BOOK REVIEWS

Taiwan Gaiko no Keisei: Nikkadanko to Chukaminkoku kara no Tenkan [The formation of Taiwan diplomacy: Japan-ROC diplomatic rupture and transformation from Republic of China], by Shimizu Urara, Nagoya, Nagoya University Press, Jan 2019, 284 pp., 6500 JPY (excluding tax) (hardback), ISBN 978-4-8158-0935-511.

Taiwan is emerging as a key place amid the ongoing US–China geopolitical and strategic confrontation. It is not easy to explain the existence of Taiwan by a simple IR theory. The physical reality that there exist two different governments across the Taiwan Strait has been theoretically denied according to the internationally accepted supreme principle of “One China.” This discourse’s normative power has guided the behaviors of the third countries for a long time, thus contributing to the regional stability. The contradiction between the physical reality and public notion has been successfully managed by the name of “status quo” without a decisive conclusion.¹

Dr. Shimizu Urara, a leading scholar of Taiwan’s diplomatic history, provides fresh insight on the unique nature of status quo of Taiwan Straits by examining the primary sources mainly from the 1940s to the 1970s. She observes that this deeply situated status quo was a natural outcome of cumulative attitudes of all involved parties that had to “give up” other options. Her book focuses on the diplomatic efforts of the Republic of China (ROC) in the struggle for its version of One China and the eventual transformation of its essential nature in the changing international environments. She pays weighty attentions to the ROC’s relationship with Japan as the title suggests. Except for introduction and conclusion, the book consists of nine main chapters. This review article summarizes each chapter’s main findings and discusses the total significance of the book.

1. The end of ROC’s realpolitik diplomacy

The first three chapters mainly deal with the ROC’s US policy from the 1940s to the 1960s. Chapter 1 (“Characteristics of ROC diplomacy in Taiwan”) addresses the key fundamentals, such as the role of diplomats, the relationship between them and leaders, and the legitimacy of government. In the context of China’s modern history wherein division or fragmentation of ruling government occurred regularly, the term of “legitimacy” was especially meaningful beyond the general concept of ruling. The ROC was proud of its diplomatic ability with a winning experience of coming back from the wartime temporary capital of Chungking to original Nanjing. Given this recent experience, the ROC initially regarded a retreat to Taiwan in 1949 as a temporary measure before the massive counterattack to the mainland. Therefore, it never abandoned the idea of representing China in its entirety. The ROC diplomats, with the professional knowledge of international law and direct experience of realpolitik, were to defend again their legitimacy at international forefront of diplomatic arena.

¹This book review is a revised version based on the original work in Japanese, S. Hirakawa, “Simizu Urara cho Taiwan Gaiko no Keisei: Nikkadanko to Chukaminkoku kara no Tenkan,” Chugoku Kenkyu Geppo, Vol. 74, No. 10 (2020): 33-35.
However, their optimism was soon betrayed as discussed in Chapter 2 (“The US-ROC relations in the 1950s and their dilemma regarding the status quo”). Even though the ROC ensured its legitimacy by allying with the US and keeping its permanent seat at the UN, Washington was never willing to offer active support for the ROC’s counterattack on mainland China. The ROC diplomats gradually understood that more flexible and even momentary concession were inevitable for the sake of a sustainable, cooperative relationship with the US. However, Chiang Kai-shek never accepted their professional suggestions. He was a fanatic about the legitimacy contest with the People’s Republic of China (PRC). While the ROC continued merely its effective control of Taiwan and nearby small Islands—thus, upholding theoretical “legitimacy” over China—, the PRC government accumulated its physical achievements of governing China’s mainland territory and its people. In addition, the reality of a divided China was gradually recognized by international society as a fixed situation which could not be overturned easily.

Chapter 3 (“The US-ROC relations and China’s representation issue at the UN in 1961”) describes the legitimacy crisis as a conclusion of the widening gap between Chiang Kai-Shek’s wish and the reality of international perceptions. By 1961, Washington’s policy was no different from other third countries who favored a reactive solution to the reality that two Chinese governments existed across the Taiwan Straits. Knowing the real crisis, the ROC diplomats again considered accepting “Two-Chinas” formula, which would secure their country’s minimum survival in the international society. Again, Chiang Kai-shek did not listen to their voices and firmly adhered to the One China concept. Thus, the only possibility for the ROC’s survival was lost. Furthermore, in foreign policy making circles, the traditional professional diplomats who were able to judge state survival were replaced by shortsighted bureaucrats who worked primarily for Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT) party’s administration. Shimizu points out that this personnel issue was one of the factors that led the decisive diplomatic isolation of the ROC government in the 1970s.

2. The art of diplomacy of “Semi-official, semi-private” or “informal”

Coping with China’s division, postwar Japan’s successive Cabinets consistently sought individual relations based on the reality, rather than ideological choices of the PRC and the ROC. Chap 4 (“The development of Japan-China-Taiwan relationship on separation of politics and economy”) examines the efforts of Ikeda administration in the early 1960s. Ikeda actively approached the PRC and elevated its relationship to a “semi-official” level by coordinating new trading and financing schemes. The ROC—then Japan’s diplomatic partner—, despite its apparent official hardline stance including a diplomatic recall, wanted to maintain some relationship with Japan. Chiang Kai-shek’s real intention was rewarded with a visit of Japan’s former PM, Yoshida Shigeru, Ikeda’s long political mentor. The personal connection between Chiang and Yoshida, two dominant figures, functioned as a symbol of resuming normal interstate relationship. By gaining the promised “spiritual and moral support to counterattack mainland China” in so-called “Yoshida Letter,” Chiang’s government believed that Japan’s political trend toward “One China, One Taiwan” was successfully stopped. However, Shimizu interestingly points out that this short-term satisfaction later—and ironically—accelerated Japan-PRC normalization, leading to Japan-ROC diplomatic severance in the early 1970s because the episode was interpreted as the end of Japan’s loyalty to the ROC.

Chap 5 (“Diplomacy and Propaganda Operations in Japan-ROC relations in the 1960s”) provides an important perspective on the essential sources of “informal” diplomacy. The focus is the KMT’s Japan policy and its maneuverings regarding anti-communism and anti-Taiwan independence. Unlike official diplomacy, these influence
operations needed to permeate to societal actors. As a result, many informal channels were among non-governmental people. The diverse personal networks between Tokyo and Taipei played key roles and fulfilled their value when the ROC launched informal “diplomacy” with Japan after 1972. Meanwhile, Shimizu sharply acknowledges the limits of this kind of networking, which totally lacked people to people contacts between Japanese-native Taiwanese, and the concept of Taiwan’s self-determination.

3. The revival of the diplomatic technique to explore the survival space

Chapter 6 ("The ROC’s withdrawal from the UN and its impact") basically echoes Chapter 3’s argument that withdrawal was an outcome of ROC’s uncompromising principle-based diplomacy without pragmatic consideration for realpolitik. At last the ROC was forced to consider the Two China formula to remain seated in the UN. Other options were not timely for resisting the political advantages of the PRC. The decision regarding a volunatrty withdrawal before being expelled was to defend the country’s dignity. Chiang” Kai-shek’s famous remark of “never co-exist with a rebel” did not symbolize an active principle of splendid isolation. Rather, he sought to maintain the very best face according to Shimizu.

Chapter 7 ("The time of Japan-ROC diplomatic farewell") examines the subsequent diplomacy of the new leader. While apparently taking over the standpoint of his father’s, Chiang Ching-kuo carefully displayed greater flexibility and pragmatism and established substantial socioeconomic relations with foreign countries. His Japan policy was judged as a good case study. In spite of the One China conditionality of Beijing, which Japan totally accepted, informal personal networks involving Japan and Taiwan—which included pro-ROC Japanese politicians (discussed in Chapter 5)—attempted to maintain the substantial “existing relationship.” Shimizu appreciates the ROC’s partial success in surviving as a “different existence from the PRC.”

Chapter 8 ("‘Diplomatic’ negotiations without diplomatic relationship") further proves the regenerating process of Chiang Ching-kuo’s government through a case study of the Japan-Taiwan aviation problem. Despite Beijing’s offensive diplomatic pressures, the ROC finally ensured the direct communication “space” with Japan where Taipei would not be treated as a part of the PRC.

Based on the previous chapter contents, Chapter 9 ("From the ROC diplomacy to Taiwan diplomacy") presents a theory regarding the diplomatic meaning for Chiang Chin-kuo’s efforts to secure a different political entity from the PRC. If his pragmatism solidified such “status,” without unification and independence, for nearly two decades until his successor Lee Deng-hui assumed leadership, and then provided foundation for Lee’s conscious shift to purposeful pragmatic diplomacy for people living in Taiwan in the 1990s, Shimizu would assert Chiang Chin-kuo’s “transitional diplomacy” was meaningful, reflecting the transition from the traditional ROC era to new Taiwan era. She also suggests that a deeper analysis will elucidate the transformation process of the internal substance of status quo in line with her academic interests.

4. The taste of “One China, – – ”

Throughout the book, Shimizu attempts to identify the true status quo. Even though the One China discourse was established and internationally accepted by the 1970s, the physical reality has never caught up with the notion. To understand this situation, Shimizu offered an interesting explanation. The phrase of “One China” always accompanies the following blank space or moment, indicating an expectation that additional words will be inserted.
Hungarian attracted such in the 21st century, 21-Seiki Inoue, Hirakawa, Chinese technique insightfully China, (Any dilemma). Kaiketu Japan international normalized; for deeper understanding, it is recommended to compare the books on Japan’s China policy, PRC's foreign policy, and international trends on China’s sovereignty issues. Inoue, Nicchu Kokko Seijyouuka no Seiji Shi [Political history of Sino-Japan normalization]; Fukuda, Chugoku Gaiko to Taiwan-’Hitotsu No Chugoku’ Gensoku No Kigen [Chinese Diplomacy and Taiwan-Origin of “One China” Principle]. Tokyo: Keio Gijyuku University Press, 2013. Hirakawa, S. Futatsu No Chugoku to Nihon Hoshiki- Gaiko Jiremna Kaiketu No Kigen to Oyou [Two Chinas and “Japanese Formula” - Origin and Application of Solution to Diplomatic Dilemma]. Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 2012. Inoue, M. Nicchu Kokko Seijyouuka no Seiji Shi [Political history of Sino-Japan normalization.]. Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 2010.

Bibliography

For Ayako Toyama, Wataru Kusaka, Tsukasa Iga, and Ken Miichi, Tokyo, Akashi Shoten, 2018, 257 pp., JPY 2,860 (including tax) (paperback), ISBN 978-4-750-34663-2

In recent years, powerful political leaders have emerged in various parts of the world. While such leaders were previously the exclusive features of authoritarian regimes, we have witnessed more and more cases of democratically elected political leaders taking destructive actions to democracy. Notably, the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, has attracted the greatest attention, but the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan or Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban can also be seen as such examples.

2 For deeper understanding, it is recommended to compare the books on Japan’s China policy, PRC’s foreign policy, and international trends on China’s sovereignty issues. Inoue, Nicchu Kokko Seijyouuka no Seiji Shi [Political history of Sino-Japan normalization]; Fukuda, Chugoku Gaiko to Taiwan-’Hitotsu No Chugoku’ Gensoku no kigen [Chinese Diplomacy and Taiwan-Origin of “One China” principle]; and Hirakawa, Futatsu no Chugoku to Nihon Hoshiki- Gaiko Jiremna Kaiketu no Kigen to Oyou [Two Chinas and “Japanese Formula”- Origin and application of solution to diplomatic dilemma].