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Chinese Working-Class Lives

Hill Gates

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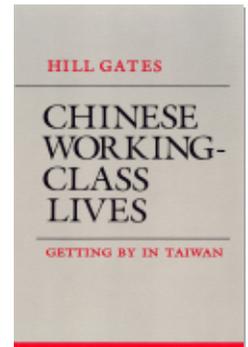
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Source Materials on Taiwan

The written sources from which we can learn about Taiwan's culture were produced in specific historical contexts and in response to the varying intellectual, political, and economic pressures that made events on this small island worthy of recording. Because of its strategic significance to sixteenth-century Fujianese merchants, Dutch mercantilists, Japanese imperialists, and Nationalist irredentists, Taiwan has had an importance far greater than its size and peripherality to the Chinese world would suggest. As a result of these historical accidents and of the way in which knowledge is produced in societies such as our own, the social-science literature on Taiwan is now probably higher in quality and quantity than that for any other part of China. We are easily tempted, therefore, to use Taiwan as a microcosm of the harder-to-study China of the past and present, while at the same time the unusual circumstances that prompted so much scholarship argue for the special nature of the Taiwan case. We know far less about China's cultural variations and unities than we must if we are to give Taiwan its proper place in Chinese and in comparative studies.

Far removed by distance and politics from the dynamics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century change on the mainland, the island has especially interested Japanese and Americans. Since the Japanese conquest in 1895, therefore, support has been available, and permission readily obtained, for Japanese researchers (before the Pacific War) and American ones (after it) to study its social relations and cultural patterns. Since about 1970, as economic success and continued political autonomy prompted concern for and pride in Taiwan itself, the Nationalist authorities, too, have supported Chinese researchers in growing numbers. Scholars from countries without special political and economic interests in the island have been few

The anthropological literature, created largely by American scholars after 1960, although generally of a high standard, contains a marked bias toward seeing Taiwan as a sample of an essentially homogeneous Chinese whole. Although much of this literature describes the “ethnographic present” accurately, its data and conclusions have frequently been held to stand for an “ethnographic past” as well. Those who have studied Taiwan’s farmers and urban poor have sometimes assumed that they were uncovering Chinese traditions that would reveal the past, both in Taiwan itself and in the wider Chinese world. My study of Taiwan’s working class often does precisely this, as when I assume, in Chapter 3, that contemporary views of gods, ghosts, and ancestors reflect nineteenth-century (or earlier) popular perceptions of significant social categories.

Although there clearly *are* continuities between Taiwan’s present and China’s past, precisely what is continuous, especially in the slippery and shifting realm of meaning, is always open to question. We must demonstrate these continuities, not assume them, for recent researches into the Chinese past increasingly undermine the sometimes unarticulated assumption of an unchanging Chinese past in favor of a search for the processes and particularities of its evolution (P. Cohen 1984). Over time, important pressures have reshaped and adapted Chinese ideologies and practices of kinship, class, economy, and power. Primary among these pressures are the competition of ethnically non-Han regional substrates with Han culture; the differential impact of China’s indigenous commercialization in, for example, the southeast coast versus the northwest interior; the unequal penetration into regions and social strata of European imperialist capitalism since the mid-nineteenth century; and the political and economic divergence of Taiwan from China for nearly one hundred years. When we consider these potent sources of cultural variation, it becomes easier to guard against assuming the universality of a pan-Chinese cultural coherence. Although Chinese states consciously foster a belief in such coherence and the relative ignorance of Westerners unconsciously supports that belief, the unity or variability of Chinese culture remains an open question both for empirical examination and for political interpretation.

The unity of Taiwan society with China’s, as well as its essential Chineseness, has by no means been a politically neutral issue to many who have an interest in the society: to the Qing authorities, beset with foreign imperialist attacks on its outlying province; to the Japanese, who wished to Japanize the Taiwanese while at the same time feeling superior to them; to the Nationalists, struggling to maintain their legitimacy at home and abroad; to the government of the P.R.C., which, like Qing rulers, is uneasy with foreign influences so near its shores; and to American military and

industrial interests, eager for allies and exploitable labor in the Pacific. As assumptions about Chinese unity frequently underlie the anthropology carried out on Taiwan, the written sources on which that anthropology draws should be read with particular attention to the social contexts and viewpoints of their writers.

The reader of this volume who wishes to pursue Taiwan studies further will receive some guidance in locating important sources of information from the list of citations on the following pages. It may also be useful to know something about other sources that, although not cited directly in this study, have formed opinion about Taiwan. This brief addendum, then, is meant to expand and give intellectual context to that list. I will briefly consider sources deriving from Western writers about pre-twentieth-century Taiwan, certain Chinese historical and popular culture genres, and Japanese scholarly and administrative writings about its colony before turning to the main body of English- and Chinese-language analyses and interpretations that have appeared since the late 1950s. This book is based primarily on these works, along with my own field notes. The emphasis in the following is on English-language materials as much as possible, for I assume that specialists will already know their way into this scholarly thicket, even if they have not yet found their way out.

Among the Western-language sources on Taiwan as it was prior to the nineteenth century, William Campbell's *Formosa under the Dutch* (1972 [1903]) is especially useful in summing up the Dutch experience and Aboriginal cultures of that time. Campbell draws on contemporary Dutch and Chinese accounts, as well as on later scholarship. In the nineteenth century, relatively few of the Westerners, mostly merchants, who traveled to Taiwan published descriptions of Chinese life there. An important exception, and still a folk hero in Taiwan to some, was George Mackay, a Canadian Presbyterian medical missionary. Mackay's *From Far Formosa* (1895) contains more than the usual missionary quotient of observations from his professional travels. A second important late-nineteenth-century source is James W. Davidson's *The Island of Formosa* (1967 [1903]), a valuable study of the early Japanese period and its economy. Though utterly unimpressed with the Chinese elite of the time and transparently biased in favor of the Japanese government that made use of his talents as a journalist, Davidson shows much sympathy for the life, work, and character of ordinary Chinese.

These descriptions of Taiwan life may be cautiously supplemented with those from the pens of the many Westerners living in southern China, especially Fujian, during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. The extensive studies of Chinese popular religion by Justus

Doolittle (1966 [1865]) and J. J. M. de Groot (1969 [1882]) are especially valuable, since they are based in large part on the regional culture from which Taiwan's derives, and with which it was complexly connected at the time.

Early Western observers often distinguished sharply among the social classes and paid particular attention to regional differences and local peculiarities in order to proselytize or make use of local resources. But they also often assumed a fundamental cultural unity, using elite Chinese culture as the standard for the entire society.

We necessarily supplement writings by Westerners with the vast store of materials that the Chinese published for themselves. Most important are the "gazetteers," or local histories, which imperial officials regularly compiled as part of their duties. These documents, intended for court use, detail not only history in a strict sense, but also economic activity, unusual phenomena or weather, local customs, and a myriad of other facts. Centuries' worth of these documents—some insightful and apparently accurate, others rather less so—exist in archives, libraries, and microfilm collections in numbers that intimidate as much as they inspire. Taiwan's *xianzhi*, as they are called, have proven a treasure trove of information about the locations and nature of economic resources and industries (for example see Harrell 1982), community rituals (for example, Weller 1985), and Chinese/Aborigine relations (for example, Shepherd 1985), to name only a few. Such materials, although they are richly informative about local variation, were written at the behest of the state to assist in the administrative tasks of unifying and ruling.

Also useful to contemporary scholars are the writings of literate Chinese who used writing in the course of their occupations, such as merchants (for example, Eberhard 1967); for religious purposes, such as Daoist or Buddhist ritual specialists (for example, Schipper 1974); or as a medium for folk art, such as the often anonymous balladeers whose broadsheet poems were sold in Taiwan's streets well into this century) (for example, Eberhard 1972; and see also Johnson et al. 1985). Such materials, preserved more rarely than official documents, are particularly precious because they reveal viewpoints of the common folk in all their variety and unexpectedness.

Under Japanese rule, administrators and scholars also gathered written materials for administrative or academic purposes. Many of these now provide invaluable data for different kinds of analyses. Although many historians, folklorists, and legal scholars (such as Oyamatsu 1901) explored local traditions and customs, the administrators' documents, carefully compiled over decades, constitute the greatest Japanese contribution to our knowledge of Taiwan society. Their system of household registers, de-

scribed fully in Wolf and Huang (1980:16–33), still maintained by the Nationalist authorities, provides demographic, social-organizational, and cultural data on a scale and of a thoroughness unparalleled anywhere but in Japan itself. Further reference will be made below to the uses to which contemporary anthropologists have put these data. For those with linguistic access to Japanese materials, a valuable resource, in either Chinese or Japanese, is the dissident (and pseudonymous) Taiwan historian Shi Ming's enormous *Four Hundred Years of Taiwan People's History* (1979), which cites copiously from Japanese-language sources, many of them in government archives. To Japanese administrators, gaining a detailed knowledge of local cultural variation was less important than defining a simple framework of Taiwanese culture on which to build the changes that their goals for the island required.

We know the Japanese period, too, from some important English-language sources written because of the American concern for Japan's expanding Pacific empire. Andrew J. Grajdanzev's *Formosa Today* (1942) is especially strong on the island's colonial economic development. George W. Barclay's *Colonial Development and Population in Taiwan* (1954) retrospectively laid the groundwork for later demographic work.

From 1945 to the late 1950s, Chinese archaeologists from the transplanted Academia Sinica continued work begun on the mainland, and ethnologists in the Department of Archaeology and Ethnology of National Taiwan University pursued their studies of Aborigines. But Western cultural anthropologists who might have studied contemporary Han culture had little access to Taiwan in those turbulent years, and probably little interest in the island. For although some China scholarship, under McCarthyist attacks, retreated into an emphasis on the past, many of those who still focused on the present were more interested in the dramatic events unfolding on China's mainland than on a Taiwan that might "fall" at any time. But precisely because of the island's political and military significance, various American advisers and diplomats studied Taiwan in its first two postwar decades, generally as a part of the U.S. mission to help the Nationalists create a capitalist democracy there. Fred W. Riggs (1952), Arthur Raper (1953), Neil Jacoby (1967), George Kerr (1965), and Mark Mancall, as editor (1964), have left especially valuable volumes examining, respectively, early Nationalist rule, rural conditions, U.S. aid to Taiwan, the U.S. betrayal of Taiwanese hopes for postwar independence, and, in a collection of papers by various authors, a range of topics from literature to the state of the military.

These and other similar sources on the early Nationalist years were supplemented by a vigorous anti-Nationalist literature in Japanese and

English by émigré Taiwanese (for example, J. Liao 1950; T. Liao 1960). Chinese-language newspapers and magazines in Taiwan, especially *Ziyou Zhongguo* (*Free China*), escaped press censorship long enough to criticize the building of a Jiang dynasty, the treatment of Mainlander soldiers, the endless and corrupt wartime economy, and many other aspects of Nationalist governance. The Nationalist government published a torrent of often unjustifiably optimistic material on the state of the economy in such periodicals as *Industry of Free China* and in annual statistical data books (for example, DGBAS, *Statistical Abstracts of the Republic of China*). Often writing in English, and clearly for an American audience, Nationalist supporters in Taiwan and the United States based many of their arguments on the premise that Taiwan was an integral part of China, and its people were wholly and essentially Chinese. In opposition, various anti-Jiang groups hotly insisted that the island had evolved so differently that its people deserved the right to choose their own government.

By the late 1950s it was clear that American anthropological fieldworkers would not be welcome in the People's Republic of China in the foreseeable future. It was beginning to appear too that the McCarthyist destruction of China scholarship in the United States was hampering the American ability to understand events in China proper. Support emerged for anthropological investigation of everyday Chinese life in Taiwan, where, it was assumed, traditional Chinese culture had been preserved from the changes set in motion by the Communist revolution. The postwar assumption of superiority to the Japanese by both Chinese and Americans led them to underestimate the impact of Japan's fifty years of control, while the Nationalist need for legitimacy caused them to emphasize cultural continuities with China. American fieldworkers began to arrive, led in 1956 by Bernard Gallin and Rita Gallin, and followed in 1957 by Arthur Wolf and Margery Wolf and in 1960 by Norma Diamond, all based at Cornell University.

These academic siblings and their students have trained the great majority of American anthropologists who have worked in Taiwan, although Morton Fried and his students Myron Cohen and Burton Pasternak of Columbia University have also played major roles in Taiwan anthropological production. In 1971 the center of gravity of Taiwan studies shifted with Arthur and Margery Wolf's move to Stanford University.

The most productive of these scholarly foci, the Stanford/Cornell group, has been primarily influenced by three areas of theoretical concern: the application of British Africanist kinship studies as developed for Chinese studies by Maurice Freedman, especially in his *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (1958) and *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (1966); the macroscopic vision of central-place theory as ap-

plied to the Chinese case by G. William Skinner, set forth in his three-part article "Marketing and Chinese Rural Social Structure" in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (1964, 1965a, and 1965b) and further developed in the essay "Cities and the Hierarchy of Local Systems," along with his other contributions to his edited volume *The City in Late Imperial China* (1977); and on Arthur Wolf's use of Taiwan's household registers to test sensitive hypotheses about Chinese kinship patterns and the cultural effects of family dynamics. Detailed and perceptive analyses of Taiwanese folk religion as behavior that reflects, supports, and reproduces island working-class life have been an important result of anthropological research done against this theoretical background (for example, Ahern 1973, 1981a, 1981b, and Sangren, in press).

Using a sophisticated mix of field interviews, archival research, and the manipulation of an immense body of household-register data, Arthur Wolf has explored one of anthropology's fundamental questions—the origins of the incest taboo and its effects on fertility (1966, 1970a, 1976). With Huang Chieh-shan (1980), he has examined an unorthodox pattern of Chinese marriage and adoption, uniting the study of Chinese kinship with demography. Wolf's concentration of his own and his students' research in Haishan, an area of northern Taiwan, has resulted in a profusion of fine work informed by the theoretical frameworks with which he, Freedman, and Skinner began. A helpful bibliography of studies of Haishan is supplied by Wolf and Huang (1980: 381–86).

Whereas the Stanford/Cornell scholars have been preoccupied with the continuities in Taiwan of patterns that Freedman and Skinner had found in China proper, an emphasis on change surfaced in the work of Bernard Gallin and Rita Gallin. These scholars brought the economic change, industrialism, and urban migration that were changing Taiwan so rapidly during the 1960s into Taiwan anthropology's mainstream (for example, B. Gallin 1963, and B. Gallin and R. Gallin 1974, 1982a, 1982b). Both Bernard Gallin and Diamond produced baseline ethnographies of village life, *Hsin Hsing: A Chinese Village in Change* (1966) and *K'un Shen: A Taiwanese Fishing Village* (1969), respectively, against which to measure this change. Margery Wolf's vivid description of a rural family, *The House of Lim* (1968), and Myron Cohen's account of a Hakka community, *House United, House Divided* (1976), are other such baseline studies.

Burton Pasternak introduced the perspective of cultural ecology in his *Kinship and Community in Two Chinese Villages* (1972), and has shared Arthur Wolf's demographic interests in subsequent work, notably *Guests in the Dragon* (1983).

Important contributions to the newly emerging anthropology of women

were made by Margery Wolf in her *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (1972) and in other publications (for example, 1974, 1975), and by Norma Diamond (1973, 1975, 1979), Emily Martin [Ahern] (1975), and many of their students, notably Lydia Kung (1983), who has studied women factory workers. Arthur Wolf's previously cited work has obvious implications for women's studies, and Rita Gallin has written on women in industrialization (1984a, 1984b). Taiwan anthropology has had a valuable influence on the rest of the discipline through these early contributions to the belated development of an anthropology of women.

During the later 1960s and 1970s, when the early Taiwan anthropologists were establishing their own careers and placing students in Taiwan field sites, a series of six important and academically fruitful conferences on Chinese society was administered by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. Five of these included Taiwan as a research area. These prestigious meetings defined the central intellectual issues for Taiwan anthropology at that time, and their impact remains strong (see Marks 1985 on the agenda-setting roles of such events in the China field).

Not all the participants were Taiwan anthropologists. The organizers invited historians, political scientists, sociologists, and others, many of whom studied other regions of China and time periods ranging back through the whole of late imperial China. The conferences supported the traditional inclination of Chinese social scientists toward history, thus encouraging the growing alliance between history and anthropology which has enriched both disciplines in the past two decades. In this, China specialists may have been somewhat in advance of anthropologists as a whole. At the same time, however, the conferences fostered a generally conservative tendency to assume Chinese continuities over time and space more than it encouraged equally valid tendencies to look for variation and change among Taiwan and mainland regionalisms.

The conferences resulted in six volumes of essays, many of which bear on Taiwan studies: *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, edited by Maurice Freedman (1971); *Economic Organization in Chinese Society*, edited by W. E. Willmott (1972); *The Chinese City between Two Worlds*, edited by Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner (1974); *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, edited by Arthur P. Wolf (1974); *Women in Chinese Society*, edited by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (1975); and *The City in Late Imperial China*, edited by G. William Skinner (1977). They contain over two dozen articles based largely on Taiwan fieldwork, which together constitute a necessary background for any researcher in this area. A similar conference held in 1976, resulting in the volume *The Anthropology of Taiwanese*

Society (Ahern and Gates 1981), attempted to sum up research focused on the island up to that time.

These conferences drew more Chinese anthropologists into the still largely anglophone tradition of studying Han culture in Taiwan. Their publications in the *Journal of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica*, and National Taiwan University's Anthropology Department *Bulletin* helped disseminate the ideas of current American anthropology in the Chinese scholarly community, where the emphases on historical anthropology, kinship studies, and traditionalism were easily accepted. The volume *The Chinese Family and Its Ritual Behavior*, edited by Hsieh Jih-chang and Chuang Ying-chang (1985), itself a result of a 1982 conference in Taiwan, exemplifies this merging of Chinese and American scholarly interests. In late 1985 the two major institutions for the study of anthropology in Taiwan cosponsored another international conference on accomplishments and prospects. From this conference may soon emerge another English-language collection, edited by Kwang-chih Chang, Arthur Wolf, and Alexander Chien-chung Yin, which will emphasize mainstream archaeological, historical, and kinship topics.

Chinese anthropologists (and sociologists) in recent decades have turned also to studies of urban life (notably T'ang Mei-chun [1978], Alexander Chien-chung Yin [1981, 1985] and Susan Greenhalgh [1984]) and to aspects of social change that can be discussed without implying serious criticism of official social, economic, or political policy. Research into controversial matters—poverty or the detrimental consequences of industrialization—is not yet well incorporated into the expanding Taiwan anthropological tradition, just as it has not been by American anthropologists. A monograph is being prepared, however, on the emerging issue of Aborigine rights by Hsieh Shih-chung; Huang Shu-min has written of agricultural degradation in Taiwan (1981), and Linda Gail Arrigo has written of the plight of women workers (1984, 1985).

Although anthropologists have conducted many studies of micro-economic processes (for example, Silin's 1976 examination of a major Taiwan corporation), analyses of economic and political change have come largely from outside of anthropology. Many of these writers begin from uncritically pro-Nationalist and pro-capitalist premises that limit the value of their conclusions. Others fail to place economic change in its political and social context. The work of economists such as Samuel P. S. Ho (1978), that appearing in *The Experience of Rapid Industrialization in Taiwan*, edited by Walter Galenson (1979), and the prolific work of Gustave Ranis, John Fei, and Shirley W. Y. Kuo (for example, Fei et al. 1979; Kuo et al. 1981), however, have made available important data and insights from which a

variety of conclusions can be drawn. Some of the political context for interpreting Taiwan's economic change comes from the work of relatively critical American scholars such as George Kerr (1965); Mark Mancall, who edited a collection of outspoken papers in 1964; Douglas Mendel, who wrote on *The Politics of Formosan Nationalism* (1970); and Lloyd Eastman, who is a strong critic of the Nationalists in their pre-Taiwan period (1974, 1984). Dissidents such as P'eng Ming-min in his 1972 autobiography; the historian Mab Huang, describing *Intellectual Ferment for Political Reforms in Taiwan, 1971-1973* (1976); and a wide variety of publications by pro-independence Taiwanese at home and abroad (for example, the documents of the Formosan Association for Human Rights, magazines such as *Formosa [Meili Dao]*, *The Independent Formosa*, *Mayflower [Wang Chun Fong]*, and *Taiwan Wenzhai* and even testimony before the U.S. Congress on human rights [Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 1977]) balance the bland superficialities of official Nationalist publications.

China anthropology, despite the hopes expressed for its future significance by Maurice Freedman in an essay titled "A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology" (1963), seems often to lag behind the rest of the discipline in its theoretical development. Where we can do fieldwork, our researches are constrained by tight governmental limits on the pursuit of topics that might undermine national policy. Where we cannot do fieldwork, we can do anthropology only on the safely dead. Intellectual issues thus come to be defined conservatively, and research topics become studies in the art of the possible. Although since the late 1960s American anthropology has absorbed and been revitalized by the exploration of various versions of Marxism, dependency theory, and other such "critical" approaches, Taiwan specialists have been slow to adopt them, although articles rebutting such approaches are smuggling them into the field nonetheless (for example, Amsden 1979; Barrett 1982; and Greenhalgh 1985a, 1985b).

Intellectual ties among American anthropologists and those in other disciplines who bring a critical and/or Marxist viewpoint to Taiwan studies have had little institutional support thus far, although the journal *Modern China* has become an outlet for such work (see the special issue on Taiwan of July 1979, and many other issues). Also, the Circle for Taiwan Studies at the University of Chicago began a series of annual conferences in July 1985 which have focused sharply, and sometimes critically, on the consequences of a changing political economy. The resulting volumes of papers may express a broader vision of anthropology for Taiwan than we have seen heretofore.

Curiously, the Chinese of the P.R.C. have published very little on Taiwan

society, although at least one Taiwan Research Institute exists, at Xiamen University in Fujian Province. This lack of interest is doubtless largely due to the underdeveloped state of the social sciences in China at present (see Thurston and Parker, eds. 1980), and to the unwillingness to emphasize regional tendencies that often counter central government policies. But it is a result too, I suspect, of the reality that Taiwan in and of itself matters far less to the mainland than the mainland matters to Taiwan.

Whether they “belong” to the China mainland or not is a question that has long shaped the identity of Taiwan’s people. Arguments for the inalienable unity of Chinese culture can always be used, whatever the motives of the writer, as weapons in the struggle that Chinese states must engage in to control their people, and to keep outsiders from weakening that control. Arguments for diversity, for separate origins, institutions, and sentiments within the Chinese world, can be used by those dissatisfied with state control to set up their own kingdoms, as rebellious Chinese have so often done. All students of Taiwan in this century will find that their work has political weight, and will be weighed politically by those whose interests in the island are not academic, but life and death matters. Readers must be alert, then, to the intellectual and political complexities that lie behind any piece of writing on Taiwan. For these, after all, are what scholarship is really about.

