

## Hopeful about students from China

May .6, 2012 The China Post By Daniel J. Bauer

Some of our university students from China are “exchange students,” and some “regular students.”

Our exchange students stay a semester or two, and then return to their “mother schools” back in China. My experience is that in their brief stays here, these students are unlikely to touch on political matters.

Students from China however who are earning their B.A. degree completely from A to Z with us over a four-year period are in a different position. Logic dictates that Taiwan universities and, in a particular way, the classmates and professors of these friends of the A to Z variety, may occasionally need an extra measure of tolerance and patience if teachable moments are to be fruitful.

The melodramatic and humanly moving crisis in Beijing this past week that centered on blind activist Chen Guangcheng, protected inside the American embassy, could in some ways be a lightning rod for tension between our Chinese and local students. It could also be a window of opportunity to light a candle in a very large room shrouded in darkness.

The same thing can be said for a flurry of headlines recently about a possible softening of Washington’s position on arms sales to Taiwan. A less explosive but similarly delicate topic was the call of Taiwan-friendly U.S. representative Howard Berman this week to stop forcing Taiwanese-Americans in California to check off an on-line voting form to signal their place of birth as “Taiwan, province of China” (TT 5-02-12 p. 3).

This really is the season to be jolly for anyone with a taste for cross-strait relations. And I haven’t even mentioned the possibilities that hover over our re-elected president’s inauguration day speech on May 20. And then there is the question of whatever the gentleman may care to say in commemoration of the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Tienanmen massacre on June 4.

May I begin with this last reference?

If the previous Tienanmen anniversaries under his watch are at all illuminating, June 4 will find Ma as gentle as a lamb and eager, as always, not to ruffle Beijing’s feathers. This cliché, with its frankly avarian qualities, is apt. Many of us have been disappointed in the past with the president’s chicken-hearted pronouncements on the importance of improved human rights in the world as a way to acknowledge the mowing down of perhaps as many as hundreds of unarmed demonstrators not all that long ago. Come June 4, I do not expect any drama out of Taipei

One of my regular students from China, an exemplary student who I like and admire, recently wrote in a mini-paper that she hopes future regulars like herself studying here in Taiwan will have happy experiences “in this district of China.”

With a sigh, I took my pen and gently crossed out the phrase. In its place, I wrote, “over here on this side of the strait.”

I know minds bigger and more brilliant than mine have proclaimed their comfort in the Ma “i kuo liang chu” proposal (one possible translation: “one country two areas”), but until the people of Taiwan say they want to be a section or, to use my student’s term, a “district” of China, I say Taiwan is, pure and simply, its own country. I guess I’m just all hung up on a couple little numbers like 1 and 2.

Nothing quite like the Chen Gwangcheng incident so effectively illustrates the prime difference between the governments of Beijing and Taiwan. Chen’s story might have happened here 60 years ago, but not today, not now, no way.

Imagine the gall of that blind dissident, this self-taught lawyer Chen. Imagine his predicament in a scene all but pilfered from Gogol’s “The Overcoat.” Didn’t the man realize with whom he was dealing? He was imprisoned for 4 years and 3 months and then kept in house arrest since September 1210 because he told the world about his government’s noble campaign of forced abortions and sterilizations for up to 7,000 women in Shantong. How could he have been so outrageously honest?

I would never march up to our A to Z students from China and throw these news events and opinions in their faces. But I am hoping that they are readers and thinkers. And I am hoping they are, day by day, seeing the light. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

## **Talking Point**

- 1) Politics is probably a topic only a few Fu da students talk about, and yet "cross-strait" relations affect Taiwan economically, culturally and surely politically. Do you yourself think very often about "the mainland" as for its influence on you and your life, now or IN THE FUTURE?
- 2) Fu da has approximately 60 students this year who are Freshmen from China. These students hope to study for 4 years here and graduate with the same degrees you will one day have. Do you know some of these Chinese students? Are they the same or different from Taiwan students? How do you evaluate the mixing of China's students with students from Taiwan?
- 3) Are you familiar with the recent life of Chen Guangcheng and his publicizing of information about forced abortions in China several years ago? Do you feel his imprisonment and suffering is a topic Taiwan should pay attention to?