PROJECT MUSE®

Retaining Separatist Territories: Comparing China and Canada

Wayne Bert

China: An International Journal, Volume 2, Number 1, March 2004, pp.
108-132 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chn.2004.0002>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/52102>

Retaining Separatist Territories: Comparing China and Canada

Wayne BERT

Attitudes/policies towards separatist territories vary widely. Canada is tolerant towards the potential secession of Quebec, but China has vowed to use force to avoid losing Taiwan. Liberal democracies such as Canada are more receptive to self-determination and separatism. However, democracies display ambivalent attitudes and democracy alone cannot explain tolerance towards separatism. Virtual states, however, consistently have lenient policies towards separatism. Decentralised Canada and the benign North American security environment also help explain Canada's attitude, but security concerns directly related to the separatist movements and the size of the parent countries show little correspondence to the different attitudes on separatism.

Much of the literature on secession deals with the questions of when secession is justified or legitimate, how the interests of the different sides can be accommodated, why groups decide to secede and what makes secessionist causes successful.¹ This article is concerned with a separate but related question that has been little investigated: what explains the differences in parent countries' attitudes and policies towards what they believe are separatist or potentially separatist territories? A parent country is one which views the separatist territory as legitimately under its control. A separatist territory is one that either aspires to, or has been successful in seceding, or otherwise maintaining a separate existence from the parent country. All territories with separatist tendencies can be treated as one class, whether they are potential secessionists

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Bert (wbert@cs.net) is an independent scholar of international politics, Chinese foreign policy and American foreign policy. He received his PhD in political science from the University of Kansas and currently lives in Arlington, VA.

from the parent country (Quebec from Canada) or, alternatively, want to maintain a separate *de facto* status they already possess (Taiwan from China).² The central question of this inquiry is why some parent countries, such as Canada, are willing to allow a minority to separate from the parent country and form its own political entity as that minority chooses, while others such as China in the case of Taiwan, Tibet and other areas, take the opposite tack and proclaim a willingness to use all means including force to ensure the territory remains part of the parent country? Since this study focuses on the cases of Canada and China, on extreme ends of the spectrum of permissiveness vs. restrictiveness, the issue of country response is clearly framed for comparison, but the author provides supplemental evidence for other separatist cases as well.

Members of the international system, international law and the United Nations, generally disavow the right to secession and deplore attempts to secede, an attitude that has been encouraged by the idea that decolonisation is good but the break up of newly-independent states should be opposed. This view is especially strong when former colonies become states, where sovereign status based on the legacy of borders drawn during the colonial period is considered sacrosanct and cannot tolerate separatism. It is also argued that some limitations on the right of secession are necessary to maintain the “international peace and stability of the nation-state”.³ This suggests that the question of why a parent country would agree to accommodate a secessionist movement is a more interesting question than why one would oppose it. Canada’s stance on this issue is a deviant case.

This article is organised as follows: the idea of national self-determination plays a key role in providing a justification for separation of a territory from the

¹ See for instance Lee C. Buchheit, *Secession: The Legitimacy of Self-Determination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) and Viva Ona Bartkus, *The Dynamics of Secession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² In this paper, secession is considered a sub-category of separatism, a phenomenon involving territories that the parent country perceives as either currently governed separately or aspiring to that status. Secession is the act of a territory breaking loose from a government which heretofore exercised sovereign jurisdiction over it. Separatism therefore makes no legal statement, while secession designates the breaking of a legal bond. The focus in this article, however, is on a parent country’s perception of a territory, not the territory’s legal status. For my purposes, therefore, the terms are viewed as interchangeable and I often use them that way.

³ See Gnanapala Welhengama, *Minorities’ Claims from Autonomy to Secession: International Law and State Practice* (Singapore: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 244, 308–12.

parent. It is also closely related to and intrinsic to the concept of democracy and the increased popularity of democratic values in the international system over the last few decades. After a brief discussion of self-determination and its implications, a summary of the attitudes of the Canadian and Chinese governments towards separatist movements (Quebec and Taiwan) is provided. In the next section, the key role of democratic norms in predisposing a government towards tolerating separatism is examined. Democracy, however, does not guarantee tolerance towards separatism. Only democracies in advanced industrial societies (virtual states) consistently display such liberal policies. This section is followed by examination of other factors that may cause parent governments to resist the goals of separatist territories: size and strategic factors, found not to be significant as explanatory factors. Finally, the author closes with brief remarks on the policy implications of the Chinese attitude towards Taiwan for peaceful resolution of that issue.

National Self-determination and Separatist Tendencies

The principle of national self-determination emerged from the time of the French Revolution. It came to be widely believed that “each distinct, homogenous people has a right to political autonomy”, including a state of its own. Further, such a state has a right to include or exclude other populations from the benefits or membership in that state. If such a people “lacks a state, or ... substantial political autonomy, it has the right to struggle for independence or autonomy by extraordinary means”.⁴ This principle spread from France throughout Europe during the 19th century and was given a substantial boost when Woodrow Wilson championed self-determination and the break up of empires into national units after World War I, elevating the principle to “the status of an international touchstone of governmental legitimacy”.⁵ National self-determination is the principle on which ideas of separatism are based. A separatist movement, however, must also be built on a claim to territory, usually based on an historical grievance. Without a plausible claim to territory, “self-determination arguments do not form a plausible basis for secession”.⁶ This dual basis of the claims for separatism, however, implies the potential for the carving up *ad infinitum* of territory into

⁴ Charles Tilly, quoted in Rodney Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 143–4.

⁵ Buchheit, *Secession*, p. 4.

⁶ Lea Brilmayer, “Secession and Self-Determination: A Territorial Interpretation”, *Yale Journal of International Law* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 192.

ever-smaller pieces to meet the demands of ever-smaller groups. Even Wilson himself was not prepared to deal with the demands his rhetoric would unleash and the many complications involved in implementing a seemingly straightforward principle.

In recent years, changes in international economics have led to the realisation that now “there is no statistical relationship between country size and growth performance”.⁷ Further, in the last half of the 20th century, aggression against or annihilation of small states has increasingly come to be seen as illegitimate international behaviour. An international safety net of international law, international organisation and material aid have been created,⁸ and the “evolution in norms has ... impaired the classical functioning of power politics. This has served to exempt weaker states from power contests in which they could not compete effectively.”⁹

Two Cases: China and Canada

The two cases in this study involve two territories, one which is currently self-governing, and another that is not. The Quebecois have been debating secession from Canada, but still remain a province in that sovereign country. The Taiwanese govern themselves and enjoy *de facto* independence from the People's Republic of China (PRC). This self-governance relies, however, on the support of the United States to ensure that Taiwan is not threatened or invaded by the PRC, which is determined to reclaim Taiwan. Polls indicate that a strong plurality of people living on Taiwan prefer maintaining the *status quo*, and while support for reunification has gradually declined through the 1990s, support for independence has increased.¹⁰ If a deal with the PRC

⁷ Jeffrey Herbst, “Global Change and the Future of Existing Nation-States”, in *The Self-Determination of Peoples: Community, Nation and State in an Interdependent World*, Wolfgang Danspeckgruber (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2002).

⁸ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹ Bartkus, *The Dynamics of Secession*, p. 209; and Herbst, “Global Change and the Future of Existing Nation-States”, p. 22.

¹⁰ Cal Clark, “Successful Democratization in the ROC: Creating a Security Challenge”, in *Taiwan's National Security: Dilemmas and Opportunities*, ed. Alexander C. Tan, Steve Chan and Calvin Jillson (Singapore: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 44–5. In 1998, 46 per cent supported the *status quo*, 20 per cent supported independence, and 16 per cent supported unification while 18 per cent had no opinion.

can be concluded that falls short of national self-determination (national sovereignty), it would probably consist of trading some of their present *de facto* autonomy, i.e., no outside political or military control, for a guarantee that whatever autonomy is negotiated would continue and that they would have a legitimate status as a permanent special region or province of the PRC. If no bargain can be struck, they will either continue in the current twilight zone, or risk PRC military action by declaring independence and the likely need to resist militarily. From the perspective of the parent governments, these “rebellious” provinces present a similar problem since the provinces either want or are contemplating a formal status of independence, despite the differences in current legal status.

The separatist movement in Quebec is based primarily on the francophone culture, language and history of the province, a belief that as a group the Quebecois have been deprived by the dominant culture, and that the francophone culture is in danger of extinction or absorption by English culture. Most secessionist movements are based on ethnic or linguistic bases, often believed to be one of the most emotionally charged issues on which groups base struggles for independence. As Daniel Bell asserts, ethnicity is particularly potent as a motivator, more so than class, because it “can combine an interest with an affective tie”.¹¹ In this case, however, it appears that the Taiwanese as a society are at least as motivated as the Quebecois to maintain their separatist status, despite their ethnic similarity to the Mainlanders. So far, the Quebecois have been unable to muster a majority vote in favour of the Parti Quebecois-sponsored referendums on sovereignty. A yes vote would mean national separateness or sovereignty, but the Party also envisioned continued economic cooperation and association with Canada, or sovereignty-association. In contrast, the Taiwanese have given increasingly greater support to the Democratic People’s Party (DPP), which originally advocated independence, but has modified its agenda as the sobering realities of holding power have weighed on its leadership. In order to maintain their independence, the Taiwanese have risked the wrath of the Mainland and the prospect of a deadly military conflict, promised as retribution if they step beyond the guidelines the PRC leadership has laid down as a deterrent.¹² As one might expect,

¹¹ Quoted in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 56.

¹² Michael Yahuda, “The International Standing of the Republic of China on Taiwan”, in *Contemporary Taiwan*, ed. David Shambaugh (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 289.

national sovereignty for Quebec would likely result in fairly amicable relations with Canada, while in the case of Taiwan it is hard to see how it could come about without a high risk of military conflict and persistent antagonism in the aftermath.

Canada and Quebec

Although Quebec's distinct francophone culture and the uniqueness of the province have long been recognised, beginning in the 1960s, a new dimension of separation and dissent began to manifest itself. Accelerated economic growth, predominantly in Montreal from 1941 through 1971, led to urbanisation of the province and the undermining of the traditional rural culture. Montreal became increasingly a French city, the urban centre of the province of Quebec. At the same time, Toronto was growing at an even faster rate and overtaking Montreal as the financial centre of Canada. These changes led to new expectations for the francophone population, and new competition for economic rewards within the Canadian federalist structure. The key elements of nationalist politics in Quebec are not security driven, but rather by the relationship of the economy of French Canada to the continental economy and its impact on the preservation of the francophone culture and language.¹³

After much discussion, attempts to agree on several different plans redefining the relationship between the provinces and the centre, and several referendums on independence in Quebec, there is still no solution to the problem. As pro-independence sentiment grew in the province — in 1980, 40 per cent voted in favour of secession; in 1995, 49.4 per cent voted in favour — English-speaking Canada made many efforts to respond to French concerns and meet some of those concerns within the framework of a single Canada. The two major attempts to negotiate constitutional resolutions that would vitiate the independence movement failed, including the Meech Lake Accord (1987) and the Charlottetown Accord (1990). Both of these agreements granted an assortment of greater powers to the provinces and recognised Quebec as a “distinct society”. A third referendum was promised, but the decisive defeat of the pro-independence Parti Québécois in April 2003 suggests at a minimum, a long postponement of that event. It should be noted that Canada is already “more decentralised than any other industrialised country”

¹³ Jane Jacobs, *The Question of Separatism: Quebec and the Struggle over Sovereignty* (New York: Random House, 1980).

and that especially since the 1960s, decentralisation as measured by such indices as spending and taxing shares of different levels of government, has “proceeded apace”.¹⁴

There is a consensus in Canada outside Quebec, that even if the Quebecois were to vote to secede, change would occur peacefully. There is no basis to believe that Canadian troops would come out of their barracks to prevent such an outcome. This is true even though there is no provision for provincial secession in the Canadian constitution. One analyst suggests the commitment of Canada to peaceful change:

I began this book asking you to “imagine the unimaginable”: Canada in the grip of armed conflict. This requires a mighty leap of imagination for most Canadians, who have come to view themselves as the most peaceful people on the globe. Like me, they were brought up to believe that Canada solves all of its problems peacefully.¹⁵

If any force-based solution to the territorial issue is to be adopted, Canadians would need a new ideology. No Canadian, however, would believe any ideology that posited that Canadian borders are sacrosanct, or that any national rivalry to Canada is illegitimate and therefore must be dealt with by military occupation and overt violence. The tradition of respecting democratic votes in Canada is two centuries old.¹⁶

China and Taiwan

China’s attitude towards Taiwan contrasts sharply with that of Canada’s towards Quebec. Whether China’s policies towards Taiwan are peaceful or threatening is

¹⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 194–200. In 1995, Canada’s federal government accounted for 41.9 per cent of expenditures, while the US central government accounted for 52.6 per cent with the balance belonging to the provinces (states) and local government (see IMF, *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook*). One commentator states that “Regional wars have been our substitute for the customary class wars”. Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996). In the April election, Bernard Landry’s Parti Quebecois polled 33.2 per cent to Jean Charest’s 45.9 per cent as standard bearer of the Liberals. The Action Democratique du Quebec received 18.2 per cent. *New York Times*, 16 Apr. 2003, p. A8.

¹⁵ Scott Reid, *Canada Remapped: How the Partition of Quebec Will Reshape the Nation* (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1992), pp. 19, 50, 56, 146.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

determined on the basis of tactics, not on the basis of principle or morals. As one analyst puts it, in spite of constant appeals to “peaceful unification” over the years, China has never stopped (1) attempting to isolate Taiwan in the international arena, (2) threatening Taiwan with the use of force under certain conditions, and (3) treating Taiwan as a renegade province of the PRC.¹⁷ Taiwan has never been well integrated with China, and the relationship between the island territory and Mainland has always been tenuous. The Taiwanese claim some distinct cultural and linguistic traits, in spite of being ethnic Han Chinese. However, the main differences are historical, and a “distinct Taiwanese identity...[is] an ‘invented tradition’”.¹⁸ The hold of the Qing (1644–1911) bureaucracy in this marginal part of the empire was always tenuous. In the 1930s, even Mao Zedong told Edgar Snow that the island was not part of China and could remain separate from the communist state he intended to found.¹⁹ From 1895 through the end of World War II, Taiwan was under Japanese occupation. The Nationalists escaped to Taiwan after their defeat in the civil war, and President Truman reversed his original decision not to protect Taiwan after the Korean War broke out. The US presence in the Taiwan Strait became an important element in the Chinese civil war, preventing either of the Chinese parties from changing the *status quo*, although low-level military sparring, especially over small off-shore islands, continued. The legacy of the Cold War and the continuing involvement of the US with Taiwan and the ruling party in Taiwan undoubtedly is one factor adding emotional intensity to the controversy over Taiwan.²⁰

In the late 1970s, the policy of “liberation by force” gave way to “peaceful unification”. This policy fit the new post-cultural revolution strategy of peace and development, and was codified in 1981 when Ye Jianying put forth his nine points for unification with Taiwan, a proposal that would “gradually eliminate

¹⁷ Michael Y.M. Kau, “The Challenge of Cross-Strait Relations: The Strategic Implications of the Missile Crisis”, in *The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Hung-mao Tien and Tun-jen (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), p. 247.

¹⁸ Thomas B. Gold, “Taiwan Society at the *Fin de Siecle*”, in Shambaugh, *Contemporary Taiwan*, p. 61.

¹⁹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 102.

²⁰ According to Robert A. Madsen, China has viewed Taiwan as part of China partly because of decisions made by the Allies, Japan and the Kuomintang in the 1940s and 1950s. “The Struggle for Sovereignty between Taiwan and China”, in *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities*, ed. Stephen D. Krasner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 150.

antagonism between the two sides and increase mutual understanding". In 1984, Deng Xiaoping followed suit with his recommendation of the model of "one country, two systems" as a model for unification. All PRC offers assume the principle of "one China" with Beijing as the central government. An eight-point proposal by Jiang Zemin, however, was quickly followed in July 1995 and March 1996, by the biggest setback to unification since the Cold War days. The missile firings by Beijing towards Taiwan and the reaction of the US in placing two carrier groups in the area of the Taiwan Strait provided a quick recollection for those who had forgotten the other side of Beijing's policy.²¹ The explanation for Beijing's switch was probably, as Suisheng Zhao says, a combination of issues: Jiang's chagrin over being blind-sided by Lee Teng-hui's May 1995 high profile trip to the US, apprehension at the changing dynamics in Taiwanese politics as independence sentiment increased and the new leadership refused to defer to the "one China" homilies of old and the success of Taiwan's "elastic diplomacy" — taking advantage of its new democratic and open polity to gain support around the world, but particularly in the US.²²

Beijing has always been committed to the use of force under three conditions: (1) if Taiwan denies the one-China principle and tries to separate from the territory of China, (2) in the event that independence is declared, or (3) if there is an invasion of Taiwan by foreign forces.²³ It has never renounced the use of force against Taiwan, maintaining that this question is an internal matter since Taiwan is part of China, and China often goes out of its way to defend it as one option to be used if necessary. The white paper issued by the state council in 1998 states that

Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. It is a lofty mission and a common aspiration of all Chinese people to put an end to the cleavage between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait and realise the reunification of the motherland. The issue of Taiwan is entirely an internal affair of China... The Chinese government seeks to achieve the reunification of the country by peaceful means, but it will not commit itself not to resort to force. Every sovereign state has the right to use all

²¹ Kau, "The Challenge of Cross-Strait Relations"; and Suisheng Zhao, "Military Coercion and Peaceful Offence: Beijing's Strategy of National Reunification with Taiwan", *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 4 (Winter 1999/2000).

²² Zhao, "Military Coercion and Peaceful Offence", pp. 501–6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 510; "The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue" released by the Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2000 (internet edition).

means it thinks necessary, including military means, to safeguard its own sovereignty and territorial integrity.²⁴

On “Letting Go” of Territories *Democracy and Self-determination*

There is a direct link between a willingness to countenance a separatist territory and a commitment to democracy. Liberal democracy is a process that provides electoral choice and the necessary safeguards of civil and political liberties to ensure that a society is governed by some variant of majority preferences, but simultaneously protects minority rights. Processes that allow for self-determination leading to secession or separatism can be seen as a subset of a democratic process, since a population given a choice of governors, may elect to be ruled by institutions and processes other than those to which they are then subject. Measures that ensure some form of self-determination, therefore, cannot be denied a population without abridgement of the democratic process. As E.H. Carr put it:

Self-determination might indeed be regarded as implicit in the idea of democracy; for if every man's right is recognised to be consulted about the affairs of the political unit to which he belongs, he may be assumed to have an equal right to be consulted about the form and extent of the unit.²⁵

While self-determination based on ethnic, linguistic or other criteria underlying national autonomy may in some cases be granted in an otherwise authoritarian setting, it is difficult to deny a population access to choices about whether they should remain as part of an already constituted polity, or join it, without denying an aspect of democratic process. For this reason, it is to be expected that countries governed democratically will be much more likely to allow secession movements to succeed than would authoritarian governments.

²⁴ “White Paper on China's National Defense”, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 28 Jul. 1998, p. 4, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, China-Daily Report*. The Chinese constitution also states explicitly that “Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People's Republic of China. It is the inviolable duty of all Chinese people, including our compatriots in Taiwan, to accomplish the great task of reunifying the motherland.” “Constitution of the People's Republic of China”, reprinted in Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (New York: WW Norton, 1995), p. 356.

²⁵ Quoted in Lawrence T. Farley, *Plebiscites and Sovereignty: The Crisis of Political Legitimacy* (Boulder: Westview, 1986), p. 4.

Most theories of secession are liberal-democratic, although claims of national self-determination can rest on a communitarian or realist basis.²⁶ One can argue that there is a communal right of a group to self-determination (and thus secession). Theories of secession based on liberal premises can go so far as what Beran call a *voluntarist* assumption, or a belief that any individual who wishes to leave a political community has the right to do so. A less extreme position is a *remedial* theory, which holds that secession is justified only if there are violations of the human rights of the members of the potentially secessionist group, and no other remedy than secession is available. Alternatively, violations could be construed as economic discrimination or insufficient valuing of the preservation of a group's culture.²⁷ In the case of China, however, discrimination with this degree of subtlety is superfluous. Therefore, "there can be no premise for using referendum to decide any matter of self-determination". The Chinese have confronted head-on the argument that "democratisation on the China Mainland is the key to the reunification of China", arguing against it primarily on the basis of international law and historical developments.²⁸ Ironically, if the US had adhered to such a philosophy, ignoring self-determination, the US would still be part of Britain.²⁹ The ignorance of the Chinese with respect to how the rest of the world operates, indeed the lack of awareness of the case argued here, is exposed when a very senior Chinese military officer states that "[t]he most important thing is not popular opinion on Taiwan, but only the opinion of the whole country. New York can't decide for New York."³⁰ Finally, it should be noted that even if China were to make a sudden turn towards democracy, the resulting system would not necessarily be more favourable to independence for Taiwan. During a transition to democracy, a government is likely to be even

²⁶ Michael Freeman, "The Right to Self-determination in International Politics: Six Theories in Search of a Policy", *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 3 (Jul. 1999): 355–70.

²⁷ *Ibid.* That formal democracy does not necessarily equate to self-determination for separatist territories was made evident when India swallowed the Portuguese colony of Goa rather than allow it independence. This, moreover, was under the rule of the committed democrat Jawaharlal Nehru.

²⁸ "The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue", pp. 11–4.

²⁹ Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. x.

³⁰ David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing US-China Relations, 1989–2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 209.

more nationalistic and chauvinistic than under autocracy, since politicians, insecure and uncertain of their support and lacking a firm democratic framework which sets rules for competition are likely to promote nationalist themes as a way of security election. Such a government, in the initial stages is also likely to be an “illiberal” democracy, another variant that is unlikely to be friendly to separatism.³¹

Canada, on the other hand, certainly recognises the remedial theory of secession, since the problem of the full realisation of Quebec’s identity has been identified, and many would argue that so far no solution short of secession has been found. Canada appears on this basis to be willing to tolerate the secession of Quebec. The voluntarist theory of secession is probably closest to the stance of the Canadian government, since there is every appearance of the willingness to allow the secession of Quebec based solely on whether the separatists win a referendum, not on the basis of one or another conception of what satisfies or provides a solution to a specifically-defined problem. An indication that the discussion of secession has been more substantive is provided, however, by the historical record showing the numerous attempts on both sides to arrive at a solution satisfactory to all, short of secession. This process has been so wearying that some are now expressing a desire to end it all, even if this means secession.³² Further evidence suggesting that the voluntarist philosophy is closest to the Canadian outlook comes from the previously discussed fact that some believe that if Quebec did secede, then other provinces might also secede or even join the US. The implication is that such a decision would not be stopped, with or without further discussion of the possibility of providing a solution to their grievances. The view of Canadians thus appears to be that they are committed to democracy. If a minority group feels that its needs cannot be met by the majority, and it desires to secede and establish an independent country, the norms of individual and national self-determination and democracy would allow secession and the country would not use force to stop it.

Since the US was faced with a secession problem leading to the civil war in the 1860s, we have a further point of comparison with the Canadian situation. It is clear that Lincoln took a very different approach to secession from that taken by modern-day Canada, in spite of the democratic heritage and record of

³¹ Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: WW Norton, 2000); and Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1997): 22–43.

³² See for instance Reed Scowen, *Time to Say Goodbye: The Case for Getting Quebec Out of Canada* (Toronto: M&S, 1999).

both nations. Although the South started the war with the taking of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Lincoln had made clear that when the deep South seceded from the union he would not allow the federal military bases to be lost. He pledged to “hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government”.³³ Thus it was inevitable that if the South was determined to secede, there would eventually be a military clash between the two sides. Lincoln, who had once seen secession as a sacred right, later termed it the “essence of anarchy”.³⁴ The stance of the US on the status of Puerto Rico, where it has indicated a willingness to abide by the will of the Puerto Rican populace, whether it opts for statehood, independence or the *status quo*, suggests the current US position on secession may be approaching that of Canada. At this point, however, the US has not agreed to be bound by results whereby the Puerto Ricans opted for statehood, since there is reluctance to admit a Spanish-speaking territory to the union.³⁵

Comparing the historical experience of China and Canada with democracy, it is not surprising that the two countries have very different perspectives on secession and self-determination. Canada has an unbroken record of adherence to democratic procedures and protection of civil liberties since the inception of the modern state in 1867.³⁶ Canadian democracy is also unique among industrialised countries in its degree of decentralisation and the degree of provincial autonomy that it grants. China is organised as a “unitary multinational” state, while Canada is a loose federal system. To be sure, China has decentralised considerably since implementing reforms and opening to the world. It also provides for the protection of minority rights by setting up autonomous regions for minorities. In spite of considerable gains by the provinces in domestic and even foreign policy-making authority that sometimes amounts to an astounding degree of autonomy, China is still, however, a unitary state in which the provinces owe formal obeisance to Beijing on most substantive

³³ An account of Lincoln’s positions and decision-making is in David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), especially ch. 10.

³⁴ See Buchheit, *Secession*, p. 110. Lincoln feared that if the South was allowed to go, there would be an arms race and territorial rivalry as the two powers expanded across the continent; Bartkus, *Dynamics of Secession*, p. 54.

³⁵ Jose Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and Moynihan, *Pandaemonium*, pp. 73–7.

³⁶ R. Kent Weaver, ed., *The Collapse of Canada?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992), especially pp. 48–51.

issues.³⁷ Comparing the policies of the two countries towards minority cultural groups is a study in contrasts. Canada, even more decentralised than other federal democratic systems, including the US, is probably more reconciled to making concessions to minorities such as the Quebecois and attempting to work out a solution than any other democratised and developed country. In contrast, China's policy towards Tibet and other minority areas has been one of conquest, repression, settlement of minority areas with Han Chinese and strong encouragement of assimilation.

China has never experienced democracy for a significant period of time. From the dynastic period, through a phase of warlordism, Nationalist rule and a series of policy and elite changes under the Communists, rule has been arbitrary, authoritarian and focused on the group and collectivity instead of the individual. Further, China's historical experience of humiliation by foreign countries produced a culture that is not conducive to compromise and negotiation of troublesome issues. After two thousand years as an empire which considered itself at the centre of the world, beginning with the Opium War in 1839, the Western invasion and crumbling of the world as they had known it humiliated the Chinese. Revolutionary upheavals and an extended and gruelling search over nearly a century and a half for a formula to develop a strong China have left their mark. Only in the last two decades after the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping has real progress been made towards liberalisation and the rule of law. Information is more freely available, and some of the press occasionally shows substantial independence. Local elections allow some choice, and in unusual circumstances result in the overturning of party choices. The introduction of the capitalist marketplace and the beginning of the dismantlement of the state-owned enterprises have invigorated the economy and further contributed to the deterioration of ideology to the point that the ideological mish-mash propounded by the regime is virtually incomprehensible. The remnants of the old order persist, however, and there is extreme variation from province to province in the degree to which the new economy and at least some sort of political reform have taken hold.³⁸

It should be noted, however, that even liberal democracies are inconsistent in their views on secession. According to the Danish constitution, Greenland

³⁷ China's state structure is described in the constitution. See Lieberthal, *Governing China*, p. 357.

³⁸ David S.G. Goodman, "How Open is Chinese Society?" and Gerald Segal, "Enlightening China?" both in *China Rising: Nationalism and Interdependence*, ed. David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (New York: Routledge, 1997).

can secede. The Netherlands and New Zealand, however, have opposed acknowledging a right of secession, at least unless very specific conditions are attached, and a relatively new democracy, India, even under Nehru, has always been adamantly against secession and today holds that position in Kashmir. On the other hand, support for the right of secession sometimes comes from unexpected quarters: Saudi Arabia, Albania and South Africa do or have supported it.³⁹ Declarations and actual practice, however, may diverge greatly. Just as Canada, willing to allow Quebec to secede, does not have a provision for secession in its constitution, both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia did, but with no provision for implementing it. The Soviet Union nonetheless self-destructed in 1991 and as the authority of the regime disintegrated, individual republics summarily declared themselves independent. In the case of Yugoslavia, the mobilisation of nationalist sentiments and political parties, especially in Serbia, doomed the entire country to ethnic division and war between smaller units once Tito was gone. Examples of peaceful separation are available, however, in other democracies. The Norwegians separated from Sweden in 1905, Iceland from Denmark in 1944 and the Slovaks from Czechoslovakia in 1993. The democratisation in Indonesia was critical in the decision by President B.J. Habibie's government to grant independence to East Timor in 1999, when both domestic and international pressure contributed to change in a way that was never possible under Suharto. The logic of democracy certainly suggests that states so constituted would be relatively supportive of the right of secession, but the cases of India and the US during the civil war show that while democracy may be a necessary condition for a liberal stance towards secession, it is not a sufficient one. Attitudes favourable to secession come most consistently from democracies with a high level of development and the post-modern attitudes of the virtual state.

Regional Attributes and Virtual States

According to Richard Rosecrance, two types of states exist. One, the traditional state, anchored in the 19th century and focused on territory, sovereignty, material production, nationalist rhetoric and national defence, is still dominant in Asia. The second is the virtual state, based on mobile capital, labour and information, or a "negotiating entity" that depends as much on economic access abroad

³⁹ Welhengama, *Minorities' Claims*, pp. 309–12, 317; Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Cass R. Sunstein, "Constitutionalism and Secession", *University of Chicago Law Review* 58, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 633–69.

as on economic control at home. The virtual state, a “head” nation which designs products, can be contrasted with and is complementary to the traditional “body” nation which manufactures them. For the old style entity, material forces were dominant in national growth, whereas in virtual nations products of the mind take precedence. Contrasting examples of these entities exist side by side in East Asia. Hong Kong, which has a GNP per capita roughly that of Canada, is the best example of the new virtual state, and the Peoples’ Republic, with a GDP per capita a small fraction of Hong Kong’s, is a good example of the old type of state. Hong Kong’s GDP is 83 per cent services and 8 per cent manufacturing production. Most of its production facilities are in southern China. The US “stands on the threshold of virtual status”, but is still “introverted politically and culturally”.⁴⁰ Complementary findings show that “value priorities in advanced industrial societies ... tend to shift away from ‘Materialist’ concerns about economic and physical security, towards a greater emphasis on freedom, self-expression and the quality of life, or ‘Postmaterial’ values”. “Striking confirmation” that “wealth promotes Postmaterialism” was found.⁴¹ Postmaterial values enhance and promote democracy, but are also conducive to a more liberal stance towards secession or separatism.

The virtual state provides a dividing line between the modern world and the less modern world, with implications for a nation’s organisation, goals, attitudes and behaviour. The contrast between Europe and Asia has been often remarked. Modern European nations tend to have highly-developed economies, are increasingly economically integrated and interdependent between themselves forming a putative united Europe, have given up their territorial obsessions of the past, and are focused on wealth creation and human self-expression rather than territory or nationalist causes. Most of Asia, on the contrary, still represents an older style of economic organisation, has lower standards of living, is less well integrated both economically and politically, and its international relations are best described as embodying an emphasis on realpolitik, sovereignty and national objectives in which the use of force or the threat of it plays an important

⁴⁰ This paragraph relies on Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Virtual State: Wealth and Power in the Coming Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), preface and ch. 1; and *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

⁴¹ Paul R. Abramson and Ronald Inglehart, *Value Change in Global Perspective* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 1, 9, 121, 127.

role.⁴² China still thinks in 19th-century terms of territory, sovereignty and irredentist causes, and the most pressing part of its national foreign policy agenda includes the recovery of Taiwan and realisation of its claims on the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, which it claims in their entirety. China worries about and guards against the penetration of its polity by subversive ideas of democracy and human rights which may force political reform. It trains its military and builds a naval fleet and air force to project force and operate beyond its coastal waters in order to become the regionally dominant power, if not a major global force. A virtual state, on the other hand, is “a nation based on mobile capital, labour and information [which] ... has downsized its territorially based production capacity and ... would rather plumb the world market than acquire territory”. Canada, following the path of interdependence, is becoming more integrated with an already dominant US through the North American Free Trade Agreement, has reconciled itself to continued cultural penetration by American publications and programmes, and focuses on maintaining its economic progress and finding ways to integrate Quebec, provided there is no majority vote to secede. If there is, anglophone Canada is reconciled to implementing such a policy. While the existence of a secessionist ethnic group within Canada itself seems incompatible with a virtual state which, given the ethos of the virtual state, one would assume to be indifferent to issues of territory and ethnicity, the reaction of the rest of Canada is congruent with the behaviour of a virtual state. Canada and China operate in different environments, and their policies reflect different approaches and objectives.⁴³

The virtual state is the most advanced in its economic and political organisation and most congruent with norms of tolerance and empathy which characterise the most developed states. It is precisely those states with democratic political orientations *and* advanced economies that are most likely to be tolerant towards secessionist movements. The contrast is with the more traditional Chinese state, still obsessed with the “historical atavism” of territory, and uncomfortable, Hong Kong notwithstanding, with the decentralised structure of a confederation such as Canada.

⁴² For a sampling of this analysis, see for example Aaron L. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia”, and Richard K. Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States After the Cold War”, both in *East Asian Security: An International Security Reader*, ed. Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

⁴³ “While Australia and Canada stress the headquarters or head functions, China will be the twenty-first-century model of a body nation”. Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Virtual State*, pp. 4, 12.

Other Influences on Attitudes towards Separatism

Security Threats Related to the Separatist Territory

Is there a difference in the security position of the two nations that influences a country's willingness to entertain the possibility of secession for one of its "provinces"? In both cases, the US is the power most likely to affect security concerns. The US has been deeply involved with the Taiwan issue since 1950, right after the founding of the PRC in 1949. When the US interposed the Seventh Fleet between Taiwan and the Mainland and consequently intervened in the Chinese civil war in June 1950 after the Korean War began, it might have been expected to raise Chinese fears of actual invasion of the Mainland by the US. Allen S. Whiting suggests that since US forces were completely tied down in the Korean War and at that time the Nationalists on Taiwan were completely demoralised and ill-equipped, Chinese caution in continuing to pursue the Nationalists was "particularly striking". There is no suggestion, however, of a fear of US invasion via Taiwan. Similarly, in the 1958 crisis over the offshore islands, after the Chinese began lobbing shells onto Jinmen Island in an attempt to put pressure on Chiang Kai-shek and the government of Taiwan, the Chinese showed considerable sensitivity to the threat of escalation. After the US Eisenhower administration made unspecified threats, followed by pledges of assistance to the Chinese by the Soviet Union, Zhou Enlai proposed talks with the US and one month later the shelling was temporarily suspended, eventually resuming, but only on odd numbered days. The fact that the shelling was begun at all, however, suggests the Chinese were not immediately worried about offensive action by the US. Thomas J. Christensen rejects the thesis that China's initiation of the offshore island crisis was motivated by Chinese fear of US aggressiveness, in favour of the view that Mao was led to "seek tensions short of war" in order to mobilise Chinese domestic society to "increase its own power in relation to the West and the Soviet Union". There seems little evidence, in short, that even at this time of maximum tension in the Taiwan Strait that the Chinese were motivated by a fear of a direct threat to Chinese security across the Strait. This is therefore an even less convincing thesis when the Taiwan Strait confrontation has become institutionalised as it has in later years.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), pp. 236–43; and Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1957–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 6.

The Chinese have consistently expressed concerns about the US defence of Taiwan and interference in their civil war and especially continued arms sales. Chinese dissatisfaction with the US presence in East Asia is also seen as an obstacle to Chinese aspirations and dominance of the region. The concern, however, does not appear to extend to an offensive use of US power to the Mainland or any other direct security threat. It is rather focused on US policy as an obstacle to the integration of Taiwan with the Mainland and the completion of the Chinese revolution and the realisation of other Chinese objectives in Asia. The Taiwan Relations Act passed in 1979 also raised concerns, but along similar lines. Underscoring this point, the 21 February 2000 paper on “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue” does not mention any security threat from the US, but concentrates instead on the issue of the status of Taiwan, Chinese objectives and the obstacles to reaching them.⁴⁵ Certainly it can be convincingly argued, however, that the recent affinity of US security policy and doctrine for pre-emption and intervention in a unipolar world are bound to increase the anxiety of the Chinese about US actions.

The Chinese resent the aforementioned US role in Asia and its superior military capabilities which are used to prevent what they see as the end of the Chinese civil war. Adding insult to injury, the US role in starting Taiwan on the road to its remarkably successful industrialisation and democratisation in the 1960s, which now makes Taiwan’s case in international opinion more persuasive, was substantial.⁴⁶ Further, the Chinese are worried about the precedent that a successful separation of Taiwan would present in other parts of China. They believe Taiwan independence, especially considering the “decades of propaganda about Taiwan’s unbreakable links to the motherland”, would encourage separatists elsewhere, especially in non-Han regions such as Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.⁴⁷

Canada enjoys an exceptional security situation, since nobody on either side of the border believes that US military action against Canada is plausible. At the same time, the US would certainly respond with full capabilities to any threat aimed at Canada, and *ipso facto* also threatening the US. This unique security

⁴⁵ “The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue”.

⁴⁶ Hung-mao Tien and Yun-han Chu, “Building Democracy in Taiwan”, in Shambaugh, *Contemporary Taiwan*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ Thomas Christensen, quoted in Kate Jackett and William Rose, “In the Face of Secession: The Prospect of Disintegration of the Multinational State”, unpublished paper, Nov. 2002, p. 2.

relationship does not, however, suggest that the US and Canada always agree on security issues, as the recent debacle over Iraq illustrates. Even in this atmosphere of heightened suspicion of the US, however, Canada may feel threatened politically or economically, but not militarily. The anglophone leadership indeed has strong incentives to retain Quebec, since any diminishment of territory and population would put it at a further disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the US. Indeed, some have suggested that if Quebec secedes, part or all of anglophone Canada may opt to unite with the US.

On the North American continent there is a unique security situation which invites a benign view of military threat and therefore contributes to decentralisation and a more relaxed view of secession. It is not surprising that both the secession of the American South and the case of Quebec province, which in the developed West is the territory furthest along the road to independence, are both located in the North American subsystem. In European (and Asian) society, change is related to the “historical importance of the institutional distinction between domestic hierarchy and interstate anarchy”. In North American society, on the contrary, where that same distinction has not been as sharply defined, there is no emerging formal supranational constitution as in the European Union, but due to the more decentralised federal systems, there is substantial likelihood of secession. When political accommodation breaks down within consociational federalism, organised groups (incipient states or provinces) are the legacy and secession becomes a possibility. The fact that Quebec is so far along towards independence “rests on the pattern of state rationalisation in Canada, which blurred the hard distinction between domestic hierarchy and interstate anarchy via the institutional arrangements of consociational power-sharing and federation”. The lack of conflict between Canada and the US diminished the value of security and allowed more decentralised structures to develop. This decentralisation in turn makes the possibility of secession greater. These structural arrangements make both countries different from other cases in the developed West, and make “the withdrawal of Quebec from Canada a prominent possible solution to a contemporary constitutional impasse”, whereas it would be a less likely occurrence in a European country.⁴⁸ This organisation structure, in other words, constitutes a distinct subsystem with unique organisation that differs from the rest of the international system, departs somewhat from Kenneth Waltz’s

⁴⁸ This paragraph relies on Hudson Meadwell, “Secession, States and International Society”, *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 3 (1999): 371–87.

anarchy model since the distinction between internal and external politics is blurred, and reflects the influence of the liberal values of the North American states.

In neither China nor Canada is the problem of a separatist territory directly related to security *vis-à-vis* the US, nor that with any other countries. Evidence for this lies in the constancy of the Chinese position on Taiwan. Regardless of whether in Chinese eyes the security threat to China was the Soviet Union, the US, the relatively benign environment of the Bandung period, or the current “peace and development” environment, the “principled” Chinese position on Taiwan has remained the same, even though tactical manoeuvres may vary. It does seem likely, however, that the extremely defensive Chinese view of US intentions in East Asia does impart a sense of paranoia and may sharpen its defensiveness on issues of separatism. In the case of Canada, the security environment is even more benign and essentially unrelated to the issue of Quebec.

Power Differentials

Could the differences in power and size between China and Canada explain their divergent attitudes towards separatist territories? On the basis of exchange rate figures, Canada's total GNP is 62 per cent that of China's. Reinforcing this disparity, Canada's population is only 2.5 per cent that of China's, so there are clear size and power differences between the two countries. It is difficult to fashion an operational definition of the difference between the behaviour of weak states and strong ones. More subjective but also more behaviourally-oriented definitions are probably more telling of the real situation. Robert Keohane distinguishes between great, secondary, middle and small powers, stipulating that a great power is one in which the leaders expect that it can, acting alone, exercise a “large, perhaps decisive”, impact on the international system. A secondary power's leaders believe that it alone can have some impact, but not a decisive one, on the system, while the leaders of a middle power expect that they may be able to affect the system in a small group or through an international institution, but not alone. A small power's leaders believe it can, under no circumstances, have a significant impact on the system.⁴⁹ Using this classification, China would certainly fall under the category of

⁴⁹ Robert O. Keohane, “Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics”, *International Organization* XXIII, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 296. For a definition of small states, see also Peter R. Baehr, “Small States: A Tool for Analysis?”, *World Politics* XXVII, no. 3 (Apr. 1975): 456–66. Population and GNP figures are from *World Bank Atlas 2000* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000).

secondary power, while Canada would be a middle power. Realist and liberal theorists tend to believe that:

Typically, the large country is more forceful, aggressive, dominant. Large states are leaders of alliances, centres of polarising forces in the world, headquarters of empire. Their role induces them to make greater per capita expenditures on military matters in order to fulfil the requirements of the role. Where the small country concerns itself almost exclusively with countries that are on its borders, very large countries seek to defend themselves against other large countries, no matter where they are located; and large countries play some part in every region of the world.⁵⁰

Such comments suggest that China, already a major power in the East Asia region, and probably aspiring to be a global great power, should have a greater concern with separatist territories. Certainly powerful countries attach much importance to matters of prestige, and prestige is an extremely important component of China's foreign policy values. China is extremely sensitive to its image and standing in the international system, and considers Taiwan's separate status an acute humiliation. From this perspective, China's status as a more powerful and important power in the international system could help explain its willingness to consider the use of force to reclaim Taiwan. Other theorists, however, take an opposing tack and emphasise factors that suggest that Canada would have at least as much incentive as China to claim separatist territory. Waltz emphasises that the weak states "lead perilous lives", while greater power allows "wider ranges of action" and "wider margins of safety" which may allow large powers to "be concerned less with scoring relative gains and more with making absolute ones". He tellingly quotes Nguyen Van Thieu, speaking for South Vietnam in 1972, who rejected the agreement for ending the war negotiated by Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho:

You are a giant, Dr. Kissinger. So you can probably afford the luxury of being easy in this agreement. I cannot. A bad agreement means nothing to you.

⁵⁰ Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 127. See also Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 98. Choucri and North's analysis of pre-WWI great power policies showed that "expansionist activities are most likely to be associated with relatively high-capability countries...", quoted in Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory", in *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 4. See also J. David Singer and Melvin Small *et al.*, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982), p. 180.

What is the loss of South Vietnam if you look at the world's map? Just a speck. The loss of South Vietnam may even be good for you. It may be good to contain China, good for your world strategy. But a little Vietnamese doesn't play with the strategic map of the world. For us, it isn't a question of choosing between Moscow and Peking. It is a question of choosing between life and death.⁵¹

Another analyst emphasises that small powers can generally have only "defensive ambitions", which highlights the lack of room they have to manoeuvre.⁵² One might expect, given the premium that states place on survival and their inability to take risks, that weaker states would guard their territory against secessionist tendencies even more jealously than larger powers. The literature suggests contradictory explanations of the effect of power on policies towards separatism. While there seems to be considerable evidence that more powerful states resort more readily to military action, it does not follow from this that they will necessarily be less willing to contemplate legitimising separatism. Quebec represents for Canada a much larger per cent of the total population than Taiwan does for China. Canada, already small and weak, can ill afford to lose anything. However, lacking a theoretical consensus on the impact of power, we shall have to look elsewhere for explanatory factors elucidating the difference in Chinese and Canadian attitudes on separatism.

Conclusion

The level of modernisation, commitment to democracy and particular historical and cultural experiences can explain the divergent Chinese and Canadian attitudes on separatist territories. Whereas Canada has acclimatised to living next to its superpower neighbour, absorbed the values of a virtual state and discarded the traditional expectations of the importance of territory, China is a rising power with an acute sense of grievance from the way it has been treated historically, or at least the way it perceives it has been treated. This strong inferiority complex has stimulated an intense desire to do something about what many Chinese believe is their misfortune, to occupy an international position that conforms to traditional power politics and emphasises the value of territory. Canada's attitude is reinforced by its commitment to democracy

⁵¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 194–5.

⁵² Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 83.

and interdependence, and to the granting of the wishes of the people of Quebec, whatever they may be. The Chinese, on the contrary, lacking both a commitment to democracy and self-determination or the status of a developed state, view Taiwan not as an area containing a population that should have some say in how they are governed, but as a geopolitical object to be manipulated to maximise the glories of a greater China. The gulf between the norms and conventions regarding democracy and self-determination held respectively by the West and China show few signs of disappearing. The figurative combat over Taiwan will continue, since each side in the dispute “has reached its bottom line” and is not interested in serious negotiation.⁵³ If the conflict can be kept rhetorical rather than military, it will be a major accomplishment. Meanwhile, the Canadians will eventually reconcile their differences, either in the short- or long-run, either raucously, or quietly, but almost certainly, peacefully.

The slavish Chinese commitment to the very Western concept of sovereignty fits well with a realist’s definition of the international system, albeit a system more closely aligned with the 19th century than with the 20th.⁵⁴ The Chinese view of the world, however, is one that very slowly, but surely, is being replaced by a view more akin to the world of interdependence and industrialised democracies. While Canada may represent an extreme view on the question of secession, even in the West, it is one that is gaining ground as the culture and objectives of the virtual state become increasingly dominant. Other Western countries still have their minorities and groups demanding independence, but increasingly it is being realised in the developed world, that some kind of concessions must be made for either autonomy or secession in democracies. It is the developed world that is transforming the international system, which in turn puts pressure on other states and institutions to adopt more modern attitudes and structures. Even Indonesia, a relatively poor and fledgling democracy, has taken big strides in that direction since 1998 even in the face of nationalist counter-pressures. It has wisely granted independence to East Timor and offered greater autonomy to regions. In its pre-democratic period, it had long resisted compromise on East Timor.

⁵³ Alan M. Wachman, “The China-Taiwan Relationship: A Cold War of Words”, *Orbis* 46, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 710–1.

⁵⁴ Alastair Iain Johnston argues that the basis for Chinese realist attitudes and behaviour, instead of reflecting the impact of the international system, has historical and cultural roots. See his *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

So far there is little evidence, however, that the Chinese intend to follow suit. Their stance on Taiwan continues to be intractable, in the face of plenty of evidence that the majority of the Taiwanese have little interest in *de facto*, or even *de jure*, joining the Mainland. The main hope for resolution of the Taiwan problem is the fashioning of some kind of face-saving deal that will allow China to claim Taiwan while guaranteeing the people there that this will have no effect on their lives. The prospects of effecting such a feat will grow increasingly remote unless major changes take place in the PRC. Lacking such developments, the Strait of Taiwan will be volatile for years to come.

The author wishes to thank Marcia Ristaino, Xiong Zhiyong and several anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on this article.