

troubled land suggests anything, it is that China's present leaders, both on the mainland and in Taiwan, believe that they have secured Heaven's mandate to effect the rebirth of China as one great united nation — free, prosperous, prestigious and serving the cause of world peace and human progress. Regrettably, the septuagenarian rulers of that divided country cannot agree on the means, and a rapprochement is nowhere in sight.

In the city of Taipei, periodic peace gestures from Peking are belittled as either a sham to hoodwink the free world or a trick to drive wedges between the people and the government and pave the way for military invasion. In the autumn of 1981 Peking outlined a nine-point program calling for peaceful unification and talks between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang. Peking offered Taiwan trade, travel and postal links with the mainland, financial aid, and a "high degree" of autonomy after reunification. Concerning autonomy, it proposed that Taiwan be established as a "special administrative district" after China is reunified and said that the island province would be allowed to maintain its political and social systems and also keep separate armed forces. As usual, Peking's peace statement was flatly rejected by Taipei as a Communist strategy to seize Taiwan without the use of force. But this time the Kuomintang leaders went to great pains and considerable length to explain the reasons for their rejection of Peking's latest peace plan.

Here, as in all important affairs, they turned to history and cited:

1. The Chinese Communist Party's record of treachery in the 1920s, the 1930s and again in the 1940s.
2. The 1949 Communist Chinese take-over of Tibet promising a regimen of broad autonomy, which was ruthlessly swept aside the very next year.
3. Communist aggressions in the Korean and Vietnamese wars, the 1962 attack on India, and ongoing infiltration and subversion in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Predictably, the Nationalists concluded that the Chinese Communists could not be trusted. They similarly dismissed Peking's offer of renewed and expanded trade as a "Communist trap" to undermine the Taiwanese economy (through possible embargoes for political reasons), and weaken their resistance to the oppressive regime on the mainland (by creating vested interests among Taiwanese exporters and traders). Nationalist authorities also condemned the unification statement because the terms held out to the people of Taiwan (e.g. a mixed economy, government by popular election) were denied to the people of the mainland. In the end, they declared that the reunification of China must be conducted under the constitution of the Republic of China, under the flag of the Republic of China, and must be based on the implementation of Dr. Sun's Three Principles of the People. And they stressed that the Taipei government would "Never negotiate with the Chinese Communists."

### Taiwan's options

In a recent interview with National Geographic Magazine, President Chiang said: "There is no change in our

policy. We have confidence and resolve that we will restore freedom to the mainland. This is not a question of power against power. It is a matter of two systems, two sets of attitudes and two completely different ways of life." In the meantime, the Nationalist regime tries to keep the Taiwanese people sealed off from the mainland not only physically but also mentally. Listening to mainland radio and the possession of communist literature are severely punishable under Taiwan's stringent sedition laws. Foreign publications arriving in Taiwan sometimes have articles about mainland China ripped out. Visits to the mainland by Taiwanese, even with relatives, is strictly forbidden, carrying a three-year jail term. Similarly, Taipei bans any trade



*Counting Chinas. The author at work and play*

with Peking although two-way indirect trade (using third-party traders) via Hong Kong and elsewhere is known to be considerable. Smuggling on the Formosa Strait has also become a lucrative sideline for some Taiwanese fishermen. Of course, when weighed against Taiwan's annual trade of forty-four billion dollars, the commerce with mainland China is not significant. It is only fair to say that a good many outsiders believe that the Taipei government's policy of self-isolation is overly fearful, unduly cautious and possibly self-defeating.

Apart from reunification, which seems to be impossible right now, the Nationalist government could declare independence, making Taiwan a nation, not a province of China. Given Taiwan's current performance and prospects, this is clearly a viable option. But the idea is abhorrent to the Kuomintang government. They are pledged to recover the mainland — by proving that their path is better than communism. This is the mission of the Republic of China. Independence would involve a demeaning loss of face for