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# Negotiations for Return of Hijacked Jet Just a New Twist to an Old Chinese Game

**FOREIGN INSIGHT**

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HONG KONG—It would be fun—but misleading—to report that what brought Taiwan and China together for their first direct talks in 37 years was the durian, that prickly, smelly fruit renowned in Asia for promoting amorous encounters.

Crates of ripening durians were among the 91 tons of cargo aboard a China Airlines cargo jet en route from Bangkok to Hong Kong and Taipei on May 3, when it was hijacked by its pilot to the mainland city of Canton. That set the stage for a strange breakthrough in which Taiwan altered a policy that has stood firm since the 1949 Communist conquest of the mainland: no contact, no negotiation and no compromise with the Communists.

Durian diplomacy it isn't. But other explanations for what Western diplomats have called an "astonishing" turn of events are just as fanciful. Logic has never played much of a role in the bitter feud between the mainland Communists and the Taiwan Nationalists.

## Family Feud

This is a family feud in which air piracy, condemned as a terrorist act elsewhere in the world, has evolved into an elaborate game among Chinese brethren, involving gold jackpots for mainland pilots who defect with aircraft to Taiwan and hero status for Taiwanese pilots who defect with planes to the "motherland."

In this case, one of two Boeing Co. 747-200F cargo jets belonging to China Airlines, the Taipei carrier owned mostly by the government, was diverted to the mainland by pilot Wang Hsi-chuen, 56 years old. China says he wanted to be reunited with his 82-year-old father in Sichuan province. On board were copilot Tung Kung-shin and technician Chiu Ming-chiu, who want to go back to Taiwan.

After four days of negotiations in Hong Kong, the two sides agreed yesterday on the return of the airplane and the two crew members by Saturday.

In most previous hijackings involving the two countries, only individual pilots flying military planes have been involved. Getting the two non-defectors back is a precedent for the Taiwan government.

The airplane itself, valued at between $60 million to $100 million, was presumably insured, as was its cargo of durians, fish, garments, and, reportedly, tires.

## The Lead Character

Pilot Wang is a strange character in this saga. His motivation is a mystery. According to Chinese in Hong Kong not affiliated with either the mainland or Taiwan, Mr. Wang is a former U-2 spy pilot who flew missions over China from Okinawa for the Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He retired from the Chinese Nationalist air force in 1967 at the rank of lieutenant colonel and took a job with China Airlines.

What makes his defection so hard to believe is that he was once praised as a Nationalist hero by none other than Chiang Kai-shek. President Chiang allowed a rare photograph to be taken of himself and pilot Wang together.

Because U.S. diplomats publicly eschew any role in the China mainland's quest to woo Taiwan back into the fold, nobody is suggesting that the U.S. government is secretly encouraging defections to the mainland or to Taiwan as a lubricant for talks aimed at bringing the two sides closer.

As analysts explain it, pilot Wang was flying delivery runs along the China coast instead of the more prestigious passenger runs. Still, it is difficult to imagine a sense of personal disillusionment that would have made him plan a defection to the Canton airport.

Whatever the outcome, there is nothing proletarian about the talks between Taiwan and China: The first day they met at the Hong Kong Country Club in Aberdeen. The second day they met at the Hong Kong Club in the central business district. The third day they met at the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club in Happy Valley—all bastions of imperial British rule.

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