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Success and Failure in Post-Miracle Taiwan

Nickola Lee Pazderic

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

1999

Anthropology

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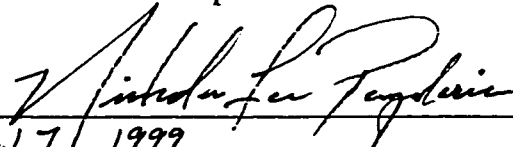
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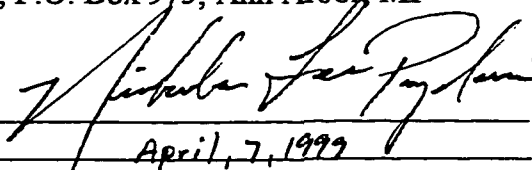
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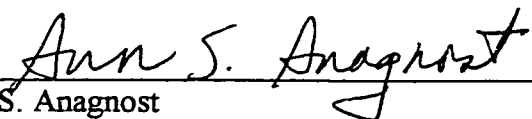


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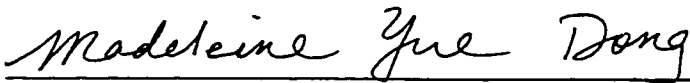
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Abstract

Success and Failure in Post-Miracle Taiwan

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Drawing extensively (though not exclusively) from psychoanalytic and Marxian theories as they apply to and reflect the technological paradigm of production and consumer desire, this dissertation provides an ethnographic description of the ways in which the success/failure binary operates in (as it serves to transform) Taiwanese middle-class, post-miracle life.

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Dear thanks go to Ardelle Pazderic, my mom.

Please also know that Christina Soong remains beyond instrumental in the evolution of my life's work.

Dedication

Ted F. Pazderic
(1932-1994)

Chapter 1: The Persistent Spirit of Post-Miracle Times

Necessary Success and its Causative Effects

In few places in the world do the wages of collective failure appear more certain than in Taiwan. Not only does the Chinese mainland threaten with force as it seduces with prophesied promises of success and security without worry in a united “motherland (*zuguo*),” but the world “community” of nation states accepts the “nonnation” of Taiwan as something of an equal only insofar as the people of Taiwan continue to procure ever-more advanced means of production, produce ever-finer commodities, and acquire ever-higher levels of taste.

Well understood by Taiwanese engaged in commerce, government, and academics, this imperative has emerged despite and because of the loss of a major portion of the manufacturing base responsible the success of the 1970s, 80s and early 90s to Southeast Asia and China in the “global race to the bottom.” This condition in which winning means losing and losing means winning follows the loss of Taiwan’s pre-industrial agricultural-based society to industrialization.

Both of these transformations occurred because of the combined efforts of the government and the public since the late 1940s to transmogrify Taiwan from, as Thomas Gold puts it, “a morass of destruction and despair.” The industrial metamorphosis that followed the trauma of allied bombings, Japanese de-colonization, and Nationalist Army occupation and that occurred with a speed, it is said, unknown before on earth, came to be called, first, by foreigners and, not much later, by Taiwanese themselves, the “Taiwan

miracle.”¹ While association of the term “miraculous” with what occurred appears to some as a self-evident reflection of the overwhelming and sudden transformation of Taiwan, the “Taiwan miracle” does betoken something more than cultural change. In particular, it connotes a spiritual occurrence in two senses, both of which are related to the definitive and central aspect of any religious system, namely belief, and its propensity to operate within a given economic/political system and to become materialized through the repetitious acts of believers.²

In one sense the “Taiwan miracle” served, as all miracles do, as an occurrence that worked in a circularity of logic typical of belief to signify the truth of that which many observers of the sign already believed. Deep in the throes of the cold war on the international scene and culture wars at home (registered in the debate over dependency theory) during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, many influential Americans saw Taiwan’s success as a sign of the capacity of capitalism and its liberal democratic agents to deliver countries, apparently on the periphery of world systems, into the center-- despite the evidence of failures almost everywhere else. Appearing at roughly the same time that the United States recognized the Communist state of the People’s Republic of China as the legitimate government of the mainland, the recognition of Taiwan’s success as miraculous, signaled (in a remarkable post-war irony) that all Nationalist Party pretensions to authority over its “nation” stood in grave doubt. The largely unspoken (but well understood) result being that Taiwan’s (miracle) success became even more critical.

¹ Thomas B. Gold, *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 1.

² The example of the spirit in the machine remains Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,

to its (affirmative) place (as it faced excommunication) in the world.³

In another sense, to this day on the island and in ROC diplomatic activity references to the “Taiwan miracle (*Taiwan qiji*)” remain ubiquitous, rendering, in effect, world-sanctioned success still central to Taiwan’s official history and trajectory-- a history and trajectory reiterated whenever necessary in talk, both public and private, in ways so as to assert the truth of “the miracle” through the act of persistent repetition. This legitimizing effect of the discourse of the miracle puts those who utter this term and the Taiwan encompassed within it into the realm of the mutually recognizing elect.

And yet, this repetition itself ironically signals that the achievement is far from final, as though a resistant gap separates Taiwan from its imagined end-- a gap that can only be closed through ever-more (but never conclusive) signifying miracles, be they economic or democratic. For while the discourse of “the miracle” operates in turn-of-the-millennium Taiwan, it does so by anticipating further, necessary transformations for the purpose of, as stated in economic discourse, “economic recovery.” This implicitly nostalgic longing for a return to the (simultaneously rejected) boom years remains inseparable from the realm of spirits. For example, this longing finds island-wide expression in repeated calls for “spiritual (*jingshen*)” renewal from people no less prominent than Vice President Lien Chan.

trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992).

³ Ann Anagnost writes eloquently of the effects of global expectations (and local resistance to them) on China (e.g., during the “Great Leap Forward” and the recent “take-off”) in the introduction to *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1-15.

Not unlike the early ascription of “miraculous” development to Taiwan by Taiwanese, this call for spiritual renewal remains in keeping with the international and quasi-Hegelian prophetic/interpretation of the post-cold war world. Specifically, calls in the late 1990s for more miracles follow, by only a few years, the recognition that Taiwan’s success fixed it, like other technologically advanced and liberal democratic countries, at the “the end of History,” where the chief danger, it is said, rests with the “single moral fact that the bourgeois is primarily preoccupied with his own material well-being.”⁴ Contained within this warning remains an undermining yet perpetuating irony not lost on Taiwanese. Namely, Taiwanese preoccupation with material well being remains crucial to their ability to produce and trade (one might say “keep up”) with countries similarly preoccupied with the imagined finer (always “finer than...”) things of the world; however, they cannot become too preoccupied because the times demand the continued production of success. The effect of this necessary yet dangerous preoccupation can be detected in ever-greater anxiety over job security (registered as increased production) and material standing (registered in increased consumption).

The hyper-activity that springs from this insecurity effects especially those spared the intense demands of production placed on the shoulders of petty capitalists during the boom years, i.e., the white-collar class of state bureaucrats and other professionals.⁵ With their professional titles, training and responsibilities, the people of this class stand required to lead the way of metamorphosis to a new, private-industry centered Taiwan of

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), p. 145.

⁵ For a theorization of the hyper-active work of post-modern production see Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the*

technological and social refinement defined by the world bourgeoisie-- itself always in danger of succumbing to its own excesses and, thereby (as the ironic and perpetuating criticism of the "last man" would have it) nowhere near its end.

Embodying this burden of necessary transmutation as they enforce it (in such a way as to put any easy politics of perpetrator and victim into doubt while, nevertheless, employing such a binary politics for its purposes), the universalizing but not universalized middle class folk has become, too, the chief and most general object of my study. While the difficulties (stemming from impossibility) of absolute categorization render point by point elucidation of the economic, political, and social profile of this (or any social class) outside of my intentions,⁶ certain characteristics of middle class life in Taiwan, nevertheless, will become apparent herein because the distinctions (over others and the past) to which many in the middle class aspire (conditioned by advertising that carves class consciousness as it reflects it) work to propel ever-greater social/spiritual transformation.⁷

Postmodern Divide (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁶ Robert M. Marsh, *The Great Transformation: Social Change in Taipei, Taiwan since the 1960s* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 181- 216, reveals the numerous subjective class divisions present in contemporary, urban Taiwan. Within this text, I will disclose the contours of middle-class Taiwan-- an important and, many ways leading segment of Taiwan's population-- which, even Mr. Marsh notes, remains: "The most class-conscious segment of the population (334)" according to his data.

⁷ In my concern with the place of consumer choices in the creation of social class, I follow Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). For a discussion of the place of social aspirations in the creation of cultural change please see: Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce: Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Volume 2*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

As is the case with all spiritual transformations, to enter the realm of the mutually recognizing elect means to give up the old for the new. In this way the phrase “Taiwan miracle” serves as a sign fraught with implications of lost feelings, places, practices, and people. These losses are themselves inseparable from a common preoccupation with a creation from nothing (i.e., from loss or failure) that plays out, as I show herein, in contemporary Taiwanese life in ways that are inseparable from the realm of the gods.⁸ In consonance with official discourse, ordinary people speak regularly of a “a loss of spirit,” while hoping to return to that which is gone. These longing recognitions of loss (called by Taiwanese “nostalgic feelings [*huainian de ganjue*]”) are, as Susan Stewart writes,

always ideological: the past it [nostalgia] seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent... Hostile to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin, nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality. The point of desire which the nostalgic seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of desire.⁹

⁸ See P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), for an account of the structural relationship of *yin/yang* as it works to express power relations in a largely pre-modern (or pre-miracle) setting. Further, my concern with loss, failure, and negativity at the center of cultural practice in Taiwan is somewhat akin to the interest of Ian A. Skoggard, *The Indigenous Dynamic in Taiwan's Postwar Development: The Religious and Historical Roots of Entrepreneurship* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), with the inseparability of violence from commercial activity in Taiwan.

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), p. 23.

This “generating mechanism of desire” materializes through the destruction/creation (i.e., transformation) that occurs in Taiwan and across the globe—informing a sense of loss so total that, it seems, only a narrative as powerful as success, guided by the promise of utopian returns, can provide a stable, illusion of certainty. In the case of Taiwan, losses, as object-causes of desire, are rarely addressed directly in discourse. Instead, ideological bi-passes form to protect people from the recognition of the direct effects of their own efforts toward transformation. For instance, at the level of national discourse, the actual condition of “destruction and despair” that faced the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Taiwanese people in the late 1940s did not (in fact, by threat of arrest, could not) find official expression as the cause for Taiwanese to enact miraculous change; rather, ideological nostalgia for another loss substituted. In particular, the KMT-generated dream-image of traditional China served development with the hope that the lost world of pre-Republican China could be recovered by the combined efforts of Taiwanese united by this belief and its loss-driven desire. This dream ended officially in May of 1991 when President Lee Teng-hui announced the end of the “Period of National Mobilization for the Suppression of the Communist Rebellion.” Before this dream of a utopian future-past came to an official end, however, other nostalgic dreams, triggered by the loss (both real and imagined) of “traditional Taiwanese life” during the period of industrialization, were emerging (as they had been since the late 1970s)—reflecting the longing of millions, sometimes in the form of a necessarily suppressed nationalism or in the form of advertising and other transfiguring narratives and actions, for a return to what (like the KMT and its China) ordinary

Taiwanese had, themselves, dismantled, paved over, re-educated and otherwise obliterated.

It is within this condition that Taiwanese ask the same question that, according to George Bataille, informed the Calvinist desire for what had been lost (i.e., unity with their god) and what remained forever out of their grasp, save through the never-conclusive proof of success (i.e., salvation):

How can humans find themselves-- or regain themselves-- seeing that the action to which the search commits them in one way or another is precisely what estranges them from themselves?¹⁰

Taking up with the general problem of “phantasms and modernity’s losses” etched in the work of Marilyn Ivy on Japan,¹¹ this ethnography seeks to disclose not only how middle class fascination with elements of loss (and its concomitant conception, failure [*shibai*]) operate, through the prism of nostalgia, to produce success and its causative effects but also the points at which this seemingly flawless system of overcoming becomes troubled by phantasmic appearances of loss and failure. Taking the shape of, for example, ghosts, antiquated dreams, failed pasts, religious encounters, and criminality, the phantasms signal estrangement as they exceed the ideological representations of utopian nostalgia. By making the absolute closure of a group and its self-image impossible, these signs of absence or failure become the points around which

¹⁰ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume 1, Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 131..I have changed the pronouns to gender-neutral forms.

¹¹ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

(nonetheless) order is rigorously enforced, hopes formulated, and overcoming (i.e., success [*chenggong*]) achieved within local practices and idioms— but never absolutely. For these phantasms, if only for a spell, remind Taiwanese (as Taiwanese repeatedly return to them) that things are not always as they seem, that the sublime exists beyond their own concocted enclosure, and that what is lost need not always (so conveniently) go away for the purpose of easy recovery in ideological nostalgia.

The Cultural Logic of Overcoming

While the analog for this phenomenon, as described in psychoanalytic literature, would be the *petit objet a* (characterized by Jacques Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*¹²), in the pages that follow ethnographic materials are written into the foreground so that this work can address issues of family structure, collective representations, and popular religious activities that mark the concerns of an earlier generation of American social anthropology in Taiwan and questions of social change and democracy common to contemporary scholarship without the supplementary intrusion of theory— a move as impossible as it may be necessary for my aim.¹³

¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), pp. 67-119, 263-276. According to Lacan the *petit objet a* represents the “dark god” (275) which serves as the cause of desire. As that which is “in you more than you,” this object represents that which is lost in order for “you” (or I or Taiwanese) to recognize your-self in the over-riding social representations. The object causes desire by triggering awareness of the loss itself.

¹³ Perhaps the best summation of anthropology on Taiwan prior the intense transformation of the 1980s can be found in *The Anthropology of Taiwanese Society*, ed. Emily Martin Ahern and Hill Gates (Taipei: Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981). For contemporary studies, see for example, *Taiwan: Beyond the Economic Miracle*, ed. Denis Fred Simon and Michael Y.M. Kau (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992) or *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, ed. Stevan Harrell and Huang Chun-chieh (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

Nonetheless, a theoretically-informed pattern runs through this text as it operates in daily circumstances. I call this outline “the cultural logic of overcoming;” for, in its most general form as a ground-up model of processes, it emphasizes, as it contextualizes, the manner in which creation from nothing gets enacted in everyday life. Specifically, I show that certain objects, forms of appearance and visages take on charged social significance in their capacity to signify and, thereby, condense imagined social relations, histories, and identities. People recognize themselves in these images and forms, thereby giving the objects tremendous social efficacy.¹⁴ The success of overcoming (i.e., transformation) occurs through the actions of people to realize (i.e., make real) themselves within the forms and objects. This transformation occurs through or because of fear (insofar as that which is feared lost is ordinarily already gone) of obliteration, collapse, or other traumatic failure or loss. Usually also cast against knowledge of world, intrusive expectations for middle-class cultural life, the apparent negativity of traumatic loss or failure (or its fear) makes possible the emergence of super-intact objects, forms and visages that receive important content from the norms of world, middle class culture just as they, in many cases, obtain their consistency from ideological (often nostalgic) resistance to the forces that induce the loss. As powerful objects condense (through group objectification) the intentions of social actors and their groups, they conceal (while, in their effects, also anxiously anticipating as reappearance) the horrifying and fascinating

¹⁴ James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), identifies a similar pattern; informed by a reading of Derrida, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, and Heidegger, he notes: “The lack of success in making ...power one’s own merely makes for persistence (p. 10).” I’m writing about that lack and that persistence and from within the same intellectual tradition.

(from the standpoint of successful transformation) elements of their emergence.¹⁵ Certain individuals in their capacity and willingness to configure, reconfigure, and embody these fetish-like objects and forms *and* invoke, enact, or (re)create conditions of loss (i.e., the conditions of positive emergence) are granted the status of “master,” “expert,” “leader,” or “god” for the social group. In exchange for their integrity as a group, the group gives to such personages (in an act of transference) their belief (implicitly or explicitly) that he or she knows the most secret elements of their lives.¹⁶ This system of cultural production and reproduction remains troubled by elements and people, ostensibly contained within and often produced by the order of the group, that simultaneously signify and embody that which cannot be contained and that which threatens to disintegrate the fundamental illusions of the group objectified in its charged objects.¹⁷ These elements or people, while threatening, are also fascinating, and by way of their regular (though never entirely successful) purgation, exorcism, or objectification (guided, at times, by the secret-bearing figures), the group maintains its integrity in active tension

¹⁵ For a description of the psychological mechanisms of disavowal typical of the subject’s simultaneous rejection and acknowledgment of a traumatic absence (or loss) see Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *Sexuality and Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rief (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 214-219; for a description of the mechanisms whereby commodities serve to simultaneously conceal and announce the traumatic conditions of their emergence see Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), pp. 41-106; for a range of essays on the use of fetishism in contemporary social criticism see *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 123-200.

¹⁷ Here the theoretical analog is Jacques Derrida’s notion of the “dangerous supplement.” See *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 97-164. The dangerous supplement is that excess produced in the normal course of social operations, a criminal class for example (a fact recognized by Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* [Chicago: Free Press, 1964]), that, while seen as dangerous, threatening and in need of containment, nonetheless, serves to give the system of social (or other relations)

with what nominally remains outside of it-- or so it seems; for as group members (or individuals for that matter) conceive of the threatening and fascinating as outside their confines, they also recognize themselves within the threatening, dangerous, and chaotic-- thereby giving (though never absolutely) order to the world through their ordering imagination and symbolic presence.

That this pattern appears to have a distinctly human-centered form should not be taken to mean that the “miraculous” transformations undertaken by Taiwanese remain entirely under their instrumental control nor is it to suggest the opposite that Taiwanese have fallen victim to incomprehensible forces. Rather, Taiwanese operate within the cultural logic of overcoming within the conditions created by their efforts, namely the technological transformation of Taiwan. This technological transformation touches the lives of individuals in their most intimate spheres, ranging from self-conceptions to sexuality to dreams of the future. The materiality of technological transmutation operating within the persistent (and, of course, feared lost) spirit of success, therefore, changes the “spirit(s)” of Taiwanese as it makes “Taiwanese” (as a successful people) possible for a similarly transformed world.

Named “the commodity fetish” by Karl Marx in the mid-nineteenth century and the “device paradigm” by Albert Borgmann in the late twentieth,¹⁸ the fundamental

an imagined integrity through its inclusion.

¹⁸ Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) argues that modern life is dominated by the paradigm of technology-- a paradigm marked by the fact that commodities, as surfaces, serve to conceal what is (in its entirety) opaque (even to experts), namely the machinery of production. Insofar as the machinery includes, according to Borgmann, the social system upon which the production of commodities depends, Borgmann’s theory of technology provides a theory of the commodity fetish (Marx, *Capital*, pp.

pattern of technology can be recognized in the division between machinery (mechanical and social) and its products (commodities and surfaces of every kind). This pattern that mirrors as it produces (through the production of surfaces by way of a vanishing background) the loss/desire paradigm of desire, operates throughout the technologically conditioned lives of Taiwanese as it does throughout the modern world. In the chapters that follow, variations on this pattern are disclosed as they condition the spirit of the times through different technologies, including photographs, print media, telecommunications, travel, construction, advertising, popular music, cinema and television.

While the ethnographic materials of this work draw from various sources, it remains based on nearly five years of personal experience in Taichung , Taiwan (Taiwan's third largest city) during the 1990s. From the Summer of 1996 to Winter 1998, I resided in one of the few remaining urban neighborhoods built during the Japanese occupation and early KMT period in which, for example, crumbling clay-brick houses, an occasional traditional farm house (*sanheyuan*), sacred trees, numerous miniature shrines, living-room sized factories of every sort, lanes little wider than a compact car, elderly people drinking tea and children playing unattended could (still) be

41-106) without class struggle; that is, according to Borgmann, the struggles for justice of distribution become, like other problems of production, issues for technocrats on one hand and antagonisms that can be put in the background through focus on ennobling practices, such as reading, on the other. As the evidence I assemble herein suggests, the class-struggle (produced by the push for Taiwan to succeed) forms a resistant reality around which forms of utopian nostalgia emerge and through which the social meanings of practices, such as reading, arise (see Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* [New York: Routledge, 1992]). Moreover, the possibility of putting the machinery in the background through practice remains itself a danger that must, according to the mandates of the times, be resisted through continued work. Because of my interest in these issues, chapters four through six can be considered an empirical and troubling response to Borgmann's influential 1984 book.

found. Located in the “old center” of Taichung near the Sun Yat-sen park and the baseball field, this neighborhood remains something of a blank, however, for most residents of Taichung-- just as its imagined contents (still) serve as ideological referents of future-pasts. Living within this overlooked cityscape of largely working-class people (of both mainland and Taiwanese forebears) and conducting my field-work with the middle class of Taiwanese society produced a number of strange effects that, nonetheless, might be imagined in light of my thesis. Specifically, as an educated foreigner I symbolize, *a priori* and with numerous (often unwarranted) benefits, the technological and social progress of middle class life for middle class Taiwanese; yet, living, as I did in a “backward (*luohou*)” place, my signifying status, if not defiled, was certainly troubled. This contradiction bewildered many Taiwanese who did not know me and thereby know the reasons for my choice. The alienating responses of those who saw me, say, speaking with a prostitute from Penghu island or playing chess with unemployed men in the park (as did many other aspects of daily life in that neighborhood) made clear to me that these “traditional” worlds, so lovingly recovered in memory, horrify and fascinate if raised out of proper context. This recognition became all the more certain to me by way of comparison; specifically, from 1989 to 1993 (as a student, teacher, and family member) I lived, primarily, in a fashionable neighborhood in Taichung.

The substantive chapters in which ethnographic materials make clear the patterns of the times begin with an account of photographic practices and images that serve to define successful person-hood and group solidarity. While the ubiquity of Taiwanese photographic practices at home and abroad tends to give photographs and their agents an

apparent transparency that works to render their significance as invisible as the stereotypical accounts of Taiwanese (or, for that matter, prosperous East-Asians in general) taking pictures are audible and, therefore, visible, the seriousness of photos resides precisely with this invisible visibility which is, as it were, at the very soul (*ling*) of photographs. For photographs, as they appear at the photography store (precisely trimmed and bundled in plastic wrapping), make opaque the social, historical and technological circumstances of their appearance. Furthermore, as they make distinct what is chosen to be distinct (i.e., selected poses, social groups, and other familiar images) they obviate elements of contemporary life deemed not suitable for representation inside the parameters of standard photographic images.¹⁹

These two obviating characteristics give photographs the capacity to constitute personages within what are considered normal social structures and historical narratives (including those of individual and collective development recounted herein).²⁰ For by the process of elimination (a process that makes possible, for example, the ironic condition of memorial through forgetting and forgetting through memorial), photographs present ideal images that bestow on those objectified in them continuity and certainty (both temporal and physical) that they otherwise lack. In this respect, as they efface, they serve to provoke desire for the forms contained within them.

¹⁹ See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu with Luc Boltanski, Robert Castel, Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Dominique Schnapper, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

²⁰ See, for example, Judith Williamson, "Family, Education, Photography," in *Culture/Power/History: a Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 234-244.

Insofar as the gestures and forms appropriate for any photograph are more or less understood by Taiwanese as ideas about what form photographs should have before they are taken, the objectifying images more often than not serve as proof of any given personage's successful adherence to the desired forms that constitutes a regular life. To not adhere to understood forms is to risk, in photographs and out, unintelligibility or indifference. For these reasons, objectifying photographs can also be said to be subjectifying.

Because the social order in Taiwan itself lacks continuity (e.g., after college, students must face the "real world (*xianshi de shijie*)," etc.), photographs take on sacred status in their ability to give coherence (a sure sign of success) to the lives of ordinary people. But, true to form, as they give form, they also create (as they record) loss. This dual capacity of photographs takes its most dramatic appearance in the contemporary fascination and horror of "mysterious photographs (*lingyi zhaopian*)"—a phrase that denotes the sacred status of photographs by disclosing their capacity to contain or represent that which is "spiritually abnormal" (an alternative and equally plausible translation of "*lingyi*").²¹ Mysterious photographs frighten because the photographs (usually inadvertently) make visible (and, therefore, prove) what most everyone hopes (while knowing otherwise) will remain invisible. This chapter will conclude by considering the form of these images, the ways they are talked about, and how their

²¹ Stevan Harrell, "Men, Women and Ghosts in Taiwanese Folk Religion," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), pp. 97-116 has written about Taiwanese ghosts as the "personification of anomalies (p. 99)." My concern in this chapter lies with the very centrality of these anomalies (expressed as *lingyi*) to contemporary Taiwanese

presence (or potential presence) disturbs everyday life and its picture-perfect certainty while simultaneously prompting desire for that which gives rise to the disturbance as it is overcome.

In chapter three I turn to the issue of social change in post-miracle Taiwan by focusing on the subjective histories, dreams and forms of debt of former officials in ChungHwa Telecom. Like all bureaucracies during the 1990s, the state-run telephone company that during the boom era provided a stable social backbone of the KMT state as it made possible technological/social transmutation has come under intense criticism from abroad and from Taiwanese for (from the contemporary vantage point) its inefficiency. This charge signals a change in status that shows at once the loss of miracle-era Taiwan and the resulting insecurities of the post-miracle era. By disclosing the ways in which the dreams of retirement that emerged with the promise given to workers of lifetime employment and guaranteed pensions came to help constitute the day to day subjective experience of telecommunications officials prior to the mid-1990s, I show how these charged forms of fantastic futures have come to call forth anxiety about the future because the future imagined no longer stands guaranteed but suddenly imperiled (as it is realized) by the prospects of “early retirement.” This disruption of dreams by dreams themselves has been, however, anticipated by their own children who have come to serve simultaneously as objects signifying the promise of the future and as personages that finalize the very dreams of the future many fantasized about in such a manner as to make those dreams all-too-real. A new mandate of success emerges against this successful

“successful” self-conceptions.

failure-- registered in new objects of devotion (specifically the company and new technologies) and the simultaneous understanding of former officials of their own swelling insignificance.²²

In the fourth chapter I change the ethnographic optic and take up with specific individuals, in particular a husband and wife, who own and operate a large construction company in Taichung. In addition to the building company, during the 1990s they initiated a book club that has become a model for other book clubs on the island. What concerns me in this chapter is the fact that their vision of “new culture” in Taiwan reveals a keen awareness of the feeling of loss “behind the touching thoughts” associated with the rhetoric of the miracle. According to their transforming discourses articulated in conversation and in their advertising, this loss makes itself most apparent in failed housing projects that have left people alienated. Their hope of overcoming resides with new housing projects and “community building” through collective book club practice. Both promise to allow people to recover “the good feelings” lost during the transformation. As do all nostalgic ideologies of recovery, this vision of the future obviates the wreckage and the inequalities of modernization that they helped produce. While their ideology is self-consciously nostalgic and, thereby, obviating, they nonetheless, as Walter Benjamin suggested people should, “seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” In particular, they seize upon objects dismissed as

²² This chapter draws notably from the work of Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on*

unessential while they were growing up to articulate their hopes. The danger (“that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes”²³), while recognized by them, stands created by them, too; for in many ways they represent the emerging ruling elite of contemporary Taiwan: successful, charismatic business people who many admire precisely because of their embodiment of the danger (i.e., the power to destroy and create in the name of “new culture”) and their exhibited capacity to resist simultaneously the danger of becoming inappropriately preoccupied with the pleasures of their favorite pursuits as they lead collective efforts toward ever-more success in the name of these pursuits.

In the next chapter I take up with these pursuits in terms of the book club’s guiding hope of providing a “life of meaning” in the “fragrance of books.” I take this promise to be roughly equivalent to the hope expressed by Roland Barthes for amateur practice:

[the amateur] establishes [him or herself] *graciously* (for nothing) in the signifier: in the immediately definite substance of music, of painting; [the amateur’s] praxis, usually, involves no *rubato* (that theft of the object for the sake of the attribute); [the amateur] is...will be perhaps-- the counter-bourgeois artist.²⁴

Woman and Causality (London: Verso, 1994).

²³ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 255.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 52. This hope is akin to that proffered and celebrated by Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, under the name of “focal things and practices”—practices that allow people, according to Borgmann, to find meaning and, even, divinity in such a way as to put the technological apparatus in the background of the lives of people.

But while the readers of the book club act as amateurs who literally envelop themselves in the aroma of books, they find of their own volition and anxiety that their practice perpetuates their appearance as signifiers, not only within the immediate substance of texts but as bourgeois subjects par excellence who, through their regular events, define their status, at times quite consciously, against the very world they consider to have overcome. The practice of reading only provides a partial deliverance as a result. In this sense it is truly amateur-- i.e., a practice destined for "free time," a time given to practitioners because of their success in which they act out their station; and yet, it remains a time that must be "given back," as it were, to ensure their continued success. This limitation of the pleasures of texts and of their own nostalgic ideology is recognized, as I show, during club practice itself. It is this limitation that leads several leading practitioners, including the builders themselves, to search for an encounter beyond the regularized and conventionally transforming longings for a more perfect middle class society, a search that leads them into a realm of experience seemingly removed from the disciplines necessary for success.

In chapter six I provide an ethnographic description of the newly-transplanted popular (consciously non-religious) practice called *Heqi*-- one of many forms of quasi-religious practice that have emerged since the end of martial law in which people from the book club, normally preoccupied with their endeavors and their status, can literally lose themselves (including that which no self-respecting middle class Taiwanese likes to lose: his or her social face). By way of the practice, the imagined world of nostalgic immediacy finds realization through intensive physical encounter with loss. Actions

equivalent to failure itself become reenacted only to allow the subjects to re-emerge (true to form) into an even more powerful field of subjectivity-- a field of subjectivity whose motivating intent, like that of the builders of "new culture," remains nothing short of global revolution.

In the final chapter I take up with an island-wide event that seized Taiwan during 1997, the case of Bai Xiaoyan.²⁵ Providing an eye-witness account of the effects of the affair, I argue that the public fascination with and horror of its own supplementary production proved critical in the election of the Democratic Progressive Party to major city and county posts-- the first island-wide election in which an opposition party proved victorious. In many respects this chapter provides a return to the implications of mysterious photographs; for in this chapter the spooks that plague the perfect images become fully physical, breaking through the common conception of the pre-married schoolgirl to trigger public recognition of their own (nostalgic) longing for a childhood already lost to the system of production and consumption. It is with the figure of the criminal, too, that those supposedly overcome through middle class practices of refinement return, with their own pretensions to status and narcissistic identifications, in

²⁵ I have been aided in the development of this chapter through reading of Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, Rene Girard, *Violence and The Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), Rene Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Andrew J. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), Mark Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," in *October 80* (Spring 1997): 3-26, Slavoj Zizek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* and Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

ways so ordinary as to provoke Taiwanese, lest they be left in despair, to enact a defining sacrifice.

A note on transliteration: I prefer to use the more or less standardized form of *pinyin* for most mandarin expressions recorded herein. However, when the name of the person or place (e.g., Lee Teng-hui or Taichung) can be recognized in its Wade-Giles Romanization by readers in some respects familiar with Taiwan, I will follow this system.

Chapter 2: Mysterious Photographs

This is Not the End

By Taiwanese reckoning the right age for marriage ranges between 29 and 32, for men, and 26 and 29, for women. By this time of their lives young men are supposed to have completed military duty and made serious headway toward their business or professional development. Young women should have gained some working experience, perhaps some foreign travel, and a coterie of close friends. As might be expected, the norm is neither always easy to attain nor always desirable. Jobs that go nowhere (that is, nowhere within the desired imaginary of somewhere), families that demand rather than furnish support, and just-plain injuries incurred (emotional or otherwise) in the process of scholastic competition (a competition rigged so that most fail, despite and because of the injunction to compete) make consummation of the ideal difficult even for those who, on the face of it, appear able to, as Taiwanese say (in 1997) “make it” (in English). The fact that people in their twenties sometimes find intrinsic pleasure in their pursuits (including those sanctioned, such as travel, and those not, such as gambling) and the fact that marriage denotes increasingly serious demands on the individual (including child bearing and rearing, mortgage obligations, care for two sets of parents, and the complications of in-laws) renders the construction of a pre-marriage, available self not always desirable. Nonetheless, most make the leap. When they do, professional photographers give sanctified, successful form to their rather sudden, though prepared for, change.

As a requisite element of idealized (i.e., normal) marriages in Taiwan, professionally produced photos cost “at least” 30,000 NT (New Taiwan) dollars. They

are considered the “least expensive” of the items (rings, clothing, honeymoon, gift cakes, and banquet) which, when totaled, are expected to cost, again, “at least,” 360,000 NT (circa 1997). For this reason professional wedding photography is not a small business in Taiwan. On Taichung’s San Min Road (a road famous for its wedding photographers), there are 40 shops that cater specifically to this clientele. Far from simple photography studios that possess a few samples and a plain studio, these production units appear decked out in the full regalia of bourgeois interiors that reflect (consciously or not) the forms they help produce.

Outside studios sample books, huge reproductions of distinguishing photographs, mannequins in dinner jackets and dazzling gowns (perceivable through windows), and warm, welcoming doors of wood or glass (often lined with gold finish) beckon perspective customers who come, usually, in tandem. Inside young women in identifying uniforms of short skirts and trim tops assist perspective customers by serving tea, presenting books of sample photographs, and discussing prices and possible forms of pose, costume and background that would be most appropriate for soon to be wed couples. This service takes place inside fantasy interiors of stone walls, high mirrors, matching furnishings, chandeliers and other combinations of upholstery, lighting, and finish that constitute a possible sitting room or, even, a showcase bedroom.

Sums spent generally cover a day devoted to modeling and, perhaps, travel that begins around nine or ten in the morning with hair styling and makeup. Most studios have beauty salons where engaged couples get groomed for daylong sessions. Often grooms provide their own suits while brides are dressed from gowns chosen from stores

of costumes that might, in a large studio, fill a twenty by thirty-foot room. Studios usually provide several change of costumes that brides wear on wedding nights, including evening dresses for banquets and post-banquet festivities. In addition to garb, costume jewelry is provided-- though many brides wear heirlooms or gifts of gold jewelry.

Once couples are groomed, massaged (as part of the styling), and dressed, photographic sessions begin. If sessions occur, in full or in part, within studios, photographers make use of a wide assortment of props and backgrounds to give photographs the aura of status and nostalgia that serve to enfold couples within commonly desired scenes-- serving to make couples the object of desire for others that they wish to be for themselves. For example, couples might be photographed against backgrounds of white or red brick (all produced from paper), windows (fogged to preclude the world of commerce taking place outside), and various colored backdrops, while toasting each other with brandy glasses (usually filled with tea), with vases, flowers, and small children (usually gazing up at admired brides) and next to cameras-- a favorite of photographers in their own preoccupation with the charm, status, and instant-nostalgia of their favorite things.

Nostalgic photographs demand change of costume into dynastic outfits. Well schooled in pre-Republican, high-culture forms, most Taiwanese can match costumes with dynastic periods very accurately. These costumes come complete with headgear, and they are shot against appropriately nostalgic backdrops such as an imagined interior of a nobleman's house. If the nostalgic moment sought is not located in dynastic history but in the history of the Republican era, the film is usually changed to black and white to

give an immediate aura of, usually not 1950s Taiwan, but, as seen in the movies of that period, 1930s Shanghai-- the high point of pre-takeover bourgeois culture. While the Republican period is often displaced into the 1930s, colonial-era Japanese costumes can be donned for the effect of status in a self-consciously localized Taiwanese history-- an effect possible because wedding photography in a nascent but contemporary form came to Taiwan with Japanese colonization and because the Japanese period appears removed in ways the Republican period does not, as yet.

In addition to studio shoots, trips to sites endowed with scenic significance, including temples and nature parks, are arranged. On nearly every day of the week, the state-built Confucius temple in downtown Taichung or the wooded areas of the campuses of the two universities in town have couples performing before cameras in makeup and heavy clothes. Children gather around, and people stop to watch brides grapple with gowns as grooms keep formal exteriors. The effect of natural scenery are soft backgrounds of color and foliage-- as if marriage were of nature itself (though, to be sure, a nature tamed and accessible). With distance from the studio equaling distinction, couples might appear in a boat in a lake with an aura of forest and mist enveloping them-- provided they paid for the privilege.

Throughout the production process of couples in scenes considered "beautiful" (*mei*) and, in a circularity of logic, desirable, photographers possess authority equal to their calling. Not only do they command gestures (often with simple movements of fingers) and choice of lighting, film, and props from assistants, photographers (almost always male) are of the few in Taiwanese society, aside from pop music stars, who can wear long

hair, black clothing, and, say, boots. In fact, they are more or less required to approximate the appearance of the imagined “artist (*yishu jia*)” as they produce “artistic (*yishu*)” photographs of couples. In this circumscribed condition they become socially sanctioned others (in that they are not, in general, part of any given couple’s circle) who, by desiring for the couple (as demonstrated by the creative and certain commands of shoots) what they already have, draw couples toward what *they* want: something memorable, unique, and *mei*-- but not unintelligible.

After a day of pampering and obedience, couples are usually tired but happy. I have only heard of foreigners who have gone through this process and become aggravated. For most Taiwanese the process is part of the “at least” of marriage and must be conducted with the seriousness they intend to bring to their new roles. At shoots grooms get called “*laogong* (old man or husband)” more often than not. As such they stand required to help untangle dresses of brides and to make certain, with vigilant but composed activity, that brides remain satisfied and centered in the proceedings.

Within a week proofs are ready, and couples must select images they wish to include in their marriage photograph albums. Almost always helped in the selection by family members, at this moment a combination of embarrassment and mastery regularly prevails. Embarrassment stems from shots that fail: *laogong* closed his eyes, a gaze fell too obviously on a nose, a background did not fit, some body part appeared odd. Eliminating unwanted images couples apparently become masters of their own representations. The capacity of photographs to render inaccessible social, technological and historical relations makes possible the assertion of the truth of couples-- a truth

posited for posterity under the names of “beauty (*mei*)” and “handsome (*shuai*).” The mastery remains only apparent, however. For as family and friends help by locating the images in desired and imagined locations (by saying, for example, “You look like a classic Chinese beauty in this one” or “Your husband could be a model for Pierre Cardin”) the prefigured positions make their presence known.

At this time or earlier, couples settle on English words for inscription on their photos. This practice has become popular in recent years. Many couples select such English language songs as “We’ve Only Just Begun.” Sometimes they settle on their own phrases, creating beautiful (while not always grammatical) English phrases. Usually in shots of brides photographed alone, the phrase, though grammatical, that I have most often encountered remains “I love how you love me.” A double desire marks such phrases: first, brides love that they stand desired; second, the language of expression, English, manifests what would sound wrong in Chinese but what sounds right from the encoded (in the photographs themselves) trajectory of couples into the realm of international, middle-class style. This double desire and its seduction matches the general project of the wedding photos insofar as brides realize their purpose as desirable in the desire of husbands to have *mei* brides and couples realize their desires to be desired within bourgeois interiors and an affirming nature-- always under the direction of knowing professionals.

A balance and perfection of form and content finds expression. A twenty second TV commercial for wedding cakes depicts this moment (and the run up to it) through the image of a teeter totter. The spot begins with a man on one side of a teeter-totter and a

woman, gazing away from the man, on the other. In the next shot they appear sitting separate but balanced in mutually exclusive interiority. The music becomes playful as they notice each other in the next shot. The teeter-totter becomes unbalanced; the man moves toward the woman; the woman moves away; they play tricks. A montage shows them laughing, unbalanced, and watching. The man falls away. The music becomes soft. They appear suddenly side by side, cheek to cheek, off the ground, and on one side of a balanced teeter totter only! The music becomes anxious. The man walks away. The woman is left longing-- balanced against nothing. By the next shot she regains her sense of enclosed self; she lifts her jaw. Just in time the man returns with the bride's wedding headgear. Wedding bells ring. He crowns her. She smiles and stares straight into the camera in a close-up reminiscent of wedding photographs.

The voice over begins, announcing the names of the cakes. The couple appears standing at the center of the teeter-totter, temporary masters, balanced and balancing. In the next sequence the couple, in their wedding-photo perfection, is replaced by two cakes, one white and one red, teetering back and forth.

Like cakes, photographs substitute for couples through dissemination-- a dissemination achieved through regular mail and, nowadays, through internet postings to friends and relatives (often abroad) who cannot attend. They also take the form of name cards that announce couples and come complete with small, professionally produced photographs. Photographs of couples in costume are sometimes given to guests at banquets. More ubiquitous than this practice remains the sight of huge (perhaps 30 by 40 inch) framed photographs that serve to welcome guests as they sign their names to guest

books and fork over red envelopes. Such enlargements stand nearby as couples see off guests via receiving lines. Any resistance and any unhappiness become as invisible as inappropriate photographs. Only smiling, happy, desiring, and desired couples and their positively enthusiastic representations remain.

Yet, as most everyone in Taiwan will admit, these moments of perfection and symmetry pass. In fact, they must; for photographs are designed to affix newly weds not only to dream worlds of middle class consumer culture but to preserve the official perfection of “youthful beauty” forever-- a forever measured by knowledge of aging registered in photos only by comparison. Taiwanese sometimes say photographs are “cruel [*canku*]”-- insofar as they measure, by their very lifeless-ness, the decay of symbolically *and* biologically functioning beings. To preserve the semblance of perfection, photographs are returned to again and again-- especially when new acquaintances turn up. When photos are shown, the same talk inevitably surfaces: “My husband looks like....” or “You look like....” Kept in bound and gilded albums, wedding photos serve to reiterate a moment of imagined perfection that is often longed for “ten years (the number usually mentioned in advance) after.”

A poignancy attends the passing, and some do their best never to leave the imaginary despite and because of the lifeless-ness. The houses, cars and accouterments of commodity culture in contemporary Taiwan allow the imagined circumstances of photographs to be realized everyday, for more and more, in ways impossible only twenty years ago (interestingly, the moment when this form of wedding photography began to become “very popular”). In magazines such as *Mei Jia Zhi* (literally “beautiful home

magazine” but simply *Home* in its English subtitle), young married women appear in smocks, trim dresses, maternity outfits and next to dressers, on beds, or on their backs reading. Men appear as businessmen calling the shots on their telephones or stretching out from a day at work. Divided by occasional articles entitled, for example, “The Final Secret Space” or “The Nest of the Modern Beauty,”²⁶ these images place couples in a never-ending course of commodity purchases and images-- all the while at “home” in the picture. Photography studios play their part in the perpetuation by offering, usually for only 10,000 NT, to take pictures and create new books of couples after, say, ten years.

Another wedding cake commercial puts the message to newlyweds straight: “Marriage is another beginning of love” and, then in English script, “This is Not the End.”

Marriage, a Photographic Pre-History

In its twenty seconds the teeter-totter commercial for wedding cakes appears intelligible because marriage has a certain, prefigured pre-history in the Taiwanese imagination. Within this pre-history photographs function to posit mutually aloof but (no doubt someday) available pre-marrieds and make palpable desiring, disruptive, and weighty gazes.

What might be called the initial stage of being for oneself cast against knowledge of another’s desire (be it of the opposite gender or the social system) can be detected in the following story told by a young woman in her early twenties about a not unusual occurrence at a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant:

²⁶ *Mei Jia Zhi: Home* [Beautiful Home: Home], vol. 4, October, 1997.

He talked for a long time about improving his life and career. He asked me some questions about investments and if I wanted to help him. I let him know I didn't want to start my career so early. Although neither of us spoke of this topic again, I still felt him trying to convince me.

We talked for awhile about our ideas of future and family. He wanted to know my plans. I told him about how I want to work hard for my parents after I graduate because they have done so much to support my life, and, because of this plan, I might not get married. I told him, if I get married, my freedom would be gone, too. He laughed at my idea. He questioned me about my parents' opinion.

I said that they want me to be happy and to have my own career. He asserted "Parents never want their children to not get married. Besides, what will you do when you are old?"

I said: "To be honest, I don't plan to live very long." But his question had a point, so I asked my mom later.

Except for the part about marriage, she agreed with everything. Parents always think of kids as children.

That day when we left the restaurant, he asked me: "Are you happy with your life?" I said: "Yes." And I suddenly knew that I had achieved my goal already. I am an easily satisfied person. He said to me: "You are negative and objectless (*wu mudi de*)."

I started laughing. Everyone can choose their own lifestyle. Can't they? I suppose I'll live a simple life for now, but I might change my mind.

Without an object, as he says, she has her own style and satisfaction that she knows she wants to preserve. If this condition is to be preserved, she must enact an aggression against the world-- registered, as it sadly (though unnecessarily) often is, against her own body; for she seems to understand that if she chooses the easily satisfied life, serving her parents and pursuing her career, she has freedom but not her life. In any case, as *he* says in knowing discovery of his object, she is "negative and objectless." She leaves the proffered and prescribed choice without choosing-- for now.

Like the choice of Taiwan to modernize, this choice might be called the "choice of the necessary."²⁷ As such it shapes the lives of unmarried people (both male and female) in Taiwan during the period of increasingly unbalanced and, therefore, hazardous relations. For most middle-class young people, the end of college means a sudden jump into the "real world." This jump is often dreaded. For men it means mandatory military service; for women it means more pressure of the sort described above. The pressures remain, however, mutually applied. Military service is rarely, if ever, resisted-- not only because of strict penalties but because young women generally believe that a man "must go into the army to become a man." On the other hand, the time after college begins a countdown for young women. They know that if they do not get some money, travel, and friends fast, they'll be lost because the message is clear: if you're over thirty, you're probably too old and too ugly to get a good man.

²⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 372-396.

For many young people the choice to represent oneself in a recognizable, premarital form begins with a realization of the loss of the apparent certainty, comfort and happiness -- all adding up to “*keai*” or cute-- of childhood. It is not uncommon to hear young people say: “I don’t know when I became so ugly in photos...” The danger of withdrawal attends this sensibility, a possibility furthered by photographs of happy childhoods that seem at odds with the complications of the real world. Memory for what, at least, should have been seduces in this way. Regarding photographs representing innocence and its loss, I have heard it said: “Memory is like sex, you need it but are afraid of it” and “Memory is like a river, no source and no end.” At times the seductive memory “indulged (*chenni*)” in is not that of childhood but of junior and senior high-school. Young people recall the “simple” life (“study and play [*dushu youxi*]”) of school. Often, for young people who attended single-sex schools, imbedded in these experiences were little crushes and feelings of intimacy that only a few remain prepared to preserve into and beyond college; for the recently arrived objectifying discourse of alterity [i.e. homosexuality (*tungxing lian*)] hits many young people with a shock of recognition-- propelling denunciations (often to other college friends) of an intensity equal only to their earlier feelings.²⁸

To get things straight, as it were, it is not unusual to hear of young women, for example, who purchase popular, America-originated but Taipei or Hong Kong published,

²⁸ The shock of homosexuality hit the Taiwanese public squarely during the early nineties, leading many people to question their sexuality and their relationships, especially their relationships with classmates at single-gender schools. Such portrayals of homosexuals as found, for example, in Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* and Qiu Miaojin’s diary, *Mengmate yishu* (Taipei: Lian He Publishing, 1996), lead the way and furthered public interest.

“magazines for men”—e.g., *Playboy*. Most young women I’ve talked with say these magazines are not obscene. They like the articles and “get useful information” about sex from them. Seen through these magazines, sex is said to be “healthy” and something that must be “faced (*miandui*).” Believing their parents do not want them to read these magazines, young women always have emphasized to me the difference between generations signified by their clandestine acts. And yet, most parents I know in Taiwan also feel the pictures of the women are “beautiful” and “natural”—although adult men recognize the danger, for themselves, of getting lost in these images.

Certainly it remains worrisome for parents that children might start reading them too early. But when stories are told of youngsters doing that, the young people discussed are normally still in junior or senior high school and, therefore (as it is understood), easily distracted from the course of study and play set for them. While believing they are surreptitious (thereby intensifying the exciting and inciting sensibility of difference from earlier forms of familial immediacy), it appears that daughters and sons who are in their early-twenties are doing very little to upset the “natural” order of things.

However, though common on campuses, actual sexual relations are dangerous (and, like memory, seductive) because they defile women in particular by putting them outside the possibility of pure representation. For this reason, women who have intimate relations with boyfriends often feel depressed about their prospects as boyfriends face the military and long-term stays for study in the United States or elsewhere. Many people believe that women who are not virgins can be detected immediately from signals that

they send unbeknownst to themselves and that “good” men will naturally, as it were, not pursue them for marriage-- though they might try to “take advantage of them” and “play with them for fun only.”

While responses to sexual experience, of course, vary, “purity (*chunjie*)” possess great importance for most young people, as it does for their parents, because that which is “pure” appears to be both intact and innocent in a world that ceaselessly divides and appears far from pure; moreover, as will be shown in the next chapter, it is a character trait attributed to them during childhood by adults all around them. Apparent from the standpoint of young people fresh from a world designed, though difficult and fraught with its own hazards, for them, the real world (as they view it with the sensibility bequeathed them) appears complicated and impure, an un-welcoming place. As they face the world, the media drives on, formulating ever-more intense and seductive patterns of identification for young people. Of course, industry seeks identification with their representations for the purpose of sales-- a purpose that is, like the link of wedding photographs to the social order of marriage, taxing and transforming (e.g., from uniformed students to stylish moderns).

It is within this condition of desire for “pure” selves and ceaseless inducements to new forms of life that many young women (again, in particular) pay two to three thousand NT dollars or more for professional photographic help. Since the early 1990s, studios have shot up for the purpose of photographing young women before they are married. Often clothed in lingerie and other “sexy (*xinggan*)” outfits, women are made to match the representations swirling around them. The collections produced are called *xiezhen ji*.

In its most literal translation the word *xiezhēn* means “writing truth” and *ji* means “a collection of.” People in Taiwan who I have talked to, however, do not like this translation: “a collection of written truths.” They prefer, simply, “photographs.” But there is more to this phrase than an equivalence so easily expressed. In particular, in its present usage the phrase made its appearance about ten years ago (late 1980s), drawn, as I have been told, from Japanese in which it means “photography.” Perhaps drawn itself from Chinese like other Japanese neologisms, the phrase has a more familiar dictionary-Mandarin meaning of “to draw or to paint a portrait.” Its appearance on the Taiwanese scene corresponded to the professionalization of the practice of taking “artistic” pictures of young women (“like the stars”), usually by friends of both genders, which began to become widespread in popularity when people started to afford cameras in the 1970s.

These portraits of written truth often become “internal objects” for many women.²⁹ Inside wallets or purses, where once one may have found black and white photos on state-issued ID cards (identifying the personage with the state), one can now find small, softly focused identifications with specular images that appear intelligible precisely because they match the pre-formed form that commodity culture makes use of to reproduce itself-- i.e., through the sales of mass-manufactured items to walking composites of modern integrity.

Young women who keep images locked in their purses can gaze comfortably at their resemblance-- allaying their anxiety about their form in the world. Yet, the totality

²⁹ Please compare with Ann Anagnost’s discussion of “the internal object” in *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China*, 172-175.

that they keep to themselves, despite its social sanction, must be protected. In most cases parents and teachers should not learn about them. Young women prefer not to show them indiscriminately to their male peers either, but they can be shown to close friends of the same gender. By holding back the representation, the image gains power in most every case. In this sense, holding back representations equals the effort to “not get too close” (as seen in the teeter-totter commercial when the couple only came as close as cheek to cheek). For to let men get too close to the representation appears to risk a joke or other comment that might compromise the status of the ideal.

Most people do not seem too concerned with this rather natural, as it were, narcissistic (*zilian*) condition of young women. Without hint of critical comment, *The China Times Weekly* of October 5th through 11th, 1997 filled its cover with a photograph of a young, semi-nude woman, clothed only by a wrap, half draping her buttocks, which is held lightly and dangerously (it should be assumed) by a hand hidden from the camera. She faces away from the lens, her hair tinted red (for that “Western” look), smiling into a mirror. It is certain that she smiles because the mirror faces the camera, revealing her smiling and somewhat disconcerting (insofar as the mirrored gaze shows slightly discolored teeth that might bite) face. When I showed this to people in Taiwan and asked them about it, men glanced at it (one man said he likes the internet [implying its pornography] better) and women (to a one), after studying it, assured me that she is a “Japanese girl.” The meaning of this phrase is not entirely that she is not representative of Taiwanese-- though this is the surface meaning for the foreigner-- but that she is

something other, in herself desirable, and, therefore (as the term and practice of *xiezhen* appears available for use), a form worthy of approximation.

Most young women do not go so far as to model their backsides for *The China Times Weekly*. But many in their idealized form become elevated objects of desiring gazes. Young women serve, for example, as models for photography clubs. Some women make around three thousand NT dollars for an afternoon of posing before objects that possess the symbolic integrity (measured against the real world) that they are supposed to possess— e.g., temples or scenes of nature. Each “model” (as they are called in Taiwanese) is set before seven or eight, almost always, male photographers. The photographers strive to obtain the best photos as judged by the teachers of the group, usually experienced male photographers who are married or who have passed the best age for marrying. The photographers who pay teachers through club fees are generally nearly the same age as or a little older than their models. Such photographs can be taken because young women get paid. It is said that they make easy money, “just being themselves,” and no one who takes part believes that they are defiled doing that. However, the code of ethics of the photography clubs prevents photographers from, as they say, “stealing shots (*toupai*)” of young women who may be shopping or otherwise engaged. To purchase telephoto lenses for this purpose is to act pervertedly. The direct line of desire and its satisfaction rather runs from photographers, by way of the consent of subjects to be, as they prefer to be, subjectified and back-- all structured and graded by those supposed to know the finer aspects of photographs. Elevating their practice of what they do without

their technology everyday, photographers and their models achieve a perfection of sanctified form.

Everywhere images of young women in their seeming integrity of form and content can be seen mediating a world beyond. Often this world beyond includes places abroad in addition to local temples and natural scenes. In a magazine published by one of Taichung's leading construction companies (in English: *Sun Splendor: The Land of Art*), I discovered photographs of a young woman I knew several years before publication of the 1996 issue. Like her friends at the time, she spoke often of travel. Apparently her dreams were realized for herself and the world; for inside she appears with a text written by her about her journey to the scenic wonderland of New Zealand. It begins like this:

When the speed of the plane began to drop, gradually strolling over the craggy peaks, spotted with white snow, (I) carefully glanced at what (I) originally thought were flocks of sheep. A child's story makes flocks of sheep familiar; at this place I will actually have contact; this is the country of long, white clouds-- New Zealand.³⁰

While it should be noted that New Zealand is quite famous in adult travelogues for its flocks of sheep, the young woman signals that she will go beyond childhood stories to make contact (no mention made of her Taiwanese tour group). This specific role for young women depicted in the American movie *Contact* and quickly replicated in Taiwanese TV commercials in 1997 is given obvious and immediately intelligible form in the four photographs attending the article. On the first page she stands on a lakeshore,

³⁰ I withhold the citation in order to conceal the identity of the woman.

mountains, houses, and yachts in the background, her fingers spread in the universally recognized (in Taiwan, anyway) “V” of victory. On the second page rests a photo of a university building, cherry trees in blossom— the kind of site of culture that many in Taiwan (including construction companies) hope to replicate in their own institutions. Below that is a shot of her holding the back rail of a ship that is obviously leaving a glaciated bay. She stands before the mist and snow and water, comfortable and at ease. On the final page stands a photograph of a high mountain (rock and ice) valley without a single soul in sight.

A recognizable pattern issues from these photos as they move by way of mediation to things, places, and people as yet (as they always must be) outside the jurisdiction of everyday life. As a copy of the ideal of beauty and youth, the image of the woman links the audience of middle class (and those aspiring to this status) to that which is beyond; for in the final and recognizable instance, the New Zealand imagined gives way to an unaccountable vastness-- a vastness normally not referenced by everyday photographs.

According to the strict norms of Taiwanese photographic practice, people should not be absent from “scenic (*fengjing*)” photos. Despite and because of the normative restriction on “scenic photographs,” this vastness remains understood by both viewers and subjects themselves. I have seen women consume such images and rate them (and themselves) according to scales of beauty. Men, in their turn, often speak of these images as *xurong* with a sense of telling irritation. *Xurong* is most often translated as vainglorious. Yet this translation does not exactly express the sensibility connoted by this

term. One teacher of computer science and father of two boys translated it as “virtual glory.” The sense of virtual explains the appearance only, a false-ness *vis-à-vis* the real; for as the photos and their entailed prohibitions suggest, beyond the appearance lies vast and empty space-- akin to the sublime. This sense is captured by *xu* as well. *Xu* denotes emptiness and a void. The double sense of appearance-concealing (and anticipating) a void that is, despite itself, honorable or glorious and, as the term *rong* suggests, luxuriant and teeming, matches the feeling of irritability expressed when the term is uttered by men. Irritation occurs because the image will not go away. And yet, despite the sense of dismissal connoted by the term, men generally do not want it to go away. Rather, the irritant as it irritates also excites people (of both genders) to look-- seduced, as they are, by signs of nothing doubling as everything.

Young, mediating signs know the vastness, registered as recognition of finitude; for the glory of mediation passes quickly, and disappearance from the frame remains assured provided moves are not made with haste toward marriage. Women nearing 30 become “nervous (*jingzhang*)” about what must be accomplished. As one young woman said to me when we spoke of this topic: “We have no time to see through great nature (*da ziran*).” Rather, the natural decay imagined remains permanently present, motivating movements in time. The rousing fear of the appearance of nature suddenly striking them from their place gets expressed as the fear of the criminal (see chapter seven) and of the undifferentiated crowd. The young woman continued: “...if you live in a modern city, you may be shot by a stranger passing you or maybe the nervous air of the crowded city will make you unable to breathe-- oh! That’s really death!”

By creating a form distinct and pure, the face of the photo conceals the real.

However, despite the apparent perfection of these often internal objects, young women speak of themselves as missing something in a symmetrical inversion of the irritation and excitement experienced by their gendered-other. The question is often put: Why am I always questing for love? Such a quest that posits the cause as the supposed answer puts a defect in otherwise perfect plans. I know young women who have vowed to stay together as friends and let no man disturb their perfect circle-- if one does, he must, as they told me, take them all on any date. But resistance of this sort usually does not last long. Schools and jobs change. People move. The more common scenario is that a young woman, imperfect in her longing for someone who will love her, finds a suitable other but this other is simultaneously preoccupied with someone else and so on. The hazard of broken hearts appears here. And what is broken, if not the spell of correspondence of dream/image to reality and the resulting loss of that which was never had?

The gendered-other becomes a savior in this socially-mandated condition-- a point made by the extraordinary (albeit logical) success of the film *Titanic* with young women in Taiwan in 1997. (It should be noted that the film also demonstrates that the best savior remains a sacrificed one). Groomed to fit this role from youth, young men who aspire (as they are conditioned to aspire) to middle class standing begin early in life working diligently toward the mandated aims of their education. As they progress through the education system, they, as one teacher and mother of a son told me, "feel all the eyes of their family and even their neighbors watching them." As they pursue their mandated

aims, they become “useless in anything but study (*sheme dou meiyou yong zhi hui du shu*)” and play— often basketball. Seeing their sons desiring above all to return the gift of their care to them via success, mothers return this gift of earnestness with snacks, tutors, discipline and words of encouragement (a devotion that discloses the intense pleasure attached to young sons). Young men are not, as noted, believed free of their mothers until after they have completed their military service and become “strong men (*qiangzhuang de nanren*).” Once they are men, other women can substitute in important respects for their mothers. It is common to hear young men considered “poor” and in need of a woman “behind” them. Lest this seem unattractive, young women often describe the most attractive men as those who “do not have time for play because they are too busy working.” To be sure, busy men are perceived as potential saviors because they can provide the house and the life young women imagine themselves living. But this does not entirely explain the condition. For example, while I have known young women who earn more than can be expected from most men as independent businesswomen, I have been told that they hope to “marry a successful businessman.” The image sought is the man, admired by both secretaries and senior managers, who needs a beautiful wife to match his imagination and to stabilize his position in the symbolic hierarchies of work and family.

When young men and young women find each other, the camera can play an important role in heightening bonds of eroticism. As common as the marriage photographers working the campuses and temples of the city are young, unmarried couples. Young men carry cameras and tripods, playing the role of amateur

photographers-- a role significantly relinquished at marriage (i.e., the moment of officially sanctioned transformation) to the professional. Movements in this encounter are scripted, too. In particular, as a given man adjusts his camera and its functions (demonstrating the mechanical competence he is supposed to have acquired as part of his mandated education for work in the productive machinery of consumer culture), he can (and should) hold his gaze well past the normally accepted span of time-- intensifying the desire of his counterpart. He can make minute gestures with titanic effect because the gaze, mediated by the camera and its lens, has been given social sanction, held up, as it were, by an invisible hand. These moments are considered very exciting-- almost beyond words.

Nonetheless, it remains that for most young people the choice of spouse becomes primarily practical. As one mother of five children told me, "they see their friends getting married one by one" and suddenly the choice of the necessary, put off until now, makes itself most apparent. With time nearly up, both men and women are heard to say: "I picked this one." It is not that the practical choice is without romance; rather, it is simply that the finality it spells for the imaginary world of love and dangerous play and, simultaneously, the beginning of household building and biological reproduction intrudes.³¹

³¹ Those who never get married and fail to ensure "the survival of society" hear about it in just these terms. Unmarried women past the age of thirty get asked about marriage by nearly every man, usually married, that they meet. Interestingly, I have known several unmarried women past the age of thirty whose books of photographs are stuffed with photographs from everywhere in the world. They say with authority, for example, that "Banff is better Glacier"-- that is, they are experts on the world of tourist destinations. They may also preserve their friends, traveling as groups, taking pictures along the way, and keeping their "satisfactions" enclosed and in resistance. Similarly, I have known

The Family in the Photo

Much of the work of linking people to families and families to families-- i.e., the production of a social fabric in Taiwan-- occurs through the use of family (including wedding) photos. Because of the power of photographs to do this, the following story of a photography storeowner and his father makes sense.

I grew up in a photography store like these two (he points to his early grade-school aged boy and girl who watch Japanese-produced cartoons on TV behind the counter). I learned everything from my father about how to fix cameras and sell them. I used to take them apart all the time and put them back together. Now it is a job. I'm not a rich man at all. My father is rich and famous. He was originally trained in Japan as a doctor. During 2-28 my grandparents had to hide him from the KMT soldiers.³² It was terrible! (His body writhes and he points his finger in admonishment). Many of the Japanese-educated men disappeared. After that he didn't dare work as a doctor. He took up photography. He said it was interesting to him. He took wedding photographs and sold cameras in a shop on Zhongshan road near the train station. Now he has a very famous collection of old cameras and Vespas...

men past the age of thirty-five (men have a longer grace period) who come under similar pressure from family members and co-workers.

³² "2-28" refers to the night of February 28, 1947 when the KMT army under the direction of General Chen Yi, began a massacre of approximately 10,000 Taiwanese, including a large portion of the island's Japanese-trained elites. Please compare: George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) and Tse-Han Lai, Ramon H. Myers and Wei Wou, *A Tragic Beginning: The Taiwan Uprising of February 28, 1947*. (Stanford: Stanford University

The Japanese-trained intellectual and medical doctor was a threat to the nationalists, but the wedding photographer was not. Nowadays, the son sells cameras that reference a past of black and white wedding photos and “good neighborliness.” The cameras that he sells actually come, not from Taiwan, but imported second-hand from the United States. Cameras such as the Pentax K-1000 or Nikon F2, moreover, symbolize an elite activity because of their earlier rarity in Taiwan. Despite and because of the fact that popular camera use occurred in other social spaces and times, many people (usually men) stand everyday around his shop, gazing on objects charged with creating culture.³³

Zhang Xiuzhen, a Hill Gates documented and named “immigrant cook” from the Mainland, tells the following story of commonality and the usefulness of wedding photographs in creating it:

My oldest son was married in 1975 to a very pretty Taiwanese girl from a big family near a fishing town in the south. I rented a small bus to drive me and about ten friends to go to their house for the engagement, so I met the people in her family and saw how they lived. They are country people, with customs different from ours. Neither I nor any of our friends could speak Taiwanese to them, and only the children could speak Mandarin to us. I can say one or two things in Taiwanese, but mostly we talked to ourselves and they talked to themselves at the engagement party. They served us a meal-- they had invited more than twelve tables of guests,

Press, 1991).

³³ It is well known that used cameras sell for twice the price in Asia than in the US.

close to two hundred people-- including the raw fish that Japanese people eat. My daughter-in-law's father had bicycled into town at four o'clock in the morning for the fish, so it was very fresh. But we mainland people don't eat such things. The father and mother announced the engagement to Heaven and Earth and their ancestors, and my son gave my daughter-in-law an engagement ring. We gave them 40,000 NT (US \$1,000) as a bride-price, and her mother gave it all back except a few thousand. I was glad of that, because it showed they were not the kind of family that sells their daughters, like some Taiwanese. We took a lot of photographs of the two families, and then we went home, taking our guests to a few scenic spots on the way...It seemed like a good beginning for my son's marriage.³⁴

Where food and ordinary spoken language failed, taking pictures succeeded in the final instance to bind families and to create commonality. While the bride-price was returned in consonance with Chinese and, in fact, local practice, adherence of Taiwanese to this custom was doubted-- as if to assert, as many Mainlanders did, that Taiwanese were not entirely Chinese. For this reason, at least as important to social solidarity as the (returned) gift of payment were photographs which served solidify bonds in a few snaps that more often than not took days of intricate negotiations to achieve. When the ceremony was complete, scenic spots were visited. By adding the nearly requisite

³⁴ Hill Gates, *Chinese Working Class Lives: Getting By in Taiwan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 127.

view/affirmation of nature to the ceremony and structure recorded, the scene was, “it seemed,” complete: a “good beginning.”

A good beginning is meant to develop, and photographs mirror and express that evolution. When photographs go up on walls, they go up in linear time-- beginning with wedding pictures and proceeding through babies, travel, graduations, more marriages, babies and so on. In the process memory becomes immobile, attached to flat objects which, as they go up, produce epic testament to the family. On the wall of the father and mother's home of a principal of a large, construction-company-owned and operated bilingual pre-school, smiling faces, siblings with classmates, new cars, New Years' celebrations, vacations, grandchildren visiting science parks and other pictures of family members (including five siblings and their children) make visible a family functioning and succeeding within the times. Within this constellation of ordered self-representations and remembrances, her parents sit everyday watching TV while their children work in the world-- all certain of their place in the family imaginary. Since the photos seemed to date from the late 1970s at the earliest, I asked about photographs from her childhood. She told me “they all got lost in a flood.” I wondered how times past could be recalled without photographic aids. Our conversation developed around this topic, and she reminisced:

With four brothers and sisters, I never lacked playmates. It was a blessing to have siblings to fight and play with because I almost forgot how bad the economy was! (laughs) My parents first had a two-bedroom house with all seven of us living together. I remember how we all slept on one big

bed my father made and played pillow fights before we went to bed. Of course, we yelled and screamed until someone started to cry, then our parents would yell at us and we would quit and lie down unwillingly (laughs). My father worked very hard every day and my mother worked even harder to take care of us. Each year we had a chance to buy new clothes and new shoes during the New Year. We did not have many entertainment products. We created our own games and toys from whatever we could find. I remember dreaming for a doll when I was little, but by the time my parents could afford one, I was already too old to play with them. All my toys were pass-me-downs from my older brother and sister, and they got them from others, too.

A stock (though well told) story springs from her: a story of playful childhoods, familial immediacy, and (just when the play was about to get too rough) hard work— all framed by an irreversible loss by flood (an unmistakable metaphor) and an irreducible (and finally unsatisfied) desire for look alike commodities of mass production that started to become available (though still too expensive for most, intensifying the yearning) while she was growing up during the 1960s.

This story expresses what goes without saying or, rather, what is said by photographs themselves; for photographs hold place for what most everyone already believes in (while knowing otherwise)— i.e., the place of people and their stories in the “miraculous” development of Taiwan.³⁵ Talk of rivalries between girls and boys, attempts

³⁵ For this reason fuzzy drawings or watercolors can substitute for early, “lost” photographs. Take, for example, the

to escape “woman’s work,” and psychological manipulations of her mother by her brothers are not brought up for the foreigner, though they might “pop up” when joking around with her family, during times of stress with her siblings, or (as discussed in chapter six) during moments of traumatic purgation and recovery in non-religious practice. Photographs that appear according to the suggested trajectory, serve to elide these memories— writing families into the official history of the times.

The writing of family histories is often a joint effort. While the gendered-division of labor is not rigorously maintained in every instance (though the exception might be said to prove the rule), in general the supposed technical mastery required of computer-programmed, Japanese-made SLRs puts husbands/fathers, once again, in the position they have been groomed for. It is often their job to organize photos at scenic sites, to take pictures according to the demands of wives and children, and to lug equipment. Often wives play the role of historians— putting pictures in sequence in large books. Large books are considered easier to put into order than the small books of photographs, bourgeois scenes, and English lettering usually handed out with “washed (*xi*)” (i.e., printed) rolls at the photography store. Pictures from every roll get selected for the bigger books. This process of elimination attends this and every transfer of photos— beginning, it should be noted, with photography stores that normally do not develop shots that fail in any way technically. Photographs deemed most representative of how families wish to be represented are often enlarged to 8X10 or 8X12. In this process, families are blown up

and placed in the center of their miniaturized worlds (next to TVs or on pianos) in gigantic buildings that encase the common homes of millions in Taiwan's middle classes.

Photographs in their central, internalized positions are useful instruments of family discipline. It remains not uncommon to hear of a college student who discovers when he or she returns home for the weekend that his or her mom has decided to put together a new family photography book that very weekend-- making certain ties remain intact. When photographs are talked about at other times, messages about conduct might be put in veiled ways to other family members. For example, one young telephone operator told me: "This is a photo of my daughter. She likes stuffed animals. My husband is feeding the baby. It proves he treats her nicely." Her husband laughed. He was made to know his place. In another instance a family photographer I have known well plans to give his children each a book of family photographs when they "graduate from high-school." Examples such as these are manifold, and they demonstrate the power of photos to corral family members.

Conversely, canny family members make use of photographs to keep themselves in the family scene despite the capacity of common social, centrifugal forces to cast them off. For example, in one family I knew well, the older-brother and his nuclear family began to skip the entire family's (*quanjia*) traditional lunar New Year festivities. Even though they are now contained in five days and removed from the agricultural slack season, these festivities remain a time of togetherness for many, otherwise attenuated families in Taiwan. In this particular case, feasts of deep-fried fish, stewed pigs feet, fish-ball soup, black-ginger chicken are prepared by the mother to be consumed with drink

and remembered time and again. Round-the-clock games of mahjong separate meals. The eldest son who normally brings his children back to the household is a crucial participant; for his symbolic status (as understood within traditional conceptions of family hierarchy) demand it. Yet, in recent years, he, his wife, and their sons have left on vacations— a move mandated by another set of operating instructions: namely, people who make money should spend some of it to travel.³⁶ Their absence has caused significant whisperings and, at times, open controversy in the family. The oldest daughter-in-law (*dasao*), no doubt knowing she takes the rap for this absence (for it is always, as the logic of the family supplement demands, the wife's fault), produced for everyone in the family on their return, several small books of photos. In the photos everyone found her son (the first-grandson) dressed in Yammi clothing, the youngest son asleep in a replica of this aboriginal people's traditional house, Taiwan's coast seen by air, and husband and wife set against Taiwan's misty, Southeast coastal mountains— the Other Taiwan.

The conflict began to subside soon after this return. To be sure, the *dasao* was careful to help her mother-in-law around the house-- making sure not to upset her, since she had a ready complaint. Nonetheless, once the photos were delivered and discussed, they became part of the family collection. The shot of the first-grandson in the clothes of the Yammi found a place on the wall. As part of the collection, the photos serve as proof

³⁶ Because their small business demands daily attention from them and because their business does not require travel to the mainland, Southeast Asia or trade shows in the US, Europe and elsewhere, they must travel when they can-- that is, when all their customers are not at work. The only time during the year when this occurs in Taiwan is during the lunar new year holiday.

of family solidarity to anyone who visits. The proof is so incontrovertible that even those neighbors in this older neighborhood who would talk about the son's absence did not for long. This is possible because the photos demonstrate the economic power of the family in addition to its solidarity. Like the shrimp, clams and black mushrooms on the table on New Year's Eve, photos demonstrate that this family has achieved surplus and can enjoy the world. As is the case with festive meals, the work of the *dasao*, like that of her mother-in-law, slips into the background-- dressing chickens and dressing children go concealed. But despite the end of the conflict, the photos must be revisited to calm anxieties, anxieties that rise partly from the fact that just as photos testify to family solidarity, their very all-too-real lifeless-ness also avers its potential absence-- that is, the ever-present possibility of family failure.

Children Through the Structuring Structures

Failure is most obviously obviated in the lives of middle class people when their children clear the hurdles of social development set before them. Perhaps the first hurdle remains that of becoming a boy. The penis of the young boy that proves it is a ubiquitous and celebrated sight in Taiwan. It is considered fine by most people for a young boy, before about five or six, to urinate whenever and wherever the idea might occur to him-- as if he knows the importance of this demonstration. Young girls can do likewise (usually with the help of their mothers), but it seems to go without the attention. This demonstration of phallic presence is sometimes made in photographs, too. I have seen several shots of boys urinating (brothers and sisters-- or mothers--watching, smiling, and affirming). I have also seen a photo of a baby (less than a month old) with a sterilized

coin (significantly, a silver dollar sent from America by an aunt) taped to his belly and his little legs held open by Daddy-- proving, it would seem, his gender and potential boon for everyone. The photo itself is considered cute and ironic. It is ironic because both parents wanted a girl to match their boy, and they both know that, nowadays, a boy is no more guaranteed to assist them in old age than is a girl (in fact, many believe girls and mutual fund accounts more reliable). For these reasons the display is nearly a parody of the excitement traditionally attached to bearing a male. But it is only nearly so; for the display of the child trapped under the weight of American money and his father's hands, however, still reveals what everyone knows the fate of this child to be.

If it seems far-fetched that a boy, in his success as a boy, might be made to signify what he already signifies, consider the case of the five-year old son of two professionals in Taichung. Because of circumstances related to his parents' career moves, he graduated from *two* bilingual pre-schools. Bilingual pre-schools and kindergartens became very fashionable for Taichung's emergent middle-class during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Often constructed and operated by building companies, they were given "American" names in imitation of established and licensed schools for expatriates, diplomats, missionaries, and well-healed locals with blue passports. In the early years especially, the newly built schools were celebrated and promoted with spectacles in much the same manner as new building projects. Events were made into galas, complete with brash lighting, parades, singers, and the presence of building company chairmen. Photos of two graduations showed this familiar pattern. Graduating youngsters were given huge gifts on brightly lit and gaily decorated stages. Boxed and wrapped, the gifts were bigger than any

single child. The parents appeared as amused and embarrassed as they are proud of their son. In each case the chairmen towered over five-year-olds as they passed out onerous goodies. Like parents via mortgages, children stand indebted to these companies and these men-- thus, the embarrassment. Furthermore, boys, in particular, are trained through toys (building blocks, plastic cell phones, erector sets) to serve companies such as these. In this sense, the huge gifts signify the already-present burden celebrated as the success of graduation.

Alert parents can also get ahead of their daughters by affixing them to the signs of fashion and beauty before daughters do it themselves. In this way, daughters (in their socially-mandated ideal images) can be contained within the family structure (as indebted to their father and mother), leap to the fore of classmates and find practice in that terribly desired and envied position of number-one. For example, when visiting the trading company office of one father, I was asked (as we sipped 100-year-old Spanish brandy that he acquired on business there): "How old do you think she is?" I saw a young woman on what appeared to be the cover of a well-known fashion magazine for young women. The woman in the photo was dressed in the popular fashions of the day-- bright colored hair, a sassy smile, and a slanting, seductive pose. I told him that I had no idea how old she was. He informed me: "It is my daughter. She's thirteen years old." Within the covers of the magazine (costing 3,500 NT) were numerous shots of the young girl in "Punk" hair, KNKY shirts (a popular style), sailor clothes, with teddy bears, and in bathing suits. Pleased with the book, her father told me:

My daughter is number-one in her class; she always studies hard. I do not have to push her. I used to push her when she was younger, but now she pushes herself. She just wants to be number-one.

We Took Many Pictures

In many of the homes I visited during my stay in Taiwan, family altars and ancestor tablets of the sort famously described by an earlier generation of anthropologists were missing.³⁷ The nearly universal exhibition of photographs and their various functions suggested the rather obvious hypothesis that nowadays in Taiwan family photographs have seized much of the power of ancestor tablets to constitute familial solidarity through the obeisance of regular practice and the physical configuration of historical progression. On several occasions I tested, so to speak, my hypothesis by bringing it to the attention of Taiwanese. When I raised the issue with mothers and fathers in nuclear family settings, the response would run something like this: “I know what you mean. We have them, but my brother keeps them. And he lives in...” usually a small town outside the metropolis. To be sure, I have known Taiwanese who have made self-conscious (are not all, contemporary efforts of this sort self-conscious?) attempts to bring ancestor tablets into the city for the purpose of daily worship. Yet, there is something exceptional about this— a quality that makes the effort, it seems, worth it. When, however, I mentioned this issue with people near the right time for marriage, I

³⁷ See, for example, Arthur P. Wolf, “Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors,” in *Studies in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 159-168; David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religion in a Taiwanese Village* (Taipei: Caves, 1989), pp. 87-102; Maurice Freedman, “Ancestor Worship: Two Facets of the Chinese Case,” in *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman*, ed. G. William Skinner

often encountered stern resistance to the hypothesis. I stood informed with great certainty, for example, that “photographs do not represent the family like ancestor tablets.” Apparently while stating my hypothesis, I over-emphasized “the family” aspect of photos-- giving rise to anxieties among my as-yet unmarried informants.

My informants usually possessed many photographs of friends, and they were placed (as they are in family homes) near TVs in the center of domestic space. These photos serve group solidarity-- solidarity realized outside both work and family settings (though members of any given group of friends might come from work or from family members). Nearly every group (including both the book club and the non-religious religious group of *Heqi*) photographs itself intensely-- giving form to its association. These photographs get shared between members. At the book club, they are shared before biweekly meetings. Amongst “poor students” each photograph taken during an outing is numbered. Classmates can choose the numbers they want reproduced for themselves. When all group members have looked through the book of “washed” photographs and registered their choices, their agents take the requests to the photo shop where they can be reproduced within a day or two.

Most adult organizations, such as the book club, take form from the “societies (*she*)” that students are nearly compelled to join, lest they lose the important socializing aspects of college life. (Students who study too hard, especially at lower-ranked schools outside of Taipei, are missing the point). Like “internal objects” discussed earlier, photographs of “special friends” from these groups can be sealed with plastic and placed

in wallets or purses, on dressers, next to mirrors, etc. This kind of picture differs from the seriousness of *xiezhen ji* because photographs with friends, especially college-age friends, are supposed to be “fun,” “maybe a little crazy.” (College-age people, in particular, must act this way because “when you are thirty or forty you will not have the energy [*meiyou liqi*].”) But even adults can “act a little crazy— just being themselves.”

Women remain free from the demands of technical competence (though surely they can use a programmed SLR) but generally destined by expectations (at odds with normal requirements only to the point that behind the silliness is supposed to be seriousness) to employ “stupid cameras (*shaguaji*)” to “grasp and preserve the moment (*zhuazhu pian ke huiyi*).” When photographs are taken, groups can squeeze together, touching momentarily in ways otherwise disallowed. These moments often remain the memory worth having, for they occur as high points in often ordinary activities (e.g., bus tours). For this reason, the camera can, I have heard it said, “make the boring fun.”

For adults and students, the unofficial but necessary social groups have important constitutive functions— providing, that most sought after of conditions, anthropologically speaking and otherwise, identity. Without such groups and their representations, one might discover more problems of the following sort— i.e., the kind of problem that emerges when everyone is dutifully slogging about in uniform without time to look (without suspicions spurred by competition) at others:

I saw a person who looked like my classmate. I waved to her, and she, recognizing me, waved back. When we reached each other, she said, “I’m

sorry. I have mistaken you for my classmate.” And, I said, in turn, “I’m sorry, I have also mistaken you for my classmate.”

The Original and the Copy

The state has done its level best to make certain crowds of the undistinguished do not clog channels of operation. Since the KMT came to Taiwan and long before photographs became nearly universally available for use in constituting familial and group relations, each citizen past the age of fourteen has been required to carry an identification card (*shenfenzheng*) and to get a new one every six years (though the latter injunction is not always followed to the letter). On these cards one finds information regarding the parents, the address, the marital history, and the occupation of the subject of the state. Everyone must have a 1.5X2 inch, studio-produced, black and white photograph permanently affixed. These photographs are also required by state and non-state sponsored organizations on applications for every type of service and employment.

It is mistaken to think that since these photographs are given to bureaucratic functions, people take them less than seriously. When people are photographed, for example, they usually do their best, with the help of the photographer, to appear “neat and clean” and “comfortable (*shufu*).” Ordinarily people do not smile overtly. The comfort and cleanliness sought are best represented with (very) slight (no-smirk) smiles and looks of earnestness. Anxious looks, un-kept hair, or any gaze appearing uncomfortable (when not checked by photographers) will certainly be noticed by family members or friends and, thus, become cause to have pictures taken again.

During the martial law era, ID photographs not only did their official rounds through the bureaucracy but they became important objects for people (in their lives and self-conceptions) outside (if it can be spoken this way) the apparatus of state. Like *xiezhen* photographs seen nowadays, young women would have their photos laminated and kept in purses. Most people would have extra photos handy for any official or otherwise need. I have seen photos of young women and men laminated together, side by side, in their official poses. One retired mainland soldier I knew had his ID photograph from the card issued him when arrived suddenly in Taiwan in 1949 blown up into a 5X8 reproduction which hangs framed in his house near photos of children and grandchildren. Quite often these enlarged ID photographs would be and are used during funerals to represent the deceased before his or her mourners. The ID photo is used because it shows an appropriately “*shufu*” portraiture of the person who, in more cases than not, suffered decline into death. If the elderly person were to have such a “*shufu*” photograph taken for this purpose, it would be considered most inauspicious.

Before the advent of post-martial-law campaigns, candidates for office appeared plastered to walls of public buildings in the ID card pose-- comfortable, earnest and similar.³⁸ Nowadays, the preferred shot is that of a candidate in comfortable middle class clothes, smiling and waving (sometimes beseeching voters) against, again, an affirming nature (usually a big blue sky with wisps of white clouds-- connoting sea breeze and, thereby, clean air around the candidate). The form is standardized in either case, and

³⁸ This shared similarity might be classified *datong* or “big similar” (as one informant translated it)-- though “unity” remains the more common translation.

candidates represent precisely what is expected. The difference: the subjects of the black and white world looked to tyrants for absolution, justice and certitude; whereas, the candidate in the multi-colored world looks to the democratic crowd which looks back at its own vacated center (insofar as the general course of things has already been determined) in the image of the candidate.

Despite this recent, colored attachment of Taiwanese (in their multi-colored distinctions) to the state through the electoral process, important remnants of the black and white state persist. For this reason to lose one's ID card(s) is a cause for panic. Not only is it cause for unwanted labor (filling out applications yet again, etc.), people feel, as one young woman told me, like "my secrets are gone." What kind of secrets? Dates of birth, graduation, marriage, names of parents, places of origin, ID numbers-- all that render individuals unique in the processes of state. They went to someone with evil intents is the fear. (The notable assumption being that the state has good ones). This condition of loss is the obverse of the deceased who, by way of the enlarged ID photograph, remains part of the public imaginary (like the once ubiquitous portraits of Chiang Kai-Shek and Sun Yat-sen), despite the loss of his or her body to the graveyard and soul to the underworld.

Because of both the power of ID cards to delineate subjects and the distribution of photographic technologies, police must be on the lookout for swindlers who, consciously or not, reverse the relation of state to individuals by conferring upon themselves identities not approved by the state or other collective institutions through photographs. To provide

an example, in a November, 1997 issue of the *Lianhe Bao* (United Daily), the following story appeared:

Super Swindler, Multiple Selves, The Honor of the Original Caught in the Meshes of the Law

A Man with a fake name Chen Yijian, accompanied by a female clerk from Danshui county office went to Danshui elementary school to handle his son's transfer papers...

When the police arrested him, Chen showed his Air Force Safety Department President's ID card and yelled at the police: "Which unit are you?" But the policemen were not fooled by Chen's ID and golden medals. They told him to stop playing games....

Chen Yujian, age 47, has a prior record for forgery... He wore a blue suit, drove a 4500cc Cadillac, lives in a nearly 100 square *ping* mansion.³⁹ His blood donation ID card shows he has given blood over ten times....He was once the Parent Teacher Student Association president of his son's school....

When police arrested him yesterday afternoon, they found he used his Parent Teacher Student Association position to cheat women and further gain financial support. Presently, Chen has relationships with two women....

³⁹ A *ping* is the common unit of spatial measurement in Taiwan. Inherited from Japanese colonizers, it measures six square feet.

According to our understanding Chen conned people into believing he was a coroner and went to a crime scene to investigate. In Taichung he made up a news car and pretended he was a journalist from Taiwan Television. He also pretended to be a medical doctor....He even had a police department Chairman's ID card....Police are requesting women who had been fooled by him to come forward to identify his crimes.⁴⁰

The photograph of his various ID cards that attends the article reveals that each card carries the same earnest, slightly smiling pose, cast in black and white, with his wrong names and phony information. Such doubling has been given the name "*fenshen*" (translated above as multiple selves). *Fenshen* can be translated literally as "to divide the self." It appears as the reverse of "*shenfen*" which officially means "one's status" or "one's identity"—designated on the ID card. Despite its official meaning, *shenfen* can be literally translated as a bit or part of the body or self. The seeming symmetry of *fenshen* and *shenfen* (diving the self [that which is false] and a bit of the self [that which is true]) is not entirely inclusive, however. For Taiwanese prefer to speak of the self, referenced by both the *shenfen* and the *fenshen*, as "*benshen*." *Benshen* means "me myself" or "this me" and commonly appears in first person narratives. During 1997 *benzun* would occasionally substitute for *benshen* in popular usage. Most commonly referring to the "original god" as opposed to the manifold of copies that populate altars across the island, *benzun* can be literally translated as "the honor of the original." People believe that the

⁴⁰ Wang Rucong, "Chaoji laoqian duozhong fenshen benzun luowang [Super swindler, multiple selves, the honor of the original caught in the meshes of the law]" *Lianhe bao* [United Daily], November 11, 1997, p. 7.

benzun and *benshen* remain intact despite the power of IDs or replicant gods to represent it in settings removed from the original-- though even this belief is troubled by the constant dickering over which "god" is the original. Nonetheless, people still keep "little bits of the self" for themselves, proving the truth of "me myself"; for, *benshen* proves a vacuous referent without attachment to some bit of material (say, a *shenfen* photograph) organized, catalogued, and recognized by higher powers that be.

This usage of *benzun* to represent the original or "true" self became quite common in public discourse during the Song Qili affair. Song Qili (Seven Powers Song) amassed a fortune during the mid-1990s by claiming supernatural powers. These powers were proven by *fenshen* photographs that showed him, for example, "flying atop golden clouds or encircled by halos"⁴¹-- forms not too unlike campaign photos. Meant to show his capacity to be two places at once, these photographs were condemned by the state as "counterfeit miracles." In October 1997 he was convicted of fraud and sent to jail for seven years. His fraud: adopting the mysterious and monopolized power of state to transform identities and create (the illusion of) miracles.

Like counterfeit money, counterfeit miracles are false because they apparently lack proving substance; *fenshen* photographs have no substantial self backing them, etc. That is, in all cases, they have no substantial equivalent *sign*-- no sign that says, for example, "in the order of the day, this *a* is *a*." But the effects of dissemination of the counterfeit prove or rather produce (through defining contrast made certain by state suppression) a true reserve of self, of gold, of history, and of miraculous happenings. In

⁴¹ Elizabeth Hsu, "'Guru' Sung Gets Seven Years," *The China Post*, October 31, 1997, p. 18.

this day of floating exchange rates and the abandonment of the gold standard, the standard of measure of what is miraculous cannot be pegged to any absolute sign (*a*) save that of its exchange value in the international trade of signs, whether they be political, economic, or academic.⁴²

Despite and because of his conviction and the floating character of equivalencies, at his sentencing, around 100 followers turned up, most carrying flowers and many crying.

Mysterious Photographs

I have never known anyone who claimed to have been a follower of Song Qili. However, almost everyone I know believes in the power of photographs to disclose not only the true identities of individuals in life (and death) stages but also the presence of ghosts, inter-dimensional travelers, unaccounted for energy fields, and other other-worldly phenomena.

I first experienced a Taiwanese encounter with the supernatural through “mysterious photographs (*lingyi zhaopian*)” in 1991. A group of young women became visibly haunted by the presence of a conventionally unattractive classmate who described the haunting of a family while she presented a photograph. As I remember it, the photo showed a family whose members appeared cast against faintly green concrete walls of a modern (built, perhaps, in the early 70s) but not a “comfortable and convenient” (built in the late 80s or early 90s) house. At the time I noted that the photograph appeared to stir feelings of fear in the students about their own trajectories: into the world of *Beautiful*

⁴² See Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*.

Home or back into the fan-cooled and unstylish world of their own houses? In any event, the representation appeared wrong. The family was not shot against flowers. They did not smile. The young women all whispered and looked at each other with wide eyes, as if noting carefully the features of each other, attempting to ascertain their own positions.

This occurrence provides but one example of the circulation of mysterious photographs in Taiwan that shadowed the development of normalized photographic practices. Within a couple of years of this particular encounter, the phenomenon would be celebrated on network television. On January 15, 1994 (coincidentally the day the book club was given official, government charter), the segment “*Lingyi zhaopian* (Mysterious photographs)” began to air during Taiwan Television’s popular, Saturday-night series “*Meigui zhi ye* (The Rose Night).” This segment became part of a longer (30 to 40 minute) segment devoted to ghost stories called “*Guihua lianpian* (A Series of Ghost Stories)” which was inaugurated on March 6, 1993— less than a year earlier. The stories and the photographs that serve as the material for this very popular segment are drawn from ordinary people across the island, effectively projecting into Taiwan’s media space what people had been whispering about for years.

The television show in which the segment fits conveys a compelling combination of cultural forms, enacted in the first place by two very popular hosts, Peng Qiaqia and Zeng Qingyu. Peng Qiaqia represents a Taiwanese aesthetic tied to the working class and passing moments of modernity. A Hong-Kong born singer, Zeng Qingyu exudes, to the contrary, cosmopolitan chic and contemporary middle class norms. Each of the two hosts has one weekly solo segment devoted to their respective aesthetic. Peng Qiaqia (the

stage-name “Qiaqia” mimics the sound of the cha-cha rhythms-- a form of “exotic” dancing that came to Taiwan with the Japanese⁴³ and is still practiced in dance halls and older parks across the island) hosts a segment entitled “Qiaqia’s Singing and Dancing Group.” Dance halls and older neighborhoods are the referent-- though the TV version is, to be sure, an ironic and sanitized evocation of the variety-show form rather than a close copy (a real close copy might, in fact, prove frightening for this show’s audience). Zeng Qingyu hosts a segment entitled “The Meeting of the Roses” in which she interviews “stars” at places such as Yangmingshan Park outside of Taipei. Conversations touch on the usual fair of middle class emotive relations: the demands of work, children, time control, beauty, the future, warm and embarrassing memories, etc.

Between these segments occur ghost stories. In this part the synthesis of cultural forms reveals itself to be a sublation into middle class patterns.⁴⁴ For as Zeng remains the same in her style and manner, Peng changes into the costume of the middle class, in particular, pull-over sweaters. Furthermore, they speak Mandarin (Peng speaks Taiwanese in his segment), and they appear very comfortable sitting centered at a tea table and chatting amiably with their guests, including one “star” and one ordinary person, on either side. Yet the sublation remains troubled. For example, made to appear rustic and removed from the sounds and sights of the city, the set appears too natural (the logs look lashed together), lost in the mountains and mist (produced by fog machines),

⁴³ During the early twentieth century, the Japanese had a major preoccupation with Latin dance forms. See Mart Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ According to the all-important indicator of audience status, advertising, the show is directed to the middle class. For example, the following items are peddled during the nearly two-hour show: lingerie, bookstores, wedding cakes,

and without climate control (the only fan never works). Week after week Peng and Zeng sit by this table and listen to stories, rubbing their “chilled” skin (Taiwanese believe ghosts leave you cold) and sharing their concern (through furrowed brows and occasional touches) for the victims. After the weekly stories, the show returns to middle class talk, music videos of pop stars, and special guests— always against this spoken backdrop of the uncanny.

The stories that are told repeat patterns understandable, if not familiar, to many modern-day Taiwanese: a money fairy that goes crazy, the shocking appearance of a dead head in a plastic bag, cars that break down without explanation, the re-appearance of a man buried too soon, a dream of a condemned Mafioso drawing a Buddha on his cell wall, a Japanese-clothed old woman tormenting new inductees, hospital beds in which patients always die within two or three days, naughty ghosts disrupting routine expectations, motorcycles that suddenly speed beyond human control, and other such “terrifying (*kongbu*)” tales.

These strangely familiar stories scare the wits out of most people. After watching them children fear the dark. Parents work at explanations. Students huddle. Many people claim the show is “too terrible” to watch. Many others, like the father of the thirteen-year-old-first-place daughter, take many of the stories as true. He told me: “I believe ghosts are real. Most of the time they have no interest in you and will not bother you.”

I asked him how he knows this, and he continued:

motor oil, beauty cream, McDonald’s, miracle mops, acne medicines, gourmet dog food, Visa cards, etc.

I saw a story on TV. An old woman was checked into a hospital room too early. During the day she was OK, but at night she took on the face of a man and spoke like a man. One night the ghost threw her out of the bed. It turns out that the ghost was the spirit of the man who died there before she moved in. Her daughters got her out of that room, and she went back to normal. How can you explain this? I think it proves ghosts.

While it remains telling that the haunting possibility of gender reversal animates him, in general it should be recognized, as the stories suggest, that much of that which is taken for granted, despite (and because of) its modern appearance, can become charged by other-worldly presences. Usually this does not happen. People go about normally. Nonetheless, such potentialities happen (often portended, after the fact, by fortunetellers), and they are sometimes captured on film. Engineers in Taiwan tell me this is possible because photography can “record low frequency energy patterns.”

Photographs recorded on the TV show range from black and white class photographs in which one student appears half missing (the “classic” ghost photograph according to long-time missionaries) to contemporary versions of the same theme: school kids on outings with “ghostly” presences standing behind them. It is also fairly common to see vacation photos of nuclear families who stand before a body of water or some other scenic site, with, strangely, a foot or limb of some member missing. Sometimes the shot will be of a child or parent alone with a headless body or a body missing some appendage next to them. Similar to this form is the shot of classmates or friends who appear to have an extra hand holding them or a hand missing as they get close for the photographic act.

A counterpart of the missing part or the extra hand is the shot of, for example, fire from birthday candles evidently exploding from a young woman's own hands as she laughs in happiness on her birthday. Other common ghostly intrusions include the appearance of "tornado-like white fog" that shows up near couples or groups of people-- sometimes taking them in. Another common form is the nostalgic shot, snapped against the ever-popular old train, for example, in which some early modern or pre-modern personage makes an unanticipated showing.⁴⁵

To give explanation to the photographs beyond the conjecture of the hosts and guests, the show employs a "Professional Student of Spirits (*lingxue zhuanjia*)," Qiu Fengsen, to provide commentary on the photographs submitted. His commentary always follows quickly presentations of stories and photographs, and the hosts and guests invariably give the "a-ha" sign through nodding heads and earnest questions, fostering a flow of associations from the expert.

The following are some examples of his commentary.

Regarding the appearance of lingering face on an otherwise simply nostalgic train, Qiu notes:

The spirits of people who died without natural causes often cling to any objects or space to find a chance to cast their sufferings. The Qing

Dynasty shadow in the train is like that. The spirit appears in a time tunnel

⁴⁵ Examples of stories and photos are taken from the following collections of *Meigui Zhi Ye* stories and photos: *Guihua lianpian 2* [A series of ghost stories 2], ed. Fengyi Cai (Taipei: Pingshi Publishing, 1996); *Guihou Lianpian 3* (A series of ghost stories 3), ed. Fengyi Cai (Taipei: Pingshi Publishing, 1996); *Yue ye yue kongbu* [The more night, the more frightening], ed. Huizhen Xie and Jinyun He (Taipei: Pingan Wenhua, 1997). Note that the photos

(*shikongsuidao*), and it happens to remain in contact with the train; it results in the picture. It is basically not a bad thing.⁴⁶

Like the aura of nostalgia itself, the time travelers just stick around their things-- and this is not too bad. Yet, when that sticking around becomes too obvious, it startles the young, comfortably-dressed man posing before the train engine and the viewers who expect, instead, behind the subject, a normally nostalgic train-- i.e., a train which has itself as its referent, not the real thing.

When a photo of a group of smiling “just being a little crazy” college-aged women is haunted by “the appearance of black hair.” Qiu explains:

This is a ghost who died without a good cause. The dead person at the moment was very ugly so the real face doesn't appear; instead a black veil covers the ghost face. Reasonably speaking, if a group of people had a lot of *yang qi*, the abnormal spirit should not have appeared. You can see the dead must have died very badly with very deep suffering. The group of people in the picture can also have chronic diseases. They should pave spiritual ways to peace as soon as possible.⁴⁷

A lack of *yang qi* (constructive energy) indicates that the group has a lot of *yin qi* (disruptive or negative energy) that allows their smiling faces to be haunted by a spirit whose suffering life is expressed in its gruesome (in this context anyway) appearance.

appear on unnumbered pages.

⁴⁶ *Guihou lianpian 2..*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

In days gone by, people would occasionally worship at small temples of *Yanggong*, the god or official of *yang*, when something had been lost. Apparently the order provided by *Yanggong* would make possible the re-appearance of, for example, bracelets, watches or even people. While nowadays in Taichung most sites of *Yanggong* have themselves been paved over, the belief that plentiful *yangqi* can assure that those who should be gone are gone and those should be found are found persists in the talk of the specialist. In this particular photograph, a ghost breaks through the normality of “making the boring fun” to make clear the potential (as the sudden appearance of troubled fate) of disease in the otherwise perfect group— disease which could cause the loss of some to death, a loss supposedly obviated by the production of the sensible, index of “true” normality called photographs.

Another tendency of mysterious photos, to render the opposite condition (not as black is to white but, more closely, when one looks in the mirror the left eye appears as the right eye) of what is customarily expected within the parameters of normality (i.e., its 3X5 photographic version), finds expression in the talk surrounding a photograph of “the upside down footprints of a ghost”— a photograph taken of two sets of footprints on a beach. According to Qiu:

This is a mysterious photograph. When I look at it, I get chicken skin (i.e., goose bumps) all over me from my feet up, and my back brain feels like needles are poking it. In the universe, the first space black whole world (*kongjian heidong*) is called the *Axiuluo* spirit field. These feet are attempting to escape the arrest of spirits. Because these spirits have exactly

the opposite footprint as humans, their footprints come from under the earth's spirit field. This is just an appearance, not connoting bad luck or connection. Whoever took this picture was just having strange relations at the time. There is nothing wrong.⁴⁸

Exciting though it may be to see the up-side down footprints of those walking the edge of another world and looking for an out, the recognition does not portend bad luck—only strange relations, the kind one might expect with those actively looking and not merely longing for a way out.

Not always do signs interpreted by the expert herald the untroubled continuation of everyday sensibilities. In a photograph of a small group of people with what appears to the viewers as a covering of smoke, the expert interprets it as a warning, thus:

White Tiger *qi* (*baihu qi*) belongs to the White Tiger star. Sometimes it connects with the family death star—indicating the worst luck. Not only will accidents happen, but they will occur constantly. When one runs into White Tiger *qi*, one should go to the *Chenghuang* temple to dissolve the bad luck. The White Tiger *qi* covered the whole person in this picture, and this indicates frequent and consistent sickness or death.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Also, a similar form of ghost photograph has been reported in the United States by Art Bell, a late night radio show host whose shows "Coast to Coast with Art Bell" and "Dreamland" reach 20,000,000 listeners nightly. In his book *The Art of Talk*, ed. Jennifer L. Osborn (New Orleans: Paper Chase Press, 1998), he displays a color photograph of a ghost photographed by a stone mason. He has this to say about it:

In looking at the photo, you'll discern what appears to be the white, cloudy outline of some being hovering in the room where this stone mason had done his work. I believe this being was a ghost. I happen to believe ghosts are spirit beings (probably spirits of the dead) which are trapped here for

Apparently getting swept away by smoke-like White Tiger *qi* remains far more dangerous than the occasional appearance of nostalgic stands-around-the-trains or escaping spirits. While a surplus of constructive (*yangqi*) power can keep repressed the emergence of disruptive (*yin*) power, the mid and late nineties are experienced by Taiwanese in terms of threatening chaos, or *yinqi*-- not to mention vapor from combustion. This spirit of disorder and loss, signaled by ominous astrological signs, simultaneously provides a link to black holes, time tunnels, and energy fields-- worlds (both horrifying and fascinating) beyond everyday appearances. While signaling the possibility and knowledge of these sites of seductive disorder (seductive insofar as the places of *yinqi* always hold the possibility of affixing people [especially those with weak spirits] to some “startling place [*jingxia de difang*]”), the expert helps produce order around these “black holes” that warp yet hold intact the time-space curve of normality. He does so by way of speech and, perhaps more importantly, through the costume (*tangzhuang*) he dons. Wearing traditional-style clothes, he is made to signify the place in the symbolic system he should (i.e., “traditional” China)-- providing a link, in the name of order, to the ceaselessly recovered (as though *it were that* which was lost) nostalgic world of traditional China. In this way, the seductive possibilities of loss via “black

some reason on earth.

Apparently, there were at least two crews on the house who just walked off the job. Eventually, this particular stone mason did the work. Yet, during the course of the work, the workers did have some unusual experiences. On one occasion, a couple of workers were going up a stairway, when all of a sudden a strong invisible force pushed them back. They toppled backward down the stairs as a result...(219,220).

holes” can be balanced by ever-available appeals to certain and enduring tradition (a *yin* and *yang* of modernity and tradition)-- despite and because of the fact, of course, that tradition, as such, appears as its own time-warp in the relentlessly modern world of contemporary Taiwan.

Moreover, conceptions of ghosts as wandering dead, quasi-scientific notions of time and space travel, and local, curative temples that already form loose but cohering patterns of associations amongst Taiwanese get expressed in the expert’s title (“Professional Student of Spirits”), too. His very appearance as a representative of a fully intact past allows the easy transfer of expectations of science and fears brought about by its transformations onto photographs, avoiding, in turn, any attachment of negative energy to himself. As he performs his synthesis and substitutions, he remains a sure figure, guiding Peng, Zeng, their guests and the television audience through what they already recognize in a hybrid-language the audience comprehends.

Appearing as frozen fragments cast into meaning by narrative, photographs are shown as they fail the terms of their own appearance-- the most common of which remains that of development, both individual and collective. While they fail, what they show, nonetheless, remains precisely what people already see, though perhaps do not know (in the same way people know “the miracle” happened): e.g., nostalgic preoccupations, fractured families, powers in excess of what are normally assumed (flaming fingers), people caught in the rushing whirl of the times, dangerous smoke threatening families and the certainty of eventual disfigurement for even the most beautiful of young people.

That which is seen but left out of the picture of normality is similar to the sensational subject of news photographs or attempts by the Taiwanese avant-garde to jar the middle class free of its preoccupations long enough to embrace new forms of living--but only to a point. In the case of news photographs that which is portrayed remains a disaster someplace else, and, if it does occur to any given person, while horrible and overwhelming, it always falls within the frame of a news story. In the case of avant-garde art, practitioners and their products can be ignored or dismissed as spiritually sick “*shenjingbing*” or, as one young woman explained to me in reference to her cropped-hair female co-worker: “they are those who are not like themselves.” Mysterious photographs, on the other hand, place the failure, the disaster, the breakup, the excess, and the extraordinary smack in the middle of normality and its representations. They are photographs of people who are, despite their attempts to the contrary, very much like themselves.

The 10% Remainder

Following the government’s crackdown against the use of photographs to prove “counterfeit miracles” of Song Qili and the simultaneous efforts of the state to educate the public in the use of faked photographs for religious and other supernatural purposes,⁵⁰ the weekly exorcisms by way of mysterious photographs were replaced by two new mini-segments (the stories are still told): “The Segment of Frightening Roads” and “Taboos Among the People of Taiwan.” The former portrays roads in remote areas of Taiwan on

⁵⁰ See Skoggard, *The Indigenous Dynamic in Taiwan’s Postwar Development*, p. 160, for an account of the use of “miraculous” photographs in *Yiguan Dao* practices in Central Taiwan.

which car accidents frequently happen. Usually locals tell their shocked stories on video of how temples were miraculously and continuously missed by crashing vehicles or how ghosts of the unnaturally dead reappear regularly. Mimicking (without humor) the semi-official, softly-focused, and very nostalgic documentaries of China that air on network TV, "Taboos Among the People of Taiwan" shows precisely those aspects of daily life left out of the nostalgic video recollections of traditional Chinese life-- for example, haunted trees that defy developers.

Despite the disappearance of mysterious photographs from *The Rose Night*, spin-off shows, such as "*Chuanhou yin yang jie* (The Busy World of Yin and Yang)," continue (as of December 1998) to air mysterious photographs regularly, and most people still believe they occur now and then. A photo shop owner tells me people search their rolls for them. Nearly everyone I have spoken with refuses to deny their existence or, at least, their possibility. One computer programmer summed up the feelings of many:

I knew some bored college students who made some ghost pictures and told stories about them. People like to believe them. They always think of bad things when they feel unsafe. Anyway, I believe there are some other invisible friends around us, and it is good to know they're true existence from the 10% remainder.

As this statement suggests, mysterious photographs (and their subject) are fascinating and horrifying peculiarities. They have these characteristics despite (and because of) the simple fact that most mysterious photographs are examples of either

fakery or technical failure (e.g., scratched negatives, poor lighting, faulty shutters, etc. that got past-- perhaps bored-- photo-shop personnel).

Faked photographs seem to compel people to answer whether the representation has been put there by someone or by a ghost-- just as certain *shenfenzhen* (ID cards) trigger the questions of the possibility of *fenshen*. Once while watching "The Busy World of Yin and Yang," a show which copies the form (two hosts, two guests, oral stories, mysterious photographs, time slot, etc.) of "A Series of Ghost Stories," with a mechanical engineer of the telephone company, we both became spooked by the semblance of a Qing Dynasty official who appeared (as everyone, in the TV screen and out, noticed right away) "walking without touching the ground" in the background of a videotape of two boys running and playing on an ocean beach in Taiwan. Because he was spooked and could not find an explanation in discussion with me, my friend took the videotape to his work place where he conferred with his colleagues about it. They agreed, he informed me, that "it must be fake." I asked if it might just be a person walking (for after all, the original image is unclear). "It is possible," he replied. A year later, after reading this very analysis, my friend informed me:

Actually, they were frightened by the film, though they would not say it. I think they just wanted the quickest explanation possible.

That explanation (like the appeal of those on the right or left to conspiracy theories or economic actors to the "invisible hand" to explain the unexplainable coincidences and relations of the world) remains that "someone had to have faked it."

Who this someone could have been is not certain-- nonetheless, someone had to have done it.

Born of the terrified need for certainty, the conviction that some make these things up for the fun purpose of scaring people is given a spiritual expression by Qiu Fengsen. When examining a photograph of a “small, curved foot” that appears behind two high-school-aged women, he notes:

The naughty ghost is a kind of funny, humorous, and playful type of spirit.

They like to play with human beings. The humans who do not have any knowledge of them often feel scared to death.⁵¹

It could be stated more accurately that ghosts terrify because people do not know about them *and*, as the expert failed to mention, because people do know of the very possibility of such knowing foolery by naughty ghosts and naughty people. Because of this uncertainty of origin, photographs and videotapes must be discussed carefully. People point to irregularities and explain them with even more intensity than that given to the normal photographs. The title of the spin-off show’s mysterious photograph segment reflects this enjoyable and irresistible fascination; for its name, “*Guiying zhui zhui zhui*,” means both “chased by the ghosts” and “chasing the ghosts.”

Similarly, people are drawn to the images because technological failures produce them. I have never known anyone who has said this, though surely it must be expected that they would not. For while people know that all photographs are produced by technology, the technology becomes meaningless (i.e., outside of the appearance of what

⁵¹ *Guihua Lianpian 2.*

is important) once the images are produced, disseminated, and put in purses and tacked to walls. When looking at a mysterious photograph, however, what one sees, in many cases, is the indicator of failure. The indicator of failure, like the reflections of everyday life inadvertently caught in images of missing parts, time-travelers, and up-side-down feet called mysterious photographs, are disavowed and displaced onto the figures of ghosts who return bringing their ill-fortune to the living. As is the case with failed social relations, once the ominous condition of technological failure is displaced onto the figure of ghosts, people express fascination with and horror of them.

This condition represents an obverse reflection of everyday life as well. For while people in Taiwan depend on “the system” (production, trade, politics, etc.) like their ancestors once depended on the weather (made intelligible through traditional almanacs and other guides to natural forces and their fates) and, therefore, both hope and believe that it must and will work (despite and because of its impenetrable mystery), the very possibility of its breakdown and its occasional occurrence (perhaps that recurring 10%) leaves people feeling alive, with a feeling not unlike “needles poking the back of the head.” The telephone company engineer described above, for instance, stands most animated in his work when the local switching machine (responsible for millions of calls) is on the blink. At those times he sometimes goes a couple days with very little, if any, sleep. Being alive corresponds to being of value; for it is at these moments when the machinery of production and the system of social relations which normally proceed apace without noticing him very much threaten to fall apart, at least partially, without him. The result is a condition like that of ghosts chasing and chasing ghosts, i.e., he works at

making impossible what excites him the most.

Perhaps it goes without saying that the phony and the failure (in the photograph and out) must be discovered, solved and rooted out. Social organization seems to depend on it. Since ghosts are attached to faked and failed objects, if fakes and failures are eradicated, ghosts disappear.

The question becomes “then what?”

Without the ever-present possibility of the specter, what work, what things, and what *non-ghostly* reality would be left? Conversely, Taiwanese generally believe that ghosts will not and must not harm their subjects too drastically; for were the subjects of ghosts to collapse, ghosts would be gone, too. Thus, humans and ghosts live in symbiosis. People, as a result, must let them hang around. Their enjoyment and fascination with them (despite and because of the horror) proves this necessity. Furthermore, they are not all bad. Nonetheless, ghosts are sometimes pretty evil—attaching themselves to all sorts of places and people. While in the next chapter and the chapters that follow, the fascinating and horrible persist as critical points around which various hope and fears of overcoming are articulated, in the final chapter ghosts take the corporeal form of active agents, haunting with a vengeance equal only to the delirious determination of society to dismiss them once and for all.

Chapter 3: Dreams of Retirement

An Effect of Success

From the time the KMT came to Taiwan until July 1, 1996, telecommunications were controlled by a government bureaucracy known as The Directorate General of Telecommunication under the Ministry of Communication. Like most bureaucracies, it has not been famous for its efficiency or its quality. Operating by and large in the background, most people in Taiwan did not complain much about it over the years, however. Service tended to get better, and the organization put in place infrastructure crucial for Taiwan's post-war transformation. Furthermore, most people did not think much about alternatives. If people cared to think about the organization at all, they generally knew that the telecommunications bureaucracy was part of the nation-building state, contained within a neo-Confucian orthodoxy and supposed to be good. If made too public (as everyone also knew), any contrary conceptions could cause the concealed violence of the nominally benevolent neo-Confucian rulers to become manifest.

In any event (i.e., in any event commonly considered worth discussion), Taiwan was becoming rich-- a fact repeatedly told everyone, both inside and outside Taiwan, rendering satisfaction or dissatisfaction secondary to the imperative to get rich. Ironically but not surprisingly, as the organization made possible accumulation of private and public capital under the protection of import restrictions and stiff duties, the telecommunications market itself became an object of international interest.

Specifically, the 1986 Uruguay round of multi-lateral trade talks called for the opening of service industries to international competition and trade. Following this round

Taiwan came under pressure from the United States to allow “access to and use of public telecommunications services”⁵² – i.e., the colonization of formerly KMT-controlled space and equipment-- by multinational corporations. The pressure on Taiwan has only increased, however, since July 1, 1996; for the assertion (which occludes any recognition of the corruption inherent to all profit taking) that the currency crisis of 1997 stemmed from the corruption and inefficiency of state-owned bureaucracies has become very powerful, as, not coincidentally, foreign investors have cased East Asia for safe, long-term investment options-- of which there are few better than former state monopolies. Thus, despite and because of the fact that expectations for future transformation (experienced as international pressure) helped create the inflation that led to the 1997 monetary crash to begin with, Taiwan has had to accede to these demands, not only creating ChungHwa Telecom but promising full privatization (which to investors means the possibility of foreign investment) by 2001. In the process the monopolies and their employees have become “bargaining chips” for entrance into the World Trade Organization.⁵³ Although the decision may be put by both foreign observers and company executives in terms of consumer choice, it is experienced by government planners as necessary because of Taiwan’s ever-precarious international position.⁵⁴

⁵² Jung-Tsang Lin, *Solutions for the Dilemma of Taiwan Telecommunication Privatization*, M.A. thesis (Dominican College of San Rafael, 1997), 61. Jung-Tsang Lin is Senior Inspector at ChungHwa Telecom.

⁵³ That the government places significant hope for its entry on this “bargaining” chip can be seen in the following news accounts: “Foreign Holdings in Telecoms to be Raised as Bargaining Chip for WTO,” *China News*, April 5, 1997, p. 7 and Marie Feliciano, “Telecom Stakes may be Raised: BOFT agrees to proposal as part of WTO talks with US trade negotiators,” *China News*, May 6, 1997, p.7.

⁵⁴ Often the argument for change is put in terms of the needs of the Taiwanese for better services. The cellular phone market is the preferred example. But, a historical reading of the problem reveals that the “need” has, as is the case with

This necessary choice spells the end of previous arrangements of relations and expectations. In particular, in order to compete with aggressive international entities, the newly-formed company anticipates (as of 1999) that it must cut costs by way of forced, “early retirement” of many of the company’s officials— an expectation well understood by employees. Such an act signals the severance of the past from the present; for it stands to break the promise of life-time employment and guaranteed pensions for officials in the company— a promise that has worked to sustain the day to day commitment of officials in telecommunications, petroleum, post, and other government-monopolized fields to the state and its technical apparatuses.⁵⁵

The Gift of Standing

most contemporary “needs,” little to do with practicality, designated as “use,” and much to do with the fashions of the times— a fashion that began as unnecessary supplement. Specifically, in the early 1990s, middle-class people in Taiwan tended to laugh at the “use” of cellular phones by their most prominent users. Gamblers calling bookies during baseball games and newly-rich land owners calling their children out of cram-school classes rather than stepping out their cars to meet them are two examples of well-known “uses” of the newly arrived status toy. The slang name given them, *Dageda*, reflects their “uses” and an ambivalence. *Dageda* refers to leaders of organized crime gangs. The term stuck to the phones because petty farmers who became rich selling land started to act out the hooligan role, learned from Hong Kong movies, through their cellular phones, trips to high-priced brothels, new cars, etc. Supposedly, the gangster would need such an instrument to secure street communication and neighborhood control, but the land owners, as the examples above suggest, shared the style but not the “use.” By the mid-1990s the demand for cellular phones grew. No longer were they “used” only by the newly rich; middle class people suddenly found them necessary for keeping contact with relatives, clients, and colleagues. Most middle class people that I know don’t laugh at this necessity the way they (with envy) did a few years earlier— even though many of the uses are the same (e.g., during a baseball game I heard a gambler answer his *Dageda*, “Mamma”). The new necessity and the demands it has created made it difficult for the telephone bureaucracy to keep up— providing an opening for criticism of its efficiency and making transformation of it “necessary.”

⁵⁵ According to the plan in place in 1997, employees who take early retirement are entitled to receive a length of service payment— usually amounting to less than a year’s pay. Most officials that I’ve talked with find this sum far too low— certainly not sufficient to buy into the “new culture” (see chapter four) world going up around them.

Known as an “iron rice-bowl,” this promise of job security and secure pensions has served as only a part of the rationale for attachment of officials to their bureaucracies. For many of the officials in the telecommunications company (the vast majority of whom are in their forties or older in 1999), entry into the company meant not only security but prestige. Educated by the textbooks of their youth to believe in the dream of a traditional Chinese culture presided over by benevolent scholars who were selected for their positions by imperial examinations, entrance into a state-owned company by way of a nationally-administered exam signified for many what they had been trained to dream about. Young people (mostly men) were guided, as well, by senior relatives who remained attuned to local memories of the gentry classes and of well-trained youth of local elite who attained positions of status and responsibility in the colonial bureaucracies of the Japanese era.

Talking over photographs with one 54 year old engineer in 1997, we came upon a black and white picture of a woman in front of a brick house, bending over a tub and scaling a large snapper for her smiling, handsome, and successful son (then 25) standing by. He said: “At that time my family was not rich. That fish was very big then.” In those days for someone from the countryside, the significance of the fish would not be missed. It served as a sign of prosperity understood not as the capacity to travel the world but as genteel ease and certainty born of state power, precisely what the title of government official promised. The only way to describe this difference is to say the fish “was very big then”; for, nowadays across Taiwan fish (dead or alive) wait everywhere to

be boiled or fried-- their capacity to symbolize affluence and status universalized and, thereby, deflated.

Likewise, many others I know in the company had their status affirmed or their expectations set by family members; for example, mothers wanted them to become "VIPs" or "receive a good education" and give their families greater local status and security. Often the young men set their eyes on other lives-- for example, "the rich man who had two wives." These dreams of security, status, and power were channeled by the government into rapidly expanding organizations necessary for the technological development of Taiwan. The exam served as the sign, linking the old imagined order to the technological state apparatus. Preparing for it took time.

Specifically, the civil service exam that served as practical barrier and symbol required sacrifice-- adding to the status of families capable of making sacrifices of time and income and of the state that accepted them. It remains not uncommon to hear of people who took up to a year off from regular work to prepare for the exam. These sacrifices occurred in times when getting by was not easy and when children, including unmarried daughters, were expected to provide outside sources of income. Looking back, however, difficulties of preparation and the weight of people watching-- in short, the details-- are largely forgotten-- except, generally speaking, at moments of remembrance that occur when trying to discipline their own children. In any case, when asked, many will recall instead the kindly help of mothers, cold well water splashed to stay awake, and "prayers to Buddha" for a passing score.

While understood as a necessity for any family seeking to advance itself through the young, the support necessary for success often remains felt (rather than remembered in the details of sacrifice) as a yearning to return the gift of care that made possible the sacrifice and step up. When looking at the black and white picture, the engineer continued: “When I look at this photograph, I think of my mother. I hope I can care for her when she is old.”

As for many others of his generation, the debt remains, and its return (i.e., its payoff) cannot be accomplished once and for all— giving rise to a hope that must be spoken by the engineer and others as a hope and never as a final “payoff (*huanzai*)” because a payoff would destroy the gift (in this case of standing and its life) and its capacity to continually produce social relations. (This sense is also captured in the phrase “*qunide* [back to you]” which is considered a most virulent form of expression-- perhaps impossible for most Taiwanese to say when angry with their parents). The recognition of others (i.e., the actual non-return return) is experienced as “*xiaojing* (the *show* of filial piety).” To produce a show of filial piety requires that both parents and children play their roles and live up to the ideal. For the elderly, the role is that of being taken care of. Once, however, they are taken care of phenomenally, care itself disappears because it is the parents themselves who should, in their superior and constitutive status, authorize, structure and regulate the caring-- thereby exhibiting their central role in the practical and totemic ideology of family life. As a result, the payback of care remains in itself impossible-- except as an animating and, at best, enchanting effect of *xiaojing*.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This emphasis on independence is itself indicative of social change; in particular, it indicates a breach between

Elderly people fear that they will lose the ability to authorize their own care-- their own role in the scene of being care for. Moreover, feeling ambivalent about the lives of their children (in the new world that Taiwan has become), they not infrequently prefer to remain independent (*duli*) despite their middle-aged children's requests that they, in this day of separate housing, move in with them for the purpose of (public display) of care.⁵⁷ The general reticence of the elderly is enhanced, too, by the belief that some die shortly after moving into the houses of their offspring "because they have no role" (save that of cook or child-care provider) in the segregated and professional (or educational) lives of parents and children. Because of these conditions, it is often considered best to defer the moment of care (i.e., the transformation of indentured young into care-giving-- life-giving-- offspring) into the future. For these reasons, the fact that the engineer's mom was already 78 years old in 1997 makes sense as it signifies a half-realized devotion to what might be considered a passing moment of modernity and its hope in late 1990s' Taiwan.

An Official's Life Deferred

As it does for many of his generation, the constitutive yearning animates and gives meaning to the actions of the engineer as he looks back nostalgically, through photographs, at the moment of entrance into the company as an official. This oscillation between anticipation and remembrance began for most officials early; for the exhilaration

generations because of social transformation that will be discussed in the following pages. In the 1970s, such a conception would be rarely, if at all, found.

⁵⁷ It is for this reason, among others, that the government and politicians have made universal retirement benefits a continual political issue during the late 1990s.

of passing the difficult exam and feasting on the praise and fish of their families tended to fade fast.

Most officials learned early that recognition of the sort experienced before entering the company would be difficult to sustain. Promotions tended to go to senior people and those with superior connections. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s notions of feigning busy-ness or grabbing power through appropriation of projects to one's own group were years away. Furthermore, co-workers would castigate anyone who attempted such foolery or individually ambitious and, therefore, threatening moves. For those exceptionally ambitious souls who sought to bring future glory close through early promotion, the correct method was (and sometimes still is) to shrewdly shower superiors with gifts-- effectively putting the superior into a position of debt to the subordinate.⁵⁸ As everyone knew, this move could be trumped by those with superincumbent, extant relationships known as *guanxi*. During the boom years this powerful form of *guanxi* was more or less monopolized by offspring of Mainlanders who had seized control of Taiwan's administrative apparatuses from Japanese-trained Taiwanese following retrocession in 1946 and 1947.

Resentment toward those willing to "pat the horse's rear (*paimapi*)" and Mainlander-dominated *guanxi* networks stewed. Spite, however, rarely, if ever, took

⁵⁸ The creation of this reversal of social relations requires skill. Aside from needing protection from the envy and ire of co-workers, the striver must also take care to make the gifts at specific moments understood as appropriate-- as though formality itself required the giving rather than the desire of inferiors; for to be given face by social inferiors is to lose face because it calls attention to the fact that all face holders depend on the assent of the crowd for their face. This is why sons cannot and must not "give face" to their fathers. Rather, the subordinate gives face by acting appropriately-- calling attention to the order rather than to one's volition in the creation of the order and, thereby, the superior as a

political form for two reasons: continual surveillance by KMT cadres working in the bureaucracies and, perhaps more importantly, the structure of the system itself. A flat system, it functioned such that even those who received promotion were unlikely to earn extravagantly greater incomes than their fellows. Officials, moreover, saw that every year they got a raise and that they were doing better, in general, than the majority of those outside the bureaucracy and that they could, by the promise of the state, project this growth into the future as retirement. Barring catastrophe of cross-straits invasion, they believed their world would probably continue indefinitely, and this belief served to calm anxieties about the actual state of being and things of any given worker.

For most officials, in particular male engineers of modest, though “educated,” technical college backgrounds, the serious matters of the daily shift, though often enjoyable, could be managed in less than eight hours. Since the number of employees grew yearly, the workload of each person tended to decrease as well.⁵⁹ Within this condition of monotony and regulated expectations, officials were given time in return for their commitment to the structures of state. Imagined in remembrance and dreams, this time took daily form in long periods of reading newspapers, conversations with co-officials, drinking tea, and sometimes napping.

Time at work was matched by time at home. Unlike petty-capitalists who spent most of their lives at their factories or who set up shop in their living rooms, officials in

superior.

⁵⁹ It is well known (in a way that troubles whenever the subject is broached directly) throughout the company that the “women’s jobs” of operator and public service representative are very demanding and monotonous— providing only strictly regulated breaks and heavily monitored work activity.

the telecommunications bureau were supposed to separate the two in a more or less balanced way. Home became a site to relax, watch some TV, and help children with their schoolwork. Many officials took up hobbies such as go, calligraphy, table tennis, travel and other pursuits deemed worthy of officials. Many became involved in Buddhism-- a religion practiced within a hierarchical structure that approximates the organization of the telephone bureaucracy. A few would take their vacations sitting at monasteries. Only a very few would, however, give up their daily routine and identity for the religious life or other leisure activities. Activities were not supposed to disrupt the functioning of state, and, likewise, the demands of work were not expected to disrupt the functioning and development of home-life. In a mutually beneficial institutional relationship, the two halves of the day were meant to be and were experienced as complementary by the subjects whose sacrifices for one made possible the emergence and stability of the other.

The complementary relationship gained temporal expression as development (*fazhan*) and its success (*chenggong*), as it found constitutional declaration in the widely propagated phrase *zhongxiao* (piety to the state and elders). Yet, the success achieved through development could best be experienced *as success* in the half of the day not directly associated with the success itself. Officials in the bureaucracy rarely felt successful during their daily routines, but during family gatherings their status would be recognized by in-laws and others who generally benefited from the stability their association with the bureaucracy brought. In a like manner, success at home was better measured from the vantage point of work. Work in the bureaucracy made possible stable, developing nuclear families in modest middle-class housing. Children grew older and

gained in accomplishments that could be shared happily with affirming co-workers living the same routine.

An important reason for this symmetry of success rests with the simple fact that success *as such* could only occasionally be achieved within the sphere of activity in which the success supposedly occurred. Not only did promotion go to others with, apparently, less dignity or superior connections, but those who had real success, i.e., the kind of success many officials grew up imagining officials to have (multiple wives, property, power), were found in only a few personages, imagined at the very top. In private industry the legend of plastics tycoon Wang Yongqing (Y.C. Wang) and his four wives circulated. In the government top officials who served in secrecy (e.g., preparing exams, making decisions, cavorting with foreigners) were known for their displays of obedience to state ancestors (as seen on TV after 1962) and their cruel power (experienced as the fear of personal ruin due to reports made by anonymous spies).⁶⁰ In the family real success held a place generally removed from the routines of washing the hands and faces of young children and seeing to their lessons. Power and its origin in the *imagined* family (as in the imagined state) rested instead with ancestors, for it was they who brought the family into being biologically and the world as it is known into being phenomenally. In particular, ancestors gave title to their descendants and names to things

⁶⁰ That power was both concealed behind a screen of illusion and located far from the lives of company officials is illustrated in the case of national exam preparation. To insure the appearance of fairness and the exam's importance, the government regularly chronicled the process of preparation on its three television stations. Those who wrote the exam would be sequestered for up to a month behind the walls of a high-security compound. Cameras would follow the men as they entered the area but would not be allowed in. The cameras would return when the test writers emerged from their seclusion following the administration of the exam, usually over a month later. The writers would all

(including places, people, relationships, and spirits) that constitute the world that Taiwanese inhabit.⁶¹

Within these state-supported (i.e., neo-Confucian) conceptions of social relations and modern patterns of work/family, men who were granted the title of “household head (*jiazhang*),” found that the power in their nuclear-family households was anything but total. Simply put, the idea of a dominant father was but a role whose actualization corresponded with the real decline of a father’s power. Like care, the force of the household was and is best deferred— a potential that shows itself most effectively and ironically at the behest of wives who often maintain more direct relations with children and whose role was and is perceived as less powerful. This condition has contributed to the capacity of women to take control of finances, children, and major decisions in most (if not every) successful middle-class marriage I know.⁶²

Dreams of Retirement

As the state and family givers of the time and title faded (or were withheld) from view in their own ever-receding attachment to the official origins of historical development, nominal government officials and household heads found their supposed station unrealizable in the present but imaginable in the future. Pushing time itself

express happiness that they could finally return home and satisfaction that one more fair exam had been achieved.

⁶¹ A certain timelessness attended and attends these beliefs which makes the world changing around them difficult to incorporate outside of the always evolving technical languages of their fields of specialty.

⁶² Violence in this scene is more often an expression of the real lack of what the father supposedly possesses than an expression of power itself. For this reason, the display of violence by fathers towards family members should always remain latent. Furthermore, to be historically accurate, as Western-influenced professionals took aim at the effects of violence in the family, even the possibility of violence became increasingly— for any man who cared about both his family and his standing— impossible.

forward and providing a defense against the madness of demanding a return for one's sacrifice before its time (say, through early promotion), the imaginable future could and can be pleurably expressed through dreams of retirement-- of which there are really only two: travel around the world and living the simple life in the mountains.

While the first of these dreams may appear as an unlimited departure from the ordinary routines of work and home, for many officials this dream reflects the life many began to lead in the 1980s. Since, in particular, the end of martial law and the international recognition of Taiwanese economic development as miraculous (making ROC passports recognizable at border crossings and Taiwanese tourists sought after for their cash), officials in the telephone bureaucracy and other industries in Taiwan have made vacations abroad a regular (if not yearly) event. If a practical impossibility, most will make a point to get away from the city on weekends or holidays, if only for a day trip by car to the mountains or some other scenic site.

Work in the bureaucracy (as a source of cash) and the machinery of the entire bureaucracy (as a producer of, to use the most obvious example, telecommunications) combine to make possible the leisure activity of travel. As with gifts of title and time, the productive machinery recedes as its gift (i.e., the commodity of travel) appears. The absent conditions of possibility are given face by travelers who become "representatives (*daibiao*)" of Taiwan. For this reason, embedded in the dream of retirement for this generation remains the nostalgic (albeit implanted) remembrance of the touring official who gave face to his or her kingdom through the act of touring. For officials in the telecommunications bureaucracy, this self-conception and expectation is neither abnormal

nor far-fetched. (Similarly, it has not been far-fetched for hundreds, if not thousands, of Taiwanese students to don, for example, the clothing of Qing Dynasty officials and Ami Tribal elders for “International” or “Multi-cultural nights” held at universities across the United States). Touring bureaucrats see themselves as upholding the virtues of Taiwanese like themselves (calm, certain, and polite). To assert their distinctiveness, they regularly refer upon return to the vulgarity of other Taiwanese (stereotypically businessmen) who reportedly make ribald displays of purchasing power in Southeast Asia and Mainland China. Although technically an illegal destination for government employees, the Chinese mainland was, while they were officials, nevertheless, a highly favored site of their tours because it gave them the opportunity to see the real China and to be seen as exemplars of Taiwan and its bureaucratic/cultural standards.

The second dream of retirement appears as a reaction to the present, its demands and abuses, cast in terms of something remembered. Yet it too presents a projection of everyday life into a seemingly endless beyond. The dream of “doing some gardening, getting out of the competition, and being left alone in the mountains” is so popular in 1990s’ Taiwan amongst former officials and people in general that I have been told by one senior engineer: “In the future Hualian (an Eastern coastal town) will be for old people and Taichung for the young-- like Florida and New York.” I have heard it said with a mixture of alarm and pride that because of these dreams and the “graying of Taiwanese society,” “land prices haven already risen by 50 to 100 percent” in places like Hualian and Pingdong counties. The hope that spurs this intense activity remains that the stresses of daily life (i.e., intense activity, traffic, noise, foul air, consumer seductions)

can be left behind and retirees can enjoy a simpler life, engaging their interests while keeping loose but warm relations with their children.

Their dream of escape, however, never really escapes that which they are escaping from—undermining while perpetuating its implicit hope; for the machinery will continue without their service as productive functionaries and, as such, it will make possible their departure from the scene of production. Often people address this troubling fact by centering their talk on gardening and other apparently self-sufficient means of life-support. But such possibilities remain lodged in the realm of fantasy. Moreover, the dream of retirement closely represents a projection of weekends already experienced. Relations with children, too, in this day of segregated work environments (school for kids and the office for adults) remain loose (of necessity) but warm.

Not only does this dream owe its possibility as a dream to the unrelenting mechanisms of production (including advertising, telecommunications, and transportation), it cannot be separated from memories implanted through state-controlled education either. For while their elderly parents did not and do not live segregated in the woods but congregated in villages and neighborhoods, if not with them, the modern dream remains intelligible because it strikes middle-aged Taiwanese, versed in Chinese mythology (from text books and temple walls of their youth), as similar to that of the Eight Immortals or Laozi.^{63 64}

⁶³ According to the prevailing popular myth of Laozi, he wrote the *Daodejing* at the request of a gate keeper of a mountain pass who realized that Laozi was a great master of wisdom at the very moment Laozi was fleeing the strife of King Zhao's reign. After he wrote down his wisdom, he disappeared in the great wilderness, never to be seen again. The immortals represent saints (*xian*) or great men who apotheosized into immortals. They are often depicted together

Yet, despite the cultural sanction of this dream, it still troubles and confuses. As one late-night Taiwanese talk show host told me:

I think retirement is a Western idea. Most people don't really know what they want to do. Maybe stay close to their families is more realistic than living in the countryside or traveling all over the world. I know my father is going through this now. I think, too, many of them hope to be taken care of by their children, but at the same time, perhaps, subconsciously, they take the Eight Immortals and their stories as their guide.

Despite the fact that the mythical Eight Immortals and Laozi represent an intelligible possibility of retirement-- a possibility that, it should be noted, appeals not only to Taiwanese but Westerners who can draw from this same mythology, albeit obliquely and as modern Taiwanese do (i.e., from within the frame of modernity). Nonetheless, retirement as a sudden, forced, and (yet) utterly pre-planned transformation, known as *tuixiu*, is something new and disconcerting in the face of simultaneous social dislocation. Elderly Mainlanders, for example, have told me that they had never heard of *tuixiu* before they came to Taiwan and subsequently retired from the military. Instead

in temples, in prints, or in children's readers feasting happily on the fruits of the world and sometimes sharing their immortality through magic means with ordinary people.

⁶⁴ Invited by some elderly residents of one retirement community, I spent several days hanging out, playing chess and drinking tea at an approximately fifteen acre site in the Central Mountain range near Puli. This center is run by the *Yiguan Dao* religious organization and is complete with a u-shaped four-story building of studio apartments, dining area, yard, fish ponds, chess sets, and surrounding woods. Literally, above all this stands the newly-fashioned temple area with, in its central hall, shrines for the elderly Confucius, Laozi, and (apparently younger) Buddha. Around the main hall were various pavilions (*ting*) with traditional Chinese ornamentation. Whether the economy can support turning much of Taiwan's back-country into retirement destinations that approximate the imaginary of this compelling dream remains to be seen.

they have told me of their parents and grandparents, in some cases local gentry, gradually taking less direct involvement in day to day affairs as they aged, reserving for themselves (as cultivated during their active years), if not the role of decision makers and arbitrators, then, at least, the role of symbolic center in their position closer to ancestors⁶⁵— precisely the role that seems to be losing its force.

When I asked a somewhat elderly Taiwanese woman about retirement, she put it this way:

Retirement? I have never thought about that before. My kids made me stop working this year. I have diabetes. I did business in the park for thirty years. I made a lot of money. I could have bought several houses for myself. But I gave all my money to my kids. I paid for the weddings of my sons, paid for my daughter's college education, helped my sons start their businesses, and paid for my husband to travel... I gave all of them the money I made doing business.

Nowadays, I stay at home and listen to the radio. I did go to America this year. But before I went, I called the call-in show. I called every night, and, after several nights, I got through to the fortuneteller. And he told me it was all right to go see my daughter and her husband in America.

...I really don't have much money now. I gave it to my children. I want to go back to work. I'm still young (65), but they won't let me. They worry

⁶⁵ To understand such a slow transformation, one need only think of Deng Xiaoping— a transformation from revolutionary agent, to supreme bureaucrat, and, finally, to bridge-playing, power-endowed recluse that testifies to this

about my health and they feel they will lose face by letting me work everyday. They're afraid people will see me pushing the cart down the street. So, they say they'll make sure I have enough to live on. They visit me, and take me to the doctor. And I take care of their kids and cook sometimes.

They've asked me to live with them, but I won't live so high above the ground. What about an earthquake? And how can I go to the market? Besides, I've always lived on the ground. So, I'll stay here. If I have to go live with one of them, I'll go live with my eldest daughter.

From her perspective, her partial acquiescence to the demands of her children does mean not retirement but a change of activity that corresponds to, as she emphasizes, a continuation of her role and power as a giver of life, both biological and economic. Her talk bespeaks the continual reiteration of gifts so overwhelming that they can never be given back. What stand for this return are shows of filial piety and day to day reciprocal exchanges across generation lines; and yet, the tone of her comments and her very insistence on the overwhelming character of her gifts reveals that the return is not as assured as she imagined it would.

In the difference between this woman's conception of aging and the modern realization of planned obsolescence, anxiety emerges. A similar anxiety haunts the weekend, expressed and prompted by the ever-pressing question: "What should we do this weekend?" The imperative contained in the question comes from every direction,

imagined and removed location of power with the state (or family) head.

including advertising, government policies (e.g., two-day weekends), actions of friends, CNN (which displays Taiwan's consumption figures as often, if not more, than its production numbers [1997]), and their own children. Simply put, the contemporary moment is dominated by a command to enjoy through consumption. This command cuts into the heart of regular life, not only for the 65 year old woman but for "Taiwan" itself which becomes, as most everyone claims when justifying the need to travel, "small"-- that is, like planned obsolescence, a lack and, therefore (according to the logic of desire), sufficient cause for craving to see and, thereby, possess more. Taiwan is only small, however, because it can be traversed by car in a few hours; to travel Taiwan by bicycle or by foot makes possible an alternative appreciation of Taiwan's dimensions that escapes the immediate apprehension of most-- despite and because of the growing interest of television programmers to depict Taiwan for Taiwanese.⁶⁶ Similarly, simply hanging out as a family and enjoying shared meals, conversations and games (precisely what many remember) seems to lack the added and necessary dimensions of the superlative, the famous, and the rare.

The alarming element of these demands can be detected in the talk of the elderly woman. For her, the imperative is experienced as the command to travel to America (an imperative made and funded by her children who believed it would do her good to "see

⁶⁶ During the 1960s and 70s it was not uncommon for classmates to take bicycle trips from, say, Taichung to Baguashan in Zhanghua city, a distance of less than twenty miles one way. In late 1990s Taiwan, for college students to contemplate even a five mile cross-city bike ride is considered "crazy." But while it is considered "crazy," such trips are often experienced as much more fun and enchanting than normal trips by car to the mountains and the usual picnics and pictures. I've heard stories from commercial college students who road bicycles across the country-side. They sang songs while riding as the sun was setting, waving to passers by-- a kind of happiness that differs qualitatively from

the world”). This departure from her centered world of photographs, food, tea, radio and custom was, however, something to be endured and only rendered intelligible through the call-in fortuneteller and his reading of her astrological “eight numbers (*bazi*)”— just as travel is rendered intelligible for even the experienced traveler through tour guides. After her return, I asked about her experience in the United States, and she declared: “There are just trees and houses there. What else is there to do?”⁶⁷ But, when friends and relatives turned up, her disposition changed. First, she showed photographs. With the ensuing and expected affirmation of others, she began to speak with greater animation— though she did mention it is “cold there.” I learned later that, despite her misgivings, she began to plan another trip with her elder sister who wants to see Vancouver.

This ambivalence finds expression in the generation of her middle-aged children as well. If one were, for example, to go about asking people in Taiwan whether they really expect to travel all over the world all of the time, most will say it depends on their money and, more importantly, their health. It is with this response that the issue of stamina comes to the fore. According to the imperative, travel becomes a kind of work, a kind of exertion which provides travelers a payment of photographs, trinkets, and pre-conditioned memories that can be exchanged upon return (as the somewhat elderly woman discovered) for not only temporary significance as one who has traveled but a position of giver of knowledge about, in particular, destinations, customs, weather and

that of the KTV or usual round of sight-seeing.

⁶⁷ Perhaps this reply was meant specifically for me, the American anthropologist, as a way of keeping me humble about my own place of origin. But, I have it on good account that her statement to me expresses her general feelings about her experience in the United States. In fact, such experiences as very common.

other aspects of other places. Since, however, the information can be gleaned from TV or the internet with ease and millions regularly tour, the value of this currency is hardly great and depends on ever-more tours to accrue substantial worth.

An important reason that dreams of retirement (and that of travel in particular) rarely cause anxieties with the telephone company officials whom I have known is that, unless retirement is put specifically in terms of the looming threat of *early retirement*, their retirement remains only a dream, only a pleasurable and deferred possibility (safely projected into the lives of their parents), and not something that must be organized, enacted, and reported as one does work. Rather, as the futures recede in fond talk, the twin dreams make the actions and tedium of the present seem meaningful-- always oriented toward a future that expresses, at once, the fulfillment of their callings as officials and earthly permanence. For as their lives and reactions are projected into the future through the prism of official remembrance, death itself is concealed-- i.e., talk of this finality gets diverted nearly every time dreams are uttered. Yet, like ID photographs, the significance of imagined-retirees functioning within a system of social relations continues. The *real* fulfillment comes later-- a later marked by the unimaginable moment when the impossible condition of official status meets its own impossible condition of emergence.

Leaving the *Dao*

Their social being given shape through a dream which circles as it elides a certain end, officials stand animated and connected, very much, as they say, in the middle. They stand socially in the center of the economic hierarchy of inequality; they stand temporally

between a projected past and a nostalgic future, and they stand themselves suspended (as good spinners of significance) between two generations. These generations represent two different sets of demands and two different modes of apprehending the world-- a difference which, never absolute, nonetheless stretches, as they imagine and experience it, their own capacities to integrate themselves and their worlds.

Most simply, above them on the ladder of familial relations officials find their parents and below them, their children. Social and material transformation has made the show of filial piety (from their middle position) difficult, a fact suggested by the account of the sixty-five year old woman and made clear by the following comment of a thirty-eight year old engineer who lives in a Buddhist-only apartment building in central Taichung with his bank-manager wife and two children. His parents, meanwhile, remain in industrialized but relatively rural Kaohsiung county. He said:

Caring for parents is very important. Maybe there's a generation gap (*daigou*). We try to communicate with our parents and tell them some news. I would like to bring my parents to Taichung to introduce them to new friends. Maybe they can go to the park to dance, to do kung-fu. Maybe they could respond to the world, so they don't feel lonely. So, I must provide the opportunity to teach them the world. Perhaps I can teach them to use the computer. The mother of Acer Corporation Chairman Shi is 70 years old; she has learned to use the computer. It is not too late to learn.

The show of piety vexes despite the stated hope, and the question becomes: How can people show piety when the forms of life are so different? The show of piety across differences ironically requires the teaching of the world in which piety can be shown. For Taiwanese raised under martial law and similarly strict parentage, to teach one's parents represents a world gone awry-- a fact not lost on this generation. For it is those of the elder generation who should, in their superior experience, possess greater knowledge of the world and teach it.

During the late 1980s, a dream of parental "retirement" and show of piety that seemed to accomplish easily an integration of life-worlds spread (not suprisingly in light of the company's leading role as an "up-stream" manufacturer of plastics, nylon, rayon and other materials in Taiwan's transformation) from Wang Yongqing's Formosa Plastics. As this dream tells it, Chairman Wang's very elderly mother would garden atop his company headquarters in Taipei-- thereby preserving her earthly and familial predilections amid massive transmutation. For most such a possibility remains, like retirement, a dream above all. Yet, despite its impossibility, the dream (like that of Chairman Shi's mother learning the computer in the mid-1990s) often found utterance by many, both inside and outside the corporation, as an admired model of integration. For the engineer, his bank-manager wife, and most others I know, however, sticky and telling difficulties remain. In their case, the Buddhist injunction against the consumption of meat is one difficult and distressing problem. A Buddhist-only apartment building may be very appropriate for parents wishing to raise kind, generous, and well-balanced middle-class children and for parents to pursue their stabilizing devotions in a highly-stabilized

environment, but for the generation who grew up eating pork as part of a religious and economic life tied to the lunar calendar, the division proves emblematic and, perhaps, as final as a division of stoves in the past.

For these reasons, the question should be asked whether the sixty-five-year old woman's misgivings regarding her travel were due to a generation gap only. Certainly travel remains more understandable and familiar for the generation of her middle-aged children; for her children regularly travel, if not abroad, then across the island. Yet, the meaning of her travel (for, in particular, her children who attempt to make a show of piety possible and understandable within their expectations, expectations inculcated by parents determined to see their children succeed) emerges against its relative non-existence in her generation amongst people, in general poor, like herself. That is, to make a show of piety to totemic family figures becomes as difficult to comprehend as it is overwhelmingly ubiquitous in advertising because it arises from nothing known before. In this way the return gift of her children becomes a poisonous return. The world made possible through her sacrifice returns through the monetary sacrifice of her children as a destabilizing and enduring (as a social expectation) event that cannot be readily incorporated into her own conceptions and expectations.

Middle-aged people, in the company and out, recognize this problematic difference. Such recognitions help explain the comments of the talk-show host regarding her father (she is in her mid thirties) and his uncertainty of whether the dreams of traveling the world or hiding away in the mountains are right. This uncertainty stems, in part, from the fact that most can remember some other form of life.

Calling out to grandparents when they came home from school, sharing bits of their lives, and being raised by their extended family are remembered, if not fondly then, at least, dimly. As the talk-show host disclosed regarding her father, such memories trouble their own projections. For most know that retirement need not be an endless chase of consumer pleasures. However, the generation emerging following them generally knows next to nothing (except that which is cast in nostalgia) of Taiwan before, say, 1972-- a date commonly cited as a turning point. For the generation born around or after this date, the twin dreams shape their everyday understandings of self and world in ways impossible for their own parents to have even imagined at such an age-- yet in ways so naturalized as to put their utterances beyond question.

For example, an eighteen-year-old commercial college student whose father is a salesman for an electronics company that moved its operations to the mainland informed me:

After I retire, I want to leave the city and buy land in the country. To get to work safely, I must live in the city. But, I hate the pollution in the city. So, I want to leave the city. I will grow plants and have animals-- dogs and cats. Having pets around will be colorful. I also want to learn to play an instrument. Now I'm busy. I have no time to play instruments. I will play guitar and piano on the farm. I can sing to my pets. I will also live alone. I won't live with a wife or children. I don't want others to tell me what to do. I just want to live by myself.

An eighteen-year-old commercial college student from a different department told me this one:

I don't have enough time to travel now. We can only use spring break or a short holiday. If you want to go to Japan during vacation, the ticket is too expensive. So, when I retire I want to travel around the world with my husband. We can travel and play and we don't have to come back to Taiwan.

The first place I want to go to is New Zealand. I want to go to Australia to see Koala bears and Kangaroos. I want to go to Japan and eat some Japanese food.

Despite what they say about the character of everyday life in 1990s Taiwan, dreams such as these elicit laughs, shrugs or comments such as "they really don't understand what struggle is," from people of their parents' generation. But the screw turns once more when children express their expectations about retirement (travel or mountain living) and leisure (luxury cars and trips abroad) to and for their parents. While not overtly demeaning, the expectations (backed as they are by the stipulations of the world economy) demand in ways that young people in their historical ignorance cannot understand. I have queried young people often about what their parents should do, and the most common response translates like this: "They've worked so hard to raise me, so I think they deserve to travel the world or live in the mountains and just enjoy life."

And here again the world goes awry. For without the reticence that marks their parents' upward pressures on their parents, children (often called the "new, new human

beings, *xinxinrenlei*”) teach their parents the world. That this teaching comes as an imposition, expressed with good intentions, is not lost on parents. Only half conditioned to live the life prescribed, parents, nonetheless, must enjoy it and prepare the world for their children to live the fantasy.

Parents accede to these demands because children serve as fetish objects of devotion. A common joke amongst engineers that I know expresses the reversal: “Filial piety (*xiao*) no longer means piety to one’s parents, but piety to one’s children.” The significance of this “joke” should not be missed; for jokes reveal the cracks in the conceptual links (as the stage name for one of Taiwan’s well-known comedians, *Tuo Xian* [Broken or Loose Connection] alludes). In this case, the imagined order of piety to parents and other elders as constitutive points of totemic identification has inverted. Parents often say they are merely serving the wishes of their children; but the logic of this statement remains the same as that of the crowd of, say, the goddess Mazu, who claims (whether they believe it or not) to act on *her* commands. In each case the representation acts of the will of the crowd, thereby freeing the crowd from responsibility of its own actions. Furthermore, the crowd casts its hopes to divinity just as parents, feeling the pressure of the world, cast their hopes onto the next generation and claim that they are acting on behalf of children. In turn, the expectations that emerge naturalized from the discourses of young people and which confirm the faith of parents (such as those of retirement) arise as reflections of projections of expectations. These projections are often born of regret over the past and uncertainty of what is to come. The regret often remains tied to the realization of middle-aged Telecom officials and others that their own

trajectories have been impeded (from the perspective of contemporary times) by early economic hardship, parental educational “deficiencies,” and scant exposure to the world outside their villages and, later, Taiwan itself. Signaled by such events as the July 1, 1996 “privatization” of the telecommunications bureaucracy, the uncertainty allows parents in the name of their children’s future accomplishments (not to mention their vigorous investments in them) to give up, as it were, on social change (for, after all, social change is forced on them) and push for, instead, the triumph of their children in forms parents understand— all the while handing down the world and its burden to the future, signified by the children.

Because of the tremendous investment in children and the ability of children to simultaneously dictate the future (as prescribed), when critics of the bureaucracies and of the high-KMT state in general (registered and anticipated prior to the criticism itself in the dissolution of family ancestors in middle class homes and in the diminishment of the importance of state ancestors and – a diminishment brought to its end in the 1999-proposed effacement of Chiang Kai-Shek from 500 and 1,000 NT notes [to be replaced, true to form, by little league baseball players and grade school students respectively]), charge that “government officials are eating the young,” Telecom bureaucrats feel demoralized. Yet while this charge contains atrocious imagery, it makes sense insofar as the ever-greater productive activity required to provide the consumer-oriented world in and for which children have been raised and naturally, as it were, expect to have in the future can be better realized through a generational re-distribution of titles and capital (for as most officials admit freely, younger people are better trained and willing to work for

less). Nonetheless, most officials I know in the company see themselves, still lodged in the ideology and hope of high-modern custom, not as thieves but as givers of life to their children.

Officials with whom I have spoken generally believe that they bore and raised their children in part to secure their old age. This security, they assert, comes as a *natural* consequence of the gift of raising them. When I asked what I took to be the doxa-exposing question of whether children asked to be born, several said that “children owe them from a previous life” (a Buddhist response), some appealed to the will of god or the weight of culture, and others shared this opinion:

Parents and children owe each other forever. That is to say, I bore you, therefore, I raise you; I raise you, therefore, you owe me. You care for me in old age, and, therefore, I owe you as an ancestor.

Designating a continuous flow between life and death, debt and repayment (expressible in the Daoist symbol of *yin/yang*), this symmetry stands under direct siege by those who believe the bureaucracy must be reduced in size to secure the consumer dreams of new generations and under indirect siege from the very logic of overcoming which finds its expression the fetish of children. It is in light of this condition that, just as the joke about piety was once told to me, another friend in the company asserted: “You like to speak of the *dao*; you can say we’re leaving it.”

A Loss of Spirit

A number of my best informants, inside the company and out, asserted that in times of change, Daoism provides the best philosophy for conducting one’s life; whereas,

during times of stability, Confucianism affords the best hope for stable, healthy social organization. What is striking about my aforementioned acquaintance's impromptu statement regarding leaving the *dao* is that in many ways such a conception of departure from (and thereby loss of) a world (chaotic as it may be) is built into the very structure and hope of the *dao* as an ordering principle of daily life. This relation gets expressed in popular legend, according to which Laozi was certain the *dao* was lost during the reign of King Zhao. He, therefore, left to the mountains to flee the chaos of the world he knew; and yet, Laozi left with a hope of return to the *dao* via the sublime solitude of the wilderness, precisely as Telecom official and others also dream of future escape/return in retirement and (as will be disclosed in chapter six) encounter/return through traumatic religious practice.

Moreover, at the gate to the wilderness Laozi was recognized as a wise man and was asked to write his understanding down. According to legend, this writing became the classic book, *Daodejing*. At least two contemporary lessons can be drawn. First, the inscription of the *dao* in its formless form remains ever poised between its reticence and its emergence, i.e., at the gate, precisely the position that Telecom officials sense they inhabit. Secondly, the *dao* that is known as structure is known as such only against itself— that is, the *dao* animates the very world of words people inhabit while, at the same time, refusing to be said— as, in fact, many in the company and out will fervently attest to, namely that the “*dao* cannot be spoken.”⁶⁸ This unspoken condition of positive

⁶⁸ Ian A. Skoggard comes to a similar conclusion regarding the figure of the *dao* in popular religious discourse. See his description of the *Yiguan Dao* beliefs and practices, *The Indigenous Dynamic in Taiwan's Postwar Development*,

emergence represents, too, the feelings of many who perceive their own silence in the face of world change which must, it seems, come to pass through knowing (insofar as they are invested with social expectations) children.

From the perspective of those leading the way of change, including the Director of the company, the answer to the threat of future oblivion is called rational, investment planning. This form of planning will (in a form both naive and total) make dreams of retirement realizable, regardless of changing structures of work and family. According to the stated agenda, for the dreams to materialize, the “private sector” must begin to supplant the *state and families* as the nexus of support. This position has become an ubiquitous mantra of new gurus of transformation who, like technical advisors of old, speak (without entirely knowing the implications of what they say) to Taiwanese certain that the world they inhabit is insufficient, of its own, for sanctioned, successful entrance into the world culture of rationality and taste. Typical of this fashion, an editorialist for the *Free China Review* opined:

Most important of all, however, is the creation of a framework that will allow the private sector to help people save for their own old age.

Westerners have long been familiar with the concept of the private pension scheme: a combination of long-term savings products often made all the more attractive by attendant tax breaks.⁶⁹

155-171.

⁶⁹ “Live Long, Be Happy,” *Free China Review*, vol. 47, n. 11, 1997, p. 1.

Aside from a misleading comparison based on the mistaken notion that “Westerners have long been familiar” with such savings “schemes” (Did medieval Bavarians have pension plans?), what is missed in this editorial and other such expectant talk is the simple fact that the pension of officials in the telecommunications bureaucracy will be cut with their “length of service” payment. With this connection severed, “the private sector,” notably US telecommunications giants and banking interests, can move in and, in the name of progress, scramble for the booty-- a fact, again, not lost on Telecom officials and a fact which, under the right conditions, can and does prompt anti-post-colonialist reaction formations.

Yet despite and because of the leading and in many ways determinative role of the world’s great centers of monetary and technical power, the expected transformation already claims the allegiance of many in Taiwan-- especially younger people who can perceive clearly the looming demographic capsizes which portends enormous burden for them, provided they cling to their dreams (or the dreams cling to them) and the system, as it is known (in particular, the “show of piety” to elders through the transfer of money and gifts upwards) remains intact. In this sense the intrusion of international interests takes a form at a time when people already seem ready; as if the intrusion served simply to mark what has, in many ways, already transpired.

Take, for example, a thirty-year-old quality-control inspector whose job it is to monitor phone connections through random sampling of actual calls and whose dream it is to travel around the world with her husband after she retires at the age of 55. She is

embarking on a sophisticated investment strategy because, as she told me, “You really have to prepare for it yourself.”

At the center of her knowledge is a self, unencumbered by the demands of direct, gift-based relations with those above and those below. Her assumption being that the workings of the machinery and her constant attention to her health will make the dream of travel a viable and always-pleasant reality. Such acknowledgments of the necessity of individual planning *vis-à-vis* the common dreams of retirement have made investment books immensely popular with the middle class (see chapter four). In the bureaucracy itself, I have often spotted such books in cubicles (absent during the early 1990s)— kept handy by middle-aged bureaucrats who feel the need to learn new ways of rationalized freedom from relations to others signified by dreams of retirement.

Comprising a literal bottom line of human orientations, investments should be conceived as forms of devotion; for they disclose the materialized hopes of investors. Since people are finite creatures, limited in their time and power (economic or otherwise) on this earth, to make devotions to one set of institutions and their divine-like representations is, of necessity, to neglect others. A statement of the young inspector bespeaks the attenuation, if not the end, of a form of reciprocity and the firm establishment (at least within her practical imagination) of another. Regarding her children and her retirement, she said this:

They don't owe us. The ratio of children to adults is now seven to three.

But, in fifty years, it will be reversed. So, it is a problem of giving up expectations.

This young mother is also dedicated (as she must by all measures of contemporary decorum) to her child's education-- providing the gift of life and the possibility of standing similar to that of hers. Because of this fact, it may appear that parents such as she simply reproduce their own parents' gift of life and its burden. But, two facts alter the equation. First, support for her future comes from the machinery (known in its "returns" through mutual funds and other retirement accounts). Secondly, children, no longer expected to provide a substantial show of piety through monetary returns, work instead in this machinery (invisible from the standpoint of its commodities) to provide, as they say nowadays, "life energy (*tigong houli*)" to the system.

What remains of the system of reciprocity and show of piety remains its "spirit (*jingshen*)" only-- a spirit which public figures rightly recognize as on the wane. Many Taiwanese have spoken anxiously to me about the future of their relations with their children. Familiar to most foreigners, the question goes like this: "Do American children care for their parents?" Though the distinction has been well-known in Taiwan for many years, they ask this not because of interest in difference per se but because the difference, propagated in media of all sorts and part of popular consciousness, is meant to reassure Taiwanese that they indeed have a social system based on piety to elders. That is, the very difference of Chinese/Americans (which must, *by definition*, exist) provides the proof that their system is still intact and that what is known as the "spirit" of Chinese is not, in fact, becoming a spectral vestige.

Frogs in Warm Water

The KMT state on Taiwan depended on this fading sense of reciprocity and balance of social relations that flourished amongst its officials for its functioning. While bureaucrats balanced their home and work lives and, thereby stabilized local life, the state social security system was primarily preoccupied with national security issues, including the development of industrial and agricultural infrastructure. The KMT-led government could not afford to steady the entire country in this way; thus, those who could claim the title of official-- and thereby entitlement to a pension-- were a minority. Furthermore, depending as it did on the co-optation of local memory and, as the stories of telephone company officials reveal, dreams of status, the post-war synthesis of modernity and neo-Confucian principles was itself founded on the violent ouster of a previous generation of Taiwanese colonial-era bureaucrats and intellectuals.

Like those elite whose places they inadvertently but eventually took, officials face the sacrifice of themselves for the construction of a new order of consumer dreams, instant and cheap communication, travel, and disburdened individual enjoyment. Because they face sacrifice, it might be expected that they would resist. But, like innumerable sacrificial victims, many take their steps to the altar willingly-- refusing to resist the new order of dreams they have set up and half believe in and, thereby, assuring ever-more production and consumption that can only emerge from their appropriately *symbolic* sacrifice.

As the loudest and most powerful voice, the newly empowered union is considered "too extreme" or "hysterical," and, as many have told me, not representative of their feelings. At times carrying effigies of leading bureaucrats with signs that say, for

example, “*tequan* (special privilege),” the union holds rallies and parades. But seeing and believing in their own privileges and knowing their own station equal to those targeted (at least insofar as they partake [or more formally, partook] of the status of official), many I know are hesitant to protest. Furthermore, they have spent many years avoiding controversy in the name of stability-- and, in so doing, serving well the needs of their families and Taiwan’s KMT masters.

The most common response that I have seen, however, is for officials to hunker down and redouble their efforts towards productivity in the name of the company. Former officials seek and horde tasks, take promotion without gain of title or income, and experience the near constant strain of reorganizing.⁷⁰ Others feel resigned to their fate and speak of starting new businesses, such as computer stores or restaurants. Still others have become sullen or melancholy, certain that the dream of retirement and status is finished and they will be back home soon enough. In every case, however, resistance to change itself remains subdued.

Since, for most, their standing in their families has closely corresponded to their status as officials, to go home without an office to return to, without a title to refer to and without its time accustomed to is to be degraded to the point of oblivion. I know many men who have wives who work, say in the schools, and earn a sufficient professional income to maintain a semblance of their former style of life. Yet, facing home without

⁷⁰ Sometimes, but not often, this new commitment to busy-ness becomes absurd. For example, I have heard of engineers responsible for small teams (perhaps six engineers) who have been asked by their superiors to put their crew to work sweeping up just to stay astir.

the identity of official status (even if one is free and able to “retire” as planned) produces very grave anxiety for most.

Thus, when the Director of ChungHwa Telecom states publicly, in a way more direct than any implicit trajectory of their children can signal, that officials appear like “frogs in warm water waiting to be slowly boiled,” the statement is made not because the workers do not resist nor because they do not organize other forms of life and, thereby, identity for themselves.⁷¹ Rather, such a statement forces officials qua workers to recognize their sanctioned mis-recognition of their status as government officials to be an illusion-- that is, a lie. In this condition they are still what they always have been: “good” men, family men, people devoted, if not to the state, then its new incarnations; but what has been promised for them because of their obedience, status in the company, retirement, and revered old age, has, if not vanished, then taken on new meaning. That they rightly fear they will lose these imaginary attachments through coming change reveals that they, in fact, never had what they imagined they one day would.

Their lives and their freedom (i.e., freedom from freedom) depended on giving themselves over to others (to the dreams of their natal families, to the dictates of the powerful, and to the projected demands of their children) as they held places in the social nexus, linking people and providing services. For this reason, it makes sense as it troubles when I commonly hear: “I know I’m not important to my company, but my job is.” Always fastened to their roles, their places can be increasingly held by machines, and

⁷¹ Laura Li, “The Aristocracy of Labor Faces a Revolution,” trans. Kevin Lax, *Sinorama*, November 1997, p. 31.

their sacrifices (through redoubled efforts or sullen, early retirement) make possible that which is to come.

Chapter 4: Building New Culture

The Birth of an Idea

In early 1997, Mr. Zhang, an engineer in ChungHwa Telecom, invited me to his suburban townhouse on several occasions.⁷² When our friendship and mutual confidence developed, he asked me to join him and a small circle of long-time friends for weekly games of table tennis, dinner, tea and conversations. Often carrying on well past midnight on Sundays, our talks centered on concerns related to contemporary life in Taiwan. These talks and relations provide the basis for this chapter. From the beginning, I made clear my role of researcher and my interest in daily life in Taiwan. They encouraged me on many occasions to publish the impressions of their lives that I shared with them informally and which I record herein.

This group of friends includes Mr. Zhang's next door neighbor who, like the others, was one of Mr. Zhang's junior high school classmates. While Mr. Zhang works (as of 1999) as an engineer and others operate manufacturing or import-export businesses of small and medium scale, Mr. Zheng (his neighbor) serves as founder and president of a large construction company in Taichung. Not inconsistent with the high regard held for him by many people because of his success in business (i.e., the kind of success that "every man dreams of"), I, as a researcher, also shared and share an interest in Mr. Zheng, his accomplishments, plans, hopes and history; for builders, such as Mr. Zheng, have

⁷² Mr. Zheng, Mrs. Zheng, Mr. Zhang and other proper names of those who are not famous are, of course, pseudonyms.

taken leading roles in the construction of the new material landscape of contemporary Taiwan and in the production of the (new) culture which attends that landscape.

My conversations with Mr. Zheng began during a day in which three car loads of friends, relatives, and neighbors traveled two hours together to the orchard of Mr. Zhang's brother-in-law to pick plums for preserves in the mountains of Nan Tou county.⁷³ While children played and others picked, Mr. Zheng sat weary, palms up, under pesticide-laced leaves. Feeling haggard from the stop and go Sunday traffic, I sat about ten feet away, neck bent at the back, and answered tersely his questions regarding my research. He responded:

I think your research topic is excellent. Taiwan became rich too quickly.

Having too much money too fast is like getting too much knowledge too fast.

Taking heed of his warning, I, nonetheless, asked what he meant by this, and he continued: "Taiwanese society is too nervous. People need to find balance (*pingheng*)."

"How do *you* do that?" I asked, as he sat poised on a rock.

"I find balance through meditation and confessions."

"To whom do you confess?"

"My wife."

His wife, sitting similarly nearby added: "If I'm happy, he's happy. I'm happy, so he's happy today."

⁷³ Mr. Zheng drove a Jaguar; others drove Toyotas.

With this exchange our conversations commenced and the centrality of Mrs. Zheng to the operations of their company began to become apparent. In a move oblivious of yet in counter-distinction to any common stereotype, she revealed her force. It may be claimed that this demonstration is of a piece with the fact that their company is dedicated to culture. Unlike production, culture is often associated with women in the common imagination. But, in the case of the Zhengs, the role of Mrs. Zheng is far from that of a domesticated, consumption-managing, and arts-practicing wife. Rather, while representing the company as its nominal head, Mr. Zheng remains not only subject to and dependent on Mrs. Zheng's affirmation ("I'm happy, so he's happy today") but also on her skill within the productive machinery. I would learn later that Mrs. Zheng "executes many of the daily operations" and that she "knows how to kill prices" (referring to her capacity as purchaser to cut costs).⁷⁴ Any absolute gender divide conceals their interdependence. In their daily work lives that begin in the morning and often stretch until ten or eleven at night and in their focal place in book club activities, they are partners.

Invited that afternoon, I traveled a few days later by taxi to their office (located in the present-day commercial and fashion hub of Taichung-- a spatial situation that accurately reflects, too, the status of the company). Mrs. Zheng greeted me with an explanation that they were busy with preparations for listing their company on the

⁷⁴ While drinking tea with Mrs. Zheng and the Zhengs on one occasion, I suggested to Mrs. Zheng that actually she was quite aggressive (*lihai*). As she must, she refused this nomenclature, insisting that she is a very "traditional woman."

Taix. ⁷⁵ She would, therefore, have to introduce the company and the book club to me while her husband held a meeting. ⁷⁶ In a conference room she presented schedule books, videotapes, glossy brochures and other materials designed to propagate the culture of the company and books. Of these materials, she opened one brochure specifically and, going page by page, used it to outline the origin and purpose of their undertakings.

This brochure, entitled *The New Culture of Good Neighbors: A Conceptual Handbook* and subtitled *The Birth-Place of a Community of True Affection with the Fragrance of Books*, represents conversations over tea that, as the story goes, lead to the establishment of their construction company. The brochure also outlines the form of community they hope to found through their business and cultural activities. In sections such as “Concentrating and collecting the fragrance of books, making friends for a life,” “Once again, our neighbors can be like our close relatives,” “Protecting the environment of the world, the full satisfaction of green, natural space,” and “The protection of security, putting into practice periodic health checks of buildings and materials,” hopes for the future of Taiwan are associated with their company while the consequences of modernization come under the kind of criticism that many concerned with the apparent triumph of Taiwanese modernization are not wont to admit.

The promises include: 1. Through the culture of books, the close feelings (lost to the process of modernization) can be recalled and relived. 2. This culture can be made

⁷⁵ Listing on the Taiwan stock exchange is a significant undertaking. As a construction company, they are following the lead of other of Taichung’s leading companies which have taken the same step over the past five years.

⁷⁶ To be sure, this division of labor reflects the common association of men with production and women with consumption. In fact their roles in this situation are more or less prescribed. Nonetheless, the cooperative character of

available to everyone through the productive capacities of the company. And, 3. The culture of quality reinforces and mirrors a productive apparatus dedicated to quality.

The chasm between everyday life and any imagined future, seemed to reinforce certainty in Mrs. Zheng,. No doubt, such certainty was and is possible because the breach between reality and dream remains contained in the relationship of problem (lack of cultured living arrangements) to solution (production of cultured living arrangements) that is publicly affirmed by the buying public through purchases and the activities of the book club-- in particular its large-scale quarterly events (see chapter five).

As I soon discovered, their hopes emerge against the very goings-on they feel compelled to take part in. For example, in distinction to the competitive struggles of the construction business taking place all around us as we spoke and yet in keeping with the yearning of Taiwanese for a life both comfortable by western standards and intelligible from the stand point of their own imaginings, the text that she wrote delved into dream images drawn in soft (non-photographic) pencil and ink and accompanied by poetic fragments, written in Taiwanese and in high Mandarin. The shaded drawings allow a soft, non-realist, and comforting representation of days gone by and, similarly, the division of linguistic labor (Mandarin/Taiwanese) reflects and promotes a hybrid of local and national backgrounds that effects an easy synthesis of what were often harshly incompatible cultural forces into a solemnly utopian promise—precisely, it should be noted, at a moment in Taiwanese history when the troubling ethnic divide stands, not

between Taiwanese and Mainlanders, but between those of official citizenship and those imported to labor (*wailao*) on projects such as those of the Zhengs.

In keeping with the tone of the fragments and images, nonetheless, as we read together, she complimented my own earnestness (born of my own desire that such a future come to pass)-- leading me, in a not unfamiliar process, into remembrances not my own:

Reminiscing:

Text: The times past, times with good feelings, lost in the flow of the great river of time. Remembering it, calling it, (you) only need to recall to repeat the warmth of those parts you and I familiarly had....

Image: an elderly Taiwanese man in cool summer clothes playing a Chinese lute.

The Closeness of the Village:

Text: In that nostalgic time, greeting in the early morning, walking at sunset, all written in the old friend's supportive diary about the sweetness of playing with grandchildren, the root of the tree, making a pot of oolong tea; within the park playing a complete game of chess, the uncle telling stories of old times-- Zhang Fei fighting against Yue Fei, Lu Bu loving Xi Shi, far from what is normal, hoping it to be good, this environment of feeling, can we not revisit it today?

Image: a collage of puppeteers, smiling children, chess pieces, tea pots, Qing architecture.

Good Neighbors:

Text: Patting at the door is a friendly greeting, going to a door to chat is the relaxation of mother. Asking for a green onion, giving a bunch, borrowing an egg, taking it yourself; the dishes of our family are for your family to taste. This kind of feeling, can we not revisit it today?

Image: a domestic scene of two plump mothers, smiling, with well kept hair, rice wine, peppers and pots of aromatic food.

Childhood Companions:

Text: After school, unplanned meetings outside the door to be together, the skirt of the young girl flies up while playing hopscotch, the boys are scattering around sticking dragon flies, catching frogs, throwing pogs....within this welcome laughter and sweat (They forget the time, fearing mother's loud call: A-Rong, A-Jia come eat!). Oh! At the beginning of the day, falling down from the mountain so early! This kind of children's fun, can we not revisit it today?

Image: a girl jumping hopscotch with her dress blowing innocently up and boys playing pogs and catching frogs within the courtyard of a traditional country house (*sanheyuan*).

When we passed these images (laid out in eight pages), I incredulously asked her: "Who might these friends with family-like feelings be?" She referred to the new culture community as that of "doctors, teachers and others. We hope to establish these communities amongst professionals; if you need an egg, I can give you one." Implicitly

including me in this group, I, nonetheless, wanted to ask about taxi drivers (Can they share an egg, too?). But, in my effort to maintain “the feeling” (*ganqing*) of the moment, I refrained, leaving the question and analysis for later.

The next page brought us up-to-date with a full-color, studio-produced photograph of friends associated with the Zhengs, sharing tea and snacks with children calmly and diligently pursuing their lessons at the same, Japanese-style table. The text, which she summarized, reads as follows:

The Birth of an Idea:

One afternoon during a weekend, with the sun falling to the West, a soft line of light pulled a long shadow through the box frame of a window.

The many good friends of the book club met together to consider the just read book *Forty Years of Taiwanese Experience*. That book has touching thoughts that fill one’s chest. Very naturally, the touching movement in the hearts of people were discussed casually.

The experience of Taiwan certainly makes the citizens of the island feel proud, but secretly behind the growth is loss, forgetfulness, and an inability to return to the times of good feelings. All the friends at the table recalled with great longing the pure and warm culture of good neighbors and human relations that have passed.

“Contemporary people are already independent, almost cold and cruel,” the director of the book club, Qiu Zhongxiao, mentioned this feeling. He said: “Every time we go out of the house, to nod your head and say hello

to your neighbor is almost a type of waste; it is truly as though the distance is great.”

Today, Mr. Lai, who assumed the position of general manager for a shipping company, looking toward Meirong, almost found an explanation for her.

“The hard work of communities requires the participation of everyone: my wife and I recently invested in the promotion of community culture, but owing to the minority of people’s insufficient common knowledge, the effort to promote double feeling has been difficult.” Meirong picked up this topic-- using her gentle voice, to speak, in one breath, the thoughts of her heart.

Meirong cast her eyes upon a whole block of buildings outside the room and couldn’t help but say: “Modern collective residences truly look like private, sealed castles; the feet of old people won’t go out their doors; children only hang out with their TVs when they go home; what kind of world is this!”

“Why can we not safely let children go outside and play? Why can’t old people enjoy the warm afternoon sun in the front of the building?”

.....bringing up a whole string of questions, the atmosphere in the meeting suddenly calmed down, every member fell into deep thought.

“This society needs modern dwellings with the feelings of ancient, earlier times; it is a pure, comfortably warm, and truly artistic form united in excellent beauty.” Zheng Changfa (Mr. Zheng) broke the silence

Zheng Changfa is the Chairman of Chinese Harmony Building Company; he warmly loves life philosophy, breathes completely readers of books, gives his customers books for gifts, not wine.

Zheng Changfa firmly, sincerely, and enthusiastically welcomed everyone:

“Lets turn the ideas we have produced into goals!”

This group of friends, they all laughed; they laughed very happily; the ideal of everyone reached an extremely great common goal; they decided to sprinkle the spirit of their seeds; the group in its decision and strength used its idea and true feelings to carve a native heath that has the fragrance of books and flowers, the art of human culture, and the warm comfort of traditional feelings. An ideal of a collective residence was born right there.

Before we could converse about the past evoked, the hopes conveyed, and the charismatic moment recalled (a moment, that is, when a voice rose from the group in its loss, like gigantic buildings themselves, to announce the aspiration for a collective, spiritual and material overcoming), we were summoned to Mr. Zheng’s office. There, taking up with their wishes *vis-à-vis* their acts, I asked how the culture portrayed reflects and reinforces their work as a couple in a very competitive office and business. Mr. Zheng told me:

Most people get divorced because one or both are too busy. The average couple only talks together for seven minutes per day. The other reason people get divorced is because of the seductions of society, drinking, prostitution, material desires. We have read over 200 books together. We have many of the same thoughts. We know how to communicate. So books are important to us. I give books for gifts (pointing to a shelf of books), but I sometimes think they do little good. People are too busy, they think. It is very easy to drink with people and become fast friends. I could take fifty people out tonight, but it doesn't last. To make one friend through books is mutual and lasting.

In Taiwan, as in Japan and elsewhere,⁷⁷ the rigors of competitive struggle in business are balanced by heavy, obliterating banqueting at night. During these sessions of intense reciprocity through drink, many business decisions are made, prepared or confirmed in the implicit belief that the creature feelings of mutual inebriation assures commonality. For the Zhengs, on the other hand, books provide a proper mode of exchange and a form of mutual enjoyment that, they believe, should allow for sustained business relationships (though, as he must, Mr. Zheng still banquets). Moreover, reading allows a focus and connection that does not distract them from their productive efforts as it provides sustenance both

⁷⁷ See, for example, Anne Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

intellectually, insofar as books furnish thoughts, and socially, insofar as book club practice sustains a social basis of support for their company's undertakings.

Despite the fact that their message gains credence against the perils of common business practices, I still wondered about the place of competition in their lives. Could not the stress of competition be at odds with the culture they advocate? Again, Mr. Zheng responded:

Working in the office gives a person the power to direct one's life (*shengmingli*). The battles and efforts to make the organization more efficient are necessary for everyone. Without them, we couldn't compete against our competitors who do so. But these struggles and battles also help the individual manage affairs at home, because if one doesn't have experience overcoming (*kefu*) difficulties and developing the power to direct one's life, how can one expect to wake up a child in the morning? By promising something? I get my kids up by entering their rooms and hugging and kissing them. They can't stand it, but they get up and they feel happy. This is important.

The necessity of success appears here. Without success their company would flounder; moreover, according to Mr. Zheng, without this "power to direct one's life" children (themselves signifying both innocence and the future) would be without an animating principle.

Realizing that the demands of the productive economy for competitive overcoming cannot be separated from the home and knowing that conventionalized

gender divisions still persist, I asked them before I departed: “Who controls the power in the family?”

Mr. Zheng:

I’m like this (holding out his little finger). My wife controls the house.

That’s the most important thing. But, at work, I don’t make big decisions without consulting her. (Laughing). She controls the money, too. I never know where it goes!

Mrs. Zheng: “They have a club for oppressed men. Do you want to join?”

In Search of Balance

Although these sentiments reiterate an interdependence of social relations experienced as mutually (though comically) oppressive, what escapes this represented balance of power and successful cooperation (as it escapes the advertising of commodious housing) remains both the system of inequality upon which their social preeminence depends and the past overcome. Obviated (like much of empirical history) in nostalgic mythology, those left behind and the past overcome persist (both materially and in consciousness) as resistant realities the Zhengs (more directly than most) confront and perpetuate everyday as they struggle in the competitive arena of construction for that which is always attained at the expense and behest of others, namely status.

As Mr. Zheng sees it, however, the struggle for advantage (under the name of efficiency) stands necessary for two reasons. First, as he put it to me at a later date, “nobody wants to be king,” indicating, as the brochure also suggests, Mr. Zheng and his wife have publicly seized the position of charismatic leaders. According to Weber such a

seizure is possible so long as those deemed charismatic “know how to maintain recognition through proving” of themselves.⁷⁸ In the case of contemporary Taiwan, this “proving” comes in sometimes stark terms, implying, at the very least, an overcoming that is, in many crucial respects, violent. Brick houses, ancient trees, old neighborhoods, miniature temples for the Earth God, and rice fields disappear (as they are nostalgically reclaimed) for purposes of “development (*fazhan*)” and “evolution (*jinhua*).” As holders of charisma, the Zhengs come to embody the agitation of this violent overcoming; that is, despite their considerable wealth, they remain unsettled by the works they must perform in order to prove their leadership and the legitimacy of the aims of their followers. Mr. Zhang, well aware of this necessity, put it to me this way:

Everyone admires them. They have the power, the money, and cars. But they are not any happier than the rest of us. People like them are always afraid their next project will fail. So their lives are very nervous.

Under these self-imposed, but always group-sanctioned conditions, they operate with an ever-present fear of failure. The Zhengs know (as do most competent people in Taiwan) that perturbations of overcoming arise from the world-mandated role of Taiwan as an economy, if not nation, that succeeds— precisely because of the fear of disintegration in a world of nation-states. This world imperative to overcome provides the second reason for their on-going efforts— that is, they see themselves, as others see them, as representative components of Taiwan’s success.

⁷⁸ Marx Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Galaxy Books, 1958), p. 246.

When I pointed explicitly to the relationship between the effects of overcoming of others and the past and the recognized loss of “feelings of good neighborliness,” the Zhengs responded in a two-fold manner-- revealing their own recognition of the problem of overcoming. With regard to people overcome and left behind, Mr. Zheng assured me that “everyone in Taiwan has opportunity (*jihui*).” Such a belief serves to reiterate the necessary choice through a circularity of logic typical of self-perpetuating belief; i.e., while it is opportunity of a kind limited to that specified by the demands of local and international markets at any given time, it *is* a world of opportunity so long as the opportunity is believed in, prepared for and sought after (all acts that serve to simultaneously cancel other possibilities). This remains a belief which the Zhengs, as exemplary of Taiwan’ success, must believe in order to assure themselves not only that their children can be woken in the morning but that a unified Taiwan endures despite the dividing capacities of enterprises devoted to culture. As for the past overcome, their advertising speaks of its recollection through bits and pieces (e.g., hand puppets, chess pieces, and, even, free reading) that speak to the present with the imagined *hope* of the past for leisured, festive, and communal life. Specifically, fragments of their own success at overcoming are recollected as materialized hopes-- an issue I turn to in the next section.

Because of their own concerted efforts over the past two decades, the cost of overcoming others and the past is not lost on them. In their early forties in 1997, they have operated several businesses (including a restaurant and a cram school). After Mr. Zheng worked for another construction company to gain experience during the late

eighties, they launched their current enterprise. They embarked on their plan to enter into the enormously profitable but equally risky construction business prior to starting their book club-- a sequence of events (like much of Taiwan's past) not triumphed in the present. In this way the sensibilities of loss and optimism that generated the purpose of their company, according to the brochure, can be subsumed in importance to opportunity. Nonetheless, as shown in the text, the sensibilities importantly constituted the social field in which their enterprise emerged and operates. The sensibilities of loss rested with the commodity (the "private, sealed castles" called houses) which could not and cannot (insofar as the commodity form conceals the social relations of its own production) provide the culture "of good neighbors and human relations that have past." Thus, despite "the touching thoughts that fill one's chest" regarding the transformation of Taiwan, a sense that things did not turn out right made possible the critical ground (of failure) for the positive emergence of their operations.

At the time of the establishment of their company, tiger cubs were sold on the streets, families flush with cash "exploded" (*baofahu*) and economic prosperity (measured in world terms) made possible a public whose desire for dwellings swelled as the horizon of old was eclipsed by the new. A common joke among men expressed the bewildering optimism and its attendant inflation of obscene expectations thus: "Every man wants a Japanese wife, a Chinese cook, a French lover, and an American house." Likewise, for young women, a serious consideration in finding a husband became whether the suitor and his parents could provide a new house as a bride-price.⁷⁹ During

⁷⁹ In their effort to realize these wishes, developers sought to incorporate the spaciousness and abundance of housing

this boom of dreams, senses of longing and loss that swept over Taiwan like a “flood” matched the prevailing discourses of miraculous achievement in intensity.⁸⁰ The loss attending this transformation found expression as a “cultural” loss or a loss of home. Building companies found it profitable to provide objects for this longing. For this reason, even the seeming end of History could only be described as “touching thoughts that fill one’s chest” provided by an affirming outside world (a kind of sweet but cheap, nonetheless, necessary, congratulations). For while Mr. Zheng and others speak (as of 1997) of the triumph of the Taiwan miracle, especially when seeking to perpetuate optimism for the purpose of sales, they seek simultaneously to overcome and capitalize upon the very disorder that the transformation provoked— a kind of gyro of destruction and construction that might be called perpetual opportunity, provided the public remains optimistic.

While optimism for new housing has waned since the mid-1990s, the push to transform Taiwan into a regional center continues— a push that the Zhengs have a stake in, both in business (through contracting public works projects) and in culture (through establishing their book club as central to a growing network of Southeast Asian clubs). Perpetuating this transformation, balance becomes a critical feature of the Zhengs’ lives; for the potential of going mad or, literally, exploding in the dynamism of failure-driven

from America (often with stylish markers from other East Asian countries, in particular Japan). Under the influence of and facing common demand for “America,” architects who returned from training abroad often found very lucrative and abundant work but not always companies prepared to implement their dreams to the last line.

⁸⁰ An extended meditation on the metaphor of the flood for the rapid transformation of Taiwan can be found in Qi Deng Sheng’s controversial short story, “*Wo ai hei yanzhu*” [I love black eyeballs] in *Taiwan bendi zuojia duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* [A collection of short stories from local writers from Taiwan], ed. Liu

society remains a constant worry that gets expressed by Mr. Zheng, in particular, as fear of heart attacks. Considered a normal event in the trajectory of the successful businessperson, heart attacks represent where and how the “touching thoughts” are acutely registered in the bodies of agitated leaders. Mr. Zheng would speak regularly of negative examples of associates and former partners who, while making incredible amounts of money, had nothing in their lives besides money and a destiny of seizures of mechanisms and flows.⁸¹ On the other hand, the Zhengs hope to retire in a “about ten years” to “teach and read good books”—the hope that an entire career can be balanced through the text. And yet, if realized too soon, this “retirement” into the text is something a bit dangerous, too. Since reading itself could easily come to consume their lives, work itself provides balance from their own desires—desires that would leave them nowhere in a world where the bourgeoisie should be properly preoccupied with success and not with the pleasures of words.

Overcoming in the Field

Despite the dangers (and seductions) of imbalance and as the Zhengs’ recollection of “the birth of an idea” suggests, the nostalgic future proffered by them expresses what many in Taiwan hope for: a comfortable balance of work and leisure, past and present within living conditions more appropriate to their imagined world standing than (from the contemporary vantage point) failures of the past. As builders it is important for them to distinguish themselves from the numerous examples of capital-driven failures; for stories

Shaoming (Hong Kong: Xiaocao chuban she, 1972), pp. 43-56.

⁸¹ As another demonstration of his search for balance, he informed our group many times that their company turned

of construction companies using radioactive materials, houses sliding with collapsing hillsides, and builders absconding the country-- leaving only skeleton frames of future high rises-- have provided ample cause for suspicion and resentment.⁸² Because of the resentment caused by these occurrences and by the simple fact that many builders leave the country they have developed, any building company that fails to match its power to alter and destroy with the creation of something desirable within the expectations and memories of the times cannot claim public assent.

Distinguishing themselves from vulgar consumption, hyper-activity, and the wreckage apparent everywhere and thereby creating of themselves, their club, and their company an object of public desire, the founding distinctions, recorded in the brochure, remain significant. Mrs. Zheng often reiterated that when they established their book club, there were only seven in the country (now there are over three hundred) and that their club served to influence President Lee's own exhortation for more such clubs across the island. Founding distinctions stand significant because they give the company a place of recognition within a field marked by severe competition between companies that all attempt to seize the public mandate. Toward this end, other companies make similar, necessary distinctions in the name of better living. For instance, while the Zhengs promote the culture of books, Taichung's leading building company, the Sancai company, associates itself with art and international style by building English language and art schools, promoting cultural programming, and taking on international building projects.

down multi-million dollar jobs, even though top managers wanted to undertake the projects.

⁸² This condition is depicted in Ang Lee's film *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*.

The following ad expresses their distinguishing art and cultural mission:

Starting in 1994, the Sancai Seasons of Art greatly opened and elongated its field of vision, to angular extension, to try to lead to more original extending of antennae to the center of every domain of art and culture...enabling all cultural lovers within the entire nation equal ability to enjoy the refined and profound program of the Sancai Seasons of Art.⁸³

This particular program of cello and piano concertos (with a Taiwanese cellist and an American pianist) toured Taiwan, fostering an association of the construction company with artful and international living. This company also puts reproductions of famous masterpieces (usually Western) on every floor of its (often 20 floor or more) buildings. Such promotions of the sign of artfulness (often unrecognized in the arts' ironic comment on that very usage) emerged from a rejection of the gay shows of dancers and singers of the variety show form that marked an earlier moment in the emergence of Taiwanese (*benshengren*) leadership in the housing industry. Furthermore, such efforts correspond to the fiat to produce "value-added products" in order to compete in a global marketplace in which value is no longer pegged to any absolute constant, save the power, style, and predilections of the leading consumers of the world. This production of value corresponds to the effort of Taiwanese businessmen to learn the commonly considered fine aspects of culture, including how to drink European table wines-- a practice that has

⁸³ The cult of the founder pleasantly preoccupied is found in Sancai's advertising. The ad continues: The Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Sancai Construction Company, Mr. Liao Fuze (consequently the one in charge of the art and culture of the artistry) for the past ten years, Chairman Liao, although dabbling more and more in the domain of trade, still promotes

quickly become “customary (*xiguan*).”⁸⁴ Made in conscious distinction to the past when businessmen were often considered vulgar and ignorant, this striving has the following logic: since nowadays overcoming means to surpass the material and symbolic conditions of that which is vulgar (i.e., “uneducated [*meiyou jiaoyu de*]”) and of the past in order to achieve global recognition (recognition felt at the level of individual interactions with foreigners who stand, as buyers, in position to judge), then the leading classes, if not the people, of Taiwan, through their production of added value and greater consumptive power, must be more than merely modern (in the sense that modern connotes aggressive attainment of lucre).

Another nostalgic advertisement for housing operates within this mandate: At the unique place of the Famous Gate of Longevity, it is definitely not money that separates individuals, but your conscientious treatment of people, even including your attitude towards life that distinguishes. “Birds of a feather flock together” is the natural disposition of humans. At the Famous Gate of Longevity, this kind of highly noble place, people cannot but strengthen relationships among neighbors which is more important than having or not having money. If it weren’t for this, the Qing He company having exhausted every resource with the entire strength of heart, bit by bit, cutting and polishing, achieving this noble domain, would it not result in the stain of the “smell of copper?”

unceasingly, from start to finish with enthusiasm, the mannerisms of the sensibility of beauty.

⁸⁴ Stevan Harrell inquired of a wine-clerk at a leading new Taichung department store in 1997 why there were no

The sensibility of overcoming and progress which attends these hopes, works, like the Zhengs' advertising and book club practice, against vulgarity measured at every level of conduct, including language. For example, convenience (*fangbian*), a favorite term during the boom years, fails to express entirely the demands of the "new culture" and, therefore, must be qualified. As the following quote from a housing advertisement suggests, convenience should be combined with new conceptions of culture to attract "new culture" consumers:

Convenience and quality, though distinguishable, cannot be separated-- not as though they were opposites, but as two forms of expression for the same style of life.

Convenience alone does not suffice and comes under criticism because it represents that which is crass "lacking knowledge" (*wu zhi*).⁸⁵ Convenience also connotes pollution, the spoiling of students and the destructive sides of "Westernization (*xifang hua*)."⁸⁵ Quality (*pinzhi*), however, remains impossible, as the ad suggests, without convenience. For the convenience of new housing makes possible, as yet another ad suggests, a "greater plasticity of life (*shenghuo de ke suxing duo*)" necessary for quality and art (*yishu*). Furthermore, the convenient, "comfortably warm" places of quality are crucial for producing children capable of exam success necessary for the "noble life of art."

Californian wines for sale there. The reply: "French wines are our custom (*xiguan*)."

⁸⁵ For this reason, the Mandarin word for convenience, *fang bian*, is sometimes substituted for with the English word (convenient) in advertising.

Yet, just as it overcomes the past and creates the present, this “new culture” of convenience, comfort, quality and artfulness does not emerge (in the imagination) directly from the preceding period of modernization— a period marked in architecture and construction by the “convenient” utility of providing houses for a rapidly expanding post-war population.⁸⁶ Rather, the roots of this “new culture” are found in multiple pasts, all of which eradicate memory of what came prior to the immediate period. Marx wrote:

And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names...⁸⁷

Chen Shuibian, Taipei Mayor in 1997, put this “cultural change” most simply:

The mottoes for our generation are “down with tradition” and “no taboos”...only by breaking out of the box can you have progress.⁸⁸

Indeed, the concrete walk-up boxes of the 1970s and 80s no longer suit the aspirations of the middle class. In addition to bringing “down” tradition “new culture”

⁸⁶ During the postwar period proper, Mainlanders owned and operated most of the construction companies. It was not until the early 1980s that this began to change. When I asked one old Mainland builder to compare advertising of old with today, he couldn't respond. There was much to say about corruption and black societies (always allied to the state during that time), but advertising simply left a blank. He told me: “I just found someone with incoming capital, like a restaurant boss, then built the buildings. Usually people, if they had the money, would buy them. They needed the space.” Another told me “I ran my company from my house. Most of my customers heard about me by word of mouth. It was not like today.”

⁸⁷ Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1991), p. 15. Also quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), p. 122.

⁸⁸ *Time*, “New Voices for Asia,” October 6, 1997, p. 21.

violently “breaks” from the preceding period’s empirical realities, including complicity with the KMT, forced choices, daily grinds, inequality in households, gambling, fears of communist (and KMT) generals and other uncomfortable conditions of its origin.⁸⁹ In place of empirical history (including, state bureaucracies and their officials), new pasts proliferate. As the advertising billboards overhanging the avenues of Taichung display, these pasts may not, of necessity, have happened on the geographic entity known as the island of Taiwan. In the case of the Sancai Company, the Eiffel tower presents the nostalgic world recreated in their towering buildings. For others, Qing dynasty officials poised over tea, 19th century European bourgeois children dressed in lace, and English manor houses provide a past for the future in Taiwan. (Lest the universality of this phenomenon be forgotten, American Express addresses the sedan-encased crowd from the same heights).

The spirits of the past conjured by the Zhengs in their contribution to the revolutionary moment remain comfortably cool old people and other things and people of a self-consciously nostalgic time-- a time located neither in Japanese nor KMT periods, but someplace else, a place unaffected by the struggles of international competition or distracting commodities, a time and place when innocence, prosperity (found in plump [though never fat] bodies) and social immediacy prevailed.⁹⁰ That this time never existed

⁸⁹ This common gesture must be distinguished from early concerns of some folk-lore studies and *Xiangtu* literati who, under the same concern with salvaging what was being lost, paid extensive attention to the everyday lives of people on the island during the boom-building years.

⁹⁰ The Zhengs’ contribution of “new culture” is, of course, not new on the Chinese scene. “New culture” was a common cause of May fourth intellectuals. Similarly, in Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Frank Hsieh (Xie Changting) founded the journal *The New Culture* (Xin Wenhua). See Paul R. Katz, “Cultural Policies in Late

speaks to the fact that the objects deemed nostalgic (e.g., “complete games of chess” and hand puppets) symbolized a hope for a better life even in the past.

Specifically, it must be stressed that the transformational role of the Zhengs did not occur without resistance on their part— adding, in critical ways, to the retrospectively-envisoned hope attached to objects such as chess pieces, simple play, and, even, the pleasure of reading free from the demands of study for advancement. For during the years leading to the high economic boom of the early 1990s, those who would become the leaders of Taiwan’s transformation were typically denied the regular joys of their favorite objects by parents overwhelmingly concerned with study and, if not study, work. For example, while discussing this subject, one of the group of long-time friends told how his favorite ping pong paddle was thrown into the fire heating a pot of rice because his mother believed it kept him from his studies; Mr. Zhang told how his father would not allow him to play flamingo guitar; and Mr. Zheng related that his love of reading was channeled into the study of science at Taiwan university. In all cases, the failed resistance to their parents’ injunctions for success (that is, their inability to give themselves over to what they love) has led to an elevation of the importance of these practices, despite and because of the fact that the demands of economic activity still claim their primary, socially mandated allegiance.⁹¹

twentieth-Century Taiwan: A Case Study of the Council on Cultural Planning and Development,” presented to the *Taiwan State and Society in Transition* conference, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 21-23, 1997.

⁹¹ In light of these attempts at recovery, it is interesting that in 1990s’ Taiwan, parents in complete devotion to the supposed and produced genius (*tiancai*) of their children and not divorced from the productive machinery of contemporary life which they help build, tend to take the other extreme by forcing children to not only study and make

Having grown up barefoot in the 1960s and having realized beyond their wildest dreams their early induced and transforming desire for the products of industrialization (for example, shoes), the Zhengs (and others) reject (while pushing forward) modernization. If the desire of this rejected transformation is spoken of at all, it is (true to form) put like this: “You know we didn’t have any shoes then...” as if to say (most hopefully) without saying, “We were really pure and innocent because of it.” The question that the Zhengs ask, “Can we not revisit (that time) today?” represents their hope of salvation from the wreckage produced during their lifetime, the gesture of faith necessary for the constitution of their own supportive crowd of believers, and a statement of loss necessary for continued success. Like every foundational denial, however, the hope of salvation (i.e., the conjured world of “good feelings lost in the flow of the great river of time”) conceals (as it receives its power from) the physical and cultural destruction and construction (i.e., transformation) that they participate in every day just as their elevation of reading to the highest good conceals their own fear of freedom from the world of necessary success and its causative effects.

The concealment can be only partial, however, for the repetitiously recalled physical elements of their story that give their memory substance still exist in Taichung but, generally, in places people concerned and able to buy artful homes do not go to. “Complete games” of chess can be found, for instance, at the Sun Yat-sen park in Taichung, but the place (once a favorite of the middle-aged middle class when they were

the top 10% but also perform in enormously serious practices such as ping-pong tournaments and other activities for “geniuses,” such as piano, violin, etc. The results of this social experiment have yet to come in.

“young and in love” and still emblematic of Taichung for people across Taiwan) is normally devoid of the same people nowadays. Romantic love successfully domesticated, middle class folk prefer the park at the art museum where, in particular, little boys can be seen suited-up in crash helmets, driving miniature cars (almost always red) around roped-off rye grass with their moms (wearily but pleurably) in tow. Located in the old center of Taichung (with its looping walkways and heavy banyan trees), the Sun Yat-sen park contains, I’m told, “too many old people, foreign workers, and gays” for middle class people and their “comfortably warm” world. If such places are revisited it is often via the camera. The Japanese landscaping provides nostalgic backdrops for photographs of mediating beauties and short “cultural” segments shown on TV-- revealing the persistence of this park as a site of longing. And, of course, should the camera get too close, ghosts all of sort might pop up around the sublime (insofar as they seduce, for example, chess players into losing contact with the world of work) but misplaced (insofar as their appropriate, properly domesticated place is in centers of “new culture” life) things to frighten the comfortably conditioned “new culture” audience.

Elsewhere, the past as conceptual backdrop is obliterated as it is evoked, too. An architect in Taichung once explained his design for the courtyard of a \$20,000,000 US residential housing complex by drawing, first, the courtyard of a traditional, u-shaped house (*sanheyuan*) to show the functions that can be abstracted from the old to provide a community center in the new. Over the course of many strokes (each indicating a function), he slowly transformed the courtyard into a blob of thick ink which threatened, under duress of number and intensity, to tear the sheet. And just as he blotted out the

drawn courtyard, it became recalled as a place where he “stayed outside to study under the trees during the hot summer.” While we later drove Taichung in his Buick, he asserted repeatedly the importance of work, competition and success for his children struggling to enter professional graduate programs at Taiwan University. As he spoke, the summer breezes under the trees were annulled by the air-conditioning and his desire, born of fear of failure, seemed to burn hot as the sun.

As might have been expected from the ferocity of the abstraction, when we arrived at one of his buildings, I discovered form without content— a problem shared by many builders. Spots where dreams went unrealized were pointed out as if they would someday come to pass: “Here would be where the men can drink tea together...there would be some calligraphy there...here is where women could sit around and watch their children and talk...” But these nostalgic dreams remain but wishes because, according to him: “There was not enough money in the budget to implement my designs.” Caught within the gyro that keeps capitalists and others committed to the status quo of transformation, he pointed to another mammoth building and said: “Over there it is much nicer, but the price per ping is much higher.” Actually, money is only the issue insofar as it is what was lacked before. What is really missing remains the collective will to institute community life in forms similar to those people knew from childhood in large apartment buildings. Instead, nuclear families, watching TV and doing homework (i.e., producing common genius as it is consumed), tend not to congregate for communal activities of the sort remembered; moreover, the amount of empty space in buildings detracts from a possible public spirit of community living imagined by nostalgic planners.

Like the absent/presence of empirical history, landowners maintain their absent (and therefore haunting) occupancy. Despite the fact that, in many cases, their rental incomes cannot cover the cost of their loan payments (a fact relished by renters), investors refuse to sell, lest they lose the “long-term value” and the symbolic leverage of their property. As a result, unoccupied units abound— including the house next door to Mr. Zhang and two doors down from the Zhengs. I have known small business people who, together with their business allies, buy blocks of houses, furnish them with beds for children, stock them with liquor in cabinets surrounding unused TVs, and decorate them with traditional calligraphy and broad-bush Western landscapes in a weird sense of form without content— waiting, as they say, for the time that has “not yet come” (*weilai*). They await *weilai* because they remain comfortable within the world of un-stylized houses that can (and usually have) doubled as shops. With the belief that no matter what they do, the world will never let them have what it promises, they resist the mandates of “new culture” only in their private spheres of family and friends (including consumption choices). For, at the same time that their stocked-houses appear as homage to the styles seizing the moneyed classes and those with pretensions to this status, they are often forced, at the suggestion of buyers (both foreign and Taiwanese), to build factories that appear high-class and to rent or borrow, say, Volvos for meetings with customers in Taipei. In any case, whether they are invested entirely in the world of “new culture” or not, they remain in possession of their purchases— driving up the cost of housing for everyone.

The Zhengs operate within this milieu of aggressive transformation under the signs of the past, equality, convenience and culture which double to conceal and oppress the empirical past and others. Capitalism provides (as does the education system for the young) the playing field of the competitive struggle and the modus operandi of organization. Their appeal to the things lost from youth shows a dissatisfaction with the effects of modernization and a simultaneous unwillingness to free themselves of it; for to free themselves leaves them, as it leaves everyone who makes the unnecessary choice, without the certain illusion of positive objects, prescribed as they are by the discourses of world, middle class culture, on which to center social life.

Unlike many others, the Zhengs, as affluent Taiwanese, have the option to leave both the competition and their history to become part of the Chinese diaspora in, say, Vancouver where they could practice reading good books everyday. Yet, they stay, despite and because of the fact that, as Mr. Zheng and others say, "Taiwan is a sick society." By way of concretely-expressed longing, shared by their crowd, the Zhengs keep faith in the sickness as they remain symbolically efficacious within their binding social community. Tuned to the hope of balance (as they engage in and embody creation and destruction) their power moves others as their vision captivates. Always concerned with appearances and careful of the tenor of interactions, they stand at the center of productive and consumptive activities for a crowd of people who began, as the book club's official history tells it "with seven people." Nowadays, the seven members has become seventy and, by extension to family members, perhaps 700. Furthermore, their club takes a leading role in the activities of book clubs across Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

If this is not enough, people who live in their buildings, governments that contract them for projects, and soon investors all testify to the place of the Zhengs beyond that as either mere workers or owners of capital. They build “new culture” and, with it (as will be shown in the next chapter), new gods.

Chapter 5: The Fragrance of Books

The Fragrant Book Pair (Mr. Book and Ms. Flower) vs. Mazu⁹²

On a Sunday afternoon in April of 1997, at a book club quarterly festival (to be precise, “World Book Day in Taiwan”), the objects of “new culture” devotion, Mr. Book and Ms. Flower (combined as “the fragrance of books [*shuxiang*]” and “the speech of flowers [*huayu*]”) were given honorable exhibition. Not removed from the general movement of nostalgic imagination and utopian hope, these signifiers, connoting sensuality, serenity, and beauty, represented that sunny day not only an enjoyable antidote to the alienation, distractions, and discomforts of aggressive modernity but also an orientation toward “the noble and refined life of art.” The unity of the crowd of believers toward this ennobled end found expression in the promise that through books readers make “lifetime friends” (thereby eliminating the “waste” of distance). As the discourse of the book club formulates it, “the fragrance of books” envelopes people within an artful “life of meaning” with “beneficial friends” (*yiyou*), enabling “new culture” life.⁹³ This new culture “life of meaning” with “beneficial friends” gains its force of articulation against a cultural backdrop that operates (as Mr. Zhang and I would encounter on that same day) in another, though contiguous and contemporary, religious and cultural domain.

⁹² The English abbreviation “vs.” is frequently used in Chinese popular texts, including the Zhengs’ own advertising to compare and combine as the conjunction “and” combines.

⁹³ Critically speaking, one can argue that these euphemisms serve as covers for *guanxi* building— *guanxi* itself being of the old order and, therefore, a little embarrassing. Instead of *guanxi*, people speak of *networking* (in English). But there is more, too, as the testimonies of book club members will show below.

Traveling from as far away as Tainan, representatives of other book clubs and interested people alike converged at the recently completed public auditorium at Chung Hsing University in Taichung. Mothers dressed in breezy flower-patterns, fathers in button-down white short sleeves, children in dresses and trim shorts (some in jeans) and an occasional tonsured monk in robes entered the auditorium to a greeting committee lead by book club members, dressed in identifying vests. Books were given free, one per person (my book: *Xing Yun Talks on Zen*).⁹⁴ The Zhengs and other club officials greeted dignitaries. Once inside, the approximately 500 hundred people who attended were treated to a gala of music, dances, speeches, and skits-- scheduled, as are all book club activities, precisely to the minute.

The performances began with the Yi Zheng Dance Troupe whose members performed the opening ceremony called "huge drums that shake the heavens and the spirit of the heart." The teenage members of this troupe tumbled and twirled to roaring sounds from the PA system, while drums without drummers (after the first number) provided the necessary archaic cultural backdrop. Meanwhile, two cameramen walked in front of the stage (an area decorated with flowers, both real and artificial)-- providing video for the bank of sixteen, large monitors that simultaneously projected the images of the dancers and drums to the audience already watching the stage.

Comfortable in this hyper-real world, the director of the government Committee for Cultural Promotion, the Director of the Book Club, and the Mayor of Taichung, each in turn, took the podium to elucidate the merits of people who read and the fragrance of

⁹⁴ Xing Yun, *Xing Yun chan hua* [Xing Yun talks on zen], (Kaohsiung: Foguang, 1987).

books.⁹⁵ The cultural minister asked the crowd: “Are the people who love to read books good or not?” And the audience answered, like students responding to a teacher: “Good.” The leader of the book club spoke of the transformations of the spirit of the heart (*gaige xinling*) made possible through reading “good books.” And the Mayor counseled the importance of clubs for the civic life of Taichung.

In keeping with a democratic shift from receiving the blessing of the state to taking its functions, in this and other events like this, the book club works to promulgate forms of relationships between people, commodities (books) and nature (domesticated and fragrant). As this transformation occurs, the structure of the event, like the fundamental layout of the city core, nonetheless, remains something from occupation times. For at this public celebration, entertainers provided injunctions to good behavior, education, and the life and improvement of the spirit-- just as traveling cultural propaganda groups did during the postwar ear. The difference: the book club is not building citizens per se, but Taiwanese denizens of world culture who, by celebrating “World Book Day in Taiwan,” recognize themselves as part of professional, world (new) culture.

Toward this end, Sun Cuifeng, a relatively well-known (for her television work) Taiwanese opera singer and actress (*gezaixi*) took the stage, not in the long robes, heavy head dresses, and defining facial make-up of traveling performers but in a banana yellow pants suit that matched perfectly the sensibility of the day. In her capacity as cultural

⁹⁵ For theorization of the hyper-real see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) and Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-reality*, trans. William Weaver (London: Picador, 1986).

expert, she told the crowd that “a lot of foreigners say we Taiwanese don’t have any culture, only snake alley” —referring to and reminding us of an (in)famous night market in Taipei where, among other things (including traditional medicines, pirated goods and foods) one could and can purchase snake meat. After teaching the audience hand movements appropriate for a female lead, she let loose a terrific Taiwanese seven-character operetta that filled the auditorium well beyond her seeming diminutive stature. The audience sat stunned (accustomed as they are to see operas only on TV). Despite and because of the fact that active troupes still sing and perform primarily to the gods (*gei shen kan*) at temples but not to people (ordinary people seem too busy to honor every god of old according to the still-operative lunar calendar), Sun Cuifeng’s demonstration made certain for all that spirits of times superseded can be conjured when necessary.

Later, Taiwanese children took the stage dressed in recognizably national costumes of Japan, Korea, Mexico, Switzerland, and other countries (while their mothers looked on from the back of the stage) to sing and dance, demonstrating (according to the glossy program): “the family of the fragrance of books— sharing books: it’s a small world.” Global diversity (contained in the familiar frame of Disney) and local culture (dressed in the same summer patterns as its “new culture” audience) could, by this demonstration, confirm the advent and universality of this noble and artistic middle class world view, a world view that shares (ironically but necessarily) the view of foreigners who snicker at snakes, pirated goods, and medicines sold, literally, on the street. By wearing her pants suit Sun Cuifeng came clean from this past to the point that she adopted the same distance from others as did and does her audience; for the *gezaixi* was

not even referenced, in this instance, by the children acting out the small world.⁹⁶ Rather, the world from which the Taiwanese opera issued vanished, as it were, only to be (as it waits to be) resuscitated as “Taiwanese new culture”— a culture capable of absent/present consideration of its own frame while it simultaneously seeks (as it finds) spirits of the past to give itself an assumed name within “the small world” frame.

Following Sun Cuifeng but proceeding the children dressed in costume, members of the book club took the stage in a segment entitled: “Same Stepping High Tide-- Hugging Books: When Mr. Book meets Ms. Flower (Fragrance of Book Pair).”⁹⁷ During this rehearsal of middle-class relations which served to mediate temporally and spatially the recovered world of culture and the anticipated future of the “small world,” the audience was treated to a skit in which hugging was demonstrated by several couples who, prior to hugging, exchanged a book and a single flower between them. The couples included: two women (hugging face to face without touching at the breasts), two men (hugging by grasping shoulders side by side), a man and woman (hugging [contrary to convention but true to form] in such a way that the man lifted up *his* leg, almost falling over-- getting a laugh), and a boy and mother (hugging in such a way that the boy, arching his back, lifted his mother over him)-- notably but not surprisingly, aging relatives, the

⁹⁶ Chen Ruoxi’s “*Zuihou ye xi*,” [The last night opera] in *Taiwan bendi zuojia duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* [A selection of short stories by local writers from Taiwan], p. 3-12, tells the poignant and far from nostalgic story of the disintegration of a local troupe in the face of the products of modernization. Of course, this historical twist is ironic because the *gezaixi* lost its audience to the emerging movie and television media now resuscitating it. For a discussion of a similar movement in Japan, see Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing*.

⁹⁷ Resonances with other, similarly transformative “saviors,” can be found in Richard J. Smith’s discussion of “Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy” during the New Culture Movement (1915-1925) in *Fortune-Tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991).

former focal point of familial relations, were not represented. The audience was enjoined to follow suit, and we did -- hugging our neighbors as awkwardly as did those upon whom we modeled our behavior. Having grown up listening to officials while standing in lines of hundreds of students in yellow hats under the hot sun on athletic fields of their public schools, the audience laughed, as if unaccustomed to public immediacy, but complied, as though accustomed to the role.

The production concluded with a shared proclamation that summed-up both the gist of many of the day's speakers and the spiritual, but not transgressive, hope of the "new culture" crowd:

I _____, at the 1997 World Fragrance of Book Day activity in Taiwan, give testimony to (my) willingness to utilize the behavior of (the following) concrete tools: buy good books, sell good books, talk about good books, and give good books to propagate, by putting to greatest use (my) strength of heart, good books for the culture of the fragrance of books and for the transformation of the spirit of the heart (*gaige xinling*); moreover, (I'm) willing, together with the beneficial friends of the fragrance of books, to complete this eternal (in heaven and on earth) beautiful dream of human life.

After the two-hour production, Mr. Zhang and I drove to his suburb where we caught a train to the neighboring town of Dajia to celebrate a different culture. We took the train because the traffic of thousands of people and various traveling deities and their entourages made road travel difficult. Everyone who converged on the market town came

to pay respects to the original goddess of travelers, business people, mercy and, according to some, the Taiwanese themselves: Mazu, for the first time touring Taiwanese temples from her home on Meizhou island in Fujian Province.⁹⁸

Instead of a comfortably cool air-conditioned auditorium, we entered, after leaving the train, a quintessentially “hot and noisy” (*renao*) situation. Set on old, urban streets lined with hawkers and small stores selling food, clothing, toys and, more likely than not, a plastic snake, the festival proceeded. At its center stood the deeply ornate Mazu temple where the Goddess sat solemn and kind as supplicants paraded toward her, in a slow and untimely line up the main street, to make offerings and displays of devotion. Devotees included: The Tainan County East Mountain Village Eternal Water Dance and Drum Team, dressed in pink with lavender sashes who did back flips to clanging symbols; the Tainan Extending Development Team of Struggling Bulls who brought their recalcitrant, human operated, water buffalo; teams of sword wielding martial arts units; and, an at least one spirit medium who flagellated his head and upper back.

Perhaps as ubiquitous as the photographers (giving “angular extension” to the proceedings for the folks watching “our Taiwanese culture” at home on the evening news or reading about it in authoritative textbooks) were explosions of firecrackers. A favorite demonstration of solidarity and, to be sure, immediacy, was provided by young men, clothed in heavy gray hooded raiment, who formed a circle with their backs to the center.

⁹⁸ See P. Steven Sangren, “History and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy: The Ma Tsu Cult of Taiwan,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* (vol. 30, 1988): 674-697.

Once these dozen or so young men reached the gaze of the Goddess, thousands of firecrackers exploded in their midst. Just as when the young men did battle with swords, the crowd, dressed in a wide assortment of clothing styles, ranging from white T-shirts to straw-hats to long-sleeve flannel and various locally-produced, night-market sold clothes,⁹⁹ was pushed back in the thick, choking gray smoke, only to squeeze in again toward the center of the temple grounds when all the remaining small fires were finally put out.

Struggling to keep contact through the crowd lining the parade route, Mr. Zhang and I traveled by foot to a brother-in-law's house-- a concrete house, doubling as store for gift packs of, for example, Small Balls of Red Bean Soup and sundry items. Inside this shop house, built during the martial-law era, we sat to a dinner of goose, chicken, frog ("Do you Americans eat frogs?"), sweet rice, beef (no pork, due to a foot and mouth disease epidemic), eel soup, spring rolls, and deep-fried fish. We ate on a plastic table cloth, sat on stools, and drank Taiwan beer and Mao Tai liquor from plastic cups-- a typically "traditional" (within the recent local history of material abundance and commodity production) meal. Table talk centered on local political issues, including talk of building new roads (the congestion proved its necessity), the competition between Dajia, Beigang, and other towns for preeminence in the Taiwan Mazu world (yes, a

⁹⁹ One boy in the crowd of on-lookers wore a shirt that read, CNOGACO BALLS and that was illustrated with a huge, very red, bull-like creature; whereas, more properly dressed kids would wear an officially licensed shirt which reads, simply: CHICAGO BULLS-- thereby avoiding the embarrassing attempt (misspelled words and distorted logos) of escaping the power of Super 301-- a sanction employed, so far only as a threat, by the US to stop copyright infringement at the local level and enforce purchase of licensed products. The effect of this ever-present "threat" (since

question of who gets more money) and the certainty (it was predicted) that Mazu, despite all hidden intentions from the Mainlanders, would go home with lots of trinkets and promises but very little cash.

Reflecting later that evening at his home on the encountered divide (*fenbie*)-- a divide characterized by local as opposed to universalizing gestures, night-market-bought clothes as opposed to department store fashions, teams of working-class youth in martial display as opposed to children held close by mothers learning the already understood "small-world" cultures through books, live music of drums, horns and firecrackers as opposed to taped music over blaring PA's, cash as opposed to credit, hot as opposed to cool, and night as opposed to day-- Mr. Zhang laughed, telling me: "We prayed to two gods today, Mr. Book and Mazu." "Is the divide really so great?" I asked. "It is true. Many Mazu people will read books, but few from the Book Fair will come worship Mazu. If they do, they'll feel embarrassed."

Instead of a gross struggle between classes conceived *a priori*, one finds a distance between people, produced as it is measured through tastes, positions, property and their sum: power.¹⁰⁰ In the sociological sense, the extant symbolic boundaries permit, albeit difficult, mobility. In fact, Mr. Zhang and Taiwan itself on the world stage

about 1993) has been to enforce distinction and short-lived mutations.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas B. Gold takes warranted issue with such a gross conception of class conflict in "Civil Society and Taiwan's Quest for Identity," in *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*, ed. Steven Harrell and Huang Chun-chieh (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p.51.

prove this possibility. Nonetheless, the boundaries remain and serve overcoming through the elucidation of difference.

Mr. Zhang expressed the achieved difference with regard to his family, in this, not unusual, way: “My relatives are very proud of me, but I don’t act differently around them.” They are proud because the mandate to overcome pervades ordinary talk and expectations in Taiwan. As a discourse of power, even those with little chance of achieving the middle class normality identify with overcoming and the “new culture” life. While many of those not overcoming identify upwardly, those anxiously seeking even greater things and development for Taiwan look back with some discomfort, trying not to act differently.

In general, Taiwanese are as uncomfortable with the divides as they are of acknowledging differences to foreigners. It has been often said to me: “It is not as bad as America.” Perhaps this is so— provided such things can be measured. Nonetheless, Taiwan is a densely populated place by world standards. Many people who are moving up have family members who remain relatively contiguous to them in space but who have not or will not move up socially. The persistent divisions are often expressed in the form of loans between siblings. Frequently, siblings remain for years in unofficial but certain arrears. Resentments, regrets and confusion develop naturally. Relationships between friends, as a result and contrary to what might be expected of Han people, are often considered to be as important as those between relatives. From and within the relationships between “beneficial friends (*yiyou*),” the distance, experienced

uncomfortably in family settings, can be and is often objectified as “traditional Taiwanese life,” obviating the embarrassment.

Considering that for those who inhabit the best of the new buildings that which is embarrassing is literally “below (*di*)” spatially and “behind (*luohou*)” in the temporal push to enter the “small world” frame, there is no wonder that the worship of Mazu embarrasses. Imagine, for example, Mr. Book and Ms. Flower waiting in line behind the giant, grimacing door gods, Grandfathers Seven and Eight, to pay respects to Mazu. Perhaps in a more egalitarian world this will occur, or, perhaps it could transpire in an even more mediated world where everyone, even Mazu, watches the festival on the pastiche screen of TV. Nevertheless, firecrackers, flaming sky lights (*tiandeng*), and intense (though disinterested) crowds of mingling followers testify to vibrancy. Precisely for this reason Mazu is not a god conjured for the selling of houses. She remains absent from the Zhengs’ brochure and elsewhere because her crowd and thereby she, in the Durkheimian sense, vitally exists and represents something other than the “profound and refined life of art.”

Steve Sangren writes regarding the unifying power of *ling* (magical efficacy or spirit) in Chinese religion:

...thanks to the Chinese penchant for attributing the same kind of power (*ling*) to all divinities, every god – Buddhist or Taoist– was encompassed within the idiom of order:disorder :: yang:yin.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*, p. 198.

The evidence suggests *ling* does unify. The notion of *ling* plays throughout the discourse of “the fragrance of book pair” as *xinling* (the spirit of the heart). It is also the case that the concept of (experienced as a yearning for) balance (*pingheng*) is ubiquitous in the discourse of the Zhengs— with a palimpsest of resonance for the *yang* and *yin* dichotomy. Finally, the Zhengs mediate order and disorder through construction and destruction, while, at the same time, the book club crowd transforms the “spirit of the heart” by reading books that reconcile, ideologically and symbolically, the transformations of Taiwan in its ongoing encounter with global change.

Nonetheless, insofar as the crowd of Mazu is “below” and “behind,” she signifies what Mr. Book and Ms. Flower do not. Because her crowd is “below” and “behind,” some may mistakenly assume (based on the nostalgia of the Zhengs and others) that the crowd of Mazu still follows the agricultural slack seasons for worship. Regardless of whether there is rice to harvest or not, most who can do work everyday in the machinery of production in Taiwan. It might be argued in light of this truism that the linkage across class boundaries in Taiwan rests with this fact, a fact grounded in economic activity and social change as much as in discourse itself; for the terms for “lower class” (including *bijiao di* and *hen diji*) are used in distinction to the term “working class”— a class (in the broadest sense of the term) to which most Taiwanese, including the Zhengs, belong. If work, however, truly linked people across class boundaries, one would expect the ideology of that work to link as well (if only because the forms of work are so obviously different). Yet, as might be expected, the official history of miraculous achievement, (the “touching thoughts” and “great longing” that combine to eradicate worlds) transmogrifies

as it moves into different spheres of taste, education, and aspirations into something removed from the international scene (though still expressive of suddenness), namely, luck. This split is famously depicted in one of Taiwan's longest-running television commercials, the ad for San Yang Whisbey. In this ad the chairman of a board of directors exhorts his board, sitting around a table high above the city, to "create a second Taiwan miracle." The working-class elixir is held in hi-ball glasses and raised in affirmation of the speech and of their collective intention to do it all again. This expression of working class fantasy cuts immediately to a crowd of hard hats on the ground, photographed from above (a new culture fantasy), who chant in unison: "Lucky, lucky" while raising whole bottles of the very popular mixture of vitamins and alcohol.

While it is true that throughout the city and into the countryside, gambling on baseball, pigeon races, and the lottery (*liuhecai*) captivates people in their daily relations in ways acting according to the mandates of world, middle class culture cannot, luck plays through the new culture class, too-- though this is the hidden fact that makes for the distinction and the dual, definitive fantasies of the cultural other. Mr. Zheng, for instance, at the conclusion of one tea-drinking session in which I propounded my theory of "lucky," raised his first ironically exhorting us all to greater "lucky." The truth of this "lucky" remains (as recognized by those to whom "lucky" is most often attributed-- e.g., petty gamblers who assert with absolute certainty that investing in stocks is but another, though far more expensive, form of gambling) that luck rules the lives of the legitimately successful as it does those without the hallowed sanctification of world, middle class

culture. Because of this, to openly attribute to someone the title of “lucky” is to degrade them.

Even for those whose legitimate attachment to the “noble and cultured” life remains tenuous (as defined by those with appropriate markers of status), Mazu fails to express their sensibilities and attachments. As one rural wife of a police officer who ran a numbers racket that paid for her husband’s Mercedes Benz told me: “We don’t go to worship Mazu. It was fun when we were children. We played with wooden toys at the temple. But now there are many other fun things to do.” Fun things include playing mahjong, watching music videos, talking with friends, and running the local lottery. The transmuted discourse of official history that can always be expressed (for the foreigner) as miraculous gets real with lucky numbers. Mazu is something for others in the area who are “more traditional” or less inclined to the new life of fun. Mazu becomes a memory, and this memory, by its very enunciation as a memory, precludes the fact that the Mazu of today carries with her a crowd whose making includes millions of plastic and metallic objects, produced during the boom years and still produced today-- though to far lesser profits. While it might still be argued that because Mazu signifies (too closely for advertising) a past and modes of production (not entirely superseded) that she remains the true icon of Taiwanese identity, those who live the “life of art” or something similar to it can and do wave her group away-- in gestures both calm and mean but never total.

One can more than assume that the feeling is mutual. Senses of antagonism, passive resistance, sullenness, and petty and not-so-petty crime (see chapter seven), testify to the effects of desire-provoking difference. Like most everyone in Taiwan’s educated

middle class, people in the book club sense (if not understand) the breaches. In particular, they make out dangers to the functioning of Taiwan as a partner in the global world of high tech production and quality consumption and to social stability on the island. Like middle classes elsewhere in the world, they hope to remedy the resistant problem of their production by making over the entire society in their image. As part of this universalizing intention to establish a “treasure-island full of the fragrance of books (*shuxiang man bao dao*),” the club, however, goes directly to jail. There, they seek to engage prisoners in reading. They have titled their outreach program: “Let the Fragrance of Books Fly Over the High Walls.”

Club members have written about it extensively and made its cause a subject of their World Book Day celebration. As the club points out, such activities are supported by United Nations resolutions and are surely warranted. The book club demonstrates its success by collecting testimonies of prisoners, in particular female prisoners, in the club’s effort to “let books do the make-up.” However, such an effort speaks at once of a failure and of a general orientation. Unable to reach, for example, the so-called small business person who might own a cigarette and betel nut stand on the street or teens who drop out to punch rivets, the effort to extend the book club “regardless of class boundaries (*bu fen jieceng*)” and bring order to the distinctions they foster over-shoots its mark. The mark is missed for two reasons. First, their sights are set not on the difficult antagonisms in their own society but on the exemplars of world, middle-class culture who guide their efforts to rise socially in a manner that corresponds to and promotes the rise of Taiwan in the world (new) order of the production and cultivation of tasteful living. Secondly, as they

supersede elements of their society, their longing for a return bi-passes those overcome and lands squarely on those who are marked, more or less permanently, as lost to society, i.e., criminals— so long as they remain contained. In this vein Mr. Zheng would speak of prisoners as those “with nothing but time to read, whereas I have freedom but no time,” as though with prisoners longing for lost loves could be ironically realized in pure, structured space— precisely what their utopian future promises through appeals to pure pasts.

Book Club Weekly Practice

In general book club members come from the professions in Taiwanese society. An opportunistic sample might include the following: a designer, a saleswoman of children’s materials, a reporter, an accounts manager, a securities analyst, a photographer, an elementary school teacher, a lender, an urban planner, an exporter, and a custom’s inspector. In keeping with the promise of the “fragrance of books,” the members find in book reading and the practice of sharing enjoyment that is never removed from the practical requirements of their successful work and family lives.

One woman said:

The study group provides me with a great change— especially in the communication between husband and wife, parents and children. It has opened all the knots in my heart (*rang wo xin shang de jie dou dakai le*).

This is because of the different ideas and influences; it is also because of this that my husband told me that he plans to buy a gold plate sometime and give it to our study group (laughing).

A man, reiterating the theme of the benefits of the club to one's personal life; asserted:

After I participated in the book club, I made up a monthly budget for my company employees to buy books, and I lent it to them freely. Of course, this is the most important thing to our sales team (uses English to say "sales team"). We also hope during our monthly meeting that they will present a paper, no matter if it is from a magazine or a book, just an idea to present to the meeting. We do this to establish common consensus between administration and employees (literally between ups and down *shang xia de yige gongshi*). So, I feel joining the study group has a great benefit; it is that I can be, comparatively, a bit more of a relaxed boss.

Many, like the following man, speak of how the group of friends in their common undertakings and spiritual effect have the responsibility to change society:

When I first joined the club. I was simply holding a heart to learn and to pursue self-growth. After two years have gone by, not only have I met a group of excellent teachers and beneficial friends (*yiyou*), but the most happiest thing is I clearly understand what is the value of human life, the relationship of my own expectations and my responsibility to promote the fragrance of books in this society.

Within highly structured and taste-conscious biweekly meetings, the transformation of the heart and the development of beneficial friends get practiced. The meetings are held at the Zhengs' construction company offices in a large, brightly lit and

climate-controlled room (specifically set aside for the club) that overlooks the central plaza of a multi-storied international office complex (as noted, a very fashionable location that abuts Taichung's "little Paris"-- a block set aside for strolling, dining and shopping). The thirty to fifty people (usually about sixty percent women) who attend discuss books chosen in advance by the editing committee.¹⁰² The club's biweekly meetings begin with skits (literally, a "fellowship report") designed to set the tone for the festive afternoon. Following the "fellowship report," the chairperson, chosen for the day, introduces the special speaker. Usually this is a club member, but, in the past, writers and other outside experts have given speeches. After the thirty-minute speech, assigned analysts each have five minutes in which to comment on the book and the speech. A short break follows in which everyone can get up and chat with others, take care of matters related to the club and have some refreshments (usually tea). When everyone returns to their seats after five minutes, the club is treated to "enjoyment of music." During this section, club members often listen to music or watch a music video. (A sophisticated sound and video system provides the P.A. and the music). Following the music, thirty minutes are given to "free sharing." During this period book club members can take a microphone, stand before the audience and share their analysis for up to three minutes per person. The main speaker is then provided five minutes for summation and comment. The remaining 35 minutes are given to five short segments: "the biweekly message," the joyful small product," "the

¹⁰² The club has ten committees (Long Term Development, Elder Classmates, Administration, Treasury, Public Relations, Activities, Editing, Art and Design, Youth Book, and Social Education) in which most active members participate.

classical time,” “the introduction of a good book,” and “the introduction of next time’s book.”

The book under discussion remains central to every meeting. Often those chosen reflect the popular books (both fiction and nonfiction) of the year. To take a random year, 1996, for example, the club read the following: *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Seeds of Happiness*, *Wonderful Communication Between Men and Women*, *The Biography of Jin Yong*, *Walk out of New Zealand*, *The Movie Theaters of Architecture*, *Field Hunting Song*, *The Map of Spirits*, *Everybody is Standing*, *Daily Notes on Mountain Living*, *Hug the Future*, *Sophia’s World*, *A Collection of World Short Stories*, *Taipei People*, *The Secrets of Success*, *The Adventure Between Heaven and Earth*. This list of books reflects the mix typically found on the best-seller lists in Taiwan.¹⁰³ This blend includes success and self-help books, popular novels, screenplays, and topical books related to health, travel, and spirituality.¹⁰⁴ Usually these lists contain numerous translations as well as

¹⁰³ The exception in the above list might be Bai Xianyong’s classic, *Taipei People*, noted for its difficulties and unpopularity, both with Confucian-minded academics and people concerned with the Taiwan-oriented and, occasionally, nostalgic portrayals of pre-miracle Taiwan found in *xiangtu* literature. It must also be noted that the choice is not surprising in light of the preoccupation with homosexuality seizing Taiwan at the time. Bai, as one of the earliest public figures to reveal his homosexuality, could be read as an example of homosexuals in general.

¹⁰⁴ Here is an example of the top selections from a non-fiction bestseller list from the New Classmates Bookstore (*xinxueyou shuju*— a Japanese-owned and island-wide chain) of March, 1997 (recorded at the Taiping road branch in Taichung): 1. *Simplify Your Life* (translation); 2. *Awaken the Giant* (a translation of success guru Anthony Robbins’s book); 3. *Taiwan Can say No* (Taiwanese sequel to the Japanese bestseller: *Japan Can Say No*, by He Duanming); 4. *A Princess who Borrows Clothes* (A story, by Chen Ming-li, about selling life insurance by a former actress turned saleswoman); 5. *Complete Fascination Handbook* (A book about how to be fascinating and fascinated by Tian Xiren); 6. *The Dream of Being Successful* (by Qing Mengzhong, the host of “Select the extension of the dream” radio program); 7. *How to Become Successful and Rich* (by Chen Anzhi); 8. *EQ is Actually Easy* (another in a long string of *EQ* [emotional quotient] sequels, all capitalizing on the “hot tide of *EQ* [*EQ rechao*]”; this one is by Zhang Yiyun).

locally-written books.¹⁰⁵ For example, when I was attending club sessions, *Inner Simplicity* and *How to Manage Generation X* (both translations) were discussed. For purposes of analysis herein, I will concentrate discussion on two locally written and produced books and their discussions in order disclose recurring themes in the club and, by extension, in the larger book-buying public. The aim is to disclose the way in which the book club activities reinforce the patterns of “new culture” life, search out points of identification, confront partially the past, project an appropriate inner experience and reconfigure ideas from the West into their own, overcoming “new culture” context.

*The Personal Investment Bible*¹⁰⁶

Written by Huang Peiyuan, the Berkeley-educated General Manager of the Sancai Company (1997), *The Personal Investment Bible* found itself a bestseller for much of 1996 and 1997.¹⁰⁷ The book advocates a long-term strategy of investment for Taiwanese which includes the principles of “buy but don’t sell” and “don’t put money in the banks,” and, in general, develop a money management “EQ” that will enable investors to formulate and stick to long-term money-management plans.¹⁰⁸ As such, the book reflects the spirit (a *Bible*!) of the times prevailing in the United States (propagated easily to Taiwan) when people were (and as of 1999 are) investing enormous sums in the financial markets. At the time of this book club meeting (November 1997), the Taiwanese

¹⁰⁵ The range of books from which the club’s reading list takes shape comes under some criticism. In fact, Mr. Zhang, once the book club editor resigned his position and eventually left the club because, as he said, “the books were like a box. I like more philosophical books. And I felt that many of the people spoke a lot but didn’t say very much.”

¹⁰⁶ Peiyuan Huang, *Licai Shengjing* (Taipei: Chengbang Wenhua Hang, 1986).

¹⁰⁷ His position, again, admits the centrality and efficacy of builders.

¹⁰⁸ The same author followed his initial success with another hit: *Investment EQ*— capitalizing, as did others, on the

economy was beginning to feel the effects of currency devaluation in Southeast Asia of 1997; yet, while this issue was noted during the meeting, it did not deter the enthusiasm of the group.

Like most every session, this meeting began to take shape a half hour before the official starting time with a hubbub of sharing experiences since the last session, purchasing books for the next meeting, practicing for the fellowship section, and otherwise carrying on with enthusiasm, happiness, and some giddiness. The official meeting commenced with “fellowship report” in which one man, wearing a shirt with ribbons stuck to his chest that said, on one side, “market” and, on the other, “American money” played the bumpkin. Properly representing cosmopolitan awareness, a young, professional woman informed him that the place for his money was indeed in stocks and that slogans were more than another popular wave (*rechao*). Informed, he left the front happily; his vulgar ways overcome.

On the white board behind them and in front of the 40 or so people in foldout chair-desks was stuck a professionally produced poster that contained a collage of wealthy Taiwanese. At the center of the poster (the poster itself situated between permanent displays containing proclamations of the aims of the building company) stood a dreamy, softly focused photo of Vice President Lien Chan. At that time Lien Chan was no longer the Premier, having lost his seat during a period of public outrage over his apparent indifference to the problems of public security (see chapter seven). In particular, many were incensed that he could take to the golf course during the Bai Xiaoyan crises.

“EQ hot tide (*EQ rechao*).”

Nonetheless, as the special speaker stood before the group, it became clear that Lien Chan had not lost his status with this group and had been selected to serve, as he does in the *Investment Bible*, as an exemplar of choices, manners, and outlook precisely for the reasons many castigate him.

After briefly recalling an earlier acquaintance with Huang Peiyuan, the special speaker turned to the example:

Mr. Lien Chan, in 1993 and 94, his stocks were only one fifth of his money. How much did this one fifth grow? It grew into 860,000,000 NT. He only has to sit around (*zuo zai zhe yi pang*), and he makes 80,000,000 NT a year. Let's look at the first hundred highest salaried workers. They all work very hard. The highest one makes 16,000,000 NT a year. Even 70,000,000 NT does not match what Mr. Lien makes when he sits around. This points out the importance of money management. We know how important money is. Do we all know what good opportunity is? Is it about the eight characters of your fate, they are very hard (*ying*), (switching to Taiwanese:) those eight characters, once born, then what?

Audience member:

“He has a golden spoon between his teeth!”

Speaker:

Oh, that is so wonderful (*bang*)! There's no need to work; there's no reason for money management. Everything is possible from the

beginning. The other way to get rich, because I don't have that chance, is to find oneself one that will....

Audience member:

“Save thirty years of struggle (*fendou*)!”

Referring to rich spouses, the audience and the speaker softened the hard reality of inequality from birth through the use of their mother tongue of Taiwanese¹⁰⁹ (a move which placed their desire within signifiers that constituted their early world) and through the use of the obviating Mandarin term of *fendou* (a word associated with the social sanctioned struggle of overcoming externally imposed hardship) to describe the transformations they have produced in a festive but somewhat anxious exchange, typical of the day's tone. The point of identification remained a higher status through economic power that enables one to enjoy the finer things without the celebrated burden of the “thirty years of struggle”— i.e., Lien Chan at the golf course.

To get to this level of refinement, the speaker followed the mandate, clearing away the wreckage of the past. In the area of money management, this means keeping money out from under the bed and out of the bank— two earlier forms of savings (the first overcome by KMT policies and the second by the sight of diminishing institutional returns in a world where the state is society). He said:

I told my father it is no use to save money; the most important thing is to look for resources to make money. Of course, this brings up conflict (*hui*

¹⁰⁹ Mr. Zheng makes a point to speak in Taiwanese whenever he takes to the podium to make comments, thereby placing himself, at every turn, within the signifying realm of home.

qi chongtu). But my family is very good at not putting money in banks. We have experts from banks; they told us not to put money in banks, but there are still people doing it. According to statistics, the average family has 600,000 NT in banks. How much interest does that make? Maybe five percent. So if you want to have 10,000,000 NT you need 200 years to save. You need to tell your second generation to put their money in the bank, too, before anyone gets rich.

A speaker in his late thirties who tells his father how to handle the family money?

Such an action is immediately understood by book club members, all of whom were raised under the Confucian ideology of the KMT,¹¹⁰ as having the potential, as the speaker admitted, to “bring up conflict” because such an action is, on the face of it, anti-filial. However (as noted in chapter two), most everyone with the aspirations expressed in this group does act in such a way, especially when the issues relate to the important decisions of the times, when expert opinion can be brought to bear, and when distinction can be put to use.¹¹¹

There remains more conflict hidden in this recalled exchange. It is widely believed that Taiwanese society is “eating up its inheritance” (*chi yichan* or *kao yichan*) in the rush to modernization. While this phrase denotes the opposite of “eating the young,” it, nonetheless, stands as an apt characterization for a generation that has

¹¹⁰ See Richard W. Wilson, *Learning to be Chinese: The Political Socialization of Children in Taiwan* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970).

¹¹¹ The public exposure of his family affairs is also a taboo. But the taboo can be partially ignored because close friends can talk about family affairs, and the club specifically sets out to create this sensibility of friends-like-family.

transformed the entire physical and spiritual character of a place in its rush to establish its place in the world, thereby, in effect, “eating” it. In contrast, when company officials are accused of “eating the young,” the reference is to their *apparent* unwillingness to change in order to secure the world of consumer dreams for their children. Regardless of what is being devoured, in the mythic imagination fostered in text-books of the post-war period, the poor farmer who thought ahead several generations when making business decisions exemplified the smartest and most virtuous of agriculturists. Nowadays, the long-term is collapsed into a few years. And the work of the preceding generations is simultaneously “lost” -- perhaps to the “great river of time.” Well aware of these subtexts, the speaker spoke to the latent issues, preparing the way for anxiety-reduction:

The rich farmers have lots of land. We say that doesn't help because they get rich from land. The question is maybe they have land from two or three generations, but they sell them and become exploding households (*baofahu*)....

Indeed, the “exploding households” of farming families who became extraordinarily affluent by selling ancestral lands (buying into the dream of the times with extravagant purchases) represent a vulgar element (the “smell of the stain of copper”) which the “new culture” seeks distance from-- their mere mention causing responses ranging from laughter (from the secure) to resentment (with those still struggling for their millions). Yet, a hypocrisy of this rejection rests with the fact that the members of the book club became affluent with the sudden transformation of Taiwan-- their own families exploding into nuclear fragments. Seeking to accomplish through their investments a

new suddenness of “sitting around,” they apparently must distinguish themselves while affirming their own cultural (i.e., class) legitimacy. The speaker continued:

Most of the people who drive high-class cars are not necessarily highly educated or from rich family backgrounds. Now, we are a different! We are high class (laughter from the audience), and we drive high-class cars. But we see people on the road who drive high-class cars that don't match their backgrounds. (As if telling a secret): The author found out that the rich people of education and good family background have a principle: they don't sell land or antiques easily; they look at them as long term investments. The land is a family estate for two or three generations. And it can't be sold!

By following the maxims of the author (reformulated only insofar as they appear in a new cultural context), readers can participate in a new, “long-term” attainment of affluence. The guiding stars in this attainment are the aristocratic families, past and present-- not virtuous farmers. While club members orient themselves in distinction to “exploding households,” elements of their own origins are forgotten. As they refuse (in a constitutive gesture) the wreckage of the past in pursuit of their status, they proceed through social comparison of conduct to the assertion of unambiguous goals. As this social logic suggests it should, the book club meeting settled, after these moments of legitimating talk, into a practical discussion of how to go about making money through investments.

This discussion of practical steps was interrupted after a time by a couple who gave a dissenting opinion. During my visits to the club, such breaks occurred occasionally. At these moments book club members would revisit periods of their pasts, perhaps inadvertently, to make comments about the proposed ideas. A western-educated Taiwanese counselor who attended the book club session told me they served as a type of “therapy.” In this case, a prominent couple in the club found the idea of “buy whatever, but don’t sell (*suibian mai, bu yao mai*)” to be unhelpful at best and misleading at worse. The wife told a story of her and her sister. A few years back they were suddenly laden with cash (“maybe 2,000,000 NT just for investment”). Not knowing any better what to do, they walked into a bank and turned their money over to an account manager. When they went back to withdraw some, they discovered that most had been lost in a stock market crash. As she spoke the sense of greedy innocence (i.e., wanting to make more money and clinging to her trustworthy, biologically immediate sister as she [they] navigated a strangely familiar environment) came clear.

The time in which these uncomfortable, publicly recalled, pasts passes quickly, however. For after three or five minutes, the tiny bell is rung by the day’s host. While the story might continue a few seconds more, generally speaking, everyone stops and retakes their seats.

During the “enjoyment of music” section the collapse of empirical history and study of bourgeois forms continued. We were treated to two Enya music videos, projected on a wall-sized screen.

In the first video called “Caribbean Blue,” the earnest (in its never-altering four count measures) and impressionistic (in its use of electronic distortion) music of Enya is matched by images of the same form: affirmatively familiar and softly focused. In the video, one sees impressionistic cartoons of young people, clothed in splashes of pastel color, who twirl and dance in courtyards of flowers and vines. The only reality to punctuate the dream images is a young, clear, blue-eyed boy who seems lost but perfectly adapted to this world in which people live in chocolate houses. Enya emerges (mysteriously so, only insofar as the dream-image is not already understood) from a lake, and there, she gives the boy a book and walks away into the moonlight.

The audience sat rapt watching this form of their lives: books, commodified houses, intense interest in the “pure and innocent (*tianzhen*)” child in the surreal world of ever-changing natural backdrops. When the lights came on, the hostess asked (in the public form of affirmation so often encountered): “Is she beautiful or not?” And the audience answered, most assuredly, “beautiful.”

Such a video that seems to fit perfectly the sensibility of the club is not unusual. At another club meeting, Strauss Waltzes were played for an audience encouraged to “listen carefully” to it while the lights were turned off-- video images not necessary; for the bourgeois sensibility of 19th century Europe is already, as it were, projected across the Taichung skyline. At another session, the group Adiemas, with its Enya-inspired, impressionistic sounds, had its videos played before the group. In one, dolphins swim through a city in which a professionally dressed woman, the focus of the camera, walks among skyscrapers and dolphins in complete control of her emotions and appearance

(and, thereby, everything?). Nature, like that viewed from a car on a drive to the mountains, becomes surrealistic backdrop that beckons people towards its fusion of known (i.e., projected and comforting) forms. In another video of a song aptly titled, “Return to Innocence,” all images are played in reverse, not in comic fashion, but as if the predestined movement of official history were suddenly thrown in reverse. Meanwhile, as if repeating [or anticipating?] the Zhengs’ direction to recall to “repeat the warmth of those parts you and I familiarly had,” the chorus chants: “Return to yourself. The Return of Innocence.”

*Transcending the Learning of this Life*¹¹²

It was during the session discussing *Transcending the Learning of this Life* (*Chaoyue jinre de xuexi*) that the Adiemas video played-- adding imaginary expression through the proper medium of film to the book under discussion. Written by a well-known host of two television series-- “The Big Dreamer” and “The Big Winner of Selling”-- Chen Lerong (translatable as, Happy Happy Chen), the prose poem reflects, like history in reverse, an inverse image of the success manual. As such it is the kind of book that people, like Mr. Zheng, read to help them find balance in their daily lives. A popular book, though not a leading best seller after its publication in 1997, it promises to help people develop a “thankful heart (*ganen de xin*)” and “a return to the beginning” (*zai hui shou*)”-- two familiar themes that found expression, not only in the book but in two very popular songs of the same names (see the next chapter). Toward this end, it touches, like

¹¹² Chen Lerong, *Chaoyue jinsheng de xuexi* (Taipei: Meta Media, 1997). The title, translated by the publisher in English as *Transcending the Learning of this Life* gives a spiritual cast to the meaning appropriate for the tenor of the

the black and white photographs of fallen leaves throughout, feelings about the contemporary moment without addressing causality. Because of this, it meanders through themes of loss and recovery, the gigantic and the miniature, the spiritual and the material, technological change and nature-- effectively tracing the glassy contours of the "new culture" world and, simultaneously, urging and promising to help people get out and, as Happy Happy Chen urges in the book's final line, "go out and look (*qu kan*)."

Although it expresses many of the club members' other feelings, when it came time to discuss the book, many felt as confused by it as they are by the world they are transforming and transformed by.

The special speaker for the day began the discussion by saying:

I read it through. It seems easy, but I don't seem to understand it. What does it mean by (quoting the book) "Come, come, come. Go, go, go. Up, up, up. Down, down, down. Tall, tall, tall. Small, small, small.

Gradually, gradually, gradually. Rushing, rushing, rushing?" Is this the stock market or the election? (Audience: laughing).

Her quote comes from page 109, chapter seven, entitled: "Obliterating Dualistic Oppositions (*minwei eryuan duili*)."

The point of view, from the Daoist (or Saussurian) perspective, would seem quite clear: the absolute ordering of knowledge of the world arrives in binary packages and are far from absolute-- a fact which everyone may know and yet not recognize (except insofar as people tend to fear the dissolution of familiar

book; nonetheless, the word translated as "transcending," *choayue*, translates, too, as "overcoming."

binaries). Happy Happy Chen extends the concept of the limits of arbitrary binaries to the predicament of human emotions in this modern day:

What are our reasons for boredom and emptiness? For most people, the times of strong feelings of pleasure are never enough, nor the feelings of bitterness nor the feelings of pleasure; they cannot be sustained for long (p. 106).

Like the oppositions, these feelings come and go, captivate and disappear.

Reasons for them remain indistinct. The speaker, following the tone continued:

I feel life is composed of relative relationships: friendship, love, and career. Sometimes happy, sometimes some worms, some conflicts, some excitement, some encouragement, some sadness.

Another member, taking up the themes, later lamented:

Many people, including me at the beginning, set out to chase fortune, fame, positions. But, really think about it. All these social responsibilities are just a small part of our lives. Temporary ownership can never last forever. Like a house, it gets old. Cars get old. Fame, positions, along with time decrease. Our next generation will never hear about us. They forget you, and we are still chasing blindly.

Cars and houses, two primary markers of success, age quickly in the social sphere of commodities and, therefore, track time. The breakdown of commodity forms in the rush of transformation and the disquieting “progress (*jinhua*)” of the contemporary hour, becomes (as the implied failure of the commodity form operates in the Zhengs’ own

advertising) the poetically and metaphorically evoked background necessary for hope.

The author writes regarding loss and utopian returns:

We roam about, and our roaming takes us further from home. A welcoming sounds says: "All along we have been one family (*jia*); in the past we were, in the future, and at the present-shared time, we are too." We have left, but it is our aspiration to leave. Even to the point of this kind of leaving, even at the beginning of this material transformation of the pattern of the universe (*yuzhou*), when it was wholly established, it was good (p. 45).

In this passage the longing recognition of loss becomes itself an eminent numen, a divinely good moment at the beginning of the universe. Longing for this impossible origin, the material world reduces to a sign of loss. Prompted by passages such as these and the talk of other members, another member, wrapping her words into the familiar imperative of overcoming, got up to talk about the struggles for success, saying: "We should always challenge the us of yesterday, so we can grown and learn, finding new things."

The apprehension of the mysterious loss through fading commodities (including their own success in the world) provokes continual appeal to the apparently certain discourse of success. That is, self-help is not removed from the Godhead. In keeping with this double movement, longing and practical investing, impressionistic hopes and devouring daily demands, innocence and greed all merged together in the talk of club

members. Like the building industry and its public, the author recognizes the general resolution of tensions in surrealistic talk of dream houses:

At last, entering the bedroom, elegantly ending up on the bed. This impression symbolizes our ignorance toward the pattern of the spirit of humans that causes disaster. We truly have no clearly visible beautiful doorplate. Also, we can not clearly touch the truth or falsity beyond the door; the great oscillation surpasses the restrictions of daily, normal life; we mistakenly think the self can accept the battle of the unconscious level. We understand one level, actually very pitifully. Dreaming is the best kind of tool for exploring the movements of the spirit of the heart (*daibianxin de xinlin tanxian huodong*) (p. 61).

As far as I could tell, no book club member followed Happy Happy Chen to make a connections between the “spirit of humans that causes disaster” and the achievement of the elegant bedroom— let alone the psychoanalytic reverberations of dreams, the unconscious, and that which is left behind. Nor did anyone make a connection between the dream with its utopian content and the truth of the unconscious (that which is literally below, *xia yishi*, consciousness). However, as the book made un-theorized and softly-focused associations, so too did the book club members, revealing that the objectifications of theory are not necessary for people who know what is happening in their lives, while it happens if only through the loose associations of signs that stand intelligible only if translatable into the signs of ordinary language and circumstances.

Another club member offered:

I enjoy flower arranging, but one day I suddenly felt those beautiful flowers growing on the ground, naturally taken care of by the sun and moon; but, because of our greedy hearts, we pick them up and sell them and make money off them. We also go learn how to put them together and make them look alive. It is sort of hypocritical and greedy. Including the one here today (referring to herself).

A strange sense of a world beyond figures in this lament. As it is known, the natural world reveals itself to be but a fabrication, somehow unavailable and unknown to the senses-- e.g., flowers, when not arranged and "cared for by the sun and the moon" serve only as signs of greed; the loss remains beyond conception. This alienation occurs because of greed and, as the author suggests, because people cannot look beyond their own world of illusion. In keeping with the book and discussion of it, a Taiwanese friend shared with me a dream that grasps for this other, non-sensible sensible world while still clinging to the metaphor and figure of the house:

A few days ago, I had a dream that I lived in an apartment without anybody living there. The surroundings included wide meadows and fruitful fields where flowers bloomed in luxuriant beauty. Moreover, the blue ocean was in front of my house. Whenever I opened the windows, this amazing scenery in its entirety would be present: it seemed like at my home (*haoxiang zai wo jia*)! I felt refreshed and comfortable instantly. Although I had no company, I didn't feel lonely. I continued to think, then

I seemed to see something running toward me from some rugged mountains. The closer it came, the more clearly I could see the shape. Gosh! It was a giant bear! I was so frightened that I trembled. I could only use my strength to scream. That's all. Before long, I suddenly opened my eyes and found I was not on my bed but on the floor....

Like that of Happy Happy Chen (born, as the book tells it, "during the year the first television station in Taiwan was established, 1962 [p. 140]"), the dream imagery of my friend expands to television-like panoramas of an affirming nature. Separated from the struggle for distinction (while producing and produced by it) in safe, comfortable and convenient housing, what returns from the horizon of the dream world of mass-meditated society frightens. Nonetheless, as it is implicitly understood, the boundary also entices. Several prominent members of the book club, including the Zhengs, pursued this edge of experience through a search for the truth of the spirit of the heart-- a pursuit that took them from their regulated and regulating practice of reading. Like my friend after the dream of the charging bear, this encounter with the "truth of the heart" literally left them on the floor, trembling.

Chapter 6: When Culture is Not Enough

An Outline of *Heqi* Metaphysics

Sometime before I learned of *Heqi* from Mr. Zhang, I was informed by a layman caretaker at a newly built Buddhist temple in the Taichung suburb of Dali “what we need is a return of *Heqi*.” *Heqi* can be translated several ways. According to my *New Practical Chinese-English Dictionary*, it can mean “gentle, affable, agreeable, friendly, cordial, good-natured.”¹¹³ As such, it might appear as yet another critical and utopian response to the raging of Taiwanese modernity. If this is so, it is like the performance of “World Book Day in Taiwan;” for, despite its apparent novelty, it is a term with resonance with Taiwan’s KMT-dominated past. For instance, in 1951 newly arrived soldiers were enjoined by cartoon teaching aides to “treat people with *heqi*.”¹¹⁴ Broken in two parts, the term also denotes the concept of harmony (*he*) and atmosphere (*qi*)—making possible the literal and plausible translation of harmonic atmosphere when applied to group settings. When I first met with the practitioners (*tungxiu*) of *Heqi*, however, I was informed that the word *qi* would be taken in its metaphysical and Chinese medical sense of “life energy.” As such, *Heqi* refers to the “positive energy” of the universe for practitioners insofar as it is set against the notion of *liqi* which means (according to the dictionary) “perversity, disharmony, irregularity” and (according to the practitioners), simply and significantly, “negative energy.”

¹¹³ Shih-chiu Liang, ed. *A New Practical Chinese-English Dictionary* (Taipei: Far East Book Company, 1971), p. 149.

¹¹⁴ Bullard, Monte R., *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan’s Development* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), p. 186, lesson 13.

Heqi practice was initiated in New Jersey by a man who is called by practitioners *laoshi* (teacher) in Mandarin and Master or Teacher in English. According to stories told amongst practitioners, his family came to Taiwan (where he was born following occupation) from “the mysterious place where many religious currents come together and form: Sichuan.” After an accident in Taiwan left him crippled, he cured himself using traditional *qigong* techniques— a not unfamiliar story for Chinese religious/medical healers. Following his cure, he went to the US to study Chinese medicine with a Chinese medical doctor from the Mainland for seven years. Completing his training in Chinese medicine, he began to teach a nascent form of *Heqi* called *xiantian qigong* (First Heaven *qigong*). When he later came to an understanding of “universal love,” he began to teach and lead *Heqi* group practice in New Jersey. Because of his tireless efforts and the devotion of his followers, it soon spread to several cities in the US-- claiming both ethnic Chinese and other followers. Only in 1996 did he and his followers take the practice to Taiwan. Like other sects, cults, and quasi-religious practices on the island during the 1990s, the number of practitioners grew steadily. As of 1999 there are practice groups in Taipei and the Taichung area. Permanent centers with paid staff operate in Taichung, Taipei, and San Jose.

Like members of the book club, adherents to the teacher and the practice of *Heqi* come from the professional middle class, e.g., engineers, programmers, nutritionists, medical researchers and others. The cost to join the group in Taiwan was 18,000 NT dollars up-front. But, in 1997, at roughly the same time that the government began to crackdown on religious groups (such as that of Song Qili), the up-front fee was canceled.

Since then, people have not been overtly encouraged to contribute money, time, and useful goods (including property) to the organization; nonetheless, the master has taught that the universal love of *Heqi* will move people to respond with gratitude. Many do.¹¹⁵

What the practice offers includes the promise to restore people to their lost true selves (*zhenwo*) in a world dominated by negative forces. With this true self recovered, individuals will be liberated to act powerfully within the constructive mandates of “universal love.” According to *Heqi* materials:

Heqi represents the bright side of life: health, happiness, love, hope, compassion, faith, stability, harmony and clarity. *Heqi* represents relationships: between people and nature, people and people, people and events, body and mind, and all the internal systems of our body. *Heqi* is a state; the base of our health. *Heqi* also represents the state of our reactions, our state of mind, our goals and our directions.

As this promise suggests, while people come to *Heqi* for a variety of reasons, the most common stem from concerns over health, both physical and psychological.¹¹⁶ To promote healing, *Heqi* bridges the East/West divide conceptually as it does so physically through the transnational flow of practitioners. The origin of sickness is viewed through the lens of traditional Chinese medicine that holds, for example according to the teacher, that “anger damages the liver system, fear damages the kidney system, worry damages the

¹¹⁵ At the time many religious leaders in Taiwan were commanding as much as 1,000,000 NT per person to join. The government, after a series of scandals, including the Song Qili affair, began to pressure groups about fundraising practices. At this time the teacher made clear that *Heqi* is not a religion.

¹¹⁶ Mr. Zhang, for example, became involved when a relative was diagnosed with cancer; Mr. Zheng turned to the

spleen system, anxiety damages the heart system, and sadness damages the lung system.” A licensed traditional Chinese doctor, the teacher can treat these ailments with the use of acupuncture, *qigong*, and herbs. Yet he also employs scientific explanations and practices. For example regarding the treatment of anemia, it is said that the practice of *Heqi* will “strengthen cardiac muscle contraction and regulate the amount of blood being pumped. When in a meditative *qi* state, the body’s need for blood and oxygen decrease, metabolism slows down, and the need for energy decreases.” For members of the professional middle classes, most of whom have considerable schooling and admire the accomplishments of Western science (often expressed through reverence for Taiwanese returning to Taiwan from successful study in the United States) but who also resent the hold of “Western” science over their daily lives, such an integration stands essential and part of *Heqi*’s attraction.

The teacher, however, goes beyond the already difficult integration of medical and metaphysical conceptions of health and the sheer fact of the return of a successful native son to evince a fundamentally social and, therefore, symbolic and technological reading and critique of the causes of failing health and psychological dis-equilibrium:

The entire environment is in an ill condition....what causes it?

Each of us is like a small radio station continuously transmitting messages.

These messages are accumulated in the cosmos, and in our bodies. It is

because these many different small radio stations continuously transmit

various negative messages (complaints, hatred, resentment, and feelings of

suppression and fear). These messages, accumulating in the outside world and within our own bodies, result in a very forceful negative effect...

According to the teacher, everyone is both transmitter and satellite dish; that is, everyone is technological and human, overpowering and overpowered, sender and receiver. This striking message is not unlike that of the government which plans (as of 1999) to put satellite dishes on new 2,000 NT dollar notes -- effacing tyrants with technology and signaling the place of Taiwan in the world as a properly receptive and advanced economy. (It should also be noted that the satellite dish will grace the 2,000 NT bill, whereas children will occupy the 500 and 1,000 NT bills-- a hierarchy of sorts). Moreover, not unlike the teaching of cultural anthropologists, his instruction indicates recognition that the symbolic order has effects, rendered in his discourse as "negative messages (*fuxiang xunxi*)," that accumulate in the body. Generating a "lack of meaning," these "negative messages" come literally as electromagnetic waves and are, therefore, part of a "magnetic field" produced by all operating transmitters. Since radio waves are the lowest frequency on the electromagnetic spectrum, it should also be noted that ghosts captured on film and radio messages sent from individuals operate in roughly the same band-- one might say the same spirit.

The materialization of the spiritual/electromagnetic field occurs through negative messages which force any given individual to the uncomfortable recognition of his or her place in the electromagnetic field of power. At a lecture in Taiwan, he put this dialectic of waves this way:

Sometimes we fear to see someone because it makes us feel pressured. And sometimes just thinking about going to see someone would give us pressure. Why? Because this person's magnetic field is greater than ours. This person's energy level is higher than ours. This person (in whatever relationship to us-- family member, in-law, co-worker) generates a negative force which is beyond what we can resist. We fear to deal with this person because we anticipate a negative outcome. In real life....we can not protect ourselves from being affected by these people and therefore we become gloomy, frustrated or angry after encountering them. This illustrates how the positive, negative, strong and weak magnetic fields of ourselves and others interact and influence each other.

The master teaches that the inadequacy that emerges from loss causes people to either transform themselves or become sullen, distraught, and, ultimately, sick. Toward the end of positive transformation, the teacher offers the appealing promise that the answer for this lack of personal force *vis-à-vis* others is nothing less than more force:

So if we understand the concept and magnitude of the magnetic field in our lives and how it functions, we would know that the changing (towards the positive) of each individual's magnetic field would strengthen one's physical condition and release one from limitations, enhance the quality of one's family life, improve the person's working climate and optimize relationships with others. So the magnetic field is the essence of our life. If the positive light of each person's magnetic field is activated everything

and every aspect in life would be transformed, like dominos, one after another, improved and made buoyant from inside out. Everything will be changed and proceed towards joy, hope and confidence.

According to the teacher, the essence of life is “the magnetic field.” By overcoming the negativity of loss or failure within this field of relations, people can successfully activate the greater power present in themselves, resulting in the emergence of a “positive light” that emits energy in the visible spectrum in such a way as to influence others with the goodness of “universal love.” This hope of the activation of one’s personal power for the radical freedom from limitations set by the hierarchical world that has, as its result, the transformation of the world echoes the dreams of many in the professional middle class as expressed, for example, in the talk and writing of Chen Shuibian, the book club crowd and Happy Happy Chen.

Similar to the discourse of others in the middle class, two phrases find constant expression in the talk of the teacher: *kefu* and *chaoyue*. Translatable as to overcome, the former refers to the one’s power to transform, outwit, and surpass the physical and symbolic worlds one inhabits. The latter, translatable as to overcome or to transcend, refers to the general longing to somehow escape the daily struggles of competitive life through personal and spiritual elevation. Within both the discourse of the master and in the talk of his apprentices, these two senses of surpassing find expression and are, as they are in the culture generally, never far removed from each other. In the discourse of the teacher, for example, the imperative to go beyond and its remainder of destruction finds

avowal in a lecture by the teacher called *tupo geju*-- translatable as “Breaking Formats” or “Suddenly Smashing the Structure”:

What is it that we are cultivating for? It is for the continuous growth of life. The evolution of life depends on how we are able to transcend ourselves (*shengming de tisheng jiu zai yu ruhe chaoyue ziji*)....

It is through the practice of *Heqi* that the new state of being (*zhuangtai*) within “universal love” is achieved. It is achieved by cultivating the positive force of *Heqi* and expelling *liqi* through *Heqi* practice. Overcoming and/or transcending both come by way of smashing structures-- an act not removed from evolution, rendering the transformations of *Heqi* practice not only natural but essential for those who intend to remain within the natural (that is, spiritual/electromagnetic) history of the world.

Walk with *Heqi*, In Universal Love Meet

Properly speaking, Daoist metaphysics recognizes that a totality of “order” or *yang* is impossible; for the disordering forces of *yin* have their place and cannot be written out of the symbolic equation of human health simply by the hope that everything should be harmonic, happy, bright, cheerful, etc. For, in fact, the very flow of *qi* (*qixue*) through the body depends on the balance and tension of *yin* and *yang*-- a balance and tension depicted in the Taiji sign of the *dao*.

At one level it stands as testimony to the degree the practitioners of *Heqi* perceive the world going awry that the ordering, healing, and perpetuating force of *Heqi* practice and universal love within the *Heqi* community are nearly all that are spoken about by them. Yet, at another level, the total repression of negative energy speaks to an

understanding of the functioning of negativity in their lives, i.e., its necessity in the constitution of their self-certainty. Such an unspoken recognition is of a piece with the fact that in *Heqi* practice the complete expulsion of negative energy happens only by way of complete immersion in “active meditation” to the point of utter abjection; for contained within the practice of *Heqi* remain traumatic and disordering moments rarely spoken about directly that allow practitioners to return to that which they have, literally, forgotten, “broken,” or transcended as they have pursued their professional and personal aims in pursuit of greater power within universal transmutation.

I witnessed such immersions at “Foundation Classes” held in the Taichung area during 1997.¹¹⁷ Held within grade school auditorium/gymnasiums, these classes ran from two to three days (depending on the length of the weekend) and were designed to initiate new converts to the promise and practice of *Heqi*. Although the sequences of events varied to a certain extent, at every session perhaps 150 chairs would be arranged in a semi-circle facing the stage. At the center of the stage curtain, a large pink heart with purple Chinese characters announced *Heqi dai* (The Universal Love of *Heqi*).

Surrounding the heart hung banners that proclaimed in official fashion “The Conference for Promoting *Heqi* in the Republic of China” and the phrases “Walk with *Heqi*, In the Heart of Universal Love Meet.” Complete with flowers, microphone and writing

¹¹⁷ Foundation classes provide initial training in the principles and exposure to the practice of *Heqi* active meditation. Most people, prior to attending this session, also attended *Heqi* Information Meetings. After completing the foundation level, the practitioner can proceed to the following, in order: Meet in Universal Love Class; Planting the Seed Class; The Foundation Class of Guarding and Maintaining; The Hand of Universal Love Class; The Implementation in Every Area Meeting; Protecting and Maintaining each Area; The Nourishing Instruction of Area Supervision; The Nourishing Instruction of Teachers; The Nourishing Instruction of Preachers.

instruments, the teacher's table sat on the court, below the heart. The table for high-level disciples, usually from the United States, rested similarly to its right. A sophisticated sound system and board, various traditional medical instruments (including moxibustion equipment), photographers, water, water-glasses, stacks of glossy *Heqi* magazines, extra chairs, children playing and staff, who kept the door and organized the flow of events, typically made up the periphery.

New Practitioners came at the invitation of people already practicing.

Distinguishable by their clothing, newcomers donned casual outfits; whereas, regular practitioners would wear nondescript white, cotton tops, black pants and shoes-- the uniform of *Heqi* practice. Tops and pants would be ceremoniously presented to the initiates by the teacher before newcomers began their first "active meditation session." Changing out of the clothes produced by the fashion industry would serve as a crucial signifying step for initiates as they sought to realize universal love through both the elimination of the "negative messages" produced by distinctive costume and the radical realization of equality achieved during group practice.

Depending on the length of the total session, much of the first day or two would be given to instruction and testimony, preparing the way for the change of clothing and the passing of *Heqi*. During these periods practitioners would give testimony, both in large and small groups, about the positive transformations they experienced because of *Heqi* and their association with the teacher. In turn initiates were prompted to talk about why they chose to attend. Vegetarian lunch boxes would be served at noon and in the

evenings.¹¹⁸ It should be noted that a schedule was never strictly adhered to as during book club practice; in fact, the flow of events, guided by the master, had an impromptu feel—though meals were regularly had and the passing of *Heqi* enacted.

Throughout every session I attended, nonetheless, certain popular songs were repeated-- giving sonorous and thematic continuity to the goings on. The song, “*Ganen de xin* (Thankful Heart),” for example, was played during several sessions. A theme song for a Japanese-made television show, *A-xin*, (about a woman who endures and overcomes hardship), it can be translated as follows:

I come unexpectedly,
 Like a speck of dust,
 Who can see my weakness?
 I come from which place?
 My feelings belong to which locale?
 Who in the next moment cries out for me?
 Although heaven and earth are vast,
 This road remains yet difficult to walk,
 I see between people everywhere
 Frustration and bitterness
 I still have how much love?
 I still have how many tears?

¹¹⁸ Heqi practitioners are encouraged to become vegetarian because the hope of the elimination of hierarchy extends to non-human species.

Let the Heavens know,
I don't admit defeat!
Thankful heart,
Thankful for you,
Companion for my life,
Let me have courage to create myself!
Thankful heart,
Thankful fate,
Flowers open, petals fall,
I am similarly precious.

From a self of insignificance, weakness and (implied) purity within a vast, unwelcoming universe, this song moved through swelling crescendos to a love-filled recognition of a positive self endowed with a surplus of emotion. This surplus providing the fuel of overcoming, renders the once unfathomable nature but a metaphorical, narcissistic reflection of the self. Expressing these familiar themes, this song in its lyrical movement was provided appropriately expressive hand gestures (as were other songs, including "My Future is Not a Dream," "Back to the Beginning," and "Build a Church") by senior disciples (including the book club's 1997 director). The leaders directed the practitioners (new and old) to surround them in a circle behind the semi-circle of chairs still facing the front. Once they had rehearsed the hand motions as a group and repeated them successfully to the hypnotically recurring music, the practitioners would give into

the feeling of the moment, standing arm and arm, swinging and singing the repeating pop song-- the master smiling calmly in their midst.

These feelings of trust and shared sensibilities within a communal sense of loss were cultivated gradually through music, gestures, stories told by practitioners, and promises delivered by the teacher-- all of which served to create a sense of significance for the decisions the new initiates would be asked to make. The sense of significance was furthered by practices designed to elicit and reinforce the status of the teacher.¹¹⁹ In particular, when the entire group took their chairs in preparation for sessions of sharing and teaching, the command of “yi” would be issued and people would stand quietly, face the master, and bow. According to the teacher, standing quietly allows people

to center ourselves. This requires no special understanding or reorganization of the mind. Merely focusing will help us to reach the proper state, a state of calmness where we no longer feel the desire for some sensation or action. Our minds are open and completely relaxed. We have surrendered to the practice.

Following the surrender, the practitioners would execute 18 bows. Again, according to the teacher:

Why 18? This number has important significance. In Hebrew, 18 means life, and in the *Yijing* (The Book of Changes), 9, represents pure Yang, and

¹¹⁹ Such assertions of the power of the master found expression outside of the official proceedings. For example, I was told many times that the master had the power to heal my “ping-pong elbow” by simply laying hands. This power came, according to the master, from Heqi itself-- though the difference was hard to tell.

18, the doubling of 9, brings forth a doubling of life's energy. Thus the 18 bows get us in touch with the energy that mobilizes life.

In pursuit of "pure yang" within a system of sacred numbers that, for one reason or another, the crowd accepted, the teacher would further emphasize that during the counting of sacred bows much comes to mind that should not be repressed:

While we do the bows, a stream of thoughts will come to mind. Do not attempt to suppress them, for they have greater importance than mere random thoughts. They are records from our deepest subconscious memory, i.e., our worries, fears, issues that we don't want to face, or events that we have forgotten. These may be matters whose accumulation has caused damage to the various corresponding systems of the body...

The radicality of this direction for the practitioners rests with the fact that feelings and associations are suppressed, not only politically during the KMT reign (as might be expected), but in every sector of contemporary daily life. Popular television comedians play on this suppression by allowing the manifold of associations possible because of the homonymic character of Mandarin and Taiwanese to trigger associations through playful mispronunciation and purposeful misapprehension in their laughing audiences. In casual conversations, people are quick to point out or laugh at slips (especially with foreigners). And yet, while the allowance of free association appears radical by common standards, the possibility of counting numbers while all sorts of associations take place elsewhere and unbeknownst to the numbers themselves occurs in a myriad of situations (including,

economic theory, Chinese geomancy, and *liuhecai*). In each case ordering signs realize their ordering force from the very disorder working, again literally, below them.

Initiates and practitioners were more than willing to comply with these injunctions and, in their turn, make public emergent associations that often touched, as did the therapeutic moments of book club practice, on issues (resolved and unresolved) from the past-- furthering the meaning of *Heqi*'s order through the often abject re-encounter of repressed memories within the structuring promise of *Heqi*. For instance, at one session an insurance salesman took the leading role and spoke into one of the audience microphones like this:

I'm number five. My father is a teacher. All my family members have high degrees. I'm only a college graduate (starts to cry). I passed the government exam, but I quit. I went to work at an insurance company for money 17 years ago. But my parents are never satisfied. Although I make a lot of money, the family doesn't accept me. My wife had only three daughters, no sons. The pressure is very great. (Continues to sob). I feel like I'm losing face.

Keeping the flow of associations running while breaking down barriers of affect attached to conventionalized gender boundaries (a move not removed from the popular push for greater professional equality represented in the Zhengs' own affairs), the teacher counseled: "Men and women all cry. Crying releases pressure of both men and women. It can relieve your burden. If you can't cry, your heart is dead."

The salesman continued-- articulating the promise of overcoming in *Heqi* through (true to form) the assertion of difference between him and his parents by way of (perhaps imagined and certainly recollected) trauma. The articulated difference mirrors a larger cultural split between those of culture and those of money (for some in Taiwan, a generational difference). With *Heqi*, however, the nagging problem of his parents' exhortations to culture could be, it seemed, easily delivered to a new level of cultural attainment in the synthesis of *Heqi*-- provided the distinctiveness of *Heqi vis-à-vis* other practices was asserted. He said:

The heart of my parents never opened. But in *Heqi*, I have found another goal. I can truly see my own heart. I could not see clearly like this in *Yiguan Dao* (another religious sect in Taiwan). So, I thank the teacher and all the practitioners.

While the man may have said he "felt like" he was losing face, at the site of practice he did not. Rather, to lose face in this condition of expression of empirical incidents of the past (un-configurable within the discourse, say, of the miracle [and its sacred numbers] and un-presentable in usual public conversations where, say, criticisms of one's family borders on taboo) meant to gain (through the gift of laying bare his suffering), if not face, then a new status as a "true self" who speaks within a discourse of ordering love and hope presided over by the master who becomes master by the very gift of laying bare. For this reason, the act of laying bare a traumatic moment might be said to be recovering a memory; for the traumatic memory recovered allows for the certainty of negativity (damaged selves from radio waves) necessary for radical (smashing the

structures) and evolutionary overcoming. In this sense, it is both ideological and the frightening counterpart of nostalgia.

To further the production of narratives of overcoming by the act of renouncing the significance normally attached to themselves, the teacher encouraged talk of “opening the heart (*dakai xin*)” – going so far as to ask, in one instance, “Have your hearts opened? When you hold the microphone, you can feel the touch.” Inciting people to recollections and confessions, the teacher would also assert that, “no matter what, the heart must be opened in order for it to be cured; it is only a question of who will open it.” This certainty invariably had its effect. The microphone would become a charged object between practitioners, i.e., a spot of outpourings, excitations, teaching, and narratives of new meaning. Always holding his at his chest, the teacher would stand calmly, making occasional comments and guiding practitioners while they would take turns speaking, as if hearing themselves for the first time, through the three microphones circulating through the crowd. Sharing would continue from forty-five minutes to a couple of hours with no shortage of speakers telling similar stories of intra-family domination, laments over social change in Taiwan, trouble with colleagues, frets over health, loss of loved-ones, dread over the future, and other tales that left the hearts of the subject open (already made grateful through the self-hypnosis of song) for the return gift of *Heqi*.

Toward the transfer of *Heqi* and the practice of active meditation, the group would engage in different preparatory practices, including such critical bodily practices as “the hand of universal love” – a practice through which a channel to the heart for the flow of “universal love” would be cut. The efficacy of this bodily process in curing people of

every kind of physical ailment (when combined with active meditation) was touted by many, including the teacher. Despite the training required for its use, this operation appeared quite simple-- beginning with pats to the back, followed by deep rubs across the entire back. *Heqi* practitioners would become visibly possessed (shaking, swaying, sweating) by the positive force of *Heqi* during their work.

According to the teacher:

We are delivering the messages of universal love through our hands. The energy of universal love will enter directly into the person's heart. Our *Heqi* universal love cultivation is through our bodies; once our hearts are opened, the body will spontaneously become well...Universal love is an inborn characteristic of each person. It is only because this wonderful channel is not open that we are lost in the bondage of our own forms and we get lost in all kinds of distractions.

Physical immediacy opens channels for the energy of universal love to trigger the universal love already present but lost in each individual-- a nostalgic notion. The negative stories serve to expel negative energy. As a result the true, lost (and hence) nostalgic self can (re)emerge-- provided, it would seem, that other, similarly aware and positive people, anticipated, prodded, and welcomed the recovered "true self." In this way practitioners-as-transforming agents would replace crucial functions of family. For example, physical immediacy is frowned upon in the institutions of daily life in Taiwan-- as disclosed by the embarrassed response to the injunction for public intimacy at the World Book Day celebration. Instead it is generally contained within the family and,

even then, within specifically prescribed bonds, such as that between mother and son.

But, in *Heqi*, “the close feelings of relatives” (longed for, while held at a distance, in the Zhengs’ advertising) could be experienced through shared song, meals, testimonies, and back rubs— giving rise to transforming group experience.

These sessions of bonding and promise would only serve, however, as preludes for an encounter well beyond normalized activity. Deferring and animating toward the encounter of *Heqi*, the teacher would speak like this:

If you are brave enough to express your true heart, your true belief, if you’re 100% sure, then walk the road with me. If you’re not certain, you can still think about it. But, if you can’t open your heart, you’ll have to recognize it in the future. If you are certain, if you are ready to become an angel....

Following such a challenge (edged with the certainty of spiritual, i.e., natural, destiny), one of the regular disciples would eventually ask the group through the PA system: “Are you willing or not?” As respectful and well-trained students, everyone would once again answer in the affirmative: “willing.”

Passing *Heqi*

During the immediate period before *Heqi* was passed and active meditation began, the chairs and tables would be cleared away and the talk of the initiates and practitioners, the singing, the songs, and the expectant immediacy of the “hand of universal love” would give way to an extreme formality. Firstly, the gender divide would be re-asserted with men lined up on one side of the court and women on the other. Secondly, the

distance between initiates and practitioners would be precisely measured. Thirdly, all instruments and people deemed capable of producing negative messages would be eliminated, including bystanders, photographic equipment, watches, and jewelry.¹²⁰ Fourthly, the colored armbands worn by practitioners would operate as important distinguishing marks because those with arm bands would work, during the dangerous moments when *Heqi* was passed and when the newcomers first attempted active meditation, as guides to the initiates.

When everyone had been rather ponderously lined up and negative objects and people expelled, the teacher would walk across each row slowly, wave his hand in front of the head of the practitioners and initiates— tapping expressly the new comers on the head in a single swoop of arm and hand. The assistants would stand behind them— making certain newcomers would not collapse from the jolt of *Heqi*.

Once bobbed by the teacher, people started to gurgle, sigh, or, even, laugh hysterically. As the teacher continued to pass *Heqi*, those touched would move more expansively. Some would jump, others wave, and a few would teeter in giddy pleasure of losing (at least the semblance of) self-control in the midst of a crowd of peers. The teacher would eventually start those who were, at first, unmoved spinning, and they would twirl in possession. When the full group was brought into *Heqi*, the pitch would intensify, and some would let out horrifying wails. Others would begin jogging with their

¹²⁰ Toward this end all actions of direct, gross elimination would be undertaken by disciples, thereby keeping the master in the space, set up for him by his discourses of hope and by the expectations of the crowd, in a state of, if not purity, then one free from friction— a social space, that is, where his persona reflected nothing to his subjects, save their own belief in his, i.e., their, goodness.

eyes closed— their assistants making certain they did not crash into others. Some people would fall to the floor and begin to roll, mixing their tears with dust. As in the case of the joggers, their assistants would guide them (by gently holding their knees while the roll of their torsos took them in new directions) through other, often similarly blinded initiates and practitioners.

The teacher would wander slowly but purposefully across the floor of the gymnasium and through the practitioners, occasionally emitting staccato, baritone “ho, ho, ho’s”— his pitch falling off at the end of each measure uttered. He would also, at times, mimic the most intense yells of some with his own, somewhat hushed sounds— providing guidance to the general practice as practitioners guided individual initiates.

After approximately an hour of active meditation, the vocalized cue was given to line up again. Practitioners would hug happily, and take their positions in the order— appearing dazed and, a bit, relieved. Everyone would bow again 18 times to the master, collecting themselves.

A second session would ensue after the brief re-establishment of recognizable order. After the break, the practice would start again with greater severity. Some would spin convulsively, and many would begin to vomit. Those who vomited were given plastic bags in which to barf (often held to their faces as their bodies writhed by their assistants). With white towels they could clean their faces. Mrs. Zheng filled two bags at her foundation session.

While watching one session, I sat with a hospital nurse who said she came at the request of her friend who had breast cancer and who believed that *Heqi* would help to

cure her. While we both sat touched by the expression before us, the nurse said to me: “It’s like going back to the womb.” I was thinking the same thing; for the physical and emotional intensity, coupled with absolute trust in guides, suggested such an interpretation. I asked her: “How do know?” And she replied: “I know. I deliver babies.”

The second session might continue for 45 minutes when order would be called again. Once everyone collectively said “thank you teacher,” the group would explode in congratulatory hugs. Tears streaming down the eyes of some, everyone, it seemed, would run from person to person, sometimes searching out someone in particular, hugging, caressing, and congratulating. The teacher would smile calmly and wearily-- unmoved but moving.

Usually, a vegetarian meal would follow. When the group was finished with the meal, they would set up their chairs, face the teacher, bow, and begin to testify (in ways impossible during active meditation, i.e., within the universe of everyday speech) to the new level of understanding in their lives because of *Heqi* and the teacher. Many of the stories revealed precisely what the nurse had suggested.

Taking the microphone, one middle aged woman said:

I love you Teacher! I love all of you! My life was hollow. *Heqi* changed my life in only three days! The first day I was strongly motivated. The second day I felt a shortage of motivation. The third day I realized I needed it. It is good to be part of universal love. I feel like I’ve almost

forgotten the last year. My husband treats me very badly. His voice always contains negative messages.

I come from an unfortunate background. My parents always fought. The noise from the fighting would wake me up. I treat people badly because I come from this kind of family. I got married, but I never felt anything.

Four years ago my husband left me with four children. I've raised and fed my children by myself. I have responsibility to my children.

But now I've stood up from the "no way (*buxing*)." I'd like to follow universal love into the future. This will change my attitude toward my customers. I'm a clothing salesperson with my own store.

Several years ago I tried to find time with community groups to help unfortunate people. But it was never concerned with unfortunate people, really. But today I've found what I wanted to find...

Following the emergence of a self-same, determined subject from her psychological despondency, another middle class woman spoke similarly of the loss attending her overcoming:

My father never hugged me. Today I feel very warm because I can hug the practitioners entirely, like I wanted to hug my mother and father. I met a practitioner, but I didn't know him. We hugged together very tightly, then I cried because this man looks like my father. (She crossed the court and hugged him in the crowd and cried)...Maybe this hug can repay my feelings of loss and pity.

Such encounters with the past (and its substitutes) are not limited to foundation classes. In a conversation about the return to the past of childhood, Mr. Zhang told me that at advanced classes (“when all the practitioners said *Heqi* really shook their hearts”):

by the fifth day all of the practitioners became innocent like children; they showed themselves entirely; that means they all opened their hearts before the class ended. I talked about how *Heqi* takes people back to childhood or infancy with some practitioners, and they all agreed. Actually, *Heqi* will create a situation to let practitioners go and find something they lost before.

The story of one advanced practitioner published in a *Heqi* glossy reveals well the pattern of loss-driven desire and the (re)discovery of certainty in *Heqi* practice. She told how she reacted against her father, a famous radio talk-show host during the KMT era, to the point that her “rebellious seventeen stage not only started early but did not end until after” she left Taiwan. She attributed all her suffering, in a typical gesture that guarantees complicity, “to no one but my father.”

When she was a student in the United States many of her friends from Taiwan struggled with “the logical patterns of thinking, humor and cynicism of Americans.” She, however, felt “released” and “reborn,” finally free of her father. But, occasionally thoughts would “pop up” of her past— for example, stories of her father taking her to the Beijing Opera when she was a child (i.e., lost stories, apparently unconscious, tellingly associated with [the desire of] immediacy): “I was very little, three or four years old...he’d sit me on his lap...and tell me the content of the stories...”

As she pursued her “active life” in the United States, she gradually came to the conclusion that her success in her studies was “installed in me from my early childhood, I, in fact, could never have been freed from anything-- even in a place where nobody knew me.”

At the time (not coincidentally) that she was (re)discovering her father secretly through memory, “the authentic, knowledgeable, rich but mundane radio programs and their hosts faded away.” It was at this time that she decided she wanted to “let him know that I now understood him and respected him despite the fact that society and his children didn’t seem to need him any more.” In a nostalgic turn, precisely at the moment her father’s power faded, her “strong frustration and intolerance” itself “dissolved and vanished.”

As she prepared in the style of emotive display that troubled some of her less-adaptable and determined Chinese friends to “confess to him all of these things...so we could have a real cool relationship,” she learned that he had died of a heart attack in Taiwan-- a coincidence that bespeaks the conspiracy of History, i.e., the disappearance of the real father at the moment that an imagined father rose to provide (if not a confessor) a single point of constitution for her and her formally unconscious but at last recovered memory. She asked, as if asking of herself: “Can there be anything more sarcastic in life than this? Can there be any joke more cruel than this?”

It was during a five-day group practice in Texas that she

grieved and screamed...tumbled around and crawled on the floor...My eyes were so swollen...I couldn't help hearing myself burst out a loud cry of Father!

As with other practitioners, her longing for the return of her childhood self represents a yearning for a moment when the demands of the world changing around her did not necessitate the ruin of that which she is or was attached to-- that is, a moment when the self was indeed true, neither responsible for nor transformative of the world. Yet this true moment remains one of grave anxiety, a moment so overwhelming that the "father" (like a good God in Descartes' meditation) emerges, simultaneously signifying certainty and taking the rap for its impossibility. The master appears to understand this moment well, giving it a formalized structure in the call to bow, followed by confessions of truth that only the master, or his chosen substitute, can interpret because he is, in most every respect, the new "father" (figure), free from negative energy, and thereby a perfect object of love.¹²¹

It is for this reason, I think, that Mr. Zheng discontinued group practice.

Specifically, he claimed to have left regular group practice because he came to the

¹²¹ Writing about the place of technical reproduction and the formative character of media technologies in the group practice of another master, Friedrich A. Kittler had this to say about the inseparability of love, electricity, and transference in the seminars of Jacques Lacan:

The word of love is sent forth, is received, is sent out again by the receiver, picked up again by the sender, etc., until the amplifier reaches the point that, in studies of alternating current, is called oscillation amplitude, and, in the contemporary discourse is called love. Because no one in the seminar attempts to protest, or, in other words, to produce inverse feedback, these provocations fulfill their intention-- love has become a resonant (oscillating) circuit.

See, Friedrich A. Kittler, *Literature, media, information systems: essays*, ed. John Johnston (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), pp. 52,53.

conclusion that *Heqi* is a religion (despite the teacher's assertion to the contrary) when the master brought out a photograph of his ninety-two year old mother and proclaimed the genealogy of their form of *qi* practice. Mr. Zheng, a similarly charismatic figure, has his own crowd with its own official history to lead, his own matriarchal figure to confess and return to, and his own technological project of social/spiritual transformation.

Nonetheless, *Heqi* remains (as of 1999) helpful in his effort to maintain balance. It helps him control his temper with others as he confronts characters who make demands on his company and other obstacles to his company's success. Mrs. Zheng tells me it helps her "stay humble" though "it does take too much time." They both can "take a few minutes when negative messages are great and practice and project only positive energy."¹²² In this way, through the use of magical practice, the troubling elements of their lives, overcome through rigorous application of discipline, determination, and science can be spun away and only the positive energy and its fetishized hope can remain at the scene of action.

Mr. Zhang finds the moment of truth in *Heqi* practice to be precisely at that moment when practitioners leave the terrifying immediacy of practice and enter the realm of universal love. It is for this momentary glimpse of truth, cast against the negative messages of the world and following a complete corporeal encounter with (if not failure itself) then the momentary loss of discursive subjectivity, that practice must be repeated.

¹²² For Mr. Zheng, in particular, such an aversion is important because, as he told me, "negative energy creates cancer." If cancer is considered in the broadest, metaphorical sense to mean a disintegration of the integrity of the body or one's group because of uncontrolled growth, perhaps he is right. Because of his leading role in development, it stands to reason that he must be a vigilant and constant practitioner.

These repetitions become the focal points around which the hope and language of *Heqi* are structured and the hierarchical and mechanistic nature of the practice emerge; for the teacher, who emanates from this moment as the object of collective transference, remains the master above a rank of disciples, and experienced hands, such as Mr. Zhang, begin to feel, as he told me, “in a box” as they process new practitioners through the repetitious encounters with, as becomes clearer with each reenactment, an illusion of the sublime.

Despite and because of its character, *Heqi* practice produces its own supplementary excess within its regulative structures. In particular, there emerged a very small group of regular practitioners who simply could not contain themselves. Because they could not suppress themselves, they were, in effect, banished to the hallways, where they would wail uncontrollably-- haunting the goings on with their most intense expressions of horror and love, well beyond the pleasure principle. When time came for group practice, they would join the group. But, true to their excessive form, when the active meditation came to an end, they remained rolling on the ground or spinning, while others set up chairs for group confessions. Like autistic children, their entry into the world of language was delayed indefinitely, and when practitioners embraced before entering the night and driving away in their sedans, they were nowhere to be found.

Mr. Zhang continues (as of 1999) to practice, nevertheless. He loves the hugging, and he believes in the truth of positive energy-- seeking to elevate his life spiritually just as he seeks professional advancement at work (through conscientious labor and active leadership) and at play (through the practice of classical guitar). He and Mr. Zheng

practice every morning, next door to each other. They have, as they tell me, “got it under control.”

For others, the practice of *Heqi* provides similar sanctuary (if only a few minutes) from the rigors of everyday life and an opportunity to experience the semblance of that which resides outside the apparent enclosure of normality. Yet, as is clear from the metaphysics of *Heqi* and from the way Mr. Zheng and others practice, the ideologies of truth, love, universality, and harmony serve to reinforce and further transformations of households, bodies, minds, and emotions within the leading classes of Taiwan. Singing their songs of success according to the mandate of the times, individuals who overcome and transform find (as they want to find) that the self attributed to overcoming is not “true” as they discover that that which is true harrows. As will be shown in the next chapter, this seeming converse semblance of the ordinary self gets sacrificed in the form of the “monster,” Chen Jinxing, for the preservation and perpetuation of the very ordinary that people sometimes seek escape from.

Chapter 7: Victims and Monsters

Chaos, Sickness, and Danger

Chaos (*luan*), sickness (*bing*) and danger (*weixian*)—not to mention “negative messages”— signify (in post-miracle Taiwan) what the cultural practices thus far described attempt to either remove from the center of experience or reorder (as the practices themselves are articulated) through practice. Standardized routines of photography, the divided and enclosed work and leisure cycle, the production of new culture housing, the meetings and aspirations of book club members, and the practice of *Heqi* all operate toward these ends. Yet, the chaos, sickness, and danger, while purged and reordered, also persist. In photographs haunting figures refuse to go away, for the Zhengs chaos remains necessary for capitalist transformations, in the book club the past and social classes supposedly overcome persevere in parallel practices that give form (by way of distinction and through objects imbued with utopian nostalgia) to “new culture,” and in *Heqi* the baggy of vomit imparts substantial sign to the “negative messages” that must constantly be purged lest health, “true selves,” and *Heqi* practice itself be lost.

This pattern has during the postwar era found expression in the public sphere *vis-à-vis* crime— insofar as crime has provided an official cause for state and black society control of local areas. Yet, following the November 21, 1996 murder of Taoyuan County Chief Liu Bangyou and eight others (including two county councilors and two other Taoyuan County Government officials at Liu’s official residence) and the December 3, 1996 discovery of feminist activist Peng Wanru’s raped and naked corpse in a Kaohsiung County field, the chaos, sickness and danger appeared as an overwhelming and

unstoppable tide.¹²³ For following the execution-style killing (believed ordered by black society Mafioso involved in the construction industry) of several officials, many began to fear that Taiwan would become a “little Sicily”— rendering its vitally important emergent status as a democratic state lost; and, after the death of Peng Wanru, an admired reformer who advocated that at least one fourth of all Democratic Progressive Party candidates be women, women across the island felt their fears about the safety of the streets, in general, and taxis, in particular, to be demonstrated for all to see. (Peng was last seen in a taxi, a vehicle that serves as a sign— despite the professional demeanor of most drivers— of regardless individualism, lawless social relations, aggressive male domination and unrestricted urban migration). Moreover, the deaths proved what people beholden to the ways of emergent, middle class life already believed: namely, that the social conditions from which they sprang, including the long-time alliance of the government and organized crime and the actions of uncontrolled capitalists required continued and aggressive cleansing and re-ordering.

This public sensibility was not lost on the political parties. In the months leading to the significant murders, the two major political alliances appeared in competition to assert order through crackdowns on crimes deemed most directly offensive to middle class sensibilities. President Lee Teng-hui, for instance, ordered a Ministry of Justice crackdown on organized crime in September 1996, and over a hundred syndicate heads

¹²³ That chaos (*luan*) in particular has been present on Taiwan since, at least, 1949. My conversations with elderly Mainlanders reveal that this discourse was also present in the 1950s.

soon found themselves in prison on Green Island off the coast of Taiwan.¹²⁴ In Taipei, Mayor Chen Shuibian led a crackdown against brothels and gambling houses (noted in chapter four). Nearly every night on the evening news yet another such establishment could be seen having its power cables cut or its employees and customers cowering from cameras accompanying raiding police. These obvious actions against the Taiwanese underworld came at the behest of the middle class which had grown very uncomfortable with the coexistence of their patterns of work and leisure with, among other aspects of Taiwan society of old, *fenghua* or prostitution culture-- a term signifying the utter opposite of (*xin*) *wenhua* or (new) culture.¹²⁵

The offensive co-existence of *fenghua* and *wenhua* can be illustrated by the location of the Zhengs' own offices near one of the most famous "dance halls (*julebu*)" in Taichung. Also located across the street from one of Taichung's best and newest grade schools, at night (as of 1999) this by-day nondescript building becomes a site of convergence for every type of expensive automobile and tens (if not hundreds) of cash-seeking, impeccably dressed, and (based on my conversations with them) commanding (at least in that environment) young women who dance, sing, and socialize in return for substantial cash payments.¹²⁶ Middle-class parents remain as much shocked by the

¹²⁴ The crackdown, also attributed to Justice Minister Liao Zhenhao, questioned 316 gangsters and detained 136, including 53 government officials by mid-December, 1996. See Kevin Chen, "ROC puts 'big brother' in jail," *The China Post*, January 2, 1997, p. 4.

¹²⁵ In Taichung this distinction can make for touchy conversations or humorous reflections; for Taichung, since Japanese times, has been represented as a "cultural center (*wenhua zhongxin*)," but to people from all across central Taiwan it may, in fact, be better known for as a "prostitution center (*fenghua zhongxin*)."

¹²⁶ Prostitution itself did not occur at the dance hall, but, I was informed, the young women and their customers could go elsewhere.

affront to their presumed moral codes of merit-based performance awards as the apparent danger these places present. In fact, the affront is nearly always interpreted as dangerous; for it is in places like this that households (through the extravagances of newly-rich land owners) explode, young women, with the suddenness of the miracle, get rich, and businessmen, effectively, reject the delicacies of professional, new culture, Taiwan in order to show their customers and themselves a “relaxing time (*xiuxian*).”

Yet, while the political parties focused much attention on the underworld (of which the Taichung dance hall serves as a most affluent and stylish example) as the cause of chaos, people felt strain and uneasiness with many areas of their lives-- often expressed in terms of children but not so easily mollified through public crackdowns. As noted in chapter three, parents worried that children were breaking the social bonds just as they seemed to realize the very dreams set for them; more and more people knew friends and relatives, if not themselves, who have experienced divorce; post-miracle demands for international style made two-income nuclear families a near necessity and latch-key kids a reality; grade inflation and expansion of performance expectations rendered a ninety percent grade barely passing for those seeking to reproduce their middle class status through their struggling children; and, simultaneously, for the first time since the economy began to boom in the 1970s, people with good educations went un- or under-employed-- the value of their degrees in a deflationary spiral. To these everyday frustrations could and can be added the imminent worries over pollution, over-population, unrelenting competition, and their cumulative effects. Because of the perplexing confluence of these conditions, their attached “negative messages,” and the troubling role

of ordinary people in fostering these circumstances, fear over what could and would happen in the future festered (without an always obvious point of responsibility or blame) in the daily experiences of millions.

An atmosphere of expectation developed-- giving sundry social organizations reasons and conditions to organize public action for social change beyond that of competing crackdowns. The murder of Peng Wanru, in particular, impelled the mobilization of many women's groups and a national advertising campaign that drew attention to the dangers to women and children from the violence of everyday life, both within the family and public spheres.¹²⁷ However, while sufficient for the coalescence of people already sharing her progressive political agenda and educated background, the corpse of Peng Wanru could not draw public interest and unite the people toward political action. But what the figure of Peng Wanru could not do, first the finger, then the assaulted corpse of young Bai Xiaoyan would.

Charged Visages

The first news of the abduction of Bai Xiaoyan came through the Taiwan electronic bulletin board system (know as "BBS"). Everyday thousands of students across the island engage each other in largely anonymous, real-time internet conversations. The news from these regular users spread through peer networks.

¹²⁷ Some feminist activists that I knew in Taichung tried, in this vein, to utilize the public wound of Peng Wanru to galvanize action. They took a discarded mannequin from a downtown alley, splashed it with red paint signifying blood, bound it with ropes, attached a note to it referring to the fate of women in Taiwan, photographed it, and posted these pictures across the National University campus. They subsequently placed the mutilated mannequin outside the student center where most students and faculty would see it. Yet, on the night of their rally against violence, only a handful of college students attended.

Although irritated by the news, most expected the famous and wealthy mother of Bai Xiaoyan, Bai Bingbing, to pay the ransom and quietly get her child back; for tales of kidnappings of the children of the rich and famous are occasionally but regularly, it seems, heard. But when stories began to break the self-imposed news media blackout of the case-- a blackout that testifies to the powerful political and media connections of Bai Bingbing-- with news that the left pinkie finger of Bai Xiaoyan had been severed by the kidnapers and mailed to her mother on April 23, the atmosphere began to become tense with horror at the cruelty and fear of what would happen next.

Within a week the discovery of the corpse of young Bai was broadcast on national TV. Reporters at the scene expressed the sentiment of people everywhere when they spoke the hope that the body pulled out of the polluted water would not be that of Bai Xiaoyan.

For most people in Taiwan a more heinous crime could neither be committed nor imagined. The reasons for this sentiment do not lie entirely with the fact that a young woman was overpowered, raped and murdered; for, as noted, reports of such occurrences appear without giving rise to wide-spread public traumatism. Rather, the reasons for the public reaction to the case stemmed from a complicated combination of causes related to the symbolic place of the schoolgirl, to the figure and fame of Bai Bingbing, and to general public anticipation that something like this would (and perhaps should) soon happen.

The figure of the schoolgirl in Taiwan connotes paradoxes in the Taiwanese imagination that, when examined, reveal fundamental prohibitions that have worked to

produce important forms of social desire over the past several decades. School children (a term denoting, according to Taiwanese, kindergartners to high school students) are generally thought of, as noted in the chapters two and three, as innocent, pure, and similar. During the period of Taiwan's technological transformation, these sensibilities, became reinforced, through the enforcement of uniform dress and conduct codes-- persisting to this day.

No matter from what neighborhood they emerge, young people leaving for school every morning appear equal; the only marks of distinction being their student numbers (which identify their year of entrance), the degree to which they keep their uniforms clean and tidy and their uniform style-- each style referring to a different school.¹²⁸ While it is comforting for Taiwanese to see students organized and studious in their roles (*xuesheng jiaoshe*), the difference of uniform style from one school to another make clear what the uniforms otherwise conceal: the intense competition that rages amongst students.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ This code of school appearance is under change in Taiwan, too. At numerous Junior Colleges, for example, students can elect to wear uniforms on certain days or not. Yet, despite this slow change, *The Journalist* reported in 1992 on the case of a young woman who wore pants instead of the required skirt to school. The reaction of the *jiaoguan* was to suspend her, claiming "Men are like men and women are like women" meaning "men wear pants and girls wear skirts". Such an exercise of power could no doubt occur in 1998, but the force of the old rules are certainly in decline because of student sentiment, parental indifference, and feminist discourse. See Yu Xiao-wen, "*Nansheng nusheng zhu gao qiang, kuzi qunzi qi zhengluan* [A tall wall built between men and women: the debate about pants and skirts]," *Xinxinwen zhoubao* [The journalist], October 17, 1992, pp. 86-87 for an example of the influence of feminist discourse.

¹²⁹ In Taiwan uniform styles in public high schools differ depending on the school. Private schools provide uniforms of different styles as early as grade school or pre-school. It is interesting that the better high schools, in particular, have the least elaborate uniforms (usually straight khakis for boys and un-pleated skirts for girls); whereas schools for future "home economists" (a major of many kindergarten teachers in Taiwan) have very elaborate uniforms of, for example, pleated and plaid skirts with colored blazers. The distinctiveness of one's school, well known to residents of the city, does not require uniform elaboration.

Nearly everyone in Taiwan who has succeeded through education will acknowledge that throughout their scholastic experience, they knew that every student sitting next to them was vying for the same honors and openings. For these reasons, despite the apparent uniformity and appearance of commonality fostered, uniforms also obliquely signal difficult divisions that go largely without saying because the channeled social desire to overcome circumstances (and each other) is concealed through the very uniforms that predominantly and simultaneously denote purity, innocence and similitude. For these reasons, when young Bai Xiaoyan was seized on her way to school in the morning, her anonymity, despite her very fortunate background, within the collection of similar, struggling young people, was violently broken and so too was a hallowed sign at the center of everyday Taiwanese life.

In a like manner, the image of the young schoolgirl, in particular, signals purity and innocence all the while channeling social, as sexual, desire toward them in a way that, since it cannot be avowed, heightens its very charge of excitation. In dorm rooms of male students it is quite common to see large posters of slightly-pouting faces of school girls in uniform, Taiwanese-made music videos play on the notion of schoolgirl innocence/sexuality (for example, coy schoolgirls in sailor-like school uniforms from Southern Taiwan sing “Mama, I’m a good girl”), and pornography (especially that imported from Japan but also that produced on Taiwan) depicts high school students in various scenes of seduction and cajoling (their reticence equaling only the final intensity of the act). The figure of the schoolgirl also connotes, for people well into middle-age, their own first experiences of sexuality. Sometimes these remembrances express an

astounding innocence that can only be called nostalgic: for instance, memories of times when sexuality in Taiwan was so refused in public life that a simple touch, conditioned by a surrounding mass of uniformed people, could stand as a promise of love and, perhaps even, marriage. Sometimes the memories are not so innocent and reveal that, in fact, many young women knew well the power of the prohibited. For example, some daring schoolgirls, all of whom were directed by school rules to keep their skirts below their knees, might, when they got the notion, pull their skirts above their knees, knowing that the disciplinarians (*jiaoguan*) who served as representatives of the KMT military would notice-- for it was their job to keep hem lines down and all body parts deemed overtly alluring from view. As the game was played, the young woman would retreat into the safety of the same-sex bathroom to pull the skirt back down-- effectively playing the fetishized lines of prohibition for the excitement of enticing the rule-enforcers towards precisely what they were in the business of not-acknowledging. It is partly for these reasons that when Bai Xiaoyan was discovered, a number of people confided to me that "Taiwan has lost its innocence." For that most innocent yet sexual of signs, the uniformed schoolgirl, stood desecrated.

Nonetheless, the profanation of the concealing and enticing figure would, in all likelihood, not have pulled millions of Taiwanese into an abyss of fear, shock and rage had the victim not been the daughter of one of Taiwan's most beloved media stars, Bai Bingbing. Bai Bingbing reflected and portrayed what many Taiwanese of her generation had experienced over the years. Nearly 42 years old at the time of her daughter's death, she grew up in circumstances poor, by any standards, but familiar, to millions of her fans.

According to her 1996 biography, she grew up in the mountainous Northeast of Taiwan in a family of ten children. Like several of her siblings, she was given away to others as a baby but was returned to her natal family after she cried for three days. Her mother often treated her cruelly; her parents argued about money; and she learned, as did most young kids in those mountains, to clean laundry and care for siblings. As a teenager (again, like tens of thousands of other young women) she worked outside of the house as a seamstress to provide money for her family. When she traveled to the larger towns or cities, she dreamed, by her own account, of the day she could wear beautiful clothes like those she saw in shops and sing like the stars on the radio. When her father's health forced a change of job, she looked to night clubs, where singers, like dancing partners in central Taichung in the 1990s, made much more money than could most other young women. Young Bai eventually tested into a KMT-controlled performing troupe (*kangle du*)-- groups used for the promotion of cultural activities across the island. Later, spotted singing a Japanese song at a nightclub, she was offered a job in a Japanese movie. Only twenty years old, she soon became a success in Japan, representing a sweet Taiwanese girl still singing Japanese songs to Taiwan's former colonial masters. During the 1970s with her name, much to the delight of her audience, meaning "jumping tits," she made records, shot KTV videos, and became a frequent subject of Japanese fan-zines. Having bore Xiaoyan to a well-known Japanese cartoonist who turned out to be a philanderer, she returned to Taiwan in the early 1980s to become a widely-recognized celebrity. She hosted television shows, appeared in TV advertisements, and acted in serials. As her fortune grew, she gave to charities and scholarship funds, located her siblings who had

been given away, and took her family (in particular, her daughter and two parents) on vacation trips around the world. Her fame and appeal was such that politicians of both parties (including Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shuibian) found it expedient to be seen with her. The Taipei County Parent-Teacher Association elected her as their president, and she even addressed the legislature. Her political philosophy was and is simple (reflecting, like much else of her life, the feelings of millions in Taiwan): no matter what, love Taiwan.¹³⁰

A representative structure can be drawn from her experience. Small in stature, she overcame every form of economic hardship through sheer determination and luck (and help from the KMT), to become successful beyond anyone's expectations, first by selling her products abroad (not without humiliation) then to her own people (as a stellar example of successful overcoming). Furthermore, despite all the failings of her parents and her marriage, she worked to keep her family intact-- taking her parents on trips abroad and training her daughter to be a good young girl. She absorbed and displayed all that is spectacular of the modern world, dressing in high fashion, traveling, and collecting cars, yet at the same time she visited local temples, learned martial arts, and portrayed traditional Chinese characters on TV. When the time came, she would also become exemplary of the mourning mother who cried for the death of her daughter-- thereby representing all those suffering the loss of Taiwan's innocence.

A Fine Crowd Forms

¹³⁰ See Bai Bingbing's official biography: Cao Mingzong, *Jianmanghua de chuntian: Bai Bingbing de qian ban sheng* [The Spring of the jianming flower: the first half of Bai Bingbing's Life], (Taipei: Yuan-Shen Press, 1996).

Regardless of these symbolic coincidences, had this event occurred in isolation, the public would have, in all likelihood, viewed it as a sad and terrible case at most. But the death of Bai Xiaoyan came at a moment when people everywhere were ready for some event to signal to them what they deeply felt. Namely, the chaos, sickness and danger threatened every aspect of their delicately fashioned lives, and the time had come to act.

Thus, within one week of the discovery of the corpse, over 50,000 people (described often as the largest crowd in years) took to the streets to protest the seeming decay of public order.¹³¹ Exactly one week later, on May 11, 1997, at the funeral for Bai Xiaoyan (attended by approximately three thousand people), Bai Bingbing had a friend read an eulogy that she wrote for her daughter but which she would not speak herself for fear that her tears would stop Bai Xiaoyan from leaving this world.

The text translates, in part, as follows:

She was only 17. She didn't have enough time to know this world. I only wish her sacrifice can speak for the public's desire for freedom from fears...If her death can take away all the misfortunes and slightly change the society...then she could say her life was not in vain.¹³²

Bai Bingbing's sorrow and desire shared by millions, another crowd would form and march on the Presidential Offices in Taipei on May 18th. This crowd, like that of the May 4 demonstration, took form through focus on the body of Bai Xiaoyan, turning the

¹³¹ See, for example, "Crime situation actually improving, says GIO chief," *China News*, May 6, 1997.

¹³² "Thousands pay last respects: entertainer's daughter mourned as fury over kidnapping continues," *China News*,

innocent life and death of the girl into, as her mother said, a sacrifice for the society in its yearning for change.

The following passage from a leaflet passed to me during the demonstration summarizes the focus and hope of that afternoon:

The tears of a mother, a family tied with yellow ribbons, a delicate heart folded to become a paper crane of every color, on the winds the cries and suffering of the caring people of an entire island, finally waiting for a child without a way home.¹³³

The affair of Bai Xiaoyan lets the entirety of Taiwan become a great household. This family already broken to pieces, already brutalized, and already, at last, attempting with a loving heart to embrace the life of Bai Xiaoyan. This body becomes the greatest opposition party on Taiwan; this body becomes the greatest political party that loves Taiwan. We present apologies to the great mother of Bai Xiaoyan, Bai Bingbing. Because she already loves Taiwan like this, she already sobbingly said she does not want to emigrate, but Taiwan, however, gave her this kind of return.¹³⁴

May 12, 1997, p. 3.

¹³³ The “yellow ribbon” referenced is indeed that of “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Around the Old Oak Tree” fame and that of Americans waiting for hi-tech warriors to return from Iraq. That is, the “yellow ribbon” reveals, yet again, the subtle and deep influence of American popular culture in Taiwan.

¹³⁴ Here I have translated “*shenwei*” as “this body becomes.” Translated literally *shenwei* means “body becomes”. *Shen* by itself can often refer to the first person subject or political or other body or group. Another translation might be “our party becomes” or “our body becomes” (or became). But, I think these translations, while correct, fail to convey the subtlety with which this phrase appears in this leaflet. *Shenwei* follows an assertion that the body of Bai made possible a family-like unification of Taiwan. It seems plausible that the writers of this leaflet also wanted to imply that Bai’s body which unifies Taiwan shares in this role with the Democratic Progressive Party. Moreover, the

Bai Xiaoyan is a seventeen-year-old high school child. Born pitifully, she died bitterly; a very shortened life, it simply asks of all of us: we, aside from understanding sorrow and understanding the use of more activities to control the disorder to protect children, the people of government can do what for the children of Taiwan?

Thinking of the unfortunate Bai Xiaoyan, who already faced her sliced finger, a strangled neck and violent beatings that led to internal bleeding, death, perhaps was a form of release; but this method of death, also no matter the style, is it impossible for the government to be fiercely accused? From the Liu Bangyou case to the Peng Wanru case, how many cases wait to be broken? How many sounds of the not-far-away tears of the people are still heard? The government allowed the public security to become corrupt and broken, allowing criminals...moreover, allowing gangsters...into the legislature.

We think that this moment of time, the pain of Taiwan's mothers is extremely concrete, the fear for children is extremely concrete, and therefore every political party must take responsibility to put forward concrete policies for...the problem of public safety.

DPP is not even mentioned in the leaflet until the very bottom of the page. Clearly the referent of *shenwei* remains suggestively ambiguous, thus, my translation as "this body becomes"— an equally ambiguous phrase.

Produced by the Democratic Progressive Party, this leaflet reveals only part of their role in the demonstrations.¹³⁵ Yet, while at the end of the year it would be the DPP which capitalized upon the unity around the death of the girl to make “concrete (*juti*)” a new political establishment of power, the demonstration was not organized by them. Rather, the Humanistic Education Foundation (*ren ben*), an NGO dedicated to reforming education through natural instruction programs in Taiwan, with the assistance of various student groups and other activists, foot the bill, set the agenda and structured the crowd.

Divided as planned at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, the structure of the crowd remains remarkably revealing; for it reflects an utopian structure of social relations that, in many ways, resides at the center of new culture longings. At the head of the march were put parents, children, and single mother groups; behind them came students and “the masses (*minzhong*)”; following them came workers, aborigine and other “public interest (*gongyi*)” groups; lastly stood overt (from the perspective of the middle class which conceives of itself, in a gesture possible only because of their central role in the status quo, as largely apolitical) political organizations, including groups of elderly Mainlanders and hard-core independence activists. Like the middle class itself, this crowd stood ordered, polite and earnest.

Yet, as might be expected of a hierarchy, when I worked my way around the crowd on the preparation grounds with two companions from Taiwan University, the

¹³⁵ Even at this early date, the Democratic Progressive Party capitalized on the formation of the crowd. Leading members of the party attended, such as Hsu Hsin-liang. Meanwhile, Lien Chan, the subject of the crowd’s wrath, sent representatives who reported by cellular phone on the proceedings. Still, The Humanistic Education Foundation paid the bill which neared 2,000,000 NT for the May 4 and 18 demonstrations. See “Lien ‘aware of demands’ after march

expression of rage became more acute the further we went toward the rear— that is, the bottom. At the front children played and mothers chatted. Further back couples talked and students sat. Of all these groups, the experience of protesting seemed rather novel, like a somber Sunday outing. Vendors came around and served sausages and snacks. Dogs dressed in sunglasses and costumes did tricks. People snapped photographs. But when we reached the workers we found people (mostly women) who seemed accustomed to the role of neglected protesters— labor demonstrations since the late 1980s being quite common but not greatly influential. While others wore the multi-colors of new culture with straw hats (referencing the “lost times of good feelings”) and their mouths occasionally covered (signifying repression), workers sat dressed in black, mouths uncovered, with banners that read— in contrast to the politely expressible “shame (*chi*)” and “indignation (*fen*)” of the foremost groups of middle class protesters— simply, “Fuck Lee (*gan Li*)”. The wrath worsened as we reached the back of the crowd to the point that the people speaking were nearly incomprehensible. An old mainlander protested some long-buried grievance, but one of my companions, herself the daughter of a son of a mainlander, could comprehend neither his thick accent nor his rage— both emanating from another place and time. Similarly, incensed from years of sometimes violent struggle just to enunciate the words “Taiwan independence” in public, Taiwan independence activists were shoved to the back while those speaking of “loving Taiwan with your feet” and “not emigrating” took leading positions.

Most important to the leading majority of this crowd was not the expression of indignation, per se, though this was surely expressed, but the sharing of a feeling (*ganqing*), a feeling I shared, for example, with Mrs. Zheng. This feeling encompassed a longing for a place-- a Taiwan-- where people need not emigrate from, a place where softer patterns of communication and relations (often attributed to women) can prevail, and a place where new manners of affectation and care could and can flourish without the violent intrusion of those not sharing the same sensibilities. Familiarly expressed in nostalgic advertising, book-club hopes, and Heqi mantras, these feelings could also be called those of a nascent and necessarily non-belligerent nationalism (insofar as they are predicated on the notion of Taiwanese qua victims).

With these feelings alive as the crowd, we walked Renai road under late-Spring low gray clouds and press helicopters. Estimates of the number of marchers, "using feet to love Taiwan (*yong jiao ai taiwan*)," ranged from 50,000 to 100,000 people.¹³⁶ Along the way my companions and I saw several friends and acquaintances lining the demonstration route. (In fact, most middle class people in Taichung I knew told me they wished they could have attended this "important" demonstration, too). The multitude chanted slogans such as "Lee Teng-hui: Admit Fault and reshuffle the Cabinet" and "Lien Chan step down." When the Presidential Office tower came in sight, we all sat down on the road and were passed white chalk. Directed to write what has been repressed on the boulevard, people around us wrote such phrases as "Homosexuals love Taiwan" and "Women have no protection; their loving hearts in fear; it is similar to being in hell."

¹³⁶ "50,000 march for Lien's resignation," *The China Post*, May 19, 1997, p. 1.

When the evening came, a laser beam shot from the crowd etched “admit fault (*ren cuo*)” in ragged written Chinese on the famous Japanese-built tower of the Presidential Office. People raised their fists in united protest, but the feeling of the crowd was not one of violent overthrow. That violence had already befallen the young victim. The violence that this crowd demanded in return, true to its self conception and its most common experience of it, remained symbolic. Calling for the resignation of the Premier and the admission by the President of fault, the crowd signaled that the power of Taiwanese society rests in the late 1990s, not with the party and aristocracy of old but with it-- the vast middle class and those who can embody its causes and sensibilities.¹³⁷

Graciously accompanying me to the train station after the demonstration, my two companions suggested a choice: McDonald’s or Burger King for dinner.¹³⁸ We went to Burger King. Nostalgic images of Elvis and other early rockers surrounding us, we easily ate burgers, fries, and cokes and talked of the good feelings. The fact that our consumption rested on innumerable violent acts that the crowd of which we were, in many ways, still a part, would never allow within its field of relations eluded us. Rather than consider the implications of our comfort to its invisible violence, my male

¹³⁷ By representing this social synthesis, the Democratic Progressive Party became the great champion of the middle class, making possible a substantial claim to power on the island. The transformation of the DPP from an opposition party devoted to Taiwan independence to a middle class party is documented by Linda Grail Arrigo. See her “From Democratic movement to Bourgeois Democracy: The Internal Politics of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party in 1991,” in *The Other Taiwan: 1945 to Present*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 131-149.

¹³⁸ While the American restaurant choice might have suggested itself because I am an American, both my companions frequent these restaurants for study and socializing. In fact, American fast food restaurants are extremely popular with students who consume the ambiance of America as much as the climate control and food while they socialize and study.

companion (a Chemical Engineering major) asserted (in indignation over the threat these criminals pose and inspired by the crowd's injunction to defend the safety of women) that the best solution would come in the future with technological advances in genetic therapy.

Damaged Spirits, Shattered Visages, Evil Eyes

Ironically but not suprisingly, the yearning of the vast middle class for an end to the old arrangement of government and black society led to a condition of chaos that made possible its assertion of canon in consonance with the predilections of world middle-class culture. In this particular case the disorder stemmed from the fact that people (primarily in Taipei) who once worked in KTVs, brothels, and gambling dens found themselves out of work and local bosses could no longer assert their control over such people from prison. This predicament was not lost on the National Police Administration Chief, Yao Gaoqiao, who told reporters that the kidnappers (themselves low-level gangsters or gangster want-to-be's) were more or less compelled into their crimes by the ministry's own crackdown on electronic gambling dens.¹³⁹

According to local accounts, the emergence of disorder from the yearning for and enforcement of structural change was responsible for (while it was registered as) spiritual damage, too. *The Journalist (Xinxinwen zhoubao)* wrote of this ruin during the early weeks of the affair in a widely-read piece. Below I quote three passages that remain indicative of the feelings that many in Taiwan shared:

¹³⁹ "Leadership put to the test," *China News*, April 30, 1997, p. 11.

(1) Recent successive acts of unbelievable brutal violence have not only taken the lives of the victims but have damaged the spirit of Taiwan's people.

(2) The Bai Xiaoyan case has been the equivalent of breaking society's mirror. Henceforth, whenever we look into that mirror we will see an anti-social, shattered visage.

(3) Predators, with their evil eyes stalking their prey, have become adept at executing their deeds with a kind of cool-headed efficiency and have turned our cities into hunting grounds.¹⁴⁰

As these identifications and projections suggest, the “damaged spirits (*shanghai de xinling*)” were, until these terrible acts, attached (undamaged) to certain narcissistic social representations (including those of the pure schoolgirl and the ever over-coming Bai Bingbing). These images shattered, Taiwanese lost their self-same certainty (or innocence) and became instead suddenly subject to a predatory world where “evil eyes (*xie'e de yanshen*)” secretly watch “anti-social (*gupi*)” or isolated people in their most intimate of daily routines.¹⁴¹

These unreflective reflections express how much of Taiwanese society was experienced after the discovery of the body. For example, covering the May 25, 1997 rally sponsored by the Foguangshan Buddhist temple of Kaohsiung and held at the

¹⁴⁰ Nan Fangsuo, “*Xie e de yanshen zhengzai kuishi shouhou ni* [Evil eyes are secretly watching you and waiting for you],” *Xinxin Zhubao* [The Journalist], May 4-10, 1997, p. 20. This piece was translated and published under the title “Complete collapse of societal values allows criminals free run,” *China News*, May 5, 1997, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ This projection of “evil eyes” was justified by the single fact that Bai Xiaoyan was stalked for a month before she

Chiang Kai-Shek memorial hall in Taipei, the press noted dutifully that Bai Bingbing in her first public appearance after the funeral of her daughter

wore a black suit...She blew her hair, put on some make up. This is the first time she wore make up after her daughter's death, but she didn't have any jewelry at all and her eyes were filled with sorrow.

Photographed as she sat between the Minister of Justice Liao Zhenghao and Buddhist master Xing Yun, this "shattered visage (*posui de mianrong*)," reportedly rose to enjoin the crowd of Buddhists to spiritual transformation that has as its end the expression of love:

Xiaoyan and I are very inward people. We did not like to say "love" to each other, and now I regret that I can no longer say "I love you" to her. I hope all the parents can keep the chance they have to be with their children and do not feel stingy in showing their love.¹⁴²

Given dramatic public expression within a simultaneous collective yearning for spiritual renewal-- a renewal that politicians, as they led crackdowns on crime, were also expected to lead¹⁴³-- this new-fashioned form of affectation that conceals as it reveals the fetish-like centrality of children in fostering domestic order would, as the pervasive logic of overcoming demands, emerge forcefully from the conditions of spiritual catastrophe and loss-- signified, above all, by Bai Bingbing's suffering face and her recited regrets.

was nabbed.

¹⁴² "Ai Taiwan: Bingbing tuidong ai xing lieche [Love Taiwan: Bingbing pushes the love train]," *Chungguo Shibao* [China Times Daily], May 26, 1997, p. 4.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Julie Yap, "Spirituality begins with those at top," *China News*, May 6, 1997, p. 2.

This form of affectation and spirituality would become the ironic grounds for terrified parents to commence their own crackdowns on their own children, a crackdown reiterating, in most strict practice, what had already become the norm-- namely, that people feared losing most what they never really had.

While it remains doubtful that anyone would call the efforts of parents to keep their children safe from kidnapers "a crackdown (*zhenya*)," it was experienced like that by young people; for the acts of control came suddenly, triggered by unrelated events and, as crackdowns normally are, destined to last only awhile. Nonetheless, many young people who typically spent eight to twelve hours per day, six days per week, away from their parents at school, studying with friends, and at play were made to stay home, as one high-school student told me, "like tame cats." Parents of college students demanded that their daughters, in particular, remain in dorms or move back into them. And many mothers of small children, including some of my closest friends, literally quit their jobs to protect their children from kidnapers.

Sporadic resistance occurred. Clever college students bargained hard with parents to keep their accustomed freedoms. A computer virus spread across the BBS network under the title "Xiaoyan Special Report" which, after announcing "Bai Xiaoyan 17, was kidnapped and tortured to death by her kidnapers *because her family is wealthy....*" would wipe out data on hard drives of the unsuspecting and curious.¹⁴⁴ Eventually, many students would cast loose indifference toward the events, and others would even organize parodical demonstrations. For example, in January of 1998 (after the capture of Chen

¹⁴⁴ "Computer virus uses Bai's (Pai's) name," *China News*, May 15, 1997, p. 3. My emphasis.

Jinxing) I saw a student English-language play in which students portrayed a Taiwanese society of parental indifference and middle-class buffoonery contrasted with youths in comic alienation linked to their parents only through hi-tech telecommunication gadgets such as cellular phones. Produced in English, a language that allowed the gifted students a separate space in which to enact their understanding and durability, this award-winning play showed the skepticism many young people felt. But, by and by, as the events of the affair unfolded, student adherence to the form of the pure schoolgirl, concealing and depicting their own daily experiences of competition and sexuality (in particular, as I discovered through numerous conversations, through recognition of the severed finger, signifying their own feelings of minuteness in a vast technological system in which bodily harm-- usually through motorcycle accidents-- happens to many) sufficiently served to guarantee terror and, thereby, submission to parental controls.

As the summer went on and the crackdown on children reached its nadir, the demands of the middle class crowd for political acquiescence were met. Although he never "admitted fault," President Lee Teng-hui apologized several times to the people regarding the inability of the government to solve outstanding cases-- promising, in turn, to provide more modern means of crime control.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, by July, Lien Chan had given up ostentatious golfing, re-doubled his trips to local temples, and stepped down from the post of Premier-- though he still served in his elected position as Vice President.

¹⁴⁵ While a source of controversy, his reluctance to admit fault does not surprise insofar as Lee Teng-hui has always, it seems, represented the technocratic face of the KMT and not that portion of the old power structure that found both order and enjoyment through alliance with local, black-society honchos.

Only the three kidnapers remained unbowed before the middle class crowd. Every day they went without arrest, the fear they evidently caused multiplied.

At the time the situation in which millions of people stood increasingly terrified of kidnapers seemed to me preposterous. Yet, despite repeated statements by authorities that the crime rate was not rising, parents who I talked with were adamant: the “bad guys (*huairen*)” were out there, and they wanted the children. To justify this belief, many parents repeated stories of kidnappings heard from other parents, and so on. The stories, however, only proved what parents already believed, namely that the kidnapers did not only want the children of the rich and famous; they wanted theirs. If asked, parents would claim that kidnapers would adjust their demands based on the amount of money a family could afford. For some families the sliding scale began at 200,000 NT; for others, in better neighborhoods, it rose to 500,000 NT and so on. The amount of money Bai Bingbing amassed over the years did not deter this conviction (despite the best efforts of the Bai virus). Many would say “Bai Bingbing worked hard and deserved her money.” The assumption necessary for understanding this retort to my awkward inquiries rests with the fact that most middle class people believed they, too, worked hard for their money. Unlike between them and the aristocratic Lien Chan, the difference between them and Bai Bingbing remained and remains simply a matter of degree.

With this fear a reversal occurred. While the middle-class generally perceives its mission as universalizing (as attested to during “World Book Day in Taiwan” and elsewhere), in this case, the “bad guys” and those outside the middle class bubble of normality seemed drawn directly to them. As one professional mother told me: “They

saw the middle class getting rich over night, so they hope for this themselves.” On the face of it, such a statement again seemed absurd; for the underworld became affluent simultaneously with the middle class. But, when I spent time at places such as the “dance hall” near the Zhengs’ offices at night to learn what those marginal to the middle class thought, I learned that many low-level workers (*liumang*) while understanding (if not actively sympathetic) toward the gang of young Bai’s three murderers, would speak of their own longing for a, as they put it, “*chungshouru* (middle income)” life, i.e., a wife, steady day job, and children. Where the content for this longing originated was not difficult to surmise, for literally behind my informants as they spoke, on billboards or by the presence of a giant new grade school, reminders of the supposed integrity, beauty, warmth and innocence of this way of life presented themselves.

And yet, the devotion to the ideal of nuclear family life remains out of tune with practice; for such warm togetherness was, at least until the crackdown on children, in many ways illusory. The broken image of Bai Bingbing represents the difference between the actual and the ideal most dramatically. For the question that everyone asked of her life was “How could Taiwan give her great gift of love such a return?”

With this question the self-same certainty of those identifying with the heralded success of the Taiwan-Miracle frays, exposing suffering, isolation and other contradictions hidden behind the narcissistic dream images of successful Taiwanese. Everyone in Taiwan who has lived through all or part of the past four or five decades, in fact, asks the question of what the transformation has really brought to them (certainly this is a critical question of government employees, the Zhengs, and, *Heqi* practitioners).

Expressed commonly as talk of emigration and fear of the future, the Bai case made the issue acute.

It might be hoped that the appearance of criminals could trigger recognition of the contradictions and other conditions of contemporary Taiwanese society because it is they who represent-- like criminals in Chinese history and other societies always have-- where the operating assumptions of the system (in the Taiwanese case, the absolute imperative of competitive struggles for money and the simultaneous demand to enjoy the fruits of it) becomes all-too-clear and all-too-pathological. But, for most people (at least through the summer), the criminals did not trigger recognition; rather, according to the common line of thought, they stood (like those parking cars outside the "dance hall") threatening and outside of what is normal. Hence, according to the immediately understood logic of the times, they represented that which must be locked away in prisons (or otherwise dismissed) to secure the security (i.e., the network of social relations) that ironically causes the concealed suffering.

As one young woman told me, "by exposing our accumulating drawbacks through the murder of Bai Xiaoyan" that which went and goes concealed behind the nondescript uniforms became disclosed within the register of public, criminal horror: young people as victims of the system that requires their "life energy (*huoli*)" for its functioning and parents who seem to need their youthful beauty to help stave off their own confrontation with the terror of the world. As noted in chapter three, parents in Taiwan are sometimes accused of "eating the young." While this criticism remains hushed and apparently reserved for those about to lose their social legitimacy (such as "inefficient" government

employees-- criticized and targeted by the crowd and global capital), it nonetheless captures a disturbing and underlying element of the Taiwanese social system; for as young people are put through the intense ringers of development for “the future,” parents, despite and because of the fact that they know that the children are, as they say, “pitiful (*kelian*),” nonetheless enjoy them immensely. It is, in fact, through their pitiful poverty (and, therefore, helpless condition) that children can be recognized as pure and lovely. Parents, on the other and defining hand generally believe they are neither, though hope that these characteristics can be experienced through children or recovered through practices such as Heqi.¹⁴⁶

The kidnapers took the implicit relation of power and enjoyment to a terrible extreme. But the extreme was and is not unintelligible; for criminals in their acts provide an uncanny reflection of what goes without saying. Criminals in Chinese culture have always had this uncanny characteristic. This is why they have traditionally constituted a large portion of the ghost population. They condense what people, gazing into the self-same certainty of the over-riding social representation, cannot see but which, in fact, must exist for the certain semblance to have any value (and thereby efficacy) at all.

The nostalgic images of the Zhengs and others notwithstanding, the fact that children had it tough in the not-too-distant past was expressed simply and often. Mothers warned their children that if they did not behave they would be “beaten to death.” In light

¹⁴⁶ In Heqi circles, some debate occurs over whether or not children should practice. Generally speaking, all children are encouraged. But while stories of teenagers speaking of the stresses of their lives appear regularly in Heqi materials, very little is said of younger children. They seem saved for the sidelines, where they can play with peers while their parents practice.

of the demands and dangers of raising kids under patriarchal rule, about the best moniker a mother might give a child was “my meat (*a ruo*).”¹⁴⁷ Nowadays it seems every child is either a “precious baby (*baobei*)” or a “little precious (*xiaobao*).” This is not to say social pressures of the type known before do not persist, nor is it to say that children were never coddled and otherwise protected from wandering ghosts and their equivalents (criminals) in the past; it is to reiterate, rather, that a remarkable centrality has been given to children— the intensity and form of expressed feeling for them in inverse proportion to their direct, economic contribution to any family. They are nowadays fetishes of purity— a quality their elders, in their endless compromises and complex games of daily social life, feel themselves losing at every turn.

Since the kidnapers laid bare the lives of middle class people by showing precisely where their own imagined integrity, warmth and beauty breaks down (in fact, cruelly forcing it to break down), the kidnapers, like a negative semblance of the master in Heqi practice, were granted the status of one’s who know.¹⁴⁸ For it was they who had “evil eyes”— eyes that watched and stalked. They, according to this fear and faith, “turned our cities into hunting grounds.” Because of their aggressive attention, they knew that parental contact was limited, just as they knew the great enjoyment and tremendous desire associated with children. With this capacity they became those who apprehended what most wished would not be known (even to themselves): that the central figure of

¹⁴⁷ For a telling description of pre-1980s Taipei attitudes toward child-rearing of working-class and petty-capitalist women see Hill Gates, “Cultural Support for Birth Limitation among Urban Capital-owning Women,” in *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era*, ed. Debrah Davis and Stevan Harrell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 251-274.

purity is but an empty hole (like an empty space in a mysterious photograph), which when encountered by consciousness, provides the shock, if not trauma, necessary for reordering under, in this case, an emergent universal discourse of “love.”

Making Them (Not Quite) Other

The ever-threatening semblances of knowing evil did not begin as such, of course. But as the affair and its effects unfolded, the chosen three were remade.

While much remaking occurred in media space, ordinary people had a hand in it. For example, as early as April 29, 1997, the National Police Administration distributed a most-wanted poster of the three murderers. This poster quickly became one of the most common sights on the entire island. In it, three black and white ID-style photos, enlarged to approximately 10 x 12 inches, identified the suspects. Next to the photos were printed their formal names (Gao Tianming, Lin Chunsheng, and Chen Jinxing) and their nicknames (Mingge, Chunshengzi, and Ajinzi)-- names that showed them, despite and because of the printed information regarding their official designations (place of birth, ID number, addresses) to be at least similar to regular guys. However, Taiwanese, in many locations, quickly transformed the standardized faces with writing and comments of their own, including such phrases as “tramps (*jianhuo*),” “human dregs (*renza*),” and “paraded prisoner (*youjie*).” People also scratched such English phrases as “bad man,” “crazy,” and “I don’t like you” across the comfortable and earnest facades, thereby degrading the three further by putting them outside the realm of everyday speech and its human experience in Taiwan-- a space tellingly shared by comic students.

¹⁴⁸ See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 123-148.

Bai Bingbing, who (unlike the middle class crowd) claimed neither anger at the President nor the government, added to the deprecation of the fugitives soon after the death of her daughter:

Although I would still like to call the kidnappers 'Mister' because I do not bear any grudge against them now, instead I would call them 'inhuman beasts' because they have not only involved themselves in trouble but have also harmed many others, including their families.¹⁴⁹

Harm would come to their families through police torture-- a practice that claims the lingering adherence of the general public and reveals the public craving to see the families of murderers suffer, too.¹⁵⁰ However, according to the principle of childhood innocence yet regardless of the presumed guilt of adult family members, the innocence of the trio's own children and children associated with them was preserved. This predilection could be discerned in the second most-common poster produced by the National Police Administration. In this one the three appeared in color photographs in scenes of relaxation. Children appearing with them had their eyes barred black to protect, it seemed, their innocence from association with the fugitives and, it should be assumed, the terrified and fascinated crowd from recognition of the origins of evil in human beings like themselves.

¹⁴⁹ "Pai Ping-ping (Bai Bingbing) says she doesn't blame police," *China News*, May 11, 1997, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ According to local informants, the types of torture applied include a water torture that consists of filling nasal passages with water, an ice torture that requires the victim sit naked on blocks of ice, and other tortures which, while excruciating, leave no marks on the bodies of victims.

As the growing fear/faith of the middle class would have it, these criminals, with their “evil eyes” staring straight at them from ID photos everywhere, did not (in fact, could not) belong to the realm of the purely sub-human, either; for as the three were banished from the realm of the human and as they eluded apprehension, they began to pop up-- not unlike moments of empirical history at book club and *Heqi* sessions. In fact, at book club meetings and *Heqi* sessions the kidnappers would turn up briefly in (as if racing through) public talk. All over the island people claimed to have seen them at 7-11s, in the forests, or on motorcycles riding through the suburbs. Typical of the omnipresence granted them, Mr. Zhang and I sat talking in his living room one afternoon (he went home from work early during those months to make certain his daughter, in her teens, got home safely) about, in fact, the discovery of the body of Bai Xiaoyan and the press reaction to it, when, suddenly, his second-grade son crashed through the front door screaming hysterically “Chen Jinxing is coming to Taichung!” I asked him how he knew this. He gulped breaths and told us in the cadences common to Taiwan’s grade school students: “Teacher Chen Meiyi told us.”

In their own desperation the fugitives appeared to respond to this new-found status-- living, in many ways, up to expectations-- by adding robberies, kidnappings, murders, and rapes (and thereby power) to their already demonized personages. In August the trio kidnapped a businessman in Taipei, Chen robbed a house, (injuring a police officer and soon thereafter the National Police Administration Chief Yao stepped down), Chen began a raping spree, and, in September, Gao and Chen (after the death of Lin Chunsheng in a shoot-out) committed a triple murder at a Taipei plastic surgery

clinic. All these and other intense and terrible events were watched by “tame cats” and their parents from the comfort of living rooms— as several told me: only the televised funeral of Princess Diana could compare.

Because these events occurred (for viewers) in media space, some who I knew (in most cases, foreigners) were quick to dismiss the whole affair as *just* hype. Yet, the tremendous attention to the events speaks to the fact that the posited difference between a mediated world of images and a real world of encounters, relationships, and substance (necessary for such a dismissal) cannot be maintained in the case of contemporary Taiwan. Thus, just as those in search of utopian community implicitly reject the actual “community” that *is* contemporary Taiwan, those who reject the hyped-reality effectively discard much of Taiwanese life.¹⁵¹ A fine example of this blurring of standards of perception and, therefore, life occurred only a year after the end of the manhunt. On December 16, 1998 on a *minshi* cable TV show entitled “The Spring Heart of a Second Wife (*Chuntian houmu xin*),” Bai Bingbing (in the title role of this serial about an utopian modern life set in a nostalgic neverland) lost her grandson (technically the grandson of the first wife) to kidnapping. The Taiwanese in the small, Yunlin County town of Baozhong with whom I watched it did not flinch at the disappearance of difference; meanwhile, a few miles down the road at the temple celebration that only occurs every five years, four *gezaxi* troupes performed, a 1,300 kilogram pig sat surrounded by

¹⁵¹ It remains comforting to do so, however; for the posited division renders the unfathomably boring reality of people everywhere riveted to televisions watching evening news reports and a host of television show (including nostalgic cop programs and true crime stories) while the world outside their walls proceeded and proceeds apace (though certainly more self-consciously), a non-event.

blinking Christmas lights, several competing young women sang, and one black and white martial arts film played and performed simultaneously for the god and a “*renao*” crowd of a few hundred-- most everyone else, on that night, remained at home, like us, watching various cable-TV shows.

To effect this finalization of world in hype required and requires a form of disavowal, similar to that which animates the intense talk surrounding ghost photographs, that goes something like this: while most everyone knew what they saw occurred in the media, they, nonetheless, acted as if they did not. Instead of going out at night, walking with friends, viewing (if not touching) the world many families and had either left behind or never knew, people, apparently safe (but not so comfortable) within guarded buildings and media, preferred to feel fear of the world, their world, through the media and its screens.¹⁵² This hysterical fear has a real basis in the effects of modernization, including the effects of the media itself. Yet, in the media, the monsters that emerged and triggered emotional responses appeared both real and unreal, safe and unsafe-- that is, the difference between fantasy and reality became blurred in such a way as to make the televised world fearsome and the external world televised.

Not everyone responded to the media the same, however. History not yet entirely unified in media, people still possess individual experiences that find expression through

¹⁵² One leader of a condominium residence committee that I knew put up copies of video-tape images of a “stranger” that one night came to their tower’s locked gate and guard house throughout the complex to alert residents of a threatening presence. While the man committed no crime, the sheer fact of his rather random appearance at the place gave cause, once again, to believe what was already believed.

commonality-inspiring media events. For example, an educated middle-class mother who hailed originally from the country-side outside Taipei told me this:

Of course I can understand them. Do you know how hard school can be for children whose parents don't know much about schooling or come from the countryside? When I went to school and the teacher called my name all the students would laugh. Why? Because my name was my nickname (says her name). You know what I mean? Classmates knew right away that I was from the countryside. The teacher didn't expect much from me. And there was nothing I could do about it. When my classmates had new supplies and shoes, I didn't. It was obvious where I was from and what people thought. I still feel angry about this. I know where their anger comes from.

Others I met expressed similar sentiments and projections. Nonetheless, most wanted the kidnappers, increasingly seen as the "sources" of disorder, caught, tried and executed. This overwhelming social desire for their eradication made the beliefs of those identifying with their backgrounds, if not their crimes, all the more certain because the wave of self-certain social indignation over the murders reminded them of their own feelings in the face of a mocking crowd; thus, the murderers expressed their private desires to realize vengeance against the middle class.

However, despite the apparent division caused and signaled by the kidnappers' anti-social and destructive tendencies, people everywhere, including "ups and downs," found constructive commonality through the destructive acts. For, as the crowd once

constituted itself around the “gap of the wild” (as one young woman put it), signified by the corpse of young Bai Xiaoyan, in many ways the whole of Taiwan began to develop itself around the mounting number of raped and dead and, near the end of the affair, the tormented lives of the monsters and their suffering families. This identification was possible because of the media. Through continual returns to the horror, the public compulsively relived the trauma and, thereby, affixed itself to scenes of abduction, rape, death, and mourning. Similar to commonality-producing moments of traumatic Heqi purgation, these encounters and their structure were given to the public by others, in the case of the violence, by elusive kidnappers. By way of supplication, as it were, to these “monsters” with “evil eyes” (as Chen Jinxing himself recognized), moments of empirical history (e.g., night markets, street life, police torture) were revisited again and again by the viewing audience.

Typical in this regard, an article entitled “Chen Jinxing secretly planned to rescue Zhang Shuzhen” appeared in the *China Times Weekly* (*Shibao zhoukan*) days before Chen’s apprehension.¹⁵³ Expressing in its title the typically absurd and hysterical fear of Chen’s sudden violent re-appearance, people across Taiwan could look at photographs of Chen Jinxing and his wife (Zhang Shuzhen) holding their son (his eyes occluded), Gao Tianming and his “dance hall” girl friend, scenes from dance halls, street-side stalls, and Chen’s sobbing mother and wife in this five page spread. Terrible and fascinating by

¹⁵³ Cheng Fang, “Chen Jinxing mi mouqiu Zhang Shuzhen [Chen Jinxing secretly planned to rescue Zhang Shuzhen],” *Shibao zhoukan* [The China Times Weekly], November 23-29, 1997, pp. 42-46.

middle-class standards, the reporter went to these “frightening (*kongbu*)” places and sorrowful people to feed the hunger and serve careers.

At a “dance hall” the reporter found some managers and dancers who may or may not have been familiar with the three— reporting, in any case, that Gao was “good at dancing, Lin was a playboy type, and Chen just liked to touch.” Inadvertently, some complaints were also reported, if only because of the great interest of the reading public to know what people such as these actually thought. One woman said:

It really doesn't make sense. For ten days undercover police came to drink coffee with me. They asked some stupid questions. What a bore! They asked who was Gao's girlfriend? Which girl lives where? What is exactly going on with whom? And they even had me pay for the coffee.

Another nearby added:

The undercover police were really good. They even found my place and told me Gao is worth 20,000,000 NT. Well, if I am Gao's girlfriend, why would I come to work? I would just stay home and enjoy the money (44).

Astounding bits of sense and humor (can one believe typical of Taiwanese?) framed into terms of the underworld and yet insufficient (because not different enough?), the reporter found Gao's ex-wife and, through a crack in her apartment door, got this quote:

I won't say anything more that will cause me trouble. I'm not his wife anymore. I don't care. Punish prisoners with cruelty. Yeah! There's a lot of types...Of course they questioned me with torture. The bottom of my feet still have the marks they made. Water poured into your nose, how

would you feel? There are people watching everyday, how would you feel
(44)?

How would you feel? This question cuts through the perversion of the divorced but fascinated, who watch and, thereby, inflict cruelty. The question, however, went unanswered by the article-- thereby protecting the perversion of fascination with victims and monsters that insulates ordinary conceptions of responsibility, purity and evil. The reporter instead sought to learn more about the monstrous Chen Jinxing-- searching for what is "inside of him." Yet, by reporting what everyone already knew (i.e., Chen was from a broken home, brought up by his grandmother, never knew his father, got in fights in school, dropped out of middle school, spent 17 of his 39 years of life in jail, etc.) the reporter found nothing explanatory. Rather, information provided by Chen's biography worked like statistics regarding the number of yearly traffic accidents for motorists: they simply expressed what everyone knew but apparently could not fathom without a singular, well-understood, expressions of the obvious terror.

Apparently aware of the demands of the audience, the reporter turned to an expression more certain and direct:

Chen's mother lives in a second floor apartment. From the second floor windows with bars, the opposite building wall has the most-wanted poster of Chen. No one knows if they were meant for her. But there are five posters of Chen, and when Chen's mother hangs her laundry outside on the balcony, she will see five Chen Jinxings there.

Chen's mother sold pickles in the market for a long time. She had very good relationships, but after the case became publicized she became silent with no words. She became ill and dared not leave the house.

Occasionally coming down from the building, if she sees a neighbor, she bows her head down and won't say a word at all (45).

Facing the anguish (once again) of a mourning mother, the statistics and the historical facts of Chen's life became real. While fascinating and horrible, the suffering remained indeterminate-- insofar as the tears, like those of Bai Bingbing could be of any and every mother. Yet, as if the indeterminate itself required ordering (i.e., meaning), the reporter asked once again: "Who is to blame for this mess?" With such a question, the effects of the common gaze on Chen's mother, the torture experienced by Gao's ex-wife, and the constant police harassment endured by the dancers became effects of a single cause. But that cause remained indeterminate, too-- that is, not confinable in the category of pure evil without continued reiteration of the crimes and the suffering of mothers that served ironically to undo the very certainty supposedly established. In the writing of the reporter, one sign, however, served to put everything in place to give meaning to the world. The reporter wrote: "we don't know what is inside of him," but one fact remains indisputable: "Chen Jinxing is a failure...(46)"

To call one a failure in a society preoccupied with success is a serious charge; for to fail is to bring chaos-- precisely as do ghosts and monsters. Yet, to fail remains ordinary, too-- not (quite) other. The stories of Bai Bingbing's life and Taiwan's success depend on lean years for meaning. Moreover, success stories depend on continual

overcoming of failure: Bai marries the wrong man but moves back to Taiwan and makes things right; Taiwan loses its seat (as the ROC) at the United Nations but overcomes this disaster through unofficial connections and economic strength. Chen Jinxing, however, grew up in a family broken by circumstances, and his attempts to make it better (through pulling a kidnapping), made it worse-- not because it was illegal (after all economic life throughout the world depends on illegal acts) but because he failed. Yet, even this difference breaks down when the effects of collective overcoming are reflected upon by ordinary people. For as revealed herein, the advertising of the Zhengs, the laments of book club members, and the cries of *Heqi* practitioners all convey the troubling awareness that Taiwan's success has been in many ways a failure.

It stands as a telling coincidence that during the fall of 1997, when Chen and Gao oscillated between personages of great evil and signifiers of failure, Taiwan was beginning to feel the effects of the Asian economic "flu." This "sickness" not only made acute what, for example, Mr. Zheng and others often said about Taiwan, that it is a "sick society"-- responding, in many ways, to a "sick" world-- but that the entire economy, based as it increasingly is on the acts of the middle class, could fail, rendering Taiwan's international position even more precarious.

Chen Writes Back

Into this perversion and hysteria surrounding his seductive and dangerous personage, the monstrous and ghostly failure, Chen Jinxing, mailed his letters-- intruding with his own words into polite conversation while answering questions asked from the beginning: "Who are you?" and "What do you want from us?"

The earliest letter mailed by the fugitives arrived in the hands of Taipei District Prosecutor Shi Liangpo on May 28, 1997.¹⁵⁴ Written in response to media accounts of the roles of family and friends of the kidnapers and soon published in local papers, the purpose of the letter (to assert that the kidnapers were solely responsible for the affair and, therefore, that their families and friends should not be suspected, tortured, or tried) did not move prosecutors; for nearly three months later, on August 21, the investigation into 12 supposed accomplices of the trio closed with long prison terms for eleven people, including Chen's wife, and a death sentence for Chen's brother-in-law proposed. These indictments would not stick in the end, however-- in no small way do to Chen Jinxing's letters.

It was not until after the November third sighting of Gao (nearly six months after the first letter was sent) that Chen began to write telling and prophetic letters that captured something close to the sympathy of the public, however. A turning point occurred because on that day the scale and futility of the investigation came into sharp and comical relief; for while previous events, including the August 19 shooting of Lin Chunsheng on Taipei's Wuchang Street (an encounter with police that Gao somehow escaped from), demonstrated police ineptitude, the November third event allowed millions of Taiwanese to watch thousands of trained troops search an entire neighborhood to no avail.

The next day the media reported that Gao escaped in Tienmu because "he knew the trails into the mountains." Newspapers and tabloids printed maps of the area and

¹⁵⁴ "Kidnappers send letter to police," *China News*, May 29, 1997, p. 1.

television cameras, from at least one station I watched, snaked through trails of the mountains (with cameras held at ankle height) to emulate a supposed get-away route. This escape gave the duo a strange stardom; for just as Gao and Chen knew and cut trails through cemeteries, abandoned apartment buildings, temples, woods, drainage ditches and other sites and channels that officials of state and their agents could neither comprehend nor find, many in Taiwan, in particular petty-capitalists, operate through unofficial channels for capital accumulation and otherwise seek to confound and avoid the inspection of the government. Moreover, as if playing the government for a fool were not enough, many could understand well the stated aim of Chen and Gao to free their families-- an aim that allows every form of economic and (no doubt) criminal activity.

Despite the resulting boost in popularity-- yet in keeping with the indeterminate nature of their personages in public consciousness-- the surviving duo were still subject to intense deprecation and the heavy burden of complete social exclusion, a condemnation and load expressed simply by the fact that police and soldiers across the island were given the order to shoot-to-kill on sight.

From within a narcissistic condition that began with his identification with images of rich and powerful Mafioso, moved to a terribly violent spree of sexual attacks, and ended with his act of interpretation, Chen wrote two letters immediately following the get-a-way that served to break through ordinary decorum (which includes daily, routinized shots of televised violence) with his own stark interpretation of the terror

gripping Taiwan and his role in creating the terror and bringing it to an end. The letter sent to the *Lianhe bao* (United Daily) translates, in part, as follows:

I committed the crime that warrants ten thousands deaths and which no words can express; but since the beginning of this case until today, having been fried by the media and subject to the methods of grandstanding investigators, I have been forced to become deeply suspicious of whether we've returned to the feudal times of emperors, where one man does evil, nine tribes deserve beheading....cruel and devious means are not what the hand-clapping, called-good, little old hundred names can take.

I hope your friends and relatives never commit the same crimes as we did, experience the same criminal condition or anything we went through, lest you will want to cry but have no tears and yet have regrets without end.

Who can approvingly listen to my speech, hearing the report of my confessions to criminal acts, and still deeply discuss for a while the true inside scoop of this case? I die without sufficient pity; my death can lead their conspiracy to good fortune; but I am very comforted, for the old heavens allowed me to survive until this day. He has his reasoning to make clear this problem. I won't die without great effort! And the cost put forth in the future by society is not within my ability to imagine.

Since I absconded, I have sent out two letters and that have disclosed (my intentions) to save my relatives and friends and rid them of their "crimes."

How can they be so one sided? This ignites my flames of anger, my

psychology out of balance. No matter what I do from this day forward, society will criticize it. I cannot go and seek concern. I will take whatever methods to achieve my goals, and I won't feel pity at all.

The public security of Taiwan is the fourth best in Asia; the problem of public security is not, however, brought about by us three who committed the Bai crime. Have the Liu Bangyou and other fateful cases been broken? Has the Peng Wanru case been broken? Taiwan has many such cases hanging up in the air; false accusations are many. Who can truly care and understand a little? Those at the top exploit the carelessness of others; everyone of them tries to push his responsibility away on to others with a great variety of political methods. They don't know what they are talking about; as long as it doesn't kill his own family, it is fine. I want to say that the instant I proceed to die, the wind and clouds will change color; that time when the mountains go ablaze, please do not, everyone, blame me!

The "super case" of us three, the investigators on the investigative side, on the contrary, have 10, 100, 1,000, or more than 10,000 crack troops lined up to hunt the fugitives. We three only have several guns. That's all....

If those investigators can pass the lie detector test and face the public with the fact that they did not punish people who are being accused in this matter, I will give up my weapons and send myself to court. If this affair doesn't get resolved, then I will take actions, without fore-knowledge of certain places, certain times of the year; I am asking the general public

and innocent victims of my actions to not blame my cruel heart and spicy hand (*shoula*, i.e., despicable methods).

When a country is dying, the devils arise (*guo zhi jiang wang yi, yaomo qi*). I don't want this country to die; no matter what, I belong to this land and to my family and relatives. But at this moment, I am regarded as a ghost (*yao*), a devil (*mo*); this has all been forced on me by them. I am not willing; I have no means to present my case. Who will listen? Even if I send myself to police today, all my words will be in vain. Let them be! When the curtain drops, I will demand my justice with dervish style, and during this period there will be many innocent people who will become victims. If you are lucky, your family won't have anything happen to them. If you are unlucky, then you will be tangled in this process which includes your family and relatives. This is only a small price I request from the incapable, ignorant society. I can only ask everyone for forgiveness! I copied this style from them; everything else will have to be judged after my body is in a coffin.¹⁵⁵

There is more. But with this long segment, the gist and state of mind of the writer comes clear. The text reveals that Chen was a sick man, a man with a "psychology out of balance"; but it is the sickness of a man, named devil, who sees evil in others but whose every effort to confront this evil ends with more evil heaped upon him, more social

¹⁵⁵ Peidong Zhou, "*Liangfengxin tan taowang shu xinjing, pi jingjie* [Two letters describe the escape, disclose an inner voice, and criticize the police force]," *Lianhe bao* [United Daily], November 7, 1997, p. 3.

certainty of his depravity, and more public repugnance at his very mention, not to say appearance.

But, once again in this time of indeterminacy, Chen's sickness was "their sickness," too. Having spent nearly half his life in Taiwan's jails, he "copied (*xuexi*)" "their" methods like good students in other institutions of state. Chief among these "copied" methods appears to be the arbitrary use of violence.

His threats of violence tellingly emerged in the letter from his lack of power, his own inability to be heard and understood-- as if his failing *vis-à-vis* the state demanded nothing but his imposition of will, discourse and patterns of understanding, precisely as did the KMT party and army toward Taiwan when first coming to control of the island years ago. Yet, as he employed the methods of state, his scorn was and is that of the middle class itself; for they, too, who have copied the methods of state, turning them into their own businesses, patterns of living, and acts of power; and it is they, too, who turn powerlessness into power through overcoming.

Like the middle class, he despised the origins of his methods as he employed them. For instance, as he referred to his despicable methods as those of a "spicy hand," he asserted that the techniques employed by the government were and are those of "feudal" times. He was writing of torture, a means to pry confessions from mouths whose bodies the state exacts intimate pain-- a means which did not advance the investigation one iota. And yet, while they were and are methods that those in the "hundred names" cannot "take," according to Chen, they were and are, nonetheless, methods never entirely disavowed by the "called-good little old hundred names" either.

For regardless of their collective accusation that the bureaucracies of state were and are not up to the tasks of the future, those in the middle class still approved and approve of torture. The crowd never raised their fists against it, as they did against Lien Chan. Rather, embarrassed by this element of its past, the middle class focused (and focuses) instead on times so invisible to the present that they can only be called nostalgic-- all the while counting the mounting number of injured and dead. Perhaps this condition accounts for Chen's sardonic description of the middle-class as the "hand-clapping, called-good little old hundred names"-- a mean description that calls furious attention to the self-absorbed, on-cue clapping affirmations of people enthralled with their own representations.

Throughout the letter the power of the government from whom he copied his methods and the power of the "incapable" society overlap-- just as they must, for the government, as described in chapter two, was receding from its high-modern domains and its officials were in every way ordinary. Yet, this government remained an easy scapegoat, even for Chen. To be sure, Chen's anger at the government arose from 17 years in prison, and from this anger he shared the common glee of castigating the state's inefficiency-- laying blame at its feet for Taiwan's poor standing on security in East Asia, for example. Nevertheless, having become society's number one object of scorn, Chen appeared too clear and too desperate about his condition to abide by easy scape-goating. To shout "Lien Chan step down" would have been a joke. Instead he perceived a more complicated condition in which events appeared random, tangled, and violent-- as if all the usual binaries, good/evil, real/unreal, innocent/guilty, justice/injustice,

misfortune/irreversible destiny, success/failure, and state/society, had burnt down in a unstoppable conflagration inseparable from his destiny: “The instant I proceed to die, the wind and clouds will change color, the time when the mountains go ablaze, please do not, everyone, blame me!”

Despite his plea, society would blame him. In fact, he made them blame him. He stoked their rage into a more ferocious force when he called those “hundred names” “innocent” but proceeded to treat them as though they were not by promising to harm the unlucky (making clear the embarrassing element of luck in even the lives of the most meritorious). Despite the fact that this defilement reflects their own self-conception, i.e., as removed from the purity ascribed to children, Chen’s attribution of guilt to ordinary folk was, because of his demonic status as one who knows, horrible and scandalous in the extreme. Displaying cognizance of the wrath that would follow from this indictment, Chen stated that his acts were somehow part of a flowing “process (*liu cheng*)” culminating in a “curtain drop (*luo mu*).” Chen knew he was part of process, played before millions, that would, as it must, end with his own death and the certainty of the “little old hundred names” of their own innocence.

This prescribed movement toward death (for his crime “warrants 10,000” of them) required, as it were, equating the guilty with the innocent— that is, his own family and friends with everyone else. He stood willing to turn himself in, provided the (guilty) authorities freed his family and friends-- all of whom were themselves guilty by association and yet, no more guilty or innocent than every other member of the old hundred names in Taiwan. Toward this end he raised an apology. Writing to all the

innocent/guilty, he begged forgiveness. In doing so, he made himself abject before them, at once their object of discipline through confession and, strangely, their master; for he both confessed to them and continued to create their unifying trauma-- he was the "superstar," an object of democratic transference.¹⁵⁶ In this condition the more blame brought to him, the more his gesture of willingness to give himself to police became, in effect, an act of love; for he stood ready to sacrifice what remained of his wretched life for his family and his land-- a redemptive gesture in comparison to the widely destructive, implicit belief, noted scornfully by Chen, that "as long as it doesn't kill his own family it is fine."

Perhaps some will argue that these statements and his acts of rape and murder show Chen to be simply a man of inflated self-importance, a man of terrible greed and appetites, a man, that is, typical of over-powering and evil men everywhere. But Chen's self-importance was not his own; he was Taiwan's "devil." "When a country is dying, the devils arise." In this condition, Chen could have gone wild like a fire, driven his motorcycle randomly through the streets of Taipei shooting "innocent" people, for example. Instead, he offered his life; for he, mimicking middle class discourse about Taiwan, belonged "to this land." When he died, people would, of necessity, blame him and the "clouds will change color."

A second letter Chen sent on that day was delivered to Li Tao. Just as Bai Bingbing represents Taiwanese of her generation to themselves, Li Tao represents the

¹⁵⁶ This result of Taiwan's "two miracles" (economic and political) was not lost on foreigners who, when asked by Taiwanese whether or not this incident would stain their international reputations, tended to reply in the negative. In

emergent professional middle class to itself. Married to Li Yanqiu (a broadcaster in her own right) with one grade-school age son, Li Tao (sometimes called “the sexiest man in Taiwan”) hosts (with his Larry King look-a-like set and clothing) a popular cable television call-in show and has written, with his wife, two, love-centered books about raising a successful (nuclear) family (*The Relationship of Love I and II [Aiqing guanxi]*).¹⁵⁷ According to press reports, after Li received the letter:

...people who pay attention to the program, “2001 Everyone Talks” could detect a shift in Li from criticism of how the Bai case damaged our society to an exploration of questions relating to “justice”— constantly bringing up that Zhang Shuzhen should be treated fairly and other issues of justice.

Typically, attraction and sympathy of the monstrous failure was matched by repugnance and fear, for as the account also noted:

Li wasn’t going to announce this matter, but when he was questioned by journalists, he decided to have a news conference. Li’s careful behavior can be seen by the white gloves he wore during the conference. When someone asked him why he wore the gloves, he responded that he did not want to leave any finger prints on the letter. The reporter replied: “Didn’t you already touch the letter the first time you opened it?” Li still insisted on wearing the gloves.¹⁵⁸

fact, many I spoke with considered this affair a type of initiation to the realm of the contemporary modern world.

¹⁵⁷ Li Tao and Li Yanqiu, *Aiqing guanxi* [The relationship of love], (Taipei: Crown Publishing, 1991); *Aiqing guanxi II* [The relationship of love II], (Taipei: Crown Publishing, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ Youfen Zhuang, “E’xia dengmen qiujiao xiongshen jiu zai shen bian she chu guimo [The evil monster came to the

While many could not believe Chen wrote the letters himself (for the letters were well written and many assume this level of culture impossible for those who drop out of the scholastic system in the eighth grade), people were, nevertheless, drawn to them in ways most ordinary people will never experience of their own marks. The drama they provided, framed within classical allusions, made them difficult to dismiss, both as seductive artifacts of desperation and as prophetic testaments to how the immediate future would unfold.

Still, one fact above all sent people “the old hundred names” into fits of indignation: Chen claimed he would kill “unlucky” “innocent” people again. Those of the middle class and others could simply not release themselves from the driving, indisputable, unforgettable and defining fact that Chen, while calling them innocent, had killed and raped them as though they were not. Nothing, it seems, could deter them from this certainty.

As if realizing the proper unfolding of events would occur within the general longing for “a return to innocence,” a few days later Chen wrote once again— offering his own form of absolution:

Mr. and Mrs. Editor, good to you all:

The words of you and everyone have been considered by me.

I will not kill innocent people. Please let your hearts down. But if you want me to give myself up, that’s impossible. After I do give myself up, I

door asking for help; a mean god stands right beside you; God appears, ghost disappears],” *Dujia baodao zhoukan* [Scoop Weekly Magazine], November 16-22, 1997, p. 167.

am going to be like the fish dish on the table. They can do whatever they want to me. They can cut and fry me. This kind of humiliation will not be accepted by us. No one will believe our words. Whatever we say is like saying nothing. People treat us like crazy mental cases. So please forgive me.

I appreciate the news critiques... I'll remember them all. And Mr. Li Tao, thank you and don't worry I won't get you!¹⁵⁹

The meaning of these words are clear only if the hearers assume their own innocence. Chen's acts gave this assumption the, no doubt temporary, ring of truth.

Former Prisoners Become Mayors and Magistrates

On November 17, surrounded by police in a brothel in Taipei, Gao Tianming shot himself in the temple. Once again, people in my neighborhood who would normally drink tea and play cards with friends, craned their necks to look at televisions stuck in corners of tea houses. The next day Gao's naked body, laid out for official examination, graced in full color the front pages of most dailies.

Only Chen was left, and the next evening (once again on my way home) I could see most everyone watching television, and, like everyone else, when I got home, I watched the television report of Chen's sudden appearance at the residence of the South African military attaché, McGill Alexander, too.

¹⁵⁹ Chen Yongfu, "Chen Jinxing: bu touan, bu hui sha wugu [Chen Jinxing: will not turn himself in, will not kill innocents]," *Lianhe bao* [United Daily], November 14, 1997, p. 3.

After a day of riding motorcycle through the city, Chen apparently entered the suburban residence between seven and eight in the evening. When police tried to enter the house, Chen fired shots, accidentally wounding McGill Alexander and his twenty-two year old daughter. Chen called for police to remove the two. Thereafter, Chen was alone with Alexander's wife, twelve years old daughter, and infant foster child. Sometime after ten o'clock that night, the Taiwan Television anchor, Dai Zhongren, talked with a reporter from another news organization who had the temerity and awareness to call up the Alexander's residence to chat with Chen. Within minutes, Dai Zhongren was on the phone with Mrs. Alexander (who assured Dai and us that everything was all right). Moments later Dai began a more than three hour dialogue with Chen Jinxing, the opening moments of which translate as follows:

Dai: Mr. Chen? I am TTV's Dai Zhongren. Why are you kidnapping these people?

Chen: I already answered that in my letter to the newspaper.

Dai: You said that you will not harm any innocent people. Why do believe you must do this?

Chen: I can't survive in Taiwan's system. I can only seek out foreigners.

Dai: Don't you feel they are innocent people?

Chen: Huh?

Dai: Don't you feel they are innocent people?

Chen: Yeah. They are innocent, but my family and friends are even more innocent. Who will resolve it for me? Who will protect their innocence?

.....

Dai: What do you request?

Chen: What do I request? I have none. I should die 10,000 deaths.

There's nothing to talk about. I do this for innocent people, not for myself.

I should have died a long time ago, but they misunderstood people, so I'm alive until today.

No doubt, Dai Zhongren asked Chen about innocent people because Chen sat with two weapons, capable of harming three people with no immediate relation to the case. But the concern could have been phrased differently; the issue of innocence or guilt need never, in fact, have come up. Dai Zhongren could simply have said to Chen: "We all hope you do not harm the three" or "Mr. Chen, please don't be such a fool and embarrass Taiwan on the international stage." Instead, as Chen re-entered Taiwan by way of the always intruding but never entirely alien Westerners, Dai Zhongren extended an already agreed upon assumption of innocence for the "called-good little hundred names" to the foreigners. And, once again, Chen affirmed it.

With Chen's reiteration of innocence and the victims apparently safe, the questions which issued from Dai Zhongren quickly delved, like the hundreds of media stories before Chen took hostages, into the intriguing and horrifying details of his criminal escapades-- giving Dai the scoop of the year and propelling him to stardom. Dai

asked in a most matter-of-fact way, for example, how many women did he rape, why did he rape them, why did he shoot McGill Alexander, how did he learn of Bai Xiaoyan's life patterns, how did young Bai die, why was the kidnapping botched, where did he get his guns, how did he escape from police, did the kidnappers stay together, did he contact his family, etc. Chen answered the questions calmly, sometimes sharing a joke about the police on his trail and sometimes trailing off into noticeable sadness over his own loss (though his tough-guy pretensions kept this in check), as he, once again, fixed the public to the scenes of the crime.

Despite these confessions, it was difficult to think of Chen as the devil that night. Dai Zhongren called him a "good guy (*hao han*)" and referred to him using the formal, second person pronoun (*nin*)-- usages which would be roundly criticized later. Chen talked surely and matter-of-factly-- as if an actor in a Hong-Kong gangster movie. Yet, as Chen spoke the already normalized story, he remained the one who would die soon-- in a moment of twilight for this man's life. In this sense, Chen's appearance not only put into temporary suspension the normal association of him with evil but also life with death-- a divine capacity.

While most people I know went to bed when Chen got off the phone with Dai at about 2:30am, he did not go off the air until the early morning to begin negotiations for his surrender with police. After speaking with Dai, Chen gave interviews to several news outlets (including one in which he sang the Chinese children's song, "*Liang zhi laohu* [Two Tigers]" with STV's [*chaoshi*] anchorwoman).¹⁶⁰ Although he bristled and began

¹⁶⁰ Ian Lamont, "Media at center of hostage drama," *China News*, November 20, 1997, p. 3.

to rant in Taiwanese (most of the interview with Dai was conducted in Mandarin) when presented with the possibility of surrender by Dai Zhongren, the next day, Chen called Frank Hsieh (Xie Changting), the DPP former vice-presidential candidate, and asked him to serve as legal representative of him and his family. Hsieh went to the scene and spent three hours in the afternoon listening to Chen's complaints against the police while patiently urging Chen to surrender-- promising, in turn, to seek justice for Chen's family. Chen released the hostages first and walked out of the residence into the illuminated, waiting crowd of reporters, police and bystanders at about 8 PM, nearly 24 hours after he entered the house.

The affair had a strange effect. While authorities rushed to discredit Chen's performance as deceptive-- reiterating what authorities had been saying since the November third escape, for instance, that his "true face was vicious, truculent, heartless and cruel"¹⁶¹ and that his "atrocities were too numerous to count,"¹⁶²-- many others thought otherwise. In particular, just as Lien Chan stood ostracized but simultaneously an object of desire, so did Chen become an intense object of admiration. Within a few days copycat criminals appeared caught on video cameras robbing banks and convenience stores wearing motorcycle helmets in the fashion of Chen; some men who I met spoke sympathetically of his raping spree (a spree which Chen told Dai he began because of "physical need" but which informants attributed to the fact that Chen had a penile

¹⁶¹ Quanzhou Liu and Ming Lei, "*Ta de zhen mao, xiong hen can bao* [His true face: vicious, truculent, heartless and cruel]," *Lianhe bao* [United Daily], December 5, 1997, p. 3.

¹⁶² Yuanliu Gao, "*Ta de zuixing, chingzhu nan shu* [His atrocities are too numerous too count]," *Lianhe bao* [United Daily], December 5, 1997, p. 3.

implant, known as a “*ru zhu*,” that made, as the story went, both women mad with pleasure and Chen unable to masturbate;¹⁶³ and others, imagining themselves as outsiders, spoke of Chen like this college student:

Sure I would like to do some of those things that Chen has done-- not the violence or killing. Maybe you'll say there is nothing left. You're right! But I'm not thinking of that. I'd like to test the world like him. It would be fun.

Nowadays everyone is looking for fun all the time, but everyone feels bored. It is pitiful that when you think you're having fun, actually the fun is having you. And it is pitiful because it is always that way. Actually, I think I hate this world; otherwise (laughing) it is this world that hates me; we hate each other, like that. If it weren't like this, there would be no Chen Jinxing. But there will be lots of guys like that, more and more Chens and until the world is full of Chens; then we can call Chen god. Then we will all be Chen; after that, Chen will disappear-- this is because we would all be the same. Then we won't hate each other (laughing).

Comments such as these indicate what the public fascination with the continuous return to the trauma on nightly TV also revealed, namely that people sought points of identification with the inverse or shadow elements of their apparently normalized and certainly fetishized lives. Instead of people safe in the humming buildings and offices,

¹⁶³ When talking over this issue with the western-trained counselor cited in chapter five, she informed me that, according to her experience, it is not uncommon for men to hold the fantasy that women want to be raped *and* for

they had a man surgically enhanced with cyborg-like genitals running amok; instead of a bored world, the public had a figure who underwent the most intense agitation any society can offer-- total exclusion; and instead of acceptance of foreign domination of cultural programming, they beheld one who took the "long noses" hostage on national TV-- providing a climatic cap to seven months of programming. Even Mr. Zheng identified an inverse reflection of Taiwan in the affair:

There are so many people in Taiwan. When some idea becomes popular, it will quickly spread. Many people will quickly copy it if they can make some money from it. This is the danger of Chen's popularity. Taiwanese are like that. Taiwan is full of people whose ancestors came here looking to make money and go back to Fujian. It is the same today, except that many people will take their money to America if they have the chance.¹⁶⁴

For most the capture of Chen brought great relief-- no matter what elements they could identify with and despite the fact that, for most people, Chen's intrusion into their lives occurred primarily by way of television and other media. This "safe" separation of the middle class in their lives of professional responsibility from the world of *fenghua* culture reflected, nonetheless, an inclusion of the criminal element in the heart of their lives-- not unlike the KMT's traditional inclusion of the "black societies" into their system of police control of local areas. So obviously signified by walls and guard houses

women to harbor the fantasy that men want to rape them.

¹⁶⁴ The copying had its effect in his life, too. While Mrs. Zheng gave her Mercedes to her uncle and started driving a Volkswagen during the summer crackdown (though she told me she did so, not of fear, but because of "economic" reasons), the Mercedes was stolen, anyway, while in her uncle's care.

of towering complexes, the split between public and private life transforms in ways symbolized by the appearance of Chen. Remembered nostalgically when people “shared eggs” across boundaries, information traveled through village networks of children and adults, and state control took immediate form in a (partially mythical) “big brother big (*dageda*),” the old days have transmuted into a condition in which people share recipes over the internet, news flows through media, and state control functions by way of an internalized standard of professional, middle class conduct. In both worlds, criminals and ghosts/demons/monsters lived and live in the imagined margins, providing an uncanny center to experience.

With Chen’s apprehension through the direct mediation of Frank Hsieh, the devil of Chen became internalized by the very crowd that rose against the government to demand more protection from such demons. In effect, Chen became their monster, just as “public security” became their issue-- the major issue which the DPP utilized to capture most major, urban mayoralities and county-heads on the island in an election that followed within two weeks after Chen’s apprehension (November 29, 1997).¹⁶⁵ With this election many former political prisoners of the KMT took seats of local importance once reserved for KMT members who, in more cases than not, maintained substantial connection to the underworld. In Taichung city, Zhang Wenying (a former prisoner herself) became mayor.

¹⁶⁵ On November 29, 1997 the Democratic Progressive Party, won 12 of 23 seats up for election. The KMT retained only 8 of 15 previously held seats; included in this eight were three off-shore islands. The Democratic Progressive Party won the populated urban areas up for election (with the exception of the victories of three independents). A year later, former Justice Minister Ma Yingjiu (KMT) would become the new mayor of Taipei; and Frank Hsieh (DPP), Chen’s lawyer, would win the Kaohsiung mayor seat-- the two seats not elected in 1997.

Chen said that when “the country is dying, the devils arise.” But in Taiwan this devil gave himself over to the new state taking over Taiwanese society. Composed in many ways through fascination with the sickness and trauma from which monsters such as Chen arose and remain symbolic of, the middle class of the new state transfer their fears to the monster just as they transfer their hopes to the Zhengs, the *Heqi* master and others. Through the sacrifice of Chen, the failure he signified became publicly internalized-- no doubt providing critical, negative impetus for further success.

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Vita

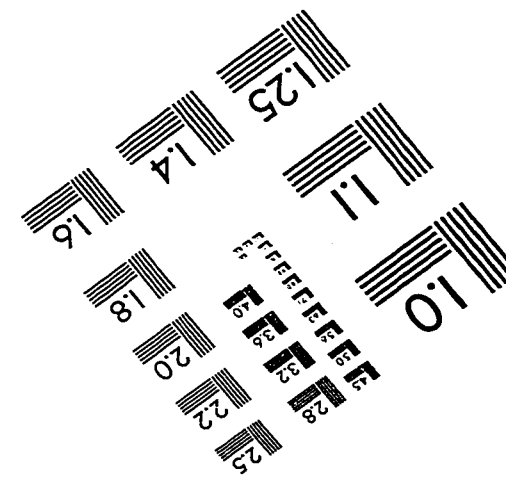
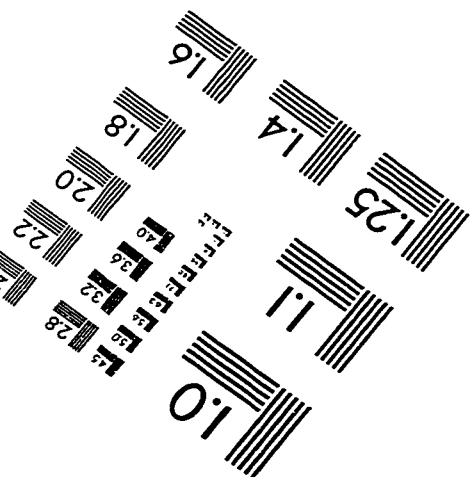
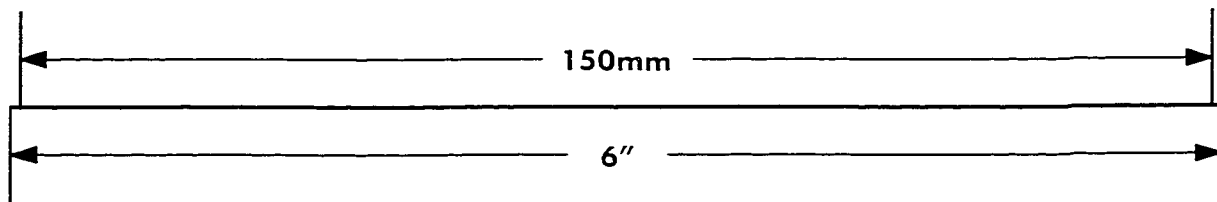
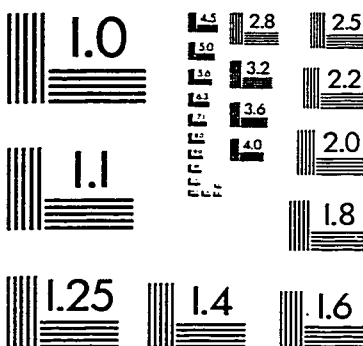
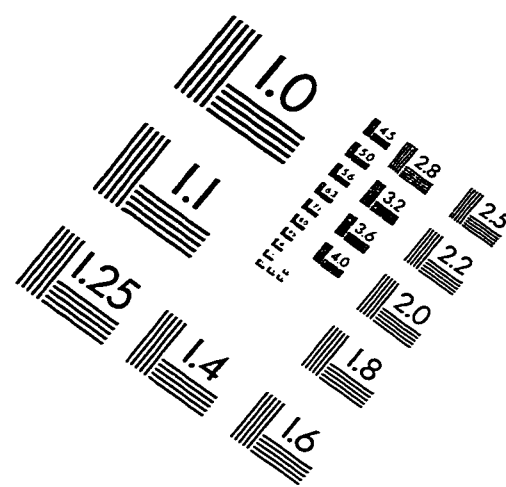
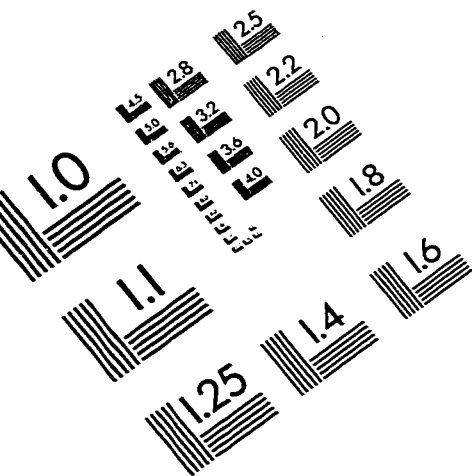
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