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Thousands Rally in Hong Kong on Tiananmen Square Anniversary

By GERRY MULLANY and CHRIS BUCKLEY

HONG KONG — Tens of thousands of Hong Kong residents, joined by a smattering of mainland Chinese, converged in central Victoria Park here on Tuesday to honor the 24th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown and vent their anger at a Chinese leadership that has increasingly signaled its intent to broaden its limited control over the territory.

Speakers shouted “down with the Communist Party” and “free elections for all citizens.”

Such protests are effectively banned in mainland China, creating a draw for the mainlanders who attended.

“I came because you can’t commemorate this day on the mainland,” said one, a former magazine editor who gave his name only as Li for self-protection. “Here you can soak up the democratic atmosphere.”

The protesters pressed a variety of agendas. A 17-year-old student named Zheng from Guangdong Province was among several holding a flag of the Republic of China, whose leaders fled to Taiwan as the Communists took over the mainland in 1949. Wan Yun, 47, a Hong Kong resident formerly from the Chinese province of Hubei, laid out documents about a land dispute that she said had brought her a year in a labor camp.

After the rally was well under way, an intense, wind-whipped rainstorm descended on the park, sending protesters scurrying for cover through flooded streets. But the rain abated a half-hour later, and the drenched throngs returned.

The annual demonstration is the most vivid display of the continuing passions over the 1989 crackdown on student protests in Beijing, an event whose name and date has been stricken by censors on mainland China. Armed soldiers and armored vehicles swept through Beijing, shooting dead – by most estimates – hundreds of people to end two months of protests, hunger strikes and passionate speeches at Tiananmen Square. Student leaders backed by thousands of mainly young Chinese had been urging the Communist Party to attack official corruption, expand citizens’ rights and take steps toward democracy.

Twenty-four years after the bloodshed, China’s Communist Party has honed its response to the unwelcome anniversary: detaining and silencing dissidents and bereaved families who hope to observe the day with mourning; mobilizing extra

police officers to ensure that no protests break out around Tiananmen Square; and scrubbing Chinese Internet sites of any references and images that refer to or even hint at the upheavals of 1989.

The major exception to this annual feat of erasure is the event in Hong Kong, a self-administered enclave under Chinese sovereignty, where tens of thousands gather each year for a candlelit memorial vigil and rally.

This year's crowd was estimated by the police at 54,000 people, although organizers put the turnout at 150,000. Despite the rainstorm, the gathering seemed energized by its ire at a new cohort of Communist Party leaders in Beijing.

"Everyone feels disappointed that the initial hopes in Xi Jinping have evaporated," Mr. Li, the editor, said of the new head of the Chinese Communist Party.

Few have any expectations that Mr. Xi and other leaders will alter the official version of what happened in 1989: the protests were a plot against the party that had to be quelled with force.

"Facts have clearly shown that during the past nearly quarter-century, China's top leaders have never been real political reformers," Tiananmen Mothers, an association for families of the people killed in the 1989 crackdown, said in a statement released by Human Rights in China, an advocacy group. "They come one after another, as if through a revolving door; and as they move forward, they become ever more distant and outrageous, causing a universal feeling of despair to descend on the people from all sides."

This year's gathering was preceded by controversy about a slogan chosen by the main organizer, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. The group proposed "Loving the country, loving the people" as the vigil's theme, which drew criticism that it was bowing to party-backed patriotic dogma.

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Directions:

1. Thoroughly annotate the article.
2. Complete SOAPStone.
3. Write a thorough response in which you comment on what happened in The Square in 1989. What's the big issue? How does this incident connect to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*?

A famous picture from the 1989 protests

