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I read something new
in those dots, strokes, and lines
gates will soon open
just look for the signs
an island awaits you
with jungles and snakes
fly over the pole
then put on your brakes

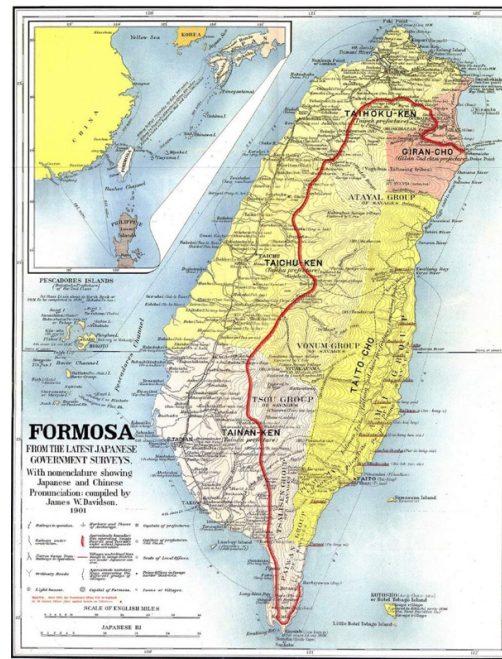


Chapter 8 - When Taiwan was China

I began my studies of Chinese in 1972 at the University of Montana – on a whim. As a student in the 70's, the James Legge translation of The I Ching: The Book of Changes (易經 Yìjīng) and translations of the Tang dynasty poets Li Bai, Tu Fu, and Han Shan by Arthur Waley, Kenneth Rexroth, and Gary Snyder were widely circulated - and China was cool! My first Chinese language teacher was Father John Wang, a Catholic Priest from Shandong province who was also head of the U of M Spanish department. We studied one chapter of John DeFrancis' Beginning Chinese every week, and finished the year by reading The Lady in the Painting (畫兒上的美人 Huà'ér shàngde Měirén). By the end of my first year, I was hooked. I wanted to go to China. Unfortunately, for an American in the early 70's, mainland China was not an option. Father Wang solved that. "No problem, Peter. Go to Taiwan."



At that time I was working on a ranch in Horse Prairie, near Dillon, Montana to support my university studies and was thinking about picking up my first horse, a dun mare. When I compared the cost of a round trip ticket to Taiwan and the price of the horse I wanted, they were about the same. So I did what any red-blooded American would have done. I flipped a coin. Taiwan won. Father Wang assured me that his brother (a Catholic priest in Taiwan) would find me a job teaching English for 60 NT\$ an hour (about \$1.50 US) and living in Taiwan was cheap, so I cut my hair, borrowed a corduroy sports coat from a friend, and was on my way.



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America, at that time, recognized Taiwan as the “real” China. Chiang Kai-Shek was still President and Mandarin was called Guóyǔ 國語 (the national language) in Taiwan. The Kuomintang aka KMT aka Nationalists ruled under martial law – but the people in Taiwan seemed to really like Americans. One of my first impressions of the Chinese in Taiwan was how warm and welcoming the

people were. Later, I found out that Chinese from many places had a similar opinion of people from Taiwan. An oft-heard expression among Chinese was “台灣的人情味很濃” Tái wān rén de rén qíng wèi hěn nóng - “Taiwan people are really nice.”

The first people in Taiwan were, most likely, not Chinese. The indigenous people in Taiwan were Austronesian. Chinese have been settling in Taiwan for centuries, however. Most came from Fujian and the dialect of Chinese which was most common in Taiwan, before the KMT came in 1949, was the southern Min dialect 閩南話 Mǐnnán huà (also called Taiwanese), the same dialect which is spoken in Xiamen (Amoy), Fujian. The Dutch occupied Taiwan for about 20 years in the mid-17th century. But it was the Portuguese who named Taiwan “Ilha Formosa” (beautiful island) in the mid 16th century. Taiwan is still sometimes called “Formosa”. China ceded Taiwan to the Japanese in the Treaty of Shimonoseki after losing the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 during the waning years of the Qing Dynasty. Taiwan remained a part of Japan for 50 years until the end of WW2 when it was reunited with China. When I first went to Taiwan, I encountered quite a few old people who did not speak Mandarin. They only spoke Taiwanese and Japanese.

In the 1972 Joint Communique of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国和美利坚合众国联合公报), “the United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China” and “does not challenge that position.” (“美国方面声明：美国认识到，在台湾海峡两边的所有中国人都认为只有一个中国，台湾是中国的一部分。美国政府对这一立场不提出异议。”)

On January 1, 1979, America joined a majority of nations by formally recognizing the People’s Republic of China as the legitimate government of China. There are currently only a handful of countries + the Holy See in the Vatican – who continue to have nation to nation relations with Taiwan.