CHINA 201

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Beijing's "One China Principle" and the U.S. "One China Policy"

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Though Beijing attempts to conflate the issue of "One China," Beijing's "One China principle" and the U.S. "One China policy" are very different. Beijing's One China principle claims that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In contrast, the U.S. One China policy does not take an official stance on the PRC's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan. Rather, the United States only "acknowledges" Beijing's position "that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China."[1]

Beijing's "One China Principle"

Beijing's One China principle insists that "there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is part of China, and the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China."[2] According to a Chinese government white paper on Taiwan published in February 2000, Beijing developed the One China principle after the 1949 founding of the PRC in order to establish diplomatic relations with other countries while safeguarding its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.[3] Nevertheless, prior to 1949, CCP leaders had sometimes expressed explicit support for Taiwan's independence. In 1936, Mao Zedong, who had recently consolidated his position as the dominant figure in the CCP, told American journalist Edgar Snow that the CCP would support Taiwan in its "struggle for independence" from Japanese imperialism.[†] [4] While CCP authorities have consistently claimed sovereignty over Taiwan since 1949, the specific term "One China principle" was not widely used until the 1970s, and the phrase only became a mainstay of official Chinese government rhetoric in the 1990s and early 2000s.[‡] [5] The PRC's first white paper on Taiwan in 1993 only mentioned the "principle

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† These interviews were published in Edgar Snow's 1937 book, *Red Star Over China*. Chinese translations of *Red Star Over China* continued to include Mao's quote supporting Taiwan independence until at least 1979. More recent Chinese editions of the book, however, have censored Mao's comment on Taiwan. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 110; Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (西行漫记) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1979), 83–84. Translation; Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (西行漫记) (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005), 146. Translation.

‡ The first use of the term "One China principle" (一个中国的原则) in *People's Daily* was not until March 1971. *People's Daily*, "The Japanese Reactionary Faction's Ambition to Plot to Re-Occupy China's Taiwan Province Is Exposed" (日本反动派阴谋重新霸占我台湾省的野心毕露), March 21, 1971, 6. Translation.

of one China" in passing on four occasions.[6] In contrast, China's 2000 white paper on Taiwan was titled "The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue" and uses the term on 41 separate occasions.[7] Since the early 2000s, the "One China principle" has been ubiquitous in Chinese propaganda about Taiwan, and Chinese officials often repeat the false claim that all countries with which it has established diplomatic relations accept the "One China principle."[8]

Beijing's Use of "Reunification"

In Chinese propaganda, the "One China principle" is closely associated with Beijing's stated goal of achieving "reunification" with Taiwan.[9] Beijing uses the term "reunification" to refer to the process of absorbing Taiwan as an inalienable part of the state called "China" and to imply that cross-Strait relations are "purely an internal matter for China."[10] In contrast, Taiwan, the United States, and some international observers generally avoid the term "reunification" because Taiwan has never been governed by the PRC.[§] [11] This report uses the term "reunification" only when quoting CCP sources and sources that conform to CCP preferences. The choice to use "unification" or "reunification" is primarily an issue for English-language sources, as both words are used to translate the same Chinese-language term, *tongyi* ("to unite as one"). Nevertheless, the CCP has not always used the English term "reunification" to describe its ambition to rule Taiwan. After 1949, Beijing vowed to "liberate" Taiwan from Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang by military means before adopting the term "peaceful liberation" in the mid-1950s in a reexamination of its policies and an attempt to sway Chiang's government toward a negotiated political settlement.[12] It was not until the 1970s that the CCP consistently replaced "liberation" with "reunification."[13] Deng Xiaoping made this change in terminology official during his visit to the United States in 1979, speaking of "reunifying the motherland" and telling U.S. senators that China "no longer use[s] the term 'liberation of Taiwan.'"[14] Xi Jinping and CCP leaders now refer to the "complete reunification" of China—by which they mean imposing PRC sovereignty over Taiwan—as "indispensable for the realization of China's rejuvenation."[15] China's 2022 white paper on Taiwan uses the term *tongyi* (translated in English as reunification) no fewer than 124 times.[16]

The U.S. "One China Policy"

Despite Beijing's false claim that China and the United States established diplomatic relations "on the basis of the One China principle," the U.S. One China policy does not take a position on sovereignty over Taiwan. As articulated by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs: "The United States has a longstanding one China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three U.S.-China Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances."[**] [17] Significantly, in the 1978 U.S.-China Joint Communique, which established diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC, the United States reaffirmed it only "acknowledges" (but does not endorse) "the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part

[§] English-language statements published by Taiwan's government, including the Mainland Affairs Council and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, generally refer to China's pursuit of "unification" with Taiwan. The U.S. government generally does not use either "unification" or "reunification" in official statements pertaining to cross-Strait relations, which instead refer to the United States' opposition to "any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side." Major international newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, also generally use the term unification. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, *MAC 2024 First Quarter Report on the Situation in Mainland China*, May 6, 2024; Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *MOFA Response to False Claims Made in Joint Communiqué between PRC and Russia Regarding Taiwan*, December 22, 2023; U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Taiwan: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, May 28, 2022; Chris Buckley and Chris Horton, "Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option," *New York Times*, January 1, 2019; Adela Suliman, "China's Xi vows peaceful 'unification' with Taiwan Days after Sending a Surge of Warplanes near the Island," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2021.

[**] A detailed explanation of the Taiwan Relations Act (1979), Three Joint Communiques (1972, 1978, 1982), and the Six Assurances (1982) can be found in the Commission's 2019 Annual Report. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2019, 452–453

of China."[††] [18] Beijing has obfuscated this distinction through deliberate mistranslation. The Chinese text of the 1978 Communique translates "acknowledges" as *chengren* ("to recognize"), a term that in Chinese clearly implies U.S. agreement with China's position.[19] In contrast, the Chinese text of the 1972 Joint Communique, which first articulated each respective government's position on Taiwan, had translated "acknowledges" as *renshi* ("to be aware of"), a term that more faithfully conveys the meaning of the English text.[20]

According to its One China policy, the United States:

- "Oppose[s] any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side";
- "[Does] not support Taiwan independence";
- "Expect[s] cross-Strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means"; and
- "Continue[s] to have an abiding interest in peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."[21]

In line with the Taiwan Relations Act (1979), the United States also makes available defense articles and services to Taiwan "as necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability" and maintains its own ability to resist any use of "force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social and economic system, of Taiwan."[22]

[††] In the 1972 Joint Communique, the "U.S. side declared [that] 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. The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves." American Institute in Taiwan, *U.S.-PRC Joint Communique (1972)*, March 31, 2022.

Endnotes

[1] U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, *Joint Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China*, December 15, 1978.
[2] China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, *The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (一个中国的原则与台湾问题), February 2000. Translation.
[3] China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, *The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (一个中国的原则与台湾问题), February 2000. Translation.
[4] Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China*, Grove Press, 1994, 110.
[5] Google Ngram Viewer Search for the Term "One China Principle" (一个中国 原则 and 一个中国的原则) for the Years 1949–2022. *https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%E4%B8%80%E4%B8%AA%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%8E%9F%E5%88%99%2C%E4%B8%80%E4%B8%AA%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E7%9A%84%E5%8E%9F%E5%88%99&year_start=1949&year_end=2022&corpus=zh&smoothing=3&case_insensitive=false*.
[6] China's Taiwan Affairs Office and Information Office of the State Council, *The Taiwan Question and the Reunification of China* (台湾问题与中国的统一), August 1993. Translation.
[7] China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, *The One China Principle and the Taiwan Issue* (一个中国的原则与台湾问题), February 2000. Translation.
[8] China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council Information Office, *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era* (台 湾问题与新时代中国统一事业), August 2022.
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[11] *BBC News*, "China and Taiwan: A Really Simple Guide," January 7, 2024; Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, *MAC 2024 First Quarter Report on the Situation in Mainland China*, May 6, 2024; Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *MOFA Response to False Claims Made in Joint Communiqué between PRC and Russia Regarding Taiwan*, December 22, 2023; U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Taiwan: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet*, May 28, 2022; Chris Buckley and Chris Horton, "Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option," *New York Times*, January 1, 2019; Adela Suliman, "China's Xi vows peaceful 'unification' with Taiwan Days after Sending a Surge of Warplanes near the Island," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2021.
[12] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 167–171.
[13] Frank S.T. Hsiao and Lawrence R. Sullivan, "The Politics of Reunification: Beijing's Initiative on Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 20:8 (August 1980): 280; China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Taiwan Policy Guideline of 'Peaceful Reunification, One Country Two Systems,'* ("和平统一、一国两制" 的对台方针). Translation; "Google Ngram Viewer Search for the Terms "peaceful reunification" (和平统一) and "national reunification" (国家统一) for the years 1949–2022. *https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%E5%92%8C%E5%B9%B3%E7%BB%9F%E4%B8%80%2C+%E5%9B%BD%E5%AE%B6%E7%BB%9F%E4%B8%80&year_start=1949&year_end=2022&c orpus=en&smoothing=3&case_insensitive=false*.
[14] *Beijing Review*, "Vice Premier Deng Visits the United States," no. 6 (February 9, 1979).
[15] China's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council and the State Council Information Office, *The Taiwan Question and China's Reunification in the New Era* (台 湾问题与新时代中国统一事业), August 2022. Translation.
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[19] Jessica Drun, "One China, Multiple Interpretations," *Center for Advanced China Research*, December 28, 2017.
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[21] U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Taiwan: Bilateral Fact Sheet*, May 28, 2022.
[22] U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Taiwan: Bilateral Fact Sheet*, May 28, 2022.