

In Taiwan, Sympathies Lean Toward Home

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES JUNE 4, 1989

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to archive_feedback@nytimes.com.

A few days ago when high school students formed a human chain from the northern to the southern tips of this island to show their solidarity with protesting students in Beijing, it seemed like the sort of gesture one might expect from Taiwan, whose Government still likes to see itself as a "free" alternative to Communist rule on the mainland.

And yet the "hands across the island" demonstration, as it was called, was something of an isolated instance in what has been generally a muted and controlled local response to the upheaval in China.

Despite burgeoning informal ties to the mainland, designed in part by the Nationalist Government here to instill a fading sense of Chinese oneness, the local reaction to the demonstrations in Beijing reflects a sense of difference with China.

The contrast between Hong Kong and Taiwan is striking in this regard. The British colony, which is due to be turned back to Chinese rule in eight years, has been obsessed with events inside China, holding several huge demonstrations, including one that brought out roughly one-sixth of the population. "But people in Taiwan think that Tiananmen Square is very far away," said Chou Tien-jui, the publisher of *The Journalist*, a weekly news magazine generally critical of both the mainland and Taiwanese Governments. "They think that we have plenty of local

issues to be concerned about."

Mr. Chou and others interviewed also believe that Taiwan, which has jailed dissidents of its own in the past, is not sufficiently democratic to enable people here to lecture others in freedom.

"We do not have the qualifications to be concerned about democracy on the Chinese mainland," he said.

Taiwan has seen several relatively small and well-controlled demonstrations, the largest being the "hands across the island" protest, which local people say was organized by the schools at the urging of the Government. Another demonstration, held on May 24, brought an estimated 10,000 people in front of Taipei's presidential palace where speakers vowed that Taiwan would be a "spiritual shield" for the Beijing students.

The Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, Government had no official comment at all on the Beijing democracy movement until the middle of May, when several senior officials, including the newly designated Secretary General of the Kuomintang, James Soong, called for "support."

Responding to criticisms both in local newspapers and from overseas Chinese over this apparent official reluctance to speak out, the Government spokesman, Shaw Yu-ming, said that Taiwan did not want to "give excuses" to Beijing for a crackdown against the protesting students. The notion was that Beijing would claim, falsely, that expressions of support here showed that the movement had been instigated by Taiwan.

The Taiwanese reaction seems consistent with the general trend in its relations with the mainland, a trend toward private contacts, indirect trade and even growing private investment.

Two-way trade last year, according to figures compiled by foreign experts, was \$2.7 billion and is projected to be \$3.3 billion this year. It is heavily weighted in favor of Taiwan, and many believe that it is allowed by the Government because businessmen on this island would quietly carry it on through Hong Kong even if it were not.

One reason often cited for the Government's acceptance of trade and travel - all of which would have been forbidden a few years ago - is that, after 40 years of de facto separation from the mainland, Taiwan has been losing its sense of belonging to China.

The Taiwan policy changed from one of quarantine to one of "sending

representatives of Taiwan's superior economic and political system," as a local newspaper said last month.

The Government of Taiwan has been ambivalent about large pro-democracy demonstrations here. Several people interviewed believed that the Kuomintang leadership would like to score public relations victories, but, at the same time, it is worried that mass rallies could become forums for discontent.

A version of this article appears in print on June 4, 1989, on Page 1001014 of the National edition with the headline: In Taiwan, Sympathies Lean Toward Home.