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Only One China

Last year, my Taiwanese friend sent me a meme that went viral on the internet in 2015. In an uploaded video of a match in the game H1Z1, an online streamer repeatedly taunted a player who killed him in the game. Hoping to provoke the player, who was Chinese, the streamer yelled in a faux Taiwanese accent, “Taiwan number one! Taiwan number one!” Since then, the video has received over 4 million views. Several months later, someone created a post on Reddit, titled “If you shout Taiwan No.1 in this game, Chinese gamers go nuts.” Recently, I was recounting to one of my good friends, who is an international student from Beijing, about a story regarding the trip I took to Taipei over spring break. After I expressed my gratitude for my overall experience there as well as my appreciation for Taiwan’s food, nature, and culture, my friend shook his head and announced with pride, “中国第一!”*

At first glance, these instances seem somewhat ridiculous and uncalled for. However, they both speak to a larger underlying issue: the tension in the relationship between China and Taiwan. To grasp the basis for this rocky relationship, it is essential to understand its context and historical background. In the late 17th century, Taiwan was annexed by the Qing Dynasty, and then ceded to Japan under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 which concluded the Sino-Japanese War. In 1949, the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party) fled to Taiwan after losing to the Communists in the Chinese Civil War. The 1992 Consensus made matters even

* 中国第一: China number one

more complicated: although the Communist Party in China and the Guomindang in Taiwan agreed that there is “only one China,” the two parties had different interpretations of the “one country, two systems” principle. While Beijing and Taipei agreed that Taiwan belongs to China, they still disagreed as to which is China’s legitimate governing entity. The 1992 Consensus also implied that Taiwan would be granted significant autonomy if it accepted reunification with China and chose not to seek independence. In addition to giving up its power as the Republic of China, Taiwan would have to join with the People’s Republic of China and the Communist government which they had viewed as the enemy since 1949 (Bush). The Guomindang leaders in Taiwan then began a transition towards democracy, which raised many questions about Taiwan’s history, what exactly Taiwan was, its role on the international stage, and its relationship with China. This process of democratization resulted in over 60 percent of people in Taiwan identifying as Taiwanese, some identifying as “Taiwanese only,” and about one-third as “Taiwanese and Chinese”; less than 10 percent of Taiwan’s population regard themselves as “Chinese only” and less than 15 percent want reunification with China (Bush).

Today, this rivalry still persists. China’s government views Taiwan as a province, and still maintains that there is “only one China” in the world, with Taiwan as an inalienable part of China. Tsai Ing-wen, the current president of Taiwan and leader of the Democratic Progressive Party, has rejected the 1992 Consensus and declared the “one country, two systems” framework to be unacceptable (BBC News). In addition, many people in Taiwan want their country to be a separate, independent nation. According to a survey in an article in the Washington Post, over 70 percent of Taiwanese people take the stance that Taiwan is an independent country under the name of the Republic of China. Furthermore, Taiwan is a fully consolidated democracy, and

some may assert that it is the only Chinese-speaking state that can consider itself a democracy (Yen et al).

Because of its presence throughout the history of China and Taiwan, the United States has played an important role in the relationship between the two countries. In the Second World War, the U.S. was allied with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, but sought help from Mao Zedong's Communist regime to assist with fighting the Japanese. Many of those who strongly supported Chiang and Mao accused the U.S. of betrayal, and resulted in heightened tensions between the three parties. In 1979, the U.S. acknowledged China's position on the "one China" issue, agreeing on the existence of "one China" and that Taiwan is a part of China; President Jimmy Carter then terminated relations with Taiwan's government. However, Congress later passed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which effectively affirmed unofficial ties with Taiwan. The TRA also allowed for arms sales from the U.S., thus increasing friction between China and Taiwan. In 1996, when China tried to influence Taiwan's first presidential election by conducting provocative missile tests, President Bill Clinton sent ships to the Taiwan Strait, showing the largest display of the United States' military power in Asia since the Vietnam War (BBC). Moreover, the connections between Taiwan and the U.S. have recently deepened as a result of Tsai Ing-Wen initiating high-level contact with Donald Trump following his election to the presidency in 2016 (Council on Foreign Relations). These events, among others, have positively shaped the relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan, making the United States Taiwan's only ally and its most important connection on the global stage.

The tension between Taiwan and China, as well as the U.S.'s power to influence their relationship, extends beyond statistics and government policies to tangible consequences that can

be easily observed by the general public today. A recent example happened in 2018, when China sent letters to 36 foreign airlines imposing a deadline for them to stop listing Taiwan as a country. If they refused, they would face “unclear but potentially damaging” repercussions from China’s authorities. The United States government publicly dismissed China’s demand as “Orwellian nonsense” and urged airlines to defy the order. However, three major airlines — American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, and United Airlines — complied with the request, and dropped any descriptor or abbreviation of “Taiwan” when referring to the airport in Taipei. Other airline companies have followed suit, complying in fear of being shut out of the global aviation market. Earlier in 2018, China’s Civil Aviation Administration censured Delta because it listed Tibet and Taiwan as countries on their website. Delta said it had made a “grave mistake” without any “political intentions” in response to the Administration’s demand for an “immediate and public apology” (Chan). Following this incident, the Administration called in representatives from 25 foreign airlines operating in China to remove all references to Taiwan as a country. The United Airlines website before the deadline is shown in Figure 1 below, and the American Airlines website in Figure 2 has no mention of Taiwan.

Figure 1

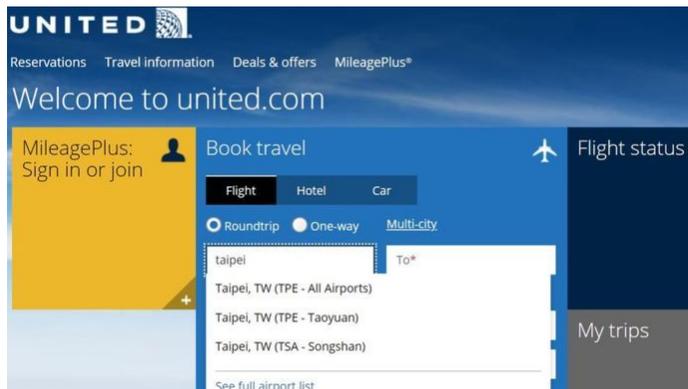
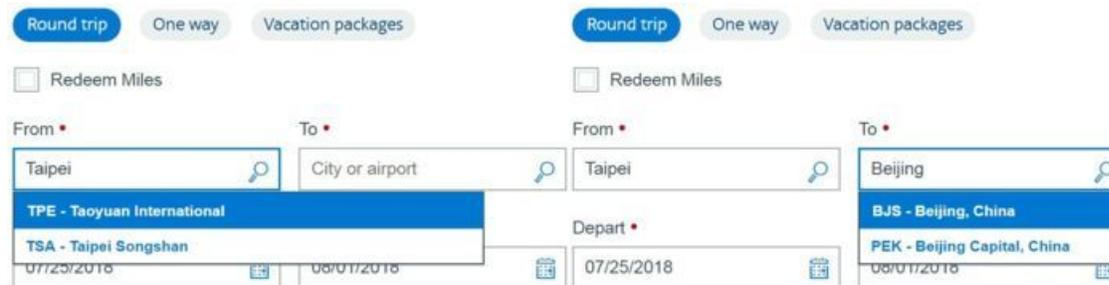


Figure 2



To further complicate matters, China's threat to block companies from doing business has not only impacted major airlines. Audi, Muji, Gap, and Ray-Ban are among the multitude of international corporations that have been subject to China's wrath as a result of considering Taiwan and/or Hong Kong as being separate from China. From labels on clothes hangers to maps of China printed on T-shirts, China has accused these companies of breaking advertising law and breaching China's sovereignty. Most companies have apologized and taken measures to comply with China's orders; however, Costco is one of the few that has stood its ground, and companies such as H&M, Amazon, and Uber have not yet found themselves in trouble with Chinese authorities (Chan). On top of targeting companies, reports have shown that food shipments from Taiwan that were appropriately labeled "Made in Taiwan" have been put on hold at customs or

* 中国第一: China number one

even destroyed. Clearly, China has gone to great lengths to ensure that the world does not recognize Taiwan as a country.

It seems highly unlikely that the tension between Taiwan and China will be resolved anytime soon, but it is still important to look ahead into the future of their relationship because of its implications. Beyond China's and Taiwan's history, the U.S.-Taiwan alliance, the continuing trend of Taiwanese identification, and China's accusations regarding the recognition of Taiwan around the world, there are numerous factors besides those discussed in this paper that could play a role in the political, economic, and social outcomes of this relationship. Since 2012, current President of China, Xi Jinping, has taken a stricter nationalist stance on the special regions that China claims, including Hong Kong and Taiwan. In June 2016, China suspended its communication with the main Taiwan liaison office because of Tsai Ing-Wen's rejection of the 1992 Consensus. In addition to pressuring global corporations to list Taiwan as a Chinese province, China also restricted tourism to Taiwan and excluded it from international discussions addressing civil aviation and global health issues (Council on Foreign Relations). In the future, this could cause problems in the economic aspect of the China-Taiwan relationship, as up to 1 million Taiwanese people live in China, many of them running Taiwanese factories there. Companies in Taiwan have invested about \$60 billion in China, and while some Taiwanese assert that building business ties with China would decrease the likelihood of military action on China's part, others are afraid that Taiwan's economy is becoming dependent on China. In terms of its military and ability to defend itself, Taiwan is situated in a vulnerable position, as it is located near China, which has an arsenal of over 1300 ballistic missiles ready to fire across the strait. China has the power and the advanced capabilities to coerce Taiwan into reunification, and

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it has refused to renounce the “[employment of] non-peaceful means” to resolve disputes over Taiwan’s status and protect its national sovereignty. China’s combat aircraft outnumber that of Taiwan by four to five times, and despite the recent authorization of \$8 billion worth of jet fighters from the United States to Taiwan, Taiwan’s military would not stand a chance against the People’s Liberation Army of China (Roblin).

At this point in history, only time will tell where the China-Taiwan divide will lead. Through its words and actions over time, China has clearly communicated its stance on the issue, and some Taiwanese believe that China will have its own way eventually. In a journal article published in the *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Xu Shiquan writes, “It must be admitted that... the objective existence of one China cannot be changed... There is no future for Taiwan independence, which can only bring disaster to our brethren in Taiwan. It is definitely not mainstream public opinion in Taiwan and is repugnant to the hopes of Chinese abroad” (Xu). This pessimistic perspective stands in contrast with that of Richard N. Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, who stated, “the status quo is... far less imperfect than what would follow unilateral actions and attempts to resolve a situation that doesn’t lend itself to a neat solution” (Council on Foreign Relations). Taiwan’s main political parties, the Democratic Progressive Party and the Guomindang, have different ideas for what strategies Taiwan should use to address its relationship with China. Regardless of their respective decisions, historical experts have cautioned that China and Taiwan should both take responsibility for their actions and try to work together to avert any crisis that could unfold. Additionally, the United States has more potential than ever to play a role as a mediator in their relationship, and will need to prioritize maintaining balance between the powers in Asia. If the U.S. was to make a mistake in

dealing with China-Taiwan relations, it would do irreparable damage to American credibility and interests among its allies. Knowing all of this, it is somewhat comforting that the stability of U.S.-Taiwan relations would be the last variable that is likely to negatively influence the future of Taiwan's independence campaign (Wang).

All in all, unpacking the complicated relationship between China and Taiwan has raised important questions about censorship, diplomacy, and international relations in our world today. What does it mean for a state or country to truly be “independent”? How does this age of technological advancement provide outlets for everyone, from the average citizen to government officials, to engage with international politics? Given their history, how should the two parties best communicate about current and future issues while maintaining peace and integrity? Perhaps the lesson China and Taiwan can teach us is that it does not matter which entity is number one, but rather their ability to work together as one.

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