

Chapter 1

THE SOUTH PACIFIC: CHINA'S NEW FRONTIER

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Treasure islands

There is nothing wrong or unusual about the food at Ang's Chinese restaurant. In fact, the roast duck served there is excellent as is its hot-and-sour soup. It is just the way the place looks. The yard is surrounded by high walls with razor wire and surveillance cameras. Two security guards watch the entrance and open the sliding iron gate only if customers, in their vehicle, appear to be genuinely wanting to have just a meal. Having satisfied the guards and parked the car inside the gate, lunch or dinner guests are met by another steel door guarded by more watchmen. They will not only shut the door but lock it once the guests are in the actual restaurant building. Then they may enjoy Ang's oriental fare in peace.

According to a 2005 survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, is the worst place to live among 130 world capitals and major cities. Two-thirds of all households were victims of crime in the first five months of 2005, and weapons were used in just over half of these instances. The murder rate is three times that of Moscow and 23 times higher than in London. Once a pretty town with a fine natural harbour, Port Moresby has become a law and order nightmare.

Papua New Guinea's notorious *raskols*—Pidgin English for rascals—are everywhere. They are gangs of young men for whom crime has

become a way of life. Having moved into Port Moresby from the highlands or elsewhere in the countryside, they end up in shantytowns and suburbs where unemployment rates hover between 70 and 90 percent. And they were born into a culture where tribal warfare, vendettas and violence are deeply ingrained. Add the availability of firearms in urban areas, and it is not surprising that Port Moresby's homes resemble top security prisons.¹

It is also not difficult to understand why so many Australians—citizens of the former colonial power—and other Western expatriates have left or are leaving. At independence in 1975, there were nearly 50,000 non-citizens in the country. Now only a few thousand Australians, Britons and Germans remain. But, as the chatter in Ang's restaurant indicates, newly-arrived mainland Chinese are replacing them as businessmen, contractors and importers-exporters. Jerry Singirok, a former Papua New Guinea Defence Force commander, wrote in a local newspaper in 2005: "Australia has always considered Papua New Guinea as its backyard [but] since 2000, Papua New Guinea has increased its bilateral relations with China in areas of trade, investment and the military...China is here to stay."²

Many are indeed here to stay permanently. According to various estimates, there could be anywhere between 10,000 and 30,000 Chinese citizens in the country. Many of them are here illegally, but Papua New Guinea residence permits and even passports are not difficult to obtain. Corruption is endemic at all levels in the government and local administration.

Aid from China comes in handy when countries such as Australia threaten to cut their assistance because of allegations of corruption, nepotism and abuse of power. Tarcy Eli, a high-ranking foreign ministry official, stated in 2005: "China's rising status as an economic power is becoming an important pillar for developing countries like Papua New Guinea...China's voice at the United Nations is one for the developing world."³

According to Singirok, "Covertly, major powers are cautious and apprehensive about China's greater role in the region in terms of trading and military."⁴ That may be so, but it would be hard to lure anyone from

those “major powers” to work, let alone settle, in Port Moresby—unless they are prepared to stay behind high walls with razor wire, and security guards with guns and ferocious dogs.

But all this does not seem to deter Papua New Guinea’s new Chinese migrants and settlers. Papua New Guinea, with its vast reserves of minerals, timber, oil and gas has attracted not only private businessmen but Chinese state enterprises as well. In the mid-1990s, only 0.5 percent of Papua New Guinea’s log exports went to China. Today it is 80 percent. In the 1990s New Guinea’s mining sector was dominated mainly by Australian but also British and Canadian companies. Today, China is moving in there as well. Papua New Guinea has nickel, cobalt, copper, and, in the highlands, even gold. In 2003, the China Metallurgical Group became the majority shareholder of Ramu NiCo, which owns a nickel mine near Madang on the northeastern coast of the country. As Geoffrey York, a Canadian journalist, reported in January 2009: “With a planned investment of 1.4 billion US dollars and an expected lifespan of 20 to 40 years, Ramu is one of the biggest mining projects China has ever attempted overseas. And China Metallurgical is determined to do it right.”⁵

A red Chinese banner flies over the tallest new building in Madang. This is the headquarters of Ramu NiCo, which has financed some construction projects and built a bridge over one of the rivers in the area. But it has not done everything right. In early 2007, Papua New Guinea’s labour minister, David Tibu, paid a surprise visit to the mine. He found that the local workers were treated like slaves. They were paid less than three US dollars a day and given tins of fish as compensation for overtime work. Christianity is strong in the area, but the workers were not allowed to go to church on Sundays. When they went anyway, the company deducted a day’s work from their pay. The canteen where the workers ate was “not fit for pigs,” the minister declared, and the toilets were filthy. Tibu’s findings made the headlines of the country’s newspapers—and prompted the Chinese to embark on a vigorous PR drive. The Chinese-owned company pledged to set aside millions of dollars to build clinics, schools and churches, and to support rugby and basketball teams, local farmers and festivals.

But many villagers were still unhappy when York visited the site in late 2008: “Tensions have sometimes erupted into violence. In August, a Chinese security officer was badly injured in a struggle with protesting villagers near the nickel refinery site, about two hours by boat from Madang. Guards still roam around the site, protecting the workers from further attacks by the landowners.” The main problem seems to be that the natives consider that the land in and around the site belongs to traditional landowners, while the Chinese do not have any real concept of private land ownership. York quoted a local radio journalist in Madang as saying that, “the Chinese have a system where everything is owned by the government, and the government tells you what to do. Their deal for the Ramu project is on a government-to-government basis. The Chinese don’t understand the value of land to the people.”⁶

Another controversy is over the Chinese company’s failure to obtain legal work permits for many of its technicians and engineers. In November 2008, police arrested 213 Chinese employees of the Ramu mine for having entered the country on improper permits. The company was hit with a 720,000 US dollar fine for breaching labour laws and blasted in the national media, which accused it of importing Chinese workers for jobs that locals could do.

It was not the first time Chinese nationals were involved in a document forgery in Papua New Guinea. In 2000, it was revealed that officers from Papua New Guinea’s Foreign Affairs Department were involved in a major passport scam together with some non-citizens. In a “Special Brief” for the Foreign Minister—stamped “secret” and dated November 2000—the country’s National Intelligence Organisation, NIO, stated that it had “written literally dozens of briefs on various Papua New Guinea scams involving human smuggling, phony entry permits, and false passports.”⁷

But none of these scams could operate without the compliance of corrupt bureaucrats, the NIO concluded. The brief went on to name two government officials who had helped not only Chinese but also Sri Lankans, other Asians and even Africans obtain Papua New Guinea passports, which were then used to stay in the country, or travel on to Australia or New Zealand.

Chinese-owned shops and small restaurants have sprung up all over Papua New Guinea by migrants using false passports and work permits, and often using locals as fronts. In Madang, and the capital Port Moresby, nearly half of the fast-food outlets and shops are owned by newly arrived Chinese migrants. There are allegations that Chinese shop owners send their earnings to foreign banks, and that little money stay in the country.⁸

Resentment of the migrants is growing. In September 2007, police fired warning shots at local people who were looting and ransacking Chinese-owned businesses in Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands. Even schoolchildren were reportedly seen running away with clothing, food and kitchenware. Several shops and warehouses were burnt to the ground and the gangs of looters hit back at the police with a barrage of stones.⁹

In May 2009, tens of thousands of Papuans went on a rampage, looting Chinese-run stores. At least four people were killed in the mayhem, which began with a fight between Chinese and Papuan workers at the Ramu nickel refinery, and soon spread to Lae, Papua New Guinea's second city, and through the highlands. In Port Moresby, a protest march was held to petition the government to reduce the immigrations of "Asians"—a general term that refers to ethnic Chinese, mainly from China but also Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries.¹⁰

It is not only native Papuans who have reacted against the influx of newcomers from China. Papua New Guinea actually has one of the oldest Chinese communities in the Pacific. In the late 19th century, the island of New Guinea was divided between the Netherlands, which controlled the western half, Germany which had made the northeastern quarter its colony, and Britain, which from Australia ruled the southeastern part called Papua. It was an artificial, colonial division where borders were straight lines on the map drawn up in Europe.

Britain and the Netherlands were not keen on encouraging Chinese immigration, but the Germans imported hundreds of Cantonese-speaking Chinese workers from the southern province of Guangdong each year to work on tobacco and coconut plantations, and as cooks or domestic servants for German officials and entrepreneurs. Some Chinese later

became mechanics, carpenters and tailors required in the colonial economy.

When World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, British-Australian forces took over the German colony. Some Chinese were repatriated and restrictions were imposed on those who remained. But many were not sent back to China, and some moved to other parts of the now combined territory of Papua New Guinea. In the late 1940s, after World War II, many Chinese came to play an important role as middlemen servicing the needs of the growing urban population. By then Britain had handed over the territory to its Commonwealth partner Australia.¹¹

About 3,000 Chinese and part-Chinese lived in Papua New Guinea before independence in 1975. But many Chinese were worried about their future in a Papuan-ruled nation, and it was even unclear if they were going to be given Papua New Guinean citizenship. As a consequence, most of them emigrated to Australia and more moved out when *raskol* violence became a problem in the 1990s. But at least a thousand stayed behind, and one of those of mixed blood, Julius Chan, served as the country's prime minister in 1980-82 and again in 1994-97. They were, however, a tiny minority in a country of 6.3 million people. Then came the newcomers.

There is a wide gap between them and the Chinese who have been there for generations. Christine Inglis of the University of Sydney says that "'local' and 'overseas' Chinese are distinguished by more than birthplace and period of settlement. A cultural and social divide separates the locally born Cantonese speakers, who have been extensively influenced by contacts with Australians and other Europeans, from the new arrivals, few of whom speak Cantonese and have much closer links with traditional Chinese culture."¹² Many Chinese old-timers also feel closer to the Republic of China, or Taiwan, than the communist-ruled People's Republic of China.

That divide reflects a broader issue in the Pacific: rivalry between mainland China and Taiwan. Less than about two dozen countries recognise Taipei as the legitimate government of China—and six of them are small Pacific island nations: Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands. The rest are a few African and

Latin American states, and island nations in the Caribbean. Taiwan's new Guomintang government has tried to downplay the diplomatic rivalry and declared an unofficial "diplomatic detente" as not to further antagonise the regime in Beijing, which happened under the previous government of the Democratic Progressive Party that advocated independence for Taiwan. But, even so, the fact that Taipei is recognised by some countries is essential to prove its status as a separate political entity with its own administration.

Taipei's efforts to get official diplomatic support for "the Republic of China" therefore always come with generous offers of aid, something that the impoverished island-countries of the Pacific badly need. Beijing has adopted similar tactics to deny Taiwan recognition. China's aid to the Pacific's largest and most resource-rich state, Papua New Guinea, is now second only to that of Australia, and Beijing has funded government buildings in Vanuatu, Samoa and the Cook Islands new sports stadiums for Fiji, Samoa, Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia. China now has more diplomats in the region than any other country.

Officers from the Pacific countries which maintain armed forces have been being trained at China's National Defence Academy in Beijing. China has also helped with equipment, computer systems, tents, uniforms, gymnasiums and other supplies, martial arts trainers and interpreters to all those countries—and appointed a military attaché to Papua New Guinea.¹³

But there is also another dimension to Beijing's efforts to deny Taipei recognition from nations in the Pacific. While the attention of the United States after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington became focused on Afghanistan and Iraq, China began to gain even more influence in what had long been regarded as America's home turf, the Pacific. Some analysts have even suggested that the ocean is becoming the venue for a new Cold War where the United States and China compete for client states and strategic advantage.

Benjamin Reilly, a senior lecturer at the Australian National University in Canberra, argues that China is expanding its influence over the Pacific with "the long-term aim of challenging the United States as the prime mover in the Pacific. It can no longer be taken for granted that Oceania will remain a relatively benign 'American Lake'." The very

weakness of Pacific island states makes them vulnerable as a strategic resource for China, Reilly asserts.¹⁴

Taiwan's interests in the Pacific are clear and relatively narrow. Besides its need for diplomatic recognition, it also has economic interests to defend. Its fishing fleets are some of the largest in the region, operating across central and western Pacific.

Beijing, on the other hand, has more far-reaching interests in the Pacific. Mohan Malik, an Indian-born China analyst at the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Honolulu argues that, "in the short term, it wants to isolate Taiwan in the international community. But in the medium and longer term its goal is to challenge and eventually displace the United States as the guardian and protector of the Pacific."¹⁵

According to Mailk, Beijing wants to emerge as a major Pacific-region aid donor and economic partner, which would undermine the influence of the United States in the region and Oceania's special ties with Washington and the West. He also argues that increased Chinese tourism and emigration are part of Beijing's strategy of "economic penetration of Oceania." In recent years, thousands of Chinese have settled not only in Papua New Guinea but all over the Pacific where they are also running grocery stores, restaurants and other small businesses, resulting in entirely economic patterns in the region.

The realisation of China's ambition to develop a blue-water navy, which it now lacks, would further increase its influence in the Pacific. Today, despite recent developments, the region is not at the top of Beijing's list of security priorities. Taiwan and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea figure much more prominently. But China has seen how Japan and other countries have historically used the Pacific Islands to build their Pacific empires. In the 19th century, the region was effectively divided between Britain, France and Germany. The United States took over the independent kingdom of Hawaii in 1898 and, in the same year, seized Guam from the Spanish. A year later, the islands of Samoa were divided between the United States and Germany.

After World War I, Japan expanded into the Pacific as it took over the German colonies of the Marshall Islands, the Northern Marianas, Palau and the Carolines, now Micronesia—small islands but with vast areas of

ocean under their jurisdiction. That eventually led to war with the United States, when Japanese forces attacked Hawaii's Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. Although there is no evidence that China will seek to expand its influence by waging war, it seems inevitable that its economic, political and strategic interests in the region will clash with those of the United States in the longer term. Apart from being preoccupied with its Middle Eastern imbroglio, it is also clear how much Washington needs Beijing's support there and with issues such as North Korea. The United States has even pulled out diplomats from the Pacific and downgraded its presence in the region. This has created a vacuum that China is taking full advantage of.

The islands of Melanesia have always been vulnerable to outside penetration as they have no real concept of nationhood. More than 800 languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea and the 192,000 inhabitants of the much smaller Vanuatu speak 114 different languages. And there are bitter memories of Western colonisation, which were often a brutal experience. The missionaries, who arrived in Melanesia in the mid-to-late 19th century, condemned indigenous cultures as "pagan" and often ran roughshod over the local population. Measles, gonorrhoea, syphilis and smallpox came with the European sailors, and unscrupulous traders kidnapped the natives and sold them to plantations in Queensland, Australia. This practice, called "blackbirding," continued throughout the 19th century, and almost entirely depleted the populations of many of the islands.¹⁶

During the colonial era, several thousand Chinese settled not only in Papua New Guinea but also in the Solomon Islands, where they came to dominate many aspects of commercial life. Today, the capital Honiara actually has its own distinct Chinatown consisting of a cluster of general stores selling all kinds of foodstuff and consumer goods. The sales assistants were mostly locals, and the Chinese owners are usually seated on high beachguard-style chairs, overlooking their stores and collecting money from the customers. It is a rather provocative scene and it could be argued that it would have been better for the Chinese store-owners to be a bit more considerate and supervise from the floor rather than from above, especially when the racial differences are so obvious: fair-skinned Chinese versus black Melanesians.¹⁷

In fact, they have every reason to be more discreet. The Solomons has only about half a million people but it is a deeply divided, violent society. In the late 1990s, ethnic tension between people from different islands erupted into violent clashes. The capital Honiara is located on Guadalcanal, the richest of the islands. After independence from Britain in 1978, it began to attract migrants from the poorer nearby island of Malaita, which the tribes of Guadalcanal resented. In 1999, a local militia that styled itself as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army began to terrorise Malaitian settlers, who responded by forming the Malaitan Eagle Force. Both groups were armed with guns as well as machetes and axes and equally brutal.

Hundreds of people died in the fighting, and it did not end until Australia and New Zealand in October 2000 managed to mediate a settlement between the two forces. The Solomons, like Papua New Guinea, is a tribal society with little or no national cohesion. The *lingua franca* in both countries—and in nearby Vanuatu—is Pidgin, a bastardised kind of primitive English that was first introduced by European traders, who treated the natives as children and spoke to them in a descriptive, child-like language. It may sound like gibberish to most outsiders, but the fact that there is a common language in these ethnically divided societies has contributed to a sense of nationhood, albeit weak and fragile.

And the tension in Solomon Islands never fully died down. In July 2003, a new contingent of Australian and Pacific Island troops arrived under the auspices of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, or RAMSI. Since that time, the Solomon Islands have been considered by many a failed state, unable to solve its own problems and dependent entirely on outside forces to maintain law and order.

The Solomons have also been heavily exploited by unscrupulous logging companies, mainly from Malaysia but also from South Korea and some other countries. Around 80 percent of the Solomon Islands; 27,540 square kilometres are—or until recently were—covered with tropical rainforest. Since the early 1990s, the timber industry has been a significant sector in the economy, contributing 20 percent of government revenues annually, and more than 50 percent of export revenues. Laws

have been enacted to regulate the logging industry, but rampant corruption has rendered those restrictions meaningless.

Malaysian companies began raping the forests of the Solomon Islands and defrauding the people there to the extent that alarm bells sounded even at home in Malaysia. In 1996, in an unprecedented move, the then Malaysian deputy Prime Minister—and now opposition leader—Anwar Ibrahim called on Malaysian companies to be sensitive to environmental issues and not overlog. But no one was prepared to listen. And a 2005 report commissioned by the Solomon Islands government found that large amounts of tax had not been paid by the logging companies as they routinely bribed local politicians to obtain unlawful “exemptions.” Vast quantities of logs continue to be shipped out of the country.¹⁸

Most loggers from Malaysia were ethnic Chinese, which inevitably gave rise to anti-Chinese sentiments in the Solomons. It also meant that any Chinese was seen as an exploiter with little or no concern for local sensibilities, whether he was an ordinary local shopkeeper or someone who raped the environment. About 2,000 of Honiara’s 50,000 inhabitants are ethnic Chinese, and most of them have been living there peacefully for generations. Over the years, they worked hard and managed to set up retail stores and other businesses and thus came to dominate both wholesale and retail trade in Honiara. And, although the Solomons recognises Taipei and not Beijing, new settlers arrived from mainland China throughout the 1990s. The Solomons were ripe for another ethnic explosion.

In April 2006, long-simmering discontent with the economically more powerful Chinese—old-timers as well as newly-arrived migrants from China and Southeast Asia—erupted into violent riots. The trigger was allegations that the newly elected Prime Minister Snyder Rini had used bribes from Chinese businessmen to buy votes of members of Parliament.

Protesters armed with knives and axes threatened to destroy the entire capital unless Rini stepped down. Inevitably, the Chinese were the main targets and victims of the riots. Honiara’s Chinatown was almost levelled following looting and arson. The rioters also attacked the Pacific Casino on the waterfront between downtown Honiara and the airport, which was renowned for Chinese—in this case Taiwanese—money-laundering.

But many victims were from the mainland, and since Taiwan—not China—has an embassy in Honiara, they appealed to China’s mission in Port Moresby for help. Beijing sent four chartered planes to evacuate several hundred of its citizens, and 21 from Hong Kong. They were airlifted to Port Moresby, and then on to Guangzhou in China.¹⁹

Australia, New Zealand and Fiji sent extra troops to the Solomons to help restore peace, and the Solomon Islands Governor-General Sir Nathaniel Waena—the local representative of the Queen of Britain, the Solomons’ Head of State—officially apologised to the Chinese community. He also appealed to those who had left to return if they still regarded the islands as their home. Rini was forced to resign.

The Taiwanese denied any political interference in the Solomons, but it is undeniable that “check-book diplomacy” by Taiwan as well as mainland China has fuelled corruption not only in the Solomons but all over the Pacific. Taiwan is a major donor to the Solomon Islands government, which has received millions of dollars in aid for rural development projects, educational scholarships and urban infrastructure development. The Taiwan government has funded a hospital and an agricultural research station in Honiara, staffed partly by Taiwanese personnel. In 2007, 20 Solomon Islands policemen were trained in Taipei, and Taiwan is becoming more involved in the country’s security services, perhaps to keep an eye on newly arrived migrants from mainland China.

On the seedier side was the now destroyed Pacific Casino, which was also where Robert Goh, a wealthy local Chinese businessman, had his office. He once served as advisor to Rini’s predecessor as Prime Minister, Allan Kemakeza, whose administration was tainted by corruption allegations. Kemakeza was also very close to other ethnic Chinese businessmen. Among them was Thomas, or Tommy Chan, father of Laurie Chan, Foreign Minister in the Kemakeza government. Tommy Chan owned the Honiara Hotel in Chinatown, where Rini and his followers camped in the run up to the elections. Chan was also the president of a group of influential parliamentarians called the Association of Independent Members of Parliament, to which Rini belonged.²⁰

Even if official ties with Taiwan are stronger than with China, local Solomon Islanders seldom comprehend the difference between the “two Chinas.” Even the Malaysian loggers are seen as belonging to the same group of “outsiders” who have come to dominate all economic aspects of their country—and to interfere in local politics. Asians have earned a bad name in the Solomon Islands, but what is the solution? Shortly after the April 2006 riots, Solomon Islands Labour Party leader Joses Tuhanuku stated that the ethnic crisis in 2006 was much worse than the clashes between the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army and the Malaitan Eagle Force in 1999-2000: “People feel that they have lost their country. The Solomon Islands are no longer in the hands of Solomon Islanders, it is now in the hands of the Chinese who control the economic life of the country, and now they are taking over the political life of the country.”²¹

Tuhanuku’s sentiments were shared by many other Solomon Islanders. Also commenting on the riots in an article in the local newspaper, the *Solomon Star*, veteran civil servant George Manimu observed that people have long resented their leaders’ giving preferential treatment to foreigners, especially Asians, when it came to trade, logging, and fisheries. “Business areas, often referred to as reserved for nationals, have also become dominated by Asian entrepreneurs,” Manimu wrote. “The actions of the people (during the riots), although criminal, reflect the release of bottled up frustrations and anger that they could not contain any longer.” As is the case in Port Moresby, there is widespread poverty and unemployment among young people, who make up most of the population in both places. There are no *raskols* in Honiara, but groups of restless young men can be seen loitering in the streets. It takes very little to ignite a riot.²²

The rivalry between China and Taiwan—and the influx of Chinese businessmen and settlers to the Pacific region—is bound to result in more riots similar to those in Honiara in April 2006. And then there could perhaps be even an even more direct Chinese intervention than just airlifting nationals, as was done after the Honiara riots. As soon as the evacuees had been repatriated, Chinese President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao instructed the Foreign Ministry in Beijing to “take measures to ensure the safety of Chinese nationals” in the Solomon Islands.²³ In 2003 and 2006, Australian-led forces restored law and order,

but what if China decides to send troops to protect its citizens and interests in the region?

As Jerry Singirok, the former Papua New commander, said in 2005: “China is here to stay.” The mineral resources and vast forest reserves of Melanesia are too high a price to give up. And then there are long-term strategic considerations, which China’s security planners would be most unwilling to reconsider only because of some anti-Chinese riots in the Solomons or law and order problems in Papua New Guinea.

Pearls of the Pacific

Two buildings stand out on Beach Road, the main street through Samoa’s capital Apia. Near the town’s landmark clock tower is Chan Mow’s shopping centre, an imposing old building first opened as Burns Philps department store in 1934. Across the road and a green park towers the modern, seven-storey Government Building, erected in 1994 with a multi-million dollar interest free loan from the People’s Republic of China. The former represents the economic power of Samoa’s old Chinese; the latter the growing influence of China in this Polynesian nation of 185,000 people. Samoa has a small but prosperous Chinese community that dates back to pre-World War I days—and Samoa has had diplomatic ties with Beijing since November 6, 1975, the first of the Pacific islands to recognise the People’s Republic of China after Fiji, which established relations with Beijing a day ahead, on November 5.

When Chan Mow took over the shopping centre in the mid-1990s, not long before he died, he was already one of the richest men in the country. But his life story also reflects the discrimination the Chinese had to endure when Samoa was ruled by colonial powers. The Germans, who arrived at the turn of the last century, were the first outsiders to take possession of the islands and they imported labour from China to work on coconut plantations and as domestic servants.

In total, over 6,000 Chinese left for Samoa between 1903 and 1913, most of them from the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. The voyages to Samoa took about three weeks, with no ports of call along the way. It was an arduous journey with appalling conditions on the ships. A

Chinese labourer later recalled: "Life onboard the ship was monotonous. Long hours were spent simply day-dreaming. No typhoons buffeted the ship. No sightings of playful dolphins nor whales, mammoth denizens of the deep. Not even that of a passing freighter. Crowded conditions prevailed. The men slept on double and triple-decker bunk beds in the hot and stuffy hold of the ship. Ventilation was poor, lighting dim, comforts minimal and sometimes the stench overpowering from the vomit of the seasick."²⁴

Many died on their way to Samoa, and those who survived the journey soon discovered that their employers did not adhere to the terms of contracts they had agreed upon while recruiting workers in China. Samoa was not the tropical paradise they had seen on posters in Guangdong and Fujian. Working conditions on the plantations were harsh, and, as Samoan historian Featuna'i Ben Liuaana put it, "to make matters worse, the German government sanctioned flogging for the minutest conduct, at twenty lashes each, once a week, before a government official, as if his presence made it less barbaric."²⁵

Then, in 1914, World War I broke out and New Zealand occupied the islands. Most Germans and Chinese were repatriated to their respective countries, but more than 800 Chinese stayed on in Samoa. All of them were men—and, in 1921, the new New Zealand authorities introduced a law prohibiting marriages between Chinese and Samoans. But many Chinese nevertheless lived together with Samoan women, and had children. So in 1931, the colonial power made it illegal for Chinese even to enter Samoan houses, and Samoan women entering the homes of labourers. The Samoan race had to be kept "pure" and the authorities must contain what a New Zealand official called "the yellow taint which was coming down through the Pacific."²⁶

But labour was still needed in Samoa, and between 1920 and 1934, New Zealand arranged for eight shipments from China carrying 3,116 men. The last shipment included Chinese from Taishan, or Toishan, in Guangdong province, a district that at the time saw massive emigration because of severe poverty. Most of the Toishan migrants ended up in New York, but those who went to Samoa were lured into signing contracts which once again did not tell the whole truth. Nancy W.Y. Tom, an ethnic Chinese, wrote in her detailed 1986 study *The Chinese in*

Western Samoa, 1875-1985: the Dragon Came From Afar: “The agents wove an appealing tale of happy and well-fed Chinese in the islands accompanied by pretty brown-skinned belles clutching almond-eyed babies in their arms relaxing under the swaying fronds of stately coconut palms.”²⁷

The reality was entirely different, and the newly arrived Chinese suffered from not only inhuman working conditions but also the terror of their own criminal gangs, secret societies which had followed the labourers to the islands—and still are active in some of the now independent Pacific states. The gangs extorted “protection money” from the labourers, and threatened to beat those who refused to pay. They also imported opium from China, sometimes via Hawaii, where many more Chinese had settled. A huge opium addiction problem afflicted the Chinese in Samoa.

The colonial authorities made the importation of opium illegal, but that only led to the emergence of a thriving black market. And the smugglers were not only Chinese; many New Zealanders also brought in opium on ships from China. With little else to do, many Chinese spent their free time, when they had any, gambling in dens run by criminal gangs. The gambling trapped many Chinese in debt, while others became drug addicts.

Nearly all Chinese were repatriated after World War II, and, in September 1948, the last Chinese repatriates were literally dragged onto the ships despite protests by Samoan families and friends, leaving behind spouses and children. But some with Samoan families managed to stay behind. Chan Mow was one of them. He had arrived in Samoa in 1934 with nothing and, as Ron Crocombe, the world’s leading expert on the Pacific, wrote in his study of Asians in the region, “began as a groundsman and plantation labourer, working as a share-cropper till late at night, and , on Sundays, selling pork from his bicycle.” He managed to save enough money to open a restaurant, grocery, farm, bakery and wholesale business—and, eventually, Samoa’s main shopping centre.

At his funeral in 1996, Apia was brought to a standstill. Thousands of mourners showed up, among them Samoa’s Head of State, Malietoa Tanumafili II, Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana and his entire cabinet

as well as leaders of the political opposition. The requiem mass—Chan Mow was a Roman Catholic—was celebrated by Cardinal Pio Taofinu'u. And, as a testimony to the futility of the old, colonial law banning sexual relationships between Chinese and Samoans, he left behind a Samoan wife, 13 children, 37 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.²⁸

Unlike in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, there are not any overt racial discrimination or prejudices in Samoa. The old laws separating the Chinese and the Samoans are, of course, long gone and many people are obviously of mixed blood. Most of the general stores and restaurants are owned by people of Chinese descent, but the lack of anti-Chinese sentiments had made it possible for Chinese, and people of mixed Chinese-Samoan blood, to become civil servants and elected members of parliament. In 1997, the new Miss Pacific was even a Samoan-Chinese, Verona Ah Ching.

Some anti-Chinese feelings have remained though, and, in 2005, an opposition politician, A'eau Peniamina, began to question what he called "China's real motives," and warned Samoans "to be careful of the Chinese [because] they can run you out of business as seen elsewhere." Few Samoans are employed in regular jobs other than for the government and as waiters in restaurants in Apia, cleaners in hotels and other service jobs. Many live on remittances from more than 100,000 Samoans who have settled in New Zealand. Even so, when a Chinese firm set up a factory outside Apia to make cashmere garments—a labour intensive industry—it decided to employ women from China for the purpose.

This has caused some resentment, but Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi struck back against Peniamina's statements: "That is racist and I will not stand for any racism in this Parliament." Peniamina's remarks about the threat posed by a few hundred migrants from mainland China were also remarkable in that Taiwan is known to have funded the opposition in Samoa in an attempt to break the country's close relationship Beijing.

In 1976, a year after Samoa and Beijing established diplomatic relations, the then Head of State, Malietoa Tanumafili II, travelled to the People's Republic of China on an official state visit, the first by a head of state of a Pacific nation. He was given a red carpet welcome,

emphasising the importance Beijing places on relations with the small Pacific states. The Samoan Head of State held talks with the then Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng and, according to an announcement at the time an agreement was signed “on economic and technical cooperation between the two countries,” which, in effect, meant Chinese aid to Samoa—as Samoa had nothing offer to China other than its strategic location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.²⁹

Apart from the Government Building in central Apia, China has also provided an interest-free loan to build a women’s centre on the outskirts of the capital. In February 2008, China announced that it would transfer yet another loan on favourable terms, now in the order of 44 million US dollars, to build more government buildings and a conference facility. Since 1976, China has maintained an active embassy in Samoa, the oldest in the Pacific. And, since 2005, Chinese television has the largest TV presence in the country. Samoa has become China’s closest and staunchest ally in the South Pacific.

One reason for China’s eagerness to court the Pacific countries is that each state, no matter how small, has a seat at the United Nations. Today, there are twelve independent Pacific nations—excluding New Zealand—and all of them are UN members. Oli Brown at the Geneva-based International Institute for Sustainable Development has pointed out that, “in total, the 7.5 million people of the independent states of the Pacific have more voting power in international fora like the General Assembly of the United Nations than the 3.5 billion people of China, India, Japan and the United States combined.”³⁰

And of those 7.5 million people, more than six million live in Papua New Guinea. The next most populous country is Fiji with 837,000 inhabitants followed by the Solomon Islands and 552,000 people. Hence the intense diplomatic rivalry between Taiwan and China. Taiwan wants diplomatic allies as well as supporters in the United Nations its own bid to re-enter the organisation, which it left when Beijing took over China’s seat in 1971. China is equally eager to ensure that Taiwan does not get that support, and every vote counts. Tuvalu with 26 square kilometres and Nauru with 21 are the two smallest members by population of the

United Nations. Tuvalu has only 11,000 inhabitants and Nauru, the world's smallest republic, 13,000.

But there are also strategic considerations behind China's new-found interest in Polynesia as well as Micronesia to the northwest. These island nations may lack the mineral resources and forests of Melanesia and they have tiny land areas. But their sea areas and economic exclusion zones are huge. The 100,000 inhabitants of the Republic of Kiribati live on 726 square kilometres of land—but its 32 atolls and one raised coral island are dispersed over 3.5 million square kilometres, a strategically located area in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and straddling the equator. The Kingdom of Tonga has 112,000 inhabitants on 748 square kilometres of land—and an ocean area of 700,000 square kilometres.

Even the tiny Cook Islands, still not fully independent but a territory in “free association” with New Zealand, has a sea area of 1.8 million square kilometres. And barely 15,000 Cook Islanders live on 240 square kilometres of land. The outside power that wins over these small island nations can control the Pacific, the world's largest ocean, and the buffer between Asia and America.

In recent years, however, the Cook Islands has developed strong relations with China. The biggest and newest buildings in the capital Avarura are the court house and a police station—both built with Chinese aid and by workers brought in from China. Ron Crocombe, the New Zealand-born dean of Pacific studies and a permanent resident of the Cooks, argues that such structures are fairly typical of Chinese aid to the Pacific: China builds symbols of power and authority for the authorities, and huge sports stadiums for the public at large.³¹

China is no doubt eager to expand its influence over the vast sea area that the Cooks controls, for fishing and, in the long run, to control yet another huge and strategically important piece of the Pacific Ocean. China has offered to build airports and wharfs on the Cooks to facilitate tourism and the fishing industry. But these could also be used for other purposes in times of crises. During World War Two II, the Americans recognised the strategic importance of the Cooks, and built two long runways on the northern aroll of Aitutaki, which until 1974 were longer than those at the international airport on Rarotonga.

On September 14, 2004, Zhang Wei, spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Wellington, New Zealand, wrote in the *Cook Islands News*: “China seeks no self-interest in the South Pacific, non-interference is a fundamental principle underpinning China’s relations with South Pacific countries,” and, he asserted, “no strings whatsoever” are attached to Chinese aid. The article prompted Ron Crocombe to retort: “All countries’ foreign relations contain some self-interest, all influence internal affairs, and all aid has strings (some visible but more hidden—sometimes in the pockets and egos of the powerful.) But in recent years China pursues its self-interests more forcefully, interferes more in Pacific Islands internal affairs, and has more strings attached on its aid than any other country...China’s main condition of recognition of any country is that it accepts the ‘One China Policy.’ That is the public first step. Cook Islanders will have to live with other steps already in progress.”

China has also used generosity to try to gain influence in French Polynesia, which actually has the largest of the old Chinese communities in the South Pacific. More than 8,000 people of Chinese descent live there, and the first to settle on Tahiti, the main islands, arrived in 1851. Today, there is a building in downtown Papeete with a roof curved in the Chinese style, and “Kuomintang” on a sign outside. Inside, there are portraits of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the founder of the Republic of China, and the flag of the republic which now is confined to Taiwan. The Chinese in French Polynesia have remained loyal to Nationalist rather than shifting their allegiances to Communist-ruled China. But the rivalry became obvious when the largest Chinese temple in the Pacific was built in Papeete in the late 1980s. Taiwan, or the Republic of China, donated a pair of carved dragons on the pillars as well as carvings and a plaque—while the People’s Republic of China’s contribution was a pair of stone lions. It was a rare gesture from Beijing to improve its standing among the Chinese of French Polynesia.

However, French rule—and regulations laid down by the European Union—mean that immigration, legal and otherwise, is strictly controlled and citizenship cannot be bought. Consequently, there has been no influx of “new” Chinese to French Polynesia. The “old” Chinese are well established, and some of the richest people in French Polynesia are of

Chinese descent. French Polynesia's booming black pearl industry was founded by Robert Tan, who also has a partnership with the territory's airline, Air Tahiti Nui. Other Chinese in French Polynesia own shops, ships, road transport, import-export businesses, restaurants and hotels. And they hold their celebrations at the local hall of the Kuomintang.

France remains the only Western power besides the United States that still maintains a significant presence in the Pacific. Apart from French Polynesia, New Caledonia in Melanesia and the small Polynesian islands of Wallis and Futuna are also "French Overseas Territories." Britain has given up all its former colonies—except for the island of Pitcairn with only about 50 inhabitants, most of whom are descendants of English and Irish sailors who staged a mutiny on the ship *Bounty* in 1798, and their Tahitian common-law-wives.

European power in the Pacific is waning, and China, although not intending to establish colonies, is expanding its influence on all fronts: economically, politically and diplomatically. A turning point in the fight for control over the Pacific islands came when Tonga in 1998 decided to sever ties with Taiwan—and recognise the People's Republic of China. Until then, Tonga and Taiwan had been very close allies. Tongan ministers were wined and dined in Taipei, and treated as leaders of some bigger and much more important nation.

It is not certain how China managed to win over Tonga, but on November 1, 1998, the Taiwanese were suddenly and for many unexpectedly told to evacuate the rented building near the waterfront in the capital Nuku'alofa that served as the embassy of the Republic of China. A day later, it was announced that the Kingdom of Tonga and the People's Republic of China had established diplomatic relations. In October 1999, Tongan King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV paid an official visit to China where he received a red-carpet welcome along with promises of aid. And the Chinese were quick to move into Tonga. In July 2000, Wu Quanshu, deputy chief of general staff of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), visited Tonga, followed in April 2001 by another army deputy, Wei Fulin.³²

The following month, May 2001, Fu Quanyou, chief of the PLA, held a meeting in Beijing with Tonga's army commander, Tau'aika Uta'atu. Tonga is one of very few Pacific island countries with a military force,

and its links with China have grown steadily since the two countries established diplomatic relations. Addressing a New Zealand parliamentary select committee investigating links with Tonga, Kuli Taumoeofolau, a former captain in the Tongan army who now lives in New Zealand, warned Australia and New Zealand “to increase their military links with Tonga or risk greater Chinese influence in the Pacific.” He said that when he was still in the Tongan army, it was obvious that the Chinese military influence was starting to replace that of Tonga’s traditional partners. “They use Tonga as a strategic location for them,” Taumoeofolau continued. “When I was the acting commanding officer for the training, operations and intelligence unit, I worked closely with two officers from the People’s Republic of China, and they were there for martial-arts training, which is good, but you see China is slowly moving up there.”³³

Then, in October 2004, Tongan King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV paid another official visit to China at the invitation of President Hu Jintao. The King passed away in September 2006 at the age of 88, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Siaosi Tupou V—who paid a state visit to China in April 2008. Evidently, Tonga is important to China, and Beijing spares no effort to maintain friendly relations with the tiny but strategically located Pacific kingdom.

There is no other reason why China would befriend Tonga because it is hard to find a more odd couple: China, atheist and still ruled by the Communist Party—and fundamentalist Christian Tonga where a king wields great political authority over an essentially aristocratic system of government controlled by noble families. And with diplomatic relations with China came more migrants who actually had begun to arrive in Tonga in the 1980s. Before that, there was not a single Chinese-owned grocery store in the country. By the early 2000s, more than 70 percent of all stores were owned by newly-arrived Chinese migrants, who made up 3,000-4,000 of Tonga’s population of 100,000. In 2001, Tonga began to expel hundreds of Chinese who had become victims of a wave of ethnic violence. In that year, there had been about 100 cases of assault, armed robbery, burglary and arson of Chinese-owned shops carried out by native Tongans.³⁴

The Chinese embassy in Nuku'alofa expressed concern about the level of violence against its nationals while the chief immigration officer, Susana Fotu, said the expulsions were in response to "widespread anger at the growing presence of the storekeepers" and the fear that the Chinese had come to dominate the economy.

It was a clash between two cultures: Tongan storekeepers were laid-back and relaxed, and their stores served more as meeting places for local men than commercial outlets; the Chinese had come to make money, and kept their stores open all day and night, except, of course, on Sundays when they had to be closed. The Chinese were also able to bring in Chinese consumer goods, which were much cheaper than New Zealand and Australian ones sold by Tongan storekeepers, who were soon put out of business.

The expulsions did not put an end to the conflict. A year and a half later, in November 2006, years of simmering discontent reached a breaking point. Ostensibly demonstrating for democratic reforms, angry mobs looted and burned at least 30 Chinese-owned stores. Cars were overturned and a reporter from the local news agency, *Tonga News*, described the looting: "Nuku'alofa is an inferno... and major Chinese outlets are up in smoke. Chinese stores were smashed and empty, save for mobs to carry booty of everything from toilet paper to boxes of chicken."³⁵

The mayhem did not end until Australian and New Zealand peacekeepers arrived, as they had done in the Solomon Islands a few months earlier. The official Chinese news agency *Xinhua* reported that the embassy in Nuku'alofa was trying to contact all Chinese residents to make sure they were safe. And, as was the case in the Solomons, Australia could by intervening militarily show the rest of the region that it was still a power to be reckoned with, regardless of increased China's influence in Tonga and elsewhere in the Pacific.

At the forefront of the riots were local youth gangs, unemployed and angry young men—not unlike the situation in Papua New Guinea and the Solomons. It is unlikely that the Tongan authorities will be able to prevent similar riots in the future, and Tonga may well be a testing case for the Chinese authorities preparedness to intervene if the lives of their

citizens is in danger. And it is important for Beijing to maintain its influence over this island nation with its vast ocean area.

China has also made considerable inroads in Fiji, where they are rapidly replacing the old Asian community in that island nation: Indians, who were brought in as indentured labour by the British colonial power in the late 19th and early 20th century. Most of them came from Bengal and Bihar and worked in sugar plantations—and brought with them Indian culture, religion and social structures to the South Pacific. They may have come as labourers, and many of them still are, but like the Chinese elsewhere in the Pacific, they soon came to dominate trade and commerce in Fiji, and soon even politics—which caused conflicts with the local Fijians. This, in turn, led to a series of military coups, which were condemned by Australia and New Zealand. In the wake of the upheavals, these two countries suspended their aid programmes, and India was also forthright in its criticism.

The coups have led to the departure of many Indian businessmen and shopkeepers to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Many of Fiji's old Chinese residents also left. They—and the Indians—were, however, replaced by new migrants from China. No exact figure has been mentioned, but the number of migrants is significant, and growing. Estimates vary between 5,000 and 22,000. Fiji's authorities privately put the number at about 15,000, but, according to Robert Keith-Reid, editor of *Islands Business* until his death in May 2006: "The government doesn't want to mention the actual figure publicly because of fear of a backlash."³⁶

And not all Chinese migrants are law-abiding businesspeople. Chinese criminal gangs have established themselves in Fiji and are engaged in prostitution, gambling, drugs, passport fraud, corruption in the fisheries' industry and corrupting local officials.³⁷ In November 2000, 357 kilogrammes of heroin was seized in Fiji, not for local consumption but to be smuggled on to Australia and North America. The heroin came from Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle, and the gangs thought that Fiji would be a convenient transshipment point for drugs destined for world markets. Who would suspect that a container arriving from Fiji would contain Southeast Asian heroin?

This has caused concern among Fiji's old-time Chinese population. Bessie Ng Kumlin Ali, a Fijian-Chinese, wrote in her very personal book *The Chinese in Fiji* about a 1996 government scheme to invite Chinese from Hong Kong to settle in Fiji after the 1997 handover to China: "Leaders of the Chinese community themselves have voiced their reservation about an influx, which had the potential to spoil long-established, hard-won relations with other communities."³⁸ "Chinese oldtimers are worried, especially about the influx of shady newcomers."³⁹

The first Chinese to arrive in Fiji were cooks and carpenters on American and Australian ships that had come to pick up sandalwood for the market in Guangzhou in the early 19th century. They were never nearly as numerous as the Indians, and at no stage before the recent influx were there more than 5,000 Chinese in Fiji. But, after generations of hard work, most of them had become relatively wealthy, and loyal to the Nationalist Chinese Guomindang, which even had an office in an old colonial mansion in Suva that doubled as a consulate for the Republic of China.

When Britain established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1951, the consulate was closed and its staff returned to Taiwan. Independent Fiji recognised the People's Republic of China in 1975, and, given the sentiments of many local Chinese is almost paranoid about blocking Taiwan from establishing closer links with the islands. Fiji has not recognised Taiwan, but there is in Suva a "trade mission," Taiwan's usual name for its unofficial diplomatic offices overseas. Fiji, in turn, has encouraged investment from both China and Taiwan to make up for the loss of Indian-run businesses and aid from Western democracies. But it is definitely closer to Beijing than to Taipei.

The Chinese community is acutely aware of this and now maintains a cautious balance between China and Taiwan. The national days of the People's Republic—October 1—as well as that of the Republic—October 10—are celebrated with public events sponsored by the respective representatives in Suva. Fiji's Chinese school, named after the first provisional president of the Chinese republic, Sun Yat Sen, benefits from a supply of teachers from Taiwan as well as the mainland.

In July 2007, a Fiji/China Business Council was set up, and the inauguration ceremony was attended by the Chinese *chargé d'affaires* in Suva. The guest of honour was Commodore Josaia Voreqe “Frank” Bainimarama, the country’s new military leader, who had seized power in yet another coup in December 2006. Aid from Western countries had been cut again after that coup, so Bainimarama made a plea to China: “The Interim Government is also actively pursuing enhanced level of developmental collaboration with China. In particular, we are working on a number of proposals to seek developmental and soft loan funding from China to assist with upgrading of our rural roads and maritime transportation, provide low cost housing to squatters, improve our water supply and revitalise Fiji’s agricultural sector.” He also pledged to relax visa requirements for Chinese nationals, “to encourage tourism.”⁴⁰

Chinese aid to Fiji has skyrocketed since the last coup in December 2006, from 900,000 to 135 million US dollars. Just as Australia and other Western donors are trying to squeeze Fiji’s military-appointed government, China has dramatically stepped up its aid, effectively dissipating any pressure Western donors might have been generating.

In August 2008, Bainimarama visited Beijing, where he stated: “Fiji will not forget that when other countries were quick to condemn us following the events of 1987, 2000 and 2006, China and other friends in Asia demonstrated a more understanding and sensitive approach to events in Fiji. The Government of the People’s Republic of China expressed confidence in our ability to resolve our problems in our way, without undue pressure or interference.”⁴¹ When Western countries make “unreasonable” demands for democracy and good governance, China is always willing to step in, in Fiji as in Papua New Guinea. China is indeed here to stay, anti-Chinese riots or no riots in Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

The spying game

On November 7, 2003, Taiwan pulled off its biggest coup in the Pacific. The then foreign minister, Eugene Chien, announced that “the Republic of China and the Republic of Kiribati have established diplomatic

relations.” Kiribati may consist of little more than a collection of low-lying atolls spread out over a huge area in the South Pacific—but, more importantly, it was where China had established a satellite tracking station, the only one of its kind outside the mainland. Kiribati, which straddles the Equator, is an ideal place for satellite-tracking.⁴² Within days of the announcement, China vacated its embassy in Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, and began dismantling the tracking station. Diplomats from Taiwan moved into their new embassy building in Bairiki.

The satellite station was set up in 1997 and, in October 2003, the facility helped track the first Chinese man in space, the 38-year-old Yang Liwei. It was a triumph for Chinese technological might and could not have been as successful as it was without land support from Tarawa. It was also long suspected that the Tarawa station was used by China to monitor American missile tests at nearby Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

But it is not certain that the loss of the Tarawa base was really that devastating for China. Some observers argue that the satellite dishes that China had at Tarawa were too small for monitoring US missile tests on Kwajalein. According to Des Ball, a professor at the Australian National University in Canberra and an expert on signals intelligence, China's *Yuan Wang* tracking ships are far more useful for intelligence gathering: “These are packed with all sorts of communications gear.” But the loss of the Tarawa station nevertheless deprived Beijing of a land base in the Pacific, where the movements and activities of the *Yuan Wang* ships could be coordinated.⁴³

Yuan Wang means “Long View” and is a fleet of maritime aerospace survey vessels, each with an impressive array of dishes and scanners. One of the tracking ships is permanently stationed in the Pacific while a second makes occasional visits. Others sail around the Yellow Sea off the coast of China, along the Namibian coast in southern Africa, and in the Indian Ocean.

To support these vessels, the Chinese Academy of Sciences also has a fleet of research ships sailing under the name *Xiang Yang Hong* (“the East is Red”), which can undertake additional upper-atmosphere missile and satellite research as well as hydrometeorology.

It may be argued that China has legitimate security interests in the Pacific. Several of China's Western rivals have at various points in time carried out nuclear tests in the region. Following the communist takeover in China and the subsequent war on the Korean peninsula, the United States Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, also set up camp on Saipan in the Northern Marianas. This became a secret training base for nationalist Chinese guerrillas from Taiwan, who were going to be sent to the mainland in a bid to re-conquer it from the communists. Some of these were the legendary "frogmen," divers who swam from smaller, Taiwan-held islands off the mainland and then went ashore to carry out sabotage and gather intelligence. In the mid-1950s—already before the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959—anti-Chinese Tibetan guerrillas were also trained on Saipan and then sent back to infiltrate a land very different from this tropical island.⁴⁴

The CIA base was closed down in 1962, but the US Congressional Research Service stated in a 2007 report that its present and former island possessions in Micronesia "provide a vast buffer for [the US-held island] Guam, which serves as the 'forward military bridgehead' from which to launch US operations along the Asia-Pacific security arc stretching from South Korea and Japan, through Thailand and the Philippines, to Australia. The US military is building up forces on Guam to help maintain deterrence and respond to possible security threats in the Pacific."⁴⁵

Although the United States recognises the government in Beijing as the sole representative of China, it is obvious that Washington's interests in the Pacific are much closer to Taiwan's. Both the United States and Taiwan want to keep China out of the region. Ron Crocombe writes in his book *Asia in the Pacific Islands: Replacing the West*: "Asian spying may still be small compared with that of the USA, which has unmanned surveillance aircraft based in Guam as well as probably the most comprehensive system of submarine, telecommunications and land-based surveillance. But China is growing fast in this area."⁴⁶ So the rivalry continues, and China is the expanding, seemingly unstoppable power in the Pacific—in terms of aid, investment, migration and, increasingly, military ties and activities.

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