwan was denied permission to participate in the PCA proceedings or even to send a delegation to observe them.¹⁶⁷ When the PCA announced its award on July 12, 2016, therefore, Taiwan predictably—and in chorus with Beijing—denounced the ruling, since they were a party to neither the arbitration nor the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹⁶⁸ Months before the ruling, the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) had preemptively rejected the outcome of the arbitration in an official statement:

"The Philippines has not invited the ROC to participate in its arbitration with mainland China, and the arbitral tribunal has not solicited the ROC's views. Therefore, the arbitration does not affect the ROC in any way, and the ROC neither recognizes nor accepts related awards."¹⁶⁹

Taiwan had offered *unsolicited* views, however, when they submitted evidence supporting Itu Aba's status as an island, as opposed to a rock, reef, or "high tide feature." The Philippines

¹⁶⁶ The U.S. Army's ADRP 3-0, *Operations*, defines economy of force as "Expend[ing] minimum essential combat power on secondary efforts in order to allocate the maximum possible combat power on primary efforts."

¹⁶⁷ Tiezzi, Shannon. "Taiwan President Ma to Visit Disputed South China Sea Island," *The Diplomat*, January 28, 2016

¹⁶⁸ Tiezzi, Shannon. "Taiwan: South China Sea Ruling 'Completely Unacceptable,'" *The Diplomat*, July 13, 2016

¹⁶⁹ "ROC Government Reiterates its Position on South China Sea Issues," MOFA press statement, October 31, 2015, accessed April 18, 2017, http://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/News_Content.aspx?n=1EADDCFD4C6EC567&s=F5170FE043DADE98

encouraged the tribunal to allow the submission because China had declined to appear for the proceedings,¹⁷⁰ although the court persisted in referring to Taiwan as “The Taiwan Authority of China,” underscoring the congruity of China’s and Taiwan’s claims. In this instance too, therefore, Itu Aba became an economy of force operation; China did not have to defend Itu Aba in the arbitration because Taiwan did it for them.

Second, Itu Aba and Pratas provide fertile soil for cross-strait cooperation. PRC Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Yingchun offered the following answer to a question about the MOFA statement cited above:

“I want to stress that Chinese people from both sides of the Straits have the responsibility and obligation to jointly uphold territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of the country.”¹⁷¹

During the 1988 confrontation between China and Vietnam in the Spratlys, Taiwan defense minister Cheng Weiyuan indicated that Taiwan was willing to help the PRC defend the Spratlys against a third-party, if asked.¹⁷² Then in 1993, another defense minister said the nature of cross-strait relations “does not preclude and does not eliminate the possibility of exchanging views on these issues [peaceful development and administration of the archipelago] with the Chinese mainland.”¹⁷³ In 1995, despite the political imbroglio Lee Teng-Hui caused by visiting his alma mater in the U.S., two oil magnates—one PRC and the other Taiwan—nevertheless reached a preliminary agreement for joint oil exploration in the vicinity of Pratas.¹⁷⁴

Third, Taiwan’s involvement in the SCS “muddies” the waters for other claimants, as well as for interested bystanders like the U.S. As one PRC scholar put it: “Should mainland

¹⁷⁰ Permanent Court of Arbitration. “PCA Case N° 2013-19,” July 12, 2016, 31-32

¹⁷¹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on November 2, 2015,” PRC Foreign Ministry, accessed April 18, 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1311236.shtml

¹⁷² Lin, “Taiwan’s South China Sea Policy,” *Asian Survey* (1997): 332

¹⁷³ Sun Chen, quoted in *Ibid.*, 333

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 333

China and Taiwan stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the negotiation process, they will make a stronger case vis-à-vis other claimants.” The PRC and Taiwan reinforce each other’s claims because they are founded on the same historical and documentary evidence. For the international audience, this reality indirectly endorses China’s claim alone, since all but 22 countries acknowledge the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China. It also makes it substantially harder for unilateral or multilateral efforts to curb China’s activities in the SCS, since Taiwan is basically complicit in China’s maritime territorial ambitions; in fact, Taiwan’s ambitions in the SCS are even broader. After all, their “line” has two more dashes. How mortifying would it be for the U.S. to find itself thrust into a military standoff with the PRC *and* Taiwan?

For Taiwan, the PRC’s strategic interests in the sideline islands mirror several of their own. China’s congruent sovereignty claims over Itu Aba and Pratas tend to strengthen Taiwan’s own position. Likewise, China’s military presence in the SCS mitigates Taiwan’s vulnerability to regional security threats, although it is unclear what price Taiwan would have to pay for Chinese intervention. Of course, the PLAN also poses a direct, existential threat to Taiwan’s control of Itu Aba and Pratas, but the point being made here is that Taiwan could possibly count on Chinese support if the Philippines, for instance, attacked one of the islands. Furthermore, cross-strait relations absolutely stand to benefit from the types of bilateral cooperation cited in the paragraph above. In short, these interests exhibit *reciprocal* strategic effects.

However, Taiwan has at least two strategic interests in these islands which are not shared by the PRC. First, since the KMT’s defeat in 1949, Taiwan has experienced a steady and humiliating contraction of its maneuver space in two key areas: 1) *geographically*, from 1949-1955, when the CCP seized most of its few remaining offshore holdings; and 2) *politically*, since

1971, when it lost its seat in the UN and began slowly hemorrhaging diplomatic partners. Therefore, retaining control of the sideline islands is partly about protecting Taiwan's fragile "national" pride and prestige. So far from Taiwan, and nearer in fact to some other of the SCS littoral states, Itu Aba and Pratas are precarious toeholds propping up Taiwan's failing grip on regional power. This explains the vitriolic outpouring of public opinion whenever foreign entities weigh in on the islands' legal status or express disapproval of Taiwan's activities upon them. When the U.S. Department of State demarched Ma Ying-Jeou's administration after the lame duck president visited Itu Aba in January 2016, the Taiwan public lashed back by taking to the street and demonstrating loudly in front of the Taipei main office of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT).¹⁷⁵

Second, Ma Ying-Jeou introduced the use of the sideline islands, especially Itu Aba, as a vehicle for enlarging Taiwan's international space. Taiwan is uniformly barred from participation in multilateral organizations requiring nation-state status. Even within those organizations it is occasionally allowed to join, e.g. the Olympics, World Health Assembly, World Trade Organization, International Civil Aviation Association, etc., it is often limited to attending as an "observer" and is always required to modify its name in some way, i.e. "Chinese Taipei," "The Separate Customs Area of Taiwan, Penghu, Jinmen and Matsu," etc. During his 2016 visit to Itu Aba, President Ma delivered a speech in which he designated the island as a "starting point" for his 2015 South China Sea Peace Initiative, whose aim was to "reduce tensions, increase dialogue, abide by international law, uphold the freedom of navigation and overflight, maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, and settle disputes peacefully." He also outlined plans to transform Itu Aba into base for multilateral security cooperation and

¹⁷⁵ The author narrowly edged between this angry mob and a phalanx of riot police on his way to work at AIT. The crowd was jeering unintelligibly and holding aloft signs which read, "Fuck You, Yankee! Go Home!"

real-world “peace” operations, as well as a center for scientific research. Ma was careful to point out that while the PRC has continued to militarize the region, Taiwan effectively did the opposite when they replaced the ROC Marine garrison with the ROC Coastguard in 2000.¹⁷⁶ If President Tsai Ing-Wen were somehow willing or able to successfully implement some version of Ma’s initiative, it would certainly win Taiwan an important seat at the table. However, it is far less certain whether China would be willing to cooperate. Without China’s participation, such initiatives are much less meaningful. If nothing else, Ma’s peace initiative at least succeeded in broadcasting Taiwan’s voice internationally. Whether anyone was listening is another question entirely.

V.3. Carrots, Sticks, and Poker Chips: An Analogy with Taiwan’s Small but Faithful Troop of Diplomatic Partners

There were several countries which transferred their diplomatic recognition to the PRC before 1971. The earliest converts were Soviet satellites or client states, or those who shared a common ideology with the CCP. The floodgates opened, however, after the ROC lost its seat in the UN, and what followed was nothing less than an exodus of biblical proportions. By 1978, Taiwan had only 21 diplomatic partners left. It is not within the scope of this paper to analyze the foreign policy of those countries who decided to change their affiliation during this period. Perhaps some countries saw the writing on the wall, and assessed that the PRC was here to stay. Other developed countries may have been lured by China’s massive population and enormous potential markets. To preserve or buy back the loyalty of poor, developing countries, Taiwan

¹⁷⁶ Ma, Yingjiu, “Remarks by President Ma on Taiping Island,” Office of the President, January 28, 2016, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://english.president.gov.tw/Default.aspx?tabid=491&itemid=36616&rmid=2355>

embarked upon a program of “dollar diplomacy,” purchasing allegiance with trade, aid and developmental assistance.¹⁷⁷ The effectiveness of this program is open to debate, but, by 2000, Taiwan had managed to recover seven countries. The years from 2000-2017, however, have borne witness to a slow reversal of these modest successes, and, as of early 2017, its ranks have dwindled back down to 22. Except for the Vatican, its remaining disciples are poor countries in Africa, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Oceania.¹⁷⁸ Whatever competitive economic advantage Taiwan may have had in past decades, it is highly doubtful that it could compete with Beijing in a bidding war at present. China’s nominal GDP in 2015 was \$11.39 trillion, compared with \$519.1 billion for Taiwan.¹⁷⁹ The GDP of Guangdong Province alone surpassed Taiwan’s in 2007.¹⁸⁰ Even conceding that Taiwan per capita GDP is much higher than the Mainland’s, there is still no way that the Taiwan authorities could outspend the CCP. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimates that the PRC’s defense spending alone in 2015 was over twice as large as Taiwan’s entire national budget.¹⁸¹

If China could “outbid” Taiwan to poach their remaining diplomatic partners, what is stopping them? Scholars suggest two possible reasons. First, the PRC has learned from recent experience that its aggressive tactics with Taiwan can sometime breed perverse effects. The PRC’s large-scale naval and amphibious exercises in 1994, which were all given menacing and highly suggestive names, like “Conquest 96” or “Doomsday of the Aircraft Carrier,” failed to dissuade Lee Teng-Hui from taking trips to Japan and the U.S. in 1995. PRC missile tests in

¹⁷⁷ Sutter, Robert G. *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy since the Cold War* (2013): 222-224

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, Adam. “Taiwan Was Already Diplomatically Isolated. Now Beijing Wants to Make It Worse,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 200

¹⁷⁹ “China” and “Taiwan,” *The CIA World Factbook*, accessed April 18, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tw.html>

¹⁸⁰ Li, Yan. “Guangdong’s Economy Large Enough to Rival GDP of Many Countries,” *The People’s Daily*, February 22, 2017

¹⁸¹ “China” and “Taiwan,” *The CIA World Factbook*, accessed April 18, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tw.html>

1995 similarly failed to prevent the KMT from re-nominating Li for the 1996 presidential election.¹⁸² Politicians often correctly judge that acquiescence in the face of threats will make them appear weak to the voting public; for some, losing an election is a far more frightening prospect than starting a war. As for the Taiwan public, China's saber rattling steeled the voters' resolve rather than softening it. Despite an alarming round of provocations just one week before the presidential election, Li still garnered 54% of the popular vote, exceeding all expectations.¹⁸³

Second, some scholars suggest that the CCP and Ma Ying-Jeou's administration entered into an unspoken "diplomatic truce" to reward Ma's dedication to repairing cross-strait relations. According to the implied terms of the truce, China would not "buy off" any more of Taiwan's diplomatic partners if Taiwan would make positive progress in the direction of reunification. For example, Gambia broke diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2013, but Beijing deferred normalization with Gambia until March 2016, after DPP candidate Tsai Ing-Wen had won the presidency.¹⁸⁴

This brief digression was intended to analogize and illustrate another strategic function common to all of The Five Islands. Beijing views the islands in much the same manner as Taiwan's diplomatic partners, as political poker chips. They can use them as carrots or sticks depending on Taiwan's actions apropos of independence. Just as the PRC could probably "steal" Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic partners, the PLA could probably seize Taiwan's few remaining outer islands. However, using the stick is a dangerous gamble for China; such military coercion could easily backfire, as it has in the past. This latter point recalls the quote at

¹⁸² Yu, Taifa. "Taiwanese Democracy under Threat: Impact and Limit of Chinese Military Coercion." *Pacific Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1997): 16-18

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 24

¹⁸⁴ Li, Yitan, and Zhang Enyu. "Changing Taiwanese Identity and Cross-Strait Relations: A Post 2016 Taiwan Presidential Election Analysis," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22 (2017): 30

the beginning of the last section: “Unless there is a serious deterioration in cross-strait relations, Beijing could hardly justify taking military action against [Itu Aba].” The same principle likely applies to the other four.

VI. Checking the Pulse of Public Opinion

Governments are responsible for formulating, promulgating and implementing official policy, but the public always has a vote—even in places like China, where the absence of democratic institutions does not necessarily preclude the public from participating in subtler forms of political expression. Populist pressure can sometimes override the better judgment or political will of experts, to which, some scholars argue, Donald Trump’s ascension to the White House in 2016 clearly attests.¹⁸⁵ This section briefly assesses China, U.S., and Taiwan public opinion on cross-strait relations, as it pertains to the outer islands. Understanding the thrust of public opinion is important because it might dictate the limits of potential military action in the Taiwan Strait, for all three governments. It also offers insight into their respective populations’ appraisals of Taiwan’s claims over the outer islands, and whether those claims merit efforts to defend them. This section also considers the identity and sensibilities of residents on the three kingdom islands, and explores how their lives are affected by the cross-strait game of tug-o-war.

¹⁸⁵ Nichols, Tom. “How America Lost Faith in Expertise: And Why That’s a Giant Problem,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2017: 62-73

VI.1. A Mixed Bag: China and U.S. Public Opinion

"We will strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest efforts and utmost sincerity, *but* will never allow any 'Taiwan independence' supporters to separate Taiwan from China under any name or in any form." ~ Ma Xiaoguang, TAO Spokesman¹⁸⁶

The “but” in Ma Xiaoguang’s statement above succinctly captures the spirit of modern China’s Taiwan policy. Deng Xiaoping may have moved the PRC’s rhetoric away from the presumptive use of force in Mao’s “Liberate Taiwan” (解放台湾, *jie fang tai wan*) campaign, when he updated the slogan to “Peaceful Reunification” (和平统一, *he ping tong yi*) in 1979,¹⁸⁷ but a non-peaceful solution has remained the dagger behind Beijing’s smile.¹⁸⁸ Nearly 70 years after the KMT retreated to Taiwan, national reunification is still the “strategic direction” of the PLA.¹⁸⁹

It is much harder to ascertain Chinese public opinion on Beijing’s Taiwan policy. The CCP has learned the wages of soliciting unbridled public criticism in historical episodes like the Hundred Flowers, Democracy Wall, or Tiananmen incidents. There is reason to believe a formal Taiwan declaration of independence would arouse passionate nationalistic reactions in Mainland Chinese, based on past experiences following the 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the 2001 U.S. EP-3 spy plane incident, the 2008 French assault of the Olympic torch relay team, or the interminable sequence of Japanese “provocations.” One U.S. survey revealed that 74% of Chinese respondents believed that settling accounts with Taiwan would ultimately

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in “‘Taiwan Independence’ Can Never Be Allowed,” *Xinhua News*, March 29, 2017 (emphasis added)

¹⁸⁷ Du, Dashan, “关于解放台湾方针的历史实践及其他,” 华中师范大学学报 哲社版 (1994)

¹⁸⁸ One of the 36 stratagems ().

¹⁸⁹ “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2016,” page 43, <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2016%20China%20Military%20Power%20Report.pdf>

result in armed conflict.¹⁹⁰ The *acknowledgment* alone, however, does not equate to *approval*.

Indeed, Chinese scholar Shi Guhong cautions against this very assumption:

“If a large-scale military conflict breaks out over the Taiwan matter...and becomes particularly intense and protracted due to the diehard resistance of the Taiwan authorities and a large-scale U.S. military intervention, we probably would not have high expectations that most of the Mainland Chinese people would forever actively support a military struggle that would have a huge cost and an uncertain outcome.”¹⁹¹

Another scholar said, “China could let Taiwan go independent. China is big enough to afford it.”¹⁹² Other voices sing a different tune, however. One university student surmised:

“If we can’t get Taiwan back, the Chinese government may lose its power to control the people. It will show that the government is too weak to protect our territory.”¹⁹³

A PLA officer confessed:

“People have very strong feelings about the Taiwan issue. If the leaders...do nothing while Taiwan declares independence, the [CCP] will fall.”¹⁹⁴

And a political commentator remarked that “Taiwan is a question of regime survival—no regime could survive the loss of Taiwan.”¹⁹⁵ In short, if domestic pressure is sufficiently high, the CCP may be compelled to make good on its threats and “see it through” to the bitter end. If strong public support for a full-scale invasion is weak or uncertain, however, Beijing may settle on a less extreme course of action, contenting itself with modest territorial acquisitions, i.e. The Five Islands, which slake the public’s thirst for retribution, yet entail fewer strategic risks.

What about American public opinion? The mere possibility of U.S. intervention represents Taiwan’s most powerful deterrent to PLA aggression. As a liberal, Western democracy, U.S. foreign policy derives partly from a combination of strategic interest and expert

¹⁹⁰ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (2007): 181

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Finkelstein, David M. “Chinese Perceptions of the Cost of Conflict,” *The Costs of Conflict: The Impact on China of a Future War*, ed. Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2001): 22

¹⁹² Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (2007): 187

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 186

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 181

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182

advice, but the greatest motive force is public opinion, which is much more mercurial and much less informed. In fact, a 2012 Pew Research Center poll revealed that 34% of American's admitted they knew nothing about cross-strait issues. Another 54% claimed to "know a little"; only 10% of Americans felt comfortably aware of the key issues. Of the 10% who claimed to have a workable knowledge of the situation, 48% supported U.S. intervention in the event of a Chinese invasion, while 43% rejected the idea. This contrasted slightly with expert opinion, which largely conditioned its support on Taiwan's conduct regarding independence activities. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of experts supported U.S. military intervention in response to unprovoked aggression, but only 27% felt that the U.S. should use force if China's move followed a unilateral declaration of independence by Taiwan.¹⁹⁶

A 2014 Chicago Council poll did not control for relative subject matter expertise, and therefore generated slightly different, but equally dismal results. In this survey, only 26% of Americans supported military intervention on behalf of Taiwan, a response that was fairly consistent with the performance in seven prior Chicago Council polls conducted periodically in 1998-2012, where support hovered between 25% and 33%. Perhaps most surprising was the revelation that Americans feel fairly neutral toward Taiwan, which scored only 52 on a scale of 0-100, where 0 indicated a "very cold, unfavorable feeling" and 100 meant a "very warm, favorable feeling."¹⁹⁷ For perspective, Turkey scored a 50 on the same scale.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ "U.S. Public, Experts Differ on China Policies," Pew Research Center, September 18, 2012, accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/09/18/u-s-public-experts-differ-on-china-policies/>

¹⁹⁷ Smeltz, Dina S., and Craig Kafura. "Americans Affirm Ties to Allies in Asia," *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs* (2014): 12-13, accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2014%20Chicago%20Council%20Survey%20-%20Asia%20Report.pdf>

¹⁹⁸ "Americans 'Neutral' on Taiwan; China Not a Threat: Poll," *Taipei Times*, September 18, 2014

Considering American's lukewarm affection for Taiwan writ large, should one expect a stronger commitment toward The Five Islands? For example, would the 34% of Americans who knew nothing about cross-strait relations nevertheless affirm their strong support for Taiwan's opposing claim over the Pescadores? Or would the 64% of experts who opposed intervention if Taiwan were invaded after a declaration of independence¹⁹⁹ reconsider their position if it were Quemoy or Itu Aba that were attacked instead? Of course not. Because public opinion is uninformed, however, it is susceptible to information in ways that expert opinion is not. Early on, this paper took note of Quemoy and Matsu's absence from the news since 1985. The eruption of violence on the outer islands would hurry them back to the forefront of American attention. Informed—and possibly ill-informed—opinions would begin to crystallize, replacing ignorance, and feeding on a steady diet of emotive front line photojournalism. Under such circumstances, it is nearly impossible to predict the U.S. public's final disposition toward Taiwan, to say nothing of its outer islands.

VI.2. The Elephant in the Room: Taiwan Public Opinion

The world has made a habit of ignoring Taiwan; what Taiwan wants appears largely immaterial to what it gets, and whatever it gets usually requires China's imprimatur. Taiwan public opinion on the status of the outer islands, therefore, is most germane to this study not because it could *demand* positive action from bystander nations, but because it could *excuse* passivity and inaction. This point is admittedly subtle and deserves further explanation. Imagine that Taiwan has unilaterally declared independence, and China has responded militarily by

¹⁹⁹ "U.S. Public, Experts Differ on China Policies," Pew Research Center, September 18, 2012

amphibiously assaulting and seizing the Pescadores. The surveys cited above indicate initially marginal public support for U.S. military intervention. A White House frantically sussing out domestic opinion and fitfully groping for politically viable alternatives is less likely to be swayed by Taiwan's foot-stomping and vehement affirmations of sovereignty than by Taiwan's shrugs and blasé dismissal of the islands. Meanwhile, the average U.S. voter and taxpayer will tune into the news and dive into the bowels of the internet in an attempt to "catch up" on cross-strait relations and Chinese modern history. Will her evolving opinion be affected more by learning that Taiwan—a "country" she likes only slightly more than Turkey—is a little bigger than she had previously thought, or by realizing that Taiwans themselves acknowledge that the Pescadores really belong to the PRC? This section will attempt to assess Taiwan public opinion on the status and fate of The Five Islands. It finds that there is a certain fatalism regarding Quemoy and Matsu that does not apply to perceptions of the other three.

The author was unable to discover a single scientific survey of Taiwan public opinion regarding the status of The Five Islands after Taiwan independence. In fact, the general academic neglect of this topic was the most important factor inspiring this study. The absence of even Taiwan-administered, Chinese-language surveys invites two explanations: 1) people are afraid to ask the questions; or 2) people already know the answers.²⁰⁰ In the former case, the Taiwan authorities might be understandably reluctant to undertake a survey whose answers could betray Taiwans' ambivalence concerning the outer islands and thus enervate bystander resolve. In the latter case, it is difficult for the foreign researcher to ascertain *which* answers the people already know without asking the questions. Because there is such a dearth of authoritative

²⁰⁰ Another possibility is that potential researchers lack sufficient funding. However, the inability to obtain funding begs a similar question.

material which deals directly with the present subject matter, this paper is forced to consider sources which are less direct and less authoritative.

Taiwan is already a “mature and vibrant democracy.”²⁰¹ In most democracies, voting is an outward expression of *personal* opinion. Election results, therefore, collect and amalgamate the sum of personal opinions to form an approximation of *public* opinion. So, what can elections tell us about Taiwan public opinion regarding The Five Islands?

One scholar was asked the following questions during a trip to Matsu:

“Why does the Democratic Progressive Party’s (DPP) flag only show Taiwan Island? Where are Quemoy, Matsu and the Pescadores? Is it really possible that these four island groups don’t add up to a single country?”²⁰²

The omission of the three kingdom islands from the DPP flag (Figure 3)²⁰³ could have been a purely aesthetic choice, having more to do with problems of scale than insidious political intentions, but the residents of Quemoy and Matsu do have some cause for worry. In 1994, DPP Chairman Shi Mingde sparked a “nation-wide” controversy when he openly advocated for the withdrawal of Taiwan military troops from Quemoy and Matsu, a proposal titled “The Case for Withdrawing Troops from Quemoy and Matsu” (金马撤军论, *jin ma che jun lun*). Shi argued that removing the overt military presence was an important step in the demilitarization of the Taiwan Strait and would improve the local economies of the outer islands.²⁰⁴ Residents on the islands drew an altogether different conclusion: the DPP wanted to withdraw troops as a prelude to abandoning the islands politically—sacrificial lambs for the cause of independence. When

²⁰¹ Drew Lebkuecher, Political Officer at the American Institute in Taipei. He frequently used this phrase to describe Taiwan’s political system in multiple deskside briefings with the author.

²⁰² Translated by the author from Chen, “馬祖：政經邊緣的認同游移,” 世新大學社會發展研究所碩士論文 (2011): 7; original Chinese: 重點在於民進黨的黨旗，為什麼只有台灣島，沒有金門、馬祖、澎湖...難道台澎金馬不是一國嗎?

²⁰³ “民進黨黨旗將增金馬澎湖地圖 以展現族群融合,” *Sina World News*, March 25, 2009

²⁰⁴ “「金馬撤軍論」逐漸成形,” *Apple Daily*, September 29, 2003, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20030929/388148/>

DPP official Chen Caineng visited Matsu in 2004 in order to find a candidate to represent Lianchang County in the Legislative Yuan, local trust in the DPP had not improved; Shi Mingde and his proposal were still the face of the Party.²⁰⁵ It did not help matters when another proposal, entitled “The Case for Abandoning Quemoy and Matsu (金马放弃论, *jin ma fang qi lun*), began circulating Taiwan cyberspace. As of mid-2015, the DPP had still never issued an official statement refuting its attribution to the Party, despite numerous accusations to that effect; this



Figure 3 – DPP Flag. (Source: Sina World News, March 25, 2009)

only led to further distrust among the residents of Quemoy and Matsu.²⁰⁶

It should come as no surprise then that Tsai Ing-Wen’s poorest showings in Taiwan’s 2016 presidential election were in Kinmen and Lianchang

Counties, i.e. Quemoy and Matsu, where she secured only 18% and 16% of the local vote, respectively. The KMT candidate, Eric Chu, by contrast, won 66% and 69%, his strongest showing “nationally.” In Taiwan Province, Cai’s worst performance had been in Hualian County, where she earned 37%; Chu bagged 48% of the vote there, his biggest win after Quemoy and Matsu.²⁰⁷ These results evince a clear disjunction of public opinion between the residents of Fujian and Taiwan Provinces which is only adequately explained by the recognition that de jure

²⁰⁵ Chen, “馬祖：政經邊緣的認同游移”：7

²⁰⁶ Wang, Xiaodi. “‘台独’眼中的金门——据守还是放弃?” *大公资讯*, May 27, 2015, accessed April 23, 2017, http://news.takungpao.com/taiwan/liangan/2015-05/3012135_print.html

²⁰⁷ “Taiwan Opposition Party Wins Presidency and Legislative Majority in Historic Elections,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 28, 2016, accessed April 23, 2017, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Taiwan%27s%20Elections%20Issue%20Brief_0.pdf

independence entails the forfeiture and retrocession of Quemoy and Matsu. As one Taiwan scholar abjectly remarked: “When you talk about independence, Quemoy and Matsu, well, they are on the outside looking in.”²⁰⁸ Cai’s landslide victory in the general election, along with the DPP’s sweep of the Legislative Yuan, does not necessarily represent an endorsement of this view, but it at least means that voters in Taiwan Province are willing to overlook the Party’s cynical and pragmatic policy regarding Fujian Province.

Cai’s campaign stop in Quemoy in December 2015, one month before the election, had failed to smooth things over with the voters.²⁰⁹ Perhaps they remembered how she, while serving as director of the Mainland Affairs Council, had killed a desperately needed deal to pipe in water to Quemoy from nearby Xiamen, on the grounds that the PRC might poison it.²¹⁰ Cai’s December pledge to revitalize the local economy has yet to pan out. Quemoy’s deputy magistrate, Wu Chengdian, has proposed projects and policies which would make Quemoy more attractive for Mainland visitors and investors, but they have run aground of Cai’s administration. “We could develop so fast if they would just let us,” he lamented shortly after Cai took office in May 2016.²¹¹ Unless Cai acknowledges the ’92 Consensus, however, things are unlikely to improve for Quemoy and Matsu. A referendum is expected on Quemoy in late 2017 to decide whether to develop the gaming industry, which could attract significant capital flows from the Mainland. Even if the referendum succeeds locally, however, it will face a difficult test in the Yuan, where Cai and her DPP vocally oppose the move. Similarly, Matsu voters already agreed in 2012 to allow gambling on their islands, but final approval still rests with the Yuan.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Qiu Yun, a research fellow with National Taiwan University, in email correspondence with the author on March 22, 2017. Original Chinese translated by the author: “一談到「台獨」，金門、馬祖就會被排拒在外。”

²⁰⁹ “Taiwan’s Kinmen Leans toward China,” *Taipei Times*, Jun 09, 2016

²¹⁰ Wang, “‘台独’眼中的金门——据守还是放弃?”

²¹¹ Schmitz, Rob. “On A Rural Taiwanese Island, Modern China Beckons,” *NPR News*, September 11, 2016

²¹² Moura, Nelson. “Kinmen Proposes Casino Development Referendum,” *Macau Business*, April 7, 2017

What about the Pescadores? The verdict from the 2016 general election—51% of Penghu County residents voted for Cai²¹³—suggests that the Pescadores’ territorial status is more secure than that of Quemoy or Matsu. Furthermore, its residents overwhelmingly (81%) rejected a proposal to allow gaming on the Pescadores in a 2016 referendum, indicating that they share Cai’s distaste for the troubles Mainland investment and Mainland gamblers might spell for the local economy and environment.²¹⁴ Lastly, there is a conspicuous absence of public debate about the islands’ post-independence fate, suggesting that most Taiwans’ feel that the Pescadores, unlike Quemoy or Matsu, share a common destiny with the main island of Taiwan, whatever that may be.

As for the two castle islands, Itu Aba and Pratas, there is no local opinion to consider, since all activities on them are “entirely governmental in nature.” Taiwan domestic opinion exhibits a nationalistic possessiveness over the them, however, signaled by the Executive Yuan’s rejection of the July 2016 PCA award, the hysterical editorials which saturated newspapers and media outlets and fiercely denounced the court’s ruling that Itu Aba was not an island, and by the angry street protests retaliating against the U.S.’s disapproval of Ma Ying-Jeou’s visit to Itu Aba in January 2016.²¹⁵ These reactions could belie a grim, subconscious acceptance of the islands’ inevitable retrocession, but there is no evidence to support this.

In short, Taiwan public opinion seems to suggest an admission that Quemoy and Matsu could not survive Taiwan independence, but this concession does not appear to extend to the other three islands, i.e. the Pescadores, Itu Aba, and Pratas. Once again, Taiwans’ assertions of

²¹³ “Taiwan Opposition Party Wins Presidency and Legislative Majority in Historic Elections,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 28, 2016

²¹⁴ Sun, Yu-Huay. “Casinos Rejected by Outlying Taiwan Islands in Referendum Vote,” *Bloomberg News*, October 15, 2016

²¹⁵ The author’s encounter with one of these protests was referenced in footnote 165 above.

sovereignty over the latter three will have little to no bearing on China's decision to seize them, and are unlikely to be a decisive factor in overcoming U.S. hesitation to intervene. The Taiwan public's implicit abandonment of Quemoy and Matsu, however, will make it easier for the U.S. to wash their hands of them as well. If the PRC can exploit these inconsistencies by attacking Quemoy or Matsu first, they could cause the American public to ask the same question many military officers, government officials and other experts asked during the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises: If we didn't defend those other islands, why are we willing to go to war over these?

VI.3. Is a Plebiscite Possible?

One Mainland commentator likened Quemoy and Matsu to “a thorn, catching in the throats of [Taiwan] separatists.”²¹⁶ Considering all of the evidence supporting this metaphor, is it conceivable that Taiwans themselves may someday choose to pluck out the “thorn?” The possibility of a future referendum on the retrocession of The Five Islands deserves a brief examination here, not because it is particularly *probable*—in fact, there is absolutely no indication that such a plebiscite is forthcoming—but because it represents a *plausible* pathway for outer island retrocession, which is the central theme of this paper. Such a referendum could originate from two potential sources: 1) Taiwan's general population, or 2) the kingdom islands' resident population.

In the case of the Pescadores, either scenario is quite difficult to imagine. Since the islands' residents voted for the DPP in 2016—the party habitually associated with Taiwan's independence movement and the notion of “Taiwanese-ness”—they ostensibly identify with

²¹⁶ Lin, Siyun. “卡在台独者喉咙里的一根刺：金门和马祖,” *China Weekly*, December 22, 2000

voters on the main island. For its part, the general population shows no sign of fatalism regarding the Pescadores in a post-independence environment, and appears to accept Taiwan's opposing claim to them as an established fact; the conspicuous lack of related commentary is strong evidence of this. Therefore, a referendum is unnecessary and unlikely, because the Pescadores do not wish to retrocede on the one hand, and Taiwan does not wish to cede them on the other. A Chinese invasion of the islands might challenge the latter assumption, however, especially if military efforts to recover them threaten Taiwan's general security, or if the Pescadores become a new "thorn," choking Taiwan's hopes for independence.

By virtue of their status as castle islands, a local referendum on Itu Aba or Pratas is unthinkable. A general Taiwan referendum, on the other hand, is distinctly possible. Admittedly, Taiwans currently exhibit a nationalistic possessiveness of the islands, but this paper has already exposed the difficulties their *congruency* presents for post-independence sovereignty claims. If the Taiwan public senses that their ownership of these islands jeopardizes the broader case for independence, or if violence erupts in the South China Sea (SCS), threatening Taiwan's "national" security or its international good standing, Taiwans could be induced to relinquish them to the PRC. Under such circumstances, China would be gravely concerned about the implications for cross-strait relations, and Taiwan's departure from the SCS would subtract from the islands' strategic value. However, China would be compelled to occupy them nonetheless, lest one of the other littoral states seize the opportunity first.

As for Quemoy and Matsu, the possibility of either a local or "national" referendum is greater, but still unlikely. A rare 2006 study revealed that Quemoy's residents identify *culturally* with the Mainland, but *politically* with Taiwan.²¹⁷ Voters' overwhelming support for the KMT

²¹⁷ Wei, Jianfeng. "An Examination of Cultural Identity of Residents of Quemoy (Kinmen)," *Intercultural Communications Studies* XV:1 (2006)

in 2016, in complete disproportion to the rest of Taiwan, suggests that the residents of Quemoy and Matsu fear the prospect of retrocession. A referendum would therefore be counterintuitive, if not preposterous. The study cited above, however, implies that Taiwan's democratic freedoms comprise the strongest link between the offshore islands and Taiwan. If the Mainland were to liberalize politically and modernize economically, retrocession may appear more attractive. This is especially true if the islands must continue to make economic sacrifices to support Cai's political agenda, which does not include deeper entanglements with the Mainland. The benefits of her New Southbound Policy, if they ever amount to anything, will accrue only *indirectly* to Quemoy and Matsu, which both stand to gain far more from strengthening ties *directly* with nearby Xiamen and Fuzhou. One Quemoy resident grumbled, "People in Taiwan regard Quemoy as a faraway place, and in their mind, Quemoy seems to belong to mainland China."²¹⁸ If the "faraway" central government kills the offshores' gambling bill, or if the Executive Yuan continues to stymie the local governments' economic cooperation initiatives, the political advantages of Taiwan citizenship may eventually lose their gloss.

A "national" referendum to abandon Quemoy and Matsu is a dubious proposition because it is both politically unnecessary and morally inexcusable, like choosing to expose an unwanted child even when less drastic options are available. Quemoy and Matsu are "thorns" in the throat of Taiwan separatists, not because they prevent Taiwans from declaring independence, but because pain is the ineluctable result of such a declaration. A referendum would obviate the dreaded Chinese invasion, effectively transforming *Taiwan* into the villain for ceding the islands against their will. This makes little to no sense. If Quemoy and Matsu are destined to rejoin the Mainland either way, why not require the PRC to assume agency, thereby exculpating Taiwan?

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 137

If the concern is to avoid a violent outcome on the islands, withdrawing Taiwan's troops achieves that end without the distasteful implications of outright political abandonment. Indeed, this realization likely formed the basis for DPP Chairman Shi Mingde's proposal to do just that in 1994.

However improbable a referendum regarding the retrocession of Quemoy and Matsu might be, it is worth considering the PRC's response if one ever came to pass. For Beijing, receiving the offshores without a fight is a worrisome prospect.²¹⁹ If the PRC is to preserve the islands' strategic value as a bridge maintaining political access to Taiwan, it would be compelled to ignore the results of the referendum, like a man ignoring the doorbell and pretending not to be at home in order to avoid the legal process server on the front porch. Even in an extreme case, such as a Taiwan military crackdown on Quemoy or Matsu after a local referendum approving retrocession, China is unlikely to follow Russia's example in the Ukraine because, unlike Moscow's interests in the Crimean Peninsula, Beijing's interests in the offshores are preventative, not acquisitive. If China refrained from intervening, they would score the double win of maintaining the status quo and framing Taiwan as a violent, oppressive regime.

VII. Patterns of Uncertainty: Has the U.S. Learned Anything from the 1st and 2nd Taiwan

Strait Crises?

“My colleagues, the rank and file working officer, more familiar with the facts of the two Chinas, were inclined towards...well, I would guess that seven out of ten of such people would have opted for Communist China at the time.”²²⁰

²¹⁹ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 131

²²⁰ John A Lacy, quoted in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 63

What a difference a day makes. Before June 25, 1950, Chiang's Nationalist regime on Taiwan was under a prolonged death watch. In August 1949, the U.S. State Department had produced the legendary "China White Paper," a 1500-page tome intended to exonerate the Truman administration, distance America from China's ongoing civil war, and place the blame for "losing China" squarely on the shoulders of the KMT regime.²²¹ Later that year, the U.S. turned off its economic and military assistance to the Nationalists,²²² and few experts and officials expected Chiang to survive the presumably imminent Communist invasion of Taiwan, which the chargé d'affaires in Taipei, Robert Strong, estimated would occur sometime between June 15 and the end of July, 1950.²²³ Instead, however, the Korean People's Army tumbled over the 38th parallel on June 25, prompting Truman's decision to neutralize the Taiwan Strait.

Marshall Green, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, reminisced:

"What I can't remember historically is exactly what the line was that we were about to take in the time when the Korean War broke out. I think we were beginning to consider quite seriously at that time whether we shouldn't move our policy towards recognizing the realities of Mainland China, that the Chinese had taken over, and that they did represent one-quarter of humanity, and that we had to have some kind of relationship with them...had the war with Korea not intervened, it is possible that our China policy could have moved in a different direction."²²⁴

Thus, in just twenty-four little hours, the U.S. had tacked back to its earlier position, and hitched its diplomatic cart to the same old horse, i.e. Chiang and his KMT. This development in and of itself, however, still fails to explain how the U.S. came to seriously consider the employment of nuclear weapons against targets on Mainland China during the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises. This "outsized response" appears all the more extraordinary when one recalls that the catalyst for the conflict had been no more than a "routine harassment" in the offshore islands

²²¹ Ibid., 61-62

²²² Ibid., 84

²²³ Huebner, "The Abortive Liberation of Taiwan." *The China Quarterly* (1987): 268

²²⁴ Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 78

of Quemoy and Matsu,²²⁵ which most experts agreed were “strategically valueless.” Yet, in a March 16, 1954 press conference, Eisenhower suggested that atomic weapons could be used “as you use a bullet or anything else.”²²⁶ Then, during the third presidential debate in 1960, Nixon and Kennedy argued about the employment of nuclear weapons specifically within the context of the offshore islands.²²⁷ Even setting the nuclear option aside, the U.S. was undeniably prepared to go to war with China over the offshore islands, to the nearly universal consternation of the international community. Why? What was Eisenhower thinking?

Three primary factors motivated the U.S. government’s over-commitment to the offshore islands: 1) The China Lobby and the “Red Scare,” 2) Dulles’ signature doctrine of “mass retaliation” and “collective security,” and 3) the administration’s conviction that Chiang had “bet the farm” on Quemoy and Matsu.

John Melby, lead author of the China White Paper, described the China Lobby in the following manner:

“The China Lobby was the antecedent of the so-called Committee of One Million. It was composed of people from a whole political spectrum, from the far right to the far left, who had only one thing in common: for whatever their reasons, they were in complete support of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. That was the only thing they were united on because of anti-communism. The American obsession with communism.”²²⁸

The Soviets’ first nuclear test in 1949, the “erection” of the Iron Curtain, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the Rosenberg trials, all operated in concert to incite a “Red Scare” in Washington. McCarthyism infected the ranks of Congress and the State Department alike and clouded decision making. Several good Foreign Service officers and sinologists were purged

²²⁵ Donaghy, Greg. "Canadian Diplomacy and the Offshore Islands Crisis, 1954–1955: A Limited National Interest." *International Journal* 68, no. 2 (2013): 242

²²⁶ Chang et al., “The Absence of War” (1993), 1519

²²⁷ Kennedy et al., “October 13, 1960 Debate Transcript,” <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-13-1960-debate-transcript>

²²⁸ Quoted in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 62

during this period, including Tony Freeman, Jack Service, and Owen Lattimore, who were all later vindicated.²²⁹ Even though history has lifted the veil on Mao's true political intentions during the 1st and 2nd Strait Crises—invasion was not an immediate goal—the U.S. quickly came to view the offshore islands as a “test of containment—as to whether or not [the Communists] would by force be able to throw out Western power or a power supported by the West from these small islands.”²³⁰ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur Radford thundered, “If we fail to resist this aggression, we commit the United States further to a negative policy which could result in a progressive loss of free world strength to local aggression until or unless all-out conflict is forced upon us.”²³¹ Dulles ratcheted up the pressure by demonizing the CCP: “The aggressive fanaticism of the Chinese Communist leaders presents a certain parallel to that of Hitler.”²³² This type of grandstanding produced the desired effect in a population plagued by McCarthyist paranoia. The landslide passage of the Formosa Resolution, granting Eisenhower carte blanche to use military force to protect the Nationalists on the offshores, is clear evidence of this. The resolution claimed that the PLA bombardment of the islands was “in aid of and in preparation for an armed attack on Formosa and the Pescadores.”²³³ Senator Lehman led a feeble effort to introduce an amendment to the resolution prohibiting military intervention on Quemoy and Matsu; the Senate struck it down 74-13. When the final resolution came up for a vote, most of the dissidents quailed, and it easily cleared the House (409-3) and the Senate (85-3) on January 25, 1955.²³⁴ Had it not been for Premier Zhou Enlai's timely and conciliatory gesture

²²⁹ Ibid., 63

²³⁰ Robert Bowie, quoted in Ibid., 126

²³¹ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 100

²³² Ibid., 111

²³³ “The US Congress Formosa Resolution (1955),” accessed April 25, 2017, www3.nccu.edu.tw/~lorenzo/Formosa%20Resolution.doc

²³⁴ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*. (1985): 69

at the Bandung Conference on April 23, 1955,²³⁵ the U.S.'s miscalculations may have propelled the conflict into a full-scale nuclear war.

This paper suggested earlier that elections are expressions of public opinion. A corollary is that congressional and executive actions are self-conscious reflections of public opinion. In a liberal democracy, politicians must play to the gallery or face political extinction. What other factor could suffice to explain this gulf between expertise and populism, where “seven out of ten” China hands favored transferring diplomatic recognition to the PRC, while only 0.7% of the House disapproved the use of force in the offshores? What explains the American public’s psychological attachment to “Free China?” Was it the Red Scare? Was it the effectiveness of Madame Song’s charm offensive? Was it the American tendency to root for the underdog? For the purposes of this paper, it does not matter. The important point is that public opinion, unlike expert opinion, is fickle and suggestible...and it is all-powerful.

A second, related factor which nearly propelled the U.S. into a nuclear war with China was the recent promulgation of Secretary of State John F. Dulles’s concepts of “collective security” and “massive retaliation,” outlined in Dulles’s April 1954 essay in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. According to Dulles, collective security was the best prescription for containing the cancer of Communism because it pooled the energy and resources of the alliance network and thereby avoided runaway defense spending and a self-destructive arms race with the Soviet bloc. Regarding massive retaliation, Dulles did not mince words: collective security included the preemptive use of “atomic weapons which are now available in a wide range, suitable not only for strategic bombing but also for extensive tactical use.” The threat of massive retaliation was the lynchpin of strategic deterrence; it was necessary to convince a potential aggressor that the

²³⁵ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 117

“probable hurt will outbalance the probable gain.” There is no allusion to Chiang or the Chinese Nationalists in his essay, and only an oblique reference to the PRC—the PLA did not begin shelling the offshores in earnest until September—but the following excerpt foreshadows the Formosa Resolution and the new policy’s application to Quemoy and Matsu:

“In every endangered area there should be a sufficient military establishment to maintain order against subversion and to resist other forms of indirect aggression and minor satellite aggressions. This serves the indispensable need to demonstrate a purpose to resist, and to compel any aggressor to expose his real intent by *such serious fighting* as will brand him before all the world and *promptly bring collective measures into operation*...[I]n such areas the main reliance must be on the power of the free community to retaliate with great force by mobile means at *places of its own choice*.”²³⁶

Make no mistake. When actively serving U.S. cabinet members write pieces in *Foreign Affairs*, the result is not a policy recommendation...It is *official* policy.²³⁷ Eight months after his essay appeared in print, the U.S. signed its MDF with the ROC, formally admitting Taiwan into the collective security framework of the Western Pacific. The 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises,²³⁸ therefore, were construed as a direct challenge to the new policy. Would it stand, or would it fall? It did not necessarily matter that the offshores were not explicitly covered by the terms of the treaty. If Eisenhower and Dulles had stood idly by as KMT forces were massacred on Quemoy and Matsu, their political reputations would have suffered, calling Eisenhower’s sincerity into question when he blustered that he “would rather be impeached than fail to do his duty [in the offshores].”²³⁹ The state of public opinion in 1955, manifested by the strength of the China Lobby, suggests that impeachment was not the price of *doing* his duty. Quite the opposite,

²³⁶ Dulles, John F. “Policy for Security and Peace,” *Foreign Affairs* (April 1954) (emphasis added)

²³⁷ This is taught to officers at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, which the author attended in 2015. There are two exceptions to this rule: 1) when the material does not deal directly with matters of policy, e.g. opinions about the gastronomical quality of White House dinner banquets, or 2) when the cabinet member does not expect to keep his job.

²³⁸ Both crises occurred during the Eisenhower Administration, throughout which period Dulles served as Secretary of State.

²³⁹ Chang, “To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis.” *International Security* (1988): 103.

it would have been far more likely to follow from him *not* doing his duty. However, “I’ll be impeached if I don’t do something” has a slightly less heroic tone.

The concepts of collective security and massive retaliation still operate in U.S. foreign policy today, although in an attenuated form. For example, the U.S. is far less glib about the employment of nuclear weapons. However, most of the U.S. bilateral security arrangements penned during the post-war era are still in effect. In fact, strengthening and expanding the existing network of alliances remains a focal point of U.S. long-term security strategy in the region.²⁴⁰ The U.S. security commitment toward Taiwan weakened after 1972, when the U.S. agreed to withdraw its troops from Taiwan.²⁴¹ The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act replaced the MDF, which was dissolved on January 1, 1980.²⁴² The TRA articulated, however, a nebulous commitment to Taiwan’s capacity for self-defense, which included U.S. arms sales. When defining Taiwan’s territorial boundaries, the TRA’s language follows the example of its predecessor by avoiding clarity. Consider the relevant passages below:

“For the purposes of Articles II and V, the terms "territorial" and "territories" shall mean in respect of the Republic of China, Taiwan and the Pescadores; and in respect of the United States of America, the island territories in the West Pacific under its jurisdiction. The provisions of Articles II and V will be applicable to *such other territories* as may be determined by *mutual agreement*.”²⁴³

The MDF expressly added the last clause to leave room for the offshores, should the president decide to defend them.

“For the purposes of this act... the term "Taiwan" includes, as the context may require, *the islands of Taiwan and the Pescadores*, the people on those islands, corporations and other entities and associations created or organized under the laws applied on those

²⁴⁰ In separate 2016 briefings between the author and DOD and State Department officials at the U.S. embassies in Seoul and Tokyo, the respective country teams both identified the formation of a U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral security cooperation agreement a primary strategic goal.

²⁴¹ “U.S.-China Joint Communiqués: 1972, 1979, 1982,” Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, accessed April 27, 2017, https://www.choices.edu/resources/documents/ch_3.pdf

²⁴² Chang, King-yuh. "Partnership in Transition: A Review of Recent Taipei-Washington Relations." *Asian Survey* 21, no. 6 (1981): 617-618

²⁴³ “Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China,” December 2, 1954, <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/mutual01.htm> (emphasis added)

islands, *and the governing authorities on Taiwan* recognized by the United States as the Republic of China prior to January 1, 1979, and any successor governing authorities (including political subdivisions, agencies, and instrumentalities thereof).²⁴⁴

The imprecision and complexity of the TRA’s language also raises questions. Unlike the MDF, it does not include overt allowances for territorial expansion, but what does it mean by “the islands of Taiwan and the Pescadores?” Does this phrase denote *only* the main island of Taiwan and the Pescadores, or does it mean “the islands of Taiwan—e.g. the main island, Orchid Island, Green Island, Agincourt, Itu Aba, etc.—*and* the Pescadores?” Also, does including “the governing authorities” in the definition of Taiwan mean that territories under the ROC’s governance are also included? After all, there is an indisputable presence of ROC “governing authorities” on all of The Five Islands. Of course, it is possible that this ambiguity is both intentional and necessary—a *strategic* ambiguity. The advantage of ambiguity is that China’s uncertainty about the prospects of U.S. military intervention in The Five Islands may have a deterrent effect. The disadvantage is that the U.S. itself may be equally unsure about what exactly it is prepared to do.

A final factor was Chiang’s intractable position on Quemoy and Matsu. The Generalissimo had only ever agreed to evacuate the Dachen in January 1955 because “it involved, at least implicitly, a greater commitment by us [the U.S.] to the other offshores, the bigger ones, Jinmen [Quemoy] and Mazu [Matsu] particularly.”²⁴⁵ It has already been noted above how he refused to withdraw from Quemoy and Matsu in April 1955, even with the promise of a 500-mile long U.S. naval blockade of the Chinese coast and U.S. nuclear weapons stationed on Taiwan. U.S. advisors and politicians were concerned that a Nationalist defeat on

²⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, “Taiwan Relations Act” (1979), <https://www.ait.org.tw/en/taiwan-relations-act.html> (emphasis added)

²⁴⁵ Ralph Clough, quoted in Bernkopf-Tucker, *China Confidential* (2001): 125

Quemoy and Matsu would undermine military morale and sow political discord on Taiwan, making a bad situation worse.²⁴⁶ Chiang had “bet the farm” on Quemoy and Matsu and buffaloes the U.S. administration into coming along for the ride. While the American public and the U.S. Congress had signaled their support for his symbolic stand on the offshores, there can be little doubt that if Chiang had wanted to withdraw, Eisenhower would not have stood in his way.

The DPP’s sweep of the Executive and Legislative Yuan in 2016 shows that today’s ROC is very different from Chiang Kai-shek’s authoritarian regime. Although it is unclear how far the Taiwan people are prepared to go to defend Quemoy and Matsu, they are certainly more ambivalent than Chiang was in 1954-1958. As for the American people, the reader will recall an earlier quote from John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential debate, where he favored a more limited line of U.S. commitment. His subsequent victory in the elections suggests that his position was not irreconcilable with public opinion. Furthermore, this study has already demonstrated that many modern Americans are not only unaware of Quemoy’s and Matsu’s existence, but are even unenthusiastic about a more general defense of Taiwan. Ironically, a 2016 Chicago Council poll found that Americans felt more favorable toward China (67) in 2016 than they did toward Taiwan (52) in 2014.²⁴⁷ The tide of public opinion can ebb and flow very quickly, and there is no guarantee that today’s trends are tomorrow’s realities.

In short, the external forces which motivated the U.S.’s decision to support the Nationalists’ defense of Quemoy and Matsu in the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises have largely disappeared: the Red Scare is over; the China Lobby is gone; Eisenhower’s foreign policy is

²⁴⁶ Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis." *International Security* (1988): 103

²⁴⁷ Friedhoff, Karl, and Craig Kafura. "Views from the G2: Public Opinion in the US & China," The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, December 1, 2016, accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/views-g2-public-opinion-us-china>

history; and Taiwan no longer “clings” to the offshores with Chiang’s tenacity. Many of the underlying *internal* forces which gave rise to these phenomena, however, remain essentially unresolved: there is still a struggle between expertise and populism; the U.S. retains its reliance and emphasis on “networked” regional security; and the substance of our commitment to Taiwan is stubbornly uncertain. Therefore, if China moves against The Five Islands, there really is no telling how the U.S. might respond. It is entirely possible that current or future administrations will make the same mistakes that Eisenhower made; that is, they will discard expert recommendations, play to the gallery, and conflate the fate of The Five Islands with the destiny of Taiwan itself. This is especially true if the U.S. leadership has not anticipated China’s designs against the other three islands, i.e. Itu Aba, Pratas, and the Pescadores.

VIII. The Yellow Brick Road to Retrocession

“Actually, fragmentation constitutes one of the few political crimes left in China; the worst epithet is not *capitalist* or *counterrevolutionary*, but *splittist*. This charge is leveled against those who give a critical view of Chinese desires for reunification with Taiwan or of China's occupation of Tibet and Xinjiang.”²⁴⁸

A July 2016 editorial in the *People’s Daily* identified the Taiwan issue as “the last bit of unfinished business in the great work of national reunification.” The author goes on to suggest that the resolution of the “Taiwan problem” should share a place of equal importance with the attainment of the two centenary goals (两个一百年, *liang ge yi bai nian*)²⁴⁹ of Xi Jinping’s

²⁴⁸ Callahan, William A. "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 209.

²⁴⁹ “实现祖国统一是中国共产党的历史使命,” *People’s Daily* (Chinese Version), July 4, 2016, (translated by the author)

“China Dream” (中国梦, *zhong guo meng*) of national rejuvenation.²⁵⁰ Nearly sixty years earlier, three Chinese academics described the “liberation of Taiwan” as the Chinese nation’s “sacred and incommutable duty.”²⁵¹ Can the “China Dream” become a reality without national reunification? More importantly, do the Chinese people believe it can?

William Callahan reflects that Chinese nationalism can only be understood in the context of national humiliation, and that the recovery of lost territory is crucial to expunging the shame of China’s past. He quotes a relevant passage from the Chinese *Book of Rites* (礼记, *li ji*) to illustrate how this idea is entrenched in the collective consciousness:

"The humiliation of a thing is sufficient to stimulate it; the humiliation of a country is sufficient to rejuvenate it."²⁵²

He draws a compelling comparison between China’s *physical disarticulation* at the hands of foreign invaders in the 19th Century and the resulting *psychological fragmentation* of the Chinese people.²⁵³ Much has been written in recent years of China’s Patriotic Education Campaign, begun in the early 1990s and designed to forge a national identity grounded in nationalism and recast the image of the CCP as a national savior who delivered China from a “century of humiliation” (百年国耻, *bai nian guo chi*). The interplay between salvation and humiliation is instrumental in the formation of two important features of nationalism, i.e. pride and anger. The periodic outpourings of sometimes violent nationalism in China in the late 1990s and throughout

²⁵⁰ At a 2012 exhibition in Beijing, newly appointed CCP Chairman Xi Jinping recited a poem by the famous Chinese poet, Li Bai— “Someday, I will mount a long wind and break the heavy waves.”—and then outlined his own dream for China, which included two centenary goals: 1) the formation of a moderately prosperous society by 2021, in which everyone can enjoy a comfortable life, free from poverty, and 2) the establishment of an “affluent, strong, civilized and harmonious socialist modern country [by 2049].” See “Xi Pledges ‘Great Renewal of Chinese Nation,’” *Xinhua News*, November 29, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-11/29/c_132008231.htm

²⁵¹ Jing, Qi, Jing Su, and Zhao Huafu. “解放台湾是中国人民的神圣任务,” *文史哲* (1958)

²⁵² Callahan, William A. “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism.” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 200, 205

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

the 2000s, and the more recent phenomenon of internet nationalism among groups like the “Angry Youth” or “Little Pink,” suggest that the campaign has done its job. Will Chinese nationalists swallow their pride and suppress their anger if Taiwan declares independence? Can the CCP be a savior if it fails to reunify the nation and redeem China’s fractured identity? Can humiliation be expunged if Taiwan and the international community succeed in permanently “amputating” Taiwan from the Chinese Motherland?

The PRC has never delineated the exact lengths to which it is prepared to go in order to prevent the separation of Taiwan, but it has also never equivocated on two basic principles: 1) reunification with Taiwan is a vital national interest, and 2) non-peaceful measures are on the table. In 1954, Zhou Enlai declared that “Taiwan is China's sacred and inviolable territory and that no U.S. infringement or occupation will be tolerated.”²⁵⁴ Two years later, he reiterated that “there are two ways for the Chinese people to liberate Taiwan, that is, by war or by peaceful means, and that the Chinese people would seek to liberate Taiwan by peaceful means so far as it is possible.”²⁵⁵ In 1971, Mao himself professed that “the Chinese people are determined to liberate Taiwan, to safeguard the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of China.”²⁵⁶ Deng Xiaoping’s 1979 assertion that “China *hopes* to resolve the Taiwan issue by peaceful means,”²⁵⁷ carries the unsubtle implication of alternative *non-peaceful* means, i.e. when Peace has run her course, the baton will pass to War. A 1993 PRC white paper identified reunification with Taiwan as a “fundamental interest of the Chinese nation”²⁵⁸ and “a sacrosanct mission of the

²⁵⁴ Chai, Winberg. "Relations between the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan: Overview and Chronology." *Asian Affairs* 26, no. 2 (1999): (65) 59-76

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69 (emphasis added)

²⁵⁸ "Document 1: PRC White Paper, 'The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China,' 31 August 1993." *Asian Affairs* 26, no. 2 (1999): 92

entire Chinese people.”²⁵⁹ In a 1997 press conference, PRC Defense Minister Chi Haotian averred that that “the PRC would never renounce the use of force, specifically against the Taiwan independence movement, movements to split the motherland, and intervention by foreign forces.”²⁶⁰ The 1998 PRC defense white paper proclaimed the following:

“The Chinese government seeks to achieve the reunification of the country by peaceful means, but will not commit itself not to resort to force. Every sovereign state has the right to use all means it thinks necessary, including military means, to safeguard its own sovereignty and territorial integrity.”²⁶¹

A 2000 white paper kept faith with China’s long-standing position by emphasizing that “China will do its best to achieve peaceful reunification but will not commit itself to rule out the use of force.”²⁶² It also added ominously that China could not “allow the resolution of the Taiwan issue to be postponed indefinitely.”²⁶³ The 2005 Anti-Secession Law flatly stated that the failure or “exhaustion” of peaceful means would necessitate the employment of “non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”²⁶⁴ These statements and documents exhibit a remarkable and almost monolithic uniformity and consistency spanning several decades. Is it all just bravado? When Taiwan declares independence, will China abjure all its threats and ultimatums? Will it impotently beat its chest and stamp its feet, but stop short of violence? In short, is China’s Taiwan policy all bark and no bite? Of course, only time will tell.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 84

²⁶⁰ Chai, “Relations between the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan,” *Asian Survey* (1999): 75

²⁶¹ “Document 6: PRC National Defense White Paper (Excerpt), 28 July 1998.” *Asian Affairs* 26, no. 2 (1999): 109

²⁶² “Document 12: PRC White Paper, ‘The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue,’ 21 February 2000.” *Asian Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2000): 42

²⁶³ Ibid., 54

²⁶⁴ “Anti-Secession Law (Full text)(03/15/05),” Chinese Embassy in U.S. (website), accessed April 29, 2017, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/999999999/t187406.htm>

A 2004 Duke University study found that nearly 76% of Taiwans believed that China would invade Taiwan if it declared independence.²⁶⁵ The credibility of China's deterrent supplies the best explanation, therefore, for Taiwans' overwhelming support for the "status quo" (79.8%), even though most citizens (75.8%) agreed that Taiwan had already achieved de facto independence.²⁶⁶ However, is it possible to maintain any status quo indefinitely? Taiwans could certainly continue to put off a definitive outcome, but if cross-strait relations remain in *perpetual* stasis, it would be the first time in history that a political situation has avoided change completely. This paper agrees with the Taiwans' pessimism and takes China at its word. It answers "no" to all of the questions posed earlier in this section: no, the Chinese people do not believe in a "China Dream" without national reunification; no, Chinese nationalism will not remain mute and stand idly by if Taiwan declares independence; no, China is not prevaricating about its nationalist interests or its willingness to resort to force. This does not mean the destiny of Taiwan is preordained, however. Quite the contrary. The denouement of this grand drama has yet to unfold. However, there appear to be only three plausible, *final* outcomes for the "Taiwan problem":

1. peaceful reunification
2. non-peaceful reunification
3. de jure independence

None of these scenarios will develop overnight. All of them will likely evolve along a gradual continuum whose trajectory wobbles unsteadily and confounds accurate analysis and

²⁶⁵ Niou, Emerson M. S. "Understanding Taiwan Independence and Its Policy Implications." *Asian Survey* 44, no. 4 (2004): 555-67. Niou does not directly provide this percentage of the general population in his essay. Instead, the present author tabulated it as a composite of sub-group responses.

²⁶⁶ Hetherington, William, and Heng-ta Chung. "Majority Says Taiwan is Independent," *Taipei Times*, October 29, 2016

prediction. Just when one eventuality seems relatively assured, a “black swan” or “deus ex machina” might foist itself upon the stage and disrupt the plot’s momentum. Conceivably, the PLA could execute a blitzkrieg assault on the main island of Taiwan, catching the international community unawares, but such an attack is burdened with a suffocating weight of strategic risk. What if Taiwan’s military defies all expectations, repels the invaders and utterly defeats the PLA? What if the U.S. anticipates China’s move and overcomes its own partisanship and indecision to intervene quickly and militarily? What if China wins the battle, but loses the war—a Pyrrhic victory whose resulting military expenditures, international censure and sanctions, along with the potential for a protracted and bloody counterinsurgency fight, irreparably harm China’s economic growth, provoking domestic unrest and political instability. China might be willing to face these consequences, but it is unlikely to choose to face them all at once, especially since an unmeasured response could easily force an unfavorable result. Rather than “betting the pot,” the PRC is far more likely to “play it safe,” pursuing a graduated response that incrementally imposes costs on Taiwan in order to bring its leaders back to their senses. The three final outcomes presented above, therefore, represent *end states*; it is not within the scope of this paper to speculate *how* they will come to pass.

The subtitle of this paper is “For Taiwan’s Outer Islands, an Uncertain Future Holds a Certain Fate.” We have come full circle then. Early on, this paper contended that The Five Islands will retrocede to Mainland China *regardless* of which outcome Taiwan ultimately faces. Reunification, whether peaceful or not, naturally entails China’s recovery of the islands. Of course, there are other conceivable outcomes. For example: a third-party state could invade one or all of them; one or more of the islands could press for independence from either China or Taiwan; or rising sea levels or tectonic upheavals could swallow them up entirely. None of these

outcomes are plausible in the near term, however, and it is difficult to imagine a post-reunification future for The Five Islands which does not involve Chinese sovereignty.

As stated earlier, *de jure* independence for Taiwan implies that China is either unable to successfully invade the main island of Taiwan, or is unwilling to take the risk. As to the question of China's *ability*, a U.S. Naval War College (USNWC) study, published in 2001, concluded that the PLA was incapable of seizing Taiwan, but that their capacity was likely to improve in the coming five to twenty years.²⁶⁷ However, the DOD's 2016 report to Congress suggested that such an operation still presents China with an unacceptably high degree of tactical and strategic risk.²⁶⁸ The USNWC study postulated that the PLA would conduct a "phased invasion," wherein it seizes the offshores and the Pescadores in advance of a final assault on Taiwan. In 2001, there were approximately 60,000 Taiwan military troops on the Pescadores; therefore, the preliminary seizure of those islands would be essential to prevent the harassment of China's flank during the main assault. The outer islands seizures would also serve as a full-dress rehearsal of the PLA's amphibious capability, untested in combat since 1955, and would be less likely to provoke foreign intervention. Furthermore, if the Taiwan military presented a determined defense of the islands, it would only weaken their defensive capacity on Taiwan, due to the resulting attrition of personnel, resources, and political will.²⁶⁹ The DOD report agrees that an invasion of The Five Islands is within the PLA's operational capacity.²⁷⁰ Ultimately, therefore, even if China were unable to successfully invade Taiwan, it could at least succeed in seizing the offshores and the Pescadores during the initial phases of the operation. Under such circumstances, their

²⁶⁷ Ferguson, Charles D., and Piers M. Wood. "How China Might Invade Taiwan," *US Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2001)

²⁶⁸ "Annual Report to Congress," (2016): 88-89

²⁶⁹ Ferguson et al., "How China Might Invade Taiwan," *US Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2001): 56-58

²⁷⁰ "Annual Report to Congress," (2016): 90

subsequent withdrawal from the islands would be highly improbable, and it is equally unlikely that China would allow Taiwan to retain the sideline islands of Itu Aba and Pratas. For its part, the Taiwan military would not have the capacity to counterattack and recover the islands, and the U.S. would be unlikely to risk a direct war with China by joining Taiwan in offensive operations.

The PRC could also be *unwilling* to undertake a full-scale invasion of Taiwan because it believes the strategic costs are too high, and its corresponding confidence in the PLA is too low. Even in this situation, however, The Five Islands would be an irresistible target. While the strategic risk would remain high, the operational risk is much lower, and “such a [limited] invasion would demonstrate military capability and political resolve while achieving tangible territorial gain and simultaneously showing some measure of restraint.”²⁷¹ It would also partially mollify Chinese nationalist anger and restore a modicum of nationalist pride.

Of course, there are countless other ways that China could punish Taiwan for achieving independence. Politically, it could poach Taiwan’s remaining diplomatic partners and block Taiwan’s access to international organizations and activities. Economically, it could seize Taiwan’s assets and investment on the Mainland, cut off all trade relations, and encourage regional partners to join in punitive sanctions against Taiwan. Militarily, it could conduct surgical air strikes and ballistic missile attacks against Taiwan’s military and industrial infrastructure; it might even target population centers. It could also establish a naval quarantine or blockade to asphyxiate Taiwan’s seaborne trade and cut off its oil supplies. The final, hypothetical outcome of “de jure independence,” however, dictates that all of these measures have failed to recover sovereignty over Taiwan. If Taiwan achieves independence, only outer island seizures allow China to recover lost territory. To invoke the amputation analogy

²⁷¹ Ibid., 90

suggested earlier, would a patient direct the doctor to take the whole arm because he cannot keep the hand? Outer island seizures also represent the only suitable task for China's 1.25 million ground forces.²⁷² Air and missile strikes, and naval blockades will only involve the PLA Air Force, Rocket Force, and Navy; as the largest and "proudest" service in the PLA, the Army will likely apply for some degree of involvement.²⁷³

As long as China can signal to bystander nations that its military designs do not extend beyond The Five Islands to the main island of Taiwan, those nations are less likely to intervene. Bystander nations would prefer to remain passive. The superiority of China's historic title over The Five Islands, coupled with Taiwan's own ambivalence about them, especially Quemoy and Matsu, will only contribute to bystander nations' hesitation and confirm their initial bias for restraint.

If Taiwan has irreversibly achieved independence, moreover, The Five Islands lose their strategic value as a forum for cross-strait communication and cooperation. This paper has already demonstrated that this strategic function of the islands was one of the few factors preventing further PRC aggressions against them. With Taiwan removed irretrievably from China's reach, these barriers to aggression would no longer exist.

²⁷² Ibid., 107

²⁷³ This is especially true in a resource-constrained environment. The most recent PLA reform program has directed substantial cuts to Army funding and troop strength, while simultaneously swelling the ranks and increasing the budgets for the other four services (Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and Strategic Support Force). Governments typically apportion defense resources according to strategic priorities, thereby fueling inter-service parochialism and resource competition, a problem that has plagued the PLA in recent decades and retarded its development of joint capacity. Correcting this harmful tendency was one of the major goals of reform. Furthermore, promotions are often contingent on performance, and it can be difficult to demonstrate performance while "sitting on the bench." Green, Edward. "Bricks Not Clay: Drivers and Implications of PLA Reform," Unpublished (2017); Saunders, Phillip C., and Joel Wuthnow. "Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications," *China Strategic Perspectives*, No.10, March 2017

IX. Five Turtles in a Flask: A Policy Recommendation and Conclusion

“Therefore that treaty [the MDF] does not commit the United States to defend anything except Formosa and the Pescadores, and to deal with acts against that treaty area. I completely sustained the treaty. I voted for it. I would take any action necessary to defend the treaty, Formosa, and the Pescadores Island.”²⁷⁴ ~ John F. Kennedy (1960)

President Kennedy was arguing for strategic clarity, as opposed to the principle of strategic ambiguity, embodied in legal documents like the MDF, Formosa Resolution, or the TRA. The vagueness of the language in these documents causes the PRC, Taiwan, and other bystander nations to question: Will the U.S. intervene on Taiwan’s behalf? If so, at what point? Many experts and scholars have blamed the U.S. policy of strategic ambiguity for precipitating conflicts like the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises, which brought the U.S. and China to the very brink of nuclear war.

In bilateral or multilateral negotiations, however, ambiguity affords a distinct advantage. A negotiator’s rejection of ambiguity in favor of clarity is intended to establish mutual trust and understanding. Unfortunately, trust cannot operate in negotiations among adversaries; there is always an underlying assumption of mendacity and predation. Even if the U.S. were to communicate its “bottom line,”—e.g. Taiwan—in good faith and in no uncertain terms, China would remain convinced that there is still room for negotiation.²⁷⁵ China would misconstrue the U.S.’s bottom line as an initial bargaining position, a cognitive bias known as the “anchoring effect.”²⁷⁶ Far better for the U.S. to acknowledge China’s implacable distrust and deliberately

²⁷⁴ Kennedy, “October 13, 1960 Debate Transcript,” <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-13-1960-debate-transcript>

²⁷⁵ Negotiation, in this scenario, is of course shorthand for the interplay between Chinese aggression on one side, and U.S. military intervention on the other.

²⁷⁶ “Anchoring Effect,” Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, accessed April 29, 2017, <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/anchoring-effect/>

open negotiations with an unacceptable offer—e.g. Taiwan and all of The Five Islands. When the “negotiation” ends with China’s successful acquisition of The Five Islands, but their failure to secure Taiwan, both sides can leave the table feeling like they have achieved something. The consolation prize of Taiwan’s outer islands is unlikely to palliate the sting of losing Taiwan, but at least China would not go home empty-handed. The acclaimed sinologist Nancy Bernkopf-Tucker argues that China’s incurable distrust of the U.S. makes strategic clarity far more dangerous than ambiguity.²⁷⁷

This paper agrees with Bernkopf-Tucker’s assessment but offers a caveat: The U.S. should maintain a policy of strategic ambiguity, but *internal clarity*. During the 1st and 2nd Taiwan Strait Crises, the disjunction of expert and public opinion produced confusion and self-doubt in the Eisenhower administration that nearly catapulted the U.S. into war with China. If the U.S. does not “privately” identify its “bottom line” before entering negotiations with China, it may find itself repeating the same mistakes.

On August 28, 1958, five days after PLA artillery inaugurated the 2nd Taiwan Strait Crisis, PRC propagandists broadcasted the following message to KMT defenders on the offshore islands:

“Quemoy and Matsu have become as helpless as a *pair of turtles entrapped in a flask*...Officers and men of the Chiang armed forces on Quemoy and Matsu...kill the U.S. advisors and defect to our side. There is no other way out.”²⁷⁸

The Chinese expression, “turtles in a flask” (瓮中之鳖, *weng zhong zhi bie*), denotes a hopeless situation, from which there is no escape. Taiwan’s future is far from certain, but for these “Five Turtles in a Flask,” retrocession is a certain fate.

²⁷⁷ Bernkopf-Tucker, Nancy (ed.). “Strategic Ambiguity or Strategic Clarity,” in *Dangerous Strait* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 186-211

²⁷⁸ Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands*, 124 (emphasis added)

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