THE TAIWAN MIRACLE

Written as an eye-witness account of our miraculous economic growth

I

Looking back at it, the first clues came in the summer of 1989. That year I returned to Washington D.C. as a correspondent for the newspaper in Taiwan. Due to an unexpected event, I gave up my old, familiar beat covering party politics at home, and, like a great hero of yore, went back to Washington to cover a bunch of boring stories about the Chinese community there.

Aside from that blunder that made everybody in the circle laugh at me, returning to America was also a moral victory for my wife, Meiyun. For several years she had been pining for the living environment in the US. No matter how hard I tried to get transferred back, Washington political news was already somebody else's territory, and there was nothing I, a defeated soldier, could fight for but something to eat.

Writing up some stories about community events didn't take much effort, and to tell the truth, usually, (now that I think of it, that would have been before the signs of change started appearing), I didn't read the newspapers very carefully. The Washington Post carried a lot of stories about "Taiwan's Great Growth" and "Taiwan is Developing Rapidly," but to me, that was all political and economic news. Since it was somebody else's line, I would just give it a glance. Reporters have that habit: work stories in your own line to death, just stay clear of someone else's territory. At the time, how was I supposed to know that the words the English press used, like "growth" and "development" were alerts sent out by research institutes? In fact, even if I had recognized this as a "scientific advance," I have always been highly skeptical of unfounded theories parading under the banner of science and technology. At most I would make a pretty translation to send back to Taipei, where the editors could stick it at the very back of the paper, for all I cared.

That summer, I had several stories to cover: the kidnapping of the Chinese owner of a video store, the scandal about the election of the principal of a Chinese language school. The Chinese here are great in-fighters. Every year around spring and summer, they always had this big, undercover struggle about who would get into the
National Construction Conference, and things wouldn't calm down until the results were announced. That was the year of the Tiananmen Incident. The American Congress had just passed some favorable legislation, so all the immigration lawyers were trying their best to see who could pull in the greatest number of bewildered students from the People's Republic. I may be exaggerating, but keep in mind that I was covering Chinese community events, and the world of these miscellaneous affairs was the center of my entire attention.

During July and August of that year, Congress took a long vacation. Anybody who was anybody at all in Washington was on vacation either in Maine or at Cape Cod. There were no signs. Really, there were no signs at all. In June a windstorm had blown down some hundred year old trees. A summer without cicadas chirring is a summer for snoozing. Before that, I just remember sitting in a well air-conditioned movie theater watching Lawrence of Arabia, which was back again, and watching how by the end of the film, nothing was left of the hero's clear blue eyes but dusty gray. When the movie let out, I opened my eyes wide, and like the rest of the audience (most of them were there for unfathomable reasons of their own) sighed a few times before I left the theater.

A bit before that, I seem to remember it was just before Congress adjourned, there was a fuss about protecting the flag. Concerned persons discussed whether to amend the Constitution to make Old Glory a sacred object that could not be burned. Looking back on it, the only thing I can see that had anything to do with later events was that it turned out that all the Stars and Stripes were Made in Taiwan. At that time there was also a Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, and it seems that follow-up coverage on Nightline mentioned that, hey, all the condoms on the American market were imported from Taiwan.

But so what? It could be that people then were unaware of the great change impending because the American market was already full of products from Taiwan, and Taiwan was heading for the highest peak of international trade. Looking back at that end of that summer, the earliest alarms did have something to do with Taiwan. A month or so before, there was some suspicion that it was because of the hot money flowing in from Taiwan that real estate prices in California suddenly went straight up. Starting in Monterey Park, also known as Little Taipei, prices calculated in the ping unit common to Taiwan flew up as high as the solid gold East Section of Taipei. The next to catch the fever was Queens in New York, where so many Chinese live; then real estate prices in New York City, New York state, and the whole east coast went up two and then three times.
I was busy reporting the protesters camping out in front of the White House. They overflowed into Chinatown, where they became an eyesore. They had banners out protesting because prices had risen so high they couldn't afford housing, and what they got were insults in Cantonese from the merchants in Chinatown. I had prepared several topics to report on, when, surprisingly, the Wall Street Dow Jones index went soaring. That was the beginning of the famous Red Month on the Exchange. Within a month, the index, which had been stable for years at about 2,000 points, soared up over 3,000, then 4,000 points, and eventually even passed 10,000 points. Especially in the great Midwest, the tide couldn't be contained. Television network news showed huge stock market display boards in cornfields in Kentucky and Iowa. Farmers who rarely left the old homestead were getting on Greyhound buses to go into the city for the latest insiders' tips. The Chicago Tribune and Atlanta Daily cut down their other sections to expand their stock market coverage. Meiyun has always been more of a go-getter than I. She started toting around a dictionary and looking up English stock market terms like preferred stock and weighted index, or else she'd have her nose in A Complete Guide to the Stock Market, reading up on price trend graphs. One day I went to the nearby store for a pack of cigarettes and saw a poster announcing that soon, convenience stores like Seven-Eleven would start trading stocks for brokerage firms.

II

K Street, the most prosperous street in Washington, started blossoming with gold signs of underground investment companies. For the next several weeks, the Washington Post was embroiled in a controversy over whether or not these companies should be banned. In the middle of that turmoil, the news came out of the Stock Securities & Exchange Commissioner's dereliction of duty; some people said that nothing had been done about the underground investment companies because his daughter-in-law worked in one. His freckled son bravely came forth in the name of justice and fairness, saying that he would let the voters in the next election decide whether he was guilty of any wrong-doings. He said his only crime, his 'original sin', was that he came from a wealthy, powerful family.

I've probably been in journalism too long. To tell the truth, this sort of attempt to fight free of the shackles of the human condition does not interest me in the least. (Sitting in front of the television, Meiyun took this opportunity to ridicule me. She snorted and said, 'You can't get Taiwan out of your system. Isn't that the 'original sin' you can't free yourself from?') I've still got my reporter's nose; I discovered that the crux of the matter was the network the underground investment companies had
developed. I got a tip in the Information Office Building that the money coming in from overseas had something to do with Hong Yuan and Long Xiang in Taiwan, and even the Horse Racing Association in Macao. Financial officials went into their typical routine of shoving the responsibility elsewhere. As an example, let me cite the following exchange from American television.

“Excuse me!” “Excuse me, sir, excuse me!” Sam Donaldson stopped the Secretary with his extra-loud voice. “Sir, investment channels in the United States have always been clear and open. Why do we now have ‘underground’ investment companies in this country?”

The Secretary smiled. He had just come out the side door of the State Department; that smile was his registered trademark. “What do you mean underground or above ground? Those companies are all 'above ground'!”

“Then you mean they're legal?” Sam asked, with a wrinkle of his eyebrows.

“It's not a matter of legality.”

The Secretary dived into his waiting car, with a winning smile on his face.

Looking back on it today, my life went on as usual during the first weeks, and even months, of the crisis. That just goes to show how distant I've always been from American society. Aside from occasionally staring at the television in utter amazement, I stuck to my old schedule: sleep past noon, then make a few phone calls in the afternoon to handle the news. The possibility of the entire American society getting involved didn't dawn on me until one evening when the lady next door came over and started explaining how to play the Big Six Lottery (a lottery on the prize winning number in the Hong Kong Lottery). Mrs. Friedman, a cup of jasmine tea in hand, praised Meiyun for catching on so quickly; she learned all the rules of the game in just a few minutes. After she left, Meiyun told me that this nice Jewish lady was not only pushing Big Six Lottery tickets, but she was also the Everybody's Joy (an underground lottery on the prize winning number in the state-run lottery) bookie for the neighborhood. Meiyun said that the church that used to run Bingo evenings was now the exchange center for hot tips, and that a community center had become a gambling center. No wonder a few days earlier, when I was out for a stroll, I thought that the neighbor's greetings had changed from "How have you been?" to "What have you signed?" and "How many have you signed?" or something arcane like that.
The immediate inconvenience this all brought me was that when I wanted to send copy back to Taipei, I had to steer clear of Big Six Lottery days, because all the international phone lines were sure to be busy. With the help of multinational companies, everybody was desperately inquiring for the prize-winning numbers in Taipei or Hong Kong. Bell Telephone went to work, and adjusted their peak rates for international calls according to when the prize-winning numbers were announced.

Another change I remember from those days was that the Chinese restaurants around were all making money hand over fist. These Western people who had dabbled in the stock market and signed Everybody's Happy just had to have a real, honest-to-god Chinese dinner to round things out. Meanwhile, business in American restaurants was awful. I hear that in order to save the situation, some of these American restaurateurs had spared no expense to import black-faced statues of the god Kuan Kung, or smuggle in a lucky red dragon fish bought for thousand of dollars, which were then raised in tanks carefully placed in the "money" location, according to fengshui. Italian pizzerias, which had been pulling in crowds of tourists for years, resorted to strategically placing big mirrors in their doorways, with a flute on one side and a sword on the other. The doorways of French restaurants were protected from evil influences by stone lions.

What about the sorcerer, Master Lin Yun? It goes without saying that the day after he supervised the redecoration of the interior of the White House, he started out across the country to decorate statues of the Patriarch in businesses and offices everywhere. The orthodox Buddhists weren't going to let him take all the glory, so construction began on both coasts of gold-roofed temples, Eastern Coming Temple and Southern Coming Temple. While multitudes were becoming Buddhists, and even having their heads shaved and leaving behind the householder's life, some Dharma Masters made vows of mercy to work for charity. Taiwan's homegrown insane asylum, Long Fa Hall, applied for a license to open a branch in Georgia; ex-President Jimmy Carter officiated at the opening, dedicating the Hall in memory of his brother, Billy Carter. During the ceremony, all registered patients went on a pilgrimage to the Mississippi River, beginning a four week therapy session.

III

Americans have always been excitable. This whole commotion (of course there were a lot of unfounded rumors) was, in the eyes of the conservatives, a social crisis. As I remember (I might have the order of events mixed up), that fall, when Congress came in session, debates on the matter continued day and night.
It took a long time for a consensus to develop on all aspects of the issue, from how to deal with investment companies, to whether this should be dealt with under banking laws, civic law, or corporate law. In the hearing rooms of Congress, there was a lot of body language. Congressmen and women from both parties appeared on television, leaping onto their desktops, writing a new page in the history of these hallowed halls. I took advantage of this opportunity to put aside my boring old Chinese community affairs, which were about as exciting as dead chicken ribs, and rushed to Capitol Hill. Press cards were hard to get, but I called upon some old friendships and managed to get an auditor's seat. Time seemed to roll back and my pen recovered its old speed, and I whipped out a couple passable news articles. The following reports of Congress are all the truth, as seen by me personally.

In the hall under the great white dome, after several gavels had been broken and several microphones had been destroyed, during a crucial hearing, Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) wore a yellow headband stating his demands. Former Congressman Richard Solarz sat in front of the Speaker's desk, with a banner wrapped about his shoulders, proclaiming him "The Bravest in the the States." Just as the controversy reached its climax, Wright, who had resigned in haste recently before scandal broke out, rushed back to Washington from Texas in a chartered plane, to demand his retirement pay. Wright rallied a group of old Representatives over sixty and called for President Bush to declare a state of martial law immediately. Younger Representatives, anxious that the Constitution would become a tool in the hands of the authorities under martial law, called these "law and order" colleagues "old crooks."

The favorite of the old Congressmen was, of course, former President Ronald Reagan. Unfortunately, his performance in battle was disappointing. Doing battle with his adversaries, the ex-President didn’t lose his tongue, his dentures fell out. Raising funds the next day, he got punched out. Poor old President Reagan took off his shirt for the cameras and disclosed his battered chest, covered with Salonpas, made in Taiwan by the Everlight Chemical Company.

Meanwhile, biologists, anthropologists, geologists, and meteorologists were all giving their own authoritative explanations for these extraordinary phenomena. (Here are some I have recorded from the wire.)

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Wire reports relate that anthropologists in an international annual meeting announced that according to their research, in order to explain the recent upsurge in
stock market investment, Big six Lottery, and Everybody's Joy, investigations must be 
consider the hunting instinct left over from primitive societies. They said that with the 
advent of the communications society, the drive for peace and security which was 
typical of agricultural societies has been repressed, leading to a reversion to the 
primitive urge to hunt. Such urges include the gamble that no prey may be taken, and 
the speculative impulse to try to capture large game with a small trap; such 
hypotheses seem to explain the chance-taking that has typified American politics of 
late. The world famous biologist, Dr. Campbell, agrees to these basic hypotheses put 
forward by anthropologists, but attributes the reappearance of such behavior to 
genetic mutation. As to why the North American genes should suddenly mutate, and 
the probable future direction of further changes, Dr. Campbell announced in his press 
conference last month that he will disclose certain relevant discoveries early next 
year.

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According to reports in *USA Today*, meteorologists have produced convincing 
thories attributing the recent freakish behavior of humanity to a rise in the 
temperature of the earth's surface. Aside from sunspots, which can hardly be ascribed 
to pollution, the connection of temperature to behavior has confirmed ecologists' 
gravest worries: that mounting atmospheric pollution contributes to the Greenhouse 
Effect. Reports from Reuters indicate that Greenpeace is attempting to trace the 
causes of recent human anxiety to ruptures in the Ozone Layer.

UPI reports that geologists are absolutely positive that recent disruptions in 
American society are caused by changes in the earth's crust: intrusive elements from 
other areas have entered into American society. This alarming hypothesis has received 
wide support. Physicists working on the geologists' assumptions have cited the 
Second Law of Thermodynamics to prove that these recent aberrations in American 
society are actually the beginning of the Big Crunch: amongst tectonic disturbances, 
social phenomena will be stirred into a great soup which will congeal at the point of 
the earth's greatest energy.

By then, all these changes dizzied me, so I have recorded only a few items of 
related news. To tell the truth, when the New York Times columnist William Safire 
coined the terms Taiwanize and Taiwanization in his columns to describe this whole 
confluence of extraordinary phenomena in American society, I had no idea that this 
was the first appearance of a term that would be on everybody's lips. In fact, that was 
the first time that Taiwan was formally related to global changes. According to
Safire’s later explanations in various circumstances, Taiwanize just happened to be a word he invented, but he had no scientific grounds. The question arose as to whether Taiwan brought about changes in American society, or the Taiwan Experience exemplified worldwide trends, and Taiwan just happened to encounter them before the United States. In Safirean linguistics, this was a moot point of whether the chicken came before the egg or vice versa.

But once a term is coined, it often takes on a life of its own. I have consulted the 90s version of Webster’s Dictionary, and found several definitions under Taiwanize. In addition to its meaning of "future," Taiwanize can also refer to the global trend towards a casino society, or, more abstractly, anything that is rapidly growing, developing, spreading, or expanding. Another interesting definition is worth mentioning. Due to the confusion about the exact definition of "Taiwan" in the social sciences, the term has undergone no academic applications or formulation, and stands as a amorphous entity; therefore, any ambiguous, vague, indistinct trend without clear distinctions between right and wrong may be aptly described by the term Taiwanize, or Taiwanization.

Credit must be given to his acute perception for the many examples of Taiwanization Safire found to describe recent changes in America. (I would like to proclaim quite proudly that some years past, I was a faithful reader of his column, On Language. Ever since Taiwanize and Taiwanization entered the mainstream vocabulary (for instance, you might hear someone saying that somebody's business, or illness, is Taiwanizing, or that some moral standard got Taiwanized), more and more evidence has appeared to interpret the American orientation towards Taiwan. For example, in the Big Crunch theory mentioned above, physicists have calculated that the focus of global force fields is right on Taiwan. Economists have claimed that changes in the United States are visible indications of Taiwan's economic might (thereby also providing tangential proof for economists' theory that economic models determine human behavior.)

In his book, The Fourth Wave, the Nobel Prize winning economist, sociologist, and futurist Alvin Toffler sets forth an integrated, new viewpoint. The validation for his argument dates back to 1989. He states that the trade volume of the Taiwan Stock market was, at the time, already number one in the world. In July of that year, after Taiwan’s stock market linked up with the worldwide financial computer network, its magnetism gradually exerted an enormous pull on American society. This resulted in a regrouping and reorganization throughout the United States, as the US was rearranged by the relentless magnetic force of the Taiwan stock market.
Toffler's new book aroused a debate. In fact, in the face of a decade of drastic change, more than a few American scholars developed new, innovative ideas. For example, I recall a strikingly different piece written by America's conservative think tank AEI (American Enterprise Institute). Ms. Kirkpatrick, America's former ambassador to the United Nations, wrote that America's great defeat was the result of pellet-sized Taiwan's policy of counterattack against the Chinese mainland, a policy expounded for many years. Taiwan's Kuomintang was capable in spirit of a pervasive "recovery" of mainland China. (In the original text, she used the word "assimilate", which may be translated "to assimilate a place"). Furthermore, she gravely predicted that, because America had for many years been subjected to the eroding effects of liberalism, it had already abandoned the frontline of moral order. The American people were waiting to be redeemed by the Three Principles of the People. If the moment was right, America would become an exemplary province of "Taiwanization".

Later on, individuals from the medical field emerged to speak out. They proclaimed that all the conjecture over "Taiwanization" was deluded babble. "Taiwanization" in essence was a contagious disease. Furthermore, those suffering from it contained in their bodies a kind of "Taiwanization" virus. At present, although no vaccine had yet been developed for it, no viral strain had been isolate, either. Nonetheless, the symptoms of "Taiwanization" could be statistically summed up.

According to an official communique issued by the US department of Health, the most manifest symptoms—however, not all symptoms were necessarily evident --- in other words, the symptoms, which were adequate but not necessary conditions, included the following items (listed in the order in which I recall them):

1. A sudden longing to eat Chinese food. When face to face with animals from endangered species (the "baby's cry" fish of Kwangsi and Kweichow can be used as an experimental test), the brain waves of persons suffering serious symptoms would exhibit an impulse to eat or an urge to consume health-invigorating tonic foods.

2. Compulsive gambling, with the mind seized by a desire to find a bookie.

3. Putting up a satellite dish, habituated by the need to view the "Hugua Show" or "Weekend Pie" in order to be able to dispel boredom.

4. Using church attendance as a tool, with prayers full of conditional phrases: "If You Lord don't consent to this ...then I won't..." "If You Lord are...to me, I will increase
my offering to You one fold, and again increase it two fold.” Exhibiting a religious zeal marked by a heartfelt fervor not necessarily related to religious beliefs.

5. Anyplace, anywhere grabbing flash in the pan “hot tips” : pictures in magazines, the number of strokes in the characters of a person's name, the time, day, month and year of birth of coworkers, (persons with serious symptoms) even making notations of the creeping bloodstains in automobile accidents.

During that time, the trend of “Taiwanization” made the headlines of the newspapers everyday. In the journalistic style of the reporters, information on Taiwan would sometimes appear as news and sometimes as rumor. Sometimes, after dinner when I watched the TV news, references would be made to "our little Taiwanese friends" as if they were props on the "Hugua Show". Moreover, the various problems brought on by "Taiwanization", even though they appeared serious in the eyes of American viewers, would nonetheless also end up comedy material evoking wave after wave of laughter. When the boundaries between news and entertainment, reality and fantasy, island and mainland gradually lost their lines of demarcation and became obscured, to the point where it was not known whether or not they had been overwhelmed by the virus, I was suddenly frequently seized by an unexplainable feeling of sorrow. I wrote less news stories, and drastically reduced the number of times I would go out of the office to report a story. Regarding this incidence of “Taiwanization” that had been reported with increasing magnitude by the press worldwide, I had a feeling that I couldn’t put into words...a feeling of disgust and exhaustion.

IV

Judging from such news, I calculated that the official American response to Taiwanization was yet undecided.

For example, the federal government couldn't make up its mind whether to bring out the 301 Trade Act, hang up a windsock, or send out the alarm. After all, the final diagnosis was not in. Stevedores were whispering that they were building up a boycott on containers from Taiwan, because they were on the first line of Taiwanization.

Congress was flooded with letters. Voters in many states suggested a referendum to decide whether or not to join the "Republic of Taiwan". (Actually, those, most letters were simply requests for betting parlors in every city and town throughout the country.) To give the issue proper consideration, Congress established a Special Committee to investigate the controversy.
Letters to the Editor claimed (and I privately agreed) that this was the most divisive issue in American history since the Civil War. In the bastions of Conservatism and Liberalism, I correctly noted that Taiwanization had already become an ideological struggle for life or death. Both sides resorted to dastardly measures to entrap their opponents. In extremist rhetoric, certain ideological leaders declared that this was a reappearance of the Yellow Peril. Under direction from the military, the Central Intelligence Agency followed up clues in this vein to discover a plot by the Republic of Taiwan National Implementation Organization (ROTNIO) to join the ROT. The ringleaders' confessions shocked Americans. ROTNIO had planned to use the two hundred million population of the United States as income tax exemptions for stock market losses incurred by the twenty million people of Taiwan. Extremists determined to resist Taiwanization to the death formed the I Battalion (The "I" standing for "I Love America"). This organization was said to be mixed up with the Taiwan underworld. I distinctly remember a patriotic commercial sponsored by the Yong Fong Trust.. To the sounds of The Peak of Love, the world's largest American flag floated over the Grand Canyon in Arizona. The I Battalion got involved with the Triad Society (an ancient Chinese secret society; in 1989 it changed its name in Taiwan to The Social Welfare Promotion Society.) It is said that the oath sworn at initiation into the Battalion was "Resist Taiwan and Restore America."

These recollections portray the irrational voice of American society, but fortunately, the United States has a solid foundation in democracy. Taiwanization became an unavoidable fact; the Special Committee announced its intention to fairly, impartially deliberate on the advantages and disadvantages of Taiwanization. In hearing after hearing, hypothesis and evidence were arranged side by side. Under the leadership of President Bush, no consensus could be reached. Those in favor of and those against Taiwanization all stuck to their original positions. Here is a condensation of my clippings (in addition to the Washington Post, I renewed my subscription to the New York Times).

Those in favor maintained the Taiwanization brought about undiluted benefits. First, the advantages of the miracle of Taiwan's economic growth could be shared, thoroughly eliminating that great American affliction: the deficit. Second, the high American unemployment rate might be lowered automatically through Taiwanization. For example, Mayor Koch of New York City and Mayor Barry of Washington D.C. testified in Committee hearings that if only the Taiwan model of “Stands all over the streets, neon lights all over the stands” were faithfully followed, not only could unemployment be cut, but also the whole urban image would become more prosperous. They proclaimed, give them ten years, and they could do as well as
anything in Taiwan: American peddlers too could drive Mercedes Benzes. Third, one of the most serious problems facing America today is education. Taiwanization implies bringing an end to illiteracy, as well as causing a dramatic rise in the voting rate of mental patients. The *Washington Post* reported that St. Elizabeth's Hospital, where the great poet Ezra Pound was confined, has formally requested an opportunity to observe conditions at the Yuli Mental Hospital in Taiwan (where the voting rate among mental patients is 100%). Fourth, Taiwanization will bring prosperity to many new industries, such extravagant religious festivals and stock market restaurants.

Those opposed to Taiwanization had a more firm footing on moral foundations. (There was some sarcastic comment that it was precisely because of this moral stand that the opposed forces lost.) Their commendable reasons were that Taiwanization implied the loss of civic credibility and rights, and the transformation of the entire country into one huge casino. As to how to turn the Taiwanizing tide, the opposition split into two opposing camps, the civil servants versus the masses. Looking back on it, I can see that the opposition failed because of their hostility towards each other (as a result, rural areas were never able to encompass the cities), and because they were never able to utilize social movement resources efficiently. Under the hostile alienation instigated by those favoring Taiwanization, the opposition finally lost its momentum to resist. Among the records left over from the struggle are militant documents such as *The Road to Opposition* and *Why the Eagle has Become a Dove*.

The decisive element, which ultimately led to the total Taiwanization of the United States, was analyzed in a long article in *National Interest* by Paul Kennedy, who had long before predicted the decline of the country. He pointed out that, just as he had predicted, the United States would go the way of the Roman Empire, which was an inevitable historical trend. He claimed pungently that after the drastic changes of 1989, the total surrender of New York City was a fatal blow to the forces opposed to Taiwanization.

However, Kennedy nevertheless called for a balanced view of this historical period. He concedes that at the time, New York City did need the stimulus of Taiwanization. It was up to Taiwanese businessmen to turn water into wine. He points out that Heaven’s Way opened the world's largest vegetarian restaurant on Fifth Avenue, and Culture City Barber Shop managed to get a foothold in Manhattan (they later bought the Empire State Building and put a Chinese roof on the top, adding a certain color to the New York nighttime skyline.) As to the new lights illuminating the Long Island shore like so many diamonds, in his article Paul Kennedy could not
help exclaiming “They are like sisters to the Flower of Flowers and Ocean Flower beer gardens!”

Large American cities, such as Washington D.C. where I lived, took on a new look. Their nighttime look improved a lot: places such as our K Street abounded with signs for Massage and Oil Massage. The black ghetto, which had been so spooky just a few years ago, came to life with sparkling neon signs for MTV, sauna, and study halls, which added color to old neighborhoods.

New clubs opened in residential areas, giving free full-color photographs of the lovelies of all shapes and sizes, as advertised (some were girls from Thailand and mainland China who had jumped ship). I, as a responsible man of over forty, who had wide experience as a reporter covering party politics, and had known the ups and downs of life, sniffed at all this, and brought back memories of the good old days: Mama-san on the Sixth Alley, aged but still great looking; the Fifth of the Twelve Beauties of that piano bar; Suzanne the barmaid who could shoot darts so well; and, of course, the time I really fell head over heels, well, if we really have to go into the sordid reasons I chose to exile myself from Taiwan, well, we just have to say it has to do with the weak spot in my heart. And all those countless meetings, and needs that could be neither satisfied nor forgotten? Those tender kindnesses which mean so much to those cast in this hard world? In this gray area, there still seem to be some tracks left behind from days gone by. In comparison, things around me today that I can feel, like marriage, career, and house, seem unreal, or I should say, it seems they don't belong to me. Conversely, ever since Washington took on such an exotic soul, beyond what I read in the papers, I lost interest in even the excitement in Congress. What even I myself couldn’t understand is that even when Meiyun was spending all her time in the betting parlor, I spent more and more time at home.

V

Before long, a storm started blowing out of New England.

State legislatures there passed legislation specifying that, whether or not egghead scholars could figure out the reasons behind Taiwanization (be it due to genes, climate, geology, or virus), official policy in those states was to promote immediate, thorough Taiwanization.

To certain Congressmen continuing to snipe at Taiwanization (due to linguistic influences from Taiwan, they called themselves “Central Popular Representatives”), their constituents’ reactions amounted to a slap in the face. They had forgotten that
climate wins hearts faster than anything else, and in the fever of Taiwanization, there had been no snow in America the previous winter. At the end of the year before, the cover stories in *Life* had been *Oh! Formosa!* and, “A Warm Front has come from Taiwan,” a resident of Maine, decked out in short sleeves, gratefully told a reporter. It rained a bit from time to time (at the top of the Cashbox charts was the old popular song from Taiwan, *Winter Rain*, as sung by Chi Chin); everybody was delighted by the money they saved; the money they saved on heating bills could be used to buy some loose shares (I remember that for the longest time, the only stocks going down were Energy Stocks.) “If for no other reason than this, we want to Taiwanize all the way.” The same article carried warm comments from citizens in Boston, long known for its frigid winters. The December sun shined brightly on the people in the photo, who were wearing sunglasses and holding 500 cc cups of papaya milk.

After the joint decision made by twelve eastern states, Midwestern states, smiling in the welcome rain, also jumped on the Taiwanization bandwagon. The temperature and rainfall both went up; farmers in the Corn Belt switched to rice cultivation. On the paths between paddies, betel trees were heavy with nuts. Due to dentists’ recommendations, chewing gum sales had already been replaced by this health product, which is so good for oral hygiene. Farmers started growing star fruit, bell fruit, and asparagus alternately, bringing new life to the fading American agriculture.

I found all this hard to believe. My greatest impression is the memory of sun and clouds reflecting off rice paddies transplanted in North America. Although this helped relieve the monotony of urban American scenery, I intuitively felt that time and space had gone awry. Maybe it was just me. I fell into a point in the past and couldn't get out. It may have been an incurable regression, because I kept moving inexorably backwards. Even in the current Taiwanization trend, all over the world businessmen from Taiwan are busily giving the First, Second, and Third Worlds constructive suggestions. Also, copy from Taiwanese journalists was gradually replacing Reuters, Tass, AP, and UPI coverage, and taking a commanding position in the world's press. As to me, an experienced old reporter, I had less and less inclination to go out and cover the news.

Lie on the sofa and light up a cigarette. Sometimes, a lot of things I had forgotten would float unbidden back into mind. Things when I was just a cub reporter, including a woman in Peitou (well-known for prostitutes). I was only twenty then. I still remember her low, hoarse voice. My reaction was perplexity: what kind of past had given her this jaded look?
She lay back on the bed and told me, “If you’ll lose your job if you don’t report this,” she sighed, “Then, young man, go ahead and write it up.”

Silently, I looked at her heavily made-up eyes. Tears were rolling from her lifeless eyes. Nothing had happened between us. She was just someone I was reporting on. I had been on the track of her affair with that famous politician for over a month, and if I disclosed all this to the world, I could be sure of a big bonus for a great scoop. But after I thought about it, I showed her the article I had finished writing, and ripped it to pieces in front of her.

Two days later, a reporter on another paper put out his article on these facts. At the end of his piece, he even included a slap at me, saying that this woman had disclosed that a reporter on a certain paper, hoping to take advantage of her, had kept this explosive news secret.

The famous politician in this case didn’t lose his career, but that reporter became the fearless hero of the day. I managed to keep my nose clean. I knew what people were thinking. Behind my back, they were all laughing at me for my inexperience. I hadn’t gotten any sweets, and I had forgotten Rule Number One: news before anything.

I remorsefully consoled myself with the thought that she must have had her reasons giving her no choice but to trick me. It may have had something to do with politics, or maybe powerful figures in the underworld. Maybe it even had something to do with the way newspaper bosses will do anything to cut competitors’ throats. I never got up the courage to look into it carefully. Actually, I don’t remember clearly any more. I can’t remember all the journalistic mistakes I made, including my fatal error before I left Taiwan. Looking back on it, all I have to show for half a life in the trade is fatigue.

Have I been wrong all along? Curled up on the sofa, watching the cigarette in my hand fade away at the very moment Taiwan was taking over the world, I abruptly realized how futile a job I have. No matter how hard you try, no matter what kind of tricks you play, by the time you catch up with the future, the moment the future becomes the present, you are doomed to be wrong. I became more and more anxious to retreat into the distant past. Little anecdotes, a few romances that kept me enthralled_ In this line, where you have to make the most of every second, is my heart always entwined in the disappeared past?
Even if it has all passed, there must be something wrong with my memory. I silently recalled, in my last glimpse of 1989, the pace in Taiwan had sped up fantastically. Even if time had stopped in that year, Taiwan was no longer the “Taiwan” that was in my heart when I left. As Taiwan advanced at an astonishing speed, in my memories, I could not put away the old, old past which no longer belonged to the present—that eternally beautiful island. In that moment, I seemed to realize could that be the burden that I can never catch up with?

This month's special issue of Psychology Today precisely measures the length of Taiwan people's memories, and extrapolates on the Taiwanese intuition of ‘time.’ The article states that compared to people in other regions, people in Taiwan have the shortest memories. The author did not quite clearly explain, that when time divisions diminish (in other words, the Taiwanese memory is crosscut, disappearing immediately), under these extreme conditions (the author said such conditions could be expressed with 8 or 1/8 mathematical symbols), cause and effect no longer exist (extreme examples are: someone could be born in a coffin, die in the womb, a match could extinguish flames, a stone thrown in water could cause ripples to stop), so that the past and future do not necessarily have anything to do with each other. The explanation that I worked hard to come up with was that only when we have such disconnected cognition that we join facts in any which way, in the manner of the writing of fiction; in other words, when we finally psychologically accept that Taiwan’s past need not have anything to do with its present or future, then we may finally say that we have caught up with the “Taiwanization train” and can ride it into the future!

In fact, according to the statistics published by Psychology Today, the Taiwanization of Americans is becoming more and more profound, and their Taiwan Experience has been internalized to cognitive levels. For example, American men are all busy looking for noon wives, so they can have a harmless affair, but at the same time, the article claims, just like their Taiwan counterparts, they can no longer remember what their last noon wife looked like!

VI

By now, Taiwan has proved again and again to be a synonym for progress, avant guard, beautiful. Even the most conservative Americans freely admit that Taiwanization is more than a social direction, it is a spiritual state.
The intriguing point is that, no matter whether people agree or disagree with Taiwanization, as far as I can see, the methods they use are the same, and they all come out of the Taiwan Experience!

For example, when faced with harmful byproducts of Taiwanization such as great numbers of illegal pistols (most of them are Red Star or Black Star pistols smuggled in from mainland China), Yellowstone National Park become a garbage dump, Dengue Fever becoming the major cause of deaths in the United States, those favoring Taiwanization attempt to ban or burn books to erase all written proof of the bad effects of Taiwanization. After a judge in Oregon burned books, a crowd of reporters took him to task for his action. His reply was, “What's been burned has already been burned.” In like manner, kidnappers all over the country gave as a final comment on their crimes, “What’s been bumped off has already been bumped off.”

For example, certain obstinate elements in the South perpetrated racial crimes, killing immigrants from Taiwan. The Secretary of the State of Alabama was questioned closely, and asked whether he felt any remorse about the bloody crimes in state history: discrimination against Indians, discrimination against blacks, discrimination against orientals, the Secretary (a white man) replied almost without thinking, “It's just like when the Manchus entered China and killed a bunch of Chinese.” (Note: afterwards, he swore that he had never said such a thing, and some of those who were present claim they can't remember.)

Another example comes from the Lone Star State, Texas. The Governor had planned to explain in a press conference why, since they do not approve, they do not express disapproval (Texas being the only state that took this opportunity to pull down the Stars and Stripes and raise their state flag in its place). On the spur of the moment, the reporters asked him what he planned to do about women's safety on the streets at night, and the problem of the uneven quality of taxicab drivers. The Governor smiled and answered, “The main thing is whether or not people in various occupations have strong backgrounds in science, art, and philosophy.” The Governor continued with an even more abstruse comment: “It also depends on whether or not we civil servants have a view of the universe connoting the unity of man and nature.”

Actually, I had read all about the futility of American attempts to reject the Taiwan Experience several years before all this happened in a best seller called A Guide to Trends. That Taiwanese prophet of trends wrote (page 109) “Blind
nationalism cannot resist the higher lifestyles of advanced countries.” All you have to do is think of the advanced country as Taiwan, and the backward country as the United States, and you can, in the same way, prophesy, “The spirit of the Boxer Rebellion is falling to pieces, and faces utter bankruptcy.” Wait a few years, and a Congressional Special Committee will announce proof in an investigative report that will be exactly what we Taiwanese said years before.

Once America was set on the path towards Taiwanization, and changes in the country's name and flag were already on the schedule, my job pressure slacked off, too, and I could cover Chinese community affairs with a couple of phone calls. Let me add some news that has something to do with my work. Our National Construction Conference Friendship Club and the Formosa Association had plans in the air to change the permanent club headquarters to the Assembly Hall of the United Nations, because many of the topics the Clubs addressed had become global issues. No matter how global their vision might have become, their focus was, from first to last, Taiwan. Just yesterday the Club President obliquely expressed his enthusiasm to serve, and incidentally to run as an Overseas Representative in the Legislature.

His judgment was right on. The tempest in the Taiwan teapot had worldwide repercussions. After North America, the whole world was engulfed in a tide of Taiwanization. Scientific proof piled up that “Taiwan” was rapidly spreading. Electronic satellite reconnaissance showed the speed of octopus-like growth. Although the speed and scale of Taiwanization varied from place to place, a global scientific conference in Stockholm came up with a satisfactory explanation: the penetration of Taiwanization displayed the characteristics of both a particle and a wave.

Gradually, scientists reached a consensus in their observations of Taiwanization. Theologians gave metaphysical interpretations for those phenomena beyond the scope of scientific explanation. For example, the Christian Monitor expressed the opinion that Taiwan came from water and fire, conforming to prophesies of Judgment Day in the Bible (Revelations 9:1-2). Televangelist Billy Graham concluded that Taiwan embodied a combination of Heaven and Hell (once again proving that the defining boundaries of Taiwan had already been lost). I remember how Billy Graham, Bible in hand, excoriated those mediums who had come from Taiwan on their own missions. He said, with pain in his voice, not only his own followers in the English speaking world were affected, places of worship in even Papua New Guinea had in them statues of Matzu of Meichou from Tachia in Taiwan; pure and simple African jungles were full of temples with incense brought specially from the 18 King Temple on the
northern coast of Taiwan. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me!” (Exodus 20:3), Billy Graham recited in a ringing voice. The screen filled with a view of the Red Sea, followed by a close-up of that dog with its ears pricked up; the beach in front of it was full of Israeli cigarette butts.

I probably sighed that these Western missionaries were using sensationalism to stir people up, because these phenomena couldn’t have anything to do with prophesy. It was just a sign of how deeply societies the world over had become Taiwanized. The funny thing was that scholars all over kept pointing to Taiwan as the source of coming disaster. Many warned that “I shall shake the dust off my feet.” No wonder they were worried. For instance, there was a fad in South American funerals to have strippers on electrone cars entertain the mourners, while television channels in Australia threw out their cute koalas in favor of prize shows such as Who is the Last Big Rat?

While the whole world was going through shock, communications were still under tight control in the People's Republic of China, so Taiwanization was still classified news for internal reference only. But what could not be concealed was another file of tanks in Tiananmen Square trying without success to stop the tide of Taiwanization. No matter what, the Taiwan Experience had already entered into the people's hearts. When the 27th Army and the 38th Army assembled, one inside and the other outside the Xizhimen, it is said that their password was “Great! I like it.” When the tanks opened fire on Changan Street, the march they played was the Taiwanese pop song, “I May Be Ugly, But I'm Gentle.” Repression failed. The Party fell back on Self-Strengthening Activities, such as Hand to Hand and Heart to Heart, in order to stop increasing Taiwanization. Participants immediately reported to their superiors that these show-off activities, which after all originated in Taiwan, were just copies of the Taiwan Experience, whereupon the Party Secretary was dismissed on charges of collaboration with the enemy and counter-revolutionary activities.

Taiwan’s influence on the world grew day by day. There was some speculation that perhaps some remote areas had not yet been Taiwanized, but where could they be? When I had nothing better to do, I would let my mind wander, thinking, Maybe on the Siberian steppes? a Caribbean islet? some village in the Himalayas? Theoretically, as long as there were some subcultures that had not yet been Taiwanized, there was still room for Taiwanization to expand, meaning that the Taiwan Experience was still growing!
Of course, as a rule world news focused on the Taiwan Stock Exchange. Chinese phrases entered languages all over the world: Changxien/duanxian (long term and short term), maapian/maipan (buying and selling), kaigao/zoudi(open high/go low), and other stock market terms such as ganshang kaihuato (make what is good better) and manpan jiehei(all across the board). After local news, people all over the world listened faithfully to stock market analyses by Ah Bula, Hu Liyang, and Shen the Little Viking.

I was spending more and more time alone at home. Meiyun rushed out first thing every morning. She told me she was off to get some stocks that hadn't officially been offered yet, but were actually available to those who knew how to get them. When she dragged herself home exhausted in the evening, I could only stare wordlessly at my wife; even though I had never found her easy to communicate with, she had never seemed such a stranger before. Sometimes she would shoot off a few questions at me, asking whether I could use my friendships in the Taiwan press to get her some insider news, or simpler yet, get some real hot tips straight from Taiwan. "Hey, what about that old friend of yours who does illustrations for the special sections?" She just wouldn’t give up.

I shook my head, wondering where she got the spunk to dream of swallowing the whole market. In addition to stocks, she did futures, and between futures it was either the Big Six Lottery and in her spare minutes she'd go sign a few numbers for Everybody's Joy. When she saw my silent reaction, she got all upset. She yelled at me several times, telling me how she was participating in a global activity that was the center of the lives of people all over the whole world. “Why,” she would sneer, “Do you choose to stand alone outside this trend?”

Why? I often asked myself the same question. Standing in front of the plate glass windows of the Information Office Building, looking at the view I had seen so many times before, as I asked myself, I became morose. There was less green to be seen. Buildings were going up all around. People were moving into air conditioned apartments. This was also a sign of Taiwaneseization. “The East Section of Taipei is your standard for urban life.” Brokers on American television channels used this commercial called “The Ideal Land" a lot.

In the sun, I looked at the shining ripples of the Potomac River, full of floating polyethylene bottles, and suddenly remembered the ribbon-like Tanshui River. Ah, it’s the same glass, but now I realize that all the times I stood here looking out, in my mind’s eye I was seeing that dream-like island_ Ah, that was during my first few
years in Washington, thinking of home was the only comfort for my soul. But when I returned to America in 1989, and heard news of victories on all fronts, ever since that summer Taiwan climbed into its new position as the center of the world. Then why do I feel so lost?

I leaned on the glass watching the people getting in and out of the elevator. Most of them were correspondents from foreign countries, walking briskly. I noticed that their faces were tired, like mine. I remembered how other journalists sit in the bar chatting about how boring and repetitious a correspondent's life is. No matter where you go, everybody says with a sigh, you meet the same sort of politicians, and you report on the power structured, which is pretty much the same everywhere. For example, someone says, in the Third World, every country has a ruling party that announces that this time, they’re going to clean up the elections (indicating that previous elections were not clean). It's a reporter's job to interview the opposition, and they sit in front of the tape recorder, making the same sort of gestures, telling about the same sort of experiences in jail, and they always say with the same enthusiasm that they embody justice.

"Keep changing places," another correspondent took it up, "Every place is a tourist hotel just like the last place. Morning, coffee, fruit juice, ham and eggs, and a newspaper slipped in under the door. The same old Herald Tribune, it's always the same…" At that, everybody quieted down, as if we had all become disoriented together. Today people all over the world open their newspapers. No matter where they are, no matter what day it is, I imagine that the news is always the same, telling all about how the Taiwan Stock Exchange keeps going up and up.

"As a foreign, you’ve gone everywhere, so you get to feeling you've never been anywhere," he continued. "Maybe you end up where you started from," another voice finished in a monotone. For me, this took on a deeper meaning. Today, no matter where in the world I may be, I have never left that lively, expanding island.

In my heart I know I was drifting away from my native land. But isn't it satirical that when I finally forgot all about the island of my memories, then and only then had I thoroughly gone through the Taiwan Experience, and become another successful example of Taiwanization?

Now, Taiwanization continues to develop and grow. Last month, the newest world map showed Taiwan as a landmass that has lost borders. Watching the miracle progress, I am thinking that this expanding realm will cover the whole world. But
when the whole world becomes a Taiwan that has lost its borders, the lost borders—it's not just a region, it's a spiritual attitude. I can't help thinking, have I, standing here now, lost my past, present, and future?

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Tomorrow I'm going to buy some stocks and try my luck!