

**CHAPTER 1**

## Experiences of Being a “Native” Observing Anthropology

**B**orn in what was then the Japanese-controlled colony of Taiwan, as were my parents, I (Keelung Hong) grew up in a Chinese colony under martial law. Like Native Americans in reservation schools, my schoolmates were turned into spies to make sure that no one used our mother tongue (Holo/Hokkien). The Chinese imposed names on us in their language, Beijinghua (“Mandarin”), just as they renamed our cities and villages and punished us if we used our native language—even to say one another’s names. Like Algerians and Vietnamese reading about “our ancestors the Gauls,” we were taught next to nothing about our native land, even its geography (since Taiwanese place-names were being suppressed; instead, we had to learn about locations in China). Our teachers scoffed at the possibility of a Taiwanese culture that was anything other than an inferior copy of Chinese civilization and of any history other than a slow and inept rise from barbarism to second-rate Chineseness. The Chinese whom the U.S. military had transported to Taiwan and left in charge considered Taiwanese barely civilized descendants of pirates and head-hunters. They considered our language corrupted by reduplication-rich Polynesian “baby talk” and punished us for speaking it even in the vicinity of school. In the view of the Chinese who ruled us and tried to suppress our festivals, folk religion, and folk healing, Taiwanese are addicted to “backward, chaotic, and wasteful superstitions” instead of being dutiful followers of the wise and virtuous leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiang Jieshi).

Although my father was not among the 30,000 Taiwanese slaughtered in the “White Terror” that began in March 1947 and continued into the 1960s, he was forced out of his job so that a Mainlander (*guasienlang*) could take it. Despite the disadvantage of competing in my third language (Beijinghua, the language imposed by the Kuomintang, in contrast to the Holo/Hokkien and Japanese spoken by my family) and systematic discrimination on behalf of Mainlanders against Taiwanese, I did well enough in

school to be able to leave and to study in the United States after completing mandatory military service. Emigration was the escape valve for the oppressive system of the Chinese oligarchy, one of the few ways in which Taiwanese of my generation could better our lot. Mainlanders and their children occupied most of the elite positions in the government and the institutions controlled by the government—especially those within universities and research institutes.

When television came along, under the control and close supervision of the KMT state, the government severely restricted shows that were not broadcast in the language of Beijing. Those speaking the majority language (Holo) were portrayed as criminals or menials, reinforcing the Chinese conquerors' views of Taiwanese as inferior, vicious, and too stupid (to speak properly [see Dreyer 2003:5]). Neither our language nor our culture was regarded as “Chinese” by the Chinese, who denigrated us and discriminated against us.

As a graduate student in chemistry first at the University of Texas, El Paso, and later at the University of California, Berkeley, I began reading about the pre-Chinese history of Taiwan and explored American eyewitness accounts of the 1947 reign of terror that silenced political discussion on Taiwan for more than a generation. Although I had an occasional pleasure of recognizing familiar facets of Taiwanese culture, and though I learned many things about Taiwan from reading what has been written in English, I had some unpleasant surprises too. When I began to look at ethnographies of Taiwanese villages, the greatest shock was to see that the customs and beliefs that the Chinese viewed with such contempt and actively sought to eradicate were presented by American ethnographers unable to get into China as aspects of “traditional Chinese culture.” Seeing what are supposedly native terms not written in Holo, the language of the people who use these terms, but transliterated into Beijinghua, the language of the people who dismiss our religion and customs, also startled me. Many of the romanizations puzzled me. Without indications of tone, others were ambiguous. Sometimes I was not even certain which language was being romanized!

I soon realized that hardly any of the anthropologists working on Taiwan were interested in Taiwanese culture.<sup>1</sup> While they seemed to be looking at us, they were really looking *through* us to try to see traditional Chinese culture. Most showed no interest in any other part of our historical experiences or with what we made of it (that is, Taiwanese culture). Being invisible or transparent constituted only a slight promotion in the valuation of our culture, because this research done by aliens legitimated substitut-

ing the rulers' language for ours and justified subordinating our culture to the so-called great tradition of Chinese civilization. Anthropologists were thereby complicit with the authoritarian ethnic minority oligarchy, to which we were economically and politically subordinate, ruling Taiwan under the fiction of being the "Republic of China," and bemoaned having to be on Taiwan while they dreamed of China. Under martial law during the four-decade "state of emergency," the state-supported "high culture" consisted of heavily romanticized fantasies of life in China. Even Thomas Gold (1994:60), one of the KMT's most loyal and admiring American scholars while it was in power, recalled that "the few works by Taiwanese written in Japanese during the occupation were neglected." It was obvious to me that publications of fieldwork done on Taiwan obliterated recognition of anything Taiwanese in order to claim the more prestigious object of study, Chinese culture. This helped to maintain the Republic of China pretense and keep any "Republic of Taiwan" unthinkable. Similarly, foreign scholars' use of the language of domination was ideologically useful to the KMT in legitimating suppression of the majority's language. The dovetailing of KMT interests and funding (directly by the KMT and the Chiang Chingkuo Foundation and indirectly by Cold War institutions such as the Hoover Institution, the Luce Foundation, and the U.S. government) for research on traditional China on Taiwan was obvious to me. However, I did not know how to enter anthropological discourse to deplore such collusion.

To try to explain my views in English, I enlisted the help of Stephen Murray. Familiar with what anthropologists were writing about anthropologists' eagerness to serve past colonialisms, he helped me to phrase my critique of complicity with Chinese domination of Taiwan in ways that were publishable in anthropology journals.<sup>2</sup> He also was able to suggest some historical reasons why (mostly American) anthropologists stretched their necks like giraffes trying to look across the Taiwan Straits at China while ignoring the fact that they were standing on an island that was becoming "developed" and polluted.

Irritated by an earlier version of the seventh chapter of this book, Hill Gates told me that "anthropologists are not the enemy." While I agree with her that some so-called political science studies touching on Taiwan have shared more "free China" fantasies than have the village and urban neighborhood studies done by anthropologists, the denial of and tacit complicity with derogation and destruction of our language and culture by anthropologists are especially insidious.<sup>3</sup> I have been lectured by sociologists as well as by anthropologists that I am Chinese and that it is wrong to insist on calling myself "Taiwanese." As recently as the late 1990s, at a

World Affairs Council panel discussion on democratization in Taiwan, the Berkeley sociologist Thomas Gold huffily proclaimed that it was “offensive” for a Taiwanese (me) to say that we could decide for ourselves whether we are Chinese. (White American “experts” always know best.) Moreover, those in other social sciences, including many political scientists and most economists writing about Taiwan, have been able to distinguish (and contrast) Taiwanese arrangements from Chinese ones.

I wish that it were true, as Gates maintained, that American anthropologists had helped or were helping to preserve components of our culture. Unfortunately, they cooperated with official ethnocide and linguicide by an army of occupation foisted on Taiwan by the winning side in World War II and recapitulated the practice of ignoring state violence, including ethnocide, against the people studied (earlier ones being anthropologists’ relationships with Native Americans and colonized Africans). Furthermore, as soon as they could get the consent of the set of autocrats ruling mainland China, most of the anthropologists who had done fieldwork on Taiwan (including Gates and both Wolfs) moved to their real interest, China. Their departure as democratization (and Taiwanization even of the KMT) accelerated strikes me as an eagerness to collude with another set of oppressive masters, rulers who believe that their legitimacy is enhanced by foreign research describing what the Chinese masters allow to be researched.

This book critically describes what American anthropologists did before they moved on. It is not intended to be a description or even an outline of what Taiwanese culture is but, rather, an interpretive review of the representations of Taiwanese realities in American social science literature, especially anthropology, during the era of KMT authoritarianism.

The next chapter provides a very summary account of American anthropological research on peasants and elaborates on the historical background of anthropological work on Taiwan. Chapter 3 gives a similarly abbreviated historical overview of questions of sovereignty and effective control of Taiwan. Chapters 4–6 discuss American writings on the period before the first American ethnographers arrived on Taiwan, which was the era of White Terror and the Chinese expropriation of Taiwanese jobs, property, and lives.

Anthropology—the social anthropology of Africa, in particular—has been indicted for serving and depending on colonialism (see Foerstel and Gilliam 1992). As Talal Asad (1973:17) put it, “The colonial power structure made the object of anthropological study accessible and safe—because of it sustained physical proximity between the observing Europeans and the living non-Europeans became a practical possibility.” Field

ethnographers' concern about access to field sites is understandable, but the complicity of alien anthropologists with the Chinese oligarchy ruling Taiwan under martial law (and beyond the termination of martial law) was extreme. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, anthropologists doing research in South Africa, even during the apartheid regime, and presenting Xhosa or Zulu terms translated into Afrikaans as "native terms." The seventh chapter shows that there was variability in the practice of presenting Taiwanese materials as Chinese. The visibility of Taiwanese was greater in some topic areas than others (research on women in contrast to research on religion) and varied systematically according to the place of training (Michigan universities in contrast to Berkeley and Columbia).

The following two chapters confront some of the failings in research methods and in the ethics of Margery Wolf's claims about spirit mediums in the most cited 1990s anthropological publications based on research done on Taiwan—works that, typically, failed to indicate in their titles that the data were quarried (by Taiwanese labor) from Taiwan. The final chapter discusses work done since Margery Wolf's misrepresentations of spirit mediumship and naming practices in Taiwan. After considering the small amount of American anthropologists' research on Taiwan since the lifting of martial law, some of the ways in which American anthropologists protect their own from scrutiny of their linguistic and conceptual incompetence are addressed in the book's acknowledgments.

### **The Horror: "That's 'Political!'"**

Writing about research funded by the Luce Foundation and the Chiang Ching-Kuo (Jiang Jinguo) Foundation, two bulwarks of legitimating the view of the Chiang Dynasty as "free China," Charles Stafford (2000:168) asserted that, "given the sensitivities surrounding the political status of Taiwan, it was probably inevitable that anthropologists would get caught in the cross fire." Anglophone anthropologists have come under fire, but it is decidedly not "cross-fire," because they have not been in the middle. Rather, they have been securely fed and sheltered within the Chinese ideological lines and have been granted access and given support for their "Sinological" research by the KMT and its foundations. Stafford concluded that, "if anthropologists were to say that Taiwan is not culturally 'Chinese,' they would undoubtedly be accused of promoting Taiwanese independence" (168). It is noteworthy that this sentence has to be in the conditional, because it is a stance that has not been taken by any Anglophone anthropologist. Nor did this anthropologist, who titled his book on education in

Taiwan *The Roads of Chinese Childhood*, contemplate the option of writing about what is observed on Taiwan without taking a position on whether it is essentially Chinese or in important ways not Chinese (that is, it is possible to report what he or other anthropologists saw on Taiwan without labeling this as “Chinese culture” or as “Taiwanese culture”).

Because my position has been misunderstood (I believe intentionally), I want it to be clear that arguing that the Chineseness of Taiwanese culture has been exaggerated, and that those who have routinely exaggerated it have been complicit with the domination of the ethnic oligarchy, under the two Chiangs does *not* mean that I believe it necessary to show that there is a totally distinctive Taiwanese culture in order to secure for Taiwan the right of self-determination, defined as universal in the United Nations charter.<sup>4</sup> As Ernest Gellner (1983:7) wrote, “It is their recognition of each other as fellows . . . which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes.” And “identity is formed and solidified on the basis of common social experience,” as Melissa Brown (2004:2) put it. The common social experience of Taiwanese during the era when American anthropologists were doing fieldwork on Taiwan was our exclusion from the life chances afforded to those identified (and to those self-identifying) as Chinese (that is, those who left China in the 1945–49 period and their progeny) and, in many instances, from life itself (see Edmonson in Corcuff 2002; Wong 2001; F. Wang 2002). As early as 1963, Maurice Meisner noted that “Formosans have shared a common historical experience that was and is different and separate from that of mainland China”(105). This experience included recurrent discrimination against and contempt for Taiwanese from those who fled general rejection and defeat in China.

When American anthropologists were working on Taiwan, they depended upon the ethnic oligarchy KMT. The framing of what they wrote about as *Chinese* fit with the blocking of an imagined Taiwanese community and recognition of Taiwanese and attempts by a minority ethnic oligarchy to mask the structures of Chinese discrimination against Taiwanese as well as to persecute what were regarded as Chinese beliefs, practices, and use of languages other than the official “national language” (*guoyü*). (The subsequent passing of the presidency to Taiwanese, the splits of the KMT into Chinese and Taiwanese factions and separate parties, is not relevant to the history of the American anthropology of Taiwan, which was almost entirely done before the lifting of martial law and the “Temporary Provisions Effective during the Period of Communist Rebellion,” a period that lasted four decades.)

I think that Taiwanese culture differs in significant ways from “Chinese

culture” (whether it is traditional Chinese culture of the vanished imperial dynasties or the culture of the contemporary PRC), but, even if there were no differences, the people born on Taiwan should decide for themselves whether they want to be a part of the PRC, a part of Japan, or an independent nation. The islands to the immediate north of Taiwan (the Ryukyus, the largest and best-known of which is Okinawa) had such an opportunity at the end of their occupation by the victorious World War II Allies, and so should Taiwan. Whatever the particulars of Taiwan’s linguistic and cultural history, Taiwanese should have the opportunity for self-determination that was proclaimed as a universal right in the United Nations Charter and in Common Article 1.1 of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Common Article 1.1 of the two covenants states: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.”

I am *not* arguing for some primordial Taiwanese-ness uninfluenced by European, Japanese, and Chinese occupiers (not to mention contemporary American cultural exports). The hybrid that is Taiwanese culture is rooted in forefathers who took great risks in turning their backs on China—many at the urging of European global entrepreneurs—and in our Polynesian foremothers. Contemporary Taiwan—which is economically far more developed than China and is now almost infinitely more democratic—was heavily influenced by twentieth-century modernization programs first of the Japanese Empire (of which it was a relatively content part), then (without direct rule) of the American one. Both of these were (and to a considerable sense still are) regarded as enemies by the PRC, which vaunts its four or five thousand years of superior Chinese civilization and nurtures a xenophobia that was particularly strong during the Qing and Mao dynasties. The linguistic and cultural differences between Taiwanese and Chinese might have mattered less if the KMT occupation of the former Japanese colony had been different. However, the importance of ethnic and linguistic differences between Taiwanese and Chinese were painfully impressed on us by our Chinese overlords, who killed most of our intellectuals (and many others) and who very systematically denied us the same opportunities afforded to the Chinese newly arrived in our midst. Nevertheless, Taiwan’s right to self-determination does not depend upon cultural distinctiveness, any more than the American Revolution depended on distinctiveness from English culture.<sup>5</sup>

The systematic representation of the non-Chinese history of Taiwan by

anthropologists (and a few sociologists) served to legitimate the ethnic oligarchy that permitted foreign social scientists to work on Taiwan while China was closed to them. Even so ardent an admirer of KMT economic development policies and neo-Confucianism as Thomas B. Gold—at least after the end of the Jiang Dynasty, with the death of Jiang Jingguo (Chiang Ching-Kuo)—forthrightly recognized that the denial of any identity as Taiwanese served to legitimate KMT rule:

Officially, Taiwan is a province [actually, three provinces] of the Republic of China, with no more claim to a separate identity than any of the other provinces of China [although the others happen not to be ruled by the same government]. Claiming that Taiwan did indeed have an identity different from that of the rest of China which extended beyond the usual dialect [*sic*], cuisine, folkways, etc. opened the Pandora's Box of the island's political future, that is, if Taiwan was not just another Chinese province, then what legitimacy did the Mainlander-KMT regime have to continue to maintain two distinct governments for one island, monopolizing power over the much stronger "central" government. . . . By implication, if it could be shown that Taiwan had a distinct identity, then the island's political structure should be overhauled to reflect this.

Not surprisingly, these questions of identity were raised as part of the strengthening and politicization of civil society. This began to occur as people on Taiwan became aware of their own strength vis-à-vis the increasingly inhibited and vulnerable KMT party-state, of Taiwan's [that is, the ROC's] fragile international existence and of the vast difference between Taiwan's historical experience and that of the rest of China. (1994:59)

Anthropologists who have moved on to the PRC, are beholden to another authoritarian regime, one that claims Taiwan has no important cultural/historical difference from China and an interest in suppressing consideration of such differences (or allowing conquered peoples, notably Tibetans, the right of self-determination). Moreover, these professors' status as Sinologists is higher both in China and in the United States than that of Taiwanologists. There are careerist inducements to support the shared Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party line that Taiwanese are simply "Chinese." Their imposition of *Chinese* on what they saw in Taiwan is not just indirectly "political." Because it seemed to naturalize Chinese rule and occluded that doing so is political (see Riggins 1997), I would argue that the imposition of *Chinese* on Taiwanese culture is actually **more** political

than any recognition of an autonomous “Taiwanese” culture. Elsewhere in the world, anthropologists write about the local. Anthropologists studying Kurdish villages would not translate Kurdish terms into Turkish or Arabic because the Kurdish lands (and entry to them by foreigners) are parts of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Anthropologists writing about Catalonia do not substitute Spanish terms for Catalán ones, though Catalonia is a part of Spain and Catalán was officially misrepresented as a “dialect” of Spanish during the Franco dictatorship that was contemporaneous with the Chiang one (see DiGiacomo 2002; Woolard 1988). While anthropologists working in many parts of the world have passed over in silence ethnocide and violence against the people whose culture they write about, citing what people say in the language they use is standard anthropological operating procedure *except* in research on Taiwan.

### **Mechanics of the Book**

Although presented in the first-person singular, both authors engaged in participant observation in Taiwan beginning in 1943 (Hong) and 1992 (Murray) and participant observation of American anthropology since 1974 (Murray) and 1981 (Hong). The ideas about Taiwanese culture are mostly the first author’s, and their formulation in English mostly the second author.

#### *Romanization of Terms*

Despite a tendency to work close to Taipei, where Mainlanders are concentrated, ethnographers have for the most part not studied native speakers of Beijinghua (or other central or northern Chinese languages). Instead, they have studied native speakers of Hakka and Holo (Hokkien, Hoklo, Fujianhua, and Xiamen are other labels for the same language). In common with general anthropological practice everywhere but Taiwan, I endeavor either to render concepts in English or to use native terms, not to translate what is presented as “native terms” into a third language.

Both Holo and Hakka are spoken outside Taiwan—and beyond Taiwan and China, especially by many persons of Han descent in Southeast Asia. Certainly, there are more native speakers of Holo in either China or Taiwan than there are native speakers of all the American Indian languages combined in the United States. Nevertheless, Native American terms from languages with only a handful of speakers are presented in anthropology journals without being translated, for example, into Navajo, the language known to more speakers (and probably to more anthropologists). Not that representation in the fieldworkers’ language is neutral either—see Asad

1986:156–60 on anthropologists’ textual constructs removed from the scrutiny of those whom these constructs supposedly “represent.” But for Holo or Hakka categories obvious translation into English is less insidious than translation into Beijinghua.

A widely diffused myth is that Chinese languages are entirely monosyllabic (that Chinese is the ultimate analytic language). This seems particularly inapt for place-names (toponyms). My renderings agglutinate the syllables without hyphens. I have resisted a strong temptation to do the same thing to personal names (except for my own) but have capitalized the “second word” of personal names because the convention for names in English is to capitalize every separate component, and I would not want to provide any occasion for someone to claim lesser dignity is given to persons with Chinese and Taiwanese names than those with names in European language.

Nicholas Bodman laid out the most widely used romanization of Holo in 1955. Along with the Presbyterian scheme, it uses consonants that are not the ones I hear. I hear *d* where others have written *t*, *b* where others have written *p*, and *g* for *k* (for example, *dang-gi* for what American anthropologists have written as *tang-ki*), plus *ch* for the *j* sound. What is pronounced *Daiba* is generally rendered *Taipei* in English, and the conventional (mis)spelling appears here in many direct quotations of Anglophone texts. (The acronym KMT is so well established on the basis of *Kuomintang* that the Chinese party is referred to with this old romanization rather than with *Guomindang*.) Buoyed by Bernard (1992), I have rendered the consonants as I hear them. Without extraordinarily technically involved representations, the elaborate tonal aspects of Holo cannot be displayed, so I have not tried to render the complicated (and phonemic) tone differences or to indicate the many glottal stops after the initial consonant (some writers indicate glottal stops for every dental consonant), only those between vowels. The romanizations do not provide sufficient uniqueness for linguistic analysis, but I am not attempting to provide a linguistic analysis of Holo, only to provide some approximation of pronunciation of the terms for persons who cannot speak it.