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**IMAGINING THE ‘FOLK’: POST-MARTIAL LAW TAIWAN AND THE
INVENTION OF NATIONAL HERITAGE**

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2022

Dedication

To my father and mother

Abstract

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2022

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The 1980s was a transitional decade for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. As China began its policy of re-opening, it found itself at a crossroads of identity and progress. Similarly, Taiwan was growing steadily out of its prolonged state of sleepy soft-Authoritarianism (軟威權主義 ruan weiquan zhuyi) that followed violent transitional tremors such as the 228 incident in 1947 and the Luku incident in 1952. The small island too began moving away from its former identity as an exiled army in conflict with the PRC and towards a new selfhood informed by democracy and independence. As both nations took their place on the global stage, it became necessary to root their national origins in something undiluted by recent trauma. Where historical and ideological narratives hinted too directly at the immediate and bloody past, a different solution—unsullied by the terrors of reality—was found. That solution was a revitalization of the Chinese folk, re-imagined and represented in museum exhibitions, folklore festivals, and multi-volume, hardcover folktale collections.

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Chapter One: Introduction to Topic and Thesis Statement

Historical Context¹

The twentieth century presented many challenges for emerging nation-states lining Asia's Pacific front. Occupation, colonization, empire and warfare held countries like China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines in a constant state of turmoil and political upheaval throughout the century. Western invasion from both military and ideological sources simultaneously filled and drained the coffers as peasant armies died under the banner of foreign ideas. Whether the emergence of these territories as nation-states was a symbolic rise to sovereignty or a continent-wide degradation of traditional community values in favor of unified systems of oppression, many postcolonial scholars² agree that Western epistemological categories of 'Asia' and 'Asians' were created through these processes—and they have yet to be uncreated. These massively homogenizing labels are representative of the broad-scale reimagining of both space and race through the nationalizing efforts of the twentieth century. This period, perhaps more than any other period in human history, saw the individual disappear into the national, the tribe into the race, the village into the country, and ethnicity into political ideology. But how can we even begin to study these ethnic evolutions and trace them across the temporal and spatial fluctuations of the twentieth century? Asia seems too grand, even reduced to its orientalist classifiers, to know where to start.

This is where Taiwan comes into play. Though certainly not representative of all of Asia, the small island offers a wealth of material, both historical and contemporary, for contemplating

¹ For continued reading on Taiwan's history and historical discourse surrounding Taiwan, see Kerry Brown and Kalley Wu Tzu-Hui, *The Trouble with Taiwan: History, the United States and a Rising China* (London: Zed, 2019), and Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

² See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

interracial conflict, harmony, and the relationship between a shared space and the diverse races and time-periods that occupy its soil. Just within the last 400 years, the island of Taiwan has, in its aboriginal context, been imagined as a mythic world-space wherein nine (or sixteen, or twenty-six, depending on whom and when you ask) tribes made peace and war. It has presented Western conquerors, the Portuguese and the Dutch, with a paradisiacal canvas for their violent painting of Manifest Destiny. When that destiny ended abruptly, the island was refashioned into a defensive outpost for Ming loyalists under Zheng Chenggong (鄭成功, also called 國姓爺 Koxinga) to recuperate and resist the Manchu empire. Then it became a land of agricultural opportunity for Hoklo and Hakka migrants from Fujian and Guangdong to till and seed until it produced stability and even wealth. Simultaneously the island was a place of disinheritance and exploitation for its natives, and many times a war ground. Near the turn of the twentieth century, Taiwan was re-imagined as the firstfruits of empire, providing imperial Japan with space to build up and out and across. A land of both refuge and triumph, it became a refuge again in 1949 for China's Nationalist Party the KMT (國民黨 *guomindang*), following their defeat at the hands of the Communist Party (共和黨 *gonghedang*) in what is called China's 'civil war.' The KMT then fled to Taiwan and, with the help of American military interests, established their new government on the island, nationalizing Taiwan under its new name—the 'Republic of China' (中華民國 *zhonghua minguo*). During the 50s and 60s, Taiwan was quickly transformed into a site of violent subjugation where Taiwanese citizens educated in Japan's language and customs had to forget all these and learn Mandarin overnight, or face dangerous persecution. Finally, the island has become in more recent decades a space for economic development and democratization. With this upward shift came a reckoning of identity: What is Taiwan? To whom does the island belong? Who are its people? What does it mean to be "Taiwanese"? Each

of these questions needed to be answered—quickly, effectively, and in a way that provided stability to both the governing and the governed.

The 1980s was a transitional decade for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. As China began its policy of re-opening, it found itself at a crossroads of identity and progress. Similarly, Taiwan was growing steadily out of its prolonged state of sleepy soft-Authoritarianism (軟威權主義 *ruan weiquan zhuyi*) that followed violent transitional tremors such as the 228 incident in 1947 and the Luku incident in 1952. The small island too began moving away from its former identity as an exiled army in conflict with the PRC and towards a new selfhood informed by democracy and independence. As both nations took their place on the global stage, it became necessary to root their national origins in something undiluted by recent trauma. Where historical and ideological narratives hinted too directly at the immediate and bloody past, a different solution—unsullied by the terrors of reality—was found. That solution was a revitalization of the Chinese folk, re-imagined and represented in museum exhibitions, folklore festivals, and multi-volume, hardcover folktale collections.

Sources and Methodology

The methodological vein of my study will center around those hermeneutic theories or frameworks that best allow me to get at the real yet elusive adhesive force connecting two very distinct entities to each other: on the one hand, the powerless, marginalized, and often discounted and forgotten classes of ‘folk,’ and on the other those legitimizing political, academic and artistic institutions the access to which belongs almost exclusively to privileged heritors of *haute couture*. Why should depictions of the one, romanticized and raised to a lofty and immortal status, appear within the porticoes of the other? Why should their humble stories fill noble

breasts with national pride, their handicrafts be put on display, and their traditional dances be performed in the most ornate halls?

Pierre Bourdieu explores such a relationship between high and popular cultures, between social processes and the cultural practices that both inform and are themselves informed by them, and between the legitimizing process that reifies a system of social stratification even as it acts through these processes. *The Field of Cultural Production*³ has allowed me to trace the heteronomous process of producing exhibits, festivals and folktale collections through the combined forces of legitimizing institutions like museums, government agencies and universities, as well as attendants and consumers that wish thereby to experience cultural stimulation and legitimization themselves. These are both popular consumers (mainly children and their middle-class parents) as well as trained *lectores* (teachers, journalists and researchers). Yet it is this process, involving actors hailing from both dominant endowment-paying classes and the upwardly mobile petite-bourgeoisie (and not involving the disenfranchised ‘folk’ in either creative or attending capacities) that defines what we understand as the ‘folk,’ whether we read a collection of folktales, visit a folk-art exhibit, or attend a folklore festival. Thus are the ‘folk’ then separated from the material culture which they produce and use, and their stories, rituals, and handicrafts pass into a new utility and meaning: once symbols of a tribe or community that stands local and apart, they have now come to represent one nation, diverse yet united in mythic origin and purpose.⁴

³ Pierre Bourdieu and Randal Johnson. *The Field of Cultural Production : Essays on Art and Literature / Pierre Bourdieu ; Edited and Introduced by Randal Johnson*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁴ Bourdieu’s *Distinction* has a wealth of insight concerning the high culture appropriation of popular or ‘low’ culture, that which is rejected by the petite bourgeoisie. As the petite bourgeoisie aims to distance themselves from popular culture by rejecting tastes therewith associated and striving for what in their minds constitutes ‘high’ or refined tastes, the upper classes search instead for an escape from the monotony of riches, delving into the exciting and unpredictable cultural world of the lower classes. Having drunk their fill of that kaleidoscope of sights and sounds and stories which belong to the cacophonous masses, they appropriate and re-make this foreign variety into more uniform political, academic, and artistic depictions of the ‘folk.’ The effects are two-fold: 1) the rich claim

Bourdieu's theory of the *field* is nicely complemented by Benedict Anderson's critical study of nations and the historical beginnings of nationality—*Imagined Communities*⁵. In his study Anderson argues that nation-ness is a particular kind of cultural artifact, an imagined political community, inherently sovereign and limited, in which each member believes they can know all other members as belonging to the same community, though they have never met the vast majority of them before. What can I, a native Texan, a farm kid turned tea-sipping intellectual, possibly have in common with the cannabis-enthusiast in Colorado, or the Wall Street billionaire in New York? How can I hope to understand the language, let alone the ideals, of the lazy-tongued and carefree Californian, or the taciturn and shivering North Dakotan? It takes quite the imagination, as well as the singing of songs like “This Land is Your Land” and rituals like hanging the flag out on Memorial Day. It takes government-sponsored institutions like the daily national newscast and the Common Core of Education. Finally, it takes technologies like the airplane and the internet to shrink the country down to bite-size, until the Seattle start-up programmer is only a Facebook comment away. As Anderson quotes Ernest Gellner⁶ in *Imagined Communities*: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”⁷ What better bedrock for understanding the process of Taiwanization, than inventing a nation where it did not before exist?

solidarity with the poor while simultaneously rejecting the economic advance of either the petite bourgeoisie or the lower classes; and 2) popular cognition regarding the day-to day-lived experiences of the poor is washed over with pristine ‘multi-cultural’ utopian visions of an un-suffering other. Their lives are hidden from public view, a more romanticized version taking their place in the public consciousness.

⁵ Benedict R. O’Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 13.

Anderson traces the wells of nationalism back to the early Gutenberg days of Bible translations, during which one of a number of dialects was chosen to represent the greater English, French, or German languages, thus subsuming the variety of dialects and peoples under a single linguistic classifier. Thus, for example, before France was France, and an estimated 75 dialects roved over its hills and through its *petites villes*, the Gutenberg printing press was invented, and with it the ability to mass-produce and sell what would soon become the hottest commodity in the world: the Bible. Previously relegated to the Latin-proficient clergy, the Bible quickly transformed into the world's first New York Times best-seller, and the printing press was its Amazon. The proto-capitalist need for Bible translations to sell to the Latin-ignorant lay-people inhabiting England, France, and Germany prioritized one of many dialects in each of these countries. In France's case, out of 75 dialects there was chosen one, and the uniting, reductive classifier of 'French' was bestowed on this one dialect, as well as the sovereign economic and religious authority to subsume all others under its wings. Following quickly on the heels of this technological and linguistic revolution, the political birth of the French nation-state out of the ashes of the French Revolution would cling to this newly imagined 'French' as its national tongue. 75 reduced to one over the course of a couple hundred years: 75 distinct cultures, languages, peoples, now comprising one united French imagination. It is certainly scary what progress can accomplish, though, after all, progress is progress—few of us would wish to go backwards. With linguistic standardization and cultural homogenization comes also one revolutionary scientific method, one shared corpus of medical knowledge and practice, one world united by tech and transport, and far fewer deaths, wars, and injustices than before.

This linguistic explanation for nationalization provides an interesting framework for understanding Taiwan's recent history of tumultuous power shifts: the ruling governments of

both the Japanese Imperialists and the KMT imposed a unifying measure of language education upon the Taiwanese, so that after 50 difficult years spent under Japanese occupation learning Japanese, they were suddenly required to learn an equally foreign Mandarin dialect. Mandarin, now spoken by the vast majority of China and Taiwan's inhabitants, is a dialect native to Beijing in northern China, which city for the sole reason of its proximity to the northern territory of Manchuria was chosen by the Manchu Qing dynastic conquerors as the administrative capital in 1644, where China's capital has since remained and whence the universalizing initiatives of all its subsequent governments have sought to infiltrate and homogenize an ever-growing territory of an imagined Chinese nation. This linguistic understanding of nationhood presents several opportunities for understanding Taiwan's more recent democratization. In presidential debates today, it is understood that all candidates should at least know how to speak Taiwanese, a version of the Minnan dialect in Fujian, China that came into Taiwan via Hoklo immigrants in the 17th and 18th centuries. Even Ma Ying-jeou, KMT president of Taiwan from 2008 to 2016, increasingly employed Taiwanese in public speeches despite his party's position of friendliness with China and his family's own disconnection from the language (his parents were from Hunan, China and he was born in Hong Kong, where Cantonese is the primary dialect). The current president, Tsai Ing-wen, goes even further to prove her allegiance to Taiwan through linguistic means. A member of the Democratic Progressive Party, Tsai regularly puts on display her Taiwanese roots and education, and she employs the use of Taiwanese as well as Hakka (a dialect of northern Fujian that entered Taiwan in a similar way as Taiwanese), and has even begun introducing a few aboriginal words and phrases into her speeches, such as at the landmark

National Apology⁸ she gave in 2016 to Taiwan's indigenous tribes. Since the late 1980's the knowledge of Taiwanese, Hakka, any of the native Austronesian languages, and even Cantonese during a recent period of national solidarity with Hong Kong, has increased political candidates' inherent 'Taiwanese-ness' in constituents' eyes, and it should be mentioned that traditional Chinese characters are still used in Taiwan. The use of these languages and this script represents a national break from China, a re-imagination of Taiwan's land and people as sovereign and united entities, no longer separated from each other by race, origin or language, but united in their national separation from China.

Is Taiwan Chinese?

My particular study comes in the wake of an increasing focus on post-Authoritarian Taiwan's democratization and identity shifts that have rocked the island's inhabitants for at least the past forty years. Melissa Brown provides an in-depth analysis of identity, temporality and narrative in *Is Taiwan Chinese?: The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities*. Besides providing much of the historical background for Taiwan's recent political and ideological debates, Brown questions the validity of a uniquely 'Taiwanese identity,' complicating various socio-political explanations aimed at defining such an identity by unmasking their attempts as tendentious "narratives of unfolding."⁹ She lists two major conflicting narratives in the cross-Straits discussion. First, heirs to a "One China" worldview advocate a Confucian understanding of ethnicity, arguing that ethnicity is not tied to ancestry or

⁸ For a discourse analysis of the apology, see Rong-Xuan Chu and Chih-Tung Huang, "The Day after the Apology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of President Tsai's National Apology to Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples," *Discourse Studies* 23, no. 1 (February 2021): 84–101.

⁹ Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, 20.

region but is rather found in shared cultural practices. Hence Confucius' conviction in *The Analects* that "barbarian" tribes would sooner or later conform to a "cultivated" Han influence.¹⁰

The second is a counter-narrative basing Taiwan's identity on selective accounts of the island's complicated immigration history. This view maintains that Taiwanese identity is a mixture of aboriginal rootedness with borrowed influence from Hoklo, Hakka, Japanese and Republic of China (ROC) influence. Thus it is based on patriliney, on the intermarriage between aborigine women and Hoklo and Hakka men first, with further intermarriage involving Japanese and KMT occupants following down the line. Brown deviates from these two narratives, arguing that identity is derived instead from shared social experience—it is a social construct. Therefore one cannot reach backwards into time and identify oneself according to the Taiwanese aborigines as they existed before the Dutch, or the Hoklo people when they first arrived on the island. One does not share their experiences: the modern smartphone-wielding technocrat shares almost nothing experientially with her Amis-tribe ancestor, even if she can trace her ancestry with certainty. Instead, place and time constitute the two deciding factors of identity. Taiwan's older generation is defined through shared experiences during the Japanese occupation, the advent of the KMT, and on into the White Terror. The younger generation finds its identity in Taiwan's globalization and democratization. Therefore the re-identification of Plains peoples like the Amis tribe as aboriginals after hundreds of years of assimilation into Taiwanese-ness is to Brown a "narrative of unfolding," not a true identity-marker, because these aborigine descendants do not share any experience with their ancestors: they have lived the majority of their lives surrounded

¹⁰ "The Master wanted to go and stay with the Nine Tribes of the East. Someone said, 'They are unruly! Why do you want to do such a thing?' Confucius said, 'If a noble man dwells with them, how could they be unruly?'" (Analects 9.14) from Edward G. Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: with Selection from Traditional Commentaries / Translated by Edward Slingerland* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 2003) 91. (All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.)

by Hoklo and Hakka culture, and more recently Japanese and Chinese culture, political influence and language. While the connections themselves may be fabricated and curated by the state, it is important to remember, and to a certain degree to celebrate, the fact that such human connections carry weight to them: these are powerful, important and meaningful histories that connect the individual to the community, a new generation to its predecessor, and stitch together the fabric of human experience. We must not deconstruct all meaning from our lives. Rather, a certain vigilance should be practiced in cases (such as elections, product promotion, or populist neo-national movements) where such histories might be weaponized against us, tugging at our heart-strings so to speak, so that good sense and human goodwill become substituted for blind patriotism and xenophobia.

Culture and Nation

In order to better understand the unique cultural hegemony by which Taiwan has linked its nationalizing project to an imagined ‘folk’—and more specifically how the roots of this imagination first spread in the period following the KMT’s political takeover of Taiwan and leading up to the island’s first democratic election in 1996, I now turn to the expertise of Allen Chun, Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan, and author of his recent book *Forget Chineseness: On the Geopolitics of Cultural Identification*. In a 1993 article titled “From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Postwar Taiwan,” Chun argues that Taiwan’s independence movement, otherwise anchored to *huaxia* myths of cultural Chineseness, “refused to separate nation (as ethnic community) from state (as political apparatus), choosing instead to seek alternative cultural origins in the imagination of an indigenous (pre-Japanese, pre-KMT) past”.¹¹ In other words, instead of drawing from already

¹¹ Allen Chun, “From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Postwar Taiwan,” *The Australian journal of Chinese affairs*, no. 31 (1994): 49–69.

existing cultures, ethnicities, and languages in Taiwan in order to build Taiwan into a sovereign nation-state separate from China, the KMT looked to the ‘glory days’ of the Chinese nation—rooted as they understood it in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644CE). As China suffered the labor pains of its socialist modernization during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Taiwan sought to rebuild what China was actively throwing away: the traditional Chinese script, cultural artifacts, Confucian principles, and historical identity now considered anathema within the borders of the island’s neighbor. The KMT wished to ‘revive’ China’s past within the borders of an island that had very little to do with China’s history. This initiative spanned the 50s and 60s, and they christened their new nation the Republic of China, a name which, despite Taiwan’s recent efforts to reframe its identity as culturally, historically, and linguistically ‘Taiwanese,’ sticks to the island nation even today.

By reading Chun’s cultural analysis into Taiwan’s folk imagination, the relationship between building ‘alternative cultural origins’ and the creation of the ‘folk’ becomes readily apparent. There are four major pillars of Chun’s argument around which I wish to make my own connections to Taiwan’s ‘folk:’ namely, that nationalizing Taiwan required 1) a shared past ranging from primordial myth to colonized memory, 2) a shared social practice of traditionalism, 3) a shared renaissance of cultural consciousness, and 4) a shared destiny of cultural reconstruction. Not only does Taiwanese folklore imagination contain all four of these pillars, I will argue that the same folklore imagination was created from them.

A Shared Past

Chun begins his analysis of Taiwan during its initial period of nationalization with the explanation that, replacing both religion and elite culture, national culture represented a new kind of ‘bounded totality’ to which culture was then made to conform. This idea is borrowed from

Ernest Gellner, who argued that the idea of a shared civilization or ethnic tradition in the minds of a country's 'citizens' served to connect them as equal and autonomous individuals employed in the mission of their country's survival. While Benedict Anderson focused on print capitalism and the evolution of a common colloquial language, factors which until more recently were simply inapplicable to Taiwan's multilingual and disconnected society, Gellner emphasized mass education and universal literacy as a means for disseminating shared social values among the populace. This was brought about by KMT actors through the imposition of standard Mandarin both upon Taiwan's Hoklo and Hakka populations already educated during the Japanese annexation in the Japanese language, as well as the island's indigenous tribes which the Japanese largely left alone.

The first function of mass linguistic education was to ground Taiwan's emerging citizenry in a *huaxia* (traditional/immemorial Chineseness) identity through teaching materials and the direct linkage of a common language, thereby achieving Anderson's prerequisites for nationalism. More importantly, *huaxia* identity provided a shared past dating back to prehistoric China that put Taiwan in direct contrast with the People's Republic of China (PRC) government's forward-looking communist radicalism. Clifford Geertz, the renowned anthropologist who championed a socio-historical contextualization of human culture and behavior, has said that such a traditionalist culture is imbued with 'primordial sentiments,'¹² with feelings of perpetual continuity linking the contemporary community with a double-mirror eternity of being. This imagined perpetuity can be directly applied to postwar Taiwan, but it also carries within it a striking contradiction. Argues Chun, "The crisis of culture in postwar Taiwan was one which was predicated by the government's attempt to nationalize Chinese culture (by

¹² Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *Old Societies and New States*, ed. C. Geertz (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963), 105-57.

making the latter a metaphor or allegory of that imagined community called the nation-state) where no such culture (of the nation) previously existed.”¹³ By salvaging a Chinese culture now disappearing in China proper during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, and grafting it upon an island non-nation whose only cohesive identity for the past 400 years was one of colonization by one and then another foreign army, the KMT invented a shared past for their proposed nation of Taiwan where none existed previously.

For the purpose of this invention, it was necessary to put Taiwan’s primordial Chineseness or *huaxia* through a process of mystification. Says Chun, “Insofar as tradition was invented or reconstituted, by nature it also had to be a kind of mystification which coincided with the hegemonic process of state formation. In other words, a need to forge a new kind of hegemony was what prompted these mystifying discourses on culture.”¹⁴ Chun here borrows from Antonio Gramsci’s writings on hegemonies, which dictate the order of society through shapeless undercurrents involving state narratives and social taboos. One such example is the hegemony of the nuclear family during the 1950s and 60s in America, a period often called ‘The Golden Age of Capitalism.’ As increased wages allowed for single-income households, and technological innovations like the supermarket and household appliances transformed the family from a source of labor into a status symbol, the father-worshipping, two-kids-and-a-dog family became normalized in American discourse. This new notion of the ‘ideal family’ was so effective that it attained a hegemonic influence on American families, until ‘Leave It To Beaver’ was on every television set and suburbanites were peering through their windows to make sure their neighbors were living righteously. Finally, the ‘nuclear family’ hegemony was tied to American identity more broadly, and its origins were ‘mystified’ (obscured, stricken from the

¹³ Chun, “From Nationalism to Nationalizing,” 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

history books), until this particular hegemony was understood to be a core value of American-ness itself, indistinguishable from the Declaration of Independence or the Statue of Liberty.

Shared Social Practice

In the middle of the twentieth century, a century defined by modernism, it is interesting to note that Taiwan built its nationalist discourse out of a defense of the traditional past. Argues Chun, “In contrast to both socialist China and the world-at-large, Nationalist China as promoted by the Kuomintang regime appealed to traditionalism.”¹⁵ In order to accomplish this, Taiwan’s KMT government needed to further two initiatives: the first consisted of the more obvious requirement to ‘write’ a traditional culture into Taiwan, and the second belonged to producing a shared ‘societal consciousness’ (民族意識 *minzu yishi*) in the minds of its citizens. The process was a complicated and by no means organic one: “By invoking ‘tradition,’” says Chun, “the authorities appeared to resuscitate elements of the past, but they were clearly inventing tradition (by virtue of their selectivity). The government in effect played an active role (as author) in writing culture (by constructing discourses on tradition, ethnicity, ethical philosophy and moral psychology).”¹⁶ As if the nation of Taiwan was for the KMT a simple folktale collection, they hand-picked what narratives (mythical, cultural, geographical, linguistic, and personal) to include in the nation’s table of contents, and which to leave out, enforcing by martial rule the values couched within the pages of the nation. Moreover, these traditional narratives were “supplemented by activities in other aspects of traditional culture, such as music, dance, folk art, painting, calligraphy and theatre,” and “convenient occasions like Martyr's Day, the birthdays of general Yuefei, the Ming dynasty naval hero Koxinga, the consummate teacher Confucius, and

¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶ Ibid., 54.

others”¹⁷ were celebrated as national holidays to reinforce traditionalist ideals and bring them into historical continuity with Taiwan’s political struggle. How else could Confucius be imagined as having any direct link to the ‘martyrs’ fighting 2,500 years later over an almost unrecognizable Chinese national territory? It is a cultural *découpage* that, in the words of Gayatri Spivak¹⁸, brings together disparate disciplines and traditions through allegory, making one represent the other, Confucius or the martyr or Koxinga transformed successively into folk representations of the made-up nation of Taiwan.

In addition to establishing a shared tradition, post-war Nationalist Taiwan sought to engender solidarity across ethnic differences through a promotion of ‘spiritual values’ that connected Taiwanese citizens to an imagined *huaxia* past. This is in line with Gellner’s views on the replacement of religion with nationhood as the primary cohesive force in modernity, and also speaks to the purely social ethics of Confucianism upon which were laid the bricks of Taiwanese identity. Confucian spiritual values are based, not on religious doctrine or statements of authority made by a spiritual leader, but on a dovetail appeal to relationships and tradition. In the words of Peter Weinreich, “One’s ethnic identity is defined as that part of the totality of one’s self-construal made up of those dimensions that express the continuity between one’s construal of past ancestry and one’s future aspirations in relation to ethnicity.”¹⁹ This close link between self-construal and the construction of one’s ancestors forms the element of virtue made famous by Confucius—filial piety. In the field of identity formation, this respect for one’s elders and

¹⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “How to Teach a ‘Culturally Different’ Book,” in *The Spivak Reader : Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* / Edited by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁹ Peter Weinreich and Wendy Saunderson, *Analysing Identity Cross-Cultural, Societal, and Clinical Contexts* / Edited by Peter Weinreich & Wendy Saunderson (London: Routledge, 2003).

ancestors performs the double rite of grounding one's identity in a genealogical past and securing its immortal perpetuation in the worship practices of descendants to come.

Shared Cultural Renaissance

By encouraging national solidarity through both a societal and cultural consciousness shared by its citizens, the Taiwanese government sparked a Cultural Renaissance movement among its citizens. Says Chun,

The Cultural Renaissance movement was not a spontaneous discovery of traditional culture. It was a systematic effort to redefine the content of these ideas and values, to inculcate widespread societal consciousness through institutional promotion, and to use organized social movements as the spiritual framework for national development in other domains. In other words, not only was there an organized effort to cultivate a spirit of national solidarity through recourse to tradition but also an attempt to lead people to believe that this spirit of cultural consciousness was the key to the fate of the nation in all other respects. . . The cultivation of cultural consciousness was also explicitly linked to an all-encompassing culture industry, through the extension of ties with overseas Chinese and foreign cultural agencies; the financing of grassroots cultural groups; the development of the tourist industry; increased publication of the classics; preservation of historical artifacts; large-scale promotion of activities in science, ethics, and social welfare; development of sports; and wider cultural coverage in the mass media, incorporating an intensified anti-communist propaganda. Cultural Renaissance was simply the first step in a long-term process to objectify (and 'commodify') culture.²⁰

This cultural commodification points more broadly to a commodification of Taiwan's existing Hoklo, Hakka, and aboriginal populations as Taiwan's primordial and allegorical 'folk.' As the National Palace Museum was opening exhibits featuring Tang and Song dynasty lacquerware, the founders of the Beitou Folk Arts Museum were taking notes for their exhibits on Hoklo ceramics and aboriginal earthenware. Publishing houses like Yuan-liou Publishing Co., Ltd. circulated copies of the Chinese classics, meanwhile beginning to consider multi-volume sets of folktale collections. Finally, grassroots cultural groups sowed the seeds for an eventual Taiwanese independence movement, and anti-communist propaganda contained within it an

²⁰ Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing," 57.

eventual anti-‘one China’ message. Chun argues that the Taiwanese independence movement would go on to adopt a “cultural reality of a Taiwanese nation” already built by the KMT’s culture-centered nationalizing efforts, focusing less and less on political guardianship over China. He says, “The Taiwanese independence movement has attempted to capitalize upon the need to recognize instead the political reality of a predominantly ethnic Taiwanese nation, by using the cultural reality of a Taiwanese nation as the basis of a new societal polity.”²¹ Having come to terms with the Taiwanese-ness of its population, Taiwan’s leaders have begun pivoting towards a proudly ‘Taiwanese’ identity to replace the former *huaxia* identity of traditional Chineseness.

Shared Cultural Reconstruction

Following Taiwan’s cultural renaissance movement (founded in 1966)²², the Committee for Cultural Reconstruction (文化重建委員會 *wenhua chongjian weiyuanhui*) was established in November 1981 under the aegis of the Executive Yuan (行政院 *xingzhengyuan*) to take responsibility for the management of cultural affairs and coordinate with the Committee for Cultural Renaissance (文化復興委員會 *wenhua fuxing weiyuanhui*). This cultural reconstruction placed Taiwan’s national culture within the context of the arts, and it was meant to remain explicitly ‘non-political.’ Cultural centers (文化中心 *wenhua zhongxin*) were set up in each township in order to organize and promote cultural activities, and to cultivate a broader view of Chinese tradition and promote interest in and the preservation of local traditions. The domestication of culture during this reconstruction era coincided with the development of the ‘culture industry’ in Taiwan, including tourism, media commercialization, public festivals, and

²¹ Ibid., 69.

²² Warren Tozer, “Taiwan’s ‘Cultural Renaissance’: A Preliminary View,” *The China Quarterly* (London, no. 43, 1970), 81–99.

the popular arts. Finally, unprecedented economic growth which attended the cultural reconstruction was viewed as an index for measuring social progress during a later time when threats to national security were removed.²³ Moreover, the culture industry remained a state enterprise during this era of ‘liberalization’ of culture, with little indication that the government ever actually relinquished its authority over the writing and practice of culture. Chun argues that, if anything, the government’s authority over culture was enhanced due to its success in broadcasting the legitimacy of Chinese culture, which now included all Chinese cultures, including the Hoklo and Hakka:

With the transition to cultural reconstruction, one begins to see the emergence of a well-organized and diversified culture industry. By depoliticizing national culture and institutionally diffusing the hegemony of the whole onto a local level (through cultural centres), reconstruction enabled culture to become categorized (as an object of gazing, discourse and practice), commodified (for public consumption), and totalized (through universal accessibility) in a way which was not previously possible. . . . Similarly, cultural centres not only served as local activity centres for artistic, musical and folk programs but also sponsored research on local society. Each cultural centre was staffed by research personnel, who in collaboration with local scholars regularly produced monographs on local history, folk customs and traditional arts.²⁴

Chapter Overview

This study focuses on the post-Martial Law experience of Taiwanization as it sought to restore unity and healing to an island ravaged by warfare and political upheaval through a ‘binding’ stratagem based in rediscovered or reinvented ‘folklore.’ It explores the methods and rationale by which scholars, government agencies, and wealthy donors built the institutions that canonized the ‘folk’ of Taiwan. I will begin with an ostensibly ‘two-shores’ literary project containing forty volumes-worth of Chinese and Taiwanese folktales: *The Complete Anthology of*

²³ Chun, “From Nationalism to Nationalizing,” 65-66.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

*Chinese Folktales*²⁵, published exclusively in traditional characters by a Taiwanese publishing company. Then, I will look at the rich folk-art exhibits of Beitou Museum, where carefully selected material objects stand in supposedly pristine eternity as representative of a kind of ‘core’ Taiwanese identity. Finally, I will take the reader to the Yilan International Children’s Folklore and Folkgames Festival, where crowds of Taiwanese from every region of the island converge every year to share in the celebration of ‘Taiwanese-ness.’ It is my belief that these three institutions, all active and producing during the post-Authoritarian era of the 80’s and 90’s, will reveal the manner in which different groups in Taiwan appropriated and reimagined Taiwan’s ‘folk’ communities and their cultural productions during the process of Taiwanization.

My second chapter, covering the forty-volume *Complete Anthology of Chinese Folktales* published in 1989, explores the process of ‘mystification’ taking place in the context of Taiwan’s nationalization. In Taiwan’s case, in order to establish a new cultural and political hegemony that would transform the island into a nation-state with privileged access to China’s ‘root’ culture and values, the KMT needed to ‘mystify’ Taiwan’s connection to China and to the party’s own imagined version of *huaxia* Chineseness. Not to do so would fail to distinguish the KMT or Taiwan itself sufficiently from PRC China, leaving Taiwan’s nationalism an impossibility. As I will show in this chapter on folktale collections, one of the best ways to peddle this mystified hegemonic discourse was through Chinese folktales re-written for Taiwanese purposes. It was necessary to hide an obvious nationalist discourse in plain sight, to make the obvious mysterious, the garishly patriotic into something that produces all the wonder of serendipity. Where the connection between folklore and nation did not before exist, the nation welded itself to a mysterious ‘folk’ origin in such a way that one can only with difficulty discern where one or the

²⁵Chen Qinghao 陳慶浩 and Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, eds., *Taiwan minjian gushi ji 台灣民間故事集* (Taipei: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1989).

other begins. Even though these folktales originated within prehistoric and pre-literate oral traditions and underwent so many transformations as they were passed down that it is virtually impossible to verify the continuity of the tales, and even though they were written down and often re-written again by members of the literati with no cultural or ontological connection to the communities sharing them, folktales—like television or the suburbs—serve a hegemonic function. They personalize and historicize a set of cultural values and tie them to the mystified origins of the nation, as the story of Davy Crockett ties values of ‘freedom’ and ‘self-reliance’ to the birth and development of the American nation. These tales can work their way into every corner of the social experience: from schools, to churches, to legislative assemblies, concert halls, public artworks, and daily discourse—folktales become tales of the nation.

It is important to recognize also that Taiwan’s cultural renaissance came as a product of the collected efforts of various agents of one nationalizing system that combined to regulate through cultural and societal consciousness public behavior in daily practice. Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* speaks of a ‘heteronomous’ process of cultural construction that brings many institutions into play. One such agent of cultural construction is the Beitou Museum of Folk Art, which will comprise my third chapter. Founded in the 1980s as a result of government funding, the Beitou Museum does much more than simply ‘preserving’ Taiwanese folk culture. Through its rigorous and by no means randomized selection of specific artifacts, as well as, more importantly, the historical context and significance it ascribes to these objects, the Beitou museum indeed ‘writes’ Taiwan’s folk into existence. Who can say what a people was like after it is no more, if it does not leave a written history behind? Only the interpreters of material objects, historians, recorders of oral histories, photographers, and the like—who all in

some way or another are tied to academies of learning funded by the government—can write about and in so doing re-invent that people and its symbolic ties to the nation.

My fourth chapter on the Yilan International Children’s Folklore and Folk-games Festival (YICFFF), founded in Yilan in 1996, shines a light on the hegemonic diffusion of nationalist narratives by the government into local cultural centers like the Yilan Ministry of Culture. Festivals and Museums throughout Taiwan, as well as folktale collections, have effectively made culture an object of gazing and public consumption, as well as research. Having stripped Taiwanese citizens, whether Hoklo, Hakka, or Aboriginal, of the right to freely practice their own culture and speak their own language, and having pressed upon them the necessity to assimilate into a manufactured *huaxia* cultural tradition with standard Mandarin as its language, Taiwanese cultural centers therefore remain one of the few places where citizens can experience what is now a lost culture swept up into that primordial feeling constructed for them. These centers provide one of the few areas of research into these lost cultures, too, so that even research on Taiwan’s ‘folk’ is misshapen by the heteronomous institutions that control it.

Concluding Remarks

My study of Taiwanese folklore and its relation to nationalism and state-formation is nothing new. Other important scholars that have gone before this study in important and meaningful ways include: 1) Jun’ichiro Abe²⁶ and Pei-yin Lin,²⁷ whose writings on folklore preservation during the colonial period (by means of the Japanese folklore journal *Minzoku* and the Japan Folk-Crafts Museum) illuminate the beginnings of Taiwan’s folk-consciousness and

²⁶ Jun’ichiro Abe, “Movements for the Protection of Folk Crafts and Three Types of ‘Local Culture’ in Colonial Taiwan,” *Soshioroji* 54 (2): (2009) 71–88, 178.

²⁷ Pei-yin Lin, “Diffracted National Narratives: Folkloric and Literary Writing in Colonial Taiwan,” *Asian Studies Review* 44 (2): (2020) 164–82.

the actors whose legacy lives on in current folklore-preservation initiatives; 2) Emma Teng,²⁸ Edward Vickers,²⁹ and Wentsung Den,³⁰ because of their contributions to understanding Taiwan's museum culture and politics, from outside designations of the island as a 'living museum' (Teng), to local debates concerning best practices for heritage conservation in Beitou (Den) and the political utility of museums for competing parties (Vickers); 3) Joyce Hsiu-yen Yeh³¹ and Marzia Varutti,³² because of their interest in cultural revitalization in Taiwan (Yeh) and the polysemic capacity of indigenous material culture re-imagined for a multitude of purposes and contexts (Varutti); and 4) Sunitha Janamohanan,³³ because of her explorative look at folk museums and the greater process of folk material collection and preservation as alternatively performed and managed by local communities instead of legitimizing institutions, thus exploring the potentialities of folk material through an autonomous as opposed to a heteronomous process of position-taking in the cultural field. I will revisit a few of these ideas in my Conclusion, where I will ask the question of what the future may hold for Folklore and its relation with and separation from the 'folk' in Taiwan.

²⁸ Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

²⁹ Edward Vickers, "History, Identity, and the Politics of Taiwan's Museums," *China Perspectives*, no. 3, (2010) 92-.

³⁰ Wentsung Den, "Community Empowerment and Heritage Conservation: The Experience of Beitou District in Taipei City, Taiwan," *The Historic Environment* 5.3 (2014): 258-74.

³¹ Joyce Hsiu-yen Yeh, Su-chen Lin, Shu-chuan Lai, Ying-hao Huang, Chen Yi-fong, Yi-tze Lee, and Fikret Berkes, "Taiwanese Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Revitalization: Community Practices and Local Development," *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland: 13 (4), 2021) 1799-.

³² Marzia Varutti, "Polysemic Objects and Partial Translations: Museums and the Interpretation of Indigenous Material Culture in Taiwan," *Museum Anthropology* 37 (2), (2014) 102-17.

³³ Sunitha Janamohanan, "The Serdang Folk Museum and the Performance of Heritage: Community Museums as an Alternative to National Heritage." In Gabriel S., *Making Heritage in Malaysia*, (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2020) 87-117.

Chapter Two: The Complete Anthology of Chinese Folktales

My second chapter aims to explore the contribution made by large-scale folktale collections on cultural revitalization and national re-imagining. *The Anthology of Taiwanese Folktales* (台灣民間故事集 *taiwan minjian gushiji*) is the first and heaviest volume in Chen Qing-hao and Wang Qiu-gui's expansive masterwork of folklore collection *The Complete Anthology of Chinese Folktales* (中國民間故事全集 *zhongguo minjian gushiji*) published in June, 1989 in forty large volumes. These two scholars' collaboration on *The Complete Anthology of Chinese Folktales* amounted to a five-year project, bringing together the contributions and compilations of hundreds of storytellers and scholars from across Taiwan and China. *The Anthology of Taiwanese Folktales* is divided into two sections, one presenting Han (the Chinese ethnic majority including both Hoklo and Hakka) folktales, as well as one containing aboriginal tales, prefaced with a scholarly look at the identities and customs of nine indigenous tribes in Taiwan.

This chapter will also explore the post-war experience of nationalization as it sought to restore unity and healing to a Taiwan oppressed by soft Authoritarianism and undergoing political upheaval in the shape of democratization. Through a 'binding' stratagem based in rediscovered or reinvented folklore, cultural centers and universities in Taiwan began promulgating cultural histories such as this folktale collection that traced Taiwan's diverse ethnic groups back to a singular origin—the island itself. I will explore the methods and rationales by which scholars involved in *The Complete Anthology* project sought to canonize orality: to make the local national, the abstract concrete, the subconscious conscious. I believe this study has important implications for how we view the proliferation and appreciation of the 'folk'—craft, language, story, dance, music—in modern-day Taiwan. Is the issue of aboriginal and minority

representation primarily at stake, or is it something more wide-reaching? My study will make use of the Chinese-language text of the anthology, its foreword and conclusion, research involving the editors and Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd. (遠流出版公司 *yuanliu chuban gongsi*), and will ask the following questions: What role did large-scale folktale collections play as Taiwan sought to claim intellectual and political sovereignty in the cultural field? How were folktale collections removed from the ‘folk’ to whom they are attributed and re-worked into national narratives? Finally, what references are made in these folktales to China, Japan, Dutch colonists and Portuguese explorers, and what is their part in Taiwan’s nationalist narrative?

Historical Context

Given the unprecedented scope of *The Complete Anthology*, one might feel curious as to the reasons for carrying out such a large-scale project from the small island of Taiwan. After all, the five-year period (1985-89) during which this project was completed was fraught with political upheaval and division within Taiwan itself, not to mention constant pressures stemming from the mainland. Chiang Kai-shek, Taiwan’s authoritarian leader at the head of the KMT, still clung to *huaxia* narratives of Chineseness, and his son and successor Chiang Ching-kuo did not lift Martial Law until 1987, the project’s second year. Moreover, up until that time Taiwan had only just begun its journey of ‘Taiwanization’, by which process more and more ethnically Taiwanese elites (residents of Taiwan before 1949 and their descendants) were allowed entrance into the KMT nationalist party. One of the primary effects of Taiwanization was the formation of a rival political party—the first Taiwan had ever seen—called the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), as well as the 1988 succession of Chiang Ching-kuo by Taiwan’s first Taiwan-born president Lee Teng-hui. The DPP and its followers adopted an ideology of ‘Taiwanese nationalism,’ claiming for the first time Taiwan’s sovereign nationhood and the need for

independence from China. By 1994 Lee referred to the KMT as the ‘Taiwan Nationalist Party,’ and by 2000 President Chen Shui-bian asserted that Taiwan was “already independent.”³⁴

Similarly, following their defeat and exile to Taiwan, KMT leaders faced a crisis of how to continue to represent themselves as leaders over China. Isolated on a small island so recently occupied by the Japanese and threatened by rumors of Chinese communist invasion, Taiwan’s leaders and culture-producing intellectuals were forced to search for a new identity rooted in the land they now possessed. This was a land wracked by nearly four hundred years of colonization, warfare and occupation, and it was only natural that its leaders might wish to represent it as the ‘original nation’ it was before the upheaval began, a nation of peace and flourishing. Whether Taiwan was ever truly at peace (intertribal warfare had always been a mainstay on the island) was beside the point: it was necessary to illustrate Taiwan not as factual histories may have shown, but as carefully collected and pre-selected folktales would portray—as a ‘narrative of unfolding.’

Therefore, there are two items worth noting about the political implications for *The Complete Anthology*’s project timeline. First, it is worthwhile to consider that the project was begun in Taiwan and funded by a Taiwanese publishing company during the period of Taiwan’s ‘One China’ KMT rule. Producing a large-scale folklore collection is by nature an exercise in ‘consecration,’ establishing certain stories (as well as the land, people, and values involved therein) as canonized representations of a unified nation. Such a large anthology undoubtedly generated recognition within the academic and literary fields towards which it was aimed, and the names of the editors imbued it with a certain prestige. Second, as the KMT grew more open to Taiwanization and the shared input of native Taiwanese elites, the island was increasingly

³⁴ Melissa Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, 56-64.

placed at the forefront in discussions of KMT rule, until finally it was regarded as its own sovereign nation. After Martial Law was lifted halfway through the project's completion and a native Taiwanese president rose to power, it made more sense to feature Taiwan pre-emptively in Chen and Wang's collection—hence the Taiwan volume's placement at the head of the anthology. It is easy to see therefore why the introduction of a large-scale folktale anthology was not only well-suited to the period of the late 80s in Taiwan, but its production was already 'emergent' within the historical context: that is to say, the collection, as much as it was intentionally imagined by the subjective actors involved in its production, was also born as a natural consequence of the historical moment. There is an inevitability in its context.

The Anthology and Its Editors

Although investors and politicians can apply certain pressures, as far as we know they did not do the grunt work of compiling *The Complete Anthology*. In order to better understand the subjective role in representing the terrain upon which Taiwan built its identity, it is important to know something of the two editors in charge of *The Complete Anthology* project. A graduate of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Chen Qing-hao has authored numerous studies of Chinese textual identity both in the periphery (域外漢文小說大系 *A Series of Chinese Foreign Novels*) and the literary center (新編石頭記脂硯齋評語輯校 *A New Story of the Stone, Zhi Yan-Zhai Ed. with Commentary*). He has collaborated with Wang Qiu-gui on a number of large-scale projects, including this forty-volume collection of Chinese folktales as well as *Legends, Belief and Rituals and Performance, Art and Craftsmanship*. Wang Qiu-gui is himself a titan in the field of Chinese Folk-Art scholarship. A native of Taiwan, Dr. Wang has maintained a prolific career spanning the fields of Foreign Languages, Chinese, History, and Anthropology at National Taiwan University and Tsinghua University, among others. He is well-known for his contributions to the

Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore (民俗曲藝) as well as his numerous publications on Chinese drama and folklore.

Of course, Chen and Wang's are not the only names mentioned in the anthology. Wherever possible, the anthology lists the names of both storyteller and compiler in an effort to elevate and preserve the important individual identities behind these stories. It is also an effort, more critically, to lend authenticity and a 'folksiness' to the collection. After all, Chen and Wang are about as far removed from the humble villages of the pastoral folk depicted within these stories as you can get. What, then, gives Chen and Wang the authority to oversee and produce their folktale collection, seeing as they are not themselves members of the 'folk'? According to Bourdieu, it is their *habitus*, or the socially genetic predisposition manufactured subconsciously within them by a variety of objective social factors—childhood, education, race/ethnicity, socio-economic bracket, etc.—as well as those personal choices (the history of which is nearly untraceable) responsible for directing them towards a career in academia with a major focus on literature and an interest (at least for a time) in folklore. Even as the collection project was both a product of its time *and* an intentionally-imagined endeavor, so too have Chen and Wang both broad and narrow influences to thank for their engagement in it. Moreover, as the individual life trajectories of both Chen and Wang prepared them for their role in the folktale collection project and gave them the capacity and connections to carry it to its completion, to an equal extent would a member of the 'folk' be woefully unequipped to do the same—whatever they possess in authenticity of experience, language, medium, etc., they lack the position required within the literary and academic field to carry it to completion.

The Publisher

Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd. was founded in September 1975 by Wang Rong-wen in Taipei. A small publisher in a market of over 2,000 publishing houses nationwide by the early 1980s, Yuan-Liou quickly made a name for itself and is currently listed as one of the most influential publishers in Taiwan, publishing 300 new titles and 600 republished titles and selling five million copies annually. Wang Rong-wen is listed in Chen and Wang's afterword as having funded much of the project: he prepared an editorial studio for them, helped to collect materials, paid for all editorial costs, and "took care of all our needs and requests."³⁵ It goes without saying that, during the KMT period, the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan exercised strict control over media outlets, including publishing houses. A project as expansive as *The Complete Anthology* would certainly not have remained immune to this control, one consequence being that language and characters stemming from the Taiwanese (Minnan) dialect are largely absent from the Taiwan volume: sometimes translated, sometimes replaced with their phonetic equivalent in Mandarin. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the KMT government was adamant that Mandarin, the language of imperial China and therefore *huaxia*, would replace Taiwanese and Japanese as the standard language of Taiwan. For the island to become united into nationhood, its language must first be standardized and afterwards mystified into folklore, as if it always already existed. As the KMT was new to the island, so the new nation's official language must also be new: Taiwanese was not a suitable fit, as it already carried with it a sentiment of defeat, of effacement before Japanese occupiers, and besides, few in the KMT spoke Taiwanese.

Even as Chen and Wang claim that the tales presented within the anthology "arise from the folk, and return to the people,"³⁶ at the same time neither the editors themselves, the teams of

³⁵Chen and Wang, *Anthology of Taiwanese Folklore*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

scholars tasked with collecting folktales, the medium nor the language in which the collection is presented, nor the institutions involved in its publication and distribution, are associated in any way with the ‘folk.’ Beyond such fantastic discourse as that invoking a ‘mysterious bond’ with Arcadian peoples, simple tribes and folk villages upon whose imagined shoulders their grand opus was built, there exists a reality that the collection is indeed an invention of scholars and academics. The editors and their team belong to academic institutions funded by the bourgeoisie and promoting bourgeois ideals, epistemologies, culture, and social norms. Forty-volume anthologies are likewise the medium of the bourgeois, not that of the folk, who prefer (by Chen and Wang’s own definition) the ‘oral’ medium instead. The assumption that the ‘folk’ are largely illiterate is implied, nixing traditional Chinese characters and standardized Mandarin-dialect grammar and word-choice likewise from the equation of authenticity. Finally, Yuan-Liou is simply another sibling within this family consisting exclusively of bourgeois actors, as are the consumers who can afford to purchase the collection (still available at a discounted \$179.60 USD). The entire heteronomous production process is self-contained.

The Foreword

The foreword to *The Complete Anthology* is a goldmine for tracing the motivations of the editors and those involved in the project. I have recorded over forty examples in the foreword alone that connect folk literature to Taiwan’s national identity. Here I will discuss the most poignant: the title “Arising from the Folk, Returning to the People”³⁷ sets the scene for Chen and Wang to root both timeless, traditional ‘Taiwanese’ as well as the modern Taiwanese identity in the stories their anthology presents. They argue folk literature is created by the “whole collective” and is “best able to reflect the spirit of a people.” They claim “It is humankind’s

³⁷ Ibid., 1.

earliest literature and history,” implying the equal value of their anthology to works of history. Consistent with the heteronomous rending of folklore away from folk communities to be the property of the folklorist and the institution, the editors argue that written script transferred the group project of literature to the individual. Folklore belongs to the common majority, written works to the intellectual few. They lament its disappearance from public education, while arguing that pre-school education *is* folk education. Simultaneously, the editors claim that the classics of Chinese literature—the *Classics of Changes* and *Poetry*, as well as the *Zuo Annals*, *Guoyu*, *Zhanguoce*, and every “legend, story, proverb, etc.” in the pre-Qin philosophical writings of Confucius, Laozi, and others—belong to folk literature, thus consecrating their own collection among previously established canonical works.³⁸ As I go on to explain in detail, this is impossible, as only literate members of the royal court could have written such texts. While these and other Classics in the Chinese tradition claim to tell many stories from outside the court, stories received orally from those who inhabit the ambiguous periphery surrounding the city walls, the literati who wrote them down were restricted to the high language (and more so the strict worldview) of the court. As with Chen and Wang’s collection, the very act of selecting certain tales and the manner in which to tell them, effectively rips these tales from out of the hands of the folk and encases them in a royal mold.

The editors root their anthology in the efforts of the May Fourth Movement, tracing the early history of Folk Studies back to the 1918 founding of the Song and Ballad Research Society which expanded to include folk tales in their 1922 journal publication. Interestingly enough, while the CCP has a long history of editing and crafting folktales during the Cultural Revolution, the only mention of that period is a vague lament that Folk Studies research ended due to “war

³⁸ Ibid., 1-8.

and chaos (戰爭動亂 *zhanzheng dongluan*).” There is no desire here to return to the sullied events of real history. Instead, the high language of a lofty project continues. “Tens of thousands of contributors (成千上萬人所搜集整理 *chengqian shangwanren suosouji zhengli*)”³⁹ (most likely a figure of speech) are said to have combed through seventy years-worth of materials, and “the most representative of each region/people has been chosen (具有代表性、地域性，或民族特色較強 *juyou daibiaoxing, diyuxing, huo minzu tese jiaoqiang*).” “Minority literature (少數民族文學 *shaoshu minzu wenxue*),” namely the stories presented (in Mandarin) in this anthology, is said to have “forged a new heaven and earth (新的創作天地 *xinde chuanguzuo tiandi*)”⁴⁰ for Chinese literature, and in another paragraph the editors claim the civilizations of China’s ethnic minorities are equal to that of the Han (or even superior, as in the case of Tibetan and Mongolian epic poetry). Finally, the foreword ends with an appeal to “the youth (青少年們 *qingshaonianmen*)” of China, hoping to recall nostalgic lullabies to their readers as a branch of folk literature. “We hope that the [young] reader will receive an education as they enjoy these stories,”⁴¹ they conclude.

There is an essentialist quality to the aesthetic value ascribed by the editors to the so-called precedents of their collection that fails to take into account the heteronomous production of those canonical works. Even as the folktale collection is the result of a number of vested interests and historically contextual institutions, so the classics, annals, and epic poems mentioned by Chen and Wang have undergone centuries of institutional re-construction, canonization and re-interpretation, so that, although they ascribe folkloric roots to these literary

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

pillars of East Asian culture, it would be more correct to say that the “classics” never belonged to the folk at all. They are, for one thing, written down, a practice and skill available only to the scribes of the inner elite. This, added to the fact of their acceptance, circulation, and perpetuation through time, speaks to a pedigree very much contained within the secure porticoes of the bourgeoisie. Far from autonomous works of the avant-garde, these classics are part and parcel of the heteronomous self-legitimizing institutions which both produce and employ the academic and literary bourgeoisie.

The Contents

Finally, the contents of *Taiwanese Folktales* lend special consideration to the comparative placing of Taiwan (and other regions) within the broader whole. Each volume (Xinjiang being a notable exception) begins with Han folktales and moves about halfway through to various ethnic minorities from the region. The Taiwan volume lists the nine aboriginal groups recognized at the time, though there are at least sixteen groups recognized today. They are grouped by theme: Mythology; Origin Tales; Local Scenery, Customs, and Specialties; Stories from Everyday Life; Fairy Tales; and Animal Fables. Perhaps the most interesting is a tale of the Saisiyat people (“The Origins of the Mountain and Han Peoples,”⁴²) describing the origin of not only their tribe but also of the Han people (by which is meant the Hoklo Taiwanese descendants of the Han). Both ethnic groups are produced from the same source in this tale, implying that the Hoklo Taiwanese share a common native-ness with aborigines, despite their 17th century migration.

The preceding Han Folktales section omits Mythology and gains a section on Historical and Legendary Figures. Among these noted figures the reader finds Zheng Chenggong, the

⁴² Ibid., 355.

famous Ming loyalist who ended the Dutch colonization of Taiwan and began the mass Hoklo migration, as well as a story concerning Zheng's brother-in-law Yang Gu-ye's massive acquisition of aboriginal land ("Yang Gu-ye Rides to Possess the Land,"⁴³). Other notable motifs include retellings of classic Chinese myths in a Taiwanese context ("How the Ocean Turned Salty,"⁴⁴ "The Snake Prince"⁴⁵ and "The Chinese Zodiac"⁴⁶) as well as landmark tales that link Taiwan's terrain to Zheng Chenggong⁴⁷ and the Taiwanese national identity for which his image continues to stand today.⁴⁸ These stories all serve rather conspicuously to place Taiwan's nationalizing self-narrative within the hallowed archive of myth, simultaneously justifying the violent acquisition of indigenous land and oppression of indigenous peoples coincident with this narrative. Myth, we see, allows for the elision of historical events even as a nation sings its own 'glorious history.'

Examples

Published during the latter years of the KMT-led cultural reconstruction, the Taiwan volume of the collection is a battleground of *huaxia* Chineseness versus blossoming Taiwanese independence. An interesting reflection of Taiwan's structure of feeling during the mid- to late-

⁴³ Zheng Chenggong's brother-in-law arrives in Taiwan from China and asks him for a place to call home. Zheng gives him three days to ride his horse as far as he can, and the land covered in that time becomes Yang's, so that to this day his descendants are all called Yang.

⁴⁴ A child obtains a magic rock that emits salt and is taught the magic words to activate and deactivate the outpour of salt. The rock is stolen by a greedy landlord who sets sail and activates the rock. Unable to deactivate it, he drowns and the ocean turns salty.

⁴⁵ A snake visits a man and asks to marry one of his seven daughters. Six daughters reject the snake but the youngest accepts him. He is immediately turned into a prince, she a princess.

⁴⁶ The Yellow Emperor holds a race between the animals to decide the twelve months of the calendar.

⁴⁷ "Sword Lake" and "Sword Well" are among the examples discussed.

⁴⁸ In Chapter Two of "The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins," Michael Stainton explores the mythification of history that becomes tied to concrete landmarks. Although the past "exists only within our present," these landmarks recall to the Taiwanese mind real events from Taiwan's tumultuous past, inspiring identity and meaning-making from "how [their] own cultural structures and intentionalities lead [them] to represent and interpret it." Regardless of ethnicity, the Taiwanese inhabit a nation of landmarks, fraught with meaning for what they represent to each individual. Michael Stainton, "The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins" in *Taiwan: a New History* / Murray A. Rubinstein, Editor, Expanded edition, (London: Routledge, 2015) 28.

1980's, the two sections on legends surrounding local scenery, customs and products as well as historical and legendary persons provide the very language that interests our inquiry. I begin with “*Jinguashi* (Gold Melon Rock),” a story of the origin behind the name of a northeastern Taiwanese village where gold was discovered in the late 19th century only for the Japanese to take over the mine following annexation. The story begins, “The Taiwanese folk say that a large part of Taiwan province’s riches came at the beginning of the 20th century from the gold mined at Gold Melon Rock.”⁴⁹ That Taiwan is named a province rather than an independent nation shows the influence of the KMT’s ‘One China’ policy dominant throughout the cultural renaissance and reconstruction. “In the last years of the Qing dynasty, during the First Sino-Japanese War, as the Qing army was waning, the foolish Manchurian government signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, humiliating our country China, stripping us of our rights, and cutting Taiwan off to give to the Japanese. . .”⁵⁰ The One China sentiment is strong in this story, calling China “our country” and arguing that Taiwan was ‘cut off’ from China following the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, in which Qing-ruled China ceded “Formosa” to Japan “in perpetuity and full sovereignty.” To summarize, a poor young couple living by Gold Melon Rock discovers one day that the droppings left by their flock of ducks have gold traces in them. They find gold at the bottom of the pond adjacent, and give richly to the community before the Japanese oppressors find them out. The tale ends: “The Japanese Imperial Army faced the resistance of Taiwan’s righteous army, and the Japanese colonists ruled with an iron fist, so that the Taiwanese people struggled to make a living, until the day when the war was won.”⁵¹ The implication that the war “was won” by what the reader assumes is the Taiwanese army, is an obvious cultural

⁴⁹ Chen and Wang, *Anthology of Taiwanese Folktales*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

reconstruction that fails to tell the whole story of who was involved in ‘the war,’ while the “humiliating loss” of Taiwan to Japan resonates post-WWI German discourse and even Putin’s discourse on Ukraine.

Another interesting folktale is titled “Sword Lake,” describing the origins of a well-known station on Taipei’s Metro route, the actual lake having long-since disappeared. As the story goes, Zheng Chenggong and his thirsty army are traveling northward to lay claim to the entire island. Wracked with thirst, Zheng takes his sword and thrusts it, Moses-like, into the ground, whence pours forth a refreshing aquifer forever after. The tale begins, “When towards the end of the Ming dynasty the Minnan people came to settle in this area, and three hundred years ago Koxinga (meaning ‘Lord of the Imperial Surname,’ implying his self-acclaimed right to carry forward the Ming dynastic house) successfully led his troops here and ousted the Dutch who had occupied Taiwan, he developed Taiwan’s southern portion and advanced his troops northward to the north portion of Taiwan.”⁵² This cultural reconstruction labels Koxinga a Washington-esque ‘father’ of Taiwan, ignoring (as many countries including the U.S. have chosen to do) the pre-existence of Taiwan’s indigenous peoples and their coming exploitation at the hands of Ming loyalists and their progeny. Instead, as we have seen with many nation-states, this story chooses to vilify the occupying Dutch as well as the Manchurian outsiders that ruled the Qing dynasty.

Another example is “Parrot Rock,”⁵³ a story about a cursed mountain which oppresses the locals until one day Zheng Chenggong cuts it down to size. The story argues that the Dutch “stole” Taiwan, even though they arrived before Koxinga and his Ming army. Alongside this statement, the tale employs a pioneering or ‘pilgrim’ sentiment to both the Ming army and the

⁵² Ibid., 33.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

parts of Taiwan not yet developed. It argues that “the people’s hero Koxinga Zheng Chenggong commanded 25,000 troops, crossing the fierce winds and treacherous waves of the Taiwan strait, and overwhelming the Dutch invaders.”⁵⁴ In reference to Parrot Rock, its development is excused by the description: “Parrot Rock was a barren wasteland, yet a perfect hub connecting the north to the south of the island.” Wasteland, invaders, fierce and treacherous winds: these words construct a pioneering structure of feeling that legitimizes Taiwan’s current Han-ethnic occupiers.

A similar story is “Sword Well,”⁵⁵ which like Sword Lake is created (in the mystified pseudo-reality of folktales) as a result of Koxinga driving his mighty sword into the ground, allegorically claiming the land as both traditionally Chinese (loyal to Ming *huaxia*) and proto-Taiwanese. Part of the story reads,

After the hero of the people (tribes) Zheng Chenggong recovered Tainan (from the Dutch occupiers), the mountain tribe ‘compatriots’ who had believed the lies of the Dutch missionaries thought that Zheng Chenggong had come to occupy the land and strip its natural treasures. But when the mountain tribe compatriots heard of his heroic deeds, everyone said that Koxinga was a righteous teacher, and he received the help of Heaven, and every village selected a virtuous elder to invite Koxinga’s ‘heavenly soldiers and generals’ to the village to be their honored guests. Then Zheng Chenggong delegated soldiers to accompany the mountain compatriots back to their village, and teach them how to plow and plant. Then he led the great army under the direction of the mountain compatriot elders, and advanced northward to Keelung.⁵⁶

Though it is acknowledged that the indigenous peoples were not totally enamored with the idea of a new foreign occupier, their resistance is conveniently elided as a misguided trust in the lies of the true oppressors, the Dutch, that evaporates just as quickly into well-warranted trust in Koxinga and his troops. From the never-absent qualifier ‘compatriots,’ to the implication that indigenous peoples had somehow survived for thousands of years without basic agricultural

⁵⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

knowledge, this tale of nationalization, like so many similar national origin tales in the West, completely omits the oppression, massacre, and assimilation of indigenous peoples existing at the heart of the nation's founding.

A final story that explains Taiwan's 'righteous' seizure by Koxinga and the Ming loyalists, thereafter perpetuating a traditionalist vein of cultural consciousness in the minds of its government and citizens, is the aforementioned "Uncle Yang Rides his Horse and Receives Land." This story concerns Koxinga's uncle, to whom it was said he would give as much territory as Yang could ride across over the span of three days. Eliding any indigenous right to this occupied land, the tale reads: "In the age of Ming and Zheng (Chenggong), the stretch of land called 'Uncle Prefecture,' belonged to those areas of this province (Taiwan) which were yet to be developed."⁵⁷ Then, in the closing lines, "To this day, the inhabitants of Uncle Prefecture are all surnamed Yang, and moreover, they are all descendants of Uncle Yang."⁵⁸ Names play a powerful role in this tale, not only in the claiming of land, nor the claiming of a time period (the age of 'Ming Zheng') in the nation's history, but more importantly for their ability to lay claim to a whole prefecture of people who, whether or not they are actually descended from this personage, are bound to the nation's manufactured folk hero through the KMT's heteronomous writing of culture.

The Afterword

As I conclude, it will be helpful to outline a few key phrases from Chen and Wang's afterword, in which they list various challenges and takeaways from the project. The first challenge they list has to do with a surplus/shortage of collected folktales in specific regions. While it seems Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang had a surplus of stories, causing the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52.

editors to undertake a vigorous selection process, Jiangxi, Shanxi, Heilongjiang, and Qinghai produced a noticeable shortage of material. In certain cases (Xinjiang, Tibet, Gansu, etc.) the province yielded more minority material than Han, and in others—such as tribes from the northwest and southwest regions—there existed no minority folktale collections at all. In the case of surplus, it then became the prerogative of the editors to determine the “most representative” tales of that region, defining the land and its people through a selectively mythic rather than impartial or historic lens. In the case of shortage, the editors were then obliged to a) pay particular attention to certain tales, increasing the possibility of embellishment; or b) associate generalized tales such as the Twelve Zodiac Animals with that region, giving voice where none was being offered.⁵⁹ This is most apparent in aboriginal tales, where the name of a tribe is not given—the tale is assigned to a tribe or to a generalized group (Taiwan’s ‘Mountain People’). Thus, we can see how the ‘scientific’ approach to folklore collection is very often complicated by translation and selective processes—it is in most cases a discursive rather than a reflective study, a purposeful collage rather than an indexical photograph.

That said, Chen and Wang wish to leave their readers with two main points. First, “We hope that compilers will approach their work scientifically, without considerations of artistic creation, moral education, or ideological propagandizing.”⁶⁰ One cannot help but read this last part as a critique of the Marxist re-writing of folktales by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, however, Chen and Wang fail to acknowledge the highly discursive and politicized underpinnings of their own collection. Second, “Our country is made up of a plurality of ethnicities. ‘The Chinese Nation’ (*Zhonghua*, popularized during the May Fourth Movement as a name for China replacing the Japanese ‘Shina’) is made

⁵⁹ Ibid., I-IV.

⁶⁰ Ibid., III.

up of 56 known ethnic groups.’⁶¹ This last quote is loaded for several reasons. Through the use of the number 56, the Han majority is included, on equal standing with minority ethnic groups. Moreover, 56 includes the Taiwanese *gaoshanzu* (高山族 Tall Mountain Peoples) without breaking these down further into nine or sixteen distinct groups. Nor is there any mention of Taiwan’s Plains aborigines (the common distinction from mountain aborigines) in this list. Finally, neither Hakka nor Hoklo (the ‘native Taiwanese’ immigrants from Guangdong and Fujian respectively) are included, with the implication that they are both Han. It seems that, while *The Complete Anthology* project foregrounds Taiwan and China’s ethnic minorities in a revolutionary assertion of Taiwanese identity, their use of traditional ethnic classifiers still serves to downplay and essentialize the subjective identities of non-bourgeois groups within Taiwan. While Han stories are foregrounded, and vague tales of the ‘mountain people’ provide aboriginal foundation upon which to build the Han-dominated nation, little space is given to a clear rendering of Taiwan’s many separate identities. This serves to show that unity, not diversity, is the main object of Chen and Wang’s collection, and the text is very much representative of the cultural reconstruction era in Taiwan.

To summarize, Chen and Wang’s folktale collection project is the heteronomous product of self-legitimizing institutions that sought a dominant position within the field of cultural production in Taiwan’s 1980s literary and academic scene. These institutions endeavored to achieve consecration of their work/legacy, recognition by other actors within the field, and prestige. They partnered with the KMT government to present a *huaxia* version of Taiwanese-ness that bridged the gap between Chinese traditionalism and a young island nation. Such institutions also wished to legitimize the nationhood of Taiwan by couching it within the

⁶¹ Ibid., III.

mytho-historical cocoon of oral tradition. They did this by re-imagining and re-making folk productions into artistic works entirely removed from the folk and processed within modes of production belonging to the bourgeoisie. This collection could not have been rendered by any authentic member of the folk, as it is not connected to them in any material sense, and thus required individual actors possessed of the proper habitus which enabled them to produce it. Finally, the canonized precedents of this folktale collection (the classics, epic poems, etc.) were produced by and belonged to bourgeois actors and institutions homologous to the ones active in this collection's production—they were not at any time of their production attributable to the 'folk.'

Chapter Three: The Taiwan Folk Arts Museum

Hidden amid the timeless mountain scenes of Beitou, a district connecting busy Taipei to the more serene Yangmingshan National Park, the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum takes its place between hot spring spas and souvenir shops—a bastion of cultural preservation. In his ‘Founder’s Statement’ available on the museum’s website, Mr. Suming Chang describes his “occasional”⁶² visit to the two-story relic of Japanese architecture off Youya road halfway up the mountain. Originally constructed in 1921 by the Japanese as the luxurious Kazan Hot Springs Hotel, the building has seen various renovations and repurposing as an Imperial Japanese and later a KMT army barracks, a filming location named Guyue Villa during the 50s and 60s of Taiwan’s ‘Hollywood’ phase, and Mr. Chang’s initial 1983 venture: the Taiwan Folk Art and Antique House. Following a generous endowment administered through Taiwan’s Ministry of Education by means of the Fu Lu Culture and Education Foundation established in 1995, the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum also fostered intimate ties with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of the Interior, receiving awards for both its promotion of heritage and preservation of historical architecture. The museum houses 4,000 examples of Taiwanese folk-craft and 1,000 indigenous artifacts in its permanent collection, and it cycles through visiting exhibitions as diverse as *The Sincerity of Master Design: Special Exhibition of Zohiko Kyoto-Style Maki-E Lacquerware* and *Depicting an Innovative Era: Modern Taiwan in Splendid Paintings*.

As the focus of my third chapter, the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum will allow for perhaps the most clear and classically-defined study into how academic and government institutions such as museums can re-imagine the ‘folk’ for purposes of cultural revitalization and community and

⁶² 台灣民間文化藝術：北投文物館的內在采風 *Taiwan Min Jian Wen Hua Yi Shu : Beitou Wen Wu Guan de Nei Zai Cai Feng = Formosan Folkways : A Guide to the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum* (Taipei Shi: Fu lu wen jiao ji jin hui, 2000).

national solidarity. In the mission statement for the Fu Lu Culture and Education Foundation, six primary objectives are listed for the preservation and promotion of Taiwanese Cultural Identity: the 1) conservation of cultural heritage, 2) maintenance of historical buildings, 3) promotion of traditional art, 4) preservation of folk artifacts, 5) rewarding and cultivating of talented artists, and 6) technological innovation. Already we find a mixture of past and future, of preservation and promotion, with an emphasis on preparing up-and-coming artists and innovators to continue a legacy of hand-picked material objects and the cultural classifications said objects are intended to define. The museum's six operating aims are similarly directed, with the interesting additions of research and interpretation, education and promotion, and business and industry, this last covering the museum's sale of cultural experience and the artifact-as-souvenir.

Additionally, attention should be paid to the ways in which museums frame folk and indigenous experience through their exhibitions. Three examples stand out from the rest: 1) *Centennial Stories: The Life History of Beitou Elders*; 2) *We, Austro-Family: A Special Exhibition of Oceanic Art and Culture*; and 3) *The Sincerity of Master Design: Special Exhibition of Zohiko Kyoto-Style Maki-E Lacquerware*. These three special exhibitions are housed within the same Taiwan Folk Art and Antique House, yet they treat three distinct cultural communities: the Hoklo/Hakka elders of Beitou, the Austronesian Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan, and local-style pottery masters from Kyoto. These exhibits are a testament not only to the complexity of the Taiwanese experience, but to the desire for Taiwan's knowledge-producing institutions to cover a wide array of groups and experiences under a Taiwanese umbrella. Finally, we cannot ignore the pervasiveness of Japanese cultural identity spanning the architecture, exhibitions, and institutional objectives of the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum. The

museum's website⁶³ is filled to the brim with detailed pages listing the various Japanese influences in the building's architecture, from the Ohiroma (Grand Room) to the Furo Bath and the Shoyintsukuri (living room), even including an in-depth history of the Kamakura Bakufu architecture style in 12th century Japan. This, combined with an array of Japanese cultural experiences such as Sado (Japanese tea ceremony) and Wakashi (Japanese desserts) showcase a feeling of pride both in the Japanese heritage of Beitou, as well as the colonial heritage of the whole island. Far from postcolonial rejections of an oppressive past, it is interesting to note how the Taiwan Folk Arts museum subsumes Japanese-ness into its multi-ethnic, poly-historical understanding of Taiwanese-ness. It is as if, under the process of Taiwanization, the Taiwanese scholar looks to expansive, rather than diminutive, definitions of 'folk,' infusing Taiwan's own native imagination with a tinge of cosmopolitanism.

Taiwan's Ethnic Groups

Before I look more closely into the political 'folk' framings of the Folk Arts Museum, it is important first to establish the distribution of Taiwan's four major ethnic groups at the time, and their implications for Taiwanese identity shifts in the late 80s and throughout the 90s:

The official classification system divides Taiwan's population into four major ethnic groups—2% Aboriginal, 72% Hoklo, 13% Hakka, and 13% 'Mainlanders'. Taiwanese Aborigines share linguistic and genetic traits with Austronesian groups in Southeast Asia and Oceania. The other three groups are all of Chinese descent: the Hoklo is the most populous linguistic group of Taiwan; their ancestors migrated from Fujian province of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Hakka are descendants of the Hakka-speaking group who migrated from Guangdong and Fujian after the eighteenth century. The name 'Mainlanders' refers to those who emigrated from China after 1945 as well as their offspring. The existence of the Austronesian indigenous people, whose linguistic characters are distinct from those of the Chinese majority, has been deployed in Taiwan nationalist writings (e.g. Su, 1980) as justification for a non-Chinese national identity.⁶⁴

⁶³ "Beitou Wenwuguan" 北投文物館, website, accessed May 1, 2022. <https://beitoumuseum.org.tw/intro/history?hl=en-us>.

⁶⁴ Hsin-Yi Lu, "'Children's Dreamland': Constructing National Identity through a Children's Festival in Post-Authoritarian Taiwan," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 9 (4): 271–85, 2011.

The time of arrival to Taiwan for each of these four major ethnic groups is of course an important factor in their distinction, or not, as ‘folk’ cultures, though not so simply as one might think. As I hope to point out over the course of this chapter, the so-called ‘pre-eminence’ of one or another group in an area did not directly argue their perceived Taiwanese-ness, regardless of their closeness to nature and soil or even the ‘folksiness’ of their material arts.

And finally to offer some political context for the museum’s founding and initial operation: “In the 1990s, Taiwan began to move away from the Chinese identity that had been forced on the island’s people by the Kuomintang and to embrace its own identity, a blend of Austronesian and Chinese cultures shaped by the colonial rulers from the Netherlands, Spain, Japan and China.”⁶⁵

Because of only around six years difference between the *Complete Collection of Chinese Folktales* (completed in 1989) and the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum (opened in 1995), the differences we already see in folk portrayals of Taiwan, who the ‘folk’ are and where their roots are laid, as well as a number of other interesting differences we will see, set these two products of the Taiwanese culture industry very much at odds with one another. The importance of the ‘folk’ to nationalizing projects is never made more clear than in the crosshairs of such minute yet powerful institutional inconsistencies.

Beitou Folk Arts Museum Publication

While it would be interesting to conduct interviews with the museum’s managers and docents, and to tour the buildings and collections, fortunately for us there already exists an in-depth analysis of the collections as well as the museum’s own discursive understanding of the role their collections play in preserving and promoting Taiwanese culture. *Formosan Folkways: A Guide to the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum* was published in 2000 by SMC Publishing, Inc. in

⁶⁵ Hsin-Yi Lu, “Children’s Dreamland,” 2011.

cooperation with the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum in Beitou. This published collection of artifacts and exhibits available at the museum provides fascinating insights not only into the museum's various collections, but more importantly allows the reader a window into the museum's underlying mission and interpretation of the 'folk' both past and present, as well as the heteronomous process through which the folk becomes commodified as an object of bourgeois gazing within the museum doors. In this chapter I undertake to explain how the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum in Beitou exhibits and perpetuates the four pillars of Taiwan's nationalizing mission: a shared past, shared social practice, shared cultural renaissance, and shared cultural reconstruction. The publication contains both traditional Chinese and English translations.

In the short preface to the publication, the founder Sumi Chang underscores a "worldwide trend towards emphasizing local culture, [and] understanding the history of one's homeland" as one of the major inspirations behind founding the museum. "People want to acquire more knowledge and increase the amount of culture in their lives," writes Chang, arguing that "social conditions of the past are reflected" from the "diversity, vitality and feelings of familiarity of Taiwan's folk cultural objects."⁶⁶ This introductory statement highlights the role of cultural centers in defining Taiwanese folk culture for the education of its citizens, and less conspicuously in writing descriptions of 'diversity, vitality and familiarity' onto the material objects it chooses to put on display. Chang continues with the founder's mission statement: "To be able to systematically collect and exhibit cultural artifacts related to Taiwan's early and folk history, and to allow people to peer into the lives and experience the pioneering spirit of Taiwan's early inhabitants, are ideals I have held for many years."⁶⁷ The distinction 'early' is a nod to aboriginal cultural artifacts from which Taiwan's culture industry derives that mystified

⁶⁶ *Formosan Folkways*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

primordial sentiment, while ‘folk history’ places the folk on a timeline in Taiwan’s inevitable nationalist history, as the ‘pioneers’ who built the foundations of the nation-state. In this linear historical sense, the ‘early’ or indigenous inhabitants are considered inseparable from the land, susceptible to occupation and exploitation without any more moral consequence than that of occupying empty land. ‘Folk history’ comes next, acting as a kind of interim history that occupies and prepares the native land (almost like a construction team), clearing it of its indigenous population through a celebrated ‘pioneering’ effort that has all the personality of a bulldozer and reducing the experiences of the ‘folk’ to their construction-developmental function in building the modern nation-state. “[The museum] has strive[n] to promote education regarding Taiwan's history, and to spread awareness and understanding of Taiwan's past, so that people here will come to cherish their homeland.”⁶⁸ This last is an interesting addition, as it reveals the transition from KMT-led to Taiwan Independence-led discourse on Taiwanese identity. Nowhere in the preface is China or Chinese culture mentioned, and history, the past, and homeland are all meant to be understood as occurring in and for the nation of Taiwan. For Taiwan to become the ‘homeland,’ previous KMT notions of *huaxia* are then replaced by a Taiwan-centered nationalism.

The World of Folk Customs—Introducing the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum

The introduction to this publication is rich with descriptions of Taiwan’s nationalized past, present, and future. As I have mentioned, there is a deep connection to previous Japanese occupiers, as the first picture in the publication is one of kamikaze pilots inhabiting the grounds of the museum, and the first painting featured is of the seven Japanese lucky spirits. This Japanese connection is less of a longing for Taiwan’s period of annexation by Japan, but

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

functions rather to disconnect a now more independent-minded Taiwan from China and the *huaxia* Chineseness its previous government worked so hard to create. Rather than being the true inheritors of a Ming dynasty Chinese traditionalism, a Taiwan with a Japanese past becomes then a perpetually colonized nation, never having belonged to China, the Portuguese, the Dutch, Japan, or even the KMT, but instead colonized for a little while, its true essence and Taiwanese identity preserved beneath the surface. Instead of transferring culture over from one area to the next, this colonized nationalism is an appeal to the land itself and makes much of those (Aboriginal, Hoklo, Hakka) who survived for long periods of time on the land and wove their identity into it.

From the very beginning we find the phrase “After the reorganization of the Taiwan Provincial Government (自台灣省改組後). . .”⁶⁹ This is a reference to the functional, economic and organizational adjustment of the Taiwan Provincial Government, that is, the elimination of the provincial status of Taiwan, usually referred to as ‘Freezing the Province.’ It came as a provision of the Republic of China government in accordance with Article 9, Paragraph 3 of the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of China. Policies were enacted in 1998 for Taiwan to remove the status of "local self-governing body" (similar to China’s ‘autonomous regions’), and to downsize and reorganize the Taiwan Provincial Government into an agency dispatched by the Executive Yuan of the Republic of China. Thus we see a noticeable shift in nationalist sentiment, from one republic of China to a more independent Taiwan, enacted by policy and scaffolded by the culture industry. In 1998 the museum received the distinction of ‘city monument,’ thereby reinforcing these efforts.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

The introduction echoes Sumi Chang in the museum's mission to (my translation from the Chinese section, which is interestingly slightly more passionate and detailed than the English section) "help our nation's people (*guoren* 'nation people') understand Taiwanese culture and care for our land."⁷⁰ Wherever the publication directly addresses the Taiwanese people (by using Mandarin), it seeks to inject a measure of pathos into its narrative, building nationalist sentiment from within. Wherever it addresses English-speaking foreigners, the publication does so with a formalistic and scientific tone, seeking to establish international legitimacy through the shared language of the academy. In Chinese, we see descriptions of a pioneering effort, "coming with a firewood cart and tattered clothes (a Chinese idiom describing hard times)." The publication argues that "education about the land takes as its mission the dissemination of folk arts and the dissemination of every research publication of the museum of cultural artifacts," underscoring the institution's role in 'writing' culture for mass consumption, this publication being a prime example. This publication "reveals completely the simple hopes/prayers of the folk as they approached life," using descriptions of the pure and 'infant-like' motives of the folk as a metonym for the infant nation, full of proto-nationalist hope and pure in motive. It describes the "cultural capital (*zichan*, capital) which the ancestors have left to us," simultaneously claiming an appropriated ancestry from indigenous/hoklo/hakka people and commodifying their culture for use in a neoliberal society. Finally, it claims to unveil "the lifestyles and particulars of the first peoples (*xianmin*),"⁷¹ offering to rewrite indigenous culture as a kind of unveiling project to which only the museum has access.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁷¹ Ibid., 10.

The introduction makes an appeal to “those patrons who make a hobby of and cherish folk art,” and promises to “recall the memories of the folk long sequestered by dust and time.”⁷² Folk art is therefore reduced, not only to a commodity for passersby, but even to a hobby for the twice-removed spectator to relish. Anderson’s point on the nationalizing effects of shared capital holds merit here: the spectator and hobbyist exchange capital with the cultural center in order to view a cultural commodity that the museum (in its capacity as the cultural arm of the government) has taken and re-written into a medium of nationalistic storytelling. Throughout this cycle it is capital, not culture, which connects the actors to one another, which researches and writes and buys and sells culture in a continuous cycle. If the museum were to close today and all its research documents burn up together, and only its artifacts remain, there would still be no difficulty under this system for a new museum of a new government to collect the artifacts fifty or five-hundred years later, write a new culture into them, and sell this culture to paying customers. The questions remain then: is the artifact itself necessary? What about the materiality of artifacts causes cultural centers like museums to create stories about them? What about their materiality attracts paying spectators to view them as inherently possessing and producing ‘culture’? In a secular, capital-driven society, where religion is (according to Gellner) replaced by nation, and culture becomes the spiritual driving force of nationalism, such artifacts are transformed into relics, totems, sacred objects to be viewed but never touched. They emanate cultural power in place of religious power, and speak of the birth of the nation rather than the birth of God. The patron of the museum is the parishioner of this new church, showing devotion to the nation through tithes and reverence. “When folk cultural relics reappear in modern times

⁷² Ibid., 11.

with the lived wisdom of old ancestors, it means that the vitality of folk culture is endless.”

Glory be to the folk.

Finally, the introduction ends with a rousing call to action: “We hope that folk culture, which belongs to everybody, will because of this museum continue to live on forever,”⁷³ and in English, “In this way we can do our part to connect the past, present and future.” Cultures come and go, civilizations are renewed and made obsolete, and yet nationalism provides a staying power that connects past, present and future. This is because nationalism argues for a kind of ‘destiny’ inherent to its civilizing mission. Taiwan’s first peoples may have been slaughtered and assimilated into Han ethnic culture, but through nationalism their lives are viewed, not as any kind of foreign obstacle, but rather as an integral component of Taiwan’s nationhood. Their primordial histories are re-written, their ancient enemies made friends, their suffering and eradication given purpose, in order to further the narrative of a Taiwanese destiny. Even the ‘evil’ Japanese and the Dutch occupiers are given a role, for the tales and artifacts of the museum would be nothing if not for them. In nationalist rhetoric all is reduced either to lamentable deprivation or glorious restoration, to a nation raped and rebuilt, its land and its people perpetually expendable in the nation’s timeless cycle of gain and loss, wounding and healing. In this sense the Taiwanese-independence version of nation was never truly ‘born,’ but is understood to have always lived under the feet of several different tribes of human occupiers. While the KMT grafted their timeless *huaxia* nationhood onto what in their minds was a sterile land made pregnant with nationalism, the Taiwan independence movement (perhaps echoing other nationalisms which have appropriated indigeneity into themselves, like the U.S.) understood Taiwan as the always-already nation. The name ‘Formosa’ (Beautiful), given by

⁷³ Ibid., 11.

Portuguese explorers to the island is a perfect example: the Portuguese were rejected, labeled evil occupiers, and ousted—the name was kept, and not only kept, but celebrated as if it always existed.

Beauty and Love in the Realm of Folk Culture

The publication's first chapter is dedicated to the Hoklo and Hakka immigrants to Taiwan in the 17th century from different regions of Fujian province in China. Strangely enough, it also invokes Eros as its muse. "If built on the feelings and love that exist between people, the springtime of Taiwan's folk culture will be beautiful and abundant for eternity. . ."⁷⁴ Before abandoning the publication's authors to their betelnut-induced euphoria, let us endeavor to understand yet another folk allegory presented here. Expositions on a bridal palanquin argue its symbolism for the basic ties that bind all Taiwanese society in a "sweet destiny" and links together clans across the island as a kind of bridge that allows "nations" and "peoples" to continue on in perpetuity. "The social, cultural and ritual customs which surround courtship and marriage, and the related material artifacts, makes love perhaps the most obvious example of the way in which individuals' feelings, and the collective consciousness, emotions, ideas and needs of people begin the process of constructing a culture."⁷⁵ Apart from the obvious temptation for every single capitalistic and political venture in the modern era to invoke Love as part of their money-making mission, it is interesting to note the invocation of 'collective consciousness' key to Taiwan's cultural renaissance movement, as well as a structure of feeling, as the publication argues a connection that culture-centered nationalism provides, not only between past customs and present, but as an interpellated network uniting all of Taiwan. By linking national cultural solidarity to the material objectivity of the bridal palanquin, an object unused by most of

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

Taiwan's previous, current and future inhabitants, the museum effectively overwrites those cultures with its own invented cultural tradition and binds them itself into forced union. The bridal palanquin indeed does act as a cultural bridge in the sense that, after all other bridges were either destroyed or hidden by nationalist destiny, the museum has built this one bridge for the Taiwanese people to gather around. The palanquin is no longer representative of the few wealthy families who used it: it is now representative of the entire nation, past and present, and every citizen, immigrant, and refugee that dwells within its invented borders.

The chapter argues that 'folk customs' preceded social and religious practices, and that folk artifacts were an important part of these cultural practices. This is a bold statement, just vague enough to be unverifiable (part of Chun's 'mystification' process of couching nationalism in primordial originality), and yet it reveals two important understandings regarding the potency of the 'folk' label in nationalist discourse. One, while it has been said that folklore replaces religion in Taiwan's nationalism, it is interesting that folk is presented as a precedent of social practice, of society, itself. One might argue the impossibility of this statement, seeing as folk culture is a product of social interaction within communities, but I offer that this publication is arguing for a preeminent quality of 'Taiwanese-ness' that existed organically within individuals (due to their proximity to and reliance upon the island's soil) and informed their culturally unique style of interacting socially with one another. It is the soil of the nation, nationalism in its most reduced state, that predicates all else, whether culture, society, religion, etc. Writes the authors:

An investigation of the historical development of Taiwan can provide an understanding of the underlying social and cultural background, much of which originates among the 閩 Min (Fujian) and 粵 Yue (Cantonese) cultures of Southern China. . . It is also due to the variety of cultural backgrounds and social statuses of the immigrant groups (notice that they are considered immigrants even before Taiwan is considered a nation where one can immigrate to), to say nothing of the cultures of the indigenous people (yes, they

did say nothing), the interactions between these various cultures, and the varied experiences during the course of colonization (colonization is a common theme in defending independent nationhood of Taiwan: always colonized, never founded, until nationalism came along). This historical process was like the waters of rivers and streams from widely divergent sources all flowing into the sea of Taiwan's collective culture.⁷⁶

All cultures and peoples, including indigenous peoples, are compared to rivers flowing 'into' (but not already existing within) Taiwan's folk culture. As I have already mentioned, this implies a core Taiwanese-ness linked to national primordiality, inevitability, and destiny. Even though Taiwan's nationhood came long after these peoples, and is still hotly contested today and remains unacknowledged by most other nations, yet it predates all else, contains all else, and rewrites all else into a new cultural collectivity. Part of this belongs to the word 'history,' implying a written history of Taiwan, which was not provided (except perhaps by Japan) until the KMT, then later revised by Su Beng and the independence movement in 1980. It is often said that history is written by the victors; I offer an extension to the accepted rule, that history is written by those who write it. In other words, the cultural history of Taiwan is defined purely by the government cultural centers tasked and funded with its writing. Defined, and created, and perpetuated, and disseminated, and ultimately bought and sold.

Next, we enter into dangerous territory: a discussion of Taiwanese Hoklo/Hakka folk culture in relation to its 'roots' in Mainland China. Keep in mind that this is no longer a KMT-ruled Taiwan, and that One China policies no longer hold as much weight:

The few hundred years of Taiwan's sinicised culture cannot be divorced from the larger picture of those folk practices developed in Mainland China over the preceding millennia, [nor] can it be treated as the same. The unique historical, economic and social conditions as well as the climatic and geographic, have given rise to a separate and distinctive Taiwanese culture which has, of course, a material culture with its own special, distinguishing features.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 23.

This is perhaps the clearest statement of Taiwanese independence in the entire publication: Taiwan is described as having a history, economics, social conditions, climate and geography all distinct from Mainland China. The uniqueness of these five factors combined, not any one factor in itself, is what makes Taiwanese culture “separate and distinctive.” Apart from climate, the remaining four factors are all within the culture-writing power of the Taiwanese government, which through a heteronomous process re-writes Taiwan’s history, economy, society and even geography with a Taiwan-Independence bias. The authors point to material culture as visible proof of this difference, describing its features as special and distinctive, eliding the fact that it is the museum and its researchers that select, describe, and give meaning to each of these artifacts of material culture. The ‘folk’ have no more a hand in defining how unique or otherwise their previous property may be than China itself, whose government undoubtedly has funded research institutions to label these artifacts as entirely consistent with and belonging to Chinese folk culture. Moreover, by calling Taiwan’s folk culture a ‘sinicized’ culture, it is implied that an originally purely Taiwanese culture rooted in soil and national essence was then acted upon from outside, much in the same way Japan or the Netherlands acted upon it. This is worth noting, as the Hoklo/Hakka people who immigrated to and stayed within Taiwan are perceived as having ‘sinicized’ or acted upon Taiwan’s culture, but in no way founding or originating it, just as, like I have already pointed out, Taiwan’s aboriginal people also ‘acted upon’ but did not originate the island’s culture.

Even Confucianism, to the true essence of which the KMT laid claim, is in this chapter presented as only one of many cultural examples. “Unlike Chinese classical, school-learnt art with its strict rules and practices, folk art has no prerequisite colors, no adherence to correct anatomical proportions and a more relaxed approach to concepts such as perspective. Instead it

relies on imagination, the association of ideas and expression of popular feelings.”⁷⁸ This is an important rift in Taiwanese identity away from *huaxia* Chineseness and towards a folk identity tied to the land. The argument is that folk art is free of rules, which at its root is saying nothing more than that, while each of Taiwan’s individual cultures certainly do maintain artistic norms (re: Atayal people of northeastern Taiwan), folk art is all-encompassing and ambiguously defined. It holds within it an interminable potential for labeling any and all artifacts presented in the museum as ‘folk art,’ and more than that, for labeling them ‘Taiwanese folk art.’

Speaking of the artifacts featured in the publication, “The majority of these products were made by artisans from within the community, not imported from outside, nor made by artists distanced from their roots.”⁷⁹ ‘Roots’ and ‘outside’ take on a different meaning in the Taiwanese-independence context, as now ‘outside’ refers to China and ‘roots’ refers to Taiwan, whereas ten years ago the opposite may have been stated. Even though the Min and Yue cultures were transplants, Taiwan is still considered the source of their roots. And again, “Folk arts are rooted in nature and the needs of the people's lives.” There is a cultural power understood to exist within the Taiwanese soil, connected to the people through the timeless necessity to exploit nature for human survival and flourishing. More than that, the connection to nature serves the function of highlighting folk art’s “simplicity and unpretentiousness,” furthering the ‘infant’ allegory of the nation. “The rough and unembellished styles of this early period symbolize the ‘earthiness’ of the settlers’ lives as they labored to bring these frontier lands under cultivation.”⁸⁰ Not only does the proposed relationship between folk art and nature serve to connect certain settlers coming to Taiwan from outside to the land which according to Taiwanese nationalism it

⁷⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 27.

was their destiny to inhabit, it also makes the land a kind of frontier, shifting the gaze outward from China towards Taiwan while lauding their pioneering efforts. Thus we see an othering of Taiwan inherent in Taiwanese nationalist discourse, which in the same breath calls it both the inviolate motherland and an intractable wasteland in need of pioneering cultivation.

Taiwan Aboriginal Culture

The publication's third chapter seeks to position Taiwan's aboriginal peoples within a nationalistic frame of reference. The chapter begins with a re-creation in traditional European cartographic style of Taiwan's traditional 'Formosa' map with the nine aboriginal tribes, branch tribes, and places listed with tribal names.⁸¹ The map shows a shifting emphasis of national roots now placed on aboriginal peoples with whom the very idea of 'Taiwan' had nothing to do. "If we wish to understand the cultural complexity that exists in Taiwan, we must also consider the contribution made by the numerous aboriginal tribes who arrived in Taiwan much earlier, perhaps thousands of years ago..."⁸² argues the text. Indigenous peoples are made to bear the torch for an identity—the Formosan identity—originated by Portuguese explorers as a name for the entire island. To these First Peoples, the island did not exist. There were no maps to position it in a global context, to even delineate the island's borders, and the territorial separation between Taiwan's tribes was porous and shifting.

The aboriginal conception of Taiwan was something much closer to Gayatri Spivak's notion of 'planetarity' in her book *Death of a Discipline*. Spivak says at the end of her book, "The planetarity of which I have been speaking in these passages is perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet."⁸³ In his work entitled *Pre-Capitalist Economic*

⁸¹ Ibid., 118-119.

⁸² Ibid., 121.

⁸³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Formations,⁸⁴ Karl Marx defines such precapitalist cultures using designations like “tribal communities,” “kinship,” “agriculturalists,” and “common property” as opposed to “private ownership.” These terms are important in order to achieve an understanding of Spivak’s idea of planetarity, one in which the Earth has not yet become criss-crossed by lines signifying epistemological ownership, but rather the de-rationalized autochthone whose very vastness once terrified and exalted the mind. In this society of ‘pre-ownership,’ one might feel free to let go of previously perceived categories of gender, class and *ethnikos*, each an ultimate product of the violent “grabbing” of the infant’s mind which Spivak says originates our primal need to classify.

In true colonial fashion, the publication describes the section of Aboriginal exhibits at the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum as “the boarding point for [the museum-goer’s] voyage.”⁸⁵ Included in the exhibits are Japanese as well as Chinese reference works documenting the various customs, dress, diet, religions, and ceremonies of anywhere between seven and ten tribes. Black and white photographs of aboriginals lend an antiquity and authenticity to the exhibit and, more importantly, to the nationalizing role that these individuals—long dead—have been made to play. ‘First contact’ is a hegemonic storytelling device key to colonizers employed by the nation, from Columbus to Neil Armstrong. Like the naturalist’s excitement at discovering a new species—and the discursive conviction afforded her by the Royal Academy to be able to give that species the name of her choice—so do nations claim it their prerogative to be able to establish contact with and thereafter discourse upon native peoples. As the lunar soil received the sharpened point of the flag-pole that first claimed the moon for America, so ‘first contact’ discourse is understood in terms of a grand reception—natives as soil and colonizers as gun-sharpened flag-pole. Edward

⁸⁴ Karl Marx and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, Translated by Jack Cohen, Edited and with an Introd. by E. J. Hobsbawm*, [1st U.S. ed.] (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

⁸⁵ *Formosan Folkways*, 123.

Said's *Orientalism* is helpful in understanding this self-justifying rhetoric in terms of the feminization of the colonized land and its people: a 'barren' wasteland, virgin and untouched, waiting to become 'fertilized' by a masculine conqueror. This is how the KMT occupiers perceived Taiwan in 1950, as a receptacle for traditional Chinese values otherwise not existing among the Hokkien, Hakka or Aboriginal tribes. As Taiwan shifted towards independence thirty years later, it was important to reorient the time and players involved in the island's 'first contact' narrative. While the KMT paid little attention to aboriginals, it became the guiding mission of an independent Taiwan to adopt them as the 'stars of the show,' so to speak.

As an Austronesian people whose languages, customs, and scientific history is entirely unrelated to those of China (linguistic theories place Taiwan's aboriginals in a group with tribes/languages ranging from Indonesia to the Philippines to Hawaii), Taiwan's First Peoples provided the budding nation with an excellent opportunity to distance itself from China. The publication goes so far as to feature a pair of 'linked-cups' that it argues is "unique to Taiwan's indigenous people and not found in Han-Chinese culture."⁸⁶ Having established this separation, the publication is quick to transform previous discourse concerning Taiwan: it speaks of the "Taiwan mainland,"⁸⁷ effectively replacing a common reference to China as 'the mainland' and to Chinese natives as 'mainlanders,' the Mandarin dialect controversially called 'the common language.' Reference is made to the "simplicity and warmness of tribal members"⁸⁸ and the "free spirit and forthright nature of tribal people,"⁸⁹ which, as we saw with the 'folk pioneers' in the publication's first chapter, both feminizes and infantilizes Taiwan's aboriginals as a metonym for the virgin, infant nation.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 145.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 149.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 127.

One cannot help but be reminded of social evolution theorists like James George Frazer who postulated that all societies evolve along a linear progression that emphasizes first a belief in magic, then religion, then science. This theory is so important to a nationalizing ideology, in fact, that for a moment it even erodes Taiwan's self-distinction from China: "Just as divination played an important role in early Chinese religious beliefs, it was also the most widespread method by which Taiwan's aborigines sought explanations to unknown matters."⁹⁰ And again, in reference to weaving, "All of Taiwan's tribes, like many societies in the world, rely heavily on this handicraft."⁹¹ So we find a tension between uniqueness and universality, highlighting the separation of Taiwan's aboriginal tribes from those of other nations while simultaneously grouping them according to a shared stage of social evolution. Such is the relation of the nation to its displaced First Peoples: even as the native Americans of the pilgrim story serve to render America that much more unique from Britain, they inhabited an evolutionary stage in the pilgrim's minds similar enough to that of the Ancient Britons to render their claim to the land forfeit, their very presence on it something which must necessarily be replaced by an evolutionary next-in-line. For Taiwan to follow suit, it was required to paint the aboriginals in a similar light, as necessary precursors to the island's present-day neoliberal occupiers, just unique enough to make the imagined collective into a unique nation.

Conclusion

The museum is not a warehouse, but a factory. It does not house a nation's past—it creates it. Through selective exhibit placements and written descriptions of material objects, museums tell a new story of the nation to those who pass through its halls. Funded and maintained by government-run cultural centers, museums offer those in authority a space to *write* history in

⁹⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁹¹ Ibid., 154.

compelling and visually stimulating ways. Through this publication, we have seen how the museum presents Taiwan as the eternally infant nation, the virgin land occupied but not defined by those deemed its ‘occupiers,’ until there arrived occupiers who, for reason that their descendants wrote the current history, became ‘pioneers’ and impregnated the barren land and its barren tribes with nationhood. Now that the Taiwanese Independence Movement is under way and nationhood is the new flag under which all of Taiwan’s diverse population is encouraged to gather, let us turn to a discussion of the Taiwanese national body and the folk festival that binds it together for a month every year.

Chapter Four: The Yilan International Children's Folklore and Folk-games

Festival

My fourth chapter will explore the mobilizing capabilities of 'folk' and 'folklore' imagination in local cultural festivals. The festival as an institution, while less permanent and legitimizing perhaps than a museum,⁹² serves more vigorously to catalyze whole communities, and in Taiwan's case entire regions, to engage with pre-packaged and intentional forms of cultural identity in an interactive space as one of thousands of like-minded participants. If Anderson argues that nationalisms are indeed imagined communities because the individual member cannot see or does not know most of the other members sharing the same nationalized community, then festivals present at least an illusion of knowing: when one sees great crowds of ostensibly compatriot people engaging in uniting practices of cultural uniformity, it is easy for one to believe that herein exists the national community. With this in mind I turn to the Yilan International Children's Folklore and Folkgames Festival (YICFFF) which draws hundreds of thousands of visitors to the rural countryside of Yilan every year, and is the only government-held event in the country that is able to turn a profit.

The YICFFF was originally launched in 1996 with \$20 million NTD from the Council for Cultural Affairs as an initiative to its regional offices to organize international cultural and artistic events modeled after a "distinctive tradition" of each specific locality. Sponsored by the Yilan Cultural Affairs Bureau, the festival features folk dances from various nationalities performed by children and teens, as well as interactive exhibits of games for children around the world and a water park with electronic dance music pulsing in the background. The Lan-Yang

⁹² One could argue that due to the impermanence of the festival, it therefore takes on an adaptability that renders this particular institution more powerful, more possessed of a longevity that renews its nationalizing message from year to year.

Cultural and Educational Foundation underscores the festival's main objective to "Provide an assortment of folk arts, displays, and performances from all over the world, as well as the best of Taiwan's cultural attractions."⁹³ These cultural attractions specific to Taiwan include performances from Hoklo, Hakka, Aboriginal and 'Mainlander Han' ethnicities.

There are several ways in which this festival can be seen to add to Taiwan's post-war mission of nationhood. Hsin-yi Lu speaks of a "structure of feeling" of 90s Taiwan, which sought to transcend the island's divided historical memory and produce a national community that was vibrant and recognizable on the global stage. The island had few diplomatic ties, and government organizations from the Ministry of Education to the Council for Cultural Affairs did everything in their power to portray Taiwan as a living museum of diverse cultural heritage, set on display for other nations to see and take part. Lu focuses much of her argument on the desire for these institutions to frame their folk discourse around and for children, leading to a re-conceptualization of childhood distinct from its Confucian roots. This focus on children manifested itself in a kind of "desired national future" towards which the re-imagined nation might collectively strive. Finally, the communal experience of the YICFFF is important when considering the various regions and diverse cultural experiences from which the festival's participants come: the festival acts as a space for diverse cultural identities to converge into one 'Taiwanese' national body.

The Festival

The YICFFF consists of three main areas: performance, exhibition and amusements. Lu describes the journey each attendee makes once they cross the threshold into the festival:

Once past the entrance gate, visitors first encounter a hemisphere platform on which young dancers, mostly children and teenagers, dress in colorful ethnic costumes and

⁹³ Hsin-Yi Lu, "Children's Dreamland," 2011. Due to the fact that the article was accessed and displayed via the Taylor & Francis website, there are no page numbers to include.

perform folk dances from their countries of origin. . . Normally, four to five troupes are scheduled to get on the stage each day during a three-and-half hour block. This arrangement allows the audience to experience an eclectic taste of different folk arts in a short time; each performance supposedly represents a distinctive national or ethnic culture.⁹⁴

Participant countries are selected with the assistance of the International Council of Organizations for Folklore Festivals and Folk Art (CIOFF), an official partner of UNESCO, and the number of countries grew from 9 in 1996 to 18 in 2010. As for the ‘folk’ quality of their dances, there are no regulations placed on the troupes by CIOFF or YICFFF to make the performances ‘authentic.’ Authenticity and Folk-ness are definitions left to the dance troupes themselves. In Taiwan’s case, the troupe is an eclectic mix of backgrounds and cultures:

As for the participation of Taiwanese children, the Festival committee selects groups that represent regionalism of Yilan as well as the officially defined multiculturalism of Taiwan. The Lan Yang Dancers, a Catholic-sponsored local dance troupe composed of children age 9–18, has been a constant player since 1996. The troupe is specialized in traditional Taiwanese folk dances, particularly those of Hoklo and Hakka. Starting in 1999, elementary school children of the Atayal tribe, the largest aboriginal group of the county, began to join the Festival as performers of their ethnic dance. These Atayal children stay with foreign guests in the same accommodation centre during the entire Festival season, an experience considered the first ‘international encounter’ for most of them.⁹⁵

Three words take on interesting nuanced meanings in the YICFFF context: regionalism, multiculturalism and international. Both Atayal and local Han and Hoklo/Hakka Taiwanese inhabit the same region of Yilan county, yet it is the Atayal specifically who are said to undergo their first ‘foreign’ experience and ‘international’ encounter. If Taiwan were not a nation bound unto itself, then the encounter between Atayal and Han would already be considered ‘international,’ let alone the foreign guests. Yilan’s regionalism is a microcosm of Taiwanese nationalism, binding together mutually exclusive peoples under one banner of ‘multiculturalism.’

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2011.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2011.

Multiculturalism is Taiwanese culture, and it overrides individual cultures within Taiwan. This 'meta-culture' is nationalism's replacement of tribal culture. As the tribe is thrust together with other tribes, so is its culture melted down and hung upon the gate of the nation's culture. It is no different here in America: American culture is stereotypically represented as its national holiday, the Fourth of July. The nation is the culture.

Just as important to the festival's understanding of the 'folk' is its large display of children's toys and playthings collected and saved from the early days of the nation to its present time:

Past the platform, visitors walk through an exhibition area displaying children's playthings from all over the world. Toys and dolls are connected with brief illustrations of each country's profile, in a similar fashion to what Urry (2002, p. 136) terms as the 'technology of nationhood' in international exhibition, which presents nation-states in an internationally recognizable cultural order of diversity by concrete images and symbols. Juxtaposed to toys from other countries is the Taiwanese collection, housed in a separate corner. Each year, the Festival organizers choose a different focus for Taiwanese playthings; but in general this section hosts nostalgic ambience, featuring handmade toys and snacks once the favorite of the children before Taiwan's rapid industrialization in the 1970s. These beloved objects serve as powerful childhood reminders for parents in their 30s and 40s. They bring their children to the Festival and are delighted with the collection of their own childhood games, most of them no longer produced. The memories the objects invoked from bygone childhood resituate them in the emergent narrative of national development: as material scarcity is a commonly shared childhood experience of those born before the 1970s, handmade toys and cheap snacks, lacking technical sophistication, provoke a sense of recognition of how far the Taiwanese economy has progressed.⁹⁶

Here the 'folk' becomes conflated with nostalgia, but not for nothing. While previous iterations of folk appeared in folktale collections and museum exhibitions that did not progress past the Japanese occupation era (1895-1945), the YICFFF is noteworthy for its modernization of folk representation and folk sentiment. No longer the struggling pioneer trying his or her best to till the soil and chase off the Dutch occupiers, this festival brings the folk to the attendee and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2011.

says, “Look! Look! You handled this object in your childhood—*you* are the folk, and this plaything is your artifact!” The festival-goers gaze turns inward, and they see the budding nation—that eternal, inviolate thing—within themselves. Then the lights of the carnival dim, the noise fades in the background, and they imagine themselves young, as young as the nation almost, triumphing in innocent play as all around them wars were fought, horrors lived, enemies defeated, and pillars of selfhood established until out of the rubble they rose in unison with their family, neighbors and friends—a new, Taiwanese people.

The final area, and perhaps the most interesting for its utter disconnect with folk sentiments, is the water-game pavilion. Complete with water labyrinth, sprinklers and hoses, and an electronic dance floor, children and adults alike cavort in this theme park-like atmosphere less attuned to historical-cultural indoctrination and more purposed to drown out every other memory of the festival with watery fun. A commentator on the festival reflected on the unifying *ressentiment* of the water-game area, saying, “On the stage of the water labyrinth, there might be simultaneously college professors and vegetable vendors—people who normally do not interact in such physical proximity. Yet, on that stage, everyone peel off their socio-economic masks, open up their childlike inner selves, and just have fun together with the strangers next to them.”⁹⁷ Lu connects this class-eradicating experience with Anderson’s notion of ‘horizontal comradeship,’ an emotional bonding mechanism useful for nationalism’s imagined community.

Lin associates the recreational experience brought by the water labyrinth with a communalizing process, which, he claims, undermines class differences within festival goers and foster a kind of fraternity toward a greater collective consciousness and well-being. This imagined affinity extends to the press as well. In contrast to their typical critical stance towards the government, local newspapers are generally very supportive of the Festival ‘as if it was the county's child’, recalled Ms C. Li.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2011.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2011.

But if this is the case, what does the festival have to tell the Hoklo, Hakka, or Aboriginal individuals about their Taiwanese-ness? Is this modern iteration of the folk more an embrace of Han-ethnic immigrants in the violent first days of KMT-ruled Taiwan? The next section will treat the question of Taiwanese identity at the YICFFF.

Festival and Identity

How does the YICFFF put Taiwanese identity on display as a national body? Does the festival present one united ‘Taiwaneseness,’ or does it practice inclusivity for all its ethnicities? What does its display of identity have to say about Taiwan’s connection to China and to its Chinese legacy? Lu argues, “The colorful festive images give the appearance of abundant cultural diversity, authenticating the official discourse of Taiwan’s multicultural heritage, consisting of four principal ethnicities of the Aboriginal, Hoklo, Hakka, and ‘Mainlanders’, which diverges from the Republican China legacy previously promulgated by the authoritarian state as the national spirit.”⁹⁹ Like the Taiwan Folk Arts Museum publication, we see in the 90s a divergence away from cultural-reconstruction era discourses on *huaxia* tradition and Taiwan’s exclusive birthright to the Chinese legacy which the mainland rejected in favor of Western communism. Now there is a sense of cultural diversity, of color and spirit, promulgating a four-pillar identity which includes mainlanders like the Hoklo who came over with Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT Han. As a vehicle of history, the Folk Arts museum purposefully did not include this group, though its research and the language of its displays prove resonant enough of a KMT culture. In the museum it is understood that mainlanders are the consumers, the purveyors, the inheritors of the Hoklo/Hakka/Aboriginal folk culture; they themselves do not belong to the folk, any more than Christians belong to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Instead, the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2011.

mainlanders are implied heirs, both destroyers and preservers of the ‘folk,’ who warred necessarily against the language/customs of the folk, replaced these with a nationalistic secularity based in neoliberal capitalism, then commodified their remains and re-purposed them for a cultural industry.

In contrast, the YICFFF presents itself as a living festival with living artifacts. Performers put on a costume of folk-ness which they wouldn’t normally wear in day-to-day life, dance a ritual dance the choreography of which they invented (remember, the folk and their customs no longer actually exist, and what little remains is translated through a nationalistic culture industry), and *perform* folk-ness. The effect is two-fold: first, the audience is taught that the folk of history who form the spiritual basis for Taiwan’s nationalism still in fact exist, and second, the nationalistic values infused into the folk imagination are commodified as a dynamic spectacle for festival-goers to consume and live out allegorically. More importantly, the performativity of folk dances serve the function of inviting citizens—specifically children—to participate and learn the invented dances and perform folk-nationalism with their own bodies. While folktales can be memorized and retold, and while earthenware pots can be imitated and re-cast, these are actions in which the consumers of such folk-inventions do not usually participate. Folk-dancing, however, is relatively easy, fun, and appeals to whatever basic human urge makes us enjoy dancing in large groups. In the act of folk-dancing, we feel connected to the nation’s primordial past and the ancestors we think to mimic, to each other in a network of social and cultural consciousness, and to the joint destiny of preserving the nation’s immortal ‘culture’ for future generations.

This is the key to understanding why KMT mainlanders are included as an ethnic category of Taiwan at the YICFFF. While the museum hid mainlanders as the silent understood

majority, their material contributions much too recent to be considered sacred relics for the nation, the festival displays nationalism not through material artifacts but through the spectacle of crowds, of which recent Han immigrants make up the cultural majority. By providing the opportunity for this ethnic group, which is neither considered nor considers itself part of the ‘folk,’ to participate in the folk-imagination through engagement with dances, attractions, exhibits, games, and the honor of representing one of the four ethnic pillars at the festival, the cultural majority Han Taiwanese are grounded even more strongly in the Taiwanese identity. As a child who plays the role of Jesus at the local church’s Easter play, so the Han cultural majority ‘plays the role’ of the folk, the nation’s pioneers and saviors, creators and sustainers, and as such feel a stronger connection to the ‘homeland’ to which their ancestors may have come only a generation or two ago. By ‘cultural majority,’ I include also those Hoklo/Hakka/Aboriginal descendants who have since assimilated into the Han culture perpetuated by the KMT, the number of which by now comprises the vast majority of Taiwan’s inhabitants. Regardless of any possible genetic connection to past ‘folk’ populations, these carry little if any cultural connection to their ancestors, especially because the cultures ascribed (with emphasis on the creative role of the ‘scribe’) to these past groups were in fact re-written during Taiwan’s cultural reconstruction. “YICFFF was purposely designed to be a new tradition for the next generation and not based on any long-existing custom.”¹⁰⁰ Tradition is a commodity made for future buyers.

Festival and Politics

Writes Lu, “It wasn’t until after the landmark election of 2016, however, that both the executive and legislative branches of the Republic of China government in Taiwan were controlled by people who considered their nationality to be Taiwanese.”¹⁰¹ In July 2016,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2011.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2011.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen visited the YICFFF and gave a talk in concert with Father Michellini, chairman of the ROC Folk Art Festival Committee, following a performance by Russian folk dancers. She praised the festival for attracting such a large and diverse crowd of festival-goers, and called it an important stage for international exchange. The president hoped that this year's festival would be even more remarkable, not only providing Taiwanese people with a rich artistic feast, but also attracting the world's gaze towards Taiwan. Some of her most poignant remarks include the following: "We hope that festival-goers learn about Taiwan both through what they see and the strong emotions they experience here;" "This is what we mean when we often say 'Let the world see Taiwan;'" "Folk-Dance is a crystallization of a nation's history and culture. . . It bears the fruit of cultural succession;" "Through Folk-Dance performance we will raise Taiwan to the international stage."¹⁰² President Tsai sees the value of the festival in its ability to represent Taiwan as a complete national body among other formed nations. By staging Taiwanese folk dances amid dances from folk groups representing other countries, Taiwan is able to stand in rank and file with those countries, using folk culture as a metric for nationhood. Using our current understanding of the heteronomous process of folklore production, it is now easy to see why something as simple as a staged folk dance might prove the establishment of the nation. With a single folk dance comes all the broad network of cultural, political, and academic institutions required to define who qualifies as 'folk,' perform anthropological research on that group of people, analyze and select what ritual movements might be understood as 'dance,' and finally christen a certain dance as more authentically representative of that group and of the Taiwanese 'folk' category in general than all the others. With so many tribes, communities and peoples in the nation, each with their own ever-evolving

¹⁰² "20160712 總統接見「2016 宜蘭國際童玩藝術節」訪賓 - Youtube." Accessed May 1, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi2Fb71xPpU>.

dance routines, this is certainly no easy task. Without these institutions, the ‘folk’ and its cultural products just aren’t possible.

Gramsci’s ‘state of interregnum’ may be used to describe Taiwan’s political and cultural shifts during the 90s, a moment in time when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”¹⁰³ After the end of cultural reconstruction, and as more and more Taiwanese began to identify less and less with China, something was needed to replace the cultural centers of the KMT. “After the lifting of martial law and with the inauguration of the first Taiwan-born president in 1988, previous national iconography rapidly lost its symbolic power with the advent of political and cultural indigenization,”¹⁰⁴ writes Lu. Taiwan nationalists like activist-scholar Su Beng viewed Taiwan’s past as a series of “continued colonization under consecutive foreign regimes,”¹⁰⁵ with the most malicious occupation being that of the KMT. In his revolutionary work *Taiwan’s 400 Year History*, Su argues that Taiwan has been an ever-repressed territory of some outside occupying force since the 1600s, and he names as oppressors the Dutch, the Ming loyalist Koxinga, the Manchu empire, the Japanese, and after 1949 the KMT (a.k.a. the Republic of China, Taiwan’s current official government). Therefore, old ‘folk’ iconography, especially involving Koxinga (like the folktales previously discussed) seemed increasingly outdated, and there was a call to move beyond the division in historical memory and towards a more future-oriented nationhood.

Readers may have already guessed what the YICFFF adopted as its new icon. It isn’t altogether surprising, or even that different from the nationalist allegory pushed in both the folktale collection and the Folk Arts Museum. I have underscored frequent mentions of the

¹⁰³ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere, vol. 1, Quaderni 1–5* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1977), 311.

¹⁰⁴ Lu, “Children’s Dreamland,” 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Su Beng, *Taiwan’s 400 Year History: the Origins and Continuing Development of the Taiwanese Society and People / [by] Su Beng* (Washington, D.C.: Taiwanese Cultural Grassroots Association, 1986) 1540.

‘infantilism’ of the ‘mountain tribe compatriots’ when welcoming Koxinga’s army, and I spoke at length about how Chen and Wang directed their 40-volume collection at children, claiming children were the ones who would perpetuate folk culture to posterity. The Folk Arts museum publication, too, emphasized the child-like purity and innocence of both the folk and their material artifacts, claiming that folk art was messy, colorful and lacking in proper rules and training. One gets the feeling while reading that Taiwan the island is just being birthed out of the sea as these folk-peoples begin to appear spontaneously on the fresh grass. So it comes as no surprise that, dismissing other symbols associated with Koxinga or *huaxia*, the YICFFF adopted the perpetual ‘child’ as its cultural icon to allegorically represent the nation of Taiwan. Even President Tsai’s statements, longing for other countries to finally ‘look upon’ or ‘notice’ Taiwan, resonate of a child begging for attention. Lu argues, “Children's figures emerged as prominent icons in various cultural projects executed during the tenure of Lee Teng-hui, Taiwan's first popularly elected president who initiated ‘political Taiwanization’ within the KMT regime.”

Here is a description of the one used at the YICFFF:

The logo of the 1994 National Festival of Culture and Arts, which was the first CCA-held festival featuring Taiwanese folklores, was a cartoon image of a crawling toddler. Putting its left ear on the ground, the baby seemed to be listening to the voice of the land. This baby symbol had twofold meanings: first, it signified an originary stage of the new Taiwanese culture/nation, as the 1994 National Festival was titled Taiwan's new beginning; Year one of culture (*kaitai xinjing; wenhua yuannian*); and second, it represented the collectivity of the Taiwanese people who had just begun to listen to the voices of their native soil.¹⁰⁶

In a sense, the two meanings of the baby symbol Lu describes are in fact two re-definitions of Taiwan’s folk: first, by claiming that the Taiwanese nation was just now coming into being, it performs the same function as KMT folk-propaganda concerning Koxinga did. As Koxinga brought some of the first Hoklo/Hakka people to the island to befriend/betray the

¹⁰⁶ Lu, “Children’s Dreamland,” 2011.

indigenous peoples living there, he and his army were painted as pioneers, first settlers, infused with a pure spirit, coming to work inviolate soil ('a barren wasteland' as one folktale put it). They, not their indigenous counterparts, were closest to nature and the soil, and even had to teach aboriginals how to farm, as if the lives of aboriginals only just started when they arrived. Similarly, the baby icon accompanied by 'Taiwan: New Beginning, Year One of Culture' very conspicuously accomplishes just that: it overrides and overwrites all previous cultural contributions to Taiwan the island and Taiwan the people, sticking its flag in the ground and staking its claim all over again that now, for the very first time, Taiwan has begun to be. Now, and never before, has a nation been born, a culture invented, a glorious beginning written into eternity. The Taiwanese people as they appear now—assimilated, neoliberal, democratic—these are the 'folk,' the vanguard, the pioneers of a new nation. They, not their predecessors, have their ear to the ground, have forged a connection with the soil of Taiwan exclusive to themselves, and may determine the right course of destiny for the island here on out.

Festival and Locality

Drawing from both identity and politics in Taiwan's folk festival scene, let us now turn to an analysis of the on-the-ground change which everything we have already discussed—from nationalism, to independence movements, to history, allegory and iconography—has effected in Taiwan's Yilan County, where the YICFFF was founded. Already a cultural hub housing Taiwan's largest 'mountain' tribe, the Atayal, as well as an environment of bucolic pastoralism that pervades its quiet farms and villages, Yilan county "for a long time was considered underdeveloped as it relied heavily on an agricultural economy. Culture therefore came into play. The county government recognized cultural tourism as a hopeful and low-cost path for economic development; revitalization of folk arts and cultures that countered the KMT's Sinocentric

agenda would further consolidate the county office's political legitimacy.” In terms of local politics, Taiwan’s first non-KMT magistrate was elected here in 1981, and the KMT lost all subsequent magistrate elections until 2005. The ‘Mecca of democracy’ as some in the Taiwan pro-independence circle have come to call it, Yilan is famous for its anti-KMT politics, providing fertile ground for a Taiwanese culture festival. In 1991, Magistrate Yu Hsyi-kun announced that his first priority for Yilan county would be ‘Building the county based on culture’ (*wenhua lixian*) which it turns out was the first step in a complete overhaul of the county’s cultural policy:

Two years later, in his second electoral campaign, Yu declared that ‘culture’, ‘environmentalism’, and ‘tourism’ were the primary objectives on his campaign platform. At the time when most local politicians in Taiwan firmly believed in unlimited economic growth and technological advancement, Yu's devotion to cultural affairs was unprecedented. The so-called Yilan Model, in which a local government led an effective, coordinated crew of bureaucrats to initiate and implement various cultural projects, hereby became highly celebrated. During the 1990s, mass media and Taiwan-consciousness boosters often depicted Yilan as a symbolic site wherein authentic Taiwanese cultures were saved from the insensitive developmentalism of the KMT. After the DPP defeated the KMT in the presidential election in 2000, several politicians from Yilan were recruited to the cabinet; most notably, Yu Hsyi-kun became the premier of the Executive Yuan in 2002–2005. In a sense, the Yilan model of regional planning and cultural development prefigured the national cultural project of post-KMT Taiwan.¹⁰⁷

There are a number of things to unpack here. First, the Yilan model of cultural projects was heralded as an effective engine for ‘saving’ Taiwanese culture from KMT developmentalism. This belief ignores the island-wide cultural renaissance and cultural reconstruction efforts by the KMT, which effectively introduced ‘culture’ (with its institutional and industrial underpinnings) to a people who had no scholastic understanding of the word. For ‘culture’ to have been saved, ‘culture’ first must have been introduced: traditional clothes, chores and pots and pans must have been made obsolete by economic development and then rewritten

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2011.

as relics, customs, and artifacts. Those artifacts of ‘culture’ must have first made their way into books, museums and patriotic plays as symbols of the ‘folk’ and by extension the nation, for the people to recognize them as serving a cultural function. So one could argue that the only culture which could possibly be ‘saved’ by the Yilan model would necessarily be that promoted by the KMT through its culture industry. Also, this belief ignores the fact that the Yilan model did not ‘save’ culture, but indeed created a new kind of culture consistent with budding pro-independence Taiwanese identity politics. This argument is supported enough, as I have stated earlier, by Chun’s analysis of the ‘selectivity’ involved in creating culture; but, as I have revealed in the meaning of the baby symbol, the Taiwanese independence movement appropriated the original idea of the ‘folk’ and parceled out its religious symbolic benefits of nationalism to Taiwan’s citizens themselves. We could argue, continuing this line of reasoning, that the culture which the Yilan model ‘saved’ was in fact the integrity of the daily habits and activities actively practiced by locals in Yilan. Their current dress, food, chores, superstitions, entertainment, etc. were that which Yu preserved, and under the new folk imagination, that was as good as preserving a thousand-year-old tradition.

Therein we also encounter an interesting buzzword at the center of culture and politics: ‘authenticity.’ Not only do we learn that the Yilan model proposed by Yu has saved Taiwanese culture, more importantly it has saved ‘authentic’ Taiwanese culture. In a country with four major ethnic groups, and moreover a country which exhibits strong representation from all four, it might be difficult to identify one or the other of them as housing ‘authentic’ culture. For the KMT cultural renaissance initiative it was certainly the Ming loyalists who accompanied Koxinga in bringing authentic *huaxia* Chineseness to Taiwan’s blank-slate aboriginals. For the indigenized Folk Art Museum it was a mixture of Hoklo, Hakka, Aboriginal and perhaps even

Japanese culture which proved authentic enough to put on display. Finally, Yilan county's folklore festival adds mainlander immigrants to the mix, even though its politics are staunchly anti-KMT. In all cases, it seems that 'authenticity' and 'folk' are intertwined. The 'folk' represents unsullied infantility, the soil, untouched and needing cultivation, and pioneers coming to till it into a semblance of the nation. It is always-beginning, like the baby symbol of an already well-established people, and in that sense it complicates the meaning of authenticity. Is authenticity well-worn, like a recipe used to perfection? Or is it virgin, untarnished by outside influence? I believe that this paradoxical definition of authenticity drives at the paradox of both the nation and the 'folk.' The nation is both primordial and infantile, both virgin and well-established. More importantly, the 'folk' are couched in antiquity, yet innocent as cherubs. They are so, even (as the YICFFF shows us) when they exist as the current citizens of Taiwan. Authenticity lends both youth and age to a people, and the 'folk' distinction gives them immortality.

Invented Tradition

The 'Yilan New Architectural Movement' initiated a wave of "tradition for the sake of future generations" in the mid-1990s that would serve as a functional baseline for the YICFFF's imagined heritage. In concert with local architects, urban planners, and culture workers, these architectural projects sought to reflect some of the diversity of Yilan county, this diversity still somewhat preserved due to the late arrival of Han immigrants with the KMT. Writes Lu: "When questioned about the authenticity of these designs, county officials claimed that they were meant to be the heritage for future generations."¹⁰⁸ Regardless of their cultural origins, these buildings began to win Yilan a sweeping notoriety around the island and visitors flocked to the sleepy

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2011.

county. In 1995, Yu Hsi-kun visited the Avignon Festival, an annual Arts festival held in France, and declared: “The income generated during one month of festivity was enough to support the yearly expense for the whole town! I asked myself: ‘what do we have in Yilan that would attract tourists to come and consume, and bring prosperity to our local economy?’”¹⁰⁹ However, when Yu and his staff examined the existing folk traditions in Yilan county, they determined that these were insufficient for building a nation-wide folk festival comparable to Avignon.

Yu and his staff therefore chose ‘children,’ ‘child welfare,’ and ‘children’s playthings’ as the major themes in their flagship festival. They selected Dongshan River Park—designed during the last KMT magistrate’s tenure by a Japanese architect firm Elephant8—as the site of the festival due to its meticulous design and global aesthetic standard. The significance of children’s playthings revolved for Ms. Li, the chief executive of the festival commission for its initial six years, around ‘creativity.’ But any tie to existing cultural traditions in Yilan is absent from her rhetoric: “Yilan has the reputation of being the guardian of traditional Taiwanese folk cultures, which is, quite frankly, a euphemism for being aged and backward.”¹¹⁰ According to her, rooting the festival in the idea of children and children’s welfare could help transform Yilan from a backwards assortment of villages into something cosmopolitan and vital.

Herein we find some interesting discourse applied with reference to the national body in terms of age and cultural value. The YICFFF underscores a tension between cultural guardianship and market innovation, between manifestations of the folk as ‘old’ or ‘young.’ If culture is written into a society and performed, it necessarily follows that all iterations of culture are new. The museum that has housed cultural artifacts for many hundred years is not old, for it still plays an active role in the selection, arrangement, presentation and publication of exhibits,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2011.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 2011.

thereby refreshing constantly even its own interpretation of objects. The village festival with a long and storied history dating back to the pioneer days of Taiwan is not old, for the planners and funders and sellers and goers in attendance shift from year to year, and no two rites are ever performed the same. While the “Children’s Dreamland” narrative of the YICFFF seems at first glance like a brand new interpretation of the ‘folk’ as inhabiting future generations and future potential as opposed to the old and the traditional, in reality all ‘folk’ discourse is targeted towards children. The folktale collection, the museum, and the festival are all commodities for children to explore: they are all attempts to shape children’s minds, and thus the social mind of the nation. When the chief executive of the festival commission declared Yilan “aged and backward,” she was merely stating that Yilan failed as a cultural market. The mission of the YICFFF was not to restore lost traditions to Yilan, nor was it necessarily to build long-lasting new ones. Rather the driving forces behind this, and every, cultural festival must be capitalism and its twin, nationalism.

To sell tickets, that is the festival’s goal. It seems almost too simple, too reductive, to be true. “The only government-held event in the country that is able to turn a profit,” I mentioned in my opening paragraph. But why make it about the ‘folk’ at all? Why call it a ‘folklore’ festival, if ‘folklore’ is nothing more than a name, a marketing tool, a gimmick? Why not make it about video games, or space travel, or dinosaurs? Anderson’s touchstone example of the relationship between capitalism and nationalism is pertinent here. While the invention of the printing press may really have been all about an evangelical mission to print more Bibles for the common people, what it resulted in was a highly capitalistic network of supply and demand that changed the linguistic and cultural makeup of Europe forever. Parishioners were less bound to their priest for biblical revelation, and Protestantism taught that exegesis may be found within the printed

Bible's pages, rather than from the lips of church authority. The church splintered, and countless denominations formed: not bound to each other by religion, by class, by race, by culture, but bound in one thing only: the purchase and circulation of physical Bibles. What is the Bible, at least to skeptics, but a collection of folktales? What is the church, to cynics, but a museum of nationalist ideas? What is a service, to atheists, but a festival requiring a fee? What is the tie that binds Taiwan's several different peoples? It is not one religion, one race, one class, one culture, one tradition. It is one currency. Following the Treaty of Shimonoseki, the Japanese Yen became the official currency of Taiwan from 1895 to 1946, when it was replaced by the Old Taiwan Dollar. Due to hyperinflation, the New Taiwan Dollar (NTD) was introduced in 1949, coming in at an exchange rate of one NTD to 40,000 OTD. From authoritarianism to democracy, from *huaxia* culture to Taiwanization, this currency has held ever since.

Conclusion

The YICFFF seems to create more questions than it answers. It is a strange mixture of 'folk' rhetoric with waterparks, dance recitals, children's playthings and global politics. Where are the 'folk' in Yilan's folklore festival? Where are they hiding? This is the question that this chapter—indeed this entire study—has been trying to answer. Are they in the dance troupes, composed mainly of a diverse array of city youth, who 'perform' folklore? Are they in the festival's attendees, divided in everything but their united fiscal ability to travel and pay admission? Are children the 'folk,' because they will inherit the nation? Are elders the 'folk,' because they will pass it on? Did the 'folk' all die out like the dinosaurs, or did they never exist? Are they merely the nationalist creations of government agencies like the Yilan Cultural Affairs Bureau? Are they products to be bought and sold? In the Conclusion I will face these questions head-on and do my level best to answer one or two of them.

Chapter Five: The Future of Folklore in Taiwan

A New Definition of ‘Folk’ and ‘Folklore’

At the end of this long study, I think I have a better understanding of that invisible tie that binds together the ‘folk’ of every people, nation, and tongue. Is ‘folk’ an invention of the state for nationalizing purposes? Absolutely. Hopefully I’ve proved as much in my preceding chapters. But what kind of invention? The folk do not seem to belong to any one race, one profession, one socio-economic class, one time period, or one cultural, political, or economic tradition. They do not exist only in storybooks, nor do they even belong to the past, as the Yilan Folklore Festival proves. The ‘folk’ may be most basically defined as: *a group of people (or an individual person in the context of a group of people) put on display*. The individual by herself is no ‘folk,’ for she cannot represent the ‘folk’ alone. Davy Crockett may be a hero of American folklore, but alone his story can never become folklore, for it requires a backdrop of people and context to give it folksiness. Jesus represents all of Christianity, and believers equate him to the Bible itself, calling him the “Word made flesh,” but without thousands of years of Christian tradition Jesus is neither folk nor folklore. Maya Angelou wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* about her own life, and is therefore author and subject of a work one might classify as folklore, but that is because it represents a people; it puts an entire people on display, not simply the individual.

How then to define ‘folklore’? What manner of state-invention is it? Folktales are stories, and folk dances are dances, and folk music is music, and folk dishes have food on them. These are all contained under the umbrella of ‘folklore,’ but what is folklore? Here is the definition I propose: Folklore is *the actions of a group of people (or of an individual in the context of a group of people) put on display*. There is no folktale if the ‘folk’ just sit around and do nothing,

no folk art if they stand motionless, no folk ritual without movement. The folk dance (and often folk music) requires dancing, and the folktale requires telling, one person to the group. The question of individuality surfaces once more: can the culinary creation of an individual chef be classified ‘folk cuisine’? No, it requires people and context to give it that ‘folksy’ flavor. There is no folk dish without the group to eat it, nor folk dance without the group to either participate or watch, nor folktale without listeners, nor folk art without wearers. Folklore is a product of the group, and while it may be re-imagined countless times by the government, by corporations, by nations, it never loses its group mentality. The Ming loyalist sea-pirate Zheng Chenggong is nothing but a silly sailor without a community tradition turned nationalism to make his story legendary. The group transforms Taiwan from meaningless geology into meaningful geography, and the nation takes its cue.

In addition to new definitions of ‘folk’ and ‘folklore,’ I have found a number of discoveries interesting. The first is how institutions of folk heritage conservation are predominantly concerned with young people. Beitou Museum has oriented one of its core mission statements around cultivating future cultural producers, the YICFFF is directed entirely towards children, and the editors of *Complete Folktales* make it clear that they hope their collection will be utilized by young readers. How ought we to understand this proclivity for a nation to put its past in the hands of its youth, and why are works of the cultural ‘past’ always ostensibly marketed to youth, when it is mainly adults who purchase and take them seriously? It seems that the value of folklore as an academic, political, and cultural investment is that it gives adults the impression that they are passing down a cultural heritage—larger than themselves—to future generations. When the tired mother coming home late from work sits by her daughter’s bedside to tell her the story of the Chinese Zodiac, she does so not thinking that the story she

reads is a product of the ROC's cultural reconstruction, Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd's connection to the KMT government, and Chen and Wang's entrenchment in the academic and literary fields. She does not read the story as an instrument of nationalism, but rather as an instrument of culture, with the belief that somehow, if her daughter does not hear this story, she will grow up somewhat less culturally Taiwanese: she will possess less of those qualities that make someone 'Taiwanese.' That 'Taiwan' itself is a relatively recent construct not at all tied to the origins of the Chinese zodiac, or that she and her daughter are a mix of Hoklo, Hakka, Aboriginal Amis, and even a little Japanese, is unimportant. She reads the tale, thinking to inscribe culture, but instead teaching her daughter allegiance to the Taiwanese flag.

Herein lies a grand conclusion: culture in times of nation-states is nationalism, nationalism is culture. The Mexican flag appears as a bumper sticker on American vehicles belonging to Americans, the Chinese flag is waved at Lunar New Year celebrations in Chinatown, and the Ethiopian flag sits atop a menu at an Ethiopian restaurant in Texas. Flags are not cultural symbols, they are symbols of nationalism. Yet they appear with such frequency at celebrations of 'culture' or 'heritage' taking place outside of the home country. That folklore is a manifestation of culture, that it is understood as an instrument for passing down culture from one generation to the next, simply means that it is an instrument of nationalism, and patriotism is its main product. Before the existence of the nation, one might argue, folklore (though it could not possibly be defined as such before institutions came up with the word) served a more 'cultural' function. But what is the meaning of 'culture,' without cultural institutions to define it? When we think hard about the practical function of folk tales, dances, songs, etc. in the pre-national days of tribalism, we see that folklore tradition was a means of preserving the tribe, that stories of the tribe's origins, taboos, enemies and friends were stories with a message: protect the tribe at all

costs. While these tribes were less expansive as the modern nation, unconnected as they were by trains, newspapers and smartphones, and there is less of the ‘imagined community’ in them that we might call proto-nationalist, the ‘group before self’ sentiment is there. No wonder that, the day the nation rose out of the sea in all its glory, folklore and its functions were so easily adapted and re-invented as tools for the proliferation and perpetuation of the state.

This is not to say that tribalism necessarily preceded nationalism, and that the latter is somehow the former ‘plus’ capitalism. While there are similar elements between certain manifestations of tribal ontologies and nationalist ontologies, that is to say, one world delineated equally into bordered territories with sovereign governments, this does not account for the notion of ‘planetarity’ I have already discussed. Under this pre-cartographic ontology, the world is a wide, unknown and mysterious place, not a known or even knowable assortment of named representations on a map. Within the planetarity consciousness lies a dualism that nationalism has exchanged for compartmentalism: the familiar tribal circle, beyond which live ghosts, demons, barbarians, and the edge of the world—the unfamiliar. While certain landmarks, structures, and families within the circle of familiarity may be compartmentalized into sovereign units of existence, their sovereignty disappears as soon as they cross the threshold into the unfamiliar, the dark wood, where ‘there be tygers.’ As soon as the individual passes into the realm of planetarity, she steps into a world of sorcery, animal spirits, miraculous cures and devastating poisons. There is no ‘international law’ governing planetary ontologies, for the ‘international’ is an invention of nationalism. Neither can we say that tribal societies necessarily operate under ‘inter-tribal’ law, for the law of the one tribe breaks down when one enters into those liminal spaces that separate communities, and may change completely once the territory of another tribe is crossed.

Stories circulated within the tribe—one might say ‘tribal folklore’—undergo a similar shift when appropriated by the state. No longer describing an autonomous worldview enshrined in the dualism of familiar tribe v. unfamiliar wilderness, folklore under nationalism takes on a more relativistic ontology, enacting the following significant shifts: 1) the birth/origins of the tribe go from a ‘seed among thorns’ allegory of the familiar sprouting in the midst of the unfamiliar, establishing roots and building out posterity from a central point, to a more hierarchical conception of the nation as one of many ‘seeds’ sprouting in competition with one another. Under nationalism, the tribal origin is understood as the seed of the nation, and all nations are like entities evolved from like tribes, whereas under planetarity, the tribe is the only recognizable species in a forest of unknowns. 2) In a planetary ontology, the various ‘disciplines’ of folklore—music, dance, storytelling, material art—are invariably tied to the tribe’s core worldview (one might erroneously say ‘religion,’ but the use of the word religion itself divorces it from a scientific worldview). These disciplines, these ‘arts,’ each serve their own function in binding the individual to her community, the community to their world, and the familiar to the unfamiliar. Therefore a folk dance is not a dance at all, not in the definition the Academy has long since provided for us that cleaves ‘dance’ asunder from ‘song’ or ‘story’ and claims they are all separate ‘arts.’ Rather the dance, as well as the story, the music, the woven object, the seed planted in season, serves a communicatory function that engages the individual (in the context of the group) in a dialogue with her ‘world,’ whether material nature or immaterial spirit. As the budding tree in Spring communicates its message of Life and Fecundity to the tribal person, constructing day after day the rich complexity of their worldview, so the individual beats upon her drum, and sings, and dons her beads and dances, all in order to communicate a reply, both to

the tree and the community of like-minded people surrounding her, that she has seen the tree, she heard its message, understood its ontology, and wishes to respond in kind.

Nationalism, in contrast, in an effort to establish similar ‘compartments’ for understanding the one nation’s existence in relation to other like nations in an international system, must separate the folklore disciplines one from another, cut them off from their communicatory function in relation to the place and people which created them, and annihilate the worldview that gave these arts purpose, replacing it instead with the sterilized, scientific label of ‘folklore.’ No longer a tool of communication between individual, community and nature, folklore under nationalism is transformed into a tool of conformity among all peoples inhabiting the imagined community of the nation, gathering millions around the same campfire, so to speak, and forcing them to listen. Moreover, after nationalism there is a standardization of folklore that simply did not exist in pre-institutional, pre-academic, and preliterate cultures. Whereas at one time folklore communicated, and as in every organic conversation its responses and questions shifted and changed from one person to the next, one generation to the next, so that no two manifestations of folklore were ever quite the same, a nationalized folklore takes on rules, and authenticity, and institutions of culture wherein to learn the ‘correct’ way of doing folklore.

A Proposed ‘Future’ of Folklore

I work at a middle school, and recently we invited an alumnus to come and perform Scandinavian folk music on her Hardanger fiddle. The musician spoke about her training at university and in academies of folk music spanning several parts of the United States and Norway. She introduced the dragon-motif carvings on the arch of the fiddle, and joked about the fifteen ways to tune a Hardanger. She talked about how she honed her craft playing at Scandinavian folk dance performances. The music she played for us certainly was wonderful.

And yet, as two hundred of us sat and listened to her play, it felt like something was missing. Some audience members tapped their feet to the music, but for the most part we sat motionless and silent. The ‘folk’ music played, but no folk joined in. No one danced, no one sang, no one recalled their childhood made sweet by the ever-present sounds of the same music. Only the institution-trained professional played, and the twice-removed audience consumed. Needless to say, the enchanting music fell flat on my ears. And then I realized that context and communication were what her music lacked: what it had in skill and professionalism, it was missing in the place, the people, the sentiment, the belief in the music as a means of connecting people one to another and each one to the environment around them. ‘Folk’ the category without ‘folk’ the reality just feels. . . off.

This begs the question: can the ‘folk’ ever be restored? Can we ever hope to declassify, de-compartmentalize, denationalize, and retribalize the ‘folk’? Can we make it large again, larger than the individual performance, and restore its communicative and binding role in a post-cartographic, post-national, planetary ontology of the world? Sunitha Janamohan explores a similar possibility through her study of folk museums and the performance of folk material collection and preservation by local autonomous communities as opposed to heteronomous institutions. But are these communities really ‘autonomous,’ and is the answer as simple as handing museums and other cultural institutions over for the community to manage? My view of the situation is skeptical, because it reinforces the nationalist-capitalist worldview required to invent museums and other cultural institutions in the first place. What though the keys that lock folk culture away in dark, sterile halls are relinquished to an aboriginal woman, herself and her community already removed from the practices and material culture of their ancestors by technological innovation and a global economy? Will she use these objects any more than the

previous docent to accomplish their original communicative function? Will the museum be changed back into a longhouse, and will its objects be used in ceremony again? Will the surrounding streets, and cars, and phone lines melt away into a mysterious forest, and once more provide an unknown spiritual force that necessitates their use? Will all knowledge of the outside world cease, and will these objects once more become her only means of knowing? To be truly autonomous, in my opinion, necessitates that shift backwards (forwards?) into a dualistic ontology of light and dark, known and unknown. It requires that the world become too big to know with certainty.

This is possible, I believe, but not while we cling to the same institutions with which nationalism has sterilized culture and made interpersonal and inter-spiritual communication obsolete. The IPCC Report's global plea regarding Climate Change for deindustrialization and de-growth carries within it the germ of an epistemological revolution, one that prioritizes the agnostic over the absolute. The folk art museum claims to know, the folktale collection claims to have authority, but folklore in its primal presentation claims just the opposite. The museum says that "knowledge of the outside world is contained within my walls, and I have curated that knowledge for you to understand." But that knowledge is stolen, re-invented and re-purposed for nationalist indoctrination and capitalist gain. The museum teaches that knowledge is to be seized, transported to a central location, and stored—untouched, un-lived—in a controlled system. It teaches that knowledge is a commodity, and may be bought and sold, ripped from the earth like a natural resource and exchanged for cold, hard cash. But folklore teaches a fear of nature that lends itself to respect and sustainable practices. Folklore says, "Many and mysterious are the ways of Nature, and though we exist at its center, yet we are surrounded on all sides, and may be annihilated at any moment, therefore let us keep the peace." Scientists have finally arrived at that

same conclusion, though it took them far longer than the ‘simple’ tribesman observing nature first-hand. Human life is unsustainable at our current rate of extraction and growth, and capitalist solutions like increased mining for rare-earth minerals required for solar and electric energy are only adding to the problem. Authoritarians rise on waves of oil, and nations retreat within themselves, and militaries and civilians alike arm themselves to the teeth and prepare for war. These are the sad realities discussed by people everywhere, in the university classroom as well as the bar outside of town. On the lips of every person is the state of the entire world, and an existential crisis hovers over us like the Angel of Death.

But we were never meant to know everything. The geopolitical underpinnings of the imagined community of Taiwan were never supposed to keep me up at night. I was never destined to know the name of Taiwan’s current president, let alone the legendary Ming dynasty pirate Koxinga. Here is what I, and all humans like me, were ‘supposed’ to know: I was supposed to know the name of the bird who sings outside my window every morning, and to be able to whistle an identical reply, not to turn on my radio and absorb—silently and unquestioningly—every detail regarding the suppression of the Uyghurs in China. I was meant to cull the fruit from the apple tree growing by my front door, and to whisper a prayer of gratitude, and to carry my bounty to the gathering table and share it with my people, not to exchange imaginary currency for a lifeless shank of cow whose face I never saw and whose brutal, industrial end I choose not to imagine. Finally, I was meant to gather shells from the coast and weave them ceremonially into my clothes, as I marvel at the beauty and eternity of a sea whose storms terrify me and the other end of which I cannot even conceive, not to travel in company with two hundred strangers inside a shrieking, metal bird, leaving tons of pollution in my wake, to go visit folk museums in a country where the ‘folk’ no longer (never did?) exist.

Transnational Folklore

These are, at the very least, controversial conclusions about folklore. Many will argue that epistemological de-growth has already become impossible, that in our quest for uninhibited economic and scientific growth we are too far gone, and therefore we must rely on transnational expansion in order to overcome folklore's debilitating connection to the state. Can folklore become communicative again if it serves to connect one nation's people—a newly redefined 'folk' spanning all classes and categories à la YICFFF—to another's? Indeed, we find some element of transnationalism already apparent in Taiwan's folklore imagination. It is interesting that Taiwan's cultural institutions exhibit a great measure of pride in the island's colonial past, and moreover seek to preserve this colonization narrative by adopting Japanese material culture into their conceptions of the 'folk.' Beitou Museum is the most obvious example of this phenomenon, although there is a measure of globalism apparent in the YICFFF, where folk dances/toys from many nations are showcased alongside those of Hoklo, Hakka, Aboriginal and Mainlander. The *Complete Folktales* also features stories involving the Japanese, showing that this outside culture has since become canonized. What happens when folklore loses its purified single-nation essence? How might we conceive of a 'transnational' or even a global folklore?

More simply, this question asks whether or not transnationalism or even globalism can accommodate a system of folklore. At first it seems doubtful, as the 'othering' required for self-preservation lends itself to some of the cultural 'uniqueness' of which folklore is so proud. For Taiwan to prove its Taiwanese-ness, it must vilify Japan as the occupier, not the cultural mother. It must claim no part of Japan. Yet the fact remains that many in Taiwan embrace their historical bout with Japan and the cultural influences they left behind: the Beitou Folk Art museum a prime example. If Taiwanese folklore is itself already a mixture of Hoklo, Hakka, Aboriginal and

Mainlander re-constructions (key word ‘re-constructions’), what then is there to hinder a transnational re-construction of the ‘folk’? There is something of it in Marx, who tells the story of a global proletariat ‘folk’ struggling under the iron rod of a global bourgeois oppressor. There is something of it in St. John’s Revelation, which speaks of “every tribe, tongue and nation” united on their knees before the Lamb of God. Multinational corporations present something like it, their tales of consumerism catching a wider and wider net of diverse members of the middle-class. Even climate change policy, with its calls to action for the ‘folk’ inhabiting every nation on this dying planet, carries something like a folklore narrative.

I suppose what I’m really asking is whether or not folklore can replace capitalism as the primary adhesive that binds the people of the world to each other and to nature. If capitalism encourages the massive investments in guns, oil, and territory that cause and prolong war between nations, can folklore convince different nations of their shared origin and substance, the way nationalism used folklore to unite the nation’s own divided, warring people? If capitalism says that it is more profitable to extract and throw away than to simplify and re-purpose, can a transnational folklore teach the opposite? To accomplish this, a series of events must take place, not all of which are necessarily desirable: 1) A global narrative of human origin and substance must be embraced, one that perpetuates an abolition of difference between individuals and communities, so that one race is equal to another, one language adopted, and one worldview—an ontology of Earth—established. Science has already accomplished much of this, and English threatens to accomplish the rest within the century. But is science a folklore? Remember my definition of Folklore: *the actions of a group (or an individual in the context of a group) put on display*. What is the scientific method, if not a tool of communication between individuals and between the individual and nature? “But science claims to know everything, while folklore

embraces the unknown,” one might counter. I disagree. Science has always embraced ignorance, as discussions around dark matter and quantum physics can attest. We do not know the half of our universe, and Science is only an imperfect understanding of its mysteries. 2) Cultural institutions like museums, collections, and festivals must be re-written to represent a ‘Human Folklore.’ As the Taiwan Folk Art Museum consolidated at least four ethnic groups into one ‘Taiwanese’ identity, and thus brought together diverse communities in relative national peace, so a global folklore must rid itself of national distinction, and house a multiplicity of exhibits within the same four walls. Like the Yilan Folklore Festival, which set Mainlander alongside Aboriginal, Hoklo alongside Japanese, and Russian performers in a photo-op next to the Taiwanese president, a global folklore must take the Earth as its county seat, the restored forest as its water-park, and the child mascot reimagined as putting its ear to the soil of a united world. 3) A global folklore must produce material objects—folk art—in the same way and for a similar purpose as traditional folk objects. No longer can industry and profit drive the production of hard steel and cheap plastic. A global folklore resonates with the local, and the immediate environment determines the makeup of its houses, the walkability of its cities, the nature of its diet. Under a global folklore, planetarity returns, and the whole world is contained in the local circle of familiarity, so that intercontinental travel is rendered unthinkable, for there is already a lifetime of novelty to be explored within the woods adjacent to the village.

Conclusion

To end, I would like to sum up the possibilities of a planetarity-focused, global folklore by presenting one of the tales from *The Complete Anthology of Chinese Folklore* by Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiu-gui. Here I provide my own paraphrase of the Chinese transliteration of the Uyghur folktale titled “Aili Kurpan’s Mother,” included in the volume titled *A Collection of*

Folktales from Xinjiang,¹¹¹ along with my allegorical interpretation of ideas of planetarity, collectivity, etc. contained within its lines:

There is a story from ages past of a widow of the Uyghur clan, who after her husband was dead raised their daughter Malikā into a hard-working and intelligent young woman. One day, when Malikā was old enough to help her mother gather firewood, she saw that all the nearby mountains were bare and treeless—only the mountain on the other side of the river was green with forest.

We begin by noticing—and celebrating—the immediate notion of belonging ascribed to our protagonist by her association at the very beginning with her people, the Uyghurs. This collectivity to which she belongs is framed neither by patriarchal discourse nor identitarian, ‘first world feminist’ colonialism. It lies outside of capitalist structures, outside of colonialist structures, outside of race/gender/class distinction, outside of religious/ideological frameworks. The collectivity merely *is*, it clings to nothing but the name of a tribe, of a people: the ‘Uyghur.’

So Malikā convinced her mother that they should go together across the river to gather firewood. But when they stood before the ferryman and asked him to ferry them across, he shook his head vehemently and declared that the forest on the opposite bank was full of wild animals. Yet Malikā assured him that they would only go a little way into the forest, and besides it was still daylight—so they crossed the river and went into the forest.

Planetarity’s notion of ‘the unknowable earth’ arrives triumphantly in the description of the forest on the other side of the river. On all of the neighboring mountains we are told that the epistemic violence of always gathering firewood from the same place has run its depletive course. Now it remains for Malikā and her mother to forage in an unknown, unmapped, unmarked forest, the very essence of the unconquerable earth. The forest is filled with wild animals. It must be reached by crossing a treacherous river, an allegory for the turbulent shift from familiar to unfamiliar. A ferryman, a sort of folk-storyteller figure, remains the sole path

¹¹¹ Chen Qinghao and Wang Qiugui, 新疆民間故事集 *Xinjiang min jian gu shi ji* / Chen Qinghao, Wang Qiugui *zhu bian. Chu ban.* (Taipei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban shi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 1989).

across. Yet we must persuade him, as we coax forth his hidden and seemingly inaccessible insight, to let us cross.

When they had gathered enough firewood, Malikā's mother turned back to the boat, but Malikā stayed behind, for she wished to rest a moment. When she got up, she turned and saw a great white bear standing before her. Quicker than lightning the bear snatched her up in its jaws and bore Malikā on its back to a cave in the mountain.

Here we find the terrible bear, the uncanny force of Nature, that unconscious, unknowable power which drags us back into a planetary fear, a primal relationship with the Earth. Thus Malikā was dragged by the white bear back into the womb of the mountain, to lose momentarily her ontological relationship with humankind through a sort of baptism of planetarity.

Then Malikā was never seen again in the village. There are those who say that after living with the great white bear for a year, she gave birth to a son, and named him Aili Kurpan. This is the very hero Aili Kurpan whose name appears in so many Uyghur legends.

Finally, the distinction between that which is Human and that which is Nature is fully abolished, and we are left with a boy—the folk hero of the Uyghur people—born from and in existential harmony with both. So humanity, reborn so to speak from the womb of Nature, rises to understand both Earth's unfathomable spirit and the spirit of one's own tribal collectivity.

Thank you for joining me on this exciting intellectual journey of folklore, nationalism, and what it means to belong to a community. I hope my study of Taiwan has provided some challenging insight into the origins of the 'folk,' the function of cultural institutions, and the imagination of the state and of the people it governs. So far as I can know, if there is any 'folk' left on this planet, if any group is still put on display for purposes of relating humans to one another and to Nature, it is you and I who bear that honor and that cross. Aboriginals and pioneers, migrants in times of war and in times of peace, here we stand upon that primordial

motherland: Earth. Let our actions, our 'folklore' if you will, be a heritage of which our successors would be proud.

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