


Taiwan strait crises and Chiang Kai-shek's strategic thinking : a perspective from the Taiwan's archive

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journal or publication title	IDE Discussion Paper
volume	481
year	2014-10-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2344/1387

 IDE Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments

IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 481

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October 2014

Abstract

This paper uses Taiwan's archival documents to reexamine the two Taiwan Strait crises and the characteristics of Chiang Kai-shek's strategic thinking. Section 2 examines the oscillation of U.S. policy concerning the ROC's offensive toward mainland China and the defense of the Da-chen islands before and after the initiation of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954-1955. Doing so will highlight the contradictory U.S. attitude that contributed to the crisis and weakened its ability to control Chiang. Section 3 focuses on Chiang Kai-shek's strategic vision toward East Asia. In particular, this section focuses on his strategic thinking and tries to assess whether or not he was a "reckless" or "irrational" leader as often described in the previous research on his personality.

Keywords: Chiang Kai-shek, Taiwan's Archives, Taiwan Strait Crises, Quemoy, Da-chen

JEL classification: Z

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Taiwan Strait Crises and Chiang Kai-shek's Strategic Thinking : A Perspective from the Taiwan's Archive

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***This work is a part of the research project financed by Grant-in-Aid for Science Research [KAKENHI] (A) (No.21243013) from 2009 to 2012, and (C) (No. 26380228, 2014-ongoing), both provided by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). This paper was originally presented at the 2011 summer symposium, *Alliances and Borders in the Making and Unmaking of Regional Powers*, organized by the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, July 7-8, 2011. I would like to express deep thanks to David Wolff, who encouraged me to contribute my work to the symposium.

Introduction

Generally, scholars who specialize in Asian diplomatic history regard the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* and archival materials in the United States as important primary resources. In terms of compiling and making public historical documents on relations between the United States and Asian countries, the United States has been playing a predominant role. In contrast, in Asian countries, archival documents had been closed to the public and scholars, and it had been very difficult or impossible to utilize them for examining historical events.

In recent years, however, primary resources have gradually been opened in various Asian countries, and it has become possible for scholars to analyze diplomatic history from Asian as well as from U.S. perspectives. Taiwan has not been an exception to this trend. The situation surrounding Taiwanese archives at such places as the Academia Historica, the Academia Sinica, and the Historical Commission of the Central Committee of the Kuomintang (KMT) has improved, and formerly unavailable documents have become accessible. As a result, the historical documents including those on the foreign policies of the Chiang Kai-shek administration, of the Republic of China (ROC)'s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and of the KMT have become available for scholars.

Thanks to these developments, it has become possible to analyze important historical events involving Taiwan, such as the Taiwan Strait Crises in the 1950s, and historical characters such as Chiang Kai-shek not only from the U.S. but also Taiwanese perspectives. According to the conventional traditional historical interpretation based on the U.S. sources, such as the *FRUS*, U.S. foreign policy concerning the Taiwan Strait Crises was primarily defensive, and the United States tried to stop Chiang Kai-shek from

launching a counterattack against the mainland China while trying to deter the People's Republic of China (PRC) from taking over Taiwan.¹ Such an interpretation emphasizes how hard the U.S. government tried to prevent "reckless" Chiang Kai-shek from expanding the military conflict aimed at the PRC. From this perspective, the U.S. policy of "unleashing Chiang", which it pursued toward the Republic of China (ROC) government after Taiwan's de-neutralization declaration in 1953, was an artificial psychological strategy or a "bluff" by the United States directed toward the Soviet Union and the PRC; but in fact, the U.S. government firmly continued to tie Chiang's hands using ROC military forces. Moreover, after the two Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950s, the U.S. government successfully restrained Chiang from taking offensive actions against the PRC, albeit with difficulties. This is the conventional interpretation of U.S.-ROC relations in the 1950s based on U.S. primary sources.²

According to ROC historical documents that have recently become available, however, it becomes clear that the U.S. government should assume its fair share of blame in contributing to the crises, and that its policy toward the ROC was inconsistent or even

¹ Thomas E. Stolper, *China, Taiwan, and the Offshore Islands: Together with an Implication for Outer Mongolia and Sino-Soviet Relations* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, An East Gate Book, 1985); Robert Accinelli, *Crisis and Commitment: United State Policy Toward Taiwan, 1950-1955* (University of North Carolina, 1996); John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, An East Gate Book, 1997).

² See Gordon H. Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Quemoy-Matsu Crisis," *International Security* 2, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 99; He Di, "The Evolution of the People's Republic of China's Policy toward the Offshore Islands," pp.222-45 in Warren I. Cohen and Akira Iriye, eds., *The Great Powers in East Asia, 1953-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990); Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996); Shu Guang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 1992).

self-contradictory. In fact, the documents show that before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the United States had been pursuing a policy that probably encouraged Chiang to retain a glimmer of hope for his ultimate return to the mainland. It is arguable that such a U.S. attitude weakened its own leverage over the ROC government and enabled Chiang to behave as he wished to the contrary of U.S. interests. Moreover, the ROC archival materials show that Chiang, even though he may have been “reckless” and “obsessed” with the impossible mission of reclaiming the Chinese mainland, was a sophisticated and uncanny strategist who possessed a grand vision for East Asia as well as for the survival of his regime.

This paper uses Taiwan’s archival documents to reexamine the two Taiwan Strait crises and the characteristics of Chiang Kai-shek’s strategic thinking. Section 2 examines the oscillation of U.S. policy concerning the ROC’s offensive toward mainland China and the defense of the Da-chen islands before and after the initiation of the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954-1955. Doing so will highlight the contradictory U.S. attitude that contributed to the crisis and weakened its ability to control Chiang. Section 3 focuses on Chiang Kai-shek’s strategic vision toward East Asia. In particular, this section focuses on his strategic thinking and tries to assess whether or not he was a “reckless” or “irrational” leader as often described in the previous research on his personality. This paper ends by summarizing its findings and suggests future research agendas.

2. Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Defense of Taiwan

(1) Issues of Taiwan’s Counterattack against Mainland China

The conventional interpretation posits that the U.S. government had been trying, with enormous difficulties, to deter reckless and unreasonable Chiang Kai-shek from launching military operations against the PRC. Throughout the 1950s, Chiang frequently attempted to persuade the U.S. government to support the ROC's counteroffensives against the mainland. In the end, however, the United States did not yield in its refusal to approve the ROC's large-scale military offensives, forcing Chiang to give up opportunities to do so. Looking at Chiang's behavior this way, his proposal to conduct a counteroffensive against the PRC reflected his reckless, risk-taking personality.

However, according to Taiwan's archival documents, this interpretation is not necessarily accurate. These documents indicate that the U.S. government's attitude toward the ROC's counteroffensive against mainland China was inconsistent. More importantly, the U.S. government even displayed a supportive attitude toward the ROC government's counterattack against the mainland at least before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis; at least immediately before the first crisis, the U.S. government actively encouraged the ROC government to renew its interests in conducting counteroffensives against the mainland. Although it is usually believed that the United States was "entrapped" into the crisis due to Chiang's attempts to do so, the United States actively contributed to the escalation of the crisis.

According to the minutes of a meeting on February 1, 1953 between ROC President Chiang and the U.S. Ambassador to Taipei, Karl L. Rankin, the latter indicated that the purpose of U.S. military aid to the ROC had practically shifted from defense to offense. Rankin said as follows to Chiang:

During the past week, I have been working on a comprehensive report to the State Department. The point in this report is a recommendation for increased military aid. I proposed in the first place that there should be a definite purpose of this aid. It has been often [said] that our aid is to defend Taiwan. However, the aid program has already gone beyond the defense stage. If this should mean that the purpose of the aid has changed from defensive to offensive, then let it be clearly said and we can work out a program accordingly³

It should be noted that this meeting was held right before the U.S. government declared on February 2, 1953 that the U.S. Seventh Fleet would no longer stop the ROC from launching attacks against Communist China. According to the conventional interpretation, this declaration hardly represented the U.S. decision to “unleash” Chiang Kai-shek.⁴ But this document shows that the day before the declaration, a high-ranking U.S. official had indicated to Chiang that they should be prepared for a policy change from defensive to offensive, signaling to Chiang that he should expect a policy change in the direction favorable to the ROC.

The conversation that took place between Chiang Kai-shek and the Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Arthur W. Radford, on June 4, 1953 was more revealing. Radford raised the question of a joint U.S.-ROC military command in case of operations against the mainland and explored whether President Chiang would be willing to give the ROC command authority to the U.S side. Radford mentioned:

In case the United States Air Force and Navy were to support a landing of Chinese

³ 412.7/0011, Diplomatic Archives (*Waijiaobu Dangan*), Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

⁴ Nancy B. Tucker, “John Foster Dulles and the Taiwan Roads of the ‘Two Chinas’ Policy,” in Richard H. Immerman, ed, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.239; Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Policy toward Communist China, 1949-1969* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), P.131; Harry Harding, “The Legacy of the Decade for Later Years: An American Perspective,” in Harding and Yuan, eds., *Sino-American Relations*, p321.

ground forces on the mainland, would the President accept the American practices of giving command to the United States Navy from the time of departure of the invasion fleet to the moment when the ground forces were ready to take over command. Second, if American ground forces should participate in the initial operations on the mainland, would the President agree to have an American assume command of all ground forces until such time as the American ground forces were ready to retire.⁵

The idea of ROC forces operating under the U.S. command, as Radford suggests, must have reminded Chiang of the UN Command that integrated South Korean forces with the U.S. military during the Korean War, implying that the United States would be willing to take the lead in conducting a U.S.-ROC joint military operation against the mainland. This was a hypothetical question for Radford, but it is not too difficult to imagine that the mere fact that the top U.S. military official directly brought such a matter to Chiang must have raised ROC expectations toward the United States. Of course, Chiang immediately responded that he would accept both proposals put forward by Radford. He also said that in order to implement the plan to put ROC forces under U.S. command, it was necessary to involve military officers and have them study more detailed procedures to do so.⁶

Chiang Kai-shek must have been rejuvenated by Radford's proposal. In his conversation with Radford the next day, June 5, 1954, Chiang spoke more concretely about conducting a large-scale counter-invasion plan against mainland China. In the meeting Chiang proposed to Radford that in support of invasion operations, he would want 10,000 paratroopers trained and equipped by the United States as soon as possible.

⁵ 412/0052, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Chiang argued that after the completion of the plan stated above, he would like to see another 25,000 paratroops trained so that they could be used to support invasion operations. Radford politely dismissed Chiang's proposal saying that the use of paratroopers in such a large-scale operation was too risky and had little prospect of success, and argued that Chiang should consider an alternative and more practical strategy. However, they confirmed that further study should be continued in preparation for a counter-invasion plan against the mainland.

(2) Defense of the Da-chen Island

As mentioned above, before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, U.S. government officials had expressed a positive attitude toward the ROC's use of force against the PRC, but the U.S. attitude gradually changed after the first crisis. On September 3, 1954, PRC artillery began shelling the KMT-held offshore islands, Quemoy. During the crisis in December 1954, a mutual security treaty was concluded between the United States and the ROC. However, the fact that the offshore islands adjacent to the Chinese coast were not explicitly included in the mutual security treaty may have invited the PRC's attack against Da-chen Island, one of the ROC-held offshore islands, in January 1955. Defending Da-chen was not favorable for the U.S. and ROC, and since the United States considered the island's strategic value as less than that of Quemoy and Matsu, it proposed that the ROC withdraw its forces from the island.

According to the conventional interpretation, the U.S. government experienced extreme difficulty in persuading Chiang Kai-shek to withdraw from the Da-chen Island.⁷

⁷ Gordon H. Chang, "To the Nuclear Brink: Eisenhower, Dulles, and Quemoy-Matsu Crisis,"

Because of this, it is often argued that Chiang was irrationally obsessed with the defense of the offshore islands despite the huge risk of causing a major military clash.

It is true that Chiang did not easily accept the withdrawal of ROC forces from Da-chen Island. But ROC archival records show that there was a legitimate reason why Chiang was so reluctant to accept the withdrawal. As it turned out, Chiang did not simply persist in defending Da-chen Island in order to keep the hope of ultimately returning to the mainland; it was the United States that had encouraged and even instructed the ROC to fortify the defenses of Da-chen before the First Taiwan Strait Crisis. The ROC archival documents reveal that before the start of the crisis, the U.S. government strongly encouraged the ROC government to enhance Da-chen's defenses, and even recommended the ROC to blockade the PRC's shipping around Da-chen and other offshore islands.⁸

There remain numerous communications between the U.S. and ROC militaries concerning their discussions of the defense of Da-chen Island and blockading the PRC around the island. In February 1953 in a letter by William C. Chase, Major General, USA Chief to the ROC's Ministry of National Defense, Chase suggested that "immediate thought be given and plans be made to blockade the China Mainland, with respect to Chinese Communists shipping only, from Swatow to Da-chen, both inclusive." Furthermore, Chase explained that the ROC military should consult with the U.S. side on this plan so that the U.S. military would be able "to assist [ROC forces] every possible way."⁹

International Security, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 96-122.

⁸ 409/0236, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

⁹ 409/0236, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

It is important to note that the ROC military initially was not enthusiastic about the blockade plan near Da-chen because it considered that Da-chen's defenses were fragile and that it would be difficult to blockade near the island without strengthening the ROC's defense capabilities there.¹⁰ The ROC even argued that if the U.S. government still wanted the ROC to strengthen the defense of the offshore islands, additional military aid and assistance from the United States would be required.¹¹ While this counter-proposal may have been partly an ROC tactic to receive more aid from the United States, the fact that the ROC was aware of the difficulty of defending Da-chen Island in itself was significant.

The United States requested on another occasion that the ROC government should increase the latter's defense efforts for the offshore islands, Da-chen Island in particular, as the U.S. military was in the process of reviewing defense plans for Taiwan and the offshore islands. In a meeting with ROC Foreign Minister George Yeh (Yeh Kung-ch'ao) on August 12, 1953, U.S. Ambassador Rankin stated the following:

Washington very much hoped that the Chinese Government would make every effort to hold the islands, particularly Tachen (Da-chen), while the matter of integrating those islands into the defense scheme of Taiwan and the Pescadores was being actively studied pending the assumption of office of Admiral Radford as Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff.¹²

As this message indicates, by August 1954 the U.S. government was actively encouraging the ROC to defend the offshore islands including Da-chen, just before the first Taiwan Strait Crisis erupted. The situation around that time did not allow Chiang

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² 426.2/0001, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

Kai-shek to refuse such a U.S. request, as the ROC was in the midst of negotiations with the United States on concluding a mutual security treaty. The defense of Da-chen should be considered in this context.

However, the U.S. government reversed its attitude toward the offshore islands after the First Taiwan Strait Crisis began as it recognized the operational difficulties and risks involving the defense of these islands. When the U.S. government asked the ROC to withdraw its troops from the Da-chen Island, Chiang Kai-shek strongly criticized such sudden change in U.S. policy. Chiang's reaction was natural and understandable, given that he had been trying to improve the island's defense because the United States had asked him to do so. Therefore, Chiang's attitude should not be considered as a symbol of his "reckless" attitude or his "groundless ambition" to return to the mainland. In the end, as a result of the U.S. government's strong pressure, ROC forces on Da-chen were compelled to withdraw in February 1955. Naturally, the U.S. government's sudden policy change made Chiang Kai-shek distrustful of the U.S. government.

Judging from the analysis provided above, it is not an exaggeration that certain U.S. actions toward the ROC and high U.S. officials' communications with Chiang Kai-shek encouraged Chiang to preserve and increase his expectation that the United States might help him initiate counteroffensives against the PRC and possibly return to the mainland. It may be reasonable and logical to think that such a U.S. attitude then weakened its bargaining power over the ROC government, and in fact enabled Chiang to behave in a way not favorable to U.S. interests. The fact that the United States had enormous difficulties in persuading Chiang to withdraw from Da-chen can be explained quite well by this reasoning, even without considering Chiang's personality and

character.

3. Chiang Kai-shek's Strategic Vision toward East Asia

(1) The Logical Consistency of Chiang Kai-shek's Strategic Thinking

In the previous section, it was shown that Chiang Kai-shek was not necessarily overly reckless or irrational, and what seemed to be his aggressive reactions to U.S. policies during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis are in a sense understandable if one takes into account the U.S. behavior toward the ROC before the crisis. Indeed, the ROC documents show that Chiang Kai-shek was rather a sophisticated thinker who possessed a strategic vision toward East Asia and was able to put the survival of the ROC in that broad vision.

The ROC memo dated November 25, 1949 shows that Chiang Kai-shek was contemplating an intriguing and uncanny idea that he might have proposed to the U.S. government. Titled "Proposed Sino-American Agreements Concerning Taiwan," the document shows that the ROC proposed, or at least considered proposing that the ROC should "enter into three separate agreements with the United States with respect to Keelung, Kaohsiung and the Taiwan Railroad *in terms identical with those contained in the Sino-Soviet Agreements of 1945 concerning Dairen, Port Arthur and Chinese Eastern Railway*"¹³ (emphasis added). This means that the United States and the ROC would form an alliance so that the United States would keep military bases in the two cities in Taiwan and retain the right to operate the Taiwan Railroad.

There is no doubt that this was Chiang's desperate attempt to keep the Harry

¹³ 412/0006, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

Truman administration from “abandoning” the ROC and from seeking to establish working relations with the PRC.¹⁴ However, the shrewd and immensely sophisticated character of Chiang Kai-shek can be seen in the intension behind this proposal. First, the ROC government considered that such agreements could be used to harass the PRC in its dealings with the Soviet Union in northern China. The November 25 document says:

The Agreement must be publicized as true copies of the Sino-Soviet Agreements of 1945 concerning Manchuria. What the Chinese Communists condone about Dairen, Port Arthur and the Chinese Eastern Railway should also, from the nationalistic viewpoint, be acceptable to them regarding similar arrangements with the U.S. regarding Keelung, Kaohsiung and the Taiwan Railway. By acknowledging Chinese sovereignty over Taiwan without waiting for a traditional peace treaty with Japan, the U.S. would show boldness in recognizing the validity of the Cairo Declaration, the Potsdam Declaration and the Instrument of Surrender as legal and binding international agreements.¹⁵

By publicizing such an agreement, the ROC government believed that it could put the PRC in an awkward position; if the PRC had tried to blame the United States for the latter’s privileges obtained in the agreement, it would have inevitably highlighted the similar problems that had been created between the Soviet Union and the PRC as a result of the 1945 Sino-Soviet agreement. Needless to say, the fact that the 1945 Sino-Soviet agreement was negotiated by the ROC, not the Chinese Communists, made this tactic awfully wily. The following passage in the same document is even more interesting. It states:

Even if the Communists should succeed in invading Taiwan, the U.S. should not

¹⁴ By that time, the U.S. White Paper on China had been already published, indicating to the ROC that the U.S. government was being prepared for abandoning the ROC.

¹⁵ 421/0006, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

directly participate against them but should prepare to recognize the Peking government on the condition that the Peking regime would recognize and respect American rights under this agreement. The U.S. should insist upon its treaty rights just as Russia enjoyed its rights in Manchuria under both regimes. Alternatively, withdrawal of the U.S. from Taiwan could only be made condition on Russia's withdrawal from Manchuria.¹⁶

Here, the ROC government was probably trying to demonstrate to the U.S. government the benefits of concluding the proposed agreement with itself. On the one hand, the passage reassured the United States that it would not have to intervene even if the ROC were defeated by the PRC. Even if such a defeat were to occur, the United States would still be able to use the agreement to harass Soviet-PRC relations by highlighting Soviet privileges in the PRC.

The fact that Chiang Kai-shek was a sophisticated strategist can be seen in three meetings he had on November 9, 1953 with U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon, who was visiting Taipei. In the meetings Chiang displayed his own view regarding the strategic situation in East Asia and laid out his idea of how to deal with it. First, Chiang elaborated how he viewed the Soviet strategy in East Asia. He argued that “[i]n Soviet strategy, cold war is hot war,” indicating that Soviet strategic interests lay in buying time to develop its own capabilities while keeping the United States engaged in constant Cold War tensions without its own direct involvement. From this, Chiang predicted Soviet reaction to a counter-offensive against the PRC as follows:

It is my conviction that Russia will never intervene openly in the hostilities when we launch a counter-attack on the Mainland because that would defeat the Soviet

¹⁶ 407.1/0185, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

policy of not taking an active part in war but of actually achieving its program of world conquest without getting itself directly involved militarily. To my mind, Russia will never enter into a war unless it is absolutely necessary. The question naturally arises as to when it will be absolutely necessary for Russia to enter into a war. I believe the time will come when the balance of power between the United States and Russia will be drastically upset; that is, when most of the countries of the world are either pro-Communist or have adopted a neutral stand and the United States is placed in an isolated position.¹⁷

This logic was certainly self-serving; since the ROC needed to get substantial U.S. support for launching its counter-attack against the PRC, it wanted to persuade the U.S. government that Soviet involvement in a war against the PRC was unlikely. Even so, the logic that Chiang employed here was not inconsistent but rather close to the line of hawkish realists, although he still may have underestimated the possibility of Soviet intervention to support the PRC.

The second interesting point that Chiang made in his meetings with Nixon is included in his following statement.

To resist effectively Soviet aggression in East Asia and prevent the expansion of Soviet influence toward the Pacific, a pact between the Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea is necessary.... My opinion is that our objective will be partially achieved if, with American backing, a pact can be first signed between the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China. A Sino-Japanese pact with American backing would also be desirable. Most Asiatic peoples are afraid of Japan and this is particularly true of the Koreans. But I think otherwise. I am willing to let bygones be bygones. For the sake of fighting Communism, I believe this is the only attitude the Asiatic people should take. After China is allied with the Republic of Korea on the one hand, and with Japan on the other, the fundamental requirement for the three countries to fight Russia together would have been largely met although there would be two pacts instead of one. However, both pacts, to become effective, must have the support of the United

¹⁷ 407.1/0185, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

States.¹⁸

What was noteworthy in this statement was Chiang's strategic view toward the role of Japan in his East Asia strategy. Of course, China was the largest victim of Japan's pre-WWII aggression, and as the leader of the ROC, Chiang must have had negative feelings toward Japan, or at least must have faced pressures from his supporters who maintained hostility to Japan. Such emotional or political aspects were hardly observable in Chiang's statement; he considered the importance of Japan from a purely strategic perspective, and argued for tolerant attitude toward Japan. Furthermore, recognizing Koreans' negative attitude toward Japan, Chiang proposed two separate security pacts, one between South Korea and the ROC and the other between Japan and the ROC. This reflects his sense of pragmatism.

This does not mean that Chiang considered that concluding a security pact with Japan was a realistic prospect. In fact, Chiang was concerned about an increasing neutralist tendency in Japan. Around the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, for instance, the ROC government was carefully watching the heated debates within the Japanese Diet concerning the danger that Japan might be entrapped by the crisis; the archival materials included the copies of Japanese newspapers on the subjects. Probably for this reason, the ROC government had a strong concern about the Japanese political situation regarding revising the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.¹⁹ The ROC government carefully studied the argument about the scope of the treaty's geographical application,

¹⁸ 407.1/0185, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

¹⁹ 019.2/0004 and 019.2/0005, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

particularly whether or not the treaty would apply in the event of an emergency in the Taiwan Strait.²⁰

(2) Other Characteristics of Chiang Kai-shek's Strategic Assessments

Another interesting feature of Chiang Kai-shek's thinking is his assessment of the danger of a Soviet "peace offensive" and its potential effects to promote neutralism in the United States and Asia. Among the ROC archival materials, Chiang's critical assessment of neutralism in Asia and the United States is conspicuous. Around the period when the two Taiwan Strait crises occurred, he was warning about the danger of a prevailing "neutralism."²¹ For example, he sent a letter to Eisenhower on April 15, 1953 in which he emphasized that the Soviet Union's recent peace offensive should be carefully studied. In Chiang's point of view, the peace offensive only served to further strengthen the Soviet Union's initiative in the world. He pointed out as follows:

I believe that the peace offensive was launched to gain time for the consolidation of power on the part of the new Soviet hierarchy at home and for exerting tighter control over the satellites abroad.... The present overtures from Soviet Russia, be they of an offensive or defensive character, must not be allowed to neutralize what you have already achieved or to forestall what you have set out to achieve.²²

Chiang Kai-shek was particularly critical of British "neutralism" and argued that it was not acceptable in East Asia.

²⁰ 013.1/0007, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

²¹ Chiang also expressed his concern about the Soviet peace offensive on July 20, 1956 (407.1/0186, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan). In February 1958, he expressed that U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union might strengthen neutralist positions in Indonesia and Japan. The archival evidence also shows that Chiang was greatly apprehensive about Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the United States in 1959. (405.21/0059, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan).

²² 412.4/0085, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

There is something else besides Communism which is still potentially more dangerous to the free world—that is, the so-called neutralism under Britain's leadership. Our most important task, therefore, is how to make the British understand our anti-Communist struggle, and especially to prevent them from opposing the U.S. role of leading the anti-Communist front...in East Asia, since the people here would never again accept Britain's leadership. Britain should not interfere with the anti-Communist efforts in this area nor with the anti-Communist policy of the United States...I hope the United States Government, when the time comes, will tell the British on our behalf that if they don't stand in the way of our anti-Communist efforts then we can assure them that when we fight back to the Mainland we shall return their properties and protect their legitimate interests.²³

Chiang regarded British diplomatic recognition of the PRC as an appeasement of Communism, and argued that British policy was a major obstacle to promoting the anti-Communist efforts in Asia. Therefore, he asked the United States to exert its influence over Britain to change the latter's diplomatic attitude toward China.

Behind Chiang's concern about neutralism lay his skepticism of the U.S. attitude toward the ROC. On the one hand, Chiang Kai-shek had a deep distrust toward the U.S. government, which was understandable given the ambivalent U.S. attitude described above. On the other side, he desperately needed U.S. support, thus feared that the United States might abandon the ROC government and develop a close relationship with Communist China. The mixture of these feelings led Chiang to emphasize the danger of neutralism in its dealings with the United States.

The ROC documents also show that its government carefully watched internal developments in the PRC, the confusion and chaos caused by the Great Leap Forward in particular. There are a number of ROC's documents submitted by the National Bureau

²³ 407.1/0185, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

of Security (*Guojiaanquanju*) titled “Current Situation in the PRC” (*Zhonggongxiankuang*). Many of these analyses were focused on the negative impacts of the Great Leap Forward, including the poor functioning of the people’s communes, suppression of religious activities, rapes, and the spread of epidemic disease in mainland China. Therefore, the ROC regarded the Great Leap Forward as a hopeless social endeavor.²⁴ The “Current Situation in the PRC” in 1958, for instance, cited concrete examples of many people starving to death in several people’s communes due to the ill functioning of food distribution in Guangdong Province, and of the deaths of many citizens in riots opposing the corruption of Chinese Communist Party officials. The ROC government grasped from these reports that the people’s communes were absurdly malfunctioning and causing domestic chaos within the PRC.²⁵

As described above, Chiang Kai-shek was not necessarily “reckless” or “irrational” as often described previously. It is true that his strategic vision was self-serving, but that does not mean that it was logically inconsistent or illogical. Rather, the ROC documents show that Chiang had a broad strategic vision about East Asia and tried to put the survival of the ROC in that perspective. The documents also show that he was capable of a sophisticated diplomatic maneuvering and possessed a certain degree of pragmatism.

4. Conclusion and a Future Research Agenda

This paper examined ROC archival documents in Taiwan to present a fuller

²⁴ 012.2/0005, 012.2/0006, Diplomatic Archives, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

understanding of the Taiwan Strait Crises in the 1950s and how Chiang Kai-shek dealt with them in the broader strategic context in which he and the ROC were situated. In doing so, the paper first focused on the U.S. government's contradictory policy regarding the issues of the ROC's counterattack against the PRC and the defense of Da-chen Island. It then focused on Chiang Kai-shek's strategic thinking toward East Asia, highlighting the characteristics of his thinking. By doing these, this paper challenged the conventional interpretation that Chiang Kai-shek was a reckless or irrational leader who insisted on returning to the Chinese mainland. In fact, Taiwan's archival documents show that the U.S. government itself should be blamed for encouraging the ROC government to consider counterattacks against the mainland. It is true that Chiang Kai-shek was also seeking every opportunity to get the United States involved in counterattacking mainland China. However, Chiang's thinking was logically consistent, and he was arguably a pragmatic strategist who was able to see East Asia in broad strategic perspective.

Of course, there are limitations in this study. As the title of this paper indicates, it provides *a* perspective from Taiwan's standpoint, and there may be other ROC perspectives that could be discovered by utilizing other Taiwanese archival sources. More relevant sources may be available at the Academia Historica, or Chiang Kai-shek's diary available at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University may provide more materials to analyze. Archival documents such as these could add more to the understanding of Chiang Kai-shek's character.

This study provides some implications for future research. First, it is necessary to find out whether analyzing more Taiwanese archival sources will reveal other ways of

interpreting the ROC's perspective toward the Taiwan Strait Crises. As pointed out above, plenty of room is left for more archival research; thus more archival research utilizing the Taiwan's sources should be encouraged. Second, it may be fruitful to explore how Chiang's perception of U.S. policy toward the ROC may have influenced his later approach toward the United States and the issue of returning to mainland China. As discussed in this paper, U.S. handling of the two Taiwan Strait crises probably strengthened Chiang distrust toward the U.S. government. It is also arguable that Chiang's warning about the spread of neutralism in Asia and the United States reflected his lack of trust in the U.S. government. It is quite possible that these sentiments Chiang came to hold may have influenced his subsequent policy toward the U.S. government. For instance, Chiang's distrust toward the U.S. government may have led to the ROC's unilateral declaration in 1962 of its intension to conduct counteroffensive operations against the mainland China. In future research, it may be interesting to explore whether such a linkage between Chiang's beliefs and the 1962 declaration existed, or how these two may have been related to each other.