

Ear to Asia podcast

Title: The Chinese Civil War's lingering shadow over modern China

Description: China-Taiwan relations remain tense as Beijing maintains its stance on potential military action to "retake" the island—a position rooted in the unresolved Chinese Civil War (1927-1949). This ideological conflict pitted the Nationalist Party (KMT), which advocated national self-strengthening, against the Communist Party (CCP), which promised socialist revolution and class equality. The war inflicted massive civilian casualties and transformed Chinese society, particularly affecting family structures and women's roles. Although China has since experienced dramatic economic and military growth, the war's legacy endures, with the CCP maintaining strict control over its historical narrative. Why does the legacy of the Chinese Civil War still drive geopolitical tension between the People's Republic and Taiwan, decades after its conclusion? How has the psychological trauma of the war shaped modern Chinese society? And in what ways does this legacy influence China's approach to its role as a global superpower today? Dr Lewis Mayo from Asia institute unravels the tapestry of the Chinese Civil War with host Sami Shah. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

Voiceover: The Ear to Asia podcast is made available on the Jakarta Post platform, under agreement between the Jakarta Post and the University of Melbourne.

Sami Shah: Hello, I'm Sami Shah, this is Ear to Asia.

Lewis Mayo: The current platform of the Chinese Communist Party is in many ways indistinguishable from the one being advanced by Chiang Kai Shek. So one might suggest that even though the communists won the civil war, it was in a sense the ideology of the nationalists that was ultimately victorious.

Sami Shah: In this episode, the Chinese Civil War's lingering shadow over modern China. Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne. The People's Republic of China has long maintained the option of using military force to retake Taiwan, a stance that is often interpreted as a sign that the Chinese Civil War, which brought the Chinese Communist Party or CCP, to power on the mainland, is not really over. The Chinese Civil War, fought between 1927 and 1949, was an ideological struggle between two rival factions, the Nationalist Party or KMT and the CCP. The KMT championed national self-strengthening and the restoration of China's dignity, while the CCP promised a socialist revolution aimed at dismantling class distinctions and eradicating the remnants of feudalism. In addition to the heavy toll on combatants, the war inflicted

widespread suffering on the civilian Population, leaving deep scars on Chinese society as families were torn apart. It also led to significant changes for women, many of whom assumed new roles and responsibilities as traditional family structures collapsed in the chaos. Despite China's remarkable economic and military rise, the legacy of the Chinese Civil War continues to cast a long shadow over the nation. This persists even with the CCP's tight control over the historical narrative, ensuring its version of events remains the prevailing one. So why does the legacy of the Chinese Civil War still drive geopolitical tension between the People's Republic and Taiwan decades after its conclusion? How has the psychological trauma of the war shaped modern Chinese society and family dynamics? And in what ways does this legacy influence China's approach to its role as a global superpower today. Joining me to unravel the blood soaked tapestry of China's civil war is Doctor Lewis Mayo, an Asia historian from Asia Institute. Welcome back to Ear to Asia Lewis.

Lewis Mayo: Thanks, Amy.

Sami Shah: So, Lewis, let's start with a very basic contextual question. Why does China's civil war matter to our understanding of China today?

Lewis Mayo: So the Chinese civil war matters because of its place in the larger story of the Chinese Revolution. And I would argue that the Chinese revolution is the biggest revolutionary transformation of any society in modern human history. It's the most long lasting, and it's the one whose effects are the most thoroughgoing, because they extend to every area of the life of Chinese people, from culture to the economy to political institutions to the structures of daily life. And this revolution, I think, begins sometime in the 19th century, if not earlier. And one of its first consequences is the overthrow of the system of dynastic empire, the system whose focus was a state with a royal family, an imperial family ruling over a large and diverse imperial territory. And that system was overthrown and replaced by a modern nation state republics and the contest over the shape of those modern nation state republics is the source of the civil war, and that in the 1920s this coalesced into conflict between, in a sense, two visions from two different parties about what modern China should look like. One of those visions was the one associated with the older party, the Chinese Nationalist Party. And that emphasized, I suppose, a transformation of Chinese society within the context of a single nation state. The other vision was a socialist one associated with the Chinese Communist Party, which was formed in 1921, and that affiliated the revolution in China with a series of revolutionary struggles going on around the world, in which working people were held to be battling against the forces of economic inequality, economic inequalities that might be found in traditional agriculture based economic systems, or economic and social inequalities based on the emerging industrial economy. And so the

battle between those two visions of what the Chinese national revolution should be about, how it should be affiliated to international struggles, is what really drives the Civil War.

Sami Shah: That does, then provide us an opportunity to get from you a beginner's guide to the Chinese Civil War, if you will, a potted history.

Lewis Mayo: Well, I mean, the fact that the start date is not clear and the end date is not clear is itself quite instructive. That I suppose that the start date is often seen at the point in the 1920s, when a coalition that had existed between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party definitively broke down when the Chinese Nationalist forces under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek, as he's known in Mandarin Chinese, took violent action against the communists, who they argued were threatening to overthrow the nationalist regime and essentially initiate a revolution modelled on the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. That conflict drives the communists away from the cities and into the countryside. They are able to survive in the countryside, but many historians argue that the period between 1927 and 1937 is really one in which the communists don't make a lot of headway in terms of expanding their revolution. In 1937, the decisive event is that Japan invades the Republic of China. It does so for a complex of reasons, one of which, I guess is, is a sense that the long term destiny of Japan is to lead an East Asian structure, that Japan's military will be the dominant force within, and that this new Japanese led order in East Asia will be an alternative to that being promoted by other competing powers in this period, namely the Soviet Union and the United States of America.

Lewis Mayo: Those are the other two rivals for power in this structure. And then when the Japanese invaded in 1937, their military action and their policies are so destructive of civilian life and social institutions that the communists are effectively able to capitalize upon that breakdown in the authority structures of the KMT, and then to go on to basically win a civil war that breaks out again after World War Two finishes in 1945. Questions of why any side wins a war are matters of endless debate; they're always unresolvable. But a lot of historians would argue that the communists were successful because they had very, very strong organizational discipline, and they were effectively able to take over military resources and to mobilize particularly the peasants in the countryside and to establish a new regime which the Chinese nationalists had been unable, essentially, to do effectively. And so that's what causes the Communist victory in 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China as the government that rules from Beijing and the Chinese nationalists who are defeated, retreat to the island of Taiwan. And just to add, Taiwan had been a colony of Japan all through the period that we've discussed up to the point of World War II's conclusion, and basically from 1895 to 1945. And in that sense, is outside the story of the Chinese Civil War up to that point.

Sami Shah: How did the revolution against the Qing dynasty in 1911, which is also known as the Xinhai Revolution, affect the subsequent civil war?

Lewis Mayo: So the Civil War. We can interpret at least as partly the consequence of divisions within the revolutionary movement. The revolutionary movement had emerged as an attempt to replace the Chinese dynastic system, which was a dynastic system under the control of the Qing royal household, which was associated with the Manchu ethnic group. This is a group whose original language is unrelated to the Han Chinese languages that took power through a conquest of the territories of the Ming dynasty, which had been the last, I suppose, ethnically Han Chinese. We define that as a dynasty, where the ruling family was of Han ethnicity and spoke Han Chinese languages. And that state that Manchu state not only taken over the territory of the the Ming dynasty, it subsequently conquered Tibet, Mongolia, the territories that we now call Xinjiang in Chinese Turkestan. So that state, right, if you think about it, has strong parallels in its structure with the Ottoman Empire, which is another multiethnic, multicultural land based structure, and the Moghul Empire in India. And I think we could also argue the Spanish empire that emerged after the conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires in Latin America. So these are the kinds of large states that dominate the world between the 16th century, really, and the early 20th century. Those states break up through a series of revolutions, of which the revolution against the Qing dynasty is one. What kind of state will replace the Qing Empire is something that no one agrees about.

Sami Shah: You also mentioned the Japanese invasion and the subsequent war of resistance. What effect did this have on the outcome of the Civil War?

Lewis Mayo: It's here worth talking about some of the ways in which historians from outside China have discussed this question. The American political scientist Chalmers Johnson in 1962 formed an argument that it was the communists successful mobilization of rural people, peasants, in particular, during the anti-Japanese War, that gave the communists a decisive advantage that they hadn't had prior to the Japanese invasion. It's also been argued that the Civil War essentially smashed the traditional rural economic structures. The old rural ruling class was basically driven out. It escaped as refugees. So the old social institutions in most of rural China were overthrown during the Japanese invasion and after it. Essentially, you had a kind of de facto social leveling, as the old elite classes lost a lot of their wealth. So the power that an elite or a dominant class group has to maintain control was substantially weakened by the fact that it no longer had the kind of economic authority that it had prior to the Japanese invasion. The Japanese invasion impoverishes and disrupts social life on an unbelievable scale. It's exceptionally violent. The struggles are very, very difficult for people used to thinking about World War Two in the context of Western Europe, to imagine or

understand. It's much, much more similar to the kind of destruction that one sees when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. So tens of millions of deaths, many of them civilians.

Sami Shah: Can we drill down a little now onto the two sides of this civil war? The main arguments of the KMT and the CCP. You've given us a bit of an overview, but I'd like to know more about what each side brought in terms of their philosophies, their justifications.

Lewis Mayo: These days, it's kind of hard to see the ideological energies that drove the oppositions in the Civil War. This is because the contemporary Chinese Communist Party, essentially over the last sort of three to even four decades, remolded itself as a party that claims authority on the basis of its nationalism and that it is a protector of the Chinese nation, and that it is engaged in the restoration of China's civilizational and cultural dignity. That's a platform that, ironically, is pretty much the one that the defeated Chinese nationalists proclaimed. They said, "We're going to modernize China, and we're going to create a space in which the beauties", I guess you could say it, "of traditional Chinese culture will be shown in a properly modern society."

The communists at the time argued that this nationalism, like other nationalisms, was a kind of disguise for the power, essentially of a local business and landowning class, a business and landowning class which the communists accused of being allied to foreign imperialists. So the Chinese Communists said we're more nationalistic than the nationalists because we are advocating radical social revolution and an overthrow, essentially, of the institutions that permit foreign domination of Chinese society and Chinese people. At the same time, as Marxists, they inherit the view that nationalism is basically an instrument through which workers in particular countries are deceived into focusing their emotional and political attentions on rivalry with other countries, rather than with fighting the inequalities within their own system.

Lewis Mayo: So that's the point of ideological difference between the two of them. These days, I think that's much more unclear, because the Chinese Communist Party doesn't really talk about its role as a leader of working class revolution. It talks about its role essentially in producing a harmonious society, in which the tensions that you find in a society like the United States purportedly don't exist, and the society in which Chinese culture is accorded true respect. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party continues to define itself as an anti-feudal structure. Now, feudalism is a very ambiguous concept in China, but what it generally refers to is all forms of oppressive traditional social relationships. So conservative attitudes within the family, particularly in relationship to the position of women. I guess local power at the expense of central power. And agriculturally based power structure, rather than an industrially based power structure. Those are the things that the Chinese Communist

Party Municipality continues to invoke when it describes its own history as the party that, in a sense, brought feudalism to an end in China.

Sami Shah: Let's focus now on the two charismatic leaders of these two different sides of the conflict. On one side with the KMT, you have Chiang Kai Shek. On the other, with the CCP, you have Mao Zedong. What were the similarities and differences then between Chiang Kai Shek and Mao Zedong? They're both such polarizing figures.

Lewis Mayo: So the Canadian historian Diana Lary has described them both as megalomaniac. That, in other words, they both came to be caught up in a cult of their own personalities, and to believe that they alone had the recipe for the salvation of the Chinese nation and the Chinese revolution. They're interesting in terms of their personal histories. Chiang Kai Shek was the brother in law by marriage of Sun Yat sen, the founder of the Chinese Revolution. Sun Yat sen's second wife, Soong Ching ling, who later became a supporter of the communists, was the sister of Soong Mei ling, the wife of Chiang Kai Shek, so there was a complex family dynamic in terms of the relationship of Chiang to Sun. He was a military guy. Mao Zedong was a person who, I never tire of repeating this, was trained as a primary school teacher. He was a person deeply concerned with the inadequacies of the traditional education system. He was a person who had hostile relations to his own family. Whereas Chiang Kai Shek is celebrated for his filial piety towards his mother in particular. I think you can see them, I guess on the one hand, as they're both military leaders, if you look at pictures of them in their youth, particularly as they're fighting the Civil War.

Lewis Mayo: Their clothing is a really interesting indication of the difference between them. Chiang Kai Shek is always immaculately attired. He has some sharp military uniform. He looks like a man of authority. He looks a lot like many right wing dictators of that period. You find in Latin America and other places like that, like Mussolini. Mao, in the images that were very central to the period when the anti-Japanese war was going on, is scruffy, frequently depicted in bad clothes with long hair, a person who certainly projected to followers this great informality. And those people who I guess are in rebellion against what might be called conservative familial values, found Mao, at least at this initial stage, to be a kind of symbol of a kind of radical unconventionality. That proves to be, at best, a partial reading of what he was, and that if you look at a lot of images of Mao, particularly after the revolution, he's very much cleaned up. He looks much more like a leader of a strong militarized republic, a bit like Stalin. A lot of the iconography of Mao is borrowed essentially from depictions of Stalin in the Stalin cult.

Sami Shah: How did their respective personalities then influence the strategies used by each side during the Civil War?

Lewis Mayo: Well, that's an interesting question. One can argue that Mao, as a person of great charisma and, indeed, of personal unpredictability, was willing to be more fluid in the way that he approached military questions to change his mind, to change his tactics and to change his strategy, and also to delegate responsibility. Chang is seen by many people as much more of a kind of micromanager, and therefore is having eventually run into problems militarily because he couldn't either, I guess, build a solid core of generals who were directly loyal to him and trusted him, or to, in a sense, pull back and let those generals basically apply their own strategies to military affairs.

Sami Shah: Earlier you mentioned how the Civil War had a profound impact on the family structures, the family makeups of China, at the time and after. Does that mean that there was a generational divide between who aligned with whom in terms of politics, or what impact did this have? Can you explain that a little bit more?

Lewis Mayo: Yeah. So the Civil War is in many ways an extension of an earlier family revolution. There's a good case for saying that, in fact, the real focus of the revolutionary intellectuals in the early period in which the Chinese communist movement emerges is not so much the problem of class, but the problem of patriarchal authority in the family. And these are a generation of people who experienced, you know, a radically different kind of education from what had been found in China prior to the late 19th century in terms of, you know, gender segregation, schooling. And so what happens when you start to have co-educational schooling, of course, is that boy and girl students or male and female students fall in love with each other, and that will often challenge any system of arranged marriage. So a kind of romanticism, which is romanticism about free choice in marriage, is one of the features, essentially, of this period. That, of course, is largely an issue for elite groups, but for people in more impoverished parts of the social structure, particularly for farmers, I guess one of the traditional kind of areas of concern is how to reproduce family control over property. And that was done through arranged marriage. And that's particularly, of course, of concern to land owners that they have a stable transmission of a property from generation to generation. As the rural economy and rural social system kind of fractures during the Civil War, that authority, that Patriarchal household heads have over wives and daughters starts to fray, and the communists are particularly assertive in mobilizing women in the revolutionary cause, that is one of their power bases. For women who are discontented with a conservative familial order, who are from intellectual or wealthy families. The communists have a deep attractiveness, and I guess that's the -- it's a common pattern for people with feminist concerns to gravitate towards leftist politics and towards Marxism. But at the rural level, at the level of the villagers, it's not so much that discontent with the constraints that traditional family structures impose on, say, the creative life of women or on

their self-expression, so much so as a set of questions about how women are subordinated essentially to the institutions of the patriarchal rural family, and the fracturing of the economy and the social institutions, the disruptions caused by people having to leave their homes, those all produce quite important readjustments in relationships between men and women that the communists are very successful at capitalizing upon.

Sami Shah: You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, and just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute's online publication on Asia and its societies, politics and cultures. It's called the Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others. Plus, you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Air Asia at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which again you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. I'm Sami Shah and I'm joined by Asia historian Doctor Lewis Mayo. We're talking about the ramifications of China's civil war in the 20th century. Lewis, we've talked now about the makeup of the Civil War, as well as the things that led to it and the impact it had on families and society. But one of the main things that comes up when we discuss the civil war in China is the human toll. How many people were killed, and just how brutal was it?

Lewis Mayo: Well, death tolls in wars are always controversial, but the scale of death in the Chinese Civil War and in the Japanese invasion, which it is really a part of, is probably the most substantial of any civil war struggle in 20th century history. So the scale of death is vast. We're talking ten, 20, 30 million at least, and the scale of, uh, of a population which is smaller than the Chinese population is now. So, you know, very, very large numbers of people affected by this violence.

Sami Shah: And the impact on society, the psychological trauma, the societal disruption. Is there a way to measure such a thing.

Lewis Mayo: The importance of the civil war, underplayed in many ways in contemporary China, in part because it was so horrible that in many ways people wanted to move on from it. And so rather than it being a topic which is publicly discussed and publicly engaged with, it's kind of in the closet. I personally feel from just an anecdotal observation about these things, that having been taught by individuals who had experienced it, um, and left China as refugees, the impact that that had on them personally was something that only revealed itself after long term exposure to those people's lives and their character. These were people who had lived through terrible events, like many people who lived through terrible events, particularly in the middle of the 20th century, they just didn't want to talk about it. So it's very similar to the trauma found amongst a lot of World War Two veterans in Japan and the

United States, and in other places that they essentially kept to themselves, in many cases only now that some of those questions are starting to be publicly discussed. For those listeners who are interested, I strongly recommend Diana Lary's book on the Chinese Civil War. That's largely because it does strongly address those issues of trauma and the concealment of that trauma in the subsequent generations.

Sami Shah: Can you say there were winners and losers in this war? And if you do say that, who were they?

Lewis Mayo: That's interesting, because one of the arguments that one can make is that the official picture is that the communists win the civil war. They defeat the nationalists, and it's their ideology that becomes the dominant one in China after 1949 and that the nationalists are essentially driven out. But as I've said earlier, the current platform of the Chinese Communist Party is in many ways indistinguishable from the one being advanced by Chiang Kai Shek. So one might suggest that even though the communists won the civil war, it was in a sense the ideology of the nationalists that was ultimately victorious. So the idea of a strong, one might say, conservative conception of China's position in the world, one that doesn't emphasize internal class struggles and doesn't emphasize the rights, particularly of the working class, which is what Chiang Kai Shek had advanced, is the one that the government in Beijing now puts forward, and those that support it, a fairly substantial part of the Chinese population, at least at the time of speaking, endorse and find credible so many of the tensions that one finds between competing visions of what the Chinese Revolution should be, if you look through the historical record, those tensions and those problems are largely hidden in public discussion in China in the present, when there's an enormous emphasis on the solidarity and unity of the Chinese nation as the defining feature of what Chinese people are.

Sami Shah: Unlike the American Civil War, which has been reasonably well documented, much less has been said and written by the survivors of the Chinese Civil War. Why is that?

Lewis Mayo: That's actually an issue that's very dear to my heart. If you look at what had happened in the discussion of the American Civil War in the period roughly 60 to 70 years after it had broken out, what you see in the United States is remarkably similar to what we see in China now, and the two rival sides and the tensions that I suppose had existed between them were, I guess, able to conceal their differences through a common commitment, for example, to the idea of an American nation committed to freedom. But so the tension, I guess, between that struggle over Civil War memory in the 1920s or 1930s is one very much between what a South, which had successfully instituted structures of racial segregation, and a North, which accepted those institutions, with only a small number of

white northerners being active in pursuing the radical cause of the reconstruction of the South after the 1860s surrender. Those clashes have been downplayed, for example, in favor of an idea that all Americans were committed to liberty and freedom, and having, for example, the Ku Klux Klan expanding into territories that had historically been associated with the Union cause. So, you know, you get Klansmen committing atrocities in Oklahoma. Other areas of the West, which basically had been allied to the Union cause.

Lewis Mayo: So when we look at the American Civil War and the public discussion about it that we see now and compare it with the Chinese Civil War situation, we have to basically pay attention to the fact that the Chinese Civil War happened much, much more recently. And so I would argue that in an equivalent period in American history, the actual ferocity of the struggles, ideological and personal, in the Civil War had been largely downplayed in the dominant record. A very good example of that is the film *Gone with the Wind*. So *Gone with the Wind* is a 1939 film which was enormously popular with white Americans, northern and southern, which tells the Civil War as a romantic story from the southern viewpoint. Now, we haven't quite got to that point in China where the Kuomintang is since fully recuperated, but one could argue that the way in which the Chinese mainland conceives of the civil war essentially now is that it's a war over two competing visions of what a unified China should be, rather than a massive and violent confrontation between rival conceptions of what the social system in China should be like.

Sami Shah: Is one of the reasons, then, the widely differing narratives of the war between Taiwan and the CCP. And does the victorious CCP then shape and influence the narrative on mainland China and in Taiwan is so different?

Lewis Mayo: Yeah. Well, I mean, what's very important about the Taiwan situation is that the dominant viewpoint in Taiwan now, that's associated with the government that's in power there, argues that the Chinese Civil War is a Chinese event that occurs on the Chinese mainland that Taiwan is really not part of. And this is an historical viewpoint associated with the cause of Taiwan independence that treats Taiwan's history as being separate from that of mainland China, and that includes the story of the civil war. Now, the Chinese nationalists, when they retreated to Taiwan in 1949, argued that what they were doing was preparing a base for the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland. And that that was the ideology that was imposed through the schooling system. So the schooling was in Mandarin, which was the Chinese language of national unity for both nationalists and for communists, rather than the local forms of Chinese that were, you know, what was spoken at home by the people on Taiwan, and that what you see in the process of what we call Taiwan democratization is an internal rejection by dissenting forces within Taiwan of that Chinese nationalist ideology. So it's not so much that modern Taiwan narratives of the Chinese Civil War are a kind of

retained version of the old Chinese nationalist idea about what the communists were, but in fact, a critique of the idea that Taiwan and the Chinese mainland belong together.

Lewis Mayo: So that's where the shift has occurred. So that, of course, means that there's freedom to discuss the events of the Chinese Civil War, in part because people on Taiwan say, well, it's not our problem. But of course, you know, Taiwan is not a society in which the state censors public discussion of historical issues, whereas in the Chinese mainland, the strong narrative is, I guess, that any discussion of public issues that raises questions about the unity of the nation is extremely dangerous. So that if you started to talk about the Civil War and the rivalries that it entailed, you might start a new one. This idea of the Civil War being a kind of hidden but looming threat that I would argue, is the thing that the Chinese Communist Party does with the Civil War narrative. It says, "If we slacken our grip on public discussion, what will happen is internal disorder and a repeat of Civil War structures." So even though I've argued earlier that the Civil War is a repressed memory in China, it is invoked by the CCP as, "What lies in store for you. If there's any kind of public discussion of political differences between conceptions of what China should be, and that includes public discussions of the more painful parts of China's modern history."

Sami Shah: How has the Chinese diaspora then been affected?

Lewis Mayo: That's an extremely interesting question, because the Chinese diaspora is a term that's used for many, many different kinds of individuals and cultures. I mean, the term might be applied to someone living in Indonesia who is of Chinese descent, whose family has been there for 8 or 9 generations, doesn't speak anything but Indonesian or another local language. That person can be classified as part of a Chinese diaspora. On the same terms as someone who has emigrated to a city like Melbourne from northern China in the last five years. The debates, I guess, in the diasporic world, are very much specific to the particular context that you're talking about. In Malaysia, for example, what you found during the 1950s was a Chinese communist guerrilla movement opposed to the Malaysian state, which argued that Malaysia needed to follow China down the revolutionary path of the communists. That would contrast quite radically with the situation in East Timor, where the education system for the Chinese population that was living there was dominated by the ideologies of the Chinese nationalists. So, in other words, if you thought about East Timor and the Chinese communists in Malaysia as really representing rival conceptions of what China's future should be, then you know, it's basically split upon civil war lines. Of course, much of the energy in modern Chinese nationalism came from what we call Chinese diasporic populations. Sun Yat sen himself acquired much of his sense of what the future of China should be. He's considered the father of the Chinese nationalist revolution, when he was living in Hawaii as a young person. And so the space that existed outside of control by

the agents of the Qing government in the 19th century permitted radical nationalists and revolutionary conceptions of Chinese identity to come into being. And so you get, I suppose, shadow civil wars played out across the Pacific and Southeast Asia in Chinese communities. But you also get situations where people who are of diasporic Chinese heritage say, "That's nothing to do with me. I'm Thai, I'm Thai of Chinese background. And so those struggles are for other people."

Sami Shah: Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966, which ended when he died in 1976. Was this Cultural Revolution a repeat of the Civil War?

Lewis Mayo: I would argue that in many ways it was a successor to the Civil War. It was a revolution, a struggle that broke out in the education system at first. And the argument, I suppose, that one can make about the education system is that it was one of the origin points of the Civil War and of the Revolution, because educational discontent, as I mentioned, Mao Zedong was, you know, a primary school teacher was one of the forces that drove many people down the radical and socialist path. So you could say there was unfinished business about education and how much revolution there should be in education. A second part was that in the large cities such as Beijing, where the Cultural Revolution sort of exploded. You had schools in which there were students who had family backgrounds that were associated with the losing side of the Civil War, and they are in classes with the children of communist revolutionary cadres. And the argument often became one between those who said, "We are carrying the revolution on, because the revolution is about who is the most committed to radical, class based politics, regardless of what our family background is", versus people who said family background is decisive.

Lewis Mayo: Our families made the revolution. Your families were on the other side. You say you're in favor of radical class politics. I think you probably secretly conspiring with the forces of the Chinese nationalists on Taiwan or Other bourgeois liberals such as the Americans. So civil War structures were shadows in that sense. A second point is that if you're thinking about people who were teenagers or in early adulthood during the Cultural Revolution, they were people who were children when the Civil War was going on. One of the problems that they faced was that their parents had been involved in this massive struggle full of drama and heroism, and they were just studying. So there's this sense of how do we capture the drama that our parents lives were shaped by in our lives? And when you think about people having watched, you know, propaganda film after propaganda film about the revolutionary struggle. One of the things that it did was to dramatize violence as the principal thing in any real revolution. This is another thing that communists said you can't change the social order without violence. The nationalists said violence is corrosive to national development.

Sami Shah: I just want to go back to the US relationship with China. How has the civil war in the US shaped its worldview and its response to both the Chinese Revolution in 1911 and the Chinese Civil War in 1945 onwards?

Lewis Mayo: Well, I think this is a very important and much understudied question. The Civil War split the United States in the East, creating incredible levels of distrust after the defeat of the South. One of the things for dealing with the problems of the South was to essentially let Southerners expand across the United States, filling up the territories. You know what we now think of as the Midwest and the West that reaches an end point in the 1890s, and the US has nowhere to go except further east. And this kind of coincides with the revolutionary outbreak in the 1890s in China, the beginnings of it. And so he sent himself as a person who receives an essentially American education in Hawaii. And Hawaii is annexed by a coup by American forces, essentially in the 1890s, and provides the core of their infrastructure for expansion across the Pacific. So American empire, which is in some ways a solution to the problems of the Civil War, runs up against the Chinese Republic. That said, the Americans also felt that, well, some of them felt that the Chinese republican movement was their child. They had produced a Republican structure similar to their own. Now, you remember that when the Chinese Republic was established in 1911, almost everywhere else in the region was in some kind of colonial empire. And with the exception of France, those colonial empires were monarchies. So the Americans argued that essentially the Chinese revolution is a revolution that is succeeding to the mantle that we, I suppose, took upon ourselves when we started our own revolution. Others argued that the Chinese revolution was far more radical than the American Revolution, and left to say in the 1960s, "Well, you know, the American Revolution was a slave holder. Revolution. The Chinese Revolution is one in which the power of slave holders and landowners is being overthrown, and that we should learn from it."

Sami Shah: Xi Jinping is the son of someone who fought in the Civil War and is the first paramount leader of the CCP and China, who was born in the post-Civil War era. How has the Civil War affected him personally and in how he leads the CCP in China?

Lewis Mayo: Analysts of Xi Jinping's career tend to focus on the idea that he is someone who has inherited his position as a result of wide trust on the part of the old members of the Chinese Communist Party in someone whose family is one of theirs. So if you thought of the Chinese Communist Party as having changed from being an organization put together by people committed to a common cause, to being something that's a bit more like a family business. You could argue that Xi Jinping is someone who is, you know, like an heir to a large family based corporation. And so, like other people from his generation, he was

shaped by the conflicts in the elite schools in Beijing between different factions of students fighting over what they perceived to be the correct direction of the Chinese revolution. Xi Jinping spent some of his youth in the impoverished areas that the Chinese Communists occupied during the 1930s and during World War two. And so I guess he has a very strong sense of his own life has been moulded by the landscape's cultural and physical. Of the Chinese Civil War and the Chinese Revolution. His relationship to Chinese radicalism is complex. He is a stability oriented person who is active in the repression of any dissent from the working classes, in particular within China. But at the same time, he believes he is a Marxist. He asserts that his philosophy is guided by Marxism and by what's called the positive aspects of Chinese cultural tradition. And so he thinks and states that he belongs within that matrix, ideologically, of those two forces, and you could say that he represents a kind of civil war will compromise in some ways between the nationalist affiliated ideologies based around Chinese tradition and the official belief that Chinese communist policy is guided by Marxism. So it's a kind of unholy alliance when one looks at the intellectual traditions of the Chinese Communist Party. But a kind of coherent approach, if you see it from the point of view of trying to reconcile the warring forces within the Civil War.

Sami Shah: Why is Taiwan so important to the CCP? Will retaking it provide some closure?

Lewis Mayo: I look at the Taiwan issue as one of a number of cases that you find around the world, where you have nationalism that is focused on lost territories. And that you organize your domestic self-representation around the idea that a bit of your country has been cut off and you are fighting to restore the wholeness of what you might call the body of the nation by eventually sewing the severed limb back onto the body from which it was cut off. So you know, examples -- one that I'm particularly fond of is that in a war between Chile and Peru and Bolivia in the 19th century, territories that are now in northern Chile that belong to Bolivia were taken over. And Bolivian nationalism to this day discusses this lost world. Hungarian nationalism has, in one of its more radical kind of formulations, an idea that there are parts of Hungary that were lost as a result of the peace settlement in World War one. This is a case that one finds in context after context. Cambodian nationalists argue that southern Vietnam was taken from them by the Vietnamese, so conjuring up the idea that Taiwan is a territory that belongs to the Chinese nation and must be restored to it, is part of a broader pattern. There are some interesting ironies about that, because, of course, Mongolia was also part of the territory of the Qing dynasty. But the Mongolians are a separate polity, largely as a result of having emerged as the first socialist state other than the Soviet Union in 1921, and much of the territory of the Russian Far East and Siberia is, or some of it is also part of the old territories of the Qing dynasty, but that stuff never gets discussed. So part of it is that, you know, kind of cold eyed view of this problem would be to say that if you keep

focusing on the idea that Taiwan is cut off from us, you get people to divert their attention from contradictions within the country.

Sami Shah: One final question, then, and it's slightly more philosophical, I suppose, than all the other parts of our discussion, is what will it take to heal the wounds of the Chinese Civil War?

Lewis Mayo: Well, I mean, I think it's a little bit like the question of what will it take to heal the wounds of the US Civil War. We've seen in American politics since the rise of the MAGA movement, you know, intense disagreement over the meaning of the American Civil War with people saying, "Well, if you've got statues of Robert E Lee in Richmond, Virginia, you're basically honoring a cause which was dedicated to the enslavement of African American people."

And other people, saying, "We as Virginians see Lee as part of our past, and we acknowledge that our past is there when we have that statue."

In many ways, I think the American Civil War struggles really only came to the fore as a public problem in my lifetime. I'm 60, and you know, it's worth remembering that when I was born, it was still illegal for black and white people to marry each other in a number of states in the US. An interesting fact about Barack Obama is that Obama is President of the United States because Hawaii was officially incorporated into the United States just prior to his birth, segregationists in the South said, we can't have Hawaii integrated into the United States because that will open the way for a mixed race person to become president. And that's exactly what happened. The struggles of the American Civil War were raging right up until the time of Obama's life, and I think are still raging now. In the case of the Chinese Civil War, I think the wounds are very deep and very recent. I don't see the resolution of the contradictions in the Chinese Civil War as being able to be resolved at any point in the near future, so I suspect that primarily they will be passed over in silence.

Sami Shah: Lewis, thank you very much.

Lewis Mayo: Thanks very much. That was a pleasure.

Sami Shah: Our guest has been Doctor Lewis Mayo from Asia Institute. Here to Asia is brought to you by. Asia Institute of the University of Melbourne, Australia. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of Ear to Asia by following us on the Apple Podcasts app, Spotify, YouTube, or wherever you get your podcasts. If you like the show, please rate and review it. Every positive review helps new listeners find the show, and please help us by spreading the word on your socials. This episode was recorded on the 22nd of October

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