

TAIWAN

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MY ASSIGNMENT: In September 1991, my company sent me and my family to Taichung, Taiwan. During this 2 1/2 year assignment, I ran a development program to design and build a small, office machine at our wholly owned subsidiary there, (The TAICHUNG Plant) located just north of the city.

GENERAL

GEOGRAPHY: Taiwan is located approximately 100 miles off the southeastern coast of Mainland China between Hong Kong and Shanghai. A substantial mountain range runs North/South along its length and only a narrow, approximately 20 mile wide, gently sloping area on the west side is fertile and highly cultivated. Taiwan is 245 miles long, 60 to 90 miles wide and has a population of about 23 million. (Imagine 1/10 of the US population all living in a very mountainous island the size of West Virginia!) Taiwan's three largest cities are Taipei, Kaochung and Taichung. Taipei is the capital and is located at the north end of the island. It is the largest city (pop: 3.5 million) in Taiwan. Kaochung (pop: 2 million) is the 2nd largest city and is located on the southern coast. Taichung (pop: 1 million) is the 3rd largest city and is located along the middle of the west (fertile) coast of the island. The east coast of Taiwan is very rugged and similar to the California coast with mountains running down almost directly into the Indian Ocean. This coast has few cities or town and has spectacular roadways in some areas cut into the mountains high above the rocky shores.

LAND USE The west coast flat land is used for residential, business, or cultivating crops (mostly rice). Rice is grown on most fields in and around any city. Along most roads you see houses clustered together around and behind which there is rice field upon rice field. In the middle and northern sections of Taiwan, they grow two rice crops per year (in the south, they can grow three per year). Rice is planted in March and again in August and is harvested in July and December. The rice plants grow to about 18 inches high and are like a thick grass. Near the end of its growth cycle it sprouts a little cluster of seeds (rice) near the top. The rice is grown in

level fields surrounded by little earth walls so that water is retained. The rice is both planted and harvested by machine although until the early 1980s it was done mostly by hand.

TAICHUNG: Taichung is roughly 120 miles south of Taipei. It has few Westerners compared to Taipei or Kaochung. This logically results in a scarcity of western food, clothes, etc. On the other hand, when living in Taichung one gets a richer "Chinese experience" than in a more cosmopolitan city like Taipei.

WEATHER Taiwan is located right on the Tropic of Cancer. The weather in Taiwan consequently ranges from lows of 50°F in the winter to highs of about 100°F in the summer. It is quite humid all the time so the higher temperatures can get pretty bad. (Remember, this is an island and is also covered with flooded rice fields which continually evaporate.) The low 50°F temperatures also pose a problem when you consider no one has central heating. (Try living in your house at 50°F for a few months!) The weather is similar to that found in Miami, Florida.

TIME ZONES Taiwan is 12 hours ahead of New York when the US is on Daylight Savings Time. When the US is on Standard Time, Taiwan is 13 hours ahead of New York. When traveling to the US, you cross the International Date Line and it apparently takes only 8 hours (local time to local time) to fly from Taipei to upstate New York. During this flight you fly through a very short nighttime. When flying from upstate New York to Taiwan it seems to take 36 hours (local time to local time). If you start in the early morning, you never lose sight of the sun!

ROADS / TRAFFIC

MY DRIVING Driving in Taiwan was a challenge to say the least. However, after a few months I became a relatively accomplished driver. I daily negotiated the narrow streets avoiding the abundance of scooters, bicycles and pedestrians thereon. The biggest problem was that the drivers did not routinely obey the traffic laws. I ultimately adopted their driving habits -- after all, I was a guest there ("when in Rome....."). One of

our friends commented that traffic lights were just "a suggestion" which was very close to the truth! Throughout the USA we have "Right Turn on Red"; in Taiwan they had "Anything You Want on Red"! Drivers routinely made left turns, right turns, and if the traffic allowed, they would go straight ahead as well. The worst time of day to drive was the early morning when the few drivers who were on the road all thought that they were the only ones on the road and consequently did not even slow down for red lights, etc. It was shocking at first but as I slowly became one of them, I learned to drive with the awareness that I needed to be ready all the time for anything!

TRAFFIC There was so much traffic at times that the roadways got totally clogged with vehicles. More than half the vehicles on the road were motorscooters, which were constantly weaving in and out of traffic. When I drove, I spent most of my time keeping an eye on them. During rush hours, the traffic went all over the place! I read one newspaper article (in an English language newspaper from Taipei) which claimed that it all made some perverted sense. It said that the vehicles fill all the unoccupied spaces which lets more vehicles move simultaneously along the same roadway. The article went on to say that if everyone strictly obeyed the law, then traffic would move slower and there would be more congestion. This article helped me become calmer and more philosophical about the traffic and to take the chaos in stride.

DRIVING ATTITUDE The attitude of the drivers in Taiwan was actually quite good. People did occasionally blow their horns to warn you that they were coming, but in general the drivers' attitudes were pretty good and you rarely saw anyone get angry or vindictive. This predominantly pleasant attitude allowed the traffic and driving chaos to work amazingly well.

DRIVING SCHOOLS Taiwan required each new driver to go to a driving school in order to get a drivers license. These schools typically had a paved area about the size of a US supermarket parking lot with painted lines defining various roads, intersections, parking areas, etc. There were stop lights, traffic signs, a three meter high "hill" (ramp) to stop and start on, etc. It was hard to believe that the calm and orderliness of these schools did anything to prepare students for the chaos of the actual roads. They did say, however, that the driving used to be a lot worse!

TRAFFIC DEATH In early November 1991, I witnessed the death of a motorcyclist in a traffic accident. I was shocked, saddened and sickened. I had never witnessed such a thing. Actually, I was an audio witness to the accident. I was just coming out of a 7-Eleven type store one night when I heard a small crash/thud and then what sounded like a hard shell suitcase sliding up the road towards me. I ran over to the curb and there in the middle of the intersection lay a mangled motorcycle with a man lying face down on the street with his arms spread out and not moving a muscle. One bystander went out to look at this man, felt his pulse and got up and shook his head. There was nothing anyone could do. Someone called for the police and we all waited. I cannot remember seeing the vehicle which the man had hit. I surmise that a car or truck either sped through or suddenly stopped in the intersection and the motorcycle hit it. In any case, the vehicle was gone - I'm not sure if it drove off or pulled over to the side or what. What stands out most about this accident was that life went on as usual immediately after. Cars continued through the intersection moving some to avoid the motorcycle and body. There was no great uproar that you would expect with such an accident in the US.

SEVEN ON A SCOOTER Before going to Taiwan, I had heard stories of six or seven people riding on a motorscooter at once. I spent 2.5 years looking for this phenomenon but the most I ever saw was five on a scooter and I only saw that about once a month. I thought I saw six one night but it turned out to be two side-by-side scooters crossing in front of me with three people on each. Five on a scooter normally consisted of two adults and three children (one child possibly in a backpack, another standing on the floor right up against the handlebars and the third seated between the two adults). One of our Taiwanese friends pointed out to me that when a family of five or six all get on a scooter, it was not because they want to, but rather because that was the only means of transportation they had. After that I had more compassion for the people on these overloaded scooters.

REFRIGERATOR ON A BICYCLE One day I saw a 60 or 70 year old man pushing a bicycle along a back road with a refrigerator tied across its seat and handlebars. The refrigerator was at least 75% of the size of a typical American refrigerator. The man looked as if this was an everyday, normal occurrence.

DRIVER'S LICENSE Getting my Taiwanese Driver's License was an interesting experience. The Taiwan Motor Vehicle Department bureaucracy was much more visible than in the US. The DMV building had various caged areas filled with clerks and supervisors. The processing of the forms was handled by one clerk, then passed to another for evaluation and finally to a supervisor for approval. The process was 3 or 4 times slower than New York (if you can believe that). Of course, I enjoyed the whole process as it was new and interesting for me and I had Bob Chen (our company driver) there to translate and help me through the procedural maze.

NARROW ROADS Most roads in Taiwan were significantly narrower than roads in the US which carry the same number of vehicles. The secondary roads just outside the city (in the rice field areas) were so narrow that two cars often had to slow down significantly just to pass. To further complicate things, the Taiwan electric utility company felt it was their right to plant utility poles right on the edge of the road! They did however make the concession to paint them with yellow and black spiral stripes to help drivers see them. The roads generally have no shoulders and in many areas, the road drops off on the sides anywhere from 1 to 5 feet into a ditch, rice field or irrigation water culvert. Safety fences, barriers and warning signs were only sparsely used.

BUSES Taiwan had many buses which were taller than the typical Greyhound bus. These tall buses were used primarily for city-to-city travel and for touring the island. These buses normally had two color TV sets hanging from the overhead (one at the front and one half way back) and video tapes were shown during the trip (usually variety shows). The driver sat lower than the passengers (at the normal height above the road). Usually a woman rode "shotgun" and ran the video tape player and generally attended to the passenger's needs (food and drinks were normally not provided). On tours, this woman would help organize Karaoke singing, comment on sights of interest, etc.

BUS ACCIDENT One night in July 1993 I was riding a bus southbound on Taiwan's only Freeway from the Taipei International Airport to Taichung. I was sitting directly behind the bus driver and was sleeping. Robin Shyu, my Chinese counterpart from our plant, was sitting next to me. All of a sudden he jabbed me in the

side and pointed ahead. I sat up and watched in disbelief as we approached a large truck which had stopped in our lane. The bus driver was trying to stop the bus but the brakes were not responding. It seemed like minutes before we hit the truck but it was only seconds. We finally hit the truck going about 25 miles an hour. The bus front end and windshield were smashed in. Immediately afterward, there was very little panic on the bus. Some people were crying or whimpering as they were startled or slightly injured by being thrown about (there was no warning on the bus of the imminent accident). We got the front door open and we all got off without panic or pushing. By the time I got off the bus, the truck which caused the accident had driven off! Robin thinks the driver was afraid he would be arrested for causing the accident (as well he might). Within ten minutes of the accident, another bus from the same (Government owned) bus company was going by and stopped and picked up half of the passengers. Ten minutes later, another bus stopped and picked up the rest of us. In just fifteen minutes we were all on our way again as if nothing had happened! The one thing I learned from this accident was that although there might be time to do something (like leap to the back of the bus) I found myself completely mesmerized by the event and did nothing. I learned that it is definitely much better to be ready for an accident at all times (use the seat belt, etc.).

LICENSE PLATES It was interesting to note that the license plates in Taiwan used Arabic Numerals (when there are already Chinese characters for each of the numbers). They had also within the last few years started to use the English alphabet as well. There are no Chinese characters which are directly equivalent to the English alphabet, but they could have chosen an appropriate group of Chinese characters to use. I guess Taiwan is getting pretty westernized. There was a fair amount of Chinese superstition regarding license plates. In early 1993, the license plate 888888 sold at auction for approximately US\$40,000. The reason was that the number 8 is pronounced like the word for "RICH" in Chinese, so all 8's sounds like RICH, RICH, RICH, etc. At the same auction, the license number 1234567 sold for almost as much because it shows an upward progression, like the upward steps of a successful businessman.

SCOOTER CARRIERS Some delicate things (cakes, etc.) were delivered in Taiwan by scooter. In order to keep the rough ride from destroying

the goods, they put them in a metal box suspended from a steel rod with a hook positioned 2 feet above the rear wheel. An air filled, rubber shock absorber was hung between the hook and the box. The box could swing back and forth but the vertical shocks were effectively dampened by the shock absorber and the goods were delivered intact. (Where there's a will, there's a way.)

GASOLINE STATIONS All of the gasoline stations in Taiwan were owned by the government (with a very few exceptions). These gasoline stations were sparsely located but there were usually numerous street signs pointing the way to each one. The prices were all the same so it didn't pay to shop around. The station attendants handled the gas hoses (self service gas had not yet arrived there). A gallon of gas cost approximately US\$2.50.

ROAD TENTS It was quite common in Taiwan to rent a large rectangular tent which was set up in the street in front of or near your house to be used for a wedding reception, funeral or other major event. These tents often took up half the width of the road and could be rather long. This made for some interesting traffic congestion at times. In some cases the entire road was used (on dead end or dual access streets). The tents were equipped with bare electric bulbs strung along the tent peak as the celebrations generally took place at night. A catering company normally prepared and cooked the food at one end of the tent or in an adjacent tent. It was an interesting challenge for us to drive by and try to guess the event.

SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS The school buildings in Taiwan were generally 3 or 4 stories high and only one classroom wide. There were many large windows on each side of the rooms and outside balcony walkways on one or both sides of the rooms at each level. Most schools were "U" or "L" shaped with the larger schools having multiple buildings. This style of architecture allowed for very good cross ventilation for each room. This was essential for most of the hot school year as the rooms were not air conditioned. The children went to school from 8AM to 4PM on weekdays and 8AM to Noon on Saturdays. Most public schools required their students to wear uniforms of one sort or another. Most uniforms had the child's name (in Chinese characters) and the

child's student number (Arabic numbers) embroidered onto their shirt front.

SCHOOL BUSES For the small children, the schools used mini-vans about the size of a Plymouth Voyager for busses. The rear seats were replaced with one small bench along each side and two benches back to back down the middle (front to rear). Although I wasn't able to count all the heads crammed into a typical loaded van, it had to be at least 25 kids! Looking in, all you could see was a sea of cute faces and black hair.

OUR HOUSE / NEIGHBORHOOD

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD We lived in an enclosed compound called Hong Tai. It was about 8 miles west of the city just off the main road (Taichung Harbor Road) which ran 20 miles from downtown Taichung to Taichung Harbor on the Straits of Taiwan. The Hong Tai compound occupied about 20 acres. It was surrounded by a high chain link fence and guards (unarmed, old men) monitored the gate 24 hours a day. It was similar to the retirement communities common in Florida. Hong Tai had about 160 mostly duplex houses and was well known for its high percentage of foreigners (about 15%). The facilities included a common swimming pool, 2 tennis courts and a small playground for the kids. We lived on the last lane of the complex which for some reason had a double-wide street which was nice (most streets in Taiwan were quite narrow).

OUR HOUSE Our house was one half of a 2-story, side-by-side duplex. On the ground floor we had a fairly large living room with a dining "L" and a staircase leading up to the second floor. The rear right section of the first floor contained a small kitchen. The rear left section contained a small storage room/office filled with two desks and five shelf modules filled with all the food, paper goods, etc. we moved over with us. There was also a small lavatory built in under the staircase. The 2nd floor had a moderately large master bedroom in the front with an attached full bathroom. There were two small bedrooms of equal size in the rear and another full guest bathroom at the top of the stairs. The upstairs landing was quite large and we filled most of it with our freezer (brought over from the US), linen and medicine cabinets plus a fair number of cardboard boxes of stuff (we had more boxes in the master bedroom as well). We had no basement or attic as these were quite rare in

Taiwan. The house was 1/2 the size of our house in upstate New York but quite comfortable. We learned how to get along in close quarters.

OUR YARD We had a very small front yard about 4 yards deep from the sidewalk to the front door and 7 yards wide. It was grassy with a few bushes and a stone walk. There was also a narrow walkway along the side of the house to the back. Our back yard had the same width and half the depth of the front yard and was mostly under a corrugated roof. Here we kept our washer, dryer, bicycles, a barbecue grill and a small blue plastic swimming pool for the kids. Our house was surrounded by a 2 foot high concrete wall topped by 4 feet of iron fencing. There was a double iron gate in the front which would allow a car to enter except there was no place in our yard for a car to go. There was also a pedestrian gate with our mail box built into it. The place was pretty well enclosed so we could let our small kids run around without too much supervision although we did not allow that to happen too much as they quickly learned how to unlock the double gate and the pedestrian gate as well!

OUR PLUMBING On our back porch we had a natural gas "on demand" hot water heater (there was no hot water tank associated with it). When a hot water faucet was turned on, the gas burner came on and heated the water as it passed through. It worked quite well and you couldn't run out of hot water! All the drains from the sinks and the bathtubs went out into an open-air, 8 inch wide and 12 inch deep concrete drainage gutter along the side of the house. Each sink and tub ran to the drainage gutter directly via its own pipe. This drainage gutter ran out towards the front of the house and then went somewhere into the ground. The toilets (thank God) did not drain into this same gutter but went into some other system. I understand that none of this waste water was treated before it got to the sea. It was an interesting way to do the plumbing and, as far as we were concerned, seemed to do the job. The bathrooms were fairly standard with a toilet, sink and bath tub/shower. The tub/showers had rubber hoses leading from the bathtub outlet faucet to movable showerheads. These were really good for hosing down the kids (rinsing the soap and shampoo off).

FLOORS The floors were all tile and very unforgiving if you dropped anything on them. I dropped the VCR hand control unit and had to send away for a new one. I once accidentally

dropped a coffee cup and it hopped across the floor without breaking until the very last little hop whereupon it hit just right and shattered!

CONSTRUCTION

TYPICAL HOUSE The "typical house" in Taiwan was about 20 feet wide, 40 feet deep and about 3 stories high. It was built right up against the road and was designed so that the ground level, front living room area could easily be converted into a store or shop of some type. In some areas, all the house fronts were being used as shops (little restaurants, stationery stores, hardware stores, you name it and there was a shop that did it). This type of construction had been going on for about 25 or 30 years and was the predominant type of construction in Taichung. Our house was typical but had a small front yard (fenced in) and was only two stories high.

TAICHUNG BUILDINGS As a general rule, the buildings in Taichung city averaged 3 or 4 stories high. In the downtown area the buildings averaged 5 or 6 stories high. There were also more modern high-rise apartment houses being built. In our area there were about 9 of these high-rise apartment houses that were completed while we were there. The ground level of these buildings had many small shops, each of which had an internal stairway up to an apartment above them for the shop owner's family or for storage when the owners did not live right there. These high-rise apartment buildings were sprinkled sparsely throughout Taichung. There were also a few 15 or 20 story office buildings here and there. The skyline was dotted with these tall buildings, but on average the city was still 3 or 4 stories high.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION There was virtually no place in Taichung you could stand and not see some type of construction going on. Taiwan seemed totally unaffected by any recessions going on in the rest of the world. The construction methods used in Taiwan were very interesting. They used a lot of steel reinforced concrete. The smaller, 2 and 3 story buildings had very unevenly laid (almost sloppy) vertical brick walls which were subsequently covered over with a smooth cement type material. Exterior walls were then covered with white or colored ceramic tiles (this was done near the end of the construction cycle). Once the first floor external and internal walls were in place then forms were put in place to hold the poured

concrete for the floor above. The floors were about a foot thick and contained lots of steel reinforcing rods. Once each floor was poured and had hardened, they started on the vertical walls for the next floor. For many buildings they still used scaffolding made out of bamboo! The bamboo poles were tied together with twisted steel wire. Some buildings had bamboo scaffolding as high as 20 stories! It was amazing! On the plus side, they did generally use a green nylon mesh netting on the outer side of all the scaffolding so that workers could not fall off.

RELIGION / CUSTOMS

FUNERALS One day I was walking in our area about a mile from home when I could hear some very loud and strange music. I walked in that direction and came upon a large funeral tent set up along side of the road in a vacant lot. The music was being made by a strange band and a woman "wailing" for the deceased. The music was being amplified and blasted out by a truck especially designed for this purpose. The music was so loud it hurt my ears as I approached. Fortunately it stopped as I got there. I decided to hang around at the roadside to see what was going on. Soon this strange band started playing again without the "wailer". The band members were all men over 60 years old and played strange looking clarinet type instruments, flutes, cymbals, drums, wood blocks, etc. The music was very loud as they were using microphones and the music was being blasted out by the same sound truck. This music lasted about 30 minutes non-stop. From time to time, one of the older men sang various forlorn songs. During this time, one of the funeral guests asked me to come inside the tent (which I did) and offered me a chair. Finally this old man band stopped and dispersed and a younger, more modern band (with western style band instruments) started to play (without amplification, thank God).

There actually were two tents at this funeral as I discovered. I was in the big tent with one entire end decorated with a series of steps each one containing a lot of flowers, incense, and gift packages (containing canned and packaged food) all wrapped up in cellophane and ribbons. An adjacent, second, smaller, tent contained the highly polished wooden casket which had a rounded top. It was located on a platform near one end where there was what appeared to be a small altar. There were many flowers in this tent as well. Many of the guests wore robes or

clothes of white (which in China was the color for death and mourning). The immediate relatives of the deceased wore special traditional (burlap material) mourning garments as well. During the old band's playing, I noticed people in white lined up outside this smaller tent. They would each move forward into the tent, stop in front of a priest and then get down on their hands and knees and crawl slowly past the casket to the altar area where they stayed seated on the floor until all of the people who wanted to (or had to) crawled to that area. Then everyone got up and came into the big tent. After a little while, everyone sat down and a ceremony got underway. At this time I had to leave and missed the rest of the ceremony.

I know from other experiences that after the ceremony many people go in a motorcade to the cemetery. The motorcade often consists of a large number of hired, small pickup trucks and vans covered with enough flowered panels so that the vehicle can hardly be seen. Each vehicle usually carries a large photograph of the deceased mounted on the roof above the front seat. As the importance of the deceased increases, so too did the number and opulence of these vehicles. At some Chinese funerals they burn small paper replicas of cars, television sets, houses, etc. so that the deceased will have these things in heaven.

CHINESE HELL Chinese hell is my kind of hell. It has 18 levels as the Chinese believe that not all people deserve the same punishment or damnation. Furthermore, it is possible to work your way up through the levels through various means which are still a mystery to me. (There may be hope after all.)

GHOST MONTH The Chinese lunar calendar month which roughly corresponds to our August is known as Ghost Month. During this month, it is believed, all the ghosts come out for a holiday. The people burn "ghost money" which the ghosts can gather and spend on their holiday to make them happy and therefore keep them from doing bad things to the people. This special paper "ghost money" costs very little for a stack and comes in very high denominations (representing billions and billions of dollars). The people burn it in special burners in front of their homes and shops at various times during the month. Ghost Month is traditionally a very bad time to decide to do or to actually do anything of a major nature like buying a house or car, moving, getting married, starting a new business or starting any other major activity.

MONKS & STRIPPERS My all-time, unique Taiwan experience occurred on the 15th day of Ghost month (late August) in 1993. I was walking about 2 miles from our house late one afternoon when I passed a very large street tent about 50 feet long parallel to the street shops and sticking out almost to the road center. This was on a high-traffic, two lane road with little or no sidewalks and with many shops packed in on both sides. Inside this tent it was rather dark and dingy and there were many (4x4 ft. square) tables each with a small amount of food, incense, candles, etc. on them. The only people in this huge tent were a few bald headed, robed monks walking amongst the tables attending to this and that. I took all this in and then continued to walk past this tent. At the far end of the tent, about 25 feet farther down the road, there was a small bandstand set up on the other side of the street. It was positioned at an angle and faced back towards the monks' tent. One corner stuck out into the street almost to the center as well. This bandstand was glitzy and modern with high intensity lights. This created a near traffic blockage where two cars could not pass and in fact every car had to zigzag to pass these tents. One or two civilians were doing their best to direct traffic through this small maze. The people/traffic congestion was building but the bandstand was empty so I decided to continue my walk. On my way back, I again approached this area and was amazed to find that the bandstand now was emanating loud music and was surrounded by a large crowd. The crowd had a path through it where the cars were passing in single file. When I got to a spot where I could see, I found that the attraction was a vaudeville type striptease show complete with 3 strippers who stripped all the way. WELL! As you can imagine, I was incensed! Yet, I felt it was my duty as an avid student of the Chinese culture to stay and see more of this primitive ritual. I was heroic in my efforts to hide my scorn by appearing to look interested as much as I could. The crowd consisted predominantly of men but this was after all a public street and there were quite a few women and some children. Finally, even though the pageant had not ended, I left fearing my long overdue arrival at home might cause serious problems. The next day, the engineers at work told me that the strippers were engaged to help make the ghosts happy so they would not bother the people. (It's a man's ghost world too!). I remember watching the people in the cars which were threading their way through the crowd. They would come from

behind the bandstand, then zigzag, then invariably look at the stage and you could see their eyes get big! The whole thing was crazy -- a new glitzy, crass celebration across the street and immediately on top of the old traditional monk celebration - both for the same event!.

GOOD DRAGON I had always thought that the dragon was a bad creature. The Chinese however consider it to be very good. I'm glad because I was born in the year of the dragon. Historically, only the Chinese Imperial family was allowed use a representation of the dragon with five claws. It was a major mistake in the old days to get caught with a representation of the dragon with 5 claws! Also, in the old days you could not use the Imperial Yellow color at all, for anything!

"FONG-SHUI" MEN AND FORTUNE TELLERS Throughout Taiwan (and China) there are a number of old men who have earned great respect for their wisdom and judgment. They are known as Fongshui (men) which literally means "Wind/Water". People go to these men to get advice on questions of location or position. Primarily they help architects, builders and businessmen in the layout of buildings, the location of doors, windows, desks, furniture, etc. in order to generate the most good fortune. There are also many fortune tellers in Taiwan. People go to them for advice as to the best or most favorable (lucky) day for a wedding, funeral or other big event. They are routinely called upon to advise parents in the naming of their children.

BIG ROUND SIGNS Throughout Taiwan, one would routinely see clusters of four-foot diameter round, portable (on three bamboo legs) signs. Multi-colored plastic flowers occupied a wide outer ring of the circle and in the center there would be a red (good luck) paper with a painted-on, Chinese character, message appropriate to the occasion. These signs were used to announce and celebrate big events such as the opening of a new store or business. The suppliers for the new store or business would hire these signs for a week or two and have them placed on the roadsides and sidewalks all around the new establishment. This round flowered media was also used for announcing the date and time of funerals using a white (death) paper for the message.

CHINESE LESSONS I took Chinese lessons for more than a year with only moderate success. Chinese was very difficult because of the strange

new sounds and sentence structures. Not only was there was a new word for everything but, more importantly, the tone you used to say a word was very critical. Different tones gave the same word entirely different meanings! (The word "shu" said with a high pitched tone means book, the same word with a strong sharp tone means tree.) (The word "mai" said with a short soft tone means to buy, the same word with a strong sharp tone means to sell.) It occurred to me that one reason the Chinese people didn't get angry very often was that the additional tones imparted by their anger would throw off their normal tones so much that no one could understand what was being said! (Actually, Chinese people could get angry and still be understood.)

PEOPLE I found I was enamored of most of the Chinese people I met in Taiwan. They exhibited the same personality traits as my friends in the US. If anything, they were more peaceful and less prone to anger than people from the US.

DOCTORS Most of the medical doctors in Taiwan were trained using American (English) text books and techniques. Nearly all doctors could read and write English but most could speak English only poorly. The doctors did not, as a general rule, make house calls. Office visits were free, but doctors sold you the pills they prescribed and thereby made their money. (Yes, it was rare to go to a doctor and not get some pills to take home.) In general, the doctors we used we felt were fairly competent.

MAIL DELIVERY In Taiwan the mailmen wear forest green uniforms and ride motorcycles with big side pouches. They ride on the streets and sidewalks and put the mail in mail boxes right from their cycles. Mail was delivered sporadically every day of the week (including Sunday). On rainy days, the mail was delivered without concern for it getting wet (our mail was left in our mailbox which offered little rain protection). Normal Chinese mailing addresses were written on the envelopes with the long dimension held vertically. Then the characters were written from the top to the bottom in this order: country, city, street, lane, alley and finally the name at the bottom. (It does make sense.)

BILLBOARDS The outdoor advertising bill boards in Taiwan were about as big as those in the US. They were made with a complex maze of bamboo poles running in all directions and all

held together with lots of steel wire. The advertising sign itself was usually made of a fabric which was secured to the bamboo structure along all its edges. The fabric had many "U" shaped cuts in it to let the wind blow through. I thought that these "U" holes detracted from the message (on the other hand, I couldn't read Chinese so what did I know!). This type of advertising was largely used for the sale of apartments in various new housing projects.

TOILETS There were two styles of toilets in Taiwan: the Western style as we have in the US and the Chinese style which was a small ceramic tub (approximately 8" wide, 20" long and about 6" deep) built into the floor. The Chinese style has a water tank (similar to the size of the water tank on a Western style toilet) which was mounted high on the bathroom wall. When the tank's "flush" string was pulled, the water runs down a pipe into the tub and washes everything down a large drain hole at one end. This toilet requires a person to squat down in a rather undignified position when using it. I used this style a few times and found it was actually not too difficult or awkward. When the Taichung plant (our company) was building new men's and women's rooms, they installed both Western and Chinese style toilets. I asked why they did not install all Western (modern?) style toilets. I was told that many workers preferred the Chinese style because they did not have to touch anything when they used them. (That seemed reasonable to me.) Most public bathrooms in Taiwan had both styles of toilets. Most of these public bathrooms did not supply toilet paper so one needed to be prepared. Fortunately, there usually was a vending machine around which sold small packs of "Kleenex" type tissues (for an exorbitant fee).

BATHROOM CLEANING Nearly all bathrooms had ceramic tile walls and floors. The floors were always sloped slightly towards a floor drain. Consequently, the standard method for cleaning the bathrooms was to scrub the wall and floors then hose the whole place down with water (including the toilet seat, sink, etc.) and leave it to drain and drip dry. It was quick and efficient but potentially a slight problem if you wanted to use the bathroom immediately after a cleaning.

RICE PLANTING The planting of the rice shoots in Taiwan was quite advanced. They used machines which used multiple, foot-square "rugs" of rice shoots. The machine would plant small groups of the shoots from the "rug" in perfect

order as the machine moved along. All this was done in fields flooded with 1 to 6 inches of water. This made for a muddy operation but the ground was soft to accept the rice shoots.

KISS OF DEATH When I traveled to Taipei on the Freeway, I often passed flatbed trucks with metal fence sides carrying pigs to market. The pigs were crowded in with standing room only for the 2 to 3 hour trip. Invariably they each had a red mark on their back which was an owner stamp or sign that the pig should go to market. I always thought of it as the kiss of death. (Farmers don't take pigs on rides for the fun of it.)

CHINESE NEW YEARS: Chinese New Year is the major event of the year and is like our Thanksgiving and Christmas combined. On the first day of this week-long holiday, most people stay home with their family. On the second day everyone goes to the home of the husband's parents. On the third day, everyone goes to the home of the wife's parents. As you might imagine, the roads and highways become totally clogged during these days. It can easily take 10 hours to go a distance which normally takes 2 hours. It is traditional for people to give children and each other gifts of "red envelopes" containing money. The Chinese New Year is based on the lunar calendar and therefore changes slightly each year.

CHINESE ZODIAC Each year in the Chinese calendar has an animal associated with it. These animals are repeated on a 12 year cycle. 1994 was the year of the dog. To find the animal associated with your birth year, check the chart below. If you do not see your birth year there, then take your birth year and add 12 years repeatedly to it until you arrive at one of the years shown below. You were then "Born in the Year of the ____" (animal shown).

1983: Pig	1987: Rabbit	1991: Sheep
1984: Rat	1988: Dragon	1992: Monkey
1985: Ox/Cow	1989: Snake	1993: Rooster
1986: Tiger	1990: Horse	1994: Dog

WORK

MY JOB My job in Taiwan was great. I loved it! The work atmosphere was very similar to that back at our home plant except that each person had about half the space or less to work in. Each

engineer had only one desk (and chair) which were lined up side by side along the walls. Robin Shyu (my Chinese counterpart) and I each had our own offices defined by bookshelves and partitions. The engineers were all male. They arrived at work about 8:00 AM and left at 5:30 PM or later. For the office staff, the company provided free American style coffee and free Coca Cola throughout the day (this lasted until we had severe budget problems in 1993).

LUNCH Each day we had 1/2 hour for lunch. You could have a "lunch box" delivered to you for about US\$1.00 which was in a Styrofoam or cardboard box. Each day you received a new selection of a variety of strange items! There was generally rice, a few unidentifiable chicken parts, maybe some beef or pork, various vegetables, various types of seaweed and sauces (some good, some bad). I could generally eat about 75% of a typical "lunch box" which everyone agreed was quite reasonable for an American. However, most of the time I went out of the plant for lunch with Robin Shyu and various other engineers to one of a number of small (hole-in-the-wall) shops to eat. One day we would go to a shop where we could get a plate of fried noodles or fried rice for NT\$30 (New Taiwanese Dollars) which was around US\$1.20. Another day we would go to a shop where we could get "Neo Ro Mien" which was an excellent beef noodle soup for NT\$40. There was also a "Mr. Chicken" nearby where we could get a chicken hamburger and Taiwanese style sweet-potato French fries (not too bad, but I would have preferred regular French fries).

TAICHUNG PLANT HISTORY The company was located within a free trade zone which was developed by the Taiwan government around 1970. Factories were built by mostly foreign companies within the area because of tax advantages which allowed them to produce products more cheaply. Our company was originally started as a joint venture by a German company and a Japanese company. After 10 years the Taichung plant was sold to another American company and then a few years later, sold to our company. It had approximately 250 employees.

THE WORK ETHIC The Taiwanese employees were reliable and very hard workers; No one seemed to be wasting time. Everyone worked as best and as fast as they could at their job. This was why Taiwan could produce things so cheaply. They had 2 breaks (10 minutes in both

the morning and afternoon) and 30 minutes for lunch. The working conditions were not as good as in the US, but reasonable (it was not a classic "sweat shop"). Each worker, in general, did his/her own quality assurance. However, in our industry, where specialized test equipment was required, there was by necessity a quality control department to do special product checks.

PERSONAL / FAMILY

TELEVISION There were 3 television stations in Taiwan all of which originated in Taipei. They were in Chinese (Mandarin) but occasionally there was a movie in English with Chinese subtitles which was nice. A month after we moved into our house we got cable TV. It carried 10 stations with two in English (a sports channel and the BBC out of Hong Kong). The rest of the channels were mostly Japanese but sometimes they carried programs in English and other languages. I watched the Super Bowl two different Monday mornings at 7 AM with Japanese commentary (This leaves an awful lot to be desired!) I was able to get to work by 9:30 AM on those days as it was soon obvious that the Buffalo Bills were not going to win.

RADIO There was only one English radio station in Taiwan (call letters: ICRT). It originated in Taipei and had a fair amount of news, public interest stories and American music so we listened to it often. Whenever I was alone in the car I listened to this station.

OUR FAMILY Our family, on the whole, did quite well in Taichung. My wife had the hardest time with "Culture Shock". She missed her family and friends a great deal and she was thrust deeper into the Chinese culture by virtue of being a mother and housewife who had to deal with shopping, health care, schools, tradesmen, etc. I was very pleased that she adjusted very well to this radically new way of life within 8 ~ 12 months of our arrival. She was on the board of the International Women's Club and also the board of the Lincoln American School. She participated in many other civic and child related groups. The kids made the transition without any problem. My daughter (4 years old upon our arrival) went to the Lincoln American School from 8 AM to 3 PM daily for Junior Kindergarten. Her class had 25 students of which half were Chinese. She then went to afternoon Kindergarten at the Morrison Academy. My son (1-1/2 years old upon our arrival) was initially cared for each weekday

morning by a local Chinese college student. He then went to an all Chinese preschool in the afternoons where he was the only blond headed kid in the entire school. We believe he learned a lot of Chinese like: "stop that", "sit down", "be quiet", etc. but he was always too smart to tell us. Later he went to the Lincoln American School for Junior Kindergarten as my daughter had done before him. Both kids enjoyed the schooling very much.

SPEAKING CHINESE It was difficult dealing with people when we did not speak Chinese and they did not speak English. My wife, especially, needed to communicate with the people who came to the door to collect money for the utility bills, etc. and often, in the beginning, she was not really quite sure what she was paying for. One time a man came and pointed to a light on the ceiling so she figured he was there for the electric bill. She always made sure to get a receipt and then I would take it to work to find out what we had paid for.

HOUSEHOLD REPAIRS Household repairs in Taiwan were quite cheap. Our front door handle broke one night and we could not retract the latch and consequently could not get into our house. We called a locksmith with the help of a bi-lingual Chinese neighbor. The locksmith came over first to get us in the house and then returned an hour later to replace the entire door handle and latch. The whole thing cost US\$40 and the lock itself cost US\$33. I did give him a nice tip which he did not expect and refused twice before taking it. We also had another experience where we needed a section of pushed-in screen fixed in our rear screen door. The man came and repaired it for US\$8. Not only were things done cheaply, but the general cultural attitude was "let's get it done right away". Most routine services were performed within a day or two. Furniture stores delivered almost anything on their showroom floor the same day. If you wanted to modify it in some way, it might take two days to a week (in the US it could take months).

PEOPLE The people in Taiwan were really quite pleasant. I met and observed a lot of people there and their characteristics were no different from the people I know in the United States.. There was no great shift in personality traits to one end of the spectrum or the other. I did not run across a Chinese characteristic that I had not seen in an American person. Besides the obvious fact that these people look Chinese, they were the same as people anywhere in the world.

I believe that in general they were a more complacent people than you will find most places (probably due to 5000 years of oppression and the teachings of Confucius).

SHOPPING

GROCERY SHOPPING Grocery shopping in Taichung was a challenge for my wife (or any Westerner) to say the least! The stores naturally cater to the Chinese needs which were somewhat different from ours. It was often difficult for us to find things to eat that were familiar. We found one grocery store that catered to some Western tastes so my wife went there quite often. Needless to say, there was a fairly stiff mark-up on the Western style items. The small store in our Hong Tai community also had a limited selection of Western style food but unfortunately, they went out of business during our second year there. Milk was either whole or occasionally we could get 2% milk (no one ever heard of 1% or skim milk there). There was also a Japanese grocery store which sold predominantly Japanese items but had some Western items as well. At that store, the food preparation and packaging was better which allowed us to more easily recognize visually what we were buying. You will be pleased to know they did carry cellophane covered Styrofoam packages of 6" live, squiggling eels for that hard to satisfy mid-night snack craving! Iceberg lettuce was nearly impossible to find. I believe that almost nothing found in a Chinese bakery appealed to the Westerner (Danish pastries with sausages in the middle, etc.). Shopping got better, however, as my wife discovered sources for familiar things. Also, she learned to cook some Chinese style food which was great. We finally acquired a rice cooker (which nearly all Chinese people use) and were able to enjoy some really good rice. My wife regularly used four different stores to get our groceries and it took her much longer than it would in the US (where we get virtually everything at one supermarket). We found a department store near the Lincoln American School which made excellent Italian bread. Another store started carrying Lender's Bagels and we must have bought hundreds of these during our stay.

OPEN AIR MARKET Near our house, there was an open air market that was open from 3 PM to 9 PM each day. They sold all kinds of vegetables, fruits, meats, chickens, prepared food, etc. Most of what they sold looked or smelled strange. I found it very interesting to wander through this

place from time to time on my walks. My wife occasionally braved the shopping there with my son in tow and got a few good things.

SHOPPING Things in Taiwan were not as cheap as you might expect. Items made in Taiwan may be inexpensive in the US but expensive in Taiwan due to the local tax structure. Also, just because something was made in Taiwan did not mean that it was sold locally. There were relatively few department stores in Taichung (as most stores were small family shops) and those that did exist were generally quite expensive.

HAIRCUT After I had been in Taichung for a few weeks, I needed to go to a barber to get a haircut. Before I went I asked Robin Shyu (at work) to write me a note in Chinese telling the barber that I wanted a Western style haircut of medium length. I could not read what he had written -- he could have written anything! I told him that if the barber shaved my head I would get him! It turned out that the barber gave me a good haircut and there was no problem. In Taiwan, the barbers are almost always women. They cut your hair first and then shampoo it while you are still in the chair. They use shampoo with just a little water and give you a pretty healthy head massage in the process. At the end, you walk over to a sink where they rinse the suds out. The cost was about US\$10.00.

RECREATION / FOODS

ROTARY CLUB I joined the only English speaking Rotary Club in Taichung (there were many other Chinese speaking Rotary Clubs in the area). It had about 30 members with 75% of them Chinese and 25% Western. Each Thursday we had a western style luncheon, a short business meeting and a guest speaker (usually quite interesting). I joined the Rotary tennis group but I subsequently resigned due to the very early and late hours they played. The Rotary Club had a gourmet group which monthly tried a new restaurant in town. Also the club had some trips and special events where we were able to visit some interesting Chinese locations (such as an old villa in the mountains) and experience some typical Chinese traditions (such as the Chinese Moon Festival).

SWIMMING POOLS WITH FISH Amongst the more unusual things I saw in Taichung were the many fishing establishments located in the metropolitan areas. There were some small

open air ponds amongst the buildings on the outskirts of town where for a fee of US\$4/hour you could fish for foot long, white fish of some kind. You could keep what you caught or sell the fish back to the proprietor for "recycling" and thereby get your fishing for free or even make money. There was also another kind of fishing establishment for catching shrimp. Instead of an open air pond, these were usually concrete swimming pools enclosed by a shed type building. The people used tiny hooks with just a dot of bait. The shrimp were around 3 inches long and had a lot of tentacles. You could even rent a hibachi there and cook the shrimp you just caught. These shrimp fishing places had all the amenities any fisherman could want: a food concession, TV, video games, and chairs around the pool to fish from. Many places had curtains that could be rolled down to protect the fishermen from rain, heat or cold.

FOODS While in Taiwan I had eel, tripe, squid, octopus, beggars chicken, and God knows what else. The street vendors sold many strange things (including chicken feet) all of which I never did get the courage to try. Contrary to popular rumor, they did not eat dogs in Taiwan. Dogs were served only in very exclusive Cantonese restaurants in mainland China (Black dogs were considered the best.) There is a joke told about the Cantonese throughout the rest of China . They say that when a Cantonese person sees an unknown animal, insect or bird, he will ask "How do you cook it?" rather than "What is it?!"

BEVERAGES Typical beverages at a Chinese restaurant in Taiwan were Orange juice or Guava juice (tastes like pear juice), Taiwan Beer (which most westerners liked very much) and rice wine. Coca Cola, Sprite and Gatorade were quite popular and widely available but Pepsi and other US soft drinks were rarely seen.

RESTAURANT SERVICE The Chinese restaurants in Taiwan served a variety of dishes to each table at varying time intervals as they were prepared in the kitchen. This worked well because all dishes were shared by everyone at the table. However, this same approach was usually applied as well to Chinese-run, western-style restaurants, where each person gets his own plate. This practice left some people eating early while others waited, or alternatively, the first persons served waited (while their food cooled) until the other people were served. In the US, most Chinese restaurants have adopted the

western approach and serve even shared dishes all at the same time.

CHICKEN LICKIN: You wouldn't want to be a chicken anywhere, but being a chicken in Taiwan has got to be near the pits. I was walking through one of the many open air markets in downtown Taichung one Saturday morning and found myself behind one of the stalls which sells chickens. There I watched a man "doing-in" a number of chickens. First he grabbed a wildly frantic chicken and then twisted and broke its neck. Then while this chicken was still very actively struggling, he rotated the chicken so that its head was down and its body was up under his arm. Then he stretched the chicken's neck down and squeezed the chicken's body with his arm. The chicken's blood poured out of its mouth and was directed into 2 or 3 shallow, 7" pie-pans containing what appeared to be cooked white rice. The blood was directed into each pan until it surrounded the rice and was up to even with the top layers of the rice. I understand that these pans of blood and rice were subsequently baked, cut up and then sold as a special gelatin-like delicacy. Anyway, back to our chicken. After it had given up its blood, it was still struggling and was then tossed into a 55 gallon barrel to settle down along with other chickens who had previously completed the above ordeal. After about 4 or 5 minutes in the barrel, the chicken was then tossed into a big container of hot water. After a few minutes there it was thrown into a machine which took all its feathers off. Chickens coming out of this machine were then sent forward into the shop for gutting, butchering (if required) and selling. The chicken head always remains on an unbutchered chicken.

CONCLUSION

LIFE IN CHINA During my stay in Taiwan, I never lost my fascination with the life of the people there. I enjoyed watching the drivers, pedestrians, looking in the shop windows and just seeing how people did things. There were so many different kinds of things going on that made Taiwan interesting. I enjoyed my stay in Taiwan very much and would do it again if given the chance.

