Let me be clear, what follows is not me venturing to chart the events we should expect ‘now China has fixed its invasion sights’ on the island of Taiwan. Instead, it is a reflection on occupations that have already befallen them, but conveniently overlooked by those who occupy their time predicting a looming invasion striking the ‘besieged’ Taiwanese. An entirely new invasion would of course escalate geo-political cold-war tensions; not simply compounding the consequences of Russia’s attack on Ukraine, but, by comparison, make matters chillingly much colder, to freezing-point in fact.

Rather than confine my words to why I dismiss talk of China striking Taiwan, I will point to a different striking point. For what strikes me is how self-appointed sages are unaware of the occupations which have struck Taiwan in the relatively recent past.

Before considering when it was last over-run by ‘outsiders’, we need to go back to when this happened the time before last.

The First Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 resulted in humiliating defeat for China. As with almost all such brutal conflicts, land proved the Spoil of War. In this case, China was forced to hand over to Japan Korea and Taiwan, beginning fifty-years of occupation for both. These ended of course with Japan’s defeat in 1945. Whereas Korea would find itself consumed by conflict and division to this day – to which I will return – Taiwan was ‘returned to China in the whole’. It was reunited, however, markedly different from when last ‘as one’ with the mainland.

**CHINA AND TAIWAN**

A half century of occupation meant that by 1945 Japanese was spoken within Taiwan as much as, if not more than, mandarin. Ensured too that kimonos were more common than qipaos, with many other alterations evident in culture and even cuisine. These changes aside, **when troops from the Chinese mainland arrived in very late 1945, they were greeted warmly by the Taiwanese; a welcome which would however prove short-lived**.

By 1947, following the murderous ‘228 Incident’, the increasingly heavy-handed indeed trigger-happy mainlanders, became viewed by the Taiwanese as all too often tyrannical occupiers. Two years later, following his defeat to Mao’s communist forces, Chiang Kai-Shek landed in Taiwan, bringing with him close to a million of his mainland loyalists (at the time the local population was 6m). Those denying this was an invasion might like to reflect on the fact that on their arrival the KMT imposed strict martial law. The latter would not be lifted for 38 years, over which time the interlopers from the mainland would broach no political dissent from locals. Indeed, one can reasonably claim that to this day indigenous Taiwanese live under occupation by those who originate from the mainland. **So, then, to those who confidently and chillingly foresee mainland China will surge into Taiwan, I say this: your prediction is 74 years too late.**

There will no doubt be those who will make the case that precisely because Taiwan has been so prized in the past, by mainland China and Japan and most lately the United States, it is a certainty China will pounce hard upon it again to prise it from America’s soft control. If this were indeed to happen, one could hardly overstate the regional and indeed far wider consequences. It is precisely because of the enormous asymmetry in the costs and benefits of an invasion, that **I refuse the accept those in control of China will act in such a reckless way**. If China deployed its military power against Taiwan’s not inconsiderable armed forces – the island being heavily fortified – it would, without doubt, have to contest with the might of the US. **To repeat, the costs to China would be incalculably large. The simple fact is why should China act militarily when it can strike Taiwan monetarily at far less cost? Strike, that is, at Taiwan’s Achilles heel, specifically the heavy reliance of its economy on the manufacture and export of semi-conductors**. True, global chip shortages have benefited those with capacity to make them. No less true is that mainland China is adding considerable new capacity to meet its own increasing demands, as well as to more compete in export markets. We need appreciate too how China has systematically bought-up more and more of the world’s rare earth mineral assets. The simple question then is **why would China swiftly pounce on Taiwan militarily with the inordinate costs associated, when it could more affordably play the long game by squeezing it monetarily?**

Let me shift focus from the south to the East China Sea.

**CHINA AND THE KOREAS**

Following the departure in 1945 of Japan’s occupying forces, Korea was effectively partitioned into a north overseen by the USSR, with the US taking the same role in the south. Matters would change in 1949 with Mao taking power in China and fixing his sights on reclaiming old lands. To this effect, a year later north Korea invaded the south to unleash a three-year bloody war that pitted the forces of the US and its allies against those of Red China, but resulted in little real change to the peninsula’s division. The US would become the south’s effective protector, whilst leaving the north to become ever more insular and increasingly maverick. Increasingly maverick and aggressive to the nuclear-point the range-bound world now finds itself, and increasingly maverick too in the eyes of its ostensible ally China.

So, what then is my point? Well, yes, I do believe Beijing will sometime soon act upon its neighbours. Act, that is, not in that I anticipate it will aggressively trigger regime-change in Taiwan. Rather, I expect – have long-expected in fact – it will affect dramatic but largely bloodless change in Pyongyang. The reality is that, even though it may have in the past performed the role of useful-idiot for China, sometime ago North Korea moved to becoming a costly and indeed dangerous liability.

I am convinced that in its self-interest, Beijing will bring about leadership change in Pyongyang (did it try and fail in this regard in 2013 and/or 2017?). Force that is the introduction of new leaders who not merely greatly dial down North Korea’s aggressive tendencies but open peaceful progressive dialogue with their counterparts in Seoul, who are more than keen to engage. One should think here of the shockingly quick and peaceful detente then swift reunification, between east and west Germany; events well within living memory and offering powerful parallels.

Not all would welcome a warming of relations between the Koreas with China acting as the counsellor. For a number of reasons, Japan would most certainly not receive this warmly, neither too would the United States. Let me quickly consider how such events might be received in Taipei. Would seeing America’s role in the region weakened relative to China, raise grave concerns that Taiwan has become far more vulnerable? Or instead, on seeing Beijing act as a conciliator between the Koreas, might this make the majority of Taiwanese see the Mainland in a more peaceful light, and indeed see a route to Korean reunification a path they might follow?

**My forecasts are of course a far cry from the deep chill so many see descending over and around the China Seas; one which quickly extends far and wide, bringing with it not merely a new cold-war, but potential ice-age. To be clear then, I am not cool with that outlook.**