

The Future of U.S.-ROC Relations: The View of an American Conservative

By Seth Cropsey

I am honored by your invitation to address this conference sponsored by two distinguished educational institutions: one—Tamkang University—located in the part of the world in which my professional interests lie, and the other—the University of Illinois—one of the proudest accomplishments of the American state in which I grew up.

It is a commonplace for American speakers to invoke Asia's increasing importance relative to the United States. But the fact is that Asia's, and especially Taiwan's impressive and sustained economic growth over the long sweep of history is what merits the attention the region is increasingly receiving today.

I will return to the implications of this growth and what it means for the future of Taiwan-U.S. relations, but it would be wrong at the forum provided by two great universities to pass over in silence the perplexity, confusion, and bewilderment with which many of my countrymen regard the economic miracles which are appearing like flowers in spring from Tokyo to Taipei to Guangdong to Thailand, and which I suspect will soon bloom in Vietnam as well. Our business experts search high and low for management secrets, organizational explanations, and corporate shareholder arrangements which could explain your success.

Their search misses the obvious. The strength of Asian societies such as yours is the resilience and energy of the traditional family, which instills discipline, respect for education, and an enthusiasm for hard work. These habits have *not* disappeared from the United States, but the source of them—the family—is today under rising pressure. Where the family's authority remains strong, the habits it develops nourish enterprise and—in the aggregate—these habits help generate wondrously productive societies.

In addition, many Asian societies, such as the one that flourishes here on Taiwan do not possess the strong and occasionally disruptive ideological divisions which—for both better *and* worse—characterize the West. One important result in Asia is the lack of a wrenching political debate—such as we are accustomed to in the United States—over whether private enterprise or the central government is best equipped to create wealth. The cooperation between many Asian governments and their most entrepreneurial citizens speaks eloquently of this common sense approach.

Common Sense Approach. But, the subject of these opening remarks is the university. And here, your common sense approach and relative lack of ideological coloration may help save us in the West from some of our own worst excesses. For example the tendency in American universities today is to disparage the West's intellectual tradition. Too many American academics are eagerly embracing everything from the fashionable complaints of aggrieved Third World political activists to the manifestos of self-styled political theoreticians whose primary claim to inclusion in a university course is their gender, race, sexual preference, or some other accident of nature or nurture.

Seth Cropsey is Director of the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.

He spoke at Tamkang University, Taipei, Republic of China, November 9, 1992, at a conference on U.S.-ROC Relations jointly sponsored by the University of Illinois and Tamkang University.

ISSN 0272-1155. ©1992 by The Heritage Foundation.

Asian institutions of higher learning, guided as they are by hands less trendy, less ideologically fashionable, and more open to respect for tradition, may in fact be the safe haven of the West's intellectual traditions. Unfortunately, the assault on the values of liberal humanism, free inquiry, and excellence is likely to intensify in the coming decades.

Too many American academics *are* beginning to see Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, and Shakespeare as the curricular equals of liberationist theologians, deconstructionists, and a host of other ideologues whose political causes exceed their dedication to free inquiry. But men such as the ancient Greek philosophers whose thinking is surely the glory of Western civilization are still taken very seriously at such institutions as this one and at others throughout Asia such as the University of Tokyo.

Understanding and Respect. My hope is that associations such as this one between Tamkang University and the University of Illinois may help light the path to the increased political and economic ties which bind America and the Republic of China. But I am no less hopeful that relationships developed over the years by conferences such as this can lead to heightened understanding and thus respect for the intellectual traditions of the West. For it is these traditions which have helped craft the model for the economic and growing political freedom which has made the Republic of China an education to developing countries around the world, including at a very practical level, the PRC. My premise is, in short, that U.S.-ROC relations have been transformed from an association based on a common enemy and are evolving toward a partnership that is founded upon a shared vision of the future.

To demonstrate this, it is necessary to acknowledge historians who still insist that the U.S. never intended to side with Chiang Kai-shek; that President Truman's China policy was in fact aimed at cutting his losses by withdrawing American forces from the Chinese mainland lest the U.S. be identified with the European colonial powers. This argument is mistaken. It ignores the fact that Franklin Roosevelt invited Chiang to participate in the 1943 Cairo Conference—a certain proof of FDR's hope that Chiang would unify China, and emerge from the Second World War as a pillar of Asian stability.

The question of American's motives for supporting the Republic of China is especially relevant today as the U.S. redefines its role in the world. As this process—which is by no means completed by the results of last week's election—proceeds, foreign policy experts of the two American political parties continue to debate the causes of the Cold War and who is responsible for the victory over communism.

Disagreement on Communism. The facts are that, as with other great issues of the post-World War II years, Americans disagreed over how seriously to regard the spread of communism. The civil dispute between the Nationalist and communist Chinese forced Americans to confront this issue in practical terms. In fact the Cold War rift that divided the American political parties on foreign policy—what to do about communism—was unintentionally opened by George Marshall. As the personal emissary of President Truman, Marshall decided that Chiang Kai-shek was not strong enough to defeat Mao.

Truman accepted Marshall's evaluation, and directed him to use American aid as leverage to secure a compromise between Chiang and Mao. This done, the stage was set for American Republicans to accuse Democrats of having lost China to the communists. In large measure, this accusation prepared the foundation on which the next generation of Democratic politicians, for example George McGovern and Ted Kennedy, would—propelled again by U.S. policy in Asia—build an indisputable record of unconcern and indifference to the spread of international communism.

With the debate between President Truman and General Douglas MacArthur over how to deal with the Chinese communists, the chasm between Republicans and Democrats grew. Truman refused Chiang Kai-shek's offer of ground forces to help the U.S. defend South Korea against the North's attack. The political skirmishing over Chiang's offer injured Truman politically in the U.S. and played an important part in MacArthur's eventual undoing. But, in the end, on June 29, 1950, Truman finally did authorize MacArthur to use air and naval action to prevent the mainland Chinese from attacking Formosa. This date establishes clearly the beginning of the formal bond that linked the Republic of China to the U.S. in common antipathy to communist China.

In the four decades since then, defensive cooperation between the ROC and America has included the sharing of intelligence, training, U.S. ship visits, the sale of missiles, aircraft, naval vessels, the licensing of U.S. equipment for manufacture in Taiwan—and a lot more, such as the ROC's logistical assistance during the Vietnam War. That conflict was a battle the U.S. lost in a war it eventually won.

Cold War Aftermath. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the loss of its empire, as well as the PRC's growing economic reforms, the spectre of international communism has died. Had Taiwan based its existence solely on opposition to communism, the people of this land would now have a high price to pay. I can speak with authority on this subject: There are more than a few American conservatives whose single, guiding idea of foreign policy during the Cold War was anti-communism. Their support was critical while the struggle between communist tyranny and freedom hung in the balance, and their often lonely struggle will cast a guiding beacon into the future when freedom comes again under assault.

But now, these stalwart anti-communists—such as Patrick Buchanan who challenged George Bush for the Republican presidential nomination—are possessed by a sense of confusion and admitted isolationism that colors their sense of where American foreign policy should go.

Others of my countrymen who strongly opposed communism throughout the Cold War were motivated primarily by an older, traditional theme of American foreign policy: respect for democracy and the belief that its spread would make the world a safer and more prosperous place for all mankind. They include such men as Ronald Reagan and Jack Kemp whose satisfaction with Marxism's demise is exceeded only by their positive vision of the benefits of free markets and free political systems.

The Republic of China's actions parallel this vision. During the same post-World War II decades that communism was exhausting itself, the ROC positively transformed itself: Specifically, it has become a major force in international commerce and it has embarked upon the path towards greater democracy. Taiwan is America's sixth largest trading partner, with hard currency reserves that exceed \$80 billion. Its steep climb to a position among the top eight percent of the world's trading nations and the near trebling of its individuals' income in a decade cannot be described by any other term than remarkable.

Equally impressive is the ROC's steady progress toward greater democratization as exemplified by the health of opposition parties, free elections, and the process now underway to rewrite Taiwan's constitution. Taken together, these profound economic and political developments change the basis of the relationship between Washington and Taipei from resisting a mutual foe to sharing a common interest in prosperity and democratic values.

This change *should* strengthen the bonds between Washington and Taipei. But before this is possible, the basis of the new relationship needs to be understood clearly on both sides of the Pacific.

America's foreign policies, like those of other countries, change according to a host of regional power balances, changes in the attitudes of foreign nations, and other international variables. While Germany and Japan were once enemies of the U.S., now they are friends. What remains constant, and what in large measure explains the shift toward warm relations with these former adversaries is a longstanding pillar of U.S. foreign policy: sympathy with and support for other democracies.

Shared Interest. The recent sale of F-16s to Taiwan, therefore, does not simply represent George Bush's effort to win the state of Texas in the 1992 presidential campaign. Nor does the sale merely reflect Washington's correct understanding that the PRC's swelling military budgets as well as its purchase of as many as 70 Russian Su-27s increase the ROC's defense requirements.

The F-16 sale also reflects the growing—if as yet unarticulated—understanding in Washington that Taiwan is gradually joining the list of nations around the world with which the U.S. shares an immediate economic interest, a long-term, principled common interest in the future of democracy, as well as a common retained interest in undermining what is left of communism through economic reform. Taiwan's prosperity and increasing democratization must be defended. And the fact is—even if our politicians find it easier to express in action what they will not in speech—that Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland, and virtually every other act of aggression in recorded history prove that strength does not invite hostility; weakness does.

For a host of reasons, the Bush Administration could not articulate this fact. However, a Clinton Administration is not likely even to be capable of realizing the ROC's importance. Its foreign policy appointees will likely reflect some degree of the liberals' Cold War unsympathy toward Taiwan. Part of this unsympathy came from the American left's reluctance to befriend a strongly anti-communist regime, such as the ROC. And part—as I noted at the beginning of these remarks—is a holdover from the liberal-conservative split over foreign policy that opened as the U.S. decided how it would deal with communism after World War II. The balance resulted simply from American liberals' antipathy towards conservatives who actively supported Taipei.

But whichever party controls the White House, Taiwan cannot and should not depend on Republican or Democratic politicians to explain to the American people why relations between Washington and Taipei have fundamentally changed. Nor should Taiwan leave this important task solely to conservatives who remain the steadfast friends of the ROC, but whose political energies are more than ever consumed by domestic problems, including winning back the White House in 1996. For our part, we at The Heritage Foundation expect to launch an important initiative in the coming years called "The Yankee Trader." It will articulate and emphasize the vast future opportunities for Americans in the growing Asian economic network of which the Republic of China is a bustling, thriving critical node.

Taiwan should maintain old friends such as American conservatives. But you can help us as you help yourselves in reminding us that our relationship, which was forged in the shadow of a common ideological enemy, needs to move forward and adjust to the great changes taking place in Asian and throughout the world.

I am very optimistic about the future of the U.S.-ROC relationship because its basis has widened economically and deepened politically. This makes for a sturdier foundation. In the U.S., thoughtful American conservatives are second to none in their hopes for the spread of democracy; if Asia succeeds in democratizing, the foreseeable future of popular government is assured throughout the world. American conservatives also share with the people of Taiwan a great respect for individuals' initiative and its fruits.

Winning New Friends. But many other—in fact, most other—Americans share these feelings. Taiwan's legitimate ability to point to its own economic and political progress is a valuable tool as it tries to win new friends. In fact, because most Americans—regardless of political affiliation—respect economic and political accomplishments such as the ROC has achieved, Taiwan possesses a practical instrument to *depoliticize* its base of support in the U.S. One does not have to look far for the benefits of such depoliticization. Your relationship with mainland China is a perfectly good example. It shows that the common cause of increased prosperity is powerful indeed.

Efforts such as those headed by my friend and former employer Caspar Weinberger, who chairs the USA-ROC Economics Council, help to advance Americans' understanding of the growing economic ties between America and Taiwan. Such efforts will receive their greatest boost by including American contractors from key states of the U.S. in the ROC's ambitious program over the next six years to construct high-speed trains, upgrade port facilities, and build airports, superhighways, and other critical pivots of a technologically advanced power.

There is no better or quicker way to inform the United States about Taiwan's economic accomplishments than to invite Americans to participate in them. Such invitations will be accepted. They will provide a number of reasons for increased American diplomatic and military support of the ROC equal to the number of jobs created in the U.S. The result would be neither ironic nor surprising: the same interest in prosperity that has reduced tensions between Taipei and Beijing also smooths the path for an improved connection between Washington and Taipei.

Under the most favorable conditions, the resurrection of such ties will lead to a renewal of diplomatic relations between the international community and the ROC. This would be an especially favorable development because it would help build an international base of support for Taiwan's security. Now is a good time to take this security seriously since one possible result of the ROC's democratization is the possibility that American politicians will take sides as political debate accelerates in the ROC's increasingly democratic society.

Under less favorable conditions, the political base of support in the U.S. for upgrading the ROC's ability to defend itself would be assured. Of the PRC's future and its intentions no one can knowledgeably predict. The only certainty, as I said earlier, is that weakness invites danger and strength keeps it at bay.

Progress Toward Democracy. There are other ways to nourish the Washington-Taipei bonds. Too few Americans know of Taiwan's progress toward democracy. Such organizations as Freedom House monitor progress toward human rights and democracy internationally. Their country report on Taiwan in the current edition of *Freedom in the World* is positive and encouraging. Transmitting and reinforcing the favorable message of such independent groups throughout the U.S. will not produce results overnight. But the memory and images of Tiananmen Square lie freshly in the American imagination, and the contrast between it and the ROC is vivid and potent. Pointing to this contrast should be a top priority. As the ROC continues its efforts to democratize, such an effort will eventually yield an abundant harvest of American goodwill for Taiwan.

Also, the ancient Chinese culture, which is admired by many Americans, consistently attracts positive attention in the U.S. I hope that programs such as the theatre and dance productions that toured the U.S. earlier this year will be continued and expanded. The recently completed Sackler Gallery in Washington displays Asian art exclusively. Nearly half a million visitors stroll through its corridors each year. An exhibit of some of the treasures from Taipei's exquisite collection in the National Museum would be a huge success. It would remind Washingtonians and

visiting Americans from around the country of the rich Chinese culture that flourishes in this land.

My strongest hope for the future of the U.S.-ROC relationship is that the American base of support for Taiwan will grow beyond its conservative seed and touch the entire United States. There is no serious obstacle to this and many positive developments to encourage it. Security is a prerequisite of Taiwan's continued economic growth, and this growth is a powerful stimulus to the positive transformation of the PRC. The ROC is America's sixth largest trading partner, and its democratization builds a bridge to Washington that is a traditional and unique element of America's foreign policy. Taipei's offer to enter into a free trade agreement with Washington could serve as the keystone of a trans-Pacific free trade area that may someday engage the productive energies of over half the world's population. And, finally, the genuine bonds of friendship that connect the ROC with the U.S. are, by diplomatic standards, old. They have survived and prospered through World War, regional conflict, and the divisive tensions of the Cold War.

Sturdy Building Blocks. And, a closing word. Do not be discouraged by the fascination Americans have long held at the size of the Chinese mainland. Nineteenth century missionaries' excitement at the potential number of converts, the wonder of Marco Polo's discoveries passed down the ages through the Europeans who settled the U.S., the colorful mystery of an unfamiliar, ancient, and sophisticated civilization—all of these do indeed exert a powerful grip on the American imagination.

But pragmatism and idealism are far more a part of the American character than a preoccupation with the exotic. Taiwan's economic vitality and its growing movement toward democracy appeal to these fundamental and shared traits. They are the sturdy blocks on which the future of relations between the United States and the Republic of China must be built. There is no stronger or more enduring material.

