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A.

**IN THE NAME OF HARMONY AND PROSPERITY:
LABOR AND GENDER POLITICS
IN TAIWAN'S RECENT ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING**

By

ANRU LEE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

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Abstract

IN THE NAME OF HARMONY AND PROSPERITY:
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By

Anru Lee

Advisor: Professor June Nash

Taiwan's industrial sector has witnessed a drastic restructuring since the late 1980s. After several decades of successful export-oriented industrialization, Taiwan gradually lost its competitive edge as a manufacturing powerhouse in the world market due to rising production costs in the country and mounting competition from other recently industrializing nations in Asia. To solve their problems and to reinvigorate the process of capital accumulation, Taiwanese industrial producers developed cost-effective strategies such as reorganizing the division of labor on the shop floor, reducing the factory size, or upgrading the quality of production. They also explored new sources of cheap labor, adopting more radical practices such as relocating their production overseas and importing foreign workers (mainly from Southeast Asia) to their shop floor in the country. With capital outflow and the introduction of foreign workers to the country, the Taiwanese economy has become increasingly internationalized and transnationalized.

In the wake of this industrial restructuring, several paradoxes were apparent. First and foremost were the contradictory phenomena of labor shortage and plant relocation. That is, on the one hand, industrial manufacturers asserted that they faced a problem of labor shortage, which they claimed had seriously curtailed their production capacity and therefore reduced their global competitiveness. On the other hand, manufacturers were seen closing down production in the country and relocating their businesses abroad, often leaving their employees with little compensation but great difficulty finding another equivalent job. The question that presents itself is why those manufacturers who claimed to have difficulty finding workers did not hire those laid-off workers who could not find jobs, which would seem to be a perfect solution to the problems of both.

Centered in the paradox between the complaint of labor shortage and the fact of plant relocation and subsequent lay-offs, this dissertation examines the labor and gender politics in the recent economic restructuring. The major goal of this dissertation is to contribute to a deeper understanding of East Asian political economy and modernity. This is approached in two directions. First, through the recent change in Taiwan's industrial sector, and Taiwan's new role in the Asian Pacific regional economy, we observed a renewed phase of capital accumulation. The strategies implemented to respond to these challenges shed light on the long-standing questions of East Asian development. Concomitantly, by looking at the contradictions in cultural belief and social relations brought to

light by the recent restructuring, we are able to see closely the specific dynamics between global economic forces and Taiwan's own cultural and social systems. This in turn increases our knowledge of the nature of contemporary industrial capitalism and its diversity of forms, as it penetrates to almost all corners of the earth and affects most of the world's societies and economies. My guiding premise is that cultural differences have a profound effect on local variations of global industrialization. This case study of Taiwan differs not only from the process of industrialization in the West, but also from other Asian societies.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Research, Field Site, and Fieldwork

Taiwan's industrial sector has witnessed a drastic restructuring since the late 1980s. After several decades of successful export-oriented industrialization, Taiwan gradually lost its competitive edge as a manufacturing powerhouse in the world market due to rising production costs in the country and mounting competition from other recently industrializing nations in Asia. To solve their problems and to reinvigorate the process of capital accumulation, Taiwanese industrial producers developed cost-effective strategies such as reorganizing the division of labor on the shop floor, reducing the factory size, or upgrading the quality of production. They also explored new sources of cheap labor, adopting more radical practices such as relocating their production overseas and importing foreign workers (mainly from Southeast Asia) to their shop floor in the country. With capital outflow and the introduction of foreign workers to the country, the Taiwanese economy has become increasingly internationalized and transnationalized.

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Centered in the paradox between the complaint of labor shortage and the fact of plant relocation and subsequent lay-offs, this dissertation examines the labor and gender politics in the recent economic restructuring. The major goal of this dissertation is to contribute to a deeper understanding of East Asian political economy and modernity. This is approached in two directions. First, through the recent change in Taiwan's industrial sector, and Taiwan's new role in the Asian Pacific regional economy, we observed a renewed phase of capital accumulation. The strategies implemented to respond to these challenges shed light on the long-standing questions of East Asian development. Concomitantly, by looking at the contradictions in cultural belief and social relations brought to light by the recent restructuring, we are able to see closely the specific dynamics between global economic forces and Taiwan's own cultural and social systems. This in turn increases our knowledge of the nature of contemporary industrial capitalism and its diversity of forms, as it penetrates to almost all corners of the earth and affects most of the world's societies and economies. My guiding

premise is that cultural differences have a profound effect on local variations of global industrialization. This case study of Taiwan differs not only from the process of industrialization in the West, but also from that of other Asian societies.

Theoretical Premises

Ever since the global economic restructuring after the 1960s, East Asian nations have been in the forefront of scholarly attention. The Asian newly industrializing countries (the Asian NICs, i.e., South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) witnessed not only very rapid growth but also equality of income distribution, low unemployment, and the near elimination of the desolate poverty often associated with the poorest social strata in other developing countries (Deyo, 1987). These impressive accomplishments have generated heated scholarly debates and produced an extensive body of literature on what factors should be cited as having contributed most to the East Asian "economic miracle" and whether the experiences of these countries would suffice to provide a qualitatively distinct form of capitalist development.

In the case of Taiwan, the focus of discussion has been on a realm of social, political, and economic activity lying between family and state (Skoggard, 1996:xvii). The Taiwan state has been recognized as a major factor for its pro-development policies, and its strength and autonomy from foreign influence and

the intervention of vested interest groups in Taiwanese society (Gold, 1984; Deyo, 1987; Winckler and Greenhalgh, 1990; Wade, 1990). The roles of families and entrepreneurs are also acknowledged. Specifically, the desire for family security and prosperity was a powerful motivation behind entrepreneurial activity (Harrell, 1985; Stites, 1985). This has contributed to the flourishing of small businesses that are the major players in Taiwan's export economy, whose versatility and flexibility prove to be essential for success in the current global economic system (Castells, 1996).

Under the theoretical framework of "the New International Division of Labor,"¹ early stages of East Asian growth have been understood as based primarily on light export manufacturing, and the Asian NICs are considered mainly as receivers of global capital, largely in the form of direct foreign investment and subcontracting arrangements. However, after several decades of expeditious growth and change, the Asian NICs are now facing a turning point. While each of the NICs faces locally specific challenges, the general trend is that they are no longer merely manufacturers but have also become capital exporters.

¹ The "New International Division of Labor" as used here refers to the relocation of manufacturing operations from advanced capitalist countries to low-wage areas in third world countries. It is followed by the a consolidation of the world economy, increased capital and mobility, the rapid advancement of tele-communication and transportation technologies, and the rise of new industrial powers such as Japan since the early 1960s (Fröbel, Heinrichs, and Kreye, 1980). However, instead of taking this movement as simply a result of multinationals searching for cheap labor, this process is understood as an internationalization of productive capital, commodity capital, and financial capital, as well as shifts of

In Taiwan, rising production costs that have accompanied economic growth -- a problem exacerbated by soaring international competition -- have compelled Taiwanese manufacturers to find means both overseas and within the country to reduce their production costs. Taiwan's new role as capital exporter surely complicates the earlier picture delineated in the New International Division of Labor, and thus calls for immediate rethinking of this theoretical schema. Questions as to whether recent changes in Taiwan's economy are merely replicating the developmental trajectories of advanced capitalist countries, or whether they represent an alternative path of capitalism, galvanizes the long-existing interest and debate in East Asian developmental models. While it is still too early to come to a final conclusion on this issue, and I certainly do not intend to claim that I have a solution for it, this dissertation is part of the larger effort of the East Asian scholarship to draw closer to an answer.

Concomitantly, this dissertation seeks to understand the specific dynamics between global economic forces and Taiwan's own cultural and social systems. To that end, I am especially concerned with the ways in which the Taiwanese perceived and responded to recent changes in their economy and society. One may be able to explain the source of Taiwan's economic restructuring by way of a structural analysis of capitalist expansion and global competition, and see Taiwanese manufacturers' strategies as inspired by economic incentives and

emphases among them (Elson, 1989:189).

calculation common to all players in the global economic system. But this sort of analysis is clearly insufficient. A full understanding of the issues must elucidate the differences in response and strategy, or the different meanings associated with similar strategies as observed around the world, that distinguish the Taiwanese case from others. This understanding can be obtained only by looking closely at the articulation of culture, history, and economy, as shown in the expressions of people involved (Blim, 1991; Cairoli, 1998). The case of Taiwan provides a perfect example to examine the intersection of global capitalism and cultural politics cross-culturally and to reveal the multiple effects of this global economic process, as it transforms and is transformed by the local culture and society (cf. Hefner, 1998).

To answer these questions, I examined the labor and gender politics implicated in the textile industry in Hai-kou,² a small town in central Taiwan, focusing specifically on how cultural beliefs with respect to gender affected Taiwanese women's labor force participation and Taiwanese manufacturers' solutions to industrial restructuring. I hold that changes in gender roles and gender ideologies are keys to understanding the recent restructuring, mainly because labor was in the center of Taiwan's recent economic debates and women have been the predominant work force in Taiwan's labor-intensive industries. Gender has long been acknowledged to be an important factor for understanding

² To preserve the confidentiality of my informants, the name of the town is a

the processes of economic globalization, as it is fundamental to the organization of production and labor (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Nash, 1988; Fernandez-Kelly, 1989b, 1994). Pioneering studies on Chinese women and industrialization also elucidate that young women's roles in the family made them an ideal source of cheap labor essential to Taiwan's early export industrialization (Salaff, 1995[1981]; Arrigo, 1980, 1984; Diamond, 1979; R. Gallin, 1984a, 1984b, 1990). My current task, corresponding to the theoretical premise I have previously laid out, is to contextualize the interplay of transnational forces and local cultures (Warren and Bourque, 1991), as Taiwanese gender ideologies are negotiated, redefined, and contested by various players including multinational investors, local manufacturers, industrial workers and their families, the government, and other social-cultural groups in the society.

Before I begin to describe my field site and fieldwork, I shall first turn to the general socio-political environment of Taiwan in the late 1980s, the period of time just preceding my research. Taiwanese society underwent dramatic changes in the late 1980s, and many of these intertwined with the later economic development that I looked at in my research. These changes also bear directly on the ways in which the Taiwanese saw their recent economic dilemmas, thereby helping to fashion dominant discourses in the society.

pseudonym.

Background of Research: Taiwan's Great Transformation since the 1980s

The late 1980s was a time of great transformation in Taiwan's post-war history. It was a time of turbulence and of new possibilities. After several decades of struggle, with many lives lost and individuals persecuted and imprisoned, the political tensions in Taiwan gradually abated. The government considered political rallies to be less threatening and more tolerable. Rally participants were not necessarily arrested or detained for further investigation, though they still risked being beaten by the police and were sometimes badly injured from the police violence. Prior to the lifting of martial law in 1987, the first opposition party eventually came out in the open in 1986. Though still illegal and considered treasonous, the party campaigned for the election at the end of that year.

Protests for various social or economic causes burgeoned at the same time. Farmers or village residents protested the pollution of their lands by petrochemical companies. Workers rallied for higher pay and better annual bonuses. Environmentalists criticized the government's single-minded developmental ideology, and economic policies that had resulted in serious deterioration of Taiwan's natural environment. Women's groups fought for the legal protection of young aboriginal women who were frequently coerced and sold by Han Chinese into prostitution.

Many of these gatherings had developed spontaneously, however, without much ideological guidance or well-thought out strategies to accomplish their purported goals. In the cases of farmers or villagers protesting against industrial pollution, or workers fighting for better pay and bonuses, the participants often blocked the front entrances of the alleged offending companies. They tried to force the owners or management to come to the negotiation table by stopping the production, or by making enough disruption to attract the media's attention, hoping that would lead to the government's intervention.

Quite a few companies gave in under these confrontational circumstances. Companies agreed to compensate for the losses of farmers or local residents for the amount of money demanded, mainly because it cost much less to compensate local communities than to endure the possible loss of profit and damage to the company's public image due to disrupted production. The companies would also be able to develop better rapport with local residents by making amends with each individual. It was "to buy their hearts," as a Chinese saying goes. Many of the local communities were indeed content with the monetary retribution to individual families. They rarely pushed the companies to actually improve their environmental standards, leaving open their options to protest and be compensated again in the future whenever new incidents or discontent arose.

Workers wrestling over annual bonuses were frequently appeased in similar ways as well. They sometimes won concessions from their employers, yet they were not able to make the terms of concession a permanent part of their work contracts. As a result, the Taiwanese society watched similar events recurring every year, seeing the same groups of people ceaselessly grumbling for more money, more payment, and more demands. The lack of legal means to settle civil disputes of these kinds, and the government's hesitation to intervene heavy-handedly as it used to do in previous decades, only aggravated the scale of animosity of the people involved and companies affected.

These eventually became a real trial of patience for the general public in Taiwan. A derogatory term, *tz li chiu chi*, literally "saving oneself through one's own action," was developed to describe these "wild-cat" events. The term addressed the irony that the Taiwan government was neither willing nor able to offer efficient redress when its citizens held legitimate grievances. Nevertheless, it was widely believed that the louder one cried, and the more annoying one became, the more likely one would be attended to and thus achieve one's goals. Thus, many Taiwanese considered the advent of democratic expressions to be lawless and unruly, particularly when compared to the earlier quiet and orderly era when the government had tight control over the society.

Right after the lifting of martial law in 1987, the Taiwanese witnessed an even swifter growth of social movements (Hsu and Song, 1989). Consumer advocates, environmentalists, feminists, labor activists, retired and aged

veterans, aborigines, farmers, teachers, and college students all added their agenda to the already highly volatile social milieu. Some of them posed a serious challenge to the legitimacy of many governmental practices based on political exclusion backed by the martial law. Also, for the first time in Taiwan's post-war history, workers were able to bargain with their employers collectively with much less fear, though they were not entirely free from the possibility of coercion or suppression. Accordingly, the number of industrial disputes rapidly rose at the end of 1980s.

While most Taiwanese citizens were experimenting with newly found freedom and rights, some of the industrial producers had become impatient with the seemingly endless demands from their workers. The industrial sector also had to face the constant disruption of production due to environmentalists' pressure for the government to enforce a stricter environmental code. A strong sentiment that the society was becoming unruly gradually developed among industrial employers and producers, and was quickly picked up by the media. In the late 1980s, right before and just after the removal of martial law, Taiwanese businesses and the media were constantly critical, depicting the Taiwan government as "lacking public authority and power" (*kung ch' Yuan li pu chang*). They charged that the government was incompetent to purge troublemakers and thereby unable to reinstate the social order and harmony that were essential to the continuation of Taiwan's economic prosperity.

Changes in Taiwan's financial market evoked further complaints of industrial producers. The stagnation of the international market in the mid-1980s discouraged Taiwanese manufacturers from further investment and expansion, while at the same time the national savings rate and Taiwan's foreign reserves remained high. With an excessive amount of savings but limited channels to invest, a huge sum of these monies was channeled into the recently thriving stock market and a sprouting real estate market as well as to illegal activities of lottery (Ch'ai and Hsieh, 1988; T. Yu, 1993).

Among its many ramifications, this volatile money market provided the Taiwanese with new ways of seeking financial profit other than working for fixed wages. As such, it attracted a large population of Taiwanese who had spare money in their hands to invest. In the middle of the fervor, some people were known to quit their jobs or become aloof about their daily obligations in order to take full advantage of speculative opportunities. It was not long before the media and social pundits, soon joined by employers, began to criticize the Taiwanese' declining morale and productivity. Many industrial producers also began to cry about the shortage of dedicated workers.

Concurrently, Taiwanese industrial producers faced serious challenges due both to intensified global competition and to demographic and economic changes in the society, which I will discuss fully in the following chapter. As a result, Taiwanese manufacturers began to move their production overseas, mostly to Southeast Asia and China.

Labor and Management: Confronting the Economic Restructuring

Along with capital flight, there were a soaring number of plant closings and an increase in labor-management disputes in the country. One of the major causes of the disputes was the failure of owners/managers to render the severance pay and sometimes also past wages owed by the employers in plant closing cases. The media frequently portrayed these workers as employees who had been betrayed, and their feelings hurt, by their supposedly benevolent employers. Their protests were often depicted as an expression of personal outrage or a search for cash compensation for personal loss. Seldom discussed in the media as well as in the general public were the socio-economic circumstances under which these events took place and the future in store for the majority of these laid-off workers.

Upon my arrival in Taipei in the winter of 1991 for preliminary dissertation research, I heard few discussions about the dislocation of laborers and little expression of concern over how and where they found jobs after layoffs. As I tried to understand the seemingly indifferent attitude of Taiwanese society toward the human cost of industrial restructuring, I gathered diverse opinions on the issue that were often contradictory. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a consensus among the people I talked with that it was not a problem for the laid-off workers to find jobs. On the contrary, I was frequently told that there was a labor shortage in Taiwan. Whether or not the new jobs that workers could

find were as good or the pay was as high as those of their previous ones were separate matters.

Yet, many of the labor activists³ with whom I talked pointed out that the new jobs that laid-off workers were able to find were usually marginal, less stable, with lower wages. It was definitely downgrading, they said. The very few formal reports on this subject (e.g., Bo, 1993; Hsia, 1993), as well as my own research in the Taipei metropolitan area, confirmed their observations. Bo's research on the plant closing in the garment industry in Taipei County indicated that, due to their relatively advanced old age, limited educational background and low skill level, laid-off women workers rarely found jobs in the booming service sector. Most of them stayed in the garment industry but worked in smaller or "underground" factories, and many became homeworkers. Needless to say, the wages and working conditions of most of these new jobs were much worse than the old ones.

Furthermore, labor activists whom I talked to were very concerned about the extensive scale of plant closures. They were particularly critical of the fact that many large firms in or near metropolitan areas had shut down not because the production costs were too high to be profitable, but because the lands on

³ Labor activists who assisted me on this stage of my research included members of labor-advocate groups such as *Nu kung tuan chieh sheng ch'an hsien*, *Kung jen li fa hsing tung wei yuan hui*, *Lao kung chen hsien* (Taiwan Labor Front), and of the former Labor Party. Most of them had prior experiences in assisting workers in labor-management disputes due to plant closing and other causes.

which these plants were built had become too valuable for industrial uses (Y. Ho, 1992:18-20). The profit turnover from industrial production had become too low and too slow compared with using the land for commercial or real estate development. Owners of these large firms shut down their factories with the anticipation of converting these industrial lands to commercial uses in the near future by pressing the government to change its zoning laws.

It also became apparent that plant-closing was frequently used by factory owners to escape paying workers' retirement pensions which were frequently twice as much as the severance pay in plant-closing cases (Hsia, 1993; S. Yu, 1994). According to Taiwan's Labor Standards Law, workers are entitled to retirement pensions after staying in the same company for twenty-five years. Many entrepreneurs who started business in the early 1970s, at the beginning of Taiwan's export industrialization, were approaching this "deadline" at the end of 1980s. They were anxious about the enormous expenditures for retirement pensions they would have to pay. It would be a very heavy burden for them, particularly under the soaring global competition. Some anticipated the problem by setting up a factory in another country and gradually moving production there. When production in their Taiwan factories slackened as a result, they announced to the workers that they could not obtain sufficient orders to make a profit and had to close the factories. Aging workers approaching retirement were hit the hardest. Most of these workers were in their late 40s or early 50s. They were not only forced to give up their retirement pension and accept lower

severance pay, but they also had great difficulty in finding new jobs due to their age and seniority.

With this background in mind, I returned to Taiwan in the fall of 1993 to conduct long-term fieldwork for my dissertation, intending to focus on the effect of capital outflow on workers. During my absence, there was a continuous flight of capital from Taiwan to other countries. Manufacturing industries continually moved out, and more factories were downsized, relocated, or simply closed down. However, I was surprised to discover that the labor-management disputes that once made newspaper headlines were no longer an issue in the public's mind. Compared to previous years, only a few labor disputes were reported, and most took place in heavy petrochemical industries with predominantly male work forces.

The shift of labor disputes from light, labor-intensive industries to heavy, capital-intensive ones was not accidental, however. It reflected Taiwan's recent economic restructuring, mirroring the sequence of capital outflow and manufacturing relocation. This is in part the reason why labor disputes among workers in petrochemical industries took place much later than those in apparels and other labor-intensive industries. Another labor-related issue that occasionally caught the media's attention was workers' struggle to take over managed-controlled unions or to form "independent" ones in government-

monopolized enterprises or industries.⁴ As in petrochemicals, most of the employees in these industries were male, and were considered elite workers in Taiwan because they were state employees rather than just factory workers. As such, they enjoyed better pay, benefits, and retirement packages. Also because of their state employee status, they were better protected than workers in the private sector from job-related changes associated with economic up-and-downs or business cycles. The size of government enterprises was also generally bigger than private companies, which made them worthy of organizing. Accordingly, their unions were also better financed. All of these attributes made them a perfect target of labor advocates, who could very well use – and they had indeed used – the likelihood of workers’ success in these organizations to advance their causes as well as to extend their public influence.

These were sporadic cases, however, that raised only temporary interest of the media and the society at large. For the most part, it was the discussion of labor shortages that dominated the popular discourse. Native industrialists were complaining vehemently that they could not find workers, and according to them, one of the major causes for this was that Taiwanese, especially those in the New New Generation (*Hsin hsin ren lei*) were getting lazy and no longer willing to work hard for a living. Government statistics seemed to support this “New

⁴ These include electricity and other power supplies, oil-refining, telephone and telegraph, provincial railroad and highway transportation systems, alcohol and tobacco, etc..

New Generation" moral discourse. According to the Council of Labor Affairs, the labor force participation rate reached a peak to sixty-one in 1987 but had dropped since then.⁵ Subsequently, local employers urged the government to find workers for them; otherwise, they would be left with no choice but to leave the country and make investments somewhere else.

In response, the Taiwan government legalized the hiring of foreign labor in early 1990s, but employers constantly complained that allowed quotas were too low and hiring procedures were too cumbersome. Under local employers' pressing threat to move overseas, the government responded by introducing more open policies regarding foreign labor employment. But the speed of "liberation" was never fast enough as far as the industrialists were concerned. The cry for labor was becoming increasingly imperative along with the capital flight out of the country.

My research thus set out to explain the co-existence of all these contending and contradictory claims and understandings of the recent economic restructuring. To that end, from June 1994 to December 1996, I investigated the changes in the textile industry in Hai-kou.

⁵ The Council of Labor Affairs, Administration Yuan, Republic of China, Monthly Bulletin of Labor Statistics.

Hai-kou: The Field Site and Fieldwork

The Initial Stage of Fieldwork

The primary task of my study is to understand the effect of the recent economic restructuring in the day-to-day context of Hai-kou. Hai-kou is a small town in central Taiwan where local residents have been engaged in textile manufacturing (mainly weaving) since the final years of the Japanese occupation (1895-1945). With a research interest in the relationship between consciousness and economic relations, I had two sets of questions in mind for investigation. The first regarded the nature of the recent industrial restructuring and who was affected by it; and the second centered on local people's conceptualization of the restructuring and to what factors they attributed it.

The choice of Hai-kou was more a result of accidents and coincidence than a conscious selection. Following the advice of colleagues in Taiwan,⁶ I explored what seemed to be an appropriate location for my research topic and where I also happened to have a friend from college living nearby. These personal connections greatly facilitated my initial contact with textile workers and producers in Hai-kou. Thereafter it became only natural and logical that I carried out my study in this place.

⁶ I am particularly grateful to the faculty and graduate students in the Department of Sociology at Tung-hai University in Tai-chung City for their help in choosing my eventual field site.

Because of its focus on textile production, Hai-kou turned out to be an ideal site for my research. Textiles were one of the few industries immediately pursued by the Taiwanese in the post-war era, and it became Taiwan's leading industry. The development of Hai-kou's textile industry thus stands for the economic history of post-war Taiwan, signifying the process of Taiwan's incorporation into the global economy. Textiles, the leading industry in Hai-kou by which local residents made their fortune in the past, continues to be the most important local industry, although it has undergone a tremendous transformation. Its scale of production is sharply reduced, and local capital and labor have both become transnationalized. Local residents' prolonged engagement in textiles, in relation to Taiwan's short history of industrialization, also made the industry an integral part of their local culture and memory.

Almost every individual I met in Hai-kou had a story to tell about textiles. They were either working or had once worked in textile factories; or they knew someone who was or had been a textile worker; or their families owned or ran factories; or they were suppliers of raw materials; or they sold or repaired machines; or they were representatives of local, national or international trading companies. Local women of almost all ages had been part of the textile work force. Grandmothers in their sixties were veterans from the initial stage, while teenage girls had entered the trade most recently. The experiences of these different generations of workers provide a rare chance in the Taiwanese context to construct a profile of women and work and to compare changes overtime.

My experience in Hai-kou began with a small weaving factory owned by the Wang⁷ family, to whom I was introduced by the sister of my college friend. I spent the first month of my fieldwork with the family, and learned the basics of the trade. The Wang firm presents a typical example of local production. The family began their operation in the late 1970s -- the heyday of the local export textile manufacturing -- relying on family assets accumulated and converted from agriculture for initial capital. Their production scale is small (never exceeding a hundred semi-automatic looms), and the nature of business is subcontracting. Although they had always hired workers, family members make up the most essential core of the work force. Like the majority of their counterparts in the Hai-kou area, the Wang factory has always been, and is continuing to be, a family enterprise. It depends on the will and wits of family members to sail through economic up-and-downs.

I then moved into the dormitory of another local textile company, where I lived and studied for the next six months. This second home of mine, that I call *Treasure Island*, is atypical of the local textile industry in many respects. First and foremost, the company is not a family business but has multiple investors. Second, its size is comparatively large by the local standard. Before I left Taiwan for the United States in January, 1996, *Treasure Island* consisted of two production units, one for spinning and the other for weaving. The company employed

⁷ To preserve the confidentiality of my informants, the names of companies and

roughly one-hundred and fifty shop floor workers, a number far exceeding the number of workers (usually fewer than thirty) hired in most of the local settings.

Third, instead of being just a subcontracting firm like most of the local operations, it has its own brand name for the yarns produced. A big sign reading "Formosa," the company's brand name, along with a drawing of the Taiwan Island, is painted high on the front gate of the company for every passer-by to see. Likewise, the company keeps a trading office in Taipei City to take charge of its trading business. However, its weaving section is still under subcontracting operation.

Fourth, benefiting from its relatively large size, the company is still able to attract young single women who are absent in small factories. At the end of my fieldwork, native (i.e., Taiwanese) workers composed two-thirds of the company's work force, and half of them were young single women and the other half married women with children. One-third of the total labor force in the company were foreign workers from Thailand, a common practice adopted by many textile factories to supplement the short labor supply in the 1990s.

Despite these differences, the company shares many things in common with other local manufacturers in this "sunset" industry.⁸ They all face serious

residents cited in this dissertation are all pseudonyms.

⁸ This is a widely used metaphor in Taiwanese society to refer to its labor-intensive industries, based on the reasoning that the good days of these industries are over and will never come back again.

competition not only from entrepreneurs in the rapidly rising industrializing countries in Asia but also from their fellow Taiwanese businessmen who have now shifted their production to these countries. The margin of their profit is further squeezed due to the competition from overseas Taiwanese producers who share the same customer base as well as a similar level of machinery, technology, and business skills as the Taiwan-based manufacturers. Also, like *Treasure Island*, most of the textile manufacturers in Hai-kou rely on foreign workers, at least as a temporary arrangement, to relieve them both from the pressure of rising labor costs and the difficulties of finding workers.

Studying *Treasure Island*, however, also granted me certain advantages. This opportunity was especially precious for me at the beginning stage of my research. As the workers worked around the clock in three shifts, I could always find someone to talk to, even at three o'clock in the morning when I was too anxious to fall asleep. Day and night I watched them work, and very soon I acquired some knowledge of textile production that helped me to talk intelligently and to ask meaningful questions to a broader audience outside the factory later in my fieldwork. Particularly, because of its relatively large production scale and seemingly more abundant financial resources, this company had more leeway to adjust to the narrowing margin of profit than small firms or family factories could have. I learned from the management of *Treasure Island* of various tactics to cope with the current economic predicament.

The workers and management at *Treasure Island* became my primary informants. I became acquainted with every one of them, and as time went by, became very close to some of them and their families. Most of the workers and management personnel in this company came from different villages near Hailou, though some were from less industrialized regions in central Taiwan. Whereas some workers had already worked in this factory for more than ten years, others had just started. For many of the workers, this was their first and the only workplace thus far. Others were veterans of other plant-closing factories and/or had experience working for different employers. Therefore, even if the labor pool at *Treasure Island* was not big enough to be a microcosm of the industrial community in general, it certainly covered a wide range of workers and worker's experiences. In addition, it is worth noting that mothers and/or mothers-in-law of many of the employees had also worked (and some were still working) in textile factories. Their experiences and those of their daughters and daughters-in-law provided a valuable transgenerational comparison of the worker profile.

A cross-generational comparison of women's lives is especially significant in the Taiwanese context. In less than four decades, Taiwan witnessed a swift transformation in economy from a poverty-stricken agrarian society, to full-fledged export industrialization, and now to the decline of manufacturing industries while the economy gradually becomes more service-centered. The experiences of different generations of working women are thus manifestations

of the evolving global system, as it intertwines with the Chinese patrilineal and patriarchal culture and the constraints embedded in Taiwan's small-scale industrial structure in different historical periods.

On Doing Native Anthropology

My status of being a native anthropologist proved mostly positive in understanding the practices, motivations, and emotions of my informants in Hai-kou, though not without predicaments. Specifically, as my female informants and I both grew up under the influence and constraints of Chinese patrilineal culture, the contrast between my life and most of theirs reveals the important economic factors which shape one's living experiences. More significantly, it is through their comparison of and comments on my ways of life that I saw most clearly their perceptions of rights, duties, and responsibilities, and their apprehension toward the power relations embedded in Taiwanese cultural and social systems that constituted their own lives.

The initial stage of my fieldwork went like a typical ethnographic report. My arrival raised certain curiosity and suspicion. Even though I was born and raised in Taiwan, and only came to North America for post-graduate study, I was obviously different from local female workers in many major ways. People in Hai-kou were generally amazed at the fact that I was pursuing a doctoral degree in the United States. Most of the workers I met had only junior high school diploma, and many of them began working in their early teens. It was

almost beyond their imagination that a woman in her thirties could still be at school, enjoy the freedom of traveling, and even get paid for doing "nothing." They also saw it as a major problem that, being a married woman, I came to Taiwan alone, ignoring my wifely duty and leaving my husband unattended in New York City.⁹

They laughed at my calling the fieldwork "work." How could anyone call "chatting," "playing," and "fooling around" all day every day work? It was entertainment! Grant money might be an intangible concept to the female workers, but they certainly were not ignorant about the hardship one would have to endure without secure or sufficient financial support. Many of them quickly came to their first conclusion about me: "Ah, your family must be rich!"

No matter how hard I tried to fit in, there were always subtle differences that gave me away. Some women were particularly fascinated with examining my hands. "Touch it!" they liked to say, calling attention to other friends of theirs, "Her hands are so soft. Her skin color is so pale (a sign for not needing toiling under the sun)." My hands were apparently not hands of those who sweated for a living; nor were they hands of a wife and mother who had to labor

⁹ This includes my duty as a wife to take care of the daily domestic drudgery and my husband's sexual - and to a lesser degree, emotional - need for companionship. As a matter of fact, many married women in *Treasure Island* signaled the possibility that my husband would have a mistress occupying my side of the bed while I was away. One friend even warned me not to hand my grant money to my husband for deposit. She cautioned that I would never see the money again because my husband would very likely use it up for vulgar

to keep her house and children tidy. My T-shirts were clean and spotless; there were no oil stains on them. I often wore white-color clothes. No one else wore white on the shop floor. It would be too difficult to wash. Female workers liked to say to me, in wistful amazement, "You have a very good destiny. How could you have such a wonderful life?"

Their questions did not end there. After their initial inspection of my appearance, almost every woman worker asked me about my family background: where my family lived, how many brothers and sisters I had, what they each were doing, and most important of all, what my father did for a living. In nearly every occasion, when they learned that my father was a medical doctor, they comprehended with great relief: "No wonder you have a very good life."

Individual accomplishment seemed to play a lesser role in determining one's personal identity. Different from the academic world where one's institutional affiliation, publications, and research projects were frequently cited and exchanged, these women emphasized one's position in a family-centered social network. This does not simply signify, however, that Taiwan has a kin-based social organization or that the family is a critical institution of Taiwanese society. Their emphasis on one's family background derived from their deep understanding of the production and reproduction of a stratified Taiwan society. I might appear more competent or successful - and I might have worked hard

purposes.

for these accomplishments -- but both women workers and I knew very well that I would not easily have gone this far if my family had not been able to provide me with financial and social support. Many of the workers did not finish high school education mainly because their labor was needed to make cash income to pay for the family debt or to feed the families. As evidenced in the life stories presented in Chapters Four and Five, I have very little doubt that, if these women had been given an opportunity, they would have chosen a very different life trajectory. No one likes to work in textile factories especially in their early teens, if they do not need to do so.

My closeness with Taiwanese workers, unfortunately, also diverted my attention from foreign workers. For an anthropologist who primarily relies on participant observation for information, I only feel comfortable about doing a good job when establishing a close rapport with my informants. As such, I have to confess that I was ill prepared for meeting non-Taiwanese workers and hence did not explore the issue as much as I would have liked otherwise. Being a Taiwanese, I was naturally suspected by foreign workers as one of the unfriendly hosts in a country where they were often not warmly received. Also, not foreseeing the relevance of the foreign component of the current manufacturing work force, I was not equipped with the appropriate languages (mainly Thai) before entering the field and thus unable to talk directly to most of the foreign workers I met in Hai-kou. Without a common language to bridge the communication gap, my contact with foreign workers in Hai-kou was mostly

limited to daily greetings, although in a few occasions I did manage to engage in short but superficial conversations in English if they happened to come from the Philippines or were well educated and understood the language. Nevertheless, none of these encounters resulted in fruitful understandings.

Later Stages of Fieldwork

At the later stage of my research, I continued to use both of the Wang family house and *Treasure Island* as my home base while I was moving around in the town and conducting research in various neighborhoods and villages. This later stage of fieldwork broadened my understanding of the labor and business practices I had observed in the two manufacturing settings. Moreover, a holistic study of the community provided me with a political, social, and cultural contextualization which enabled me to assess the dialectical relationship between the labor processes on the shop floor and the larger society (cf. Nash, 1989).

The experiences I acquired from *Treasure Island* and the Wang family factory proved to be invaluable for my research. A comparison of the labor process in the two localities reveals the parameter of strategies each factory had in relation to their production scale, source of capital and labor, and type of product. Although the difference between *Treasure Island* and the Wang family

factory is not equivalent to that of competitive and monopolistic sectors¹⁰ -- both of these Taiwanese firms are in the former category -- the existence of multiple forms of labor control was quickly observed. They also had distinct sources of workers and means of labor recruitment. The Wang factory, a small family firm, relied on family members or word-of-mouth to find workers, whereas *Treasure Island*, a medium-sized company, used formal channels such as advertisements or junior high school job fairs, as well as word-of-mouth, for labor recruitment. These distinctions, plus the fact that women workers in these two types of workplace differed in their age and marital status, formed a highly fragmented social realm within which diverse meanings concerning Taiwan's economic habitat were developed.

About this Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Following this Introduction (Chapter One), Chapters Two through Six investigate different issues as they are

¹⁰ Nash (1985) points out that the way in which each firm is integrated in the world capitalist system influences its labor-management relations. The greater margin of profitability in monopolistic capitalist firms makes it possible for larger corporations to accommodate to industrial unions, whereas smaller competitive firms appropriate personalistic and paternalistic labor policies as well as rely on disadvantaged social groups such as women and minorities for labor. Also, smaller firms depend on common-sense approaches to labor recruitment and tenure while large corporations develop more explicit and rationalized personnel relations (Nash, 1985:60).

related to Taiwan's recent economic restructuring. Chapter Two, entitled "From Sunrise to Sunset: History of the Textiles in Hai-kou," deals with the development of the textile industry in Hai-kou. This chapter aims at elucidating the specific relations of production in the local area, which by and large reflect that of the larger society as well. These specific production relations, themselves a historical product, have created a set of dispositions within which local factory owners and workers draw their understanding and strategies for the later economic changes. Chapter Three, "The Waning of a Hard Work Ethic," discusses the ways in which the Taiwanese understand the recent economic changes, focusing on the conflicting views around, and the meanings and implications of, the New New Generation moral discourse. Chapters Four and Five, entitled "The Meaning of Work: Textile Workers Transgenerationally" and "Between Filial Daughter and Loyal Sister" respectively, focus on the lives and subject formation of female textile workers.

Unique to the current global economy is "the particular circuits of capital and labor that have resulted from competition over time," and labor and capital migration across borders represents two contemporary aspects of the same process (Fernandez-Kelly, 1989a:152). Chapter Six, "Guests from the Tropics," centers on the most dramatic change in Taiwan's industrial processes, i.e. the introduction of foreign workers. The Taiwan government lifted the ban on foreign workers' employment in 1991 to alleviate the labor shortage. The introduction of foreign workers has a multifarious impact on Taiwanese society.

This chapter focuses on the economic aspects of the impact, and investigates the multifold opinions voiced by various sectors of the working populations.

The conclusion, Chapter Seven, summarizes issues relevant to Taiwan's recent economic restructuring and their significance for our understanding of the contemporary development of global capitalism. Changes in gender roles and gender ideologies in Taiwanese society are keys to understanding the Taiwanese' differing practices and perceptions regarding the recent restructuring, especially in the following respects. First and foremost, the appropriate roles for women had been greatly redefined as a result of the economic development over the past few decades, which fostered a demographic re-composition in the wage labor market. This in turn challenged the existing gender ideologies that imposed moral imperatives to the social division of labor in the first few post-war decades. Yet, paradoxically, while young women have obtained more opportunities for employment, they also face new contradictions in their lives. The moral implications of familial relations, upon which gendered conformity to patrilineal demands are defined, remain crucial and influential. Specifically, family loyalty is continuously evoked during economic crises to resolve both the family's predicament in survival, and the nation's problem of capital accumulation. This frequently calls for an altered course of action from young women's own expectation.

Chapter Two

From Sunrise to Sunset: History of Textiles in Hai-kou

The first time I visited Yueh-mei Village, one of the earliest textile districts in the Hai-kou area, I was amazed by the grandiosity of its village temple. Standing in the center of the village plaza, the temple rose up steeply on a two-story high pedestal, with a heavily decorated roof and flamboyant architectural style. It is certainly the most remarkable, if not the largest or tallest, building in the surrounding areas. In response to my surprise and fascination, my companion Mrs. Tsai, a married-in daughter-in-law from an adjacent village, sighed slightly: "Oh, yes, they have money, don't they?"

An old man in charge of the day-to-day maintenance of the temple said us that the Yueh-mei villagers rebuilt the temple and lifted it to the current scale not long ago. A village temple is usually a showcase of the economic status of its residents, and the people in Yueh-mei demonstrate their position well. It is said that there are quite a number of rich people in Yueh-mei – or at least, people who originally came from the village. They made their fortune early on, right from the beginning of the local textile development. Yet, the village temple seemingly stands alone and is the silent witness of the vicissitudes of the local economy. The plaza was quiet in the afternoon on my first arrival, just as on many of the afternoons on my following visits. Retired (male) farmers and entrepreneurs were the only regular visitors, not because the side room of the

temple housed the Yueh-mei Club for the Elderly, but mainly because they were the ones left behind. Over the years Yueh-mei experienced a population decline. Many successful businessmen moved their families to nearby downtown Hai-kou or Changhua City, in search of greater economic opportunity, better education for children, or simply a different life style. They rarely come back to the village, except on occasions to pay annual tribute to their ancestral halls where their family ancestors' spirits and tablets rest. Many of the former residences along the village's main alley are abandoned and falling apart for lack of care. The owners have established their homes as well as economic prospects elsewhere.

The dispersion of Yueh-mei's population mirrors changes in the local economy as well as in the society at large. As Taiwan's postwar industrialization accelerated, textile production also diffused widely in almost every corner of the Hai-kou area. Yueh-mei no longer held a central place but became one of the many production sites during the swift process of rural industrialization. Yet, like the single remaining hand-loom in the Hai-kou vicinity, which was used by early-day weavers before automation and is now casually kept in a back corner of the warehouse under the temple and occasionally carried around on lantern festival parades,¹¹ Yueh-mei is an essential part of the local memory. It symbolizes a legendary past, from which the present stems but is no longer

¹¹ The lantern festival refers to lunar January fifteenth, the last day of Chinese

affected.

This chapter tells the story of Hai-kou's textile industry, one of which in a short time span experienced drastic changes from a bleak period of war-time recovery, to an excessively protected, lucrative "oligopoly" of the domestic market, then to a dramatic incorporation into the international trading system, and finally to a recent downfall due to escalating production costs and intensified worldly competition, exemplifying the major stages of Taiwan's post-war integration with the global capitalism. This chapter also examines how the process of economic expansion led to the emergence of a highly decentralized production system that was dominated by family-centered, small-scale subcontracting firms. These firms formed intricate cooperative relationships, based on which textile producers in Hai-kou were able to remain immensely resilient and hence competitive in the ever-changing international markets. Their community-based employment practice also immersed potential labor-management contradictions in a more covert way. Formal employer-employee relations were frequently disguised as informal relationships between fellow villagers, neighbors, or even relatives or fictive kins (discussed in succeeding chapters). Yet in the same vein, the sheer size of local factories also limited the owners' access to formal financial sources and to institutional support from the government, as well as to a larger pool of prospective labor force beyond

New Year, which symbolizes the end of Chinese New Year celebration.

immediate neighborhoods.

Ascent: The Historical Roots

The Beginning

Textile manufacturing has had a long history in Hai-kou. Since the end of the Japanese colonization (1895-1945), Hai-kou has been known for its weaving production. Nevertheless, none of my informants seemed able to recount the birth of this local industry. Some speculated that it might be related to the straw hat-weaving tradition in the coastal area of central Taiwan where Hai-kou is located. Straw-hat weaving was operated through a household production system, in which a middleman distributed raw materials to women in rural areas, and collected and resold the finished hats to shops. Cloth weaving was sanctioned under the Japanese rule. In the economic blueprint of the Japanese Empire, Taiwan was designated to be the supplier of foodstuff (mainly rice and sugar) and recipient of industrial commodities from the Metropole. Textile manufacturing, along with some other light industries, was only developed after the Japanese military launched its invasion to Southeast Asia and needed an intermediary base for military supplies.

Nonetheless, Taiwan remained largely an agricultural society, and individual households were not allowed to weave. As a result, the local production in Hai-kou was very small, and usually done in secrecy. Women

worked on their wooden handlooms alone at home. They also had to sell their product clandestinely. Many old people described those days as a mixture of harshness and adventurousness. It was usually women, the less likely legal offenders in the eyes of law enforcement, who were selling the home-made fabric. They used the cloth to carry their children on the backs, so that they could sell it in public without being noticed.

The weaving technology during this initial period was primitive, according to my informants. Also, it was very difficult to get cotton, the raw material needed for weaving, near the end of the Second World War. Women in Hai-kou had to draw yarn from old quilts or hand gloves on a simple, hand-operated spinning device. Owing to the simplicity of the technology, the range of product was limited (cotton quilts, fishing nets, and foot-binding strips were some of the major items), and the width of the cloth was narrow.

The weaving industry in Hai-kou further developed upon the end of the Second World War. Beginning with the cotton threads and foot-binding strips, people in Hai-kou gradually improved their technology and learned to produce cloth wider in size as well as for more diverse uses. But the technology remained rudimentary and the production speed was slow. Ironically, weavers in Hai-kou were benefiting from their low productivity. The short supply of cloth made their product scarce and therefore highly valuable. This was particularly true in the first few years of the post-war era. After the war was over, when most of the population on the island was suffering from a severe shortage of almost every

item of daily goods, many people in Hai-kou were enjoying a lucrative profit from weaving. The elderly in town remember these glorious days. At the end of a day, clerks from cloth stores in nearby cities would rush in, cut off the cloth from the loom, and rush out to sell. Sometimes the cloth was only several inches long, i.e., too short to be of any great use, but the demand was so pressing that cloth dealers were craving for material of any length. "Hai-kaw chi-ah" (Hai-kou fabric) became very famous not only in central Taiwan but also in Taipei's Ti-hua cloth market, the largest fabric wholesale and retail center on Taiwan.

Making A Fortune with the Government's Protection

The ban against private textile manufacturing was lifted following the defeat of the Japanese when Taiwan was ceded to the Chinese government led by the Nationalist Party (hereafter "KMT," short for "Kuomintang"). Since the Hai-kou people had already had substantial experience in weaving, as soon as the political circumstances allowed, many of them established workshops at home and began to hire hands to carry out the weaving activity. The technology remained simple and therefore was easy to acquire; so was the capital for setting up a workshop. Small workshops were mushrooming.

It did not take long before downtown Hai-kou, Yueh-mei, and few other villages turned into industrial zones. Workshop runners assembled their own machines, and set up work stations in spare rooms, storage areas, or even corners in the house. In order to meet the need for labor, in addition to those available

for hiring in the downtown area, weavers and helpers were also drawn in from surrounding villages, where agriculture (and sometimes fishing) prevailed as the major means of subsistence.

Despite the fact that a rudimentary industrialization was underway, the problem of getting cotton supplies faced by early weavers also hindered the emerging entrepreneurship in postwar Hai-kou. Taiwan did not grow cotton, which had to be imported from outside. Before the Chinese Civil War broke out on the Mainland, textile producers in Taiwan were able to obtain cotton supplied from the Mainland. However, after the KMT was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party and driven to Taiwan in 1949, the trading ties between two sides of the Taiwan Strait were cut off, and Taiwan had to rely on foreign sources for industrial raw materials. At the time Taiwan was still recovering from its war-time damage. It had very little foreign exchange reserves to spend on the cotton imports.

The withdrawal of the KMT was a mixed blessing for Hai-kou's manufacturers. Although the lack of raw materials impeded their operations, the influx of more than one million expatriates from China (mostly the military and civil servants) also made the development of Taiwan's textile industry the KMT's first priority in order to clothe the people. This generated promising business opportunities. Yet, also retreating with the KMT government was more advanced production equipment from Shanghai. The Shanghai industrialists brought in large, power-gearred plants, which had much higher productivity than

the manually operated workshops in Hai-kou. The Hai-kou producers were too slow to compete with these new comers. Subsequently, the Shanghai industrialists gradually took over most of the island's market share. Furthermore, these "Mainlanders"¹² had strong ties with the KMT. They were the ones, along with few Taiwanese indigenous businessmen, whom the government was inclined to assist particularly in economic hard times.

Liu (1992[1974]; also see Hsiao et al., 1992, Wang, 1993) points out that many of the early economic policies of the KMT government were designed to assure the dominance of party-related capital, which served as a crucial base for the party's control over the Taiwanese society. Although garment and textile manufacturing have commonly represented the first stage of industrialization in both advanced industrial and industrializing countries, with part of the Mainland textile industry transferred to Taiwan -- more of the former Mainland textile industrialists moved their assets to Hong Kong instead of Taiwan -- the KMT government seemed more than eager to institute policies in favor of the textile industry (Liu, 1992[1974]:206-224). In spite of a differential proportion of the gains due to the size of production and the ties with the KMT officials, Mainland industrialists and their Taiwanese counterparts were both beneficiaries of protection policies such as a multiple exchange rate system, import and foreign exchange controls, hidden subsidies, and rationing and administrative

¹² "Mainlander" is a term frequently used in Taiwan, referring to those who

pricing of certain goods and services including the cotton from United States aids.

Textile Capital Accumulation and the United States Development Aid

Development aid provided by the United States government played a crucial role in the development of Taiwan's postwar industrialization. Beginning in 1950 huge amounts of the U.S. aids flowed into Taiwan, and it continued until the late 1960s (Ho, 1978:111). Cotton was one of the most important items in the aid; it constituted almost ninety percent of the cotton imported to Taiwan in the 1950s. As described previously, cotton was a very costly raw material, and cloth a highly priced merchandise. By granting manufacturers the right to purchase reduced-priced U.S. Aid cotton (and the yarn made of it), the KMT government had already contributed to capital accumulation for investment in and development of the textile industry. According to Hai-kou's textile veterans who benefited from the U.S. aid, the government sold the yarn to textile manufacturers nation-wide at a price less than one third of the regular market cost.

Textile producers in Hai-kou were first discriminated against when the cotton and yarn was rationed to private manufacturers based on the number of power looms they owned. Since most of the Hai-kou producers had only

migrated to Taiwan from Mainland China after the defeat of the KMT in 1949.

wooden handlooms, they were thus excluded from the purchase of these heavily subsidized raw materials, and as a result, from the extremely lucrative textile business. This problem was solved only when local leaders mobilized a fair number of factory owners and organized a "Taichung County Hand-loom Textile Business Association," and petitioned the government for purchasing rights. They were eventually approved, and were rationed cotton and yarn based on the number of handlooms in their possession (Ho-mei chen kung suo, 1989).¹³

In addition to the cheap cotton supply, the KMT government further assisted in the accumulation of capital in textiles with the implementation of its Entrusted Spinning and Weaving Policy. Under this policy a limited number of textile producers signed a contract to spin for the government and they were rewarded with surplus amounts of cotton which they used to develop their own enterprises. The yarn processed for the government was resold to textile manufacturers, again, at a heavily subsidized price. Finally, the government guaranteed to buy back a certain percentage of the cloth made from the manufacturers at a favorable rate. Under this policy, the selected textile manufacturers not only obtained cotton or processing fees from the government, they were also guaranteed a market share for their final products. All these

¹³ How the local businessmen in Hai-kou were able to influence or even change the decision of the KMT government at a time of political turmoil such as the late 1940s and 1950s is itself an interesting question. The answer to it would certainly lead us to a better understanding of the dynamics of an authoritarian regime (KMT) with the people it governed (the Taiwanese) at its founding stage.

fortunate manufacturers needed to begin this extremely profitable business was production equipment.

The original Entrusted Spinning and Weaving Policy and its various modifications lasted for less than a decade, when its side effects (corruption and a black market) were seen to outweigh its benefits (Lin, 1969:103-104, in Kuo, 1995:93). Although only a small number of mills in Hai-kou (the production scale was too small and the degree of automation was too low to be called "factories") were directly covered by this policy, a larger population in town benefited indirectly. Some mill owners/producers were granted the rationing right but no longer produced cloth themselves. They resold the rationed cotton to other producers at a higher rate and made money from the price difference. Some others gained the rationing right with borrowed looms that belonged to their neighbors. One of the producers from a village well known for its residents' defiance in the Hai-kou area became rather excited when he recited their tricks to me. He said,

Not everyone who got the purchasing permit had looms. We borrowed the machines from one another in order to get the permit. The government sent representatives around to count the number of looms each of us had. We all knew in advance of the arrival dates of government representatives. On the day before they came, let's say, to your place, we all moved our looms to yours for them to count. When the representatives went to another person's house, we moved the machines to another house, too. We moved the looms around, following the

However, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to explore the issue.

schedule of the government representatives. Many of us got a share in this way.

My father always sent me to grocery stores to fetch sodas, so we could treat the government representatives when they came. You know sodas were very expensive in those days, and it was really a big deal to treat someone with sodas... [But] my father's effort was paid off. I figured that roughly fifty mills in my village got the purchasing permit, but probably only ten of us were really in the business.

The people who were not in the textile business but obtained the purchasing permit made a fortune by reselling the cotton to their fellow villagers. Those who had to purchase cotton or yarn from their neighbors were still able to make a profit because of the great need for cloth in the domestic market.

In terms of technology, the introduction of power looms raised the productivity of Hai-kou's producers, which enabled them to compete with big companies (such as the Shanghai firms and their Taiwanese counterparts) for the domestic market. The advancement of machinery also allowed them to produce a wide variety of commodities.

In A Time of Plaid

The primary product of Hai-kou's weaving industry at this period was plaid, according to the local residents I talked to. There was hardly any division of labor in the industry. Each mill was an all-encompassing production unit, doing tasks that included yarn-dyeing, cloth weaving, and even sales. They also designed their own patterns. In fact, the pride of the craft lay in the creativity of pattern design. Those who were talented and designed novel patterns could not

only succeed in the business but also win themselves local fame. In order to maintain their supremacy in the market, mill owners always guarded their designs carefully. Looms were kept from outsiders' view, and cloth was covered on the way to market.

Nonetheless, there was not much marketing involved at this time. Producers in Hai-kou mainly carried samples of their products from shop to shop. If some of the shop owners liked their samples -- or thought they would sell -- they might offer a space in their shop to display the products. Sometimes they also urged the producers to replicate popular items. Rather than buying out the finished fabric from textile producers, cloth shop owners often played a middleman's role. They provided their storefronts as a showroom for the products, and they received commission based on the quantity sold. It was usually the textile producers, not cloth shop owners, who were held accountable for the unsold fabric; they had to bear most of the business risk. In spite of the widely spread popularity of "Hai-kaw chi-ah," very few local producers seemed to realize their own potential of becoming wholesalers or marketers. Most of them remained content with their role as successful producers, and stopped short of developing marketing skills.

In a time of very low mechanization -- i.e., the looms were largely power-g geared, but the other tasks still needed to be done manually -- the labor of weaving was minute and complicated, and required both patience and dexterity. With or without hired hands, family members of mill owners/local producers in

Hai-kou were deeply involved in the production. Although there was no strict sexual division of labor, men usually took care of the dyeing procedures which required physical strength to stir the pot and hang dry the dyed yarns, as well as starching. They were also in charge of the mechanical details such as pattern design, machine adjustment (to fit different designs), repair and maintenance. They were often the sales and public representatives as well. Women washed chemicals from dyed yarns, did preparation work such as warping and drafting, and wove. They were also responsible for the household chores, and cooked for employees if there were any.

Despite the fact that textile manufacturing gradually dominated the local economic life, most of the mill owners who had land continued to farm. There was always more work than anyone could possibly finish. Family members were fully utilized. No one's labor went wasted.

Preparation for Future Entrepreneurship

The prosperity brought about by the textiles not only enriched mill owners, but also brought in regular and substantial incomes to those farming families whose children were able to get a job in textile factories. As the weaving industry underwent rapid growth, increasing numbers of young people were hired to carry out the production. Girls were hired to tend looms. Young men usually worked as apprentices first. In the beginning they mainly did heavy labor, but they would eventually learn to maintain, adjust, and repair looms and

become skilled mechanics (i.e., "the master workers"). As plaid was the prevalent product, to become a skilled mechanic meant to learn to disassemble a small piece of cloth sample, comprehend its texture, and assemble the loom accordingly to replicate the pattern design -- a rather complex task requiring some imagination.

The impact of this new wave of employment was far-reaching. Along with the regular income brought home by the young generation was an improved material life, repaying the debt owed from previous poor farming seasons, and ultimately providing a surplus for saving.

Past literature points out in the macro-economic level the important contribution of private domestic savings to Taiwan's postwar economic development, which financed most of the industrial investment in the private sector island wide (Ho, 1978). In Hai-kou, capital accumulation and formation occurred not only in mill owners' but also in workers' families, albeit in a different scale. It was the savings collected from young workers' wages over time, boys' and girls' alike, that became the primary asset at a time when sons in a family grew up and were about to have a career. Many young men in Hai-kou worked in textile factories, and acquired mechanical knowledge. Most of them opened up small weaving factories as they pursued a career of their own.

Wives of these small workshop owners, many of whom were weavers before they got married, became their husbands' most important partners. Their know-how on the shop floor assured a smooth flow of production as well as an

efficient management of the work force.

Peak: Little Dragon Flying High

An "Economic Miracle" on the Rise

Multiplying rapidly, small factories in Hai-kou did not merely depend on the owner's will or skill for success. It was the expansion of Taiwan's export economy that brought in wealth and prosperity to people in Taiwan and surely residents in Hai-kou.

Taiwan's import substitution industrialization did not last long. The demand of the domestic market was saturated in the late 1950s. In order to sustain further economic growth, it became both a necessity and an inevitability to turn to export-oriented production. Whether the Taiwanese government relaxed its control over economic policies under pressure of the U.S. government or out of the foresight of its foreign-trained technocrats, has been a heatedly debated subject and is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, it is important to point out that the future success in the export-oriented industrialization (hereafter, EOI) can be attributed only in part to the "liberalization" of Taiwan's macro-economic policy in the late 1950s. This is illustrated by the difficulty in identifying a particular set of industrial policies which was the underlying cause of Taiwan's rapid economic growth

(Aberbach et al., 1994).¹⁴ It is the link with the global economy that proved to be crucial.

Taiwan's export expansion runs parallel to the changes in the global capitalism after the 1960s, namely "flexible accumulation," i.e., a fundamental transformation in the dominant form of capital accumulation from one based on mass production to one based on the quick turnover of capital (Harvey, 1991, in Skoggard, 1996:69-70). The economic restructuring in advanced capitalist countries and the relocation of manufacturing production from these countries to other parts of the world facilitated Taiwan's EOI. In the case of the textile industry, Taiwan first benefited from Japan, when the latter was experiencing an overproduction of synthetic fiber and a rapid rise of production costs. Japan also faced growing protectionism from the United States, and needed to get around this by exporting this industry overseas. They first sold the synthetic fiber to Taiwan in the late 1950s, and later brought in orders for garments made of such material for them to sell in the U.S. market (Lin, 1994).

¹⁴ Nonetheless, this issue remains controversial and far from being resolved. For example, Thomas Gold (1994) identifies the KMT-led party-state as one of the promoters of Taiwan's post-war economic development. He emphasizes characteristics such as "stable rule by a political-bureaucratic elite not acceding to political demands that would undermine economic growth; cooperation between political and private sectors under the overall guidance of a pilot planning agency; heavy and continuing investment in education for everyone, combined with policies to ensure the equitable distribution of the wealth created by high-speed growth; and a government that understands the need to use and respect methods of economic intervention based on the price mechanism" (Gold, 1994:49).

From then on textile manufacturers in Taiwan acquired the technology to produce fabric from synthetic fiber. Textile production increased rapidly over the course of the 1960s, as textiles gradually became Taiwan's single largest product for export (Rubinstein, 1999).

Taiwan's textile industry was moved further forward by U.S. retailers who were looking for cheap apparel to sell in their domestic market starting from the 1960s (Cheng and Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi and Pan, 1994). The relation between the garment and textile industry is evidence of backward linkage, that is, when a down-stream industry (e.g., garment) is growing, it will stimulate its upper-stream industries (e.g., textiles) to grow as well. When Taiwan's garment industry was booming, the demand for yarn and fabric increased, and this in turn stimulated the domestic spinning and weaving industries.

The Local Story

At the local level, producers in Hai-kou experienced a tremendous transformation at this juncture (particularly after the late 1960s). New economic opportunities were brought in not only from Taiwan's fast growing garment industry, but also from a nearby village that specialized in manufacturing umbrellas, which had great impact on the regional development of the Hai-kou area. This nearby village was once called "The Umbrella Empire" and it reportedly produced one third of the world's umbrella export (Skoggard, 1996). Synthetic fabric was in great need as "the Empire" expanded, and to save the

transportation cost, most of it came from Hai-kou.

Both garments and umbrellas, as well as other textile-related industries, required specified manufacturing items. The standardization of cloth dramatically changed the face of Hai-kou's textile industry. There was no more need for great imagination or talented craftspeople, nor to steal ideas from others. The plentiful supply of standardized orders from overseas assured each producer a profit. It also allowed a certain degree of mass production or even "overproduction." Several local producers told me that they used to have the luxury of making as much cloth as possible and of not having to worry about selling it. There were always buyers with an urgent need or offering a better price.

The standardization of commodities also entailed a different kind of, if not simpler, technological know-how from the plaid period. A mechanic no longer needed to master the knowledge of how to fabricate various designs but focused on merely one single product. This was often referred to as the "68-68"¹⁵ era by local producers. The pride procured from one's creativity disappeared and the market turned to mass production instead of craftsmanship. This transformation was a difficult time particularly for those who were highly successful in the domestic production of plaid fabrics. It was not uncommon for me to hear remorse for the old days. Mrs. Tsai's cousin-in-law, whose family made beautiful

¹⁵ The number indicates the specification of one particular manufacturing item.

and originally designed plaid but failed to adjust to the changes, often expressed his sorrow for the loss of his uncle's artisan's dignity. "My uncle used to say 'Look at all these ugly and plain-looking cloths. I can't imagine anyone buying it. What are they going to use it for?' He stopped short of seeing changes in the larger economic processes and this eventually cost him the momentum to adapt to the new opportunities.

Textile manufacturers also lost their control over the destiny of their final products. Unlike the plaid epoch when producers designed their own patterns and were aware of the application of their fabric, producers in Hai-kou who manufactured for the international markets no longer had the knowledge about the use of their products. Even though the sentiment of losing control ran most strongly among old, highly skilled craftsmen like Mr. Tsai's uncle, many producers in Hai-kou shared the unanswered question about the fabric they were making. "We didn't know for whom we were producing, where the cloths would go, or what would be made of from them. Most of the time we didn't bother to ask, either. We just produced, produced, and produced," I was repeatedly told during the course of my research.

The effects of the booming textile industry were multi-fold. First of all, existing factories were expanding. Owners could afford to purchase more machines (power-g geared, of course), and they hired more workers. As the demand for workers increased, employers gradually exhausted the local labor supply. They had to go to farther places and more rural areas to look for

potential employees. Secondly, as the production scale was enlarged, so was the number of mechanics. As stated previously, many of these skilled workers eventually quit their jobs and established their own operations. The prosperity of the industry frequently ensured their success, which further raised younger workers' expectation of becoming capitalists in the future. The textile industry in Hai-kou reached its peak in the early 1980s. At its heyday there were more than 600 factories in town, as estimated by local observers.¹⁶

Concomitant with this thriving entrepreneurship was a changing labor market. Weaving is primarily a woman's field of work. Female workers are hired to tend looms. If the wide-spread poverty in the countryside in the fifties and sixties led to a demand-sided labor market, the situation was turned around after the rural economic conditions improved. Whereas there was an increasing demand for laborers, fewer young people (young women in particular) were available for hiring. Most of the farming families were better off. They did not need to rush their daughters to work following their graduation from elementary

¹⁶ The number listed in the official statistics would be much lower than this, for many of the local factories were non-registered and unlicensed, and therefore were not included in the official record. The closest information I gathered was from the 1992 Statistics of Taiwan Textile and Apparel Industries (published by Taiwan Textile Federation), in which the number of members of Taiwan Weaving Industry Association island wide in 1992 was only 296. As will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter, this number could not be used to compare that of Taiwan's textile (weaving) factories in its peak in the 1980s, for many manufacturers ended their businesses or relocated their productions overseas after the late 1980s. Nonetheless, the number may provide a gross estimate showing the possible gap between the number of factories in the official

school. Also, parents were more accepting of the value of women's education. As a result, more girls were allowed to go to secondary schools. Factory owners in Hai-kou began experiencing a labor shortage as early as the 1980s.

A Subcontracting and Decentralized Production System

One of the distinctive traits of Taiwan's postwar industrialization is its dominance by small-scale enterprises (Tables 2.1-2.3).¹⁷ Textiles in Hai-kou are no exception. The majority of the local factories were small (i.e., with an ownership of one hundred to two hundred looms), and run by individual families. Furthermore, many of these operations emerged spontaneously without government planning and regulation. They were not registered and thus unlicensed. Needless to say, they were excluded from formal channels such as banks or cooperatives for financial support, and had to depend on their family savings, or borrowing from relatives, friends, or other informal sources such as private loan associations or even usurers for capital. Neither were they entitled to industry-use electricity (Hu, 1983, 1984). For those who did get licenses from

record and those actually in operation.

¹⁷ The definition of small- and medium-scale businesses has changed over time, following the expansion of the scale of Taiwan's economy. Currently, small- and medium-scale businesses in the manufacturing sector (defined by the Ministry of Economy in 1982) refer to those whose value of transaction is below NT\$40,000,000 (roughly US\$1,000,000 for the NT-US dollar exchange rate in the 1980s was approximately forty to one) and total value of capital is below NT\$120,000,000 (roughly US\$3,000,000) (Chou T. C. 1992:108).

the Bureau of Industry, the situation was not necessarily better in terms of financial support. Very often they were denied bank loans because of their small size and limited factory assets.

Table 2.1: Number of Small- and Medium-scale Businesses and Its Percentage in the Manufacturing Sector

	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1984	1985
Number	51,389	26,938	40,739	68,616	90,580	120,981	119,073
%	99.7	97.2	95.4	98.7	98.9	98.8	98.8

Source of information: Chou, 1992:115.

Table 2.2: Value Produced by Small- and Medium-scale Businesses and Its Percentage in the Manufacturing Sector

	1971	1976	1981	1984
Value*	64,957	386,087	616,212	1,401,305
%	26.7	47.1	44.8	48.2

* Unit: One million New Taiwan Dollars

Source of information: Chou, 1992:116.

Table 2.3: Number of Employees in Small- and Medium-scale Businesses and Its Percentage in the Manufacturing Sector

	1966	1971	1976	1981
Number	251,877	428,261	1,136,766	1,362,551
%	42.7	35.6	59.6	62.0

Source of information: Chou, 1992:117.

Yet, these small firms compose the backbone of Taiwan's export economy, which is closely related to Taiwan's market-dependent link with the global economy. The relationship between Taiwan's textile manufacturers and foreign buyers can be best understood with the notion of global commodity chains

(GCCs) (cf. Appelbaum and Gereffi, 1994). A commodity chain may be defined as "a network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity" (Appelbaum and Gereffi, 1994:43). Appelbaum and Gereffi (1994:44) identify two distinct types of governance structures of GCCs: "producer-driven" and "buyer-driven" commodity chains. Producer-driven commodity chains describe "those industries in which large, integrated industrial enterprises play the central role in controlling the production system [which is] most characteristic of capital- and technology-intensive industries. [These industries] are usually dominated by transnational corporations" (Appelbaum and Gereffi, 1994:44). Buyer-driven commodity chains, on the other hand, "involve those industries in which large retailers, brand-named marketers, and trading companies play the pivotal role in setting up decentralized production networks in a wide range of exporting countries. [It is commonly seen] in labor-intensive, consumer-goods industries such as garments, footwear, toys, and consumer electronics" (Appelbaum and Gereffi, 1994:44). Direct foreign investment in industrial production (for example, large multinational firms in export processing zones) plays only a minor role in Taiwan's EOI. Taiwan has based its "economic miracle" on small-scale, family-centered, subcontracting firms, which rely on foreign buyers for orders.

Foreign buyers are primarily looking for cheap commodities. However, as the competition in their domestic as well as international markets intensifies, they also ask for increasingly shorter turnaround time for the products.

Taiwanese manufacturers have been highly effective at meeting the needs. They have been efficient and flexible, and very capable of maintaining quality at a given price, while ensuring reliable, on-time delivery (cf. Gereffi and Pan, 1994).

The efficiency and flexibility comes from a highly decentralized industrial system. On the top of the system are domestic trading companies and "center plants" (Hu, 1983; Hsiung, 1996), which directly trade with and receive orders from foreign customers. Beneath are layers of subcontracting firms in various sizes and with different technological levels, which produce different components for specific products. Among subcontracting firms there are also vertical and horizontal relations of cooperation. A center plant usually establishes relations with several subcontracting firms and vice versa. There are no legally binding ties between center plants and subcontracting firms. Their relationship ceases whenever one side decides to terminate it.

The vast number of subcontracting firms and the multiplicity of their interdependence sustain the stability of this industrial system. It also forms a cushion for those plants on the top to fall back during periods of economic recession. The lower the factory is situated in the subcontracting hierarchy, the more vulnerable it is in economically difficult times. At the time when foreign orders are sharply reduced, center factories may stop providing their subcontracting firms with work in order to retain a full production schedule in their own plants (Hu, 1983:403). The ferocious competition among small subcontractors then forces them to cope with the demand of center plants, which

are themselves constrained by their unequal relationship with foreign buyers. In fact, Taiwanese subcontractors constantly have to reduce their production cost and adjust their production organization to comply with stringent trading terms.

Textile manufacturers in Hai-kou were at the bottom of the subcontracting system in their industry. The primary product of their operations was gray cloth, the very rudimentary material that required further processing, where the higher profit lies. However, the low technological level also lowered the financial barrier for starters. No expensive machines were needed for the operation. Many of the up-coming entrepreneurs bought second-hand looms, sometimes even from their former employers. They obtained orders through the connections made in previous laboring years;¹⁸ and again, some became subcontractors of their former employers.

Mostly acquiring their knowledge from hands-on experiences, the majority of small factory owners lacked formal technical education or education in engineering, nor were they equipped with skills in foreign languages or international trade. They depended on indirect sources for business. What they usually did in order to secure a profit was, on the one hand, to cultivate their relations with the "upper hands,"¹⁹ and on the other, to maximize their own productivity on the shop floor. Also, short of financial resources to begin with,

¹⁸ Similar phenomena are observed by Hu (1983, 1984) and Ka (1993).

¹⁹ That is, those whom one receives subcontracts from.

mill owners in Hai-kou largely relied on a cheap but highly productive labor force (and their family members usually made up a very important part of it) to compete with big producers with more advanced machinery.

Decline: The Current Predicament

From Sunrise to Sunset: Socio-economic Changes since the late 1980s

Textile production used to be the leading industry in Taiwan's export economy, but it has declined rapidly since the late 1980s and has become a sunset industry. Several factors account for this change. In addition to the volatile social milieu fostered by the political democratization discussed in the previous chapter, the larger socio-economic environment of Taiwan had also changed. First of all, Taiwan was turning from the Republic of China (ROC) into a "Republic of Casino" (also ROC), as the domestic and international media mockingly called it after the country's people fervently participated in various forms of money games or investment due to their possession of overgrown yet underutilized capital. The stagnation of the international market in the mid-1980s discouraged Taiwanese manufacturers from further investment and expansion. Yet, the national savings rate²⁰ as well as Taiwan's foreign reserves²¹

²⁰ The national savings rate has always been high in Taiwan even before the economy took off in the 1960s. For example, it was fifteen percent of the GNP in 1952. The percentage of the savings in the GNP continued to grow in later years

remained high. With an excessive amount of savings but limited channels to invest, a huge sum of these monies was channeled into the recently thriving stock market and a sprouting real estate market (Ch'ai and Hsieh, 1988; T. Yu, 1993). As a result, Taiwan's stock index grew from several hundred points only to more than twelve thousand points in a short number of years, and the price of housing and land soared many times of that prior to the mid-1980s.

Although the stock market fever was cooled down and the stock index was back to a few thousand points after the government's intervention in the early 1990s, at its peak it was indeed "an exercise of the whole nation" (*ch'yuan min yun tung*). Regardless of their age, sex, educational background, occupation, socio-economic status, or previous history in financial investment, many Taiwanese who had spare money in their hands were lured by the high and quick return of the stock market to put in their money. Lounges of investment companies also became a popular place to hang out. People of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds - including old retirees who had much time to kill, young and middle-aged people who quit their previous jobs to become full-time stock investors, or housewives on their way to or back from grocery shopping -- gathered in front of the wall of monitors to watch the change in stock prices as

and amounted to more than thirty percent in 1970s and more than thirty-five percent after the 1980s (T. Yu, 1993:105-106).

²¹ Taiwan held the second largest foreign reserves in the late 1980s, and in the mid-1990s the fourth largest in the world.

well as to chat and exchange information with fellow investors. To many of them, stock market investment was not only a means for swift cash gain, but also presented an exciting and adventurous diversion from their daily drudgery.

For Taiwanese who were short of money to invest in stocks, there were other ways to seek quick return in Taiwan's overheated money market. *Ta chia lo* - literally "everyone enjoys," an illegal form of lottery - was the best known among them. Although illegal, *Ta chia lo* was also a phenomenal "exercise of the whole nation" (as it was mockingly called by Taiwan's news media and social pundits), and attracted an even larger population than the stock market. Basing its winning numbers on those of the government-run lottery, *Ta chia lo* provided much more flexible rules of playing and thus a much better chance of winning. Furthermore, it created a social atmosphere of ferment. Combined with traditional practices of Taiwanese folk religions, people who bet on *Ta chia lo* often sought inspiration or instructions for winning numbers from every possible supernatural source, including deities, ghosts known for their godly power, the mentally ill or deranged who were perceived as potential mediums of spirits, or any likely signs presented by unusual events or incidents (Weller, 1994:148-153, 1998:93). In some occasions, particularly on the days before the winning numbers were announced, people were known to shift their attention from work to *Ta chia lo*, which irritated their employers.

This wave of capital games and investment zeal had a multifaceted impact on Taiwanese society. Industrial producers were directly affected in two

important ways. First, the price of land skyrocketed beyond the means of many manufacturers to purchase or rent. This was particularly true in the areas near big cities, which as a result either compelled pre-existent land owners/manufacturers to convert their land into commercial or real estate ends, or pushed upcoming entrepreneurs/producers to more remote regions to establish new production facilities. To begin a new business or to expand old ones became increasingly difficult under these circumstances. Second, the volatile money market in the late 1980s provided Taiwanese with new ways of seeking financial profit other than saving one's salaries. Whether or not these new opportunities corrupt the Taiwanese work ethic and encourage the development of a gambler's mentality, as the media and social pundits liked to claim at the time, were questions yet to be answered. Nonetheless, the newly awakened awareness of economic opportunities – mainly making money through means other than industrial manufacturing or from working for someone for certain hours with a certain wage – did in some ways change Taiwanese understandings and imagination regarding money making or management. In the long run this may lead to the development of a mature financial market within which Taiwanese have different mechanisms to invest their money. However, for a short period of time, in the middle of the fervor, some people were known to quit their jobs or become aloof about their daily obligations in order to take full advantage of speculative opportunities. Employers in the industrial sector complained about the declining morale and

productivity of their workers, and some of the industrial employers also began to cry about the shortage of dedicated workers as a result.

In addition to these economic/casino contingencies, Taiwanese manufacturers were further affected by a demographic change in the wage labor market, a predictable phenomenon mainly resulting from a declining birth rate after the 1960s and recent changes in the economy. First of all, a major transformation of the labor market was underway when the rural economic conditions improved and workers' families were better off. Parents no longer pushed their daughters to work at an early age. More and more young girls were able to continue their education to junior high school and beyond (Chou, Clark, & Clark, 1990).²² Subsequently, they either stayed in school longer and took factory jobs later, or they did not take factory job at all. Moreover, the birth rate in Taiwan has rapidly declined since the 1960s. As a consequence, there has been a decrease in the population between age twenty and twenty-four since 1984, which further aggravated the issue of insufficient labor supply for labor-intensive industries like textiles (Lin C.C., 1994:21).

As a result of the past four decades of economic expansion, Taiwan was no longer a blue-collar society. Manufacturing peaked at thirty-five percent of the working population in 1987; after that its share of the labor force gradually

²² The mandatory education was extended from six to nine years in 1969, but in the first ten odd years of implementation it was largely ignored by the local

declined. At the same time, the proportion of the work force in the service sector increased substantially. By the end of 1995, half of the working population held jobs in the service sector.²³ Simultaneously, a large number of young women who entered the wage labor market for the first time chose to work in the booming service sector instead of manufacturing industries. As the in-coming labor force was drawn to white-collar jobs in the service sector, industrial producers suffered from both the lack of workers and rising industrial wages.

Internationally, the huge trade surplus generated by the successful export economy also created tremendous pressure for the appreciation of the New Taiwan (NT) dollar. In particular, the U.S. government had pushed Taiwan to appreciate its currency in order to reduce the American foreign trade deficit (Schive, 1992). The exchange rate for the NT dollar vis-a-vis the US dollar plunged from forty in 1985 to twenty-six in 1990, a forty-two percent and the highest percentage of increase among major Asian currencies during that period (Schive, 1995:13). The rapid appreciation of the NT dollar forced labor and other production costs, calculated in US dollars, to rise dramatically. This severely impeded Taiwanese manufacturers' export capability, at the same time they were facing more competition from industrial producers in Southeast Asia and China.

population. Girls were still urged by their parents to work upon elementary school graduation. This only began to change in the late 1970s.

²³ Monthly Bulletin of Labor Statistics, published by the Council of Labor Affairs, Administrative Yuan.

Capital Flight and Offshore Production

Challenges precipitated by the domestic socio-political and international economic transformation fostered Taiwanese manufacturers' need to restructure their own industrial production system. Throughout the 1980s many Taiwanese manufacturers relocated production by investing first in Southeast Asia and later in China, mainly in search of cheap labor, inexpensive land and raw materials (Klein, 1992; Chang and Chang, 1992; Bonancich et al., 1994). The capital flight was initiated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (*chung hsiao ch'i yen*, hereafter SMEs). They were the backbone of Taiwan's export economy and major producers of down-stream commodities, which made them the most vulnerable to the recent political and economic changes in Taiwanese society. Their move outside Taiwan, however, triggered a backward linkage of capital outflow. Large enterprises of upper-stream industries who provided materials to these low-end producers followed suit when a significant number of SMEs had set up production and created a need locally, or when the host countries had become rich enough to develop a domestic market for consumer commodities (J. Wang, 1995:226).

Offshore investment was further prompted by the Taiwan government's fiscal liberalization measures in 1987, which removed almost all foreign-exchange controls except for regulations on remittances to Taiwan with the intention to prevent the influx of foreign hot money (Schive, 1995:12-14). By the

end of 1997, the total amount of Taiwanese investment in Southeast Asia had mounted to US\$36 billion (Appendices 1 and 2).²⁴ Taiwan also becomes the second largest foreign direct investor in Southeast Asia, trailing Japan.

The significant phenomenon of offshore investments has also changed the pattern and contents of Taiwan's own export manufacturing. First, it has become a common practice among Taiwanese manufacturers who invest overseas to split their production in parts and, according to the technology involved, to move their least competitive production units overseas while retaining the high-tech parts at home. Their remaining production in Taiwan serves as a center for research and development. Second, Taiwanese businessmen usually maintain control over their pre-existing trade networks. They receive orders through trading offices in Taiwan and then redirect the production to a third site. Third, in relation to the first two practices, machinery, raw materials (e.g., synthetic fibers), and intermediate goods have become important items on Taiwan's export list, to support their compatriots' offshore production. Known as "triangle manufacturing" (Gereffi and Pan, 1994; Pan, 1997:13), these items are then used to produce final commodities for the markets of capitalist advanced countries particularly the United States. This has helped Taiwan to decrease its export of light consumer products to the U.S., and thus relieved some of the pressure on Taiwan by the U.S. government and American businesses to reach a trade

²⁴ The Free China Journal, October 13, 1997.

balance. Over time, however, Taiwanese firms may increase their purchases of raw materials and intermediate goods from local suppliers in their host country as local industries become capable of providing these goods, a process of backward linkage analogous to Taiwan's own experience of industrial development.

Southeast Asian countries were initially the destination of Taiwanese offshore production investments in the 1980s. However, this began to change after Taiwan's governing Nationalist Party (widely known as Kuomintang or KMT) undertook a new approach towards its arch-enemy, the People's Republic of China. After forty years of separation since the end of the Chinese Civil War, Taiwanese citizens who came to the island after 1949 were allowed to visit their families on the mainland in the late 1980s. Later, all Taiwanese with or without relatives on the mainland were permitted to visit China for civilian activities such as travel and tourism. However, this latter policy also paved the way to Taiwan's swift investment in the PRC during the 1990s. Since the 1987 removal of the ban on visits from Taiwan to China, Taiwanese investments in the People's Republic of China have increased significantly.

The preference for China over Southeast Asia as a site of overseas investment is perfectly understandable from economic perspectives, however disfavored by the Taiwan government due to political concerns.²⁵ For those

²⁵ Given the continuous tension and hostility between Taiwan and China, and the

Taiwanese SMEs that see Southeast Asia as too distant and alien and the supply line from Taiwan to the region too costly and unreliable, the geographic and cultural proximity of China appears to be an ideal alternative. Also, as Southeast Asian governments gradually reduced their incentive provisions, and the labor cost in those countries rose rapidly after a decade of economic growth, the region lost its original attraction to Taiwanese investors. Between 1990 and 1995, the direct investment from Taiwan to China had reached more than US\$30 billion, and amounted to thirty-four percent of Taiwan's overall outward investment, widely surpassing Taiwan's investment in any other parts of the world

Chinese government's unwillingness to give up its claim over Taiwan's sovereignty, Taiwan's growing economic interdependence with China emerges as not only an economic but also as a political issue and an issue of national security. These issues have been under intense discussion in Taiwan as high-tech and capital-intensive industries began to follow their downstream SMEs to China, and when the potential business opportunity provided by the most populous market in the world lured many big Taiwanese companies to expand there.

To divert Taiwanese investors from their focus on China, yet not to discount the predicaments faced by industrial producers, since 1994 the Taiwan government has advocated a south bound policy. That is, the government openly urges Taiwanese businessmen to go south and make investment in Southeast Asia, instead of going west to invest in China. Behind this economic move there is a critical political plan. The Taiwan government is hoping that, by establishing strong and long-term economic ties with the ASEAN nations, Taiwan will also win these countries' support and have a voice and influence in the region. Nevertheless, the government's attention is mainly centered on big enterprises. It retains a hands-off policy towards SMEs. Yet, the south bound policy was never well received by large manufacturers who still see China as the best site for investments.

(Appendices 2 and 3).²⁶ Taiwan is currently a major direct foreign investor in the PRC.

Strategies for Survival

By the late 1980s many textile producers had closed down their plants in Taiwan and relocated production to China and Southeast Asia, searching for cheap labor and inexpensive raw materials in these regions (Klein, 1992; Chang & Chang, 1992; Bonacich et al., 1994). As aforementioned, this capital outflow was initiated by small- and medium-sized firms like those in Hai-kou, which were the most vulnerable to the recent changes in the international markets and hence desperately in need of cheap labor. In Hai-kou, according to my informants, more than half of the looms were removed from the production line in the early 1990s. Some of these loom owners rebuilt their plants overseas. Some others simply sold their machines to upcoming entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, and reinvested their money in other businesses.

Plant closures were accompanied by a reorganization of the production system in the industry. One of the reorganizing strategies was to further informalize -- or subdivide -- the production process. Informalization has always

²⁶ Most of Taiwanese investments on China have been routed through Hong Kong. This is due to Taiwan's law that requires that investment projects in the PRC of more than US\$1 million be made through a company in a third country (Schive, 1995:37), and Hong Kong appear to be the most convenient broker for the Taiwan-China capital flows, at least before its hand-over to China before July

been a distinctive characteristic of Taiwan's manufacturing industries including textiles. Before a spool of fiber is ready for weaving, many preliminary tasks need to be done. To save cost as well as to increase efficiency, it has become a common practice in Hai-kou for different firms or individuals to specialize in different tasks and provide services to fellow producers. In order to retain orders in local hands, it is also a fairly common practice among Hai-kou's producers to give away businesses to acquaintances when the orders received exceed one's own production capacity, or to come to friends' rescue when they cannot finish orders on time.

Many of these transactions are done without formal, written contracts but based on consent derived from personal trust or past experiences of collaboration. One of the local manufacturers thus proudly claimed to me during our interview that textile producers in Hai-kou were the most cooperative and noble businessmen he had ever seen.

At any rate, among the producers a complex network of cooperation – both horizontally and vertically – was formed, enlisting an important ground for stability of Taiwan's highly decentralized production system, as discussed in previous sections in this chapter. Lately, with the problem of labor shortage and an increasingly narrow margin of profit, producers in Hai-kou put out almost all the work except weaving (and machine repair and maintenance, for many of the

1, 1997.

owners were former mechanics). As a result, they formed an even more intricate network. By doing so they split and reduced the production cost, and shared the uncertainty in a time of crisis.

Another strategy for surviving that I observed was to upgrade the machinery. A small group of wealthy industrialists purchased new machines to increase their productivity, upgrade the quality of product, and save on the number of workers needed. Some sold their old machines and purchased a smaller number of new looms, which enabled them to produce new yet more complicated items for their newly found niche in the international markets. As to the majority of small factory owners in town, they did not have the financial means to invest but just sold some of their looms and downsized the production scale to the extent that family members alone would make up a sufficient work force.

The composition of the work force had also changed. More and more married women were recruited to work. Many small firms even tried to readjust their work schedule to accommodate the needs of "housewives," in the hope to attract them to take factory jobs. Their effort was assisted the government through the government's campaigns. Being concerned about the negative impact of labor shortage to future economic development, the Council of Labor Affairs also made labor recruitment one of its top priorities. Discussions of how to encourage married women to participate in the wage labor market became a frequent issue in news media (World Journal, 1993).

Legalization of Foreign Labor Employment

The most dramatic change in Hai-kou, and in Taiwan, is the introduction of foreign workers (mainly from Thailand and the Philippines) to local industries. In order to alleviate the problem of labor shortage, the Taiwan government finally legalized the employment of foreign workers for some industries including textiles in early 1990s. Yet, the textile manufacturers in Hai-kou, as their counterparts throughout the island, have complained that the quotas are too low and the hiring procedures are too cumbersome to meet their pressing needs. (The impact of foreign labor employment is discussed in Chapter Six).

For those families who can neither find native workers nor get the government's approval to hire foreign labor, they have to rely on family labor more than ever before to make up for the missing work force. However, as the younger generations have attained (or are attaining) higher education, and they have more alternatives other than working for their families, parents are losing control over their children. They may desperately need cheap labor, but they can no longer count on their children.

Chapter Three

The Waning of a Hard Work Ethic

It was a hot afternoon in June, 1994. The weather was as brutal as in any of Taiwan's infamous summers. Mr. Lin -- a foreman of *Treasure Island* and I were chatting, standing by the side of a water fountain for cool air and to escape from the torturing heat of the sun. As usual, our conversation centered on the recent changes in the textile industry. A 25-year veteran at *Treasure Island*, Mr. Lin observed the changes in the company almost from its founding days. "You have seen it yourself!" he said, in a very dismal voice,

We can no longer find workers. People are not interested in factory jobs anymore. The young generation nowadays prefers to work in the service sector where the work is easy and they can dress beautifully. Left in the factory is a polarized work force: the old ones and those who are too young yet to know about the outside world. Chao Shou-po (the minister of the Council of Labor Affairs then) claimed that we are going to have a 'Second Spring' [for Taiwan's export economy] -- No way! It's impossible, I tell you.

Our conversation, as usual, ended with Mr. Lin's despirited words. He was not optimistic about the future.

Mr. Lin was not alone in feeling a drastic decline in the textile industry. Many of his co-workers at *Treasure Island* and fellow inhabitants in Hai-kou shared his view. Textiles had been the most important economic activity in town. Riding on the wings of Taiwan's fast growing export economy, textiles

had earned the local residents a fair amount of wealth over the past few decades. Yet, the rapid changes in the industry since the late 1980s have generated a common sentiment of crisis among the town's population, albeit expressed in different words than those of Mr. Lin.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the recent restructuring has to be understood in the context of the global economy and Taiwan's relationship with it. Equally important is the distinctive production system built upon the specific historical, political and cultural dynamics in the Taiwan society. Nevertheless, in spite of the complexity of issues involved in Taiwan's recent economic changes, "labor shortage" was often singled out as one of the most crucial factors for this downturn. Moreover, the decline of workers' work ethic, as implied in Mr. Lin's words, was frequently taken as a cause of the labor shortage, and this belief, pervaded the popular discourse.

This chapter focuses on the paradoxical nature of the claim of labor shortage, and examines the emerging moral discourse particularly from the perspective of labor demand and capital accumulation. Taiwan's export industrialization has been dominated by small-scale producers and depended upon cheap labor, primarily young single women, for profits. However, due to the social-economic and demographic transformation in the society, young Taiwanese women are no longer available for factory work. As such, the claim of labor shortage speaks of the reality of lack of traditionally sought-for work force. Yet, the claim of labor shortage is false in the sense that there are other

Taiwanese who are neither young nor single, but who were laid off because of plant closings or relocation and thereby in need of jobs.

This is most evident in the unemployment rate that climbed to a three-percent record high at the end of 1997. The mounting unemployment rate has begun to cause a major concern in Taiwanese society that had enjoyed nearly full employment until the very recent past. A recent newspaper article (Liberty Times U.S.A., 10/13/1997), entitled "To become middle-aged is not a mistake. The mistake was to choose the wrong vocation" ("*Chung nien pu shi ts'uo, ts'uo tsai tang nien ju ts'uo hang?*"), attributed the climbing unemployment rate to an enlarged population of middle-aged male workers²⁷ who lost their jobs due to plant closings or factory relocation (one fourth of the unemployed were between age thirty-five and forty-nine). These middle-aged workers were trapped in an awkward situation, the article continued, for they were too young to be retired yet too old to learn new knowledge and technologies. The article further stated that, even if these workers' skills were still in need, very few companies would be willing to hire them primarily for the concern that the companies would soon be burdened with their retirement pensions.

Furthermore, not long after the legalization of foreign workers, the public learnt from the labor unions of some leading Taiwanese corporations (mainly in

²⁷ Although this newspaper article did not specify the sex of these unemployed workers, it is clear from the tone of the article, and the photo printed along with

the petrochemical industry) that, in order to reduce the labor cost, their companies were deliberately replacing the Taiwanese work force with foreign workers. Under these circumstances, whether a social welfare program for the unemployed should be in place, and if so, how it can be implemented are on the immediate agenda of the Council of Labor Affairs, and certainly a primary battlefield for labor advocate groups.

Nonetheless, the disheartening news of a mounting unemployment rate serves neither as an antithesis nor as a counterattack to the argument of declining work ethics. The reason for this lies in part in the segmented nature of Taiwan's wage labor market in which small producers in labor-intensive industries like those in Hai-kou are looking for a specific kind of employees (Edwards, et al., 1975).

Therefore, I contend, the moral discourse has to be understood as a cultural manifestation of small producers confronting their recent predicaments. The narrative itself addresses an economic reality, but it certainly includes manufacturers' own tactics and calculation for profit and survival as well. Nevertheless, largely excluded from formal financial sources, and lacking the capability to solve problems beyond their immediate production sites, small producers in Hai-kou were left with very few options. Labor shortage and its alleged cause of young Taiwanese' declining work ethic thus provide small

the article (featuring a middle-aged man sitting alone on a park bench, with a

producers a sensible reason to ask for help from the government, for they did not cause their problems but were only fallen into victim of corrupted moral values in Taiwanese society.

Through the contradictory beliefs in the moral discourse, this chapter also attempts to show that, despite the hegemonic nature of the moral discourse, it is by no means free from challenges or oppositions. Following Gramsci, I see hegemony as a world-view and moral outlook, within which "one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations" (G. Williams, 1960:587; in Nash, 1989:11). However, I also recognize hegemony "not as a finished and monolithic ideological formation but as a problematic, contested, political *process* of domination and struggle" (Roseberry, 1996:77, emphasis in original; in Moore, 1998:351). The continuous success of a hegemonic ideology thus depends on the ability of the power elite to respond to new challenges as the ideology makes claim to be the true social reality (cf. Nash, 1989:15). Failure to incorporate new interests or new demands will likely cost them the effectiveness of hegemonic control.

In this case, the recent moral discourse drew its strength from Taiwanese' association of success with hard work. Nonetheless, for this moral discourse to

numbed look on his face), that idle males were the concern here.

be persuasive, it also had to be able to capture probably the most important element that made this hard work-success connection credible, i.e., equal opportunities for upward social mobility, most often evinced by Taiwanese male adults' industrial entrepreneur (read: boss) status. This in the past was sufficed by Taiwan's strong and fast-growing export economy, which is of course no longer easy to sustain. The increase in the number of middle-aged unemployed male workers and labor advocate groups' challenges to industrial employers' claim of labor shortage both contest the validity of the moral discourse. Young Taiwanese' attraction to the service sector, on the other hand, conforms to the hard work-success ideology if only partially. It is precisely the expectation to succeed that turns them away from the old and dying manufacturing sector to service, the sector with modern image and of presumably unlimited albeit uncertain opportunities.

To illustrate these, I shall begin this chapter with the local (i.e., Hai-kou) conceptualization of labor force participation and thus alleged cause of labor shortages. The second part of this chapter examines the changing attitude of workers and their families toward textile employment. Textile employment used to be the utmost opportunity for young women looking for paid work in the Hai-kou area, but it is no longer so due to the social-economic and demographic changes in the society at large. This in turn affects labor-management relations in the workplace, which leads to the third part of this chapter. The third section

focuses on local producers' efforts to retain a sufficient work force and strategies to recruit new sources of labor.

The New New Generation Moral Discourse

An adequate labor supply is essential to realize the potential of surplus accumulation in an economy. It is important from the perspective of capital to maintain a steady supply of labor and to solve any problems caused by labor scarcity. However, far from a simple notion of scarcity of "cheap labor" or labor of any kind, we need to note that "specific tendencies within the capitalist system have generated specific types of labor scarcity," whereby "[any] situation in which the characteristics of the labor supply threaten existing or foreseeable levels of accumulation can be defined as one of labor scarcity" (Sassen-Koob, 1984:177). It is from this theoretical postulation that we can begin to understand the claim of labor shortage in current Taiwan economy.

For most of the textile producers and residents in Hai-kou, "workers" were young, single women, especially girls in their teens and early twenties. Even when the labor force participation of middle-aged married women increased in local factories, this stereotype remained largely unchallenged.

Working in textile factories used to be the first choice, and for a long time almost the only non-agricultural job, for women who wanted paid work in the Hai-kou area. Large numbers of girls entered local textile factories upon their

graduation from elementary or, for some in a later generation, junior high school. Working in textile factories was considered to be virtuous, and indeed an ordeal of nearly every young woman coming of age in the late 1960s throughout most of the 1980s. In many cases, particularly in earlier years, the wages of these working girls were the only regular and reliable income of their farming families.

However, as previously mentioned, a major change was underway when the rural economic conditions improved and workers' families were better off (many of them in fact have owned factories by this time). Parents no longer pushed their daughters to work at an early age. More and more young girls were able to continue their education to junior high school and beyond (Chou, Clark, & Clark, 1990).²⁸ Subsequently, they either stayed in school longer and took factory jobs later, or they did not take factory job at all. Moreover, the birth rate in Taiwan has rapidly declined since the 1960s. As a consequence, there has been a decrease in the population between age twenty and twenty-four since 1984, which further aggravated the issue of insufficient labor supply for labor-intensive industries like textiles (Lin C.C., 1994:21).

As fewer and fewer young women consider jobs in the textile industry as their first choice, and even fewer are willing to work in small factories, married women in their late 30s or early 40s gradually become the dominant work force

²⁸ The mandatory education was extended from six to nine years in 1969, but in the first ten odd years of implementation it was largely ignored by the local

in the local industry. Young single women are rarely seen in small firms, most of the workers in such places are married women. Even in a relatively big factory like *Treasure Island*, which employed one hundred shop floor workers at the time of my research and was considered one of the largest companies in town, young single Taiwanese women made up only one third of the work force. Another one third constituted of married Taiwanese women. The other one third of the total work force came from Thailand. This was a big change from just a few years ago, as I was informed by a manager of the company that the ratio between unmarried and married women was eight to two only in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and there were no foreign workers then.

Defining Labor Shortage

No matter how hard you have tried to upgrade your machinery and hence reduce the demand for labor, you still need workers. There is no automated factory in an absolute sense. You always need someone to keep an eye even on the most advanced machine on earth.

A factory owner in Hai-kou moaned to me. So much as small producers in Hai-kou relied on cheap labor for a profit, the recent social and economic changes presented a deadly threat to their existence.

population. Girls were still urged by their parents to work upon elementary school graduation. This only began to change in the late 1970s.

The aging of the work force reflects the recent predicament of the textile industry. Many local manufacturers lamented that "the old are too old, and the young will not stay long," adding that when the old cohort eventually reached their age of retirement, their businesses would also be finished. "A fault in human supply" (jen li tuan ts'eng), in their own words, had become a matter of life and death. Local producers reasoned that a steady supply of labor was the key to their success. In the past few decades it was the continuous waves of elementary school graduates that vitalized the local labor force. They came in and succeeded those who left upon marriage. Factory owners in Hai-kou never expected women to stay on after they married. It was perceived as a natural move that women quit upon marriage.

Textile labor force in Hai-kou had been successfully reproduced by this generational replacement until the recent change. In addition to the smaller pool of prospective workers due to the decline of birth rate in Taiwanese society, local producers nowadays are further frustrated by the fact that young people they expect to take factory jobs upon school graduation no longer choose to do so. As for those few who do come to work in factories, most of them are also going to vocational schools in the evening. Factory employment is only a temporary arrangement for them. They will quit the factory jobs and move on to better things as soon as they are out of school.

New New Generation is Lazy!

You want to know where the young people are? Go back to sleep now and come back to me after ten o'clock tonight. I will take you to where they are then. *(A sarcastic remark made by a middleman from a trading company in Taipei at 2:00 in the afternoon)*

When I asked local residents why there was a labor shortage, there appeared to be a generational difference in the answers I was given. People aged over thirty-five frequently informed me that young people were lazy, whereas young people did not think so of themselves. It had almost become a standardized answer among the older residents that "young people like to play and enjoy themselves. They prefer to work in the service sector." As evidence, some of these older informants also pointed out to me that the number of employees hired in a restaurant (e.g., waiters and waitresses) was far exceeding that of a factory. Middle-aged factory owners criticized the youth, saying that young people in the "New New Generation" (hsin hsin jen lei)²⁹ liked to take on jobs which were easy-going, high paid, with regular days off on weekends and national holidays, and which would also allow them to dress beautifully. The society had lost its virtue of diligence, they bemoaned.

²⁹ According to Free China Journal (12/16/1994), the expression "the New New Generation" is an adaptation of the term "the New Generation," which was coined in the mid-1980s by Japanese writer Sakaiya Taichi. He was referring to the generation of Japanese born after 1965. In Taiwan, however, where the phenomenon of rich and carefree urban youth occurred a bit later, the phrase points to those born after 1970s.

Their criticism readily disregarded the group of assiduous night-school students who held full-time jobs on their shop floors or served as lowest-rank clerks or assistants in their offices. It also ignores the fact that the employment trend of young employees being hired in a restaurant or a KTV³⁰ rather than in a factory echoes changes in Taiwan's consumer culture engendered by the economic prosperity. The growth of wealth in the society generated an increasing demand for imported consumer goods, specialty shops, restaurants, and recreational facilities including KTVs, clubs and bars, and bowling alleys, spawning an increase of youth employment in service and retail businesses. What was also true, but not mentioned by the factory owners in my research, was that many of them liked to patronize KTVs, restaurants, and night clubs for a moment of relaxation in the evening, socializing with fellow businessmen and exchanging information, with young waitresses serving them. They might spend a fortune in one such place in one night. This peculiar taste in entertainment among Taiwanese male businessmen also plays a major role in promoting young women's employment in such places.

The laziness of the New New Generation is in fact a message pervading in the popular discourse of Taiwanese society, judging the generation of young people who were born after the 1970s when Taiwan began to win the fame of

³⁰ KTV, standing for "karaoke TV," is an advanced derivation of sing-along bars. It is a club-like recreational place of booth-style private karaoke video rooms,

"economic miracle" in the world. They grew up in a fairly affluent environment in comparison with the generations before them, and are largely exempted from the economic burden endured by children in Taiwanese families prior to their ages. Nonetheless, portrayed in the mass media as care-free, self-centered, hedonistic, and consumption-oriented, this generation is perceived as a bunch of spoiled young kids eating up the fruits of Taiwan's hard won success. The degradation of their work ethic also seems to indicate an inevitable decline of Taiwan's economy.

The economic success of Taiwan in the past is frequently attributed to the hard-working Taiwanese people, both in the popular discourse and among scholars at home and abroad (for critique, see Dirlik, 1997). This firm belief vis-a-vis the newly emerged "New New Generation" discourse and the subsequent result of labor shortage provide small producers a strong moral ground to win support from the larger society. It also shifts the society's attention away from more urgent socio-economic issues such as the structural changes in Taiwan's economy, the exploitative nature of manufacturing jobs, and the reality of Taiwan's small-scale industries in the current global economy.

with a big-screen TV and a computer-controlled selector box in each room (Boretz, forthcoming).

Contested Discourses on the Shop Floor

On the shop floor the perceptions of different groups of workers have changed accordingly. Before the rise of recent labor shortages, factory owners in Hai-kou preferred to hire young girls. Married women were not welcomed in, and in practice excluded from the local wage labor market. Young girls were said to be better workers, for they were not burdened with family responsibilities. Because they only needed to answer to themselves, young single women would not be distracted but concentrate thoroughly on their jobs. Married women, on the contrary, were burdened with endless chores. They had to cook, wash clothes, clean the house, and take care of their husbands, children, and often parents-in-law. They were said to be inattentive workers, because they were easily distracted by what happened in their families. They were more likely to take days off, when their children were ill or something in the family needed to be done. Worst of all for the employers, in Taiwanese society, it was also married women's duty to prepare food and light incense on the numerous "bai-bai" occasions, including the days on the Taiwanese folk-religion calendar to worship various deities and the days individual families chose to pay respect to their ancestors. On those occasions, it was inevitable for married women to either take the whole day off, or at least, to come in late or go home early. Either situation would cause employers great annoyance and inconvenience.

However, as the demographic profile of local industrial labor force has changed dramatically, so have the perceptions of married workers and their

young single counterparts. Although all their domestic duties have remained, married women are no longer viewed as slack workers. They have become the model employees.

It is now widely held by both management personnel and workers that married women are much better workers. It is said that they work hard -- and often work overtime -- and rarely take days off. When they have to take days off in order to attend personal or family matters, they often voluntarily find time to make up for the hours they are absent. They are also said to be discreet, careful, and trustworthy. In comparison, young single workers nowadays are perceived as sloppy, inattentive, irresponsible, and easily distracted -- some of these words were used to describe married women, in contrast to young workers being hard-working and diligent, less than a decade ago. Older folks also like to refer to this coming generation as "having good life" or "born with good destiny" ("hao ming"), the meaning of which could be either benevolent or derogatory depending on the tone of the one who said it. These language changes reflect the tactics of employers in response to the issue of labor shortage, notwithstanding the truth in it given the job performance of these two groups of workers.

Young workers I talked to knew about all the bad names applied to them, even though some of the New New Generation characteristics were more likely associated with urban middle-class youth than those working in Hai-kou's textile industry. Young workers had their own views, however. They did not see themselves as lazy, sloppy or irresponsible; they simply had a more relaxed

attitude and spent more time to find pleasure in their lives. In contrast to themselves, they commented that married women craved for money and were difficult. They said that married women were manipulative. Married women haggled over task arrangements and line leaders' record of their production outputs.

Once perceived as the ultimate job for young women in Hai-kou, textile employment is now on the bottom of their preference list. I have been told many bad things about textile work by both young people and older workers and by factory owners. For instance, the conditions in the workplace are horrible. It is hot particularly in summers, due to the heat generated by the looms which is worsened by Taiwan's natural climate. And needless to say, very few employers are willing to spend money on air-conditioners to make workers comfortable. If cotton is the primary raw material used in production, the air inside the factory is always full of cotton fibers and thus very polluting, and once again, not many employers are willing to spend money on ventilation to improve the situation. It is also extremely noisy on the shop floor because of the loud noise made by the looms. Degradation of hearing ability is one of the vocational hazards textile workers have to bear.

Also, many local people told me that the work schedule in textiles was horrible. To make a maximum use of machinery, it is the local convention that textile factories run twenty-four hours per day. Also, textile workers are required to switch shifts, which is hard on biorhythms and unnatural to one's

body. It also becomes difficult for a textile worker to arrange activities in her leisure time, for she may be off at odd hours. To use my informants' words, to switch shifts "disrupts one's life order."

The work itself has been identified as laborious by most of my informants. A textile worker is usually assigned twenty to thirty looms depending on the scale of the factory. The major responsibility of a loom tender is to keep an eye on looms so that the machines could operate smoothly. When a loom stops (for various kinds of reasons), she has to be able to fix the situation as quickly as possible so that the loom would be back on line quickly. Since most of the textile factories in Hai-kou adopt a piece-rate system – to ensure workers' efficiency, of course – it is also of the worker's best interest to act instantly when a loom halts. To do a good job, she dare not take a break. She also has to watch all her looms with equal attention, which entails constantly walking around the area where her machines are stationed. It is said that a weaver would have to walk tens of miles in an eight-hour shift; this required too much of one's physical strength. Ironically, the more advanced a loom is, the less problem it may cause, but also the bigger the loom will be. Therefore, a worker may choose to work in a factory with advanced looms, but the number of looms she has to tend as well as the area of her designated responsibility will likely increase accordingly.

All things considered, textile employment has lost its attraction among young women in Hai-kou. Instead of manufacturing, the younger generations are yearning for jobs in the service sector.

In Search of Modernity

Employment in the service sector in the New New Generation discourse is frequently depicted as easy work and quick money, but in reality, jobs in the service sector are neither accommodating nor well paid. This is particularly the case of young women who are high school graduates or who are currently pursuing high school education. Most of these women can only find the lowest-rank jobs in an office, most likely assistants -- or "hsiao mei," as the Taiwanese call it, literally "little sister," i.e., someone who is young, inexperienced, and unskilled, but precisely for such who can be dictated or pushed around to do things. Or they can work in the front line of customer service. Aside from the mistreatment or humiliation one may have to withstand from one's superior or customers, the pay of entry-level service jobs are comparably lower than those of the textile industry. In 1995, a textile worker in Hai-kou made around NT\$20,000 to 30,000³¹ per month depending on the nature of her work (non-textile industrial workers usually made only NT\$14,000 to 16,000), in comparison, young women in the local service sector were largely paid NT\$16,000 or 17,000. Moreover,

³¹ During the course of my fieldwork, the exchange rate between US dollar and New Taiwan (NT) dollar maintained one to between twenty-seven and twenty-eight. For convenience, I converted all the NT dollars into US dollars with a one-to-twenty-seven rate. However, after the Asian financial crisis beginning in mid-1997, like most of the other Asian currencies, the NT dollar vis-a-vis US dollar has depreciated drastically. By mid-1998, the exchange rate between US dollar and NT dollar is approximately one to thirty-four, and this rate may continue to

front-line customer service generally entails long working hours and requires stamina. It is not unusual for a sales clerk to work for eight or ten hours per day, during which time she remains standing most of the time and continuously uses her charm (i.e., "emotional labor," Hochschild, 1983) and skills to attend customers. Despite the fact that people work in the front-line customer service usually get a day off each week, due to the nature of their work, they commonly work on weekends when most of the society are at rest, and take days off during the week when everybody else is working. This also poses difficulty in arranging one's social activities, and "disrupts one's life order."

Likewise, many of the service sector jobs these young women are able to find are dead-end. Although the situation is gradually improving, many jobs in the service sector, like those of manufacturing industries, are gender-specific and discriminatory (Chang Chin-fen, 1995). Women's jobs in the service sector are often of an auxiliary nature, pay less and lack promotion opportunities. Some of the employers also urge their female employees to quit upon marriage. Therefore, the service sector does not provide a promising alternative to young women turning away from traditional manufacturing employment in search of a brighter future.

It is precisely for the last reason that scholars of gender and industrialization in East Asia have argued it is a false expectation that young

fall.

single workers' prospects in the service sector can improve their socio-economic status (Kung, 1994; Salaff, 1995). Or rather, it represents a "myth of social mobility" (Kim, 1992, 1997), whereby the expectation of having a better future renders young workers more accepting of their presumably temporary, day-to-day exploitation and subordination. My own data coincides with these arguments. For instance, I found that not many young women in Hai-kou had a clear idea about what they wanted to do in the service sector. When pushed, they often answered uncertainly that they would like to be a sales clerk (*tien yuan*), an accountant (*kuai chi*),³² or a marketing assistant in a trading firm or office (*yeh wu chu li*), all of which were traditionally women's jobs which led to no promising future. Only one spoke clearly that she planned to become a computer programmer because that was her major in vocational high school. Most of the other girls, however, studied "general business" (*tsung ho shang ko*) which involved basic training in office work but not specific skills.

Yet, I shall argue strongly that to view young women's anticipation as falsely placed optimism is missing the point. Whether or not socially and economically sensible, their vision is an inevitable product of contemporary Taiwan society. It is an exemplification of the very form and concept of Taiwanese modernity, propelled by glamorous urban consumer culture and lifestyles as well as sophisticated modern technologies. This is by no means

³² In Taiwanese terminology, this simply refers to someone who is doing

another piece of evidence of the New New Generation moral decline, for to emphasize the fun-loving and extravagant spending aspects of Taiwan's current social life is a very superficial way to identify the newest trend of cultural and social production. Rather, young Taiwanese women's motivation -- and certainly young men's as well -- to become part of the contemporary white-collar professional work force should be seen as informed by "fantasies of identity" -- that is, "ideas about the kind of person one would like to be and the sort of person one would like to be seen to be by others" (Moore, 1994:66, in Mills, 1997:40).

Mary Beth Mills stated the obvious yet often overlooked point when she cited Cynthia Enloe (1989:16-17, in Mills, 1997:39) that "young women around the globe enter and stay in new types of employment -- despite low wages, harsh labor discipline, and unhealthy working conditions -- not solely for the money earned but also to achieve more complex social goals." Following Mills (1997:39), as Taiwan's social and cultural development in the current stage increasingly intersects with global processes of capitalist expansion and commoditization in its current stage of development, the "needs, values, and worries" of young Taiwanese women no longer revolve only around familiar meanings of family and immediate community. They are now inspired by new imagined and imaginable needs and possibilities, which are engendered in the larger society

bookkeeping.

and often conveyed in the modern, cosmopolitan, and advanced image of Taiwan spread through mass communication technologies. Young Taiwanese women's wish to take part in the modern commercial and financial world is part of these new forms of imagination.

Still, new forms of imagination often have substantial impact on one's socio-economic life. Whether or not conscious, by pursuing service-sector jobs young Taiwanese women increase their marriage prospects and prospects of upward social mobility through marriage. As Taiwanese economy and society inspire young generations to seek a profession other than manufacturing, more and more ambitious young men – like their female counterparts – choose not to work in factories but to take advantage of opportunities provided in fast-growing non-industrial sectors. Therefore, young Taiwanese women staying in factories may find themselves with fewer and fewer satisfactory mates, both in number and in personal characters and future prospects, in their immediate surroundings. In contrast, women working in offices or shops may have more opportunities not only to come into contact with a greater number of prospective husbands but also spouses of more modern outlook, mind-set, and better economic prospects.

Labor Regime Then and Now

To be sure, the moral criticism of a lazy, degraded work force is not new in modern Taiwan history. Elderly people in the countryside expressed similar criticisms of young people's declining hard work ethics in the late 1960s, when Taiwan's export industrialization was fully underway. People said then that "the youth are too spoiled and too soft to do farm work, and they are too fond of factory jobs -- i.e., indoors, with limited although long working hours, and paid with cash wages" (DeGlopper, personal communication),³³ despite the fact that parents had preferred that their own children work in factories, precisely for the regular cash incomes they could bring in. Similarly, owners of small-scale furniture firms in Lukang, a neighboring town of Hai-kou, complained about how hard it was to find or to keep apprentices, i.e., teenage boys who were expected to work for eighteen months without pay while they began to learn the skills. Once again, these craft masters talked of their apprentices "running away" or "running off" to factory jobs (DeGlopper, personal communication).

It may appear that old people have the tendency to criticize younger generations for lack of virtues including hard work ethics, however, moral criticism of this kind is often conveniently used to support economic claims, particularly in a time of transition. These two claims are not mutually exclusive.

³³ I am grateful to Donald DeGlopper, who informed me about the similar moral discourse in the earlier transition of Taiwan economy after listening to my presentation of this chapter at the 96th AAA annual convention (1997). He also kindly checked up his fieldnotes from research conducted in Lukang in the late 1960s for related information, which I cite here.

Furthermore, conveyed in the moral criticism is more than a simple concern of labor supply. In the case discussed here, it also included industrial producers' -- and in DeGlopper's research, master furniture makers' -- uneasiness derived from a changing employer-employee relationship within which they were losing their upper hand over workers.

Nostalgia for the Good Old Days

Up until the 1970s, Hai-kou's factory owners enjoyed a great advantage over workers mainly due to job scarcity. Since there were more young people looking for non-agricultural paid work than textile jobs provided, workers were generally more than happy to take any employment opportunities they were offered, regardless of the pay and terms of work. It was a golden age for employers; workers did not have much choice.

Factory owners often spoke to me with nostalgia tone about those good old days. A second-generation entrepreneur whose father set up one of the very first weaving factories in the area said:

Twenty years ago, if you wanted a job [in a textile factory], you had to find someone who was respectable enough [in the community] and who was willing to guarantee your trustworthiness, and then you could plead with the boss to give you the job.

It was not unusual then for one who needed a job to bring gifts, e.g., a chicken raised by one's family or vegetables from one's own garden, to prospective

employers, in the hope to get the latter's favor. Many parents also took their daughters, who frequently had not yet graduated elementary school, to factory owners with the hope that they would get a job involving weaving preparation work. By doing this, they were hoping that their daughters would be assured a weaving job in the same factory upon graduation. Also, whenever a daughter was too tired, too discontented, or too distraught to go to work, her parents would not hesitate to drag her back to the factory. They would apologize to the boss for her misbehavior, and beg the boss to keep her in the factory. "The parents would say to the boss, 'we are letting you down if our daughter can't work for you,'" an informant explained it to me.

The relationship between employers and employees was frequently portrayed to me as benign and paternalistic, not only by textile producers but also by workers. I was told that factory owners were highly respected, for they were rich, influential, and nearly fatherly figures who took care of employees and their families. Young girls often revered their bosses and potential employers. To many of them, textile employment, though often harsh and obliging, also represented something solemn and mysterious. In one conversation two friends of mine, both of whom were previous weavers, responded with awe about a large local company after I mentioned to them my visit to its owner: "That company! It's quite famous and old. It's been there since we were kids. When we were young, we all liked to peep over its wall to see what's going on inside [the factory]."

At a time when poverty was the general rule, workers did not negotiate for reasonable working schedules. Twelve-hour working days were the norm in the local textile industry. As a matter of fact, this practice was not stopped until the 1980s (although some local factories still maintain a twelve-hour working schedule). Workers did not complain about having to work overtime, either. The experience of a former *Treasure Island* technician, who was in his fifties, illustrates in this respect:

[In the 1970s] people were poor, and jobs were scarce. If you wanted a job, you had to go through the right person [to get it]. We worked very diligently. If the boss said we had to work overtime, we'd all do it without a word. Nobody dared to defy him. When I was at *Treasure Island*, we had only six spinning machines. [To catch up with the deadlines,] we were always working overtime. From Monday to Saturday -- we had only Sundays off -- from early morning to nine in the evening every day, we constantly worked overtime. People began to accept it as part of a normal working day and somewhat became doubtful when we got a day or two without the need to work overtime. The wages were very low. But people were poor, and they needed [as much money as they could get]. Taiwanese worked very, very hard then.

Needless to say, this former technician was one who held a critical opinion of the falling moral standard and declining hard work ethic in current Taiwanese society.

Similar manners of respect and authority were observed between workers on the shop floor, although these were more of a personal nature rather than something institutional. Before the looms became automated in Hai-kou's textile factories (most of the local firms replaced their old shuttled looms with

shuttleless automated ones in the early 1980s), young girls had to learn to tend looms from their older, more experienced weavers by watching or word of mouth, but mostly from hands-on experience if the older workers allowed the girls to try tending their looms. However, many older weavers did not like others to touch their looms. Inexperienced young girls often messed up the threads and slowed down or completely shut down the looms because of their lack of familiarity with the machinery. It would take considerable time for experienced weavers to untangle the threads and reestablish a normal speed of operation, which also meant that their productivity and personal wages based on a piece-rate system would be severely reduced. Henceforth, new young female workers usually had to be discreet and respectful to their older co-workers, or at least to remain good terms with them, in order to learn the essential skills of their trade. The relationship between a master technician (i.e., *shi fu kung*) and his young apprentices was even stricter. A master technician had great authority over beginning mechanics under his supervision. A former mechanic who later established his own firm recalled his own experience in his youth:

It was very hard to be an "apprentice"³⁴ in the 1970s. You couldn't eat at a time prior to the master technician. You had to wait for him to sit down. If you were discovered dozing by the side of looms in a cold winter night [when you were on the night shift], the master technician would confiscate your wrench. A wrench cost more than NT\$200 in those days, and [my]

³⁴ Different from the "apprentice" mentioned by Donald DeGlopper (personal communication), "apprentices" in textile factories were in fact regular employees who got paid, albeit often in lower wages because they were not fully skilled.

monthly wage was only NT\$450. But a mechanic couldn't go without a wrench, you had no choice but to buy a new one. If you were found dozing twice in a month, your wage was utterly gone.

Nowadays master technicians no longer have this kind of authority. Young workers don't give a damn. If you say something to them or correct them, they shout back at you. They have no respect for you.

However, not everyone in town with whom I had conversations gave an orderly and spotless record of this past. Some of the residents recognized the highly unequal relations between an employer and his employees behind the seemingly benign surface. "Workers did not have much dignity," a textile producer in his fifties whose family factory was one of the oldest in the area said in reminiscence:

When I was a teenager, we were still using half-automated looms ("pan tsi tung te," as they called it). That means we needed to replace the shuttle when the thread ran out. We always left about two inches of thread in the shuttle before we took it out. A kid living in a village next to us and working for my next-door neighbor once stole such a shuttle and put it in his pocket. He wanted the thread for his kite. Two inches, the thread! You know how they punished him after he was caught? They took off his pants, and burned his belly button with a cigarette. If it had been now, the boss would have been put in jail! But the father of that kid did not think it wrong or unbearable. He apologized to the boss on his son's behalf. There was no such thing called human rights at that time.

Some workers told me stories about the humiliating treatment they received in a covert yet critical manner. A soft-spoken woman in her late thirties said to me that at her first job – she began working in her early teens – the boss would line up all his employees, young and old, at the beginning of each

working day. If someone came in late, the person "would have to stand there for another long moment when everybody else had begun to work, until the boss told him/her to go." This served a warning to the person so that he or she would not dare to be late again. She also spoke frankly about how factory owners would only hire people who would listen and obey orders:

But of course they wanted someone who was well behaved. Otherwise, with so many people looking for jobs, why should they give the job to you but not someone else? What made them hire you [if you were not obedient and hard working?]

Workers Are the Bosses

The good old days acquired an almost nostalgic glow when labor shortages became an issue in the local industrial labor market. The boom in the local textile manufacturing under Taiwan's export industrialization did not only bring wealth to local entrepreneurs, it also greatly benefited the families of textile workers. Consequently, this lessened a family's need to send their young daughters to work, which in turn affected their notions about textile work and work in general. Mr. Yao, a senior clerk at the Hai-kou Town Hall, who had been in civil service for forty years, commented on the changes in the local economy and its impact on people's lives:

In 1956 I was a young clerk [in a neighboring town hall]. One of my duties was to send draft notices to local families. When I sent the draft notice to a villager's house, it was usually the young wife who received it. The husband was out working. I often saw the young wife coming into tears as soon as she saw the notice. People got married at a very early age

in those days, and they bore children right after. There were very few factories back then. If a husband went to the service, his young wife and her new born babies would be in serious economic difficulty, not to mention the extreme hardship she would have to endure as a young daughter-in-law left alone with her mother-in-law. The wife wouldn't be able to find a job.

The circumstance had completely changed twenty years later. By [1970s] many girls were sent to work right after they graduated elementary school. In each family there was at least one or two daughters working in textile factories. When I sent the draft notice, young daughters in the family were usually at work. Their household economic condition had improved immensely. Nobody ever cried over draft notices. You also started seeing people buying cars or land.

Now [in the 1990s] parents encourage their children to have as much education as possible. They even encourage their children to continue post-graduate studies or to study overseas. Money is no longer their primary concern.

Mr. Yao might have exaggerated the point of local parents' emphasis on children's education, for many of the local residents I met were reluctant to educate their daughters. Nevertheless, his observation had accurate in pointing to the general trend in the local economy and society. One of the significant changes was parents' attitude towards young daughters' employment. Parents in Hai-kou no longer felt ashamed if their daughter was unwilling to take a full-time job of any kind, let alone working in a textile factory. Mr. Yao added:

Now if a factory owner comes to fetch his young, grudging worker, her parents won't necessarily comply with the boss. The parents would say: "It's OK if she doesn't want to work in your factory. As long as our neighbors do not gossip that she is lazy, we are OK if she takes a part-time job or if she has no job at all."

The prosperity of ordinary Taiwanese families, as well as the changes in the wage labor market, had certainly altered parents' expectations of their daughters as well as of these young women's life trajectories.

Labor shortage is by no means the only predicament faced by Hai-kou's textile producers. But it can become an employer's greatest nightmare because it disrupts the day-to-day shop floor operation. During my stay at *Treasure Island*, the general manager appeared somber on several occasions because another factory of his was constantly short of workers. On one such occasion, he told me that he desperately needed to find two workers. "Two?" I recall my own disbelief after hearing him saying so, "That's all you need, and you can't find them?" He gave me a firm nod and began to groan that he would be forced to shut down the entire operation if he could not find two workers soon.³⁵

Many factory owners complained to me, saying that workers were the real bosses these days: "They complain. They make demands. And they quit at any time as they wish." There was neither loyalty nor predictability. A former weaver who later became a daughter-in-law of a factory-owning family compared the days when she was a worker and when she became a boss.

³⁵ The general manager was indeed telling truth. His other factory had recently upgraded its machines, in order to save labor and to improve the quality of product as well as to broaden its varieties. There were sixty-four looms in this factory, and the factory hired a total of six workers of three shifts, with two on each shift, to take care of these machines. Given the small scale of this factory, lacking two workers would mean to drop one third of the total production. It was a great loss.

Resonating the opinions of her contemporary, she said that workers begged bosses to give them a job in the old days. "See how hard it was for workers then," she said. But it had completely changed.

Now if an employee doesn't show up for work [author's note: usually a sign of quitting], we go to her house [to persuade her to come back]. If we know someone has recently quit from another factory, we go and appeal to her: "Ah-shui ah, please come to work for us." It's so hard and so different now. I would kneel to our employees to plea that they stay. [Labor shortage] was very troubling.

She continued to tell me that only when the government allowed them to hire foreign workers were they given a feasible solution to their problem. I shall discuss this issue in Chapter Six.

Strategies of Labor Recruitment and Maintenance

The management of *Treasure Island* has tried many means to secure an adequate work force. Since the local labor pool was exhausted, they had ventured farther and farther, even to the East Coast and Green Island -- allegedly the last virgin land of Taiwan that is free from industrial pollution -- to find workers. "We found three workers on that trip!" the manager who ventured to the East Coast proudly announced to me. The company as well as some other larger companies in the area had also tried to use "Work and Education under Cooperation" programs (*Chien chiao ho tsuo*). That is, *Treasure Island* would

recruit thirty odd junior high school graduates³⁶ who would like to continue their education but could not get admission from the limited number of local public schools or could not afford tuition, and then make arrangements with a private vocational school to have these young women admitted. The company paid the tuition, and worked out a schedule with the school to accommodate the production need of the company and the class time of the girls. Young women who participated in such programs had to sign a contract with the company, promising not to leave the company at least before their graduation. Otherwise they would have to pay back the tuition along with other cash penalties. The company benefited from such programs by keeping a sizable stable work force for at least three years. However, as more and more young people could afford their own tuition, and the number of high schools had increased rapidly in recent years, such programs lost their appeal. The company could no longer find at least twenty students to make the program effective.

Later, instead of trying to recruit a group of young women at once to make the "Work and Education under Cooperation" program work, the company changed its policy to sponsor individual workers. By accepting financial aid from *Treasure Island*, a worker had to agree to work for the company at least during the tenure of her schooling, otherwise, she would be fined (The company

³⁶ The number might vary, but the number had to be sufficient enough – and thus worth – to make up a full-sized class (or two classes or more, depending on the recruitment).

had already dropped this program due to its ineffectiveness). Lately, the company set up a reward for its own employees who are able to recruit new workers. During the course of my research, one would get NT\$8,000 for each new person introduced: NT\$4,000 at the beginning of the new worker's employment, and the rest of the money at the sixth month of employment.

In addition to these formal means, *Treasure Island* also designates the recruitment task to all of its managers. It is indeed a major responsibility of each section manager to keep an adequate number of laborers in his own department. He has to be able to maintain a sufficient work force, using any means ranging from recruiting new employees to holding the ones already under his supervision. Managers at *Treasure Island* used to go to local junior high schools and those in neighboring vicinities to give "job talks" every summer before the graduation ceremony. In recent years they even get hold of a school's yearbook and then make home visits to the graduates to persuade them to work for *Treasure Island*.

Traditional concepts of social relations such as "guanxi" ("relationship") and "renqing" ("human emotion") have also been applied intensively by the Taiwanese to forestall workers from quitting.³⁷ Intricate interpersonal relationships have always been considered an essential element of Taiwan's industrial development in the post-war era (Shieh, 1989, 1993; Chen, 1994, 1995).

³⁷ For a general discussion of the importance of "guanxi" and "renqing" in

Indeed, the complex network among numerous small- and medium-sized businessmen and manufacturers has been considered the key to Taiwan's success in the international market as it demonstrates a great extent of flexibility and adaptability (Castells, 1996:151-200). Despite the fact that most of the literature of Taiwanese (and Chinese) "network capitalism" (Hefner, 1998) focuses on the building of ties among entrepreneurs, I would also apply the concepts of network and networking to understand labor-management relations. In the field I have heard many stories that employers cultivated close relationships or fictive kin ties, or used already existent social ties, to reduce labor costs and to increase flexibility in production, and lately, to retain laborers.³⁸ These carefully cultivated relations often prove successful (and sometimes powerful and coercive) in the recent crisis of labor shortage.

As an example, one of the packers at *Treasure Island* complained to me several times that she wanted to quit because her job was hard and tiresome and the pay was limited. However, one year after I first met her, I still found her working in the packing department. She did try to quit once or twice, but she always came back a few days after quitting. When asked why she continued to return, she sighed and said,

conducting businesses in Chinese societies including Taiwan, see Hamilton, 1998.

³⁸ An ultimate example of this is the use of one's own family members, as discussed in Chapter Five.

How can I succeed in quitting? The manager lives in my village! Every time after I quit, the manager always came immediately to my house to talk to me. If I insisted on quitting, he would come around again, and again, and again, until I decided to come back. Not only would he come, so would some other managers. How can you say no to them?

To cultivate personal relationships with one's employees is even more crucial to small factory owners who have even greater difficulty finding workers. Moreover, employers not only foster relationships with their employees but frequently extend close ties to employees' families as well. As a consequence, the kindred-like spirit established often serves as a powerful persuasion at times when a factory owner needs the cooperation of his/her workers. The story of Pei-lan, a single woman in her mid-twenties, can best illustrate the usefulness of relationships of this kind.

Pei-lan was recently hired by *Treasure Island* to work in the pre-weaving section when I began my research in the company. She worked the day shift only -- she would not have worked at *Treasure Island* had the company not promised her to do so -- leaving the night and graveyard shifts to be filled by foreign workers (Chapter Six). Pei-lan used to work in weaving factories, but she told me that she would never again take a job requiring changing shifts. The job she had prior to that of *Treasure Island* had worn her out. There were thirty-two looms in the factory she previously worked. This factory was on a twelve-hour working schedule, with two weavers on each shift. Each weaver took care of

sixteen looms. Pei-lan said that, though twelve hours were long, the workload was bearable until one of the four employees of the factory quit.

After that, my Big Brother³⁹ decided not to look for a replacement but change our schedule from two shifts to three shifts, with the three remaining employees each working on one shift. The working hour was shortened to eight hours, but the number of the looms was doubled. Now we had to tend thirty-two looms each! There was so much work to be done. I was far overworked. I lost more than ten kilograms in a few months only.

Knowing that Pei-lan continued working in this factory for almost another year after the major change in their work schedule, I asked: "Why didn't you quit immediately?" For that Pei-lan answered,

I thought about quitting. The work was just too much for anyone to endure. But he is my Big Brother. I couldn't bear to bring up the topic. Besides, how could I quit? Not only my Big Brother but also his wife visited my family very often. They brought gifts to everyone in my family: to my father, to my mother, to my sister, and even to my brothers. How could I quit? Even if I insisted on doing so, my Big Brother and his wife would appeal to my parents, and my parents would feel obliged to persuade me to work [for them]. My parents always said: "Your Big Brother is so nice to our family. It would be very embarrassing for us to see you quit his job to work for someone else." What could I do otherwise?

It was only when she became ill from being overworked that she obtained an indisputable reason to quit her job in this factory. Nevertheless, she remained friendly with her previous boss, the Big Brother.

³⁹ He was in fact Pei-lan's boss. However, according to Pei-lan, he treated her like

The Issue of Foreign Workers

Finally, the complaint of declining work ethic and the resultant labor shortage are joined with a feasible solution, i.e., the employment of foreign labor. By law, foreign labor is to be paid with at least a monthly minimum wage of NT\$14,000 (US\$518). This usually becomes the maximum wage they are paid. Given the fact that it costs nearly NT\$30,000 (US\$1111) to hire a native textile worker, it appears not only practical but also critical to Taiwanese small producers to hire foreign workers in order to lower their production costs and therefore remain competitive in the international market. The appeal for "replacement" labor, on the basis of a declining social morale and the fear for Taiwan's fall in the global economy, gives them a strong and legitimate reason to ask for the government's intervention. Nevertheless, as I will show in Chapter Six, the Taiwan government does not merely comply with industrial producers' demand for foreign labor. The concern of the larger Taiwanese society over the effect of foreign workers (economically, socially, and culturally) has served as a counteractive force that the government can not ignore but has to attend to.

a younger sister, and wanted her to call him Big Brother instead of Boss.

Conclusion

Hegemony is always a mixture of true and false statements (cf. Smart, 1997:405). Economically, at the root of the “New New Generation” moral discourse is the changing demographic profile in relation to opportunities in Taiwan’s wage labor market. Young people in their late teens and early twenties are no longer the predominant work force since they enjoy more education and/or leisure time, leaving people ten years older or more – and married women in particular – to become the core participants of the economy. Accompanying this demographic shift is the preference of the upcoming generation for service sector employment over jobs in manufacturing industries. Both of these changes have been the consequences of Taiwan’s past success with its export economy. Young Taiwanese in the New New Generation grew up experiencing a more affluent society, and a much more diversified economy, than that in their parents’ time. They came to expect to have “modern” jobs in the “modern” sector where their perceived prospects lie. Yet, these changes also indicate a new stage of capital accumulation within which one can no longer take cheap labor as a granted source for profits. This has indeed become a serious setback for small producers in traditional labor-intensive industries like those small textile manufacturers in Hai-kou. As such, the decline of the New New Generation’s work ethic presents a convenient explanation for at least part of their predicament.

Among textile workers in the Hai-kou area, clearly indicated in the different attitudes toward the New New Generation's moral decline was a generational division. I found three distinct groups of workers on the shop floor: married women in their late thirties and early forties, single women in their late twenties or early thirties, and young single women in their late teens or early twenties. As a matter of fact, these three cohorts of women often constituted separate work and social groups on the shop floor. As I shall show in the following chapter, the separation was not simply derived from the differences in their age and marital status, but rather from the connotations carried by these differences. Work in general, and industrial work in particular, covered a wide range of meanings to these three groups of women who differed by generation and by the time in their lives when they entered textile manufacturing (cf. Rofel, 1994). As women, their gender roles fixed the parameters within which particular cultural and social responsibilities had to be fulfilled; this in turn affected their participation in the wage labor market. Subsequently, they had different ideas about the causes and consequences of Taiwan's recent industrial restructuring, which indeed had a different impact on each group. I shall discuss these issues in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

The Meaning of Work: Textile Workers Transgenerationally

In the early 1970s, Lydia Kung (1994[1978]) studied young factory workers in an electronics plant an hour bus ride from Taipei. At the time of her research, Taiwan was transforming from an agricultural society to one based on industry. The export-oriented economy had just begun to take off. New employment opportunities in then booming light industries were created in or near urban areas. Young people from the countryside all over the island migrated to cities to look for jobs. At that time, factory work represented the first stable form of employment open to Taiwanese women, and was almost exclusively reserved for young single women. The size and demographic structure of the work force in Kung's company reflected this early stage of industrialization. Half of her company's four thousand employees were working daughters from a nearby market town. The other half were farming daughters from the south who lived in factory dormitories. These young women were the first generation of industrial workers in Taiwan's post-war history.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Although young single women were the preferred employees of industrial producers (particularly for the multinationals), this does not mean that older married women were not engaged in productive work but only staying home, conducting housework and caring for their families. While homemaking was considered to be the primary role of married Taiwanese women, homemaking duties often combined with homework. Industrial producers actively sought married women as a source of low paid labor intended to supplement factory

The economy and society of Taiwan have greatly changed since then. By the time of my dissertation research in the mid-1990s – approximately twenty years after Kung’s now classic study – Taiwan has lost its status as a manufacturing power house of light consumer goods to its neighboring countries in the Asian-Pacific region. The economy is much more diversified, and industries have been upgraded and become more capital intensive. Young women largely shun factory employment, leaving it to older married women who have greater family responsibility yet less education or skills needed in the contemporary service sector. The participation of married women in Taiwan’s industrial labor market has indeed accelerated since the mid-1980s (DBGAS, 1991; DGBAS & CEPD, 1991).

At Treasure Island, despite the management’s effort to recruit young girls, after the 1980s, they were forced to change the company’s single women-only employment policy and began to hire married women and mothers as well.

Similar to the situations in other textile factories in Hai-kou, married women

output for the export sector (i.e., the putting-out system). Furthermore, “[w]hile homework is not uncommon in industrial nations, Taiwan is one of the few countries actively to pursue such cheap labor through state policies” (Appelbaum and Henderson, 1992:228). Under the “Living Room is Factory” campaign, originated in 1968, the Taiwan government “[provided] special incentives for families to purchase sewing machines and learn sewing skills for homework. This simultaneously [increased] the supply of cheap female labor while reducing its cost, since expenditures [did] not have to be made on facilities, energy, dormitories, or management. Nor [were] women who [worked] at home provided with health insurance, minimum wage guarantees, or similar protections” (Appelbaum and Henderson, 1992:228; more discussion in Cheng

have become the backbone of production at *Treasure Island*.

Notably, most of the married women who work in Hai-kou's textile industry are not first-timers in the industrial labor market. In fact, they were the first generation of post-war industrial workers who helped to accomplish Taiwan's "economic miracle" in the 1970s when they were very young. They had been the core work force of Taiwan's economic development in the past, and they still play an active role in today's industrial production. However, the economic environment they live in is very different from the past. In less than 20 years, factory women who are in their 30s or 40s have witnessed rapid transformations of Taiwanese society from a poverty-stricken rural economy, to its glorious days of full-fledged export-oriented industrialization, and now to the decline of manufacturing industries while the economy gradually becomes more service-centered. Dramatic changes in Taiwanese women's roles and responsibilities have also occurred in a very short time span, as evidenced in these women's lives and experiences.

This chapter focuses on the meaning of work to three generations of women who came of age after Taiwan's export industrialization. The life stories of three women – all of whom I first met at *Treasure Island* – are chosen to highlight the socio-economic circumstances and cultural environments each of these generations face. Social scientists normally compare the lives of successive

and Hsiung, 1992 and Hsiung, 1996).

generations – for example, mothers and daughters – who are twenty years apart. However, given the immense economic change Taiwan has experienced since the 1960s, I adopted industrial generations instead of kinship generations for analysis, which are generally ten or even fewer years apart (c.f. Salaff, in Kung, 1994:xiii; also Arrigo, forthcoming). Taiwanese women joining the wage labor market ten years apart have very different work experiences. The life stories in this chapter are thus manifestations of the evolving global system as lived by Taiwanese women, and each of the stories is closely related to one another, for the development of a later stage of the evolving system is built upon the previous one.

Yeh Ah-fong, the woman whose life story is discussed first in this chapter, was born in 1961. As the majority of the women born in the late 1950s and early 1960s and came of age in the early 1970s, Ah-fong grew up in the countryside experiencing a decline in agriculture and a swift transition from agrarian to manufacturing-based economy. Ah-fong was one of Taiwan's first-generation industrial workers in the post-war era. The early work and family experiences of her generation are well documented in pioneering studies of Chinese working women (for example, Diamond, 1979; Arrigo, 1980, 1984, 1985; Salaff, 1995[1981]; Kung 1981, 1994[1978]; R. Gallin, 1984a, 1990). Most of them began working at a very young age, sacrificing their own chance for education to support their families and the education of their younger siblings. However, unlike the previous generations of Taiwanese women who retired from paid work (if they

had any) upon marriage, Ah-fong and her cohorts continued working after marriage, usually only taking time off during the first few years following their first child birth. There are two major reasons for this. Firstly, when they reached the age of marriage – usually in their twenties – in the 1980s, the Taiwanese economy had transformed to an extraordinarily successful export-oriented industrial economy. The society had grown much more prosperous, and the standards of living were much higher, than in the previous decades. As a result, in order to catch up with the rising living standards and living expense, many married women of Ah-fong's generation feel compelled to take paid jobs in order to increase the family income. Secondly, as the economy began to experience a squeeze in labor supply after the 1980s, specifically in the industrial sector, many employers who originally rejected the idea of hiring married women were obliged to change their policies. Ah-fong and her contemporaries have many more opportunities than their previous generations to find employment with a married status.

Yang Ch'un-mei, the second woman discussed in this chapter, was born in 1965. As she is only four years younger than Ah-fong, Ch'un-mei shared much in common with Ah-fong in life. Both of them were filial daughters working for wages in a very young age, and both of them constituted the work force in the early stage of Taiwan's export industrialization and contributed to the later accomplishment of the "economic miracle." Nonetheless, their life experiences differ in many ways. Women of Ch'un-mei's generation, who were born in late

1960s and early 1970s and came of age throughout the 1980s, usually have more education than Ah-fong's cohorts. Despite the fact that the Taiwan government extended the mandatory education from six years (i.e., elementary school) to nine years (i.e., junior high school) in 1969, parents in the countryside tended to ignore this policy – particularly if the child in question was a daughter – until much later. Most of the women in Ah-fong's generation with whom I became friends have only elementary school education, whereas most of Ch'un-mei's cohorts went to junior high school even night vocational school or junior college. More important than the length of education, however, is the image of progress implied in education. Early on in their working life, women of Ch'un-mei's generation had begun to witness the burgeoning of a modern and urban society and a gradual shift of the economy to one centered on service. Many of them also began to consider possibilities of a future outside the shop floor, and some of them, even outside the traditional realm of marriage.

Born in 1975, Lin Hsiao-fen, the third woman discussed in this chapter, is one of the New New Generation who are inspired to take part in Taiwan's contemporary glamorous, modern, urban, cosmopolitan, and consumption-oriented society and economy. However, being one of the few in her generation who still remain in factories, Hsiao-fen displayed many doubts of herself and uncertainties towards future. Her life story is illuminating in that it manifests the undercurrent of anxiety in Taiwanese society, noting a mixture of hope and skepticism.

Concomitantly, this chapter seeks to shed light on the scholarship of gender and the international division of labor. Over the past few decades, an extensive body of literature has explored the effects of global capitalism on the definition and meanings of gender. Two central and interconnected issues have been examined (Warren and Bourque, 1989, 1991; Cairoti, 1998:182). The first concerns the domestic domain, primarily the impact of women's participation in industrialization on gender and the family in local cultures. The second stresses the very nature of the current global economy, and questions whether women's participation in factories worldwide is intrinsic to capitalism. After generations of pioneer studies we now fully acknowledge that these two levels of analysis are not separable. Our current task is "to contextualize and research the interplay of transnational and local cultures as gender ideologies are negotiated, refined, and contested" (Warren and Bourque, 1991:300) by various players such as multinational investors, local producers and managers, workers and their families, governments, and other social-cultural forces like religious groups.

However, it seems to me that there is a general tendency in the literature to stop short of recognizing the historical evolution in Third World countries, where the economy continues to transform after the initial introduction of capitalist industrial production. Much attention has been paid to the incipient stage of transformation when young single women are the preferred work force. As a result, researchers have limited their investigation to the local and global interaction at the juncture when the social relations in a newly industrializing

economy are first affected and reconfigured, with a hidden assumption that there is one - and only one - clear transformation in the social system under discussion. The scope of research is likely to be limited despite the fact that it is never intended to be so. This is probably related to the brief history of industrialization in most of the Third World countries. Nevertheless, young women do not persist as preferred or available labor force forever. In a rapidly developing economy like that of Taiwan, young women can become inaccessible to industrial employers when the economy grows beyond merely manufacturing. Not only that an ever growing wage labor market lures away potential workers to more desirable new spheres, but the definition and meanings of gender have also been dialectically reconstructed as the economy continuously reconstitutes its patterns of production and reproduction. Young women become unavailable because of both economic reasons and shifts in cultural expectations.

My own research in Hai-kou certainly indicates that the process of industrial transformation involves women's interpreting and reinterpreting their productive and reproductive roles as they are incorporated in distinct phases of capitalist production. In the following sections, I shall illustrate the trend of changes that I have discussed above through the life stories of three female textile workers.

Yeh Ah-fong: From Working Daughter to Working Mother⁴¹

Why should I tell you about my childhood? Even if I do tell you, you wouldn't understand. You don't share the same experience with us! I had a very harsh life when I was young -- you know how much abuse [from employers and older co-workers] I had undertaken when I was young? -- I don't want to recall it. Why do you force these questions on me? My life is getting better and better. I work, I make money, and I have a stable and secure life. This means more to me [than lamenting for my past]." (*Ah-fong lost her temper with my persistent probing of her past life history.*)

Yeh Ah-fong, a line leader in her mid-30s, took me under her wing almost on the first day we met. She was usually friendly to me and liked to have me sitting next to her while she was doing her duty. She showed me the functions of the different parts of their machines, and taught me tips of becoming a successful loom keeper. She also spoke frankly about her relationships with her superiors and co-workers. In her own conceptualization of my research, she had been very helpful to me in collecting essential information. But she rarely told me about herself. I knew very little about her family, her childhood, or her early work experience. She did not see the point of

⁴¹ This refers to Louise Lamphere's (1987) From Working Daughter to Working Mother: Immigrant Women in a New England Industrial Community. In this book she examines the transformation in the industrial labor market from one predominated by young daughters of immigrants to one by married women with children, as local industries evolved. A similar process is observed in current Taiwan. I borrowed her title to indicate the fact that Ah-fong used to be a working daughter but she continued working after marriage and childbirth, for reasons I will discuss below.

my poking into these subject matters; nor was she eager to answer my questions when I pressed for these issues. Only once did she bring up reminiscences of her childhood voluntarily, after I accidentally – and probably mistakenly – told her that children in my family rarely did house chores. She said to me in a scolding tone that she had washed the clothes of her whole family to ease her mother's burden, when her mother had to take a paid job outside home upon her father's death. She was only 12 then. Ah-fong's voice was rather soft and sentimental that day, unlike the loud and practical attitude she so often expressed in the workplace. She told me that her mother had to work very hard, taking several jobs along with farming on their small plot of land, to support the four children in the family. Only when Ah-fong left home for factory employment in Hai-kou, and after her elder brother came back from his military service, did the family finally come out of stark poverty.

From the tidbits of information gathered from our various conversations, I was gradually able to construct a fuller picture of Ah-fong's early life experience. Born in 1961, Ah-fong grew up in Yun-lin County, where the economy was based on agriculture and where the path to industrialization lagged behind the rest of Taiwan. There were four children in the family: she had one elder brother, one younger brother, and one younger sister. Being the second child and the eldest daughter in a poor and fatherless family, Ah-fong did not have much choice but to begin working early. She was recruited to *Treasure Island* at the age of fourteen by her cousin who had already worked in the company, inspired by the

company's effort to find workers outside the nearly exhausted local labor pool due to Hai-kou's speedy export industrialization. Despite the fact that she was not a "native" but came from a more rural region, Ah-fong's work history closely followed the life trajectory of factory women of her age in the Hai-kou area.

Coming of Age in an Economy Undergoing Transformation

Ah-fong and women of her generation grew up in a declining agricultural economy. Despite the fact that almost all of the rural households owned some land after the land reform (1949-1953), from farming "one could only get food to eat, but not money to spend." The rapid growth of rural population, and the government's policy of maintaining a low rice price and of developing the industrial sector at the expense of agriculture, had severely curtailed the rural households' ability to keep the fruits of their hard labor within the family. After land reform, the old land tenure system was largely destroyed and most of the former tenants obtained private ownership of the land they cultivated. Also, with technical assistance from the government, agricultural output had significantly increased after the war-torn years. Between 1952 and 1968 agricultural production grew vigorously at an annual rate in excess of 5 percent (Ho, 1978:147). Nevertheless, these early accomplishments did not result in an increase of family wealth in the countryside. The increase of agricultural productivity as well as of new cultivated lands could not keep up with the growth rate of rural population. More importantly, however, the government's

policy had largely inhibited surplus accumulation in the agricultural sector.

According to Liu (1992)[1974], in order to insure a sufficient supply of foodstuffs to feed the huge population of civil servants and soldiers (around one million) who came to Taiwan with the defeated Nationalist government from mainland China after the end of Chinese Civil War in 1949, the government implemented several policies to control the price of rice and to collect rice directly from farmers. In addition to the compulsory sale of rice to the government, farmers also had to pay land taxes, government loan repayments, and payments for land purchased from the government through the "land-to-the-tiller" act in kind. All of these amounted to "hidden rice taxes," because the official purchase price was much lower than the wholesale market price of paddy (Lee, 1971; Ho, 1978:180).

The most notorious policy, however, was the rice-fertilizer barter system (*Fei liao huan ku chi*). The Taiwan government had been the sole source of chemical fertilizer for more than two decades since the 1950s. It controlled all fertilizer production, imports, and distribution. Until the early 1970s the barter ratio between rice and fertilizer was set consistently to favor fertilizer (whose value was highly overestimated, roughly 40 percent over its production or import cost) (Liu, 1992). Taiwanese farmers paid too high a price for the fertilizers they used, given the world price of fertilizer.⁴² In the 1950s and 1960s

⁴² See Ho, 1978:181 for a comparison to the fertilizer price in other Asian

the rice collected through this barter system accounted for over one-half of the rice collected by the government (Ho, 1978:80). The high price of fertilizer was in part a consequence of the government's policy to subsidize industrialization at the expense of agriculture (Ho, 1978:181-182).

A direct result of these highly discriminatory policies was a sharp decline in the income of farming families. Selling land in exchange for badly needed cash was rarely an option due to several reasons. First and foremost, most of the land was inherited from ancestors. One would not easily sell it unless the family was in dire straits. Also, farmland was not as valuable as it is today; nobody would ever imagine becoming a millionaire by selling his farmland. Under such circumstances, young people in rural areas who were unable to find work in agricultural production were forced to seek employment outside agriculture; most of them entered then newly developed industrial labor market.

Young girls born throughout 1940s and 1960s in Taiwan's countryside had witnessed the inability of agriculture to sustain a vital livelihood let alone to accumulate wealth. Subsequently, many of the farming families were in debt, either to the government or to usurers in the countryside. Furthermore, debt did not end upon the death of a father who owed the money, but was passed to the next generation of male offspring through family division. Sons divided and inherited both family property and debt equally. A debt-ridden family life was

countries.

thus a common childhood experience borne by many women in Hai-kou.

Young girls who came of age throughout the late 1950s and 1970s then entered textile factories in large numbers. They became the first generation of industrial workers engaged in the fast growing export industrialization, which began in the late 1960s and started to blossom in the mid-1970s. They were the "neophyte" young workers whose lives had been the focus of studies of global industrialization on gender and family relations in Taiwanese or Chinese society (Diamond, 1979; Arrigo, 1980, 1984, 1985; forthcoming; Salaff, 1995[1981]; Kung, 1981, 1994[1978]; R. Gallin, 1984a, 1984b, 1990; Hu, 1984). They entered the wage labor market at a very young age, generally when they were thirteen or fourteen, upon elementary school graduation. However, it was not unusual that parents arranged for their young daughters to work even one year before graduation for the purpose of securing a job. Textile employment was a common ordeal for these young girls.

Although the majority of these girls left paid work upon marriage or the birth of their first child, as the past literature has well documented, many of them also returned to the workplace as soon as they could find someone or some ways to keep an eye on their children. They were, thus, not only the first generation of industrial workers in Taiwan's post-war industrialization, but also the first generation of married Taiwanese women who participated in large numbers in the wage labor market.

Because of their early participation in the wage labor market, many of

these women who were in their mid-30s had only six years of schooling, while those who had reached their 40s rarely went beyond elementary school, despite the fact that the Taiwan government had extended the mandatory education to its citizens from six to nine years in 1968. Education did not seem to matter much, however. In the mid-1970s when Ah-fong was first hired at *Treasure Island*, manufacturing industries employed the highest percentage of the working population in Taiwanese economy, aside from agriculture (Kung, 1994:44-45; Ho, 1978:131).⁴³ There were not many other job options open to young women especially in rural areas regardless their educational attainment.

Even if a young girl of Ah-fong's modest background had wished to seek a different life trajectory, she would have been easily discouraged by the harsh economic reality that she had to overcome. In the end, she usually accepted her expected destiny. Salaff's research (1995)[1981] on the impact of industrial employment on the lives of working daughters in Hong Kong under similar economic circumstances provides an ethnographic as well as a theoretical ground to understand the predicament faced by young women. She discovered that a working daughter's position in the family depended on the economic history and other socioeconomic attributes of her family and on the daughter's

⁴³ Many of those who declared themselves as farmers were in fact engaged in non-farming economic activities, and they might derive most of their revenues from non-farming sources. Nevertheless, they would continue to grow rice or other food crops even only half-heartedly, mainly for the reason that they would be fined or even lose the title of their land if they left the land unattended.

birth order and the structure and cycle of her family. That is to say, family economic circumstances determined the training a daughter was able to receive and the age at which she undertook employment. In the center of Salaff's analysis was the ascendancy of Chinese family which she called the "centripetal family regime" (Salaff, 1995:7-10). In its centripetal form, the family became a power base to manipulate other institutions. It gathered in its forces "by demanding the primary loyalty of its members and mobilizing their labor power, political, and psychological allegiances on behalf of kinsmen" (ibid.:8). Therefore, young women from poorer backgrounds had very few options other than to work in order to fulfill their family obligations.

In Search of Modernity

Many women I met in Hai-kou, particularly those who were in or had passed their thirties, expressed similar sentiments to those of their Hong Kong counterparts in Salaff's study. But their memories of their early working days were not unequivocally bitter. For one thing, aside from having to work hard (which they had to do at home as well), young girls generally enjoyed the company of the peers they knew from work. Some of the fortunate ones might also benefit from the relative material affluence provided by their employers. Mei-yun, also a line leader at *Treasure Island* who was slightly older but nonetheless shared a very similar work and life experience with Ah-fong, once told me in a matter-of-fact way that she gained a lot of weight in her first few

years working at *Treasure Island*. The dishes prepared by the company's kitchen were much more delicious than those of her own family, she said, and they always had plenty of food to eat.⁴⁴ A woman in another company also told me that she used to save and take home the lunch toasts provided by her company for her younger brothers to eat. She said,

[In the 1970s] you didn't see much of those toasted breads around here. You know, the kind with butter and jam on it. It smelt so good! My family couldn't afford that kind of [fancy] food. But I wanted my brothers to experience it. I usually saved the toast and took it home after work for them to eat.

If to take part in the booming service sector is the New New Generation's way of searching for modernity in the late 1990s, I would also argue that to participate in the then prospering industrial sector should be considered in part as young girls' efforts to get away from the pitiful life style centered around the doomed agricultural economy in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. In retrospect, Ah-fong and many of her older co-workers were grateful for the opportunities they had to work in textile factories. Their incomes had greatly improved their families' living standard. It is by now a common story to students of Chinese/Taiwanese women and industrialization that young women

⁴⁴ *Treasure Island* provided three meals plus one late night snack to its employees every day. The meals were highly subsidized by the company. Employees paid almost nothing for the food they ate at work. At the time when I was conducting research, employees at *Treasure Island* paid NT\$10 – roughly US\$0.40 – per day

workers contributed their wages to the purchase of modern consumer goods (e.g., TV, radio, refrigerator, etc.) and to the education of their younger siblings. From my observation in Hai-kou, however, I would contend that a more fundamental process towards "modernization" began within the physical structure of one's home. I was often told how working daughters' wages had helped the family to fix different parts of their houses (usually beginning with the roof), and eventually to transform their old, often mud-made and straw-roofed flat farm huts into brick or concrete, several story-high houses with tiled floor, modern kitchen and sanitary facilities. The completion of a new house made of the latest materials not only indicated a more comfortable, better equipped, and more convenient living quarters, it also symbolized a better economic status, and more importantly, a modern outlook of life of the family.

The family house was certainly an important part of Ah-fong's self-identity. In our few conversations in which she talked about her natal family, Ah-fong usually began with the hardships her family had endured in those early days, and finished with affection as she related to how her family was eventually able to build a house of their own. She often said,

We had only a broken-down farmhouse then. [My mother] finally saved some money to build part of our house, and a few years later, she saved money again to build another part. That's how we owned our new house!

for the food.

From Working Daughter to Working Mother⁴⁵

Ah-fong continued to work at *Treasure Island* until she married at age 22. Ah-fong met her husband at *Treasure Island*, who was then an electrician of the company. However, a few years ago Ah-fong's husband quit his job to become an independent contractor -- one of the common career trajectories followed by young Taiwanese males. Another common trajectory was to work as a mechanic first and then open up one's own factory after having learned the skills. Ah-fong herself stayed home upon marriage, and raised three children (two boys and one girl). She returned to *Treasure Island* seven years later, after her youngest son was old enough to be admitted to kindergarten.

As previously stated, it was the *Treasure Island's* policy until the late 1980s that they hire only single women. The few married women they would consider hiring before the 1990s were former employees of the company who left upon marriage. Ah-fong was rehired under such circumstance. However, the company was forced to change its recruitment policy, when they could not find sufficient numbers of young, single workers. The company, as well as their counterparts in Hai-kou and in Taiwan at large, could no longer afford to reject married women who sought employment.

Nearly all of the married women at *Treasure Island*, except one or two, had been experienced textile workers before they married. This was also the case for

⁴⁵ See Footnote 41.

textile factories across the region. For the married women themselves, textile manufacturing was one of the best job they were able to find. Although it required women to be on shifts, it paid much better than most of other female manufacturing jobs. The other option married women had was to take cleaning jobs or work in fast food chains in the booming service sector, but these were often part-time jobs with much lower pay.

Although males have always been, and continue to be, considered as the breadwinner in Taiwanese society, the ideology does not always conform to the reality. Some of the married workers at *Treasure Island*, as well as some other married working women I met during the course of fieldwork, returned to work, either because their husbands did not have regular jobs or did not make enough money to pay for the day-to-day living expenses, or they spent most of their earnings on drinking or gambling and ignored the needs of their families.⁴⁶ Ah-fong was among the fortunate. Her husband neither drank nor gambled; fishing was his ultimate leisure-time passion. More importantly, he made fairly good money from his independent contractor-electrician job.

⁴⁶ I do not have good statistical data to show the magnitude of men's drinking and gambling problems. Nonetheless, my conversations with local people, both men and women, seemed to conform that the problem was fairly common. Whether or not one spent excessively on drinking or gambling, these two were quite ordinary activities among male social gatherings not only in Hai-kou but also island wide. Boretz (n.d.:2) postulates that "there are, at a minimum, five tangible elements which no [Taiwanese males'] entertainment venue can be without: drinking, smoking, singing, and in one form or another, sex and gambling." These five elements "each and in combination are [media] providing

Although Ah-fong liked to say that she returned to *Treasure Island* because she wanted to "help out" her husband -- a frequently heard expression made by married working women in explaining their reasons for reentering the wage labor market -- the socio-economic reality surrounding Ah-fong's decision was never that simple. The truth was far more complex even in her words:

When [my husband] worked for *Treasure Island*, he made NT\$25,000 a month. Now he works as an independent contractor, and he is able to make NT\$40,000 or 50,000 each month. Our family has been greatly improved after he left *Treasure Island*. We are okay now.

I could've stayed home if I had wanted to. But I want to share my husband's burden. We have to pay the mortgage, and there's also these children's education... It's all for survival.

Conveyed in Ah-fong's words was her recognition that it would require more money for the family to keep up with the current consumption level of Taiwanese society, and for her children to get ahead in the future through investment on education, even though her husband's income was sufficient to provide them a modest yet comfortable life.

Taiwan's Socio-economic Changes and Married Women's Employment

Ah-fong was not alone in her decision to return to paid work. It is increasingly common for a Taiwanese woman to continue working after

the actional context for the production of male subjectivity" (n.d.:5).

marriage, or even after the birth of the first child if she can find someone (usually her mother or mother-in-law) to take care of the baby without pay or with little pay. Women working on the shop floor usually cannot afford private daycare service. Even if they can afford it, the cost often equals their wages, thereby making their employment worthless.⁴⁷ They usually have to rely on close relatives to assist them. Otherwise, they would choose to stay home for a few years, and return to the workplace after their youngest children have reached school age (like Ah-hong had done). This general observation is confirmed by Thornton and Lin (1994) in their research of women of all social groups. By dividing the women into marriage cohorts, they discovered dramatic changes in Taiwanese family organization and married women's employment over time. Women married in 1955-59 were unlikely to be involved in paid work outside their husbands' families -- 84% of them reported not working between marriage and first birth -- whereas 58% of the 1980-84 marriage cohort (to which Ah-fong belongs) had done so (Thornton and Lin, 1994:129-131). Also, although only 6% of the 1955-59 marriage cohort worked outside the family between their first and second childbirth, 26% of the 1980-84 cohort did so (Thornton and Lin, 1994:132).

Married women's massive participation in the wage economy marks a

⁴⁷ The other important reason for their not hesitating to quit upon the birth of first child is that their jobs as shop-floor workers are dead-ended. Unlike their white-collar counterparts, whose career development might be disrupted by quitting upon childbirth, female industrial workers stand no loss in promotion. They can always find another manufacture-related job if they choose to return to

new stage of capitalist development in Taiwan, under which the distinction between women's productive and reproductive roles has broken down, merging the focus and strategies of each domain (Nash, n.d.). The fact that young single women are in search of more skilled, better paid clerical and other white-collar jobs in Taiwan's expanding economy, on the one hand, opens up married women's opportunities in the wage labor market, yet on the other hand, also forces them to take paid jobs. As evidenced in other industrialized societies, self-upgrading in Taiwan (i.e., the youth's prolonged learning at school) "involves a dual burden on the household: not only must they bear the costs of education (some of which may be absorbed by the state), but they must also suffer the loss of their children's earnings that would otherwise have been allocated to the family (Safa, 1983:111). Subsequently, married women (the mothers) often have to make up the forgone labor and incomes of their children who require more years of education for skilled wage labor.

For Ah-fong, the need to rely on oneself for socio-economic improvement was even greater than most of her co-workers who were natives of Hai-kou. Both Ah-fong and her husband were newcomers to the region. Neither of their parents nor other members of their families lived nearby (except for a nephew of her husband who followed the example set by his uncle to work at *Treasure Island* as an electrician before becoming an independent contractor). Henceforth, Ah-

the wage labor market.

fong could not count on her mother or mother-in-law for help on childcare or domestic chores. Nor were their parents capable of assisting them financially in any way. One of Ah-fong's regrets in life was that her husband inherited nothing from his parents. She told me that her husband had four brothers. Without the means to support their five sons, she said,

[My parents-in-law] told their sons to go their own ways. They gave no help to their sons. My husband and his brothers had to find a life for themselves.

Therefore, unlike most of her local co-workers whose husbands either inherited a piece of land on which they could build a house, or inherited a ready-built house from parents, Ah-fong and her husband had to build their lives in Hai-kou from scratch. After more than ten years of hard-working and saving, they finally purchased a townhouse in a government-subsidized housing project in 1991.

Ah-fong took great pride in her new house. On the day I toured her house, while sitting on their genuine leather couch in the living room, she said to me:

My mom used to be very worried about me. [For a long time] I was the only child in my family who didn't have a house of her own. Only after we purchased this house, did my mom stop worrying for me.

It's nice to have one's own house. We used to rent our friend's place. But you don't feel stable living in others'. Even our children feel that way, too. [Ah-fong looked around her living room before she spoke.] Just the other day my daughter said to me, 'Mom, it's so wonderful to have a house.' This means a lot to them.

Ah-fong's next major purchase was a computer for her eldest son (I knew this because she had consulted me for the prices). It was a widely known fact on the shop floor that Ah-fong's son was an excellent student (with very good grades) in the local junior high school. Ah-fong's friends in the company who had children of similar age often admired her for having a gifted son who required no disciplining for him to study ("It was a blessing," they often said). Ah-fong was delighted to hear these compliments. She had good faith in her son as well. In Taiwan where fine academic performance was believed to be a prime condition for a child's later success, Ah-fong's son's future prospect seemed to be ensured. "He is learning computer now," she said,

Five days a week, and it costs a thousand dollars! But he is very smart. He has learned everything his teacher taught him. Smart kids learn fast. His father is very fond of him; he is thinking of buying him a computer. Maybe [we should buy the computer] when he is older.

Security, Stability, and Social Mobility

In explaining why many of the middle-aged women I met in Hai-kou did not speak about their past, one of the employees at *Treasure Island*, who also claimed that she had no past memory, said to me: "How the heck can one waste time in remembering the past? There is already enough for one to worry for the present." She emphasized that it was even more impossible for those who had troubled current lives (e.g., irresponsible husbands, disobedient children, or

economic difficulties) to think back. Ah-fong did not belong to the latter category; yet, she surely shared her colleague's view of seeing no value in reminiscence. Reflections of the past brought back nothing except unpleasant memories.

Ah-fong was a practical person. Now that they had established a permanent residence, what mattered to her were the continued success of her husband's business and a steady job of her own, which formed the foundation of their material and spiritual well-being. They both had been working hard to maintain a comfortable life. Ah-fong would also try every means within her own reach to better her children's education, so that they could be properly equipped for the fierce competition they had to face in the years to come. Her eldest son's high performance in school had shown that he would have a promising future, at least not one relying on hard manual labor like that of his parents. Ah-fong was content.

Yang Ch'un-mei: Woman of the Holy House

You know what you should do? You should tend looms yourself so that you can really learn how we do our jobs. ["But the company has warned me not to touch the machines for the sake of my safety," I answered.] Well, if you are not to work like us, you should at least force yourself a schedule to stay on the shop floor for eight hours every day, and not to leave for whatever reason you might have until the time is up. Then you will learn our sadness, that we don't want to be here yet we have no other choice but are forced to be here. (*Ch'un-mei's conversation with me on the first day we met*)

Yang Ch'un-mei was one of my roommates at the dormitory of *Treasure Island*. Before meeting her in person, I was told that she was an amazing woman and real fighter in life. Born in 1965 to a farming family, Ch'un-mei's experience of growing up largely exemplifies that of girls in her generation under similar circumstances. She is the oldest daughter in the family, followed by four brothers and two sisters. Her father was the sole economic support of the family when the children were young. The ill health of her mother and the responsibility of taking care of seven young children prevented her from looking for work outside home. With many mouths to feed but insufficient economic means to do so -- Ch'un-mei's family owned a small plot of land -- Ch'un-mei's father was constantly in debt and under pressure to look for non-agricultural earnings. However, as Taiwan's export-oriented industrialization had only begun, and young boys and girls were the preferred work force, he could only supplement agricultural revenue with low-paid part-time jobs. Exhausted from his economic burdens, Ch'un-mei's father frequently took his frustration out on his wife and children. Ch'un-mei had mixed feelings towards her father. More than once she said to me,

I know my father had great responsibility, and he was under tremendous pressure... but he beat my mother hard, even when my mother was already bent and knelt on the floor. I tried, coming between his fist and my mother's fragile body, and cried, begging him to stop. He only became more outraged, and beat my mother and me even harder. He so

frequently shouted: "It's all your fault, you two. The two pei-chien-huo!"⁴⁸

Like many girls of her generation and the generation before, to ease the family economic hardship, Ch'un-mei began to work for industrial wages right after she graduated from elementary school at age 12. She could have gone to junior high school since tuition was affordable. But it was her father's plan that she worked in a weaving factory. Although he changed his mind after Ch'un-mei appealed for the education, Ch'un-mei gave it up herself. She said that she wanted to lessen her father's burden, and she could not bear to see her mother beaten by her father. Her income soon became the mainstay of her family's budget.

Ch'un-mei's comprehension of the family hardship, and her willingness to sacrifice herself to overcome it, did not always go without doubt. She vividly remembered those days when she was too distressed to go to work but dragged by her father to do so, and could only sob in the dark corner of her machines. It was not always self-pity that made her cry. Her rage often came from the realization of patriarchal authority as the force that unjustly subjected her to hard labor, which was readily exaggerated by the harsh reality of the wage labor market. Ch'un-mei often said,

⁴⁸ "Pei-chien-hui," literally commodity that will only lose money and could never make a profit, is used in Chinese to describe women (and daughters in particular) who consume parents' resources, and need dowry to get married, but will not contribute their labor to and bear children for their natal families.

My father didn't want to take a factory job. He said he couldn't tolerate being tied up dead for eight hours every day. He'd rather work in the field. He said it's freer that way. Because of that, he didn't have a regular job, and his income from our plot of land was not enough to feed the family.

He wanted freedom. He didn't want to be bound. Did he ever think of the consequence of this preference of his? It was I who had to work in a factory! It was me who had to be bound! Because of his alleged distaste for restriction, I was the one who had to labor so hard.

For more than ten years Ch'un-mei was the primary breadwinner of the family. The harshest years came after her father's death when she became the household head and the sole wage earner at the age of 19. Her brothers and sisters were still in school then. They were too young to share her responsibility in a major way.⁴⁹ Ch'un-mei's mother relied on her eldest daughter to make decisions for the family, on top of her already heavily laden economic and emotional support.

Ch'un-mei's burden was finally lightened when the oldest of her younger brothers graduated from middle school, finished mandatory military service, and came home to work as a relatively well-paid mechanic. Other brothers soon followed suit, and with a middle school diploma, they each took on various kinds of technician jobs. Ch'un-mei's family economic situation became greatly

⁴⁹ All of Ch'un-mei's siblings continued their education after elementary school. Ch'un-mei's father particularly insisted that her brothers have at least junior high school diploma, a typical attitude of Chinese who would invest working daughters' incomes on boys' schooling needed to get ahead in the industrial

improved. A new house was built, and her responsibility as the Big Sister was largely lifted.

Yet, toiling from a very young age had left grown-up Ch'un-mei in ill health. Specifically, she had a weak stomach. Ch'un-mei speculated that it was caused by the lengthy working hours and improper lunch break when she worked in weaving factories:

Previously we were on 12-hour shifts [in the weaving industry]. The day shift was eleven hours, from seven in the morning till six in the evening, and the night shift thirteen hours, from six in the afternoon to seven the next morning. We never ate at the proper time -- three or four o'clock for dinner, and the other meal after mid-night. We also rushed down our food, and dashed back to work. It all caused indigestion! And the loom was high, and I was short. [To reconnect the broken threads,] I had to stand on a stool, and stretched my body across the machine. My stomach was right on the frame. Doing that so often, I certainly developed a serious stomach problem.

Embracing One's Own Life

Only after she was freed from the primary family responsibility, did Ch'un-mei began to seek her own life. She went back to school in 1990 at age 25. When I first made acquaintance with her in 1994, she was 29 and recently graduated from junior high school. She planned to take senior high and vocational school entrance exams that summer. In order to prepare for the exams, she took many days off from work, and only resumed work regularly

order (Kung, 1994; Salaff, 1995; Parish and Willis, 1993).

after she was admitted and enrolled in a night vocational school. The management at *Treasure Island* was not pleased with her constant absence from work. Nonetheless, due to the tight labor market, they went along with her decision and were very glad to have her back after her exams. They also made her working hours flexible enough to accommodate her need of study both before and after her entrance exams.

Ch'un-mei often told me that she had always wanted to continue her education, a dream she was deprived of but eventually came true. She left her previous weaving job to work at *Treasure Island* after she started her junior high school education a few years back. A job without the need to be on a regular shift would give her more time to study, she said. At *Treasure Island*, she first worked at the packing department, but later changed to tend looms on the shop floor. She explained,

The packing job was too demanding, and the work schedule conflicted with my school schedule. I requested to be transferred [to my current department], but my supervisor was unwilling to let me go. He said that the salary at Packing was higher. Who cares about the meager wage difference? If I had wanted to make money, I would have taken a job at a weaving factory and made thirty or forth thousand dollars per month. I didn't do it because I wanted to spend time on school. I didn't want to exhaust myself. Later I threatened to quit, that's when he got concerned and arranged the transfer for me.

At *Treasure Island*, packers only worked during the day, from 8:00AM to 5:00PM with one hour of lunch break in between. The spinning department

where Ch'un-mei later worked, unlike other spinning and weaving departments in the company, had only two shifts: the day shift (from 8:00AM to 4:00PM) and the night shift (from 4:00PM to mid-night). Workers changed shift every Sunday. However, due to her school schedule (her classes ran from 4:30PM to 8:30PM), Ch'un-mei was unable to change shift but mainly worked on the day shift. She also had to leave half an hour earlier than other workers in order to be on time for school. Yet, from time to time she either volunteered, or was asked by the management, to work on the graveyard shift with other "working students" (*kung tu sheng*, i.e., young workers who go to school in the evening or night-school students who work full time during the day) and workers working overtime, especially when the company needed to rush for orders. She seemed to like the idea of working after school; since by doing so she said she could save more time to prepare for school work. Also, the climate after midnight was much more relaxing than during the day. There were no management personnel in the company except department foremen. Ch'un-mei received less attention, which gave her some latitude of freedom.

The reluctance of Ch'un-mei's supervisor at the packing department to let her go, as well as the flexible schedule allowed to her, signified the company's concern over the labor shortage. Each department supervisor was under pressure from the company to keep a full (or at least, sufficient) work force in his department. It was his job to fill the vacancy left by workers who departed.

Ch'un-mei did not stay at *Treasure Island* much longer, however. One year

after she began her high school education, she left the company for a part-time job at a gas station -- a work-study program designed for night-school students, sponsored by the state-owned petroleum company and owner of the majority of gas stations in the country -- with much lower pay but fewer working hours.⁵⁰ Ch'un-mei said that she wanted to take a break from harsh work, and she needed the time to study. She had planned many possibilities for her own future. One day not long after the semester began, she asked me how she could take the certified public account (CPA) exam. Knowing that the certification exam was reserved exclusively for college graduates and post-graduates, and the pass rate was very low, I hardly thought that Ch'un-mei as a night school graduate stood a change to first pass the college entrance exam and then the CPA exam. I did not dare tell Ch'un-mei what I really thought. Nonetheless, with her strong will and fighting spirit, who knows what she would be able to accomplish?

In the Sacred Heaven Fo-tang⁵¹

To further pursue her goals, Ch'un-mei adopted another more radical means in addition to go back to school. Ch'un-mei was a follower of Yi Guan Dao (the Unity Way). According to Skoggard (1996:157), this is "a syncretic,

⁵⁰ Again, this seemingly benign work program for the convenience of night-school students can be considered as the petroleum company's strategy to attract a segment of the labor force who would have or be willing to work for less pay and with flexible working hours.

⁵¹ That is, temples or places of worship of Yin Guan Dao.

universally salvational, apocalyptic, and evangelical religion whose members practice vegetarianism and are led by charismatic masters."⁵² Ch'un-mei converted to Yi Guan Dao when working in the textile industry. Conversion to Yi Guan Dao had been an experience commonly shared by young female textile workers nation wide, mainly because most of them lived in factory dormitories and shared each other's daily experiences.⁵³ She belonged to the "lineage" of Precious Radiance, an influential Yiguan Dao faction in this region under which many of Ch'un-mei's fellow villagers, ex- and current coworkers were enlisted. Ch'un-mei had developed special communion with the Sacred Heaven Fo-tang, a Yi Guan Dao temple built, inhabited and managed by a group of single women who had by and large decided to remain celibate in order to devote their lives to

⁵² Discussion of the essence of Yin Guan Dao, and its interaction with the larger society, see Skoggard (1996:155-171), Jordan (1982), Jordan and Overmyer (1986:213-266), and Bosco (1994).

⁵³ Right now I do not have a satisfactory answer for the question why young textile workers converted to Yi Guan Dao. However, from the limited information I gathered on this subject, it seems that most of these women first learned about Yi Guan Dao through their co-workers. Until very recently most of the textile factories had dormitories regardless of their sizes. Workers tended to live in the housing provided by their employers most of the time. At night, after work, young factory women usually spent time together. It was in these occasions that those who were already believers would suggest to take their friends to "bai-fo" ("pay respect to the buddha") or to "ting-ching" ("listen to the religious scriptures") which usually turned into an event of initiation. I cannot answer in full what in the religion attracted my informants. Nonetheless, in answering my question, they often said: "The teaching sounds good," "It's a good thing to do," etc.

study the Dao.⁵⁴ After her brothers took over the family responsibilities, Ch'un-meï successfully persuaded her mother to let her move into the fo-tang.

Although she did not entirely reject the possibility of marriage, neither did she eagerly pursue it. She spent most of her evenings in the fo-tang, and returned home to visit her mother from time to time. When asked for the reason why she decided to live in the fo-tang, Ch'un-meï said:

For many years I was the one who had to take care of my family. I had to make all the decisions, and solve all the problems. I got so tired, and exhausted [from both of the physical and mental stress.] Besides, my brothers needed to learn to make decisions. I am glad I have this opportunity to be with myself for a while! My mom understands this need of mine, too. ["What about the pressure to get married?" I asked.] My mom is worried about finding me a husband. But I told her there's no guarantee marriage will do me any good. Look at her marriage! My dad and mom constantly quarreled, and she got beaten so often... My mother looks much happier and more at ease only after my father's death. Nobody will hit her anymore. I don't want to live like her.

The teaching of Yi Guan Dao centers on the belief that, in an effort to save mankind from an impending cataclysm, the Laomu (the Venerable Heavenly Mother) has sent Milefo (the Maitreya Buddha) to spread the Dao and save

⁵⁴ Yi Guan Dao was considered by the government as a threat to political stability and public safety, and was banned as illegal and demonized as heterodox for nearly forty years until the suspension of the martial law in 1987. Largely due to this unpleasant and often dangerous history, Yi Guan Dao is organized as a secret sect, with temples located on the top floors of private homes. Believers are organized in temple cells of eight to ten core followers per temple (Bosco, 1994:425); worship is largely practiced clandestinely. However, there are larger temples built for the purpose of major gatherings and public activities. The

mankind (Skoggard, 1996:157; Bosco, 1994:433). According to Skoggard (1996:157-158), "those who receive the Dao will survive the apocalypse and be freed from the endless cycle of death and rebirth for a period of ten thousand years. Followers are expected to diligently and sincerely study the Dao in order to perfect themselves and through their example lead the rest of mankind to salvation. One accumulates merit most surely by contributing time and money to the religion's proselytizing mission and bringing in new recruits." Women of Sacred Heaven are certainly good models of this religious dedication.⁵⁵ The Sacred Heaven Fo-tang constitutes of two adjacent cement buildings, one is of four floors and the other five floors, connected both on the first as well as the third floor. The five-floor building serves as a public space for worship, religious teaching, and regular meetings. "Sisters"⁵⁶ of the fo-tang live in the four-floor

Sacred Heaven Fo-tang is one of the latter sort.

⁵⁵ During the term of fieldwork, I stayed in several places of residence -- thanks to the hospitality and kindness of friends and informants -- and Sacred Heaven Fo-tang was one of them. Ch'un-mei first introduced me to "Big Sisters" (Ch'un-mei was the youngest among them) at the fo-tang on my first Moon Festival (lunar August fifteenth) in the field. Later she kindly shared her bed with me during the following Chinese New Year, when both the factory and dormitory of *Treasure Island* were closed for the holidays and I was locked out as a result. My knowledge about the women at Sacred Heaven and about Yi Guan Dao was based on my conversations with Ch'un-mei, my short stay at that New Year, subsequent visits, and reading previous publications. In spite of the earnestness of the Big Sisters to convert me, my own hesitation to be inducted had hindered my participation in most of the possibilities (and probably the most precious and perceptive ones) to learn more about the religion and its followers. Nonetheless, I keep my interest in the religion and regard it as a prospective research topic.

⁵⁶ Women at Sacred Heaven who decided to remain celibate were not nuns. They

building. According to Ch'un-mei, the fund for constructing the Sacred Heaven Fo-tang was solely contributed by some of the women currently living in the fo-tang. Before Sacred Heaven they had already rented a house near Hai-kou's downtown marketplace and lived together to study the Dao. One day they decided that they could do more than simply practice Dao themselves. They put together their own savings, purchased the land of the current site, and built the fo-tang. Presently Sacred Heaven has become one of the main Yi Guan Dao centers in the region, since the temple on the top floor is open to the public most of the time, and a general congregation is held on Sundays. There are also classes and recreational activities designed for specific segments of the congregation (e.g., women, children, adolescence, etc.) during the week. Sisters of Sacred Heaven are thereby both participants and facilitators of these activities.⁵⁷

were mainly dedicated Yi Guan Dao believers who chose to endow their time and income to spread the Dao. "Sister" is used in a conventional and secular sense to imply the bonding, intimacy, and affection developed among women who live under one roof and share their social and spiritual lives together.

⁵⁷ According to Jordan and Overmyer (1986:222-223), the organization of one Yi Guan Dao branch (lineage) is as Table 4.1. Two officers not shown on the chart are the legal and management advisors to the Senior, who are accorded respect at a level just short of that accorded to the Senior himself, but who do not have religious titles or duties (ibid.:223).

Women of the Sacred Heaven Fo-tang were not in these formal ranks, except that one of them would assume the position of Tang-chu. However, they were the indispensable elements in the course of spreading the Dao.

Table 4.1: The Organization of Yi Guan Dao

Religious Title	Organizational Title	Number of Such Officers
Preceptor (Teacher Who Opens Perception) (<i>Ch'I-wu Shih</i>)	Senior (<i>Chi'en-jen</i>)	1
Director of Studies (<i>Tsung-tao Shih</i>)	General Manager (<i>Tsung Ching Li</i>)	1
Counselor (<i>Fu-hsiu Shih</i>)	Assistant General Manager (<i>Fu Tsung Ching Li</i>)	30+
Initiator (<i>Tien-ch'uan Shih;</i>)	Manager (<i>Ching Li</i>)	300+
-----	Local Hall Chairman (<i>Tang-chu</i>)	unknown

Source: Jordan and Overmyer (1986:222-223).

At the time of my research, there were roughly twenty women residing in the fo-tang, Their ages ranged from thirty to nearly fifty. Ch'un-mei was the youngest among them, but not the only one who was in school. Many of the Big Sisters did not continue their education after elementary school, but were sent by their families to work in weaving factories. Some of them who were in their mid-thirties at the time of my research were going back to junior or high school at night. All of them except one, Sister Jin-ru, had regular jobs, mostly in the local

manufacturing sector. I was told that Jin-ru's health condition did not allow her to take a full-time job outside home. Therefore, she had to take in some sewing jobs and work in the fo-tang. She also assumed the role of housekeeper during the day when all the others had gone to work. To live in the fo-tang, neither Ch'un-mei nor other members paid rent. However, all residents pooled a certain amount of their income to pay off the daily maintenance. They also gave five thousand dollars to Jin-ru to make up for her loss of not being able to work outside as well as for her care of the fo-tang. Sisters at Sacred Heaven lived a very simple life. Their world was mainly centered on their religious belief. Yet, they did not vow to become nuns as devoted women in other organized religions might choose to do; Yi Guan Dao had neither the personal need nor the institutional obligation for them to do so. They participated in the day-to-day social and economic life just as much as any other ordinary Taiwanese. The majority of them also kept close ties with their families of orientation. Still, they were a special group of women. Despite the fact that there was no formal ritual to signify the transition in their status, many of the middle-aged women in the fo-tang were considered as "married" daughters in the eyes of their families. It was the very thought that they had already been "married" that kept their elderly parents in comfort, who would otherwise worry about their daughters whose future was not taken care of. The "married" status of Big Sisters at Sacred Heaven was most notable on the second day of Chinese New Year, on which day they would go back to their mothers' houses (nian chia) just as in the case of

married daughters. Ch'un-mei informed me that in the morning of each lunar January 2nd, many Big Sisters' paternal nephews would come to escort them home: "It's the custom. Brothers should send their sons to greet their aunts. That's the respect appropriate for married-out sisters."

The Legacy of Marriage Resistance

Sisters of the fo-tang did not win a wide audience outside the Yi Guan Dao circle. Celibacy and cohabitation of women often arouse over-laden suspicion and disapproval, or to say the least, curiosity. Out of coincidence, not long after I was introduced to sisters of Sacred Heaven, Ah-fong and one of her married coworkers joined the yoga class at the fo-tang. They became very interested in the life in the fo-tang, and probed Ch'un-mei with many questions over a lunchtime. Another married worker joined the conversation. The three of them were most prying into the issue of celibacy. "Do they have to pledge not to get married in order to be admitted to the fo-tang?" Ah-fong was so eager to know. Sharing the common cultural knowledge with the three married women, and knowing well that to remain single was not quite a legitimate thing to do, Ch'un-mei eventually came to the defense of her sisters, claiming that they did not reject marriage. She said that women of the fo-tang were still waiting for their time to come (which was indeed a true enough statement); only their destination came late. This conversation was cut short by the end of their lunch

break. Nonetheless, I detected an undertone of envy in these married women's mocking manner. After all, "[women in the fo-tang] all have jobs. They all get to keep their income (which was not always true)" -- and they were all free!

Anthropologists attempt to perceive cultures through the eyes of people living in it, directing their questions and framing theoretical understanding accordingly. Marriage is significant to Chinese women, for it serves both as a symbol of and gateway to women's ultimate existence in the Chinese patriarchy. I thus share the same obsession with my three married informants over the marriage/ celibacy question, as many anthropologists of Chinese society did before me.

Marriage was virtually universal for women in traditional Chinese society. Yet, from the Canton Delta in the late 19th and early 20th centuries came reports of a startling phenomenon: wives who refused to live with their husbands and young women who vowed never to marry (Topley, 1975; Jaschok, 1984; Sankar, 1984; Siu, 1990; Stockard, 1989). Marjorie Topley argues in her landmark article, "Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung," (1975) that these practices constituted two forms of marriage resistance. The first was a form of "pu lo chia," literally "women who do not fall down to the family." Such women tried every means to prevent themselves from having to join their husbands' families. On their wedding days, they took herbal medicines to suppress urination and wrapped themselves with strips of cloth, mummy style, under their wedding gowns to prevent consummation. Three days after the wedding

ceremony they returned to their natal villages for the traditional home visit, which they prolonged for several years but with regular visits to their husbands' families on important ceremonial occasions. Stockard (1989) disputes that this practice was not exactly a form of marriage resistance but a common local custom called "delayed transfer marriage," for women who became pregnant on their visits would have to return to their husbands, and resume their roles of wife and mother. The transfer of women was delayed but nonetheless completed. However, the prolonged residence with one's family of orientation frequently led to real marriage resistance. Some women took the further decision to stay away until they were past childbearing age, and never consummated their marriage. In the latter case, however, a woman had to find or pay her husband to find a secondary wife who would assume the obligations of childbearing, serving the husband and parents-in-law. By doing so the woman who paid would be exempted from the drudgery yet maintain her status as the first (and real) wife which guaranteed her a place in the ancestral hall after death (Topley, 1975:67; Stockard, 1989:48-69). In the second form of marriage resistance, *tzu-shu nu*, "women who dress their own hair," women took vows before a deity, in front of witnesses, never to wed. The hairdressing ritual preceding the vow resembled the one traditionally performed before marriage to signal a girl's arrival at social maturity. After the vow, these "sworn spinsters" would no longer live with their natal families, but often organized themselves into sisterhoods and lived in frequently self-owned spinster houses, where their

spirits after death would also be laid to rest (Topley, 1975:67; Stockard, 1989:70-89).

Both Topley and Stockard attribute the rise of these marriage resistance practices primarily to the alternative economic position offered by employment of women in the local silk industry. In the local silk industry, unwed and thereby childless young women were believed to possess smooth and nimble hands, good eyesight, long duration of concentration and attention, and after the development of mechanization of sericulture, mobility to move around different filatures to meet their production needs. The local economy provided an unmarried woman with a means to support herself -- a rare option in traditional Chinese society. Nevertheless, both authors also stress apprehension toward marriage as these women's principal impetus (also in Sankar, 1984). The preceding anti-marital bias in the local culture ripened into marriage resistance practices insofar as the technology and employment pattern allowed.

Although the marriage resistance practices in the Canton Delta contradicted the dominant view of marriage being women's destiny, women's recurrent concern over the spiritual displacement after death in the cases of marriage resistance attested to these women's conformity to beliefs held by the male-centered patrilineal culture. The deeply seated cultural proscription against the tablet placement of an unmarried daughter upon her death at her natal home, and consistent fear of becoming a homeless, wondering ghost, made unwed women adopt various strategies to secure their well-being in afterlife. To

that end, resistance proves to be a culture-laden concept, and those who express some forms of rebellion do not necessarily challenge the pre-existent social order. Precisely for that reason, female social reformers in the early Republican period (1912-1945) were frustrated by Cantonese women who resisted marriage yet showed no interest in taking part in the struggle against feudal cultural beliefs and conservative Confucianism. Yet, rebellion is often significant to individuals involved, for their personal lives may have changed forever. In this case, women in the Canton Delta were set free from the ordeal of Chinese women by resisting marriage. Furthermore, their behavior contributes to the anthropological study of culture. It is from these women's very patterns of resistance that anthropologists learn to see clearly the strength and weakness of Chinese patriliney and patriarchy.

The first impression of Sacred Heaven reminded me of the legacy of marriage resistance in South China at the turn of the 20th century. Sisters at the fo-tang seemed to resonate with those sworn spinsters who vowed never to marry and who found ways to take care of their material and spiritual wellbeing. However, it would be mistaken to assume that women at the fo-tang based their choice simply on fear or resentment toward marriage and married life. Neither is it accurate to assume that their act necessarily embodied a feminist awareness. These women's religious consecration played an important role in their decisions. Yet, it is their keen understanding of women's role in the Taiwanese family that led them to believe a total separation from married life – hence the

time- and energy-consuming roles of married women -- would give them the best chance to study the Dao, and thus to enhance the possibility that they be exempted from the everlasting suffering of reincarnation.

Personal Growth and Accomplishment

In addition to escaping from Taiwanese women's unpleasant destiny, I argue that far more positive to the lives of these women were the opportunities they procured from Yi Guan Dao to live beyond the daily terrain of family and work. As Sacred Heaven was a major worship center in the local area, Big Sisters not only took care of the day-to-day maintenance of the temple but also coordinated with the higher-ranking religious leaders to design and execute evangelical activities. Although they did not hold (or had not held) any official religious titles, they were essential assistants in the induction ceremony.

The tasks assigned to each sister indicated on whiteboard hanging on the wall of the living room indicated a pretty full schedule. They also had to keep good relationships with the Yi Guan Dao believers in their "parish," i.e., followers in adjacent villages who came to the Sunday congregation regularly. They also made visits to those who were ill and unwell, as well as received temple visitors and worshippers.

In addition, sisters of the fo-tang also took courses offered by the Yi Guan Dao regional office in their own free time. Some of the courses they took were of a religious nature. The purpose was to help them better understand the essence

of the Dao, in order to prepare them for more important tasks in spreading the Dao. The course materials, reflecting the syncretic nature of the religion, were adopted from various religious and literary sources including ancient Chinese texts. I was amazed to see some of Ch'un-mei's books from these courses, for they required a special knowledge usually acquired through higher education in order to understand the syntax and semantics. Despite the fact that interpretations given to these texts were to support a specific religious worldview, women who seldom had the chance to come across ancient literature were able to experience it. Some courses taken by the sisters were of a much more secular nature, for instance, the English conversation class. Some sisters were also sent on short missions, traveling far (such as to inland provinces of China) to spread the true meanings of the Dao. In all of these occasions, these women were able to learn new knowledge and skills, as well as to explore new life experiences. This was indeed a luxury or privilege usually associated with urban middle-class women which most of the working wives or full-time housewives in Hai-kou were deprived of either because of their lack of appropriate economic means or of their preoccupation with the perpetual family obligations.

Ch'un-mei's Brave New World

Being the youngest and newest member of the Sacred Heaven Fo-tang, Ch'un-mei had not yet developed her religious devotion to the extent that some

of the Big Sisters had, although she had taken part in the fo-tang's routine activities. Her goal in life was largely based in the world of mortals. Yet, Sacred Heaven served a major function in her life. It helped her to secure a legitimate social position before she got married. Furthermore, it provided her with an alternative life trajectory with which she could choose to follow and create her own destination.

Ch'un-mei's optimism was supported by a friendly wage labor market. She was still young and thus a desirable worker for employers in the waning local textile industry. Her recent release from family economic responsibility, as well as her current student status, both contributed to her willingness to accept lower-paying jobs with flexible working schedules in the service sector. Nevertheless, this might prove to be a temporary solution only, with her prospect linked to the changing conditions in the local wage labor market and pending on the course of Taiwan's economy.

Lin Hsiao-fen: Young Child with the Best Life

There are so many "o-ba-sans"⁵⁸ in my village. I don't like them! They have nothing important to do but sit together talking all day every day. They gossip! They have such an idea about young girls that they should

⁵⁸ This is a commonly used term that the Taiwanese borrowed from Japanese since the colonial period. It means middle-aged or old women, or married women with children.

all go to work right after junior high school. It is useless for girls to have too much education, they say. And only jobs in textile factories are "jobs." Jobs in the service sector? They think that's the root of the world's sins. (*Hsiao-fen complained to me while I was riding in the back seat of her motorcycle, going home with her to interview her mother.*)

The mothers of many young workers at *Treasure Island* also worked for textiles when they were younger. One day I went home with such a young worker, who had just celebrated her 20th birthday, to interview her mother. That night, my friend Lin Hsiao-fen, her mother and I were sitting on the bed while I was tape recording her mother's account of her weaving experiences. Hsiao-fen, lying comfortably on the bed with her head on her mother's lap, would make comments from time to time when she disagreed with her mother or when her mother mentioned something unknown to her. In the course of our interview, the mother did not say anything critical about her daughter. Only once she looked down at Hsiao-fen and said with a smile on her face: "She is the laziest, the one with the best life. She doesn't do any housework." Hsiao-fen protested mildly, saying that she did sometimes help her mother cooking and doing dishes.

Most of our conversation was in Taiwanese, the language used most locally especially by the older generations who had hardly any formal or at most elementary education. Hsiao-fen's mother had limited proficiency in understanding Mandarin Chinese, the official language taught at school since KMT took over Taiwan at the end of WWII. In the middle of our conversation,

Hsiao-fen suddenly turned to me and said in Mandarin Chinese: "Anru, why don't you ask my mom about my going to school again? I bet she will say no to you." I did what she asked me to do. Her mother did not say anything but slightly shook her head. She still looked at her daughter indulgently, with a big smile on her face.

Hsiao-fen's Family

Hsiao-fen's family lived in a coastal town approximately thirty minutes bus ride from downtown Hai-kou. Despite the short distance, this town never caught up with Hai-kou's fervent textile industrialization. It remains largely agricultural to this day. Garlic is the main crop, for the local soil is too salt-soaked to grow rice. Because of the lack of non-agricultural opportunities in the town -- there are only a few factories -- many of the town residents have moved away, or at least, looked for jobs either in Hai-kou or in an industrial park near the other side of the town. People in their fifties or older folks are the major population left and engaged in farming.

Hsiao-fen's family was one of the few who stayed. Hsiao-fen's parents, who were both in their fifties, grew garlic, but in idle seasons they had to find other revenues to supplement the family income. Hsiao-fen's father used to be a plasterer until he injured his back. Her mother worked for others as a seasonal farm laborer. Sometimes she also took temporary factory jobs, although this meant that she had to travel outside the town to find work.

Hsiao-fen was the third child in her family. She had one elder brother, one elder sister, and one younger brother. Among the four children, only the youngest brother went to senior high school; the other three had only junior high school diplomas. At the time when I met the family, Hsiao-fen's elder brother had come back from his military service and was working as an apprentice to a local furniture maker. Hsiao-fen's sister, who was two years older than she, worked in a weaving factory out of town. She lived in the dormitory of the factory, and only came home once a week or less. Hsiao-fen's youngest brother was still going to school. Knowing that going back to school was one of the two fancies occupying Hsiao-fen's mind -- the other was to become a sales clerk in adjacent Taichung City, the largest city in central Taiwan -- I spent quite some time discussing her children's education with Hsiao-fen's mother. She explained to me why only one of her four children went to senior high school:

We encouraged my first born [to continue his schooling.] My husband urged him to stay in school as long as he could. He said he would sell the land to pay for his tuition. But my son didn't want to. We couldn't do much to force him. ["What about the girls?" I asked] Girls? Oh, no. [When Hsiao-fen's sister graduated junior high,] it was the time my first born was doing his military service. Our family budget was tight. Since our first born didn't go to high school, it wouldn't be right for the girls to go. I said to my daughter: 'Your brother is in the military. Why don't you take a job to help our family?' This daughter of mine was a good girl. She has been working in the same weaving company since then. Now Hsiao-fen wants to go to senior high school -- It wouldn't be fair to my first daughter if I let Hsiao-fen go. She would be embittered, wouldn't she? I have to be fair...

None of Hsiao-fen's female cousins go to high school. My sister-and cousins-in-law all said girls don't need much schooling -- I have more

than ten of them. We are a big family. We all used to live together -- It'd be sufficient for them to go to junior high, and make money right after. ["So you can't do otherwise?" I asked.] Right, right, we can't be different. [Hsiao-fen's] grandma and grandaunts also said junior high is sufficient for girls. Let the girls make some money, they said.

The implementation of nine-year mandatory education might have changed Hsiao-fen's elderly relatives' ideas about the appropriate length of girls' education (in Ah-fong's or Ch'un-mei's days, it was six years instead of nine). But it certainly had not changed the deeply entrenched belief in women's inadequacy to accomplish, and more fundamentally, their inability to contribute to the long-term welfare of their parents' families. Thus, despite Hsiao-fen's mother's affection for Hsiao-fen, she followed the local tradition to seek a more practical destiny for and immediate return from her daughters. With only a junior high school diploma in hand, however, young girls like Hsiao-fen did not have much choice in the current economy but had their best chance in local factories, just as Hsiao-fen's elderly female relatives had triumphantly predicted. Yet, a vicious cycle had been perpetuated by first depriving girls of the opportunity (e.g., education) to broaden their options, and later blaming them for their inability to achieve. This further reinforced the pre-existing conviction that a woman "could best cook, do laundry, bear and raise children for her husband's family," who thereby did not deserve much investment.

A New New Generation in an Old Vocation

Hsiao-fen was one of the girls in her junior high school recruited by *Treasure Island* before graduation. She was also one of the few who remained on the job when most of her co-workers hired under the same circumstance had left for various sorts of reasons. Hsiao-fen was born in 1975. When I first met her in 1994, she was only 19 years old but had been working at *Treasure Island* for five years.

Family Obligation, Consumption, and Leisure

"I used to be the youngest in the company," she said to me when we first met, "but not anymore." Some of the working students who just came in were younger than Hsiao-fen. Nonetheless, this did not change the general impression of Hsiao-fen's older workers that she was the "baby" among them. This is not to say that she was too young or too spoiled to be responsible -- after all, young workers these days were irresponsible by definition! -- but only that Hsiao-fen shared the habits of her cohort in the New New Generation such as enjoying regular days off, preferring not to work overtime, taking it easy on the job (e.g., not rushing to restart the looms after they halted), sometimes coming in late because of oversleeping from a previous day's outing, and not hesitating to spend money on fashionable items -- that is, cheap imitations of fancy, brand-named clothes or jewelry. Hsiao-fen's spending behavior was never as

extravagant as that of those urban middle-class youth hanging out in the Eastern District of Taipei City (Taipei Tung chu), one of the major shopping centers in Asia, which has acquired a bad name for the New New Generation. She did not feel comfortable, for instance, spending money on a McDonald's value meal. However, she definitely differed from her older co-workers in her relative freedom in spending her own income, even though she, as well as other young workers of her age, might not be completely relieved from family economic duties.

Kung (1994:116) reported in her research nearly twenty years ago that, although there was no explicit and precise arrangement of income transfer from daughters to parents, young female workers were expected to turn over minimally fifty to eighty percent of their earnings to parents. A daughter who turned over all her wages would be considered the most filial. Daughters' contributions to their natal families were mainly rewarded through the dowry provided by their parents on their wedding days. In comparison, this perception of filial piety continued to be strong while I was conducting research in Hai-kou. Yet, I also noticed several changes in the fulfillment of family obligations and daughters' own consumption from Hsiao-fen and young people of her age that deviated from Kung's past observation. A direct change involved in the appropriate percentage of wages turned over to one's parents: the percentage had generally fallen, with fifty percent as the most frequently cited number. In some cases, young women turned little or none of their wages to parents, but

they had to pay for their own high school tuition, which usually amounted to NT\$10,000 or NT\$15,000 per semester, as well as other related spending. It is important to note, however, even though there seemed to be little change in percentage, the actual amount of money at young women's own disposal and its worth were both greatly enhanced due to the increases in wage scales and real wages. In addition, parents nowadays seemed more relaxed about allowing their grown-up yet unmarried daughters (particularly those having reached their mid- or late 20s) entirely control their own incomes. Instead of saving for their daughters (usually by joining credit clubs) and giving the sum (often partial after home use) to them as dowry on marriage, more and more parents gave their grown daughters full autonomy over their money. However, this is very likely related to the fact that Taiwanese women in the 1990s marry later than they did twenty years ago. Therefore, their parents feel compelled to attend to their daughters' rights and needs as adult women by granting them more financial liberty.

How Hsiao-fen disposed of her income represented a mixture of an old mode of obligation and a new pattern of consumption. Before Hsiao-fen was promoted to the position of assistant line leader at the end of 1994,⁵⁹ she made

⁵⁹ With all the talks of young workers being lazy and carefree, when it came to the decision of promotion, the management at *Treasure Island* still preferred the young and unmarried to the old and married, regardless of the latter's alleged diligence and sense of responsibility. Hsiao-fen's line leader, Li-ying, was one of the few exceptions. She was married but also had been working at *Treasure*

around NT\$17,000 (US\$630) to NT\$18,000 (US\$667). One month she proudly announced to me that she made almost NT\$20,000 for she worked thirty full days without taking any time off. Her monthly wage rose to NT\$20,000 (US\$740) or NT\$21,000 (US\$778) after the promotion depending on the number of days she worked. She gave her parents NT\$10,000 every month, she said, before she turned 20. The money she turned over to her parents, along with that of her sister's, had been a great help to her family. Hsiao-fen's parents were able to use the family savings to rebuild their old, one-story brick house into a concrete, three-story, two-family house just two years before. After turning 20, however, Hsiao-fen got to keep all the salary to herself. "Wah, you are rich! You have a lot of money to spend," I teased her. "Nah, half of the money goes to a [monthly] credit club. And I have purchased a life insurance policy, which costs me three thousand dollars per month. That leaves me only six or seven thousand to use," Hsiao-fen said. "Do you get your insurance money back sometime in the future?" I asked. "Of course! [Otherwise, who would do such an investment?]" Hsiao-fen obviously thought that my question was pretty stupid, nonetheless, she patiently explained to me that she would get all her money back after reaching a certain age. Moreover, her insurance policy also included benefits around her life cycle, that is, the insurance company would cover costs on the

Island since her early teens except for the several years right after her wedding when her children were very young. She was trusted because of her long-term relationship with the company and that her ability was well recognized. The

occasions such as her wedding or childbirth.

To purchase a life insurance policy is indeed a new way to invest and save one's money in Taiwanese society. It is a very recent phenomenon that has only flourished since the Taiwan government lessened its regulation over the financial sector of the economy in the late 1980s.

Work

Among the employees at *Treasure Island*, I was most curious to know about the background of young workers of Hsiao-fen's age. After all, they were what attracted my attention to the declining textile industry in the first place. As industrial manufacturing had no longer appealed to the younger generations, I was eager to learn why some still stayed. As a matter of fact, "Why did you come to work in textiles? Why didn't you seek a job in the service sector?" were often the first two questions I asked my young worker-friends in Hai-kou. None of the workers with whom I talked to thought that their jobs were the greatest in the world, yet again, workers of different generations had their various concerns. Older women tended to think of the pay in textiles -- the highest amongst women's manufacturing jobs -- as the most important factor for their decision to stay. Younger women had more diverse reasons for their decisions. Some chose to work in textiles because this was considered to be a transitional stage in their

other few married line leaders all shared similar backgrounds with Li-ying.

lives before they graduated senior high school; they were less picky about jobs and the pay was good. Some were previously hired in textiles and left for a low-level white collar job, but chose to return to textiles because they disliked the fact that jobs in the service sector tended to have longer working hours but with lower pay (especially those involved in retail sales or customer service). They sometimes left a service job because they were alone or lonely in the workplace (like those worked as secretaries or business assistants in an industrial setting and were the only one in the office except the boss). Some thought about changing to a new vocation from time to time but hesitated to put it into action, mainly because changing jobs could be risky, scary, and no sure guarantee that life would be necessarily better afterwards.

Whatever the reason might be, it was clear that employees at *Treasure Island* all had certain ideas about who would and should work in textiles. Textile factory employment was a dead-end job. And indeed, young women of ambition and capability would quickly yearn for something better to move on. Those who stayed did not leave primarily because they had no other alternatives. This was made apparent, if not explicit, to me by a close friend in the company. A junior high school graduate in her mid-20s, this friend had been struggling hard to find a life other than that of textile work. She was as curious as I to learn about the motivation of her colleagues. She suggested that I conduct interviews with certain people in the company, asking, for example, a new recruit who recently graduated senior high school why she chose to work as a weaver with a

high school diploma; asking a working student why she quit her job as a kindergarten teacher's aid and came here; or asking a newly wed worker whose husband had a well paid job why she continues working after she got married. To my friend, these were the kinds of people considered to have better options or qualifications and hence who would choose to shun textile employment. For such assumption, their continuous presence in the factory required explanations.

The contrast between the bright outside world and the gloomy shop floor of textiles could not have been made more clear than on the occasions when previous employees of *Treasure Island* came back for a visit. These ex-workers usually dressed beautifully and fashionably, often in floral dress or long skirts and wearing make-up. Their outfits were clean, colorful, and stain-free, which by contrast made the greasy spots on their working friends' T-shirts and casual pants distressingly obvious. Worst of all, they often brought along promising and exciting stories of their current jobs with them.

As one of the kind who was in fast extinction, Hsiao-fen was keenly aware of the derogatory undertone attached to her job and her current state of life, even though she rarely articulated her comprehension -- and apprehension -- in a clear, straightforward way. What she did instead was to denigrate her own ability. In numerous occasions my daily greeting with Hsiao-fen began with her self-disparaging remark: "Anru, I am so stupid! [I don't continue schooling because] I am dumb." I was never sure whether she believed in what she said about herself. The only thing I could do -- and frequently did -- was to dispute

her remark to assure her self-confidence. Nonetheless, I was partly to be blamed for reinforcing the local depreciation of textile factory employment by repeatedly asking its young employees whether they ever considered taking another (read: better) job. The answers I received for that question were almost unanimous: Yes, of course, they would like to have another job. The question that mattered to them was never "whether," but "how," "what," and "when."

A Dream Yet to Come

Like many of the young workers I had come to know well, Hsiao-fen became more discreet and less playful after she celebrated her 20th birthday. She was seen working overtime often, and more attentive to her job. To fulfill my curiosity about her sudden change, Hsiao-fen said:

I am no longer a kid. I am 20 now. I have to be responsible, save some money for myself, and take care of my future.

While transforming herself into a respectful employee, Hsiao-fen also became more critical toward her job. She began to describe her job as "purely manual labor, requiring no brain work. And one becomes dumber and dumber as one goes along." She had confided to me and many of her co-workers her wish to become a sales clerk -- one of the few vocations in the service sector that Hsiao-fen thought of as both decent and attainable. Yet, the doubt about her ability as well as the prospect of a new job continued to linger. Whenever this

topic entered our conversation, Hsiao-fen always immediately dissuaded herself by saying that she would never get a good sales clerk job (e.g., in a brand-named shop where employees received a monthly bonus based on their sales performance on top of their wages and where they had opportunities for promotion), because "they only hire people with a senior high school diploma."

Hsiao-fen's limited education had become the prime obstacle to both of her self-motivation and realization. In order to have a major change in her life, she would have either to enhance her educational credentials or to find a non-manufacturing job under the circumstance of the current job market which she would feel happy about. Her parents did not support these options, either. However, Hsiao-fen was not terribly distressed by her inability to act. After all, she was still young. She had not yet formed a definite idea about her coming years.

Reassessing Working Women's Experiences

Although gender has been identified as a key factor in understanding the current global industrialization insofar as it reveals fundamental aspects in the organization of production and labor, gender by itself is not sufficient to explain the experiences of women. It is the articulation of gender and other social institutions (in this case, the patrilineal kinship system and the family alone with relations in production) that has to be examined. Being a woman at various

stages of the life cycle entails very different rights and responsibilities. Also, gender is not a system of determined cultural beliefs and social interactions, but a process characterized by heterogeneity and instability. Furthermore, multiple patterns of capitalist accumulation coexist in each social formation by appropriating a population segmented by varied productive and reproductive roles. Women are thus labeled as different kinds of workers or potential labor force, and integrated into the wage labor market at different times and in different forms. To study the relationship of the economy and the formation of women's subjectivity, a new analytical framework is urgently needed, which requires not only recognition but also keen knowledge of the historical dynamics, social complexity, and cultural heterogeneity of any societies under study. We need to address the wide range of women's experiences as they are products of specific historical-economic periods intersecting with different stages of life cycle encoded within a culture.

The three women whose life stories are presented in this chapter all worked for others, i.e., they were all employees working for wages. Their life stories are examples of the transition of patriarchy from the private to the public domain (cf. Safa, 1995). That is, their earning ability in the industrial labor market had won them recognition from their families, and in the case of Yeh Ah-fong and Yang Ch'un-mei, also granted them a greater voice at home. Yet, their wage-earning power had not fundamentally challenged the traditional perception of gender roles in the workplace. Precisely because of Taiwanese

textile producers' dependence on cheap labor, and of women's designation as secondary wage earners, young and middle-aged women in Hai-kou were continuously sought out to be the desired work force. Much of these women's optimism was at present supported by a worker-friendly labor market, within which female labor was desperately in need. The specific pattern of their labor market participation (i.e., being an employee), which also reflects the way in which their families related with the Taiwanese economy, affects the dynamics within their families as well as how each of their gender roles and family obligations were defined and claimed.

In the following chapter, I will focus on the story of the Wang family, an industrial-entrepreneurial family struggling to overcome the difficulties barged in by the intensified competition in the international market and the changing labor market on the Taiwan island. The problem of labor shortage drove the males in the Wang family to intensively deploy the labor of their daughters and sisters, who had traditionally been the core work force in their family's textile factory. Compared to the three women who were hired by others and whose lives were discussed in this chapter, young women in the Wang family were in a much more awkward situation when trying to break away from the family in order to pursue their own dreams. Their different pattern of labor force participation (i.e., working for their own families), in conjunction with the particular predicaments faced by Taiwanese industrial producers at the present time, resulted in a distinct relationship between these daughters and their family

and contradictory interpretations of their appropriate gender roles and family obligations. These contributions will be considered in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

Between Filial Daughter and Loyal Sister

[My Big Uncle]⁶⁰ didn't invest in his children's education. He keeps his daughters working in his factory. That is why he can still manage without downsizing. Our kids have higher education. They won't be interested in running a textile factory in the future. [Thus] We don't have any plan to upgrade or enlarge our production. I think we will close our factory after our retirement. (A mother/factory owner in her fifties, Hai-kou, 1994)

I am really grateful to my daughters. They have done so much! In those days [when they were in elementary schools], on weekends I always enjoined them repeatedly: "Don't go away. Don't go play. You have to make the woof shuttles. You have to tie the threads." [laughter] They were all overwhelmed by the work then! Now they complain to me that they were unable to go to school because they had to help me out. I tell them our family was not rich, it was enough for them to graduate vocational schools... It is exactly because they have worked so hard in our textile factory that I don't want my daughters to marry into textile families. I don't want them to have a harsh life any more. (A women/factory owner in her seventies, Hai-kou, 1995)

A close relationship exists between the organization of the family and the mode of production both in the family and in the larger society at any given time. The current chapter investigates textile manufacturing in small-scale, family-centered factories, for they are the predominant type of production in Hai-kou as well as in Taiwan's industrial sector. When Taiwan began its export-oriented industrialization in the 1960s, many farmers set up factories on their own land and mobilized their family members to perform production tasks. Although family acting as a corporate unit and family members working

together is not new in the Han Chinese culture, the newly emerged economic opportunities give the cooperation a new meaning. Family labor proves crucial in the success of Taiwan's small-scale industry. It provides a cheap, steady, flexible, and efficient work force which enables Taiwanese manufacturers to produce goods at a low price while ensuring reliable, on-time delivery.

Under the recent predicament of labor shortage, family labor becomes even more important than ever before. However, when family labor is desperately in need than before, but the elder in the family can no longer count on their children for help. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the socio-economic changes in the past three decades have created new opportunities for upcoming generations. Young people -- and young women in particular -- have attained higher education nowadays, and they are more inclined to acquire jobs in the booming service sector rather than in declining manufacturing industries. Conflicts between generations in small producers' families has likely been exacerbated when a family factory manager -- usually the household head, frequently the eldest male (father) but sometimes the eldest son -- would prefer his whole family working for the family business but daughters of the family wish to pursue a career of their own.

In light of the story of the Wang family, who owned a small textile factory in Hai-kou, this chapter examines the dilemma faced by young Taiwanese

⁶⁰ "Ta-po," i.e., the husband's eldest brother.

women in small producers' families, who are caught between better opportunities for personal advancement and increasing family needs for labor. I begin with a brief history of the Wang family when they joined in the local textile production in the late 1970s. I then turn to the gender aspects of family production and its ramifications for men and women of the Wang family. This chapter aims to challenge the long-standing concept of Chinese corporate family, as the notion often emphasizes the "cooperation" aspect and overlooks the gender and generational inequalities embedded in Chinese family hierarchy which make the cooperation possible. However, I do not simply call for an alternate vision by adding in the gender dimension, but one with a careful analysis of the dialectical relationship among gender, culture, and economy. Without such sensitivity, any gendered critique could run the risk of ignoring the dynamic process and only assume a flat, unchangeable concept of gender inequality. To illustrate this, I shall begin with a discussion of the "family" question.

The Family Question

In the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I lived with a Wang family that owned a small weaving factory, and spent most of my time with Mei-ling, the family's youngest daughter. Wang Mei-ling had already passed her thirtieth birthday and was the only daughter still unmarried. She worked in her brother's

factory from nine in the morning to 5:30 in the afternoon, and attended junior college at night. During my first few days there, I watched Mei-ling work during the day and then went to school with her in the evening.

It was the beginning of June, and the semester was about over. The school gave all students three days off, so that they could study for final exams. On the first day of this "study vacation," Mei-ling worked in the factory as usual. In the late afternoon, one of her married sisters, Mei-hua, visited her parents and stayed for dinner. After dinner, Mei-hua immediately left, telling her parents that she had to go back to take after her computer shop. Right after Mei-hua's departure, Mei-ling packed her book bag in the back seat of her car and told me it was time to go. "Where?" I asked. Mei-ling did not answer but only jumped into her car. But we did not take our usual route to school. Instead, we drove in the opposite direction, towards the city. "Where are we going?" I asked again. "To my sister's shop." Noticing my confusion, Mei-ling explained that she had arranged to spend the night with her sister. She said,

You asked me where we were going during dinner, well, I didn't want to answer you there, because I didn't want my parents to know I have three days off. If they know I didn't have to go to school today, they'll ask me to work more hours at night. They'll be very upset to see me out of school but not working. To keep them from knowing, my sister and I arranged to leave home several minutes apart. But you know, I wonder whether they may have figured it out just by watching me and Mei-hua whispering at the dinner table.

We spent that evening in Mei-hua and her husband's computer shop, watching TV and chatting. A different Mei-ling emerged that evening. She was nothing like the daughter I had observed at home and in the factory, the woman who rarely talked to her parents and usually had a gloomy look on her face. This evening Mei-ling suddenly brightened up. She talked seriously with her sister, argued with her brother-in-law and laughed heartily at his jokes and silly remarks. She was animated, quick to express her opinions and sometimes even argue with her sister. Watching Mei-ling, I could not help but think that she must have felt free here. While at the same time, the image of a daughter who considered herself unjustly treated and constrained by her family came to my mind.

Mei-ling and I first met two weeks before I began to live with the Wang's, when I was taken by Mei-hua to see her family. As soon as Mei-ling knew that I was a university graduate⁶¹ and currently studying in the United States, she started to ply me with questions about the universities in Taiwan: about the sorts of departments different schools had, about the test scores needed to get into particular departments, about strategies and tactics to study for university entrance exams, and about my experiences in college and abroad. "You have such a wonderful life! You always get to do what you want. You are so free," Mei-ling said in an astonished yet distressed tone. She told me that she wished

to study at a university someday, although she suspected that it was only a fading dream in reality. Mei-ling did manage to attend junior college, eight years after she graduated high school, but she still had to endure the disapproval of her family. She said,

None of them [the family members] supported my decision to go to junior college. They don't see any value of my going back to school. They want me to get married -- or at least to work for the family. I have always worked for the family, first for my father, now for my brother. But why do I have to do so? Why do I have to sacrifice myself for the family? Why me? Is it fair? Do you think it's fair?

Wang Mei-ling's anguished voice has echoed through my research since then. Her indignant questioning has also challenged the popular belief that the Han Chinese are invariably willing to sacrifice themselves for the economic betterment of their families, a belief shared both by the Taiwanese people and scholars at home and abroad. This is not to say that Mei-ling was not hardworking or not she was unwilling to meet family needs. As a matter of fact, she had worked in her father's weaving factory since graduation from junior high school. The issue at stake is the gap between the expectations of those who are in charge and those who work under them. Emphasis on the collective aspect of family economy tends to conceal the fact that different family members usually endure different strains and are often rewarded unevenly. Mei-ling's call

⁶¹ "Tta-hsueh," i.e. university or four-year college, which is different from "chuan-ke," i.e. junior college which requires only two or three years of study.

for fairness raises the often overlooked issue of gender inequality in a modern industrial family such as the Wang's, which bases its economic success on the labor of children, sons and daughters alike, yet perpetuates a patrilineal practice which rewards only the labor of sons.

The family has long captured the imagination of scholars of Chinese societies. A common view sees the Han Chinese family as a corporate unit to which family members contribute labor and income, under the authority of the household head, usually the eldest male (Skinner, 1957; Freedman, 1966; Cohen, 1976; Harrell, 1982, 1985). Widely discussed in the literature is the careful economic calculation in a household division of labor that maximizes family prosperity (Cohen, 1976, 1978, 1992; Basu, 1991; Oxfeld, 1993). The effects of such calculation on family organization and demographic profile in rural communities are also frequently noted (Pasternak, 1972, 1983; Pasternak and Salaff, 1993; Chuang, 1994). Recent studies of Taiwan's industrialization highlight the continued importance of family in these regards. Family ties and kin relations are seen as still providing the security, motivation, and networks which have made Taiwan's industrialization possible (B. Gallin, 1966; Gallin & Gallin, 1985; Greenhalgh, 1990; Hu, 1983, 1984; Stites, 1982, 1985; Gates, 1987; Niehoff, 1987; Bosco, 1990; Ka 1993).

Hidden under the claim of a collaborative welfare, and less discussed, is the diversity and conflict of interests of individuals. The presumed family solidarity also affects the analysis of women and industrial work in the Han

Chinese context. In Kung's (1994[1978]) and Salaff's (1995[1981]) pioneering and seminal studies of Chinese working (primarily factory) women, both authors stress the subordination of working daughters' personal desires to their family's needs. Both authors state that young factory women in Taiwan and Hong Kong did not resent the fact that they had to sacrifice themselves for a higher living standard for the family and for the education of sons in the family. The authors contend that this situation was compatible with the Chinese value placed on the family as a joint venture for survival and continuity. Furthermore, Salaff (1990, 1992, 1995[1981]) suggests that the extent to which a daughter is allowed to enjoy her own wages depends on the "dependence ratio" (the ratio of dependents to wage earners) in her family.

Nevertheless, several studies indicate that significant differences of apprehension exist among family members. Cohen (1976) reports that an adult son's calculations of self interests will affect the timing of family division, often instigated by their wives. The wives are then blamed for disrupting family unity. With this rationale, the family salvages the disgrace brought about by greedy sons who are considered the true members of the family. The creation of "uterine family" by married women indicates their efforts to secure their own position in the families, albeit this very behavior is also submissive to the patrilineal principle and thus reproduces a society in which males are highly privileged (Wolf, 1972). Hu (1985) argues that the authority of male household heads is undermined by the employment of the younger generations, and especially as

sons and daughters-in-law manage to retain the income they earn. Recently, a critique of corporate family ideology in relation to Taiwan's rapid industrialization from a gender perspective has emerged as a result of surging feminist scholarship. Li and Ka's study (1994) of a garment district in Taipei City shows that the success of small-scale manufacture depends heavily on the participation (sometimes unwillingly) of unpaid or under-paid female family members. In relation to the export economy, the collision of Taiwan's subcontracting firms and the Han Chinese family system proves to be crucial for the former to remain competitive in the global economy (R. Gallin, 1984b; Cheng and Hsiung, 1992; Hsiung, 1996). Furthermore, Greenhalgh (1985, 1994) argues that "by valorizing family collectivism and obfuscating the gender inequality on which it is based, the ideology not only reproduces Orientalist constructions of Chinese culture, but it also discourages the discovery of subjugated knowledge and lends support to a new, flexible form of capitalist accumulation that is based on gender and other social inequalities" (Greenhalgh, 1994:746).

In spite of these efforts, the degree to which women's awareness of gender inequality affects the labor deployment and resource distribution is yet to be explored. Equally important is the historical evolution of Taiwan's industrialism, its connection with the global economy at each stage, the social changes, and specifically, changes in family and gender dynamics, brought about over this industrial process. Previous literature pointed out that the new work opportunities and wealth that emerged from industrialization facilitated changes

in the family and between genders, although slow and frequently with serious cultural and political drawbacks (Diamond, 1979; Arrigo, 1980, 1984, 1985; Salaff, 1995[1981]; Kung 1981, 1994[1978]; R. Gallin, 1984a, 1990). Revealed in the stories of the daughters in the Wang family, however, are the multifarious but conflictual consequences of this process for the lives of young women, particularly those in small-scale manufacturing families. A close look at the Wang family dynamics over time shows a conflation of economic strategic planning and women's submission to traditional family values at the early stage of Taiwan's export industrialization. Nonetheless, it also discloses a later departure when society becomes richer, the economic structure is transforming, wage scales are rising, yet the competition in the international market intensifies. As a result, on the one hand, young women have more opportunities to pursue a life of their own, but on the other, they are burdened with the demands of family loyalty in a time of waning manufacturing industries.

The Entrepreneur/Industrialist Wang Family

From Agriculture to Industry

Like most of their industrial-producer neighbors, the Wang family's weaving factory and living quarters were on the same site. Their house was located in the middle of farmland. It was a three-story, big gray cement building, and downstairs was the weaving factory and the top two floors were the family's

living space. A brook ran through the back of the house. Behind the brook was the Wang family's asparagus field.

The Wang family was one of the major asparagus growers in the region. Asparagus used to be the family's primary source of income. Thirty years ago, in the late 1960s, when Mei-hua and Mei-ling's grandfather was still alive and in charge of the family, asparagus was an important cash crop in the local economy and a major item in Taiwan's agricultural exports to Japan and the West. In the heyday of asparagus cultivation, the Wang family hired some hands to help them with the daily harvest. Mei-hua and Mei-ling's father, along with his brothers and sisters, was acting like a modern factory line leader in the asparagus field. Each of them was assigned to an area and worked with the four or five hired hands in his or her designated territory. The Wang family was quite well known for its asparagus business. Once an old neighbor of the Wang family told me that Mei-hua and Mei-ling's aunts were called the "Asparagus Princesses" in the region before they married. The family made quite a fortune out of this asparagus business.

However, the good days of asparagus seemed to be gone with Mei-hua and Mei-ling's grandfather when he died in 1975. After his death, following the local tradition, the three sons, Mei-ling's father and his two younger brothers, divided the family's land and property and went their own way. They continued

to grow asparagus for a while, but the profit quickly declined.⁶² The youngest brother gave up asparagus first; he started a small factory making small, assembled parts for faucets. The second brother soon followed: he began a weaving factory. Mei-ling's father, the eldest brother, continued asparagus cultivation the longest, but the profit in textile production finally led him to purchase twenty-four looms and he began to weave in 1978. A few years later he acquired more machines in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the rapidly expanded local textile industry. At its peak the Wang family owned sixty-eight looms and hired fifteen workers.

Family Members Working Together

Although the Wang's had hired workers from the very beginning, children of the family always comprised an essential part of its work force. There were four children. Mei-hua and Mei-ling's eldest sister, with the best "mathematics mind" in the family, became the factory accountant. She also cooked for workers and tended looms when labor was short. She did that until she married at age 25. Mei-hua and Mei-ling's elder brother first worked as a mechanic, but he gradually took over his father's supervisory role on the shop floor. As the only son, he would eventually inherit the family business, so that it

⁶² Taiwan's asparagus gradually lost its overseas market, facing competition from other Asian countries in the 1970s. In particular, the export of asparagus

was taken for granted that he had to learn how to run the factory. Mei-hua and Mei-ling, the two younger daughters, were still going to vocational high school at night when their father started the factory. They normally worked four hours in the morning and took a nap in the afternoon before going to school. However, whenever workers took a day off, daughters had to make up for absent labor to keep the looms going, often working long hours at night.

Family members working together under the supervision of a patriarch is not a novel arrangement in Han Chinese culture. However, the introduction of industrial production provides new ways to accumulate wealth, and therefore gives family cooperation new form and meaning. Industrial production also brought in a new form of labor. Factory work offered a better alternative to harsh farm work during hot summers and cold winters, or sitting idly without any work to do.

A major factor responsible for Taiwan's export expansion is the international subcontracting system. Most of the subcontracted work is labor-intensive; it requires little capital investment to start and mainly relies on continuous labor input to create higher output (Skoggard, 1996). Also, unlike agriculture whose productivity is limited by the availability of land and the length of growing seasons, there is virtually no limit in industrial production. Machines can operate day and night, as long as the market continues to absorb

dropped dramatically after the European Economic Community canceled

their products (Skoggard, 1996). As Taiwan's industrialization rapidly proceeded, surplus agricultural labor, mainly young women, became an invaluable potential work force. For the first time in Taiwan's history, far from being a burden, daughters became the backbone of their family's economy: Those from landless families worked for other factory owners, and brought home regular and urgently needed cash income. The daughters of factory-owning families were even more indispensable. They not only worked full-time side by side with hired laborers, but could work even more to make up for the absent labor.

The importance of family labor was further augmented by the unequal relationships between Taiwanese manufacturers and buyers from advanced capitalist countries. Foreign buyers are primarily looking for cheap commodities. However, as the competition in their domestic markets as well as the international market intensifies, they also ask for increasingly shorter turn-around time. Taiwanese manufacturers have proven themselves highly effective in meeting these demands. They are efficient and flexible, and very capable of maintaining quality at a given price, while ensuring reliable, on-time delivery (Gereffi and Pan, 1994).

To accomplish this, manufacturers need to have the cooperation of a work force willing to work cheaply around the production cycle, i.e. working overtime

Taiwan's quota and gave it to China in 1979 (Wu, 1993:436-437).

for days or even weeks to meet deadlines and taking unpaid time off when the market is slow. Who could be more likely to fulfill these needs than a manufacturer's own family?

Therefore, many new industrialists like Mei-hua and Mei-ling's father heavily rely on family labor to assure profit and to smooth flow of production. Family members provide a steady source of labor, and factory owners can always count on them to work overtime whenever necessary. Most importantly, the labor of family members is cheap. In many family factories, they are not paid but receive a "monthly stipend" with a value much less than the wages they could otherwise make in the wage labor market. In the case of the Wang's, the children received NT\$5,000 per month when the factory just opened and only in the early 1990s had their "salary" risen to NT\$15,000. In comparison, weavers in Hai-kou usually made NT\$27,000 or more each month in 1996.

The Gender Dimension: Valuing Men More, Weighing Women Less

It had become a tradition in the Wang family that children stayed home and worked after graduating vocational high school. Given the fact that many young women of Mei-ling and Mei-lin's age (both of them were born in early 1960s) in Hai-kou have only junior high or even elementary school education, daughters of the Wang's were in fact in a prestigious position. Ironically, although they might enjoy a better material life, Mei-ling and her sisters were

largely bound by family duty and had less free time than working daughters in less affluent families.

Mei-hua and Mei-ling both came of age at a time when Taiwanese society was gradually becoming richer and the job market was expanding beyond manufacturing. They expressed their wish to continue with their education, so that they would have a better chance to enter other occupations than weaving. But their parents discouraged them. Apart from the fact that the family factory needed their labor, their parents shared the popular notion that women did not need much education. As previously mentioned, it was a widely spread perception in Hai-kou that it was useless for women to attain higher education. No matter how much a woman had accomplished, she would eventually marry into someone else's family, cook for them and bear children for them, as women had always done before and would always do in the future. The life trajectory Mei-ling's parents assumed for their daughters was that they would stay home, work, and marry. Their primary responsibility as parents was to find a respectable family for their daughters to marry into, and there was no need for their daughters to think otherwise. While this has been the practice in many generations of Han Chinese parents in the past, it has different implications now. In the past, Taiwanese society considered young daughters to be of no economic value but only a waste of the rice of their families. They did not help increase their family wealth -- nor did they continue the family lines -- and naturally, should not be entitled to the inheritance of family property. However, daughters

nowadays are no longer idle family members but valuable workers. Their labor contributes to the accumulation of family wealth that they all know very clearly will be inherited by their brothers in the future.⁶³

One may still argue that this practice is based on a logic of "exchange." That is, although daughters are not entitled to the fruits of their own labor, after marriage, they enjoy the fruits of their husbands' sisters' labor, just as the results of their labor are shared by brothers and brothers' wives. This may sound fair, but in reality, inequality runs along the gender line. Although young men and women in the family may work equally hard, the local custom in Hai-kou grants inheritance rights to males only. Sons therefore have a much clearer notion for what the future holds for them. In fact, they see their future materialized day after day as they work on the shop floor. If the family factory makes a profit, they have better future prospects; if the family business loses money, they know that they will have to work harder on their own. Daughters do not envision their futures when they work for their parents. Who knows what family they will marry into? Their futures are always uncertain and beyond their control, even after they get married.

Mei-ling's eldest sister married out as expected. She married into a local family that also owned a weaving factory, and became a hard-working weaver

⁶³ In law sons and daughters alike are entitled to equal rights of inheritance. Nevertheless, it is still widely practiced in the Hai-kou area (and many parts of

along with her sisters-in-law under the supervision of her father-in-law. Mei-hua and Mei-ling were still in vocational high school when their eldest sister married. After their big sister married out, their labor became much more important to the family factory. However, it was around the same time that the lives of the two young sisters began to take apart.

Sisters Telling Stories

Despite the fact that the Wang parents had wished their daughters would be contented with a senior high school diploma, they changed their mind after a few years' insistence and allowed Mei-hua to continue her education in a junior college (for reasons not revealed to me). Mei-hua thus became the first child in her family permitted to go to college. She returned to school in 1984, three years after she graduated senior high school. She was twenty-one years old then, and Mei-ling was nineteen. Mei-ling had expressed her wish to go to school with her sister, but her parents refused. They told Mei-ling that they could not afford to pay for two college tuitions at once. But this was only part of their reason. They were also concerned with the issue of labor supply. They could not bear to lose two workers at the same time; they could allow only one daughter to study at a

Taiwan) that only sons are entitled to the inheritance. Daughters are given dowry when they marry out.

time. Nevertheless, Mei-ling was once again discouraged after her sister graduated junior college. Mei-hua was about to marry, so that the family was about to lose her labor permanently. Thus, Mei-ling's labor became even more indispensable. Once again, the family could not afford to let her go.

Notwithstanding their personalities -- Mei-hua was outward looking, curious, adventurous, and good at as well as enjoying talking to strangers. In comparison, Mei-ling was quieter, more focused, and seemingly more stubborn and less easy to compromise -- Mei-hua and Mei-ling had very different relations with their parents. While Mei-hua remained close with parents even after she married, Mei-ling was constantly in disagreement with them and had reached a point that she almost refused to talk to them. The parents' differential treatment with the two sisters might have caused Mei-ling's initial bitterness. After all, Mei-hua was permitted, if not blessed, to continue schooling, but Mei-ling was denied several times to do just the same. Mei-ling's attitude towards courtship and marriage did not help her to ease the tension in the family, either. Whereas Mei-hua married in 1990, a few years after college, according to her parents' plan, Mei-ling refused to consider any such possibilities and became a nuisance at home and a burden to her parents.

Mei-hua's and Mei-ling's personal experiences with their parents had certainly shaped their interpretations of the past and their expectations about the future. Yet, to understand the full meaning of the two sisters' very different experiences, we cannot merely resort to the individual personalities involved

and the specific dynamics among the Wang family. It is important to see the two sisters' relationships with their family in light of the Chinese patrilineal and patriarchal culture and the constraints embedded in Taiwan's small-scale industrial structure.

Wang Mei-hua: The Daughter Who's Married Out

When I was in high school, I disliked weekends so much. Whenever it was Saturday, my classmates all became very excited because they were going to have a day and half off. They always planned to have fun after school. I didn't get excited at all. My life was very different from theirs. I just went straight home and worked in the factory. I knew I wouldn't have time off. I was doubly busy on weekends.

Mei-hua once told me so when I was sitting in her computer shop and sipping the tea she made for me, while we were both watching high-school students coming in and out of her store. This was probably one of the most solemn comments she made about her life before marriage, although she had a big smile on her face while she said it. Mei-hua usually spoke in a light-hearted tone when talking about those "old days." Despite the fact that she had been working so hard and was often forced to juggle her time among school, factory, and her job in the insurance company after her graduation from junior college in 1987 – and later, dating her boyfriend in secrecy – she rarely showed hard feelings towards her parents. She usually laughed at the silly things she did

before. The one story she loved to tell was how she "stole" half an hour daily on the way home from the insurance company in order to meet her boyfriend.

I had to sign in at 8:00 in the morning, and went to the routine meeting followed after. The meeting usually ended around 10:30, and I would immediately leave the company and rush home to tend looms. I worked at home till 4:30 in the afternoon, and hurried back to the company at five, signed out, and hurried out again to meet my boyfriend. We met around 5:15, and had a bowl of shaved ice or a glass of juice together. I had to say good-bye to him at 5:45, that left me fifteen minutes to rush home so I wouldn't be late for my 6:00 shift, and nobody would be suspicious about my movement. And we did it all over again the next day!

After she came back from the insurance company at 6:00 in the evening, Mei-hua continued to work on the shop floor usually till midnight. "I was always working, working, and working. There was no time left for me to think of anything else," she said to me.

Mei-hua not only lived an extremely busy life, she also lived a life with a "double" identity: she was an insurance sales person in the professional world and a weaver in her father's factory. Pursuing her own career did not release her from her duty in the family business. She was expected to fulfill her family role first before she could do other things. Despite the fact that she had been deliberately arranging her daily schedule to fit the family demand, her job eventually caused tension in the family. Her brother, the supervisor on the shop floor, frequently complained to their father that Mei-hua was irresponsible because she did not do her share of work until it was too late, i.e. in the late afternoon after she came back from the insurance company. He wanted their

father to force Mei-hua to quit. But Mei-hua insisted on keeping her job.

According to her sister Mei-ling, the more the father and the brother pushed, the more determined Mei-hua became. Consequently, the brother and sister were in disagreement all the time.

As the time went by, the family's objection seemingly waned and they gradually accepted Mei-hua's divergent attention as part of the reality they had to live with, although they were never happy about it. On Mei-hua's part, by taking a job outside the family in the first place and later resisting the pressure from the elder, she was negotiating for more space of her own, although the family duty was still an important guideline for her decisions and actions. The recognition that she had her own idea about life did not come easily, however, and the tension was continuously simmering beneath the compromise made by the family. The conflict of interests was only solved after Mei-hua married.

It seems rather amusing to Mei-hua to look back now. After all, she is a daughter who has been "married out." She is no longer obliged to work for her natal family. Instead, as a married woman, her fate is linked with her husband -- or rather, her husband's family -- so is her labor. She helps her husband take care of his computer shop. In her free time she also takes part in Taiwan's booming insurance industry, working as a sales person and making her own money from commission. Mei-hua is fortunate. Her parents-in-law are both retired farmers. They neither run a factory nor own a company, and are not desperately in need of her labor. Furthermore, her parents-in-law have much leisure time to take

care of Mei-hua's children, which set her free to explore new possibilities for herself and her husband. Mei-hua and her husband also decide to close their shop on Sundays. No more working on weekends!

Wang Mei-ling: The Daughter Who's Left Behind

Comparably, Mei-ling had a very different yet much more bitter story to tell.

Not long after Mei-hua married in 1990, the Wang family underwent many changes. First of all, Mei-ling became the only daughter still working for her parents, along with her brother. Second, like their counterpart nation wide, the Wang factory was affected by the recent economic crisis and suffering from lack of labor. Third, Mei-ling's father had reached an age of retirement, he was about to pass their family business to his son, the heir of the family. Last but not least, Mei-ling was approaching her thirties, an age at which most of the Taiwanese women would have already married.

Mei-ling eventually became a big headache for her parents when she passed her thirtieth birthday but still remained single. She was under a tremendous pressure not only from her family but also from relatives and neighbors who all urged her to marry. Mei-ling always became very demoralized when we touched this topic in our conversation. "You know how gossipy those old women are in the village? They often tease my mom by asking her how much longer she is going to keep me home. They say I must be a

treasured daughter so that she is reluctant to marry me out even though I have passed the age already. My mother said to me that if I do not get married soon, she will have no face to live in the village anymore." Mei-ling's parents were bearing the stigma of having a middle-aged unmarried daughter.

Aside from the social pressure, Mei-ling's parents had a practical reason for their concern. As they viewed it, Mei-ling should have married and joined another family long before the age of thirty. Mei-ling's future was to be bound with her husband, not with them. Her husband or his family was the one who would provide for her and take care of her material wellbeing, not her parents. Now she was not married, who was going to do this for her? Mei-ling's parents were not going to give her a piece of their property, not even if she remained single for all her life. They said that this would be unfair to their son as well as daughters who had married but were only given a small amount of cash as dowry. Mei-ling's situation clearly reveals the dilemma faced by young Taiwanese women if they choose a life trajectory "deviant" from the cultural expectation.

Much worse than being old and remaining unmarried, however, was Mei-ling's insistence upon going back to school. After many years of waiting, Mei-ling eventually managed to go back to school in 1990. She did not ask for her parents' permission this time, but only told them the day before she was to register. Her father could not force her to quit and had to accept it as a fact. Mei-ling's determination to go back to school at a relatively old age was perceived by

her family as the cause of her delay of marriage. Yet, Mei-ling told me that it resulted from her parents' need to keep the factory going and their biased attitude of seeing sons as more important than daughters. She said that her parents worked hard, and pushed their daughters to work hard, to save as much money as possible for their son. "I've told [my parents] many times that I am not going to marry unless I graduate from college, but they just don't listen," she became really upset when she said this to me,

It's all their fault that I am still in school now and haven't got married yet. I always wanted to study, and I have expressed myself very clearly to them ever since Mei-hua graduated college. And they kept saying yes to me, but never really supported my decision in action. But even if they had been willing to let me go, with a constant problem of labor shortage, what could they have done otherwise? They had no choice but to keep me working in the factory!

Mei-ling explained to me why she insisted on schooling first and marriage second. She said,

Eventually I will be married out. If I don't get my education now, I won't have any chance at all after I get married. My own parents don't even support me on such matter, who else in the world do you think will support me? My husband's family? Ha, in your imagination!

Family Welfare vs. Individual Interest -- But Whose Family Is It Anyway?

Around the same time when Mei-hua became married and Mei-ling returned to school, their father was hit hard by the changes in Taiwan's economy

and decided that he was too old to endure anymore of the pressure. He retired in 1991 and passed the business to his son. To solve the constant headache of labor shortage and to upgrade the quality of products, Mei-ling's brother decided to downsize the factory. He sold all the old machines and bought six more advanced ones. According to his plan, supported by his parents, he would now only need one worker on each shift. Besides being the "sales manager" of his own factory, he would also be the mechanic. With Mei-ling on one shift, he only needed two more weavers to work the other two shifts. Mei-ling's labor was obviously seen as a factory asset transferred from the father to the son as part of his inheritance. As long as Mei-ling was not married, she belonged to the family, and so did her labor. She was paid NT\$15,000 each month, as in the past when her father was in charge of the family business.

After her brother took over the factory, and while she was attending school in the evening, Mei-ling continued to work the day shift in her brother's factory. But she had her own plan. To work for her brother was only a temporary arrangement. She hoped to find a job and have a career of her own after graduating from junior college.

Mei-ling's brother did not find two more workers as he had planned. In a time of labor shortage, jobs of the "night" and "graveyard" shifts were the least attractive even with higher wages than any day-time jobs. In any case, Mei-ling became her brother's only weaver. Although he had to turn off the machines at

night to accommodate Mei-ling's schedule, he also tried to keep Mei-ling at work as long as possible except for the time he had to let her go to school.

It was a necessary strategy on the part of Mei-ling's brother, to keep the factory going, particularly in a time of labor shortage. However, Mei-ling spoke bitterly to me about it. She was always urged to work overtime whenever she was off from school. Her brother's wedding in 1992 seemed only to enhance her bitterness. Mei-ling's sister-in-law did not come from a textile family. She knew nothing about weaving, and she was not eager to learn. Mei-ling's brother rarely asked his wife to work in the factory. "Tending looms is a lot of hard work, and he loves her very much," said Mei-ling sarcastically. It became painfully obvious that Mei-ling's brother totally depended on her. She was responsible for the success of the business, and she would be blamed if she did not do her "share," even on those occasions that she had to take time off for school or personal reasons. Mei-ling felt particularly angry that her labor was taken for granted by her family. Her family did not appreciate her contribution, nor did they support her decisions. She said,

If I were a hired worker, I would just brush off the dust on my hips and leave at the end of a day after eight hours of work. I wouldn't give a damn about the progress of the production. It would be the boss's problem. But I am [his] sister! My mom always presses me, saying: "If you don't help your brother, whom else are you going to help?" It is taken for granted that I should work as much as possible to help my brother out. It never occurred to them that I also have my own things to do. I need to have my own time.

Mei-ling's relationship with her brother and parents began to sour when she insisted upon going back to school. It became even worse when she asked to have Sundays off in addition to her school time. Apart from expressing discontent directly to Mei-ling, Mei-ling's brother also complained to their parents, calling upon their authority and influence to dissuade her. There was a long struggle before her brother and parents finally yielded to her will. At the end it was Mei-ling's action of going out every Sunday that forced them to accept her decision.

But Mei-ling also endured an emotional hardship for her persistence. She said,

My mother was particularly upset. She was offended by my request. She felt that I was letting down the family by taking Sundays off. Without me there, my brother would either have to tend the looms himself or shut down the production completely. Either way, it would require him to work more or cut back his profit. How could I do this to my brother, particularly in such a difficult time? She had refused to talk to me for a very long time.

But they [the parents] only care about their son! This is their son's factory, not mine. I won't be able to live under my brother's roof for all of my life, even if I want to. I will have to find something for myself.

For a Better Future, or Not?

[P]eople in different social positions have different "interest," and they act accordingly. This does not in itself imply either conflict or struggle, nor does it imply that people with different interests hold radically different views of the world. It does imply, however, that they will seek to enhance their respective positions when opportunities arise although they will do so by means traditionally available to people in their positions. Change comes about when traditional strategies, which assume traditional patterns of relations... are deployed in

relation to novel phenomena which do not respond to those strategies in traditional ways. (Sherry Ortner, 1984:155)

While Han Chinese family norms defined the proper behaviors of family members, placing Mei-ling under her parents' authority, and working in the family factory as a filial daughter, the same norms also granted her an opportunity to escape from her ordeal when the family business passed from her father to her brother. He, too, had authority over her, but his authority was never as powerful and absolute as that of her parents. The boundary of family was opened up for different interpretations when part of the family estate (i.e., the factory but not the farmland) was transmitted from the older generation to the younger one. Mei-ling's "old" age in combination with her unmarried status further added to the cultural ambiguity. Thus, on the one hand, Mei-ling was considered part of the "family" by her parents and brother, particularly when they were desperately in need of her labor and family loyalty appeared to be a powerful justification to appeal for her sacrifice. On the other hand, they also recognized the fact that Mei-ling was not, and never could be, a permanent member of the Wang family. Under the patrilineal principle, she was not to carry the family name, neither was she to inherit the family property. She would marry out. Given the fact that she was over thirty but still single, and she had refused her mother's match-making efforts, it seemed that Mei-ling's prospect for marriage was increasingly dimmer. Culturally she became a nuisance at home, particularly as her brother was about to build his own family. She had neither

obligation nor full rights to stay with her brother. It seemed to the parents that they had no other choice but to let her go, which was also her personal wish.

Mei-ling graduated junior college in June, 1994. She was determined to leave her brother's factory and find a life of her own. Her parents continued to push her to work for her brother or to get married, but instead of accomplishing either of their wishes, they could only concede. Mei-ling left home to stay with her friend several times during the summer after quarreling with her parents. It seemed to become her way of protest and resistance, whenever her communication with her parents failed. She no longer worked for her brother, who continued to be haunted by the problem of labor shortage. Losing Mei-ling's labor put him in a very difficult situation. He had tried to cover the day shift himself and find another weaver to work at night, but none of the workers he hired stayed long. When he was asked about his sister, he usually shrugged and muttered: "She does not want to do it. What more can I say to her?" He did not feel that he was in the position to demand her cooperation.

Mei-ling decided to take the civil service exam at the end of the year, as the first step in search of her new life, and she had spent most of her time studying for it. However, she was also worried about her future. She was hoping to find a job related to her training in junior college, so that she could start building her career. But she also feared that to work full-time would take time from study and diminish her chance of passing the civil service exam. Nevertheless, being a woman in her thirties, she was hardly favored in the wage

labor market. She was too old for entry-level jobs, which were usually reserved for women in their early twenties. Conventionally, women of Mei-ling's age are either married or about to get married. Employers perceive them as fading out of the labor market, and thus often hesitate to hire them. But Mei-ling was not qualified for advanced-level jobs, either. She had no previous working experience other than in the Wang family factory. After a few mediocre and unsuccessful tries, she eventually worked for her sister Mei-hua, helping her and her husband run their computer shop.

Mei-ling obtained her "freedom" at a high price. She continued to live with her parents. But she came to work in the early morning, and went home at nearly midnight. She avoided spending time at home. She seldom talked to her parents or brother. It seemed that she was "dividing" herself from the family. Her future was hardly promising at this particular moment. From time to time she was extremely demoralized about not being able to find a real job, and feared the possibility that she might have to go back to textiles. Nonetheless, for all the uncertainty she faced, Mei-ling was still glad of her choice. Before I left Taiwan for the United States in early 1996, I asked her whether she ever regretted her decision to leave home, a big smile immediately burst on her face. She said:

Yes, I am happy. As long as I do not need to work for them, I am happy!

In a Subversive Voice

One of the feminist scholarship's goals is to "[make] the invisible visible, [bring] the margin to the center, [render] the trivial important, [put] the spotlight on women as competent actors, [and understand] women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men" (Reinharz, 1992:248-249). This chapter and the previous one follow the tradition. However, beyond revealing the conflictual dimension in the Han Chinese family, in light of the stories of daughters in the Wang family, I also push for the important task to contextualize the emergence of these women's voices and the particular messages they convey. In comparison, daughters of the generations prior to Mei-ling's might not have had the luxury of dreaming of a future other than making money for the family and getting married afterwards. The poverty that pervaded the Taiwanese society and the scarcity of employment largely prevented them from pursuing an alternate route. But rather than inferring the "liberating" effects of a modern, industrializing economy on Taiwanese women, one also sees through Mei-hua's and Mei-ling's eyes the complex and often contradicting forces that affect a young woman's life.

Given the range of variation between the two sisters in the Wang family, the future of unmarried Mei-ling is far from certain. In search for her own career, she has traded the security and bargaining power she might otherwise have had by remaining in the circumscribed yet protected home environment for

her freedom and "autonomy." The job market continues to be unfriendly. Her parents do not seem to have changed their minds regarding their daughter's destiny or her inheritance right. Nonetheless, there is no definite closure of her struggle. The conclusion is still pending.

Chapter Six

Guests from the Tropics

To reassure surplus accumulation, industrial producers in Taiwan not only resume to the strategy of relocating their production overseas, they also try to deploy new sources of cheap labor such as foreign workers. In response to the capital's crisis of labor scarcity, the Taiwan government lifted its ban on foreign labor employment in the late 1980s.

The introduction of foreign workers has a multifarious impact on Taiwanese society. This chapter focuses on the economic aspect of the impact. Drawing from my observation of the textile industry in Hai-kou, and conversations with local factory owners and workers,⁶⁴ this chapter explores, first, the Taiwan government's policies and public debates as regards foreign labor, second, the labor practice on the shop floor in Hai-kou's textile factories, and third, the different perceptions the local population hold on foreign labor, in the context of their different economic status and needs.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ As explained in Chapter One, my research mainly focused on the Taiwanese. Therefore, I am not going to pretend that I know about the lives of foreign workers who stay in a strange land where they are not exactly welcome. Neither am I going to speculate on their motivations of leaving home and coming to work in Taiwan, although I can make an intelligent assumption. Rather, the primary focus of this chapter is on the Taiwanese perspectives on foreign workers. The behavior of foreign workers is seen mainly through the eyes of Taiwanese.

⁶⁵ Although in this chapter I focus my discussion on foreign workers in the industrial sector (namely the textile industry), they are not the only group

Half Way in the Transnational Labor Migration: Taiwan Perspective

International migration is a ubiquitous phenomenon in human history, increasing particularly after the European expansion since the sixteenth century. Whether coerced or spontaneous, population movements from one location to another in recent times demonstrate a structural interconnectedness of societies under global economic processes (Burawoy, 1976; Castells, 1975; Kearney, 1986; Portes, 1978; Sassen, 1988; Zolberg, 1978). Although Europe and North America have been historically the primary destinations for most international migrants, lately other regions with high economic growth or expanding labor markets such

recently introduced to Taiwan's wage labor market. There are also large numbers of foreign workers in construction industries and in domestic service, and they each have very different impact on the pre-existent native workforce in the sectors concerned. Specifically, the introduction of foreign labor into Taiwan's construction industries has affected the job opportunity and security of Taiwanese Aborigines, the ethnic minorities in Taiwan who have been disproportionately represented in construction, a job category considered as the most laborious and the least favorable in the wage labor market. The concentration of Taiwanese Aborigines in construction, along with some other vocations such as sailors, is a result of long-term discriminatory policies against them starting from the late Ching period, and beyond the scope of this chapter. However, for the purpose of this chapter, it is important to note that the unemployment rate of Taiwanese Aborigines has been observed up since the open-up for the foreign labor employment. To ease the replacement effect, the Council of Labor Affairs planned to propose that, in order to be eligible for a foreign labor quota, contractors of government projects have to hire a certain proportion of the Aborigines (e.g., one Aborigines to eight foreign workers). Otherwise, their applications will be denied (The Liberty Times U.S.A., 2/6/1998, 3/8/1998).

as oil-exporting Arab and newly industrialized East Asian countries including Taiwan also experience a major influx of migrant workers.

Sassen-Koob (1984) postulates that the use of migrant labor has taken many forms during the course of capitalist expansion depending on a country's place in the international division of labor and the particular modes of production prevalent at the time in the world economy. In the case of present migrations to industrialized East Asia, labor imports are associated with "the reproduction of capital's dominance over labor" (Sassen-Koob, 1984:180). Such labor imports "increase the level of profits of certain firms and... of capital as a whole by lowering the cost of labor and the cost of the reproduction of the labor force" (ibid.:181). For an economy to function, a labor force has to be maintained and renewed. In most cases, the distinction between these two elements of the reproduction of labor force is concealed. The same institutions simultaneously perform both renewal and maintenance functions (Burawoy, 1976:1051-1052). However, a system of migrant labor is characterized by the separation of processes of renewal from those of maintenance. Certain costs of labor-force renewal are thus externalized to an alternate economy and/or state (ibid.:1050).

Furthermore, migrant workers are powerless. This position is enforced through specific legal and political mechanisms which regulate geographical movement and impose restrictions on the occupational mobility of migrants and often their length of residence in the receiving societies (ibid.:1050). The political status of migrant laborers is the key factor here. It is their relation to the state,

i.e., the denial of legal, political, and civil rights, that distinguishes them from domestic (or native) workers. As a result, migrant workers are deprived of the rights and abilities, as individuals or as a group, to influence the institutions that subject them to the employer as well as to other fractions of the labor force (ibid.:1061).

Foreign Labor Policy in Taiwan

The recent legalization of foreign workers in Taiwan faithfully reflects the general pattern discussed above. First and foremost, the state plays a major role in the making of the policies. The legalization of foreign workers began with construction industries. To alleviate the problem of labor shortage in construction, the Taiwan government began to loosen its control over foreign labor by passing the "Solutions to the Labor Shortage in Fourteen Major Public Infrastructure Projects" (*Shi ssi hsiang chung yao kung ch'eng ren li hsu ch'iu yin ying ts'uo shi fang an*) in 1989. But this applied to government projects only. However, to counteract the accelerating phenomena of plant closure and capital outflow starting from the mid-1980s, the Taiwan government eventually opened up foreign labor employment in manufacturing industries in the early 1990s. This is not to say that there was no illegal hiring of foreigners before (or after),

nevertheless, it has indeed become a state project after the legalization.⁶⁶ In order to regulate the inflow of foreign laborers efficiently, the Taiwan government signed agreements with several foreign governments (mainly in Southeast Asia), and only allows citizens from those countries to be legally employed in Taiwan. The Taiwan government also licenses a limited number of labor-import agencies -- so do the governments of the sending countries -- to be in charge of related matters such as recruitment, health examination, and other measures designed to screen for disqualification before a foreigner is allowed to enter as a legal worker.

The opening-up process has also been slow and gradual, and under strict quota systems. In October, 1991, the Taiwan government began to accept foreign labor applications (with a quota of 15,000 workers) for fifteen vocational categories in six highly polluting, labor-intensive industries including textiles. In 1992, the government extended its acceptance of applications to 68 vocational categories (with a quota of 32,000 workers), and again to 73 vocational categories with a quota of 9,000 workers in January, 1993.⁶⁷ Less than a month later, the government ceased its regulation on the maximum quota and announced that applications submitted before February 4th would be approved unconditionally but with a maximum of 50 foreign workers per application (Pan Y. H., 1993:75-77). Before I left the country in January, 1996, the last information I gathered on

⁶⁶ See Pan (1993) for the impact on pre-existent illegal foreign workers after the legalization of foreign labor employment.

⁶⁷ In this case the government also gave a special quota to domestic workers.

the foreign labor policy was that each factory was allowed to hire foreign workers up to one third of its total work force. This is by and large the policy up to date.

It has been clear since the very beginning that foreign workers are primarily introduced to ease Taiwanese industrial producer's urgency for cheap and disposable labor, resonating the phenomenon of capital outflow, as a strategy to reinsure surplus accumulation. Nevertheless, it is also the general public's consensus that foreign workers' stay has to be short and temporary; they cannot become a permanent burden of the society. Many Taiwanese are concerned with potential threats allegedly brought about by foreign labor such as rising unemployment rate and lower wages, rising crime rate, disruption of social harmony and aggravation of social tension due to sharpened class and cultural differentiation, higher population density and subsequent crowdedness and worsened environmental and living quality (Chang, 1995:589-590). Most of the policy recommendations of scholars, economists in particular, thereby focused on the maximization of economic efficiency of foreign labor employment yet the minimization of its social and cultural costs. As an example, Chang (1995), an economist, recommends that the government publicly auction the foreign labor quota, and use the revenue obtained to fund job training programs for unskilled and low-skilled Taiwanese workers who may be replaced by foreign laborers.

Consequently, underlying the Taiwan government's foreign labor policy is the concern to protect the job security of the Taiwanese, and to prevent foreign laborers (legal and illegal) becoming permanent residents and a cause of social problems (The Liberty Times U.S.A., 2/20/1998). Under the current policy, each foreign worker is allowed to work in Taiwan only once for two years, with an extension of another year. During their tenure in Taiwan, foreign workers are prohibited from changing employers. They can only work for the employer who brought them to the country. Neither can they marry the Taiwanese, or such a marriage does not grant them a permanent resident status or citizenship. They still have to go back to their countries of origin at the end of their contracts.

These legal and political measures have a profound impact on foreign workers while they are in Taiwan's wage labor market as well as on the shop floor. In the following section, I will illustrate the impact through a discussion of labor practice in the textile industry in the Hai-kou area.

On the Shop Floor

Life and Work at *Treasure Island*

At *Treasure Island*, one third of the employees (around forty of them) were foreign workers from Thailand. Most of these Thai workers were women, and few of them were men. They were divided into small groups and assigned to both weaving and spinning sections as well as to different shifts. Their tasks

varied, but the division between men and women mainly followed the traditional pattern in textile, i.e., men maintained and repaired machines or carried heavy objects, and women tended looms or assisted loom tenders. However, the management would occasionally ask Thai men to assist in loom-tending.

By and large, the Thai workers played an auxiliary role. In particular, they were not involved in the last phase of production, which has a decisive effect on the quality of final products and is assigned to Taiwanese only. Taiwanese workers were believed to be more skilled, for they had learned from their experienced line leaders and peers. In contrast, the language barrier between Taiwanese and the Thai inhibited effective communication and thus transfer of knowledge between the two groups. The management at *Treasure Island* could not speak directly with the Thai -- or vice versa. Both sides relied on the few ethnic Chinese to be their mediators and translators. As a result, the delivery of commands and transmission of technological know-how were difficult and incomplete, which in turn prevented the company from placing trust in its foreign workers for important tasks.

Given the fact that the majority of foreign labor in Chaughus County, where Hai-kou is located, came from Thailand, the Bureau of Industry at the Chunghua County government offered some Thai language classes to factories in the county. Yet, no one at *Treasure Island* seemed eager to take this opportunity, probably for the reason that the company did not provide enough incentive for

any individual to invest the considerable amount of time needed to master the new language.

The Thai workers live in the company's dormitory during their two-year stay. The company did not build the dormitory specifically for the Thai. The dormitory had always been part of the company's facility since its founding days, to house its workers from out of town as well as those who came off from night or graveyard shifts and needed a place to sleep before going home. In its peak days, the dormitory was the home for a few hundred young women. However, since the number of employees had shrunk rapidly in the past few years, and most of the remaining employees possessed motorcycles and thus preferred to commute daily, the Thai were almost the only regular residents in the dormitory. The women resided on the third floor of the women's dormitory. Male Thai workers resided in the men's dormitory, to which I had no access.

The company had a kitchen, and provided three meals and a late night snack for all of its employees every day. Dormitory residents were not allowed to cook in their rooms. Yet, in addition to the food supplied by the company, the Thai also cooked for themselves. Taiwanese home cooking did not always suit their appetite. They had their own favorite dishes, whose flavors and tastes were not necessarily appreciated by the locals. One of my roommates at *Treasure Island* -- our room happened to be on the third floor of the dormitory and was the only room occupied by the Taiwanese adjacent to those of the Thai's --

consequently complained to me the stinky smell that filled in the air in meal times.

In their off-hours the Thai liked to go out, shopping, visiting night markets, or meeting and socializing with friends who were also guest workers in Taiwan. But they were not encouraged to stay out overnight. The company kept a close eye on them, and checked their whereabouts every night. The Thai workers needed to have permission from their direct supervisor in order to leave the company even in their off hours, though their requests were rarely turned down. One of the functions of the security office by the company's front gate was thus to stop unauthorized foreign workers from going out.

The Thai workers had very little spare time to spend, however. Textile workers do not have weekends free. It is a common practice in Hai-kou to work seven days a week. The only extended off-time that textile workers have, Taiwanese and the Thai alike, is between the hours they are off from the day shift on Saturday afternoon and going back to work on the graveyard shift at midnight on Monday, which gives them thirty-two hours for recuperation (Table 6-1). For Taiwanese at *Treasure Island*, this was their "Grand Weekend" (Ta li pai), a time for sleeping late or catching up with personal and family duties. But the Thai were usually busy. They rarely took the time off but often asked the management to give them extra hours of work.

Table 6-1: Shift change in textile factories, Hai-kou Area

Shift Change	Time Change	No. Of Off Hours
Graveyard to Night	(Sun) midnight - 8AM to (Sun) 4PM - midnight	8
Night to Day	(Sat) 4PM - midnight to (Sun) 8AM - 4PM	8
Day to Graveyard	(Sat) 8AM - 4PM to (Mon) midnight - 8AM	32(24+8)

One of the major differences between Taiwanese and foreign labor at *Treasure Island* was that the former was on a piece-rate wage system and the latter was paid at a fixed rate. Without overtime pay, a Taiwanese loom tender made around NT\$22,000 (US\$814) to NT\$30,000 (US\$1,111) per month depending on the nature of her work (the monthly wage of a mechanic, usually a male, ranged from NT\$30,000 to NT\$40,000). In comparison, regardless of their sex, a Thai was paid around NT\$14,000 (US\$518). This amount was originally required by the Labor Standards Law to be the minimum wage for all workers, native and foreign, but it usually became the maximum wage paid to foreign workers. Foreign workers came to Taiwan primarily to make money. As their monthly wage was fixed under the system, the only way they could make more money was to work overtime. The Thai at *Treasure Island* frequently worked two consecutive shifts (i.e., sixteen hours), without a break in between.

Foreign Labor Across the Region

The situation of foreign workers at *Treasure Island* is neither a norm nor a universal. Great variations exist among factories in the Hai-kou area with regard to the number of foreign workers hired, their national origin, sex ratio, work assignment, living arrangement, food preparation, and life after work. Not every factory has a ready-built dormitory to accommodate foreign labor. Some firms put together temporary huts, and some others -- particularly those family-centered small factories -- spare unused space in owners' houses to board these workers. Also, a few factory owners do not bother to prepare food but choose to provide materials for their foreign workers to cook for themselves.

The sex ratio of foreign labor varies greatly from factory to factory. Some factory owners hire only males or females, most others have a mixture of both. Although the tasks assigned to male and female foreign workers are mainly in the realm of tradition, it seems that more and more factory owners discovered the advantage of using foreign males to do both "men's" and "women's" jobs. Among Taiwanese, the sexual division of labor in textile is strictly prescribed, though more so for men than for women. Women may occasionally become mechanics, but men will never choose to tend looms; neither would any sensible factory owners ask their male employees to do such tasks. "That's a woman's job," I was often told. Nonetheless, the introduction of foreign labor also introduced new ways of labor deployment. As I have observed above with Thai

males, factory owners in Hai-kou more than once assigned their male foreign workers to tend looms, without shame or hesitation. When asked for the reason, their answers were usually simple and straightforward:

It's perfect. Men can do both, tending looms and uploading and downloading fabric.

or

But why not? They have no complaints.

Sometimes I was told that men were just as good as women. Yet, a close look beyond this phenomenon reveals a strong economic incentive that did not exist when the work force was merely Taiwanese. The labor market in Taiwan is gender biased. Men's labor is usually valued more than women's, even if they are performing the same task. A textile factory owner will have to pay much more to hire a Taiwanese man to tend looms, assuming that there are willing candidates. Hence, based on both cultural sanction and economic estimation, it is a better deal for Taiwanese factory owners to hire a female loom tender and a male mover, both of whom are characterized as unskilled labor and can be paid less. The introduction of foreign labor presents an even better option. As male and female foreign workers are paid the same wage, it appears to be a shrewd business decision to have foreign males to do both tasks. The concept that loom-

tending is a woman's job does not apply to foreign workers. A job is gender-specifically-labeled only when there is an economic impetus.

Aside from the differences, there are also common patterns underlying foreign workers' situation in Hai-kou. First of all, employers across the region generally do not entrust their foreign employees for crucial production procedures. Foreign workers are frequently assigned to the dirtiest, most laborious (and smelly, like dyeing), and least skillful tasks that very few Taiwanese will do nowadays. In an industry like textiles in which machines operate twenty-four hours per day, but where fewer and fewer Taiwanese are willing to endure the hardship of being on shift, foreign workers become the main work force of night or graveyard shifts in many local factories. Also, although the policy varies from company to company, most employers developed strict codes in regulating the movement of their foreign workers. The Thai at *Treasure Island* were required to report to their immediate superior before leaving the company in their off hours. This was rather a benevolent rule in comparison to some of the harshest in the area. A Taiwanese weaver told me that foreign workers in her workplace were prohibited to leave the company at all:

My company has very rigid rules toward wai-laos (i.e., foreign workers). The company hired a couple to keep an eye on the Thai. The couple lives in the dormitory, so they get to watch the Thai 24 hours a day. Day and night! The Thai resent it.

They [the Thai] are not allowed to go out -- not on any occasions. The company doesn't want them to communicate with wai-laos in other companies. They don't want the wai-laos to exchange information and compare with others. ["Are they allowed to have visitors?" I asked.] Only if the visitor is their brother, sister, or spouse... The Thai like to drink. They drink a lot.

A Model Company in Foreign Labor Management

How to effectively manage foreign workers emerges as one of the newest challenges not only to Taiwanese factory employers but also to government officials in related agencies such as the Council of Labor Affairs. The widely used phrase "foreign labor management" -- i.e., *Wai chi lao kung kuan li* or *Wai lao kuan li* -- in the manufacturing circle, government's guidelines, and scholarly literature of labor and human resource exemplifies their collective concern and anxiety to be in control. Two issues are frequently emphasized in the general discussion of foreign labor management: the custody of foreign labor and enhancement of their productivity. The fact that all companies have developed policies to control foreign workers' movement shows the magnitude of the former concern. As to the issue of productivity, factory employers commonly complained that two years are too short because they have to waste the first several months to train their foreign workers. Their foreign workers can only reach a satisfactory level of productivity after six months or longer on the job. By the time foreign workers have familiarized themselves with their tasks, they are almost about to go home. Taiwanese employers allege that they will have to hire

new foreign workers, and start the training cycle all over again. Also, many factories adopt a fixed wage system like that of *Treasure Island* whose nature impedes foreign workers' incentive to be quick learners and efficient producers. They do not have much to gain from improving their productivity. How to motivate foreign workers to learn and yield a high efficiency has therefore become an urgent issue for the parties concerned.

E&P, standing for "Excellence and Prosperity" and one of the largest tire-producing companies in Taiwan, was recently chosen by the Council of Labor Affairs to be a model company in foreign labor management and listed on the emulation tour for factory owners and managers in central Taiwan. According to a manager of *Treasure Island* who participated in the tour, foreign workers at E&P (also from Thailand) could only apply to the company once a week about the time they intended to go out in the week to come. Otherwise, they would have to be escorted by their fellow Taiwanese workers if they were leaving the company. The Taiwanese served both to protect the Thai from troubles and to prevent them from escaping. Also, the management of E&P enforced the rule that those living in the same room were held jointly responsible for one another's action. All of the roommates would be sent back to Thailand as a punishment if any fleeing occurred among them. This strategy turned foreign workers into their own guards. In fact, this strategy was so effective that none of the Thai at E&P dared or were able to run away in recent years.

In contrast to most of the local companies in the Hai-kou area, foreign workers at E&P were on a piece-rate wage system. Instead of paying a fixed monthly salary for all, the company only rewarded a full wage with bonus to those who accomplished a prescribed target production quota. Also, their pay was reduced for any products that might be of sub-standard quality in order to compensate for the company's loss. The company also expected them to reach a satisfactory level of productivity within a given time. The workers were told that they would be sent back to Thailand if they failed to do so.

Amazed by the rigor of the codes, I asked the manager at *Treasure Island* how the management of E&P could afford to send back their workers even for the purpose of enforcing the rules, given my understanding that it took both money and time -- and time in particular -- to have the approval for any foreign worker to work in Taiwan. The manager answered that their forcefulness was their key to a successful foreign labor management. What the management of E&P needed to do was to send back a few to set an example. Not many foreign workers would risk their jobs to challenge the authority of the company. Nevertheless, the manager at *Treasure Island* also pointed out the fact that E&P had established its overseas operation in northern Thailand for a decade. They knew the region, and they drew workers to Taiwan mainly from that region. Unlike most of the Taiwanese employers who relied on recruitment and placement agencies to facilitate the hiring and were blinded with the selection process, "they get to choose better workers," said the manager at *Treasure Island*.

Although the new migrations to East Asian countries can be seen as yet another example of the typical pattern according to which migrants go to areas of high economic growth, yet in this case it is rooted in the re-composition of world capital (Sassen-Koob, 1984:176). For such, new labor practice regarding migration is developed as evident in the case of E&P. As more and more Taiwanese companies invested or relocated their production overseas, hiring practice like that of E&P has become increasingly common. The transnational link between Taiwanese companies and their overseas operations not only signals the most recent development of Taiwan's capitalist accumulation, i.e., a massive capital outflow in search for cheap, abundant raw material and labor, but also facilitates a flow of labor in both directions. For those who manufacture in both Taiwan and abroad, they arrange for workers from the region of their investment to supplement or reduce the labor cost back home. Some of the foreign workers hired under this circumstance have already worked for their Taiwanese employers before being transferred to Taiwan. They have been familiarized with the production and discipline codes of their factories, so that they should be able to fit in their new workplaces without much disruption. Furthermore, since Taiwanese companies usually move the least complex and most mass-produced part in their production overseas and leave the more technologically advanced and complicated procedures in Taiwan, their Taiwan operations often serve as a training ground for employees from overseas. Taiwanese manufacturers recruit foreign workers and train them in Taiwan.

After they complete their two-year contracts, these foreign workers go home and become line leaders or foremen in the overseas factories of their Taiwanese employers.

The Run-Away Incident

As stated previously, according to the Taiwan government's regulation, each foreign worker is allowed to work in Taiwan once for two years. After that they are not to renew their contracts and have to go back to their countries of origin. It was the summer of 1994. Some of the Thai workers at *Treasure Island* came in the early fall of 1992. The company would have to send them back very soon.

I was away for one weekend in late July. When I came back on Sunday evening, Teacher Lin,⁶⁸ the chaperon of the women's dormitory, informed me that something "big" had happened. Over the weekend two Thai women went out but did not return. "They must have gone to look for other jobs," Teacher Lin said, "They have to go back [to Thailand] in a few months. But they want to stay. They want to make more money." Teacher Lin then pointed out to me the

⁶⁸ Mrs. Lin was not a teacher. Neither was her job involved in anything of a teaching nature. People in the company called her "Teacher Lin" out of respect as well as recognition of her supervisory and caring role to the women workers in the dormitory. Teacher Lin was one of the earliest employees of *Treasure Island* since its founding days. She has been working at the company for nearly twenty-five years and was entitled to retirement pension several months after my arrival. She stayed on the job after her "retirement," however.

photos of the two women who ran away from the chart of pictures she had on her desktop, and said,

This one! This one is particularly a trouble maker. She constantly came in late after going out. We had looked for her for several times in the past. I always had the hunch sooner or later she was going to cause us some serious problems.

Teacher Lin continued to tell me that this was not the first time foreign workers at *Treasure Island* ran away before their contract ended. A male worker, who was also from Thailand, ran away a year ago. He was recently caught by the police and sent to a detention center for illegal migrants waiting for deportation. "Life is not easy [in the detention center]. They are treated like criminals!" Teacher Lin shook her head, expressing her incomprehension of Thai workers' run-away behavior. She informed me that the company had acted quietly this time and hired a private investigator to look into the whereabouts of the two Thai women. According to the government's rules, employers of run-away foreign workers have to report the missing to their local police stations at once, so that the police would be able to assist in the search. Missing foreign workers are considered potential law offenders and pose a serious threat to the society at large. Nonetheless, many Taiwanese companies choose not to report to the police, mainly out of concern that they will be held responsible and even sanctioned for the run-away behavior. The government may take away a

company's foreign labor quota if such a missing case occurs. Thus, the management of *Treasure Island* decided to act on their own.

A week passed. A rumor spread in the company saying that the two run-away workers were seen working in a factory in an industrial park nearly Hainan. Before the weekend was over, however, the two women came back. Employees at *Treasure Island* gossiped that the factory owner who hired them a week ago was concerned with their illegal status and decided to fire them. They had nowhere else to go but to come back. At any rate, they quietly sneaked back in the dormitory, and reappeared on the shop floor at their presumed working hours as if they had always been there.

Life went on at *Treasure Island* for two peaceful days. In the third morning, while typing up fieldnotes in my room, I heard swift steps and men's voice in the hallway. Men were not allowed in women's dormitory! I stuck my head out of the window and saw several Thai males carrying big luggage and walking down the stairs. They were leaving the dormitory, followed by the two run-aways and some other Thai women. I followed the group to the front gate of the company, and saw that a crowd of Thai workers had been waiting. The two run-aways went to see the personnel manager for the last time. After they came out of the office they were immediately taken away by a staff from the recruitment and placement agency who had facilitated the hiring of the Thai at *Treasure Island*. There was only time for the crowd gathering at the front gate to say good-bye.

Later during the day Mr. Chang, the general manager of *Treasure Island*, informed me that the two run-aways were flying back to Thailand, at their own expense, that afternoon. The staff from the recruitment agency would see to their departure. "We have to act quickly," Mr. Chang said,

We have no other choice. We don't want to turn them in to the police [which we are supposed to do] according to the law. We don't want to send them to the detention center. It's like a prison! But we can't keep them in the company, either. We couldn't confine them. If we don't send them back right away, who knows what other troubles they might bring us? They have run away once. They will try again.

Voices of the Taiwanese

The "deportation" of the run-aways became a popular topic in the company's conversation for days to come. None of the Taiwanese employees were affected by the incident, but it provided them an entertainment in their boring daily routine as well as an excellent opportunity for a researcher like me to ask about their opinions on foreign labor. In addition to the run-away incident, several other events regarding the Thai occurred lately. A woman requested the company to terminate her contract and send her back to Thailand. She received a letter from home, telling her that her husband was having an affair. "Why should I work so hard here and make money for him to have fun in Thailand?" she said to the company. Another man who was considered a trouble

maker by the company, and who was said to not take orders from his superior, was sent back not long before the run-away incident. A close working relationship with the recruitment and placement agency on these events seemed to indicate that *Treasure Island* as a customer was entitled to full warranty for their purchase of foreign labor. The recruitment agency had to agree to replace the returned goods with satisfactory commodities. They supplied *Treasure Island* with new workers to replace those who failed to carry out their terms.

Factory Owners - Employers

Foreign labor running away is a potential problem faced by all factory owners who employ guest workers. They are thus interested in and sympathetic to those of their own kind who have to put up with the dilemma. After listening to my recitation of the incident at *Treasure Island*, a friend who owned a local weaving factory and hired fifteen Thai workers quickly responded:

Did they [the Thai] have to go back soon? That will do. It's in fact very bad to wai-laos themselves that they try to run away. Their employers will only develop worse rules to control their movement. The best strategy [for foreign workers] is to stay where they are. [If they do so, t]heir employers won't restrict them that much, and both sides will be happy.

He spoke from his own experience. The Thai workers in his factory were not restrained from going around. They moved freely between their workplace, living quarters, and shopping areas in downtown Hai-kou. By granting his

workers unconstrained freedom, this friend seemed able to establish mutual trust with his workers and exempt from the worry of them attempting to flee.

The Middle-Level Management

The middle-level management at *Treasure Island*, i.e., those who were in charge of the shop-floor production and had direct contact with the foreign workers, had the most negative things to say about foreign labor. Primarily because of their supervisory role and responsibility for efficiency and productivity, the middle-level management tended to see the Thai as slow, lazy, and stubborn workers who did not want to learn. Mr. Huang, a foreman at *Treasure Island* said to me in a conversation after the run-aways were deported:

If it were up to me to decide, I wouldn't like to hire any foreign labor. See how many of them have been sent back since your short stay here? ("Four," I raised my fingers and answered.) That's right. Four! They say foreign labor won't cause any problems because they will go back after two years. It's OK only when there are few of them. Now their number has increased to such an extent, that we will have many problems to come.

One of the criticisms made by the middle-level management at *Treasure Island* was that the Thai did not learn the proper ways to take care of the production. Mr. Huang continued,

As I said, when there are only a handful of them, they follow your instructions. When their number increases, they stop listening to you, [and instead,] start teaching one another the wrong ways of doing things.

They don't learn the good things, but only the bad. At first our company lost money on them in the first few months when they just came aboard. Their products were only of lesser quality. [But they eventually picked up the right methods, and improved their performance as time went by.] Now they don't even bother to learn from you. They don't care whether their final products are in perfect shape. We completely rely on the Taiwanese [who work in the packing section and serve as the last gate keeper before the products leave the company] for quality control.

Nevertheless, the language barrier was the key to the problem here. As stated earlier, unable to directly communicate with the Thai, the management had to rely on the few ethnic Chinese to translate for them. The ethnic Chinese were also foreign workers at *Treasure Island*; they were not hired to be translators but production workers. They had their own duties to perform, and could not possibly keep up with the needs of the management. Hence, the communication between the management and the Thai workers was indirect and constantly delayed. Many important messages and subtle information were lost in the process.

Conflicts and struggles between the management and foreign workers played out on the shop floor in various forms on a daily basis. Despite the fact that most of the Thai (except the few ethnic Chinese) did not speak Mandarin and Minanese/Taiwanese and could not understand the conversation among their Taiwanese co-workers, they were not deprived of the ability to watch and observe. It did not take them long to realize the differential, and often discriminatory, practice toward them. They complained about the different pay scale and work assignment from time to time. The Thai at *Treasure Island* as in

many other companies were often allocated to night and graveyard shifts, because most Taiwanese were not willing to work at night and often demanded of their employers during their job interviews that they work the day shift only. As a result, foreign workers had to work the two night shifts consuming more physical strength and rarely getting a chance to see the sunrise because they had to sleep during the day.

It was usually the ethnic Chinese, who understood both Mandarin and Minanese/Taiwanese, who picked up information on the shop floor and informed their Thai compatriots about the discriminatory practices. They also negotiated with the company on behalf of the Thai workers. From my limited conversation with the management of *Treasure Island* on this subject, I was given the impression that the managers had an ambivalent attitude toward their ethnic Chinese employees. For one thing, ethnic Chinese were usually better workers because they communicated with the management directly and learned the essential production knowledge more quickly. They were also indispensable for their language skills. Yet, they were often the "trouble makers" and leaders of dissent among the foreign workers.

In spite of all the grievances they had against the company, foreign workers could not do much to change their situation. The company always had the power to send them home if they were alleged to be slow workers or trouble makers. Their protest and resistance was in a petty and covert form, but could

cause continual disruption to the daily routine of production. Mr. Chen, another foreman of *Treasure Island*, said to me.

They complained, complained, and complained. [It] gave me a big headache! Sometimes they also slow down their work, and stagnate the whole production process. They even threatened to have a strike once.

"What did you do then?" I asked.

Well, I warned them that if they didn't keep quiet and work hard, I would bar them from any opportunity of working overtime. You know they all love to work overtime. That's the only chance they have in order to make more money [other than their monthly wages]. They can't afford to lose that.

Mr. Chen continued that the Thai came from different regions. They were not a unified group. The management of *Treasure Island* often played on the fact that there were factions among them, and gave overtime work only to those considered to be cooperative. This strategy aggravated the ill feeling among the Thai, and prevented them from forming solidarity. It also created competition among them, which in turn forced them to drop their grievances and cooperate with the management.

Employees/Workers

"But how do you feel about foreign workers? Do you resent their presence here [in Taiwan]? Are they replacing Taiwanese in textile factories?" --

Given the popular impression, which is alleged to be based on government statistics and scholarly research, that foreign workers are taking over Taiwanese' jobs, these questions were of fundamental importance. Yet, neither middle managers nor workers at *Treasure Island* seemed particularly worried. Instead of expressing their concerns over the potential replacement effect of foreign labor, some foremen chose to make comments on the decline of work ethics among the New New Generations.

Most of the young single workers at *Treasure Island*, however, were going to night school while working during the day. They considered their jobs in textile as only temporary, and expected to move on to better ones upon graduation. In answering my questions regarding foreign labor, one of the young workers thought hard for a while as she was answering an exam question, and replied:

For now, no. But I think they would replace Taiwanese eventually.

But this was not exactly a problem of her concern. She had prepared to find a white-collar job as soon as she was out of the school.

It was middle-aged unskilled workers who revealed the most anxiety over the presence of foreign labor, especially if they observed a gradual substitution of Taiwanese with foreign workers in their workplaces. This was the group of people who did not have many alternatives if they were pushed out of their

current jobs and thus most vulnerable to the situation. In one interview my informant, a weaver in her late thirties, repeatedly pleaded to me for an answer to the impact of foreign workers. She was very anxious to know whether the employment of foreign labor would one day reach a point that all Taiwanese lost their jobs to others. In her workplace, the Thai had successively become the major labor force. She said that the general manager of her company had explicitly expressed his preference of foreign workers over Taiwanese:

He said that the Taiwanese take [factory] jobs only when their families have extra needs. When the extra needs are met, they quit their jobs immediately. He feels it takes him too much just to keep up with all these hassles. It's much simpler to deal with wai-laos. Now my manager relies on us to teach the wai-laos. He will fire us all as soon as the wai-laos have learned what we know. I no longer feel I have any job security.

To count the cost for hiring a foreign worker became a favorite exercise for my informants and me in many occasions. According to our calculation, despite the fact that a foreign worker was paid a monthly wage of NT\$14,000 (US\$518), it would cost much more for the employer. An employer had to pay for their foreign employees' lodging, food, health insurance, airplane tickets for going home once or twice during their two-year contracts, and a special fee to the Council of Labor Affairs. In the end it would amount to at least NT\$20,000 (US\$740) per month to hire a foreign worker, not much cheaper than hiring a local Taiwanese. Yet, there were other benefits. First and foremost, it saved an employer from the headache of labor shortages. It also assured the stability of

his/her work force for at least two years, for foreign workers would not change bosses; they had to stay where they were hired. Second, it might be easier for Taiwanese employers to enforce a strict discipline code when their employees were foreign and under a constant threat of being sent back. Finally, it saved employers from labor's retirement pension as well as annual bonuses. The former has increasingly become a serious problem for many Taiwanese companies established in the 1970s, because they are facing an aging labor force but until now failed to save for their workers.

Conclusion

The introduction of foreign labor to Taiwan has first to be understood as an analogue of an age-old strategy of capital to control labor, facilitated by the state. It increases the employer's profit by lowering workers' wages from the separation of processes of labor renewal from those of maintenance and thus externalizing certain costs of labor reproduction to the countries these foreign workers came from. The Taiwan government's legal and political measures to prevent foreign workers from becoming permanent residents, and to deny them the rights of geographical and occupational mobility as well as to organize unions, further extends the power of Taiwanese employers. Foreign workers are under constant threat of "deportation" if they do not comply with the employer's needs and demand. The government's tight regulation over foreign labor also

gives the larger society a sense of security and control, although it has been increasingly criticized as being insufficient and inefficient. The fear of labor displacement and of cultural alienation in one's own society has made to the newspaper headlines from time to time, yet for the time being, it largely remains a latent social concern rather than a public outcry.

The introduction of foreign labor to Taiwan, however, is more than a simple replication of an old strategy. It signifies a new phase of articulation between international capital and labor flows (Sassen-Koob, 1984:185). On the one hand, there has been an acceleration of direct foreign investment of Taiwanese enterprises to China and Southeast Asia, primarily in the form of manufacturing capital, and on the other, there has been a large influx of Southeast Asian migrant workers to the country. Both of which are strategies developed by Taiwanese industrial producers with the hope to maintain their competitiveness in the global economy. Notably, in an increasingly sophisticated world system of production, there is no clear demarcation between those who invest overseas and thus directly exploit cheaper local labor and those who continue to produce in Taiwan and thus hire foreign workers to reduce production costs. Many Taiwanese manufacturers have carefully divided production into parts to be distributed to different sites, in order to maximize the comparative advantage provided by each locality. Labor is thereby contracted to move in multiple directions in this intensified process of capital accumulation.

Chapter Seven

Global Integration and Local Dynamics: Understanding Taiwan's Economic Restructuring

The processes set in motion by industrialization articulate with local culture and history, to produce distinct contours for each locality and society (Blim, 1991). New kinds of labor processes and relations have proliferated as a result of the mergence of global economic forces and indigenous values and practices (Cairolì, 1998). In order to understand the centrality of labor in the discourse and practice of Taiwan's recent economic restructuring, it is essential to look at the local production systems, which have been dominated by small businesses particularly in the export forefront. Exemplified by the development of Hai-kou's textile industry, the specific production relations, themselves a historical product, have created a set of dispositions under which Taiwanese factory owners and workers draw their understanding and strategies for the later economic changes.

To conclude, this chapter summarizes four important issues that have been discussed in previous chapters in understanding Taiwan's recent economic restructuring. The first section explains the link between Taiwan's marketing dependency and its specific industrial production system that makes labor issues predominant in capital accumulation. The second section focuses on developmentalism as an ideological background that shapes the discourse and practice with regard to the recent economic crisis. The third section discusses the

roles of gender in Taiwanese family and kinship system, which are essential to capital accumulation in Taiwan's post-war export economy. The fourth and last section centers on the construction and enacting of women's agency as being shaped by, and in turn having a great impact on, Taiwan's culture and economy.

Marketing Dependency and the Precedence of Labor Issues

To be sure, labor has always been an overriding issue in the discussion of global economic transformation. Even in the current stage of capitalist development which involves an internationalization of productive, commodity, and finance capital, and in which cheap labor is no longer a primary reason for capital movement (Elson, 1989:189),⁶⁹ labor remains a major concern both politically and academically. The growing significance of commodity and financial capital does not diminish the importance of industrial production, but brings new dynamics to the shop floor around the world.

Taiwanese industrial producers share the concerns of their counterparts around the world about minimizing production cost in order to maximize profit.

⁶⁹ At the present time, in many cases, international capital investment carries the mission to penetrate the local market of invested countries. To increase profit, investors may withdraw from production and concentrate on marketing goods produced by others. Another commonly used strategy along the same line is to compete through acquisitions, taking over potential rivals and buying market share (Elson, 1989:189).

Many of their claims and tactics mentioned in previous chapters reveal this concern of theirs, which also indicates conformity to the general trends of capital's control over labor in the current global economic system. In spite of this common interest with employers worldwide, due to their specific pattern of linkage to the world economy – i.e., “marketing dependency” (Skoggard, 1996:70) – Taiwanese manufacturers have special reasons for disciplining labor and keeping down the labor cost.

Marketing dependency refers to the distinct arrangement “in which Taiwanese-owned factories manufactured commodities to be sold under the brand names of transnational corporations or large retailing companies,” leaving design work, product development and marketing to foreign agencies (Skoggard, 1996:70). This pattern of development has allowed Taiwan's capital-deficient small enterprises to take a quick and low-cost course to industrialization and an invaluable ready-made access to the international markets. Nevertheless, the lack of technological supremacy and marketing ability also made Taiwanese capital very vulnerable to economic circumstances such as world recessions, oil crises, trade restrictions and negotiations, and competition from countries with the ability to produce similar commodities with cheaper prices. Uncertainties in the marketplace have discouraged Taiwanese entrepreneurs from making any large, long-term investment, but oblige them to make business decisions based on short-term product cycle and quick profit return (Skoggard, 1996:70). To remain small is thus adaptive, as it enables them

to be flexible and to spread the business risk broadly through a decentralized industrial system. Nonetheless, precisely because of their small size, Taiwanese firms lost their power to command prices in the marketplace (Skoggard, 1996:70). Their small size also impeded their access to domestic as well as international financial institutions, and the respective decentralized nature of Taiwan's industrial production prevented the government from intervening directly and effectively, particularly in times of economic difficulty.

Without the ability to command either the price or the market, small firms in Taiwan largely realize their profit through labor, the factor over which they have most control. As a result, wages and the access to cheap labor are their principle concerns. Skoggard (1996:81-85) observed that in Taiwan's shoe industry small manufacturers realized profit mainly by hiring women – presumably the secondary wage earner in the family and thus willing to work for less – and through their ability to manipulate the piece-wage systems. Specifically, piece work enabled factory owners to change the pay rate for each task involved from order to order. This flexibility allowed them to adjust labor costs for each order so as to guarantee profits. Neither of these tactics is unique to the shoe industry, but as a matter of fact, are widely adopted by employers in Taiwan's manufacturing sector, including those in Hai-kou's textile industry. It is under these circumstances that we can begin to understand why Taiwanese manufacturers choose to prioritize the labor issue in the context of the recent economic exigency.

The Moral Discourse, Ideologies of Harmony and Prosperity, and Hegemony

Under the structural constraints of marketing dependency, and of their comparatively small size, Taiwanese industrial producers largely rely on their ability to manipulate the labor process to acquire profits. This has certainly contributed to the focus on labor as the principal concern in the recent economic restructuring. The New New Generation moral discourse did not emerge by chance, but truthfully captured the manufacturers' anxiety over their deficiency in capital accumulation. But the New New Generation discourse encompassed more than just the economic concern of small producers. Although challenged by some labor advocate groups (on behalf of unemployed middle-aged workers), the moral discourse nonetheless succeeded in articulating "the overwhelming majority of ideological elements characteristic of a given social formation" and therefore creating "a collective national-popular will" (cf. Smart, 1997:405-406). As such, it made its appeal to a larger audience in Taiwanese society.

On that hot summer afternoon, after lamenting young people's declining work ethic, Mr. Lin, the foreman at *Treasure Island*, continued,

If we don't work hard, we [Taiwanese] will be like the Philippines very soon. Look at the Philippines! They used to be the most industrialized and wealthy country in Asia, but now they have [to come to Taiwan] to work for us. [When you take a trip to the Philippines, you will see] the people there don't work. They indulge themselves and don't want to

keep up with what they have accomplished. [Mr. Lin paused for a second, seemingly to convince himself before he went on.] No, we won't be like the Philippines. We're hard working, and we've built a much more solid foundation to fall back on.

Although I was initially surprised when I heard the Philippines surface in the conversation I had in Hai-kou, I soon discovered that the Philippines was a fairly common reference when local residents wanted to reflect on their current economic predicament. Despite its racist undertone, the comparison to the Philippines implicated the Taiwanese' anxiety for failure. For many Taiwanese, the contrast in wealth – or rather, similarity in developmental history – between Taiwan and the Philippines or other Southeast Asian countries is not simply a convenient imagination on their part. It becomes only too real when they step out of the country, travel to Southeast Asia or China, and witness the “backwardness” and rural character yet the thriving force for progress and success of their host countries. This reminds them of Taiwan in their own childhood, only twenty or thirty years ago. The prosperity of Taiwan is still too recent to become a permanent part of the national memory. Nonetheless, Taiwan's world-wide acclaim for its swift economic development surely fosters the Taiwanese a sense of pride. Taiwan's ruling KMT party has also propagated a developmental ideology, both rhetorically and institutionally, as a way to establish its five-decade governing legitimacy, further promulgating the importance of the economy in shaping Taiwanese self-image. Yet, given the profound degree of Taiwan's dependence on foreign trade, and the continued

state of hostility and possibility for military action between Taiwan and China,⁷⁰ their self-confidence tends to be precarious. This mixture of pride and continuing feeling of insecurity, I contend, dictates the ideological construction of Taiwan's recent crisis of capital accumulation.

Equal opportunity and upward mobility are important validations for the developmental hegemony. In addition to the rapid economic growth, equally impressive to the world about Taiwan's post-war industrialization is its relatively equitable income distribution, accompanied by a nearly full employment rate, increases in real wages, and improvement of material standard of living (Deyo, 1987). The small income disparity in Taiwanese society can be in part attributed to the spatial and organizational dispersal of industrial production, which, instead of erecting large enterprises with high concentration of capital and labor, provided opportunities for the Taiwanese to become small business owners. Past literature has paid much attention to the specific life trajectory of Taiwanese male workers in conjunction with Taiwan's highly decentralized industrial structure. Gates (1979) describes Taiwanese workers as "part-time proletariats," because very few of them expect to remain life-long employees. Young Taiwanese workers share a common goal that they will only work for wages for a few years and they will one day own a business and

⁷⁰ The tension between two sides of the Taiwan Strait has been escalated in recent years by China's expeditious integration into the global economic system and Taiwan's changing domestic political atmosphere with a tendency towards

become their own bosses. Industrial work is therefore “an entrepreneurial strategy” (Hu, 1983; Stites, 1985; Niehoff, 1987), from which young workers learn the knowledge, skills, and business networks in preparation to establish their own firms. My own research surely confirms these observations. Many factory owners I met in Hai-kou started out as mechanics’ apprentices in weaving factories (and many of their wives were former loom tenders as well), and young technicians nowadays continued to carry the expectation of having their own operations in the near future.

Yet, hegemony can never be exhaustive in practice (R. Williams, 1977:112), and it is always a mixture of true and false beliefs (Smart, 1997:405). In Taiwan, the booming of small-scale enterprises is closely associated with Taiwan’s role in the global economic system and determined by the quantity of manufacturing orders from overseas. As Taiwan gradually lost its edge in producing light consumer goods for the international markets after the 1980s, the chance to achieve small business ownership has correspondingly diminished. Despite this fact, the expectation of entrepreneurship continues to remain high if not in the traditional manufacturing sector. However, even in the heyday of export industrialization, when there were plentiful business orders, not every working-class Taiwanese male shared equal opportunity to become an entrepreneur. The chance for a male worker to become his own boss varies from industry to

asserting Taiwan-centered historical and cultural consciousness.

industry, depending upon how segmented the production process is and to what extent subcontracting is utilized (Shieh, 1989:30-31). For instance, in the garment industry, those who specialize in cutting fabric pieces and pressing have better chance than those who do packing to establish an independent operation, and knowing about both production and marketing gives one the best edge to become an entrepreneur (Shieh, 1989:31). Capital is also a primary factor. Not only does each individual have a different ability to mobilize financial resources essential for success, it is comparably easier to start up a small factory in labor-intensive industries than capital-intensive ones, or within the same industry in the less capital-concentrated segments of the production (Shieh, 1989:30-31). Within the textile industry, for example, it is easier to begin a dyeing factory than a weaving factory for the latter is more capital intensive (Shieh, 1989:31).

Similarly, as hegemony is at no time fully encompassing, there can be never a singular hegemonic discourse (R. Williams, 1977:112). Accompanied the aspiration for success and prosperity is the ideology of harmony. In the late 1980s, when Taiwan began to feel the pressure of intensified global competition, and the society witnessed a wave of burgeoning social activism, the sentiment that peace and social order needed to be restored to ensure a continuation of economic prosperity was nurtured by the business circle. During labor disputes management and often government mediators stressed cooperation but not confrontation to create "win-win" solutions. Yet, hidden behind the benign face of harmony and the alleged result of prosperity was an attempt to pacify the

disenfranchised (Nader, 1990, 1997). It was a move away from concerns with root causes (in this case, the crisis of capital accumulation) and toward valorization of status quo and vested interests (Nader, 1997:713-714).

The coercive power of the harmony ideology is most pervasive in the Taiwanese family. Ideas of gender and family are essential to the ideological construction of Taiwanese economy. Whereas the past success of Taiwan's export industrialization was closely related to the belief in and practice of entrepreneurship, the attainment of entrepreneurship was supported by the roles of men and women in the family. There is no distinction made between the opportunity of men and women to become economically independent and successful in the developmental ideology. In reality, however, men are considered the household heads and breadwinners, and are encouraged both ideologically and institutionally to be self-employed bosses. Women, on the contrary, are at most auxiliary in that their contribution enables the men in their families to accomplish the goal of entrepreneurship (Hsiung, 1996). Assumed to be the unit of production, accumulation, consumption, and distribution, the family forms the foundation of entrepreneurship. All members of a family presumably share the same inspiration, have equal access to resources, equal opportunity to pursue personal interests (which once again are assumed to coincide with the collective interests of the family), and equal share to the wealth accumulated. Yet, under the framework of patrilineality and patrilocality, men and women secure their share through very different and highly unequal means.

Men as sons are born lifelong members of their fathers' families. Whether or not married, they both contribute to and obtain benefits from the same social unit in which they acquire rights through birth. In the case of Taiwanese women, however, as daughters they are not considered permanent members of the family of orientation. Under Taiwan's export industrialization, they have likely contributed to the wealth of their parents' families, which forms the basis for their brothers' future prospects. A daughter may have helped to build, and also enjoyed, the property and prosperity of her natal family while she is single, but she has no claim over it. Her future rests with her husband's family. A Taiwanese woman does not and cannot attain full status through birth. Her marital status is the primary determinant of her social and economic privileges as well as her cultural and personal identity.

Whether or not they are inspired to be self-sufficient entrepreneurs, women form the core work force in Taiwan's export-oriented labor-intensive industries. Taiwanese women's labor force participation, and the meanings that factory women attribute to their work, are closely related to the culturally specific ideas of gender and family, the focus of the following section.

Gender and the Meaning of Work

Labor is never simply an economic term associated with only human body, physical strength, individual output or productivity. Rather, it has always

been a concept laden with cultural meanings and social connotations. Members of a society are designated to various kinds of labor which are often given different values. Any individual's claim over others' labor has to be recognized – if not legitimized – through a socially approved system of labor division. Therefore, to grasp the full ramifications of the Taiwanese' recent discussion of labor, one needs to look beyond the immediate economic reasoning and to ask questions regarding the construction and conceptualization of labor division and its appropriation. Specifically, gender has to be taken into account, for it is a defining factor in the division of labor in Taiwan's post-war economic development.

Young single women have been the favored labor force in the industrial sector. However, rather than seeing the sexual division of labor as a given, we should acknowledge it as an ever-changing product of the socio-economic processes overtime. The various contending voices in the New New Generation moral discourse reveal just these sorts of processes. The competing views in the moral discourse elucidate in the clearest way the contradiction between gender prescriptions and women factory workers' lived experiences in a world of need, obligation, and opportunity. The apprehension of industrial employers and the society over the young people's putative declining work ethic (and specifically over that of young women, for they are the most sought industrial work force) is thus an example of the inability or unwillingness of those who engaged in,

profited by, or contemplated women's industrial labor to give up their deeply ingrained ideas about men and women (cf. French and James, 1997).

Still, there is more to be considered. Central to Taiwan's labor debate is the discordance of accounts not only between individuals of distinct economic interests (e.g., capital owners and workers) or between men and women, but also among women of different ages. This leads us to two important theoretical issues that are not only relevant in terms of understanding the particular dynamics in Taiwan's recent economic restructuring, but also crucial in advancing our knowledge of the labor and gender politics in the current global economy.

The first issue regards the intersection of gender and other social institutions that define women in the same society as groups of diverse obligations, rights, and interests. Gender has been acknowledged as a primary category for the allocation of political, social and economic power. It is specifically identified as a key factor for understanding the processes of economic globalization insofar as it is fundamental to the organization of production and labor (Nash and Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Nash, 1988; Fernandez-Kelly, 1989b, 1994). However, gender as a category by itself is not sufficient to explain the experiences of women; rather, it is the articulation of gender and other social institutions that has to be examined. Also, similar to the concept of labor, gender is not a system of essentialized cultural beliefs and social

interactions, but a process characterized by heterogeneity and instability and changes overtime (Ginsburg and Tsing, 1990).

To study the relationship of economy and subjectivity formation, we thus have to have a plural understanding of the subject matter. Women as well as men do not exist as a group with monolithic interests. It may be difficult to find a single set of collective consciousness and action. Multiple patterns of capitalist accumulation coexist in each social formation by appropriating a population segmented by varied productive and reproductive roles. Women are thus labeled as different kinds of workers or potential labor force, and integrated into the wage labor market -- separately or concomitantly -- at different stages of industrialization. This is particularly salient in societies like Taiwan where patriarchy predates the penetration of capitalist enterprises⁷¹ in that gender intersects with kinship in these societies and designates individuals into a hierarchical order according to their gender, age, and generational category (Etienne and Leacock, 1980; Nash, 1988). Meanings of gender are manifold, and

⁷¹ In order to clarify the specific historical circumstances in which gender was forged to become a decisive factor in the world systems, Nash (1988) urges a distinction to be made between forms of male dominance between those rest upon patriarchy and those whose male hegemony is imposed. Patriarchy refers to "elder male authority in a gerontocracy. It provides reciprocal benefits to the subordinate females and youths in the society where it prevails, and it implies persistence from past institutions," (Nash, 1988:15). This process differs from the promotion of male dominance in Third World countries where gender hierarchy was originally lacked but fostered in the introduction of capitalist enterprises (Nash, 1988:12).

only substantiated by daily contextualization, as comprehended and enacted by both management and workers.

This was evident in my research. At the time of my research, three distinct groups of women workers were found in Hai-kou's textile industry: women in their late 30s or early 40s, unmarried workers in their late 20s or early 30s, and young single workers in their late teens or early 20s. These three groups of women, as elucidated in the life stories of Yeh Ah-fong, Yang Ch'un-mei, and Lin Hsiao-fen, formed separate work and social groups on the shop floor as well as after work. The separation was not simply derived from differences in their age or marital status, but rather from the connotations these differences implied. Work in general, and industrial work in particular, covered a wide range of meanings for these three groups of women, who differed not only by generation but also by the time in their lives when they started working (Rofel, 1994). Socialization of women in their gender roles fixed the parameters within which particular cultural and social responsibilities had to be fulfilled. This in turn affected their participation in the wage labor market. Concomitantly, they had different ideas about the causes and consequences of Taiwan's recent industrial restructuring, which indeed had a different impact on each group. They thus acted upon their ideas accordingly and differentially.

Comparative to the culturally defined value of labor is the interplay of gender, ethnicity, and nationality in the global division of labor as evidenced in Taiwan's recent economic restructuring. One of the most distinctive features of

Taiwan's recent restructuring is its rapidly transnationalized work force, with an increasingly sizable number of Southeast Asian workers in its industrial sector. This coincides with the larger trend of intra-regional migration in Asia, as Japan and other fast growing Asian economies (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and oil-rich Middle East countries gradually become favored destinations of migration in addition to traditionally preferred Europe and North America (Third World Resurgence, 1996). A central cause of this wave of international migration is the unequal economic development between sending and receiving countries. It is a process by which individuals take advantage of economic opportunities distributed differentially across space (Kearney, 1986:331). Yet, in light of the strict foreign labor policies in the case of Taiwan, it is also intended by receiving countries to maximize the advantage of transnational labor while minimizing the cost of social reproduction in their countries (Kearney, 1986:344). What needs to be addressed, however, is the predominance of Asian women in the current regional migration (Third World Resurgence, 1996). This reflects the important direction and general pattern of labor deployment globally. In Taiwan, industrial producers consider female foreign workers as a favorable source of cheap labor, as they exploit the latter's impaired status as both female and non-national.

Nonetheless, the introduction of new labor also introduced new ways of organizing work. During the course of fieldwork, I observed that some Taiwanese textile producers assigned their male Thai workers to tend looms.

Clearly evinced in these cases was Taiwanese manufacturers' shrewd economic calculation which was not considered as abhorrence within the context of preconceived cultural assumptions. As male and female foreign workers are paid the same wage, and since they are not obliged to follow Taiwanese cultural beliefs, there appeared to be little gain for Taiwanese factory owners to make loom-tending an exclusively woman's job. A job is gender specially labeled only when there are economic incentives and cultural sanctions or disinclination.

Worker's Identity and Women's Agency

When studying workers' identity and resistance in the current global industrialization a fundamental question must be raised. Non-western experiences of capitalism have often been assessed in terms of "class consciousness," a concept largely based on western industrial experiences with an emphasis on "the degree of recognition of class interests, organized action against capital, and even the goal of structural redistribution of power in society" (Ong, 1997:77). Yet, capital has expanded to further and further corners of the world in the current global economic system, and included increasingly heterogeneous groups of people in its work force. Diverse forms of labor control have also developed, ranging from direct supervision on the shop floor, state intervention and suppression, to social and cultural regulations embodied in workers' kin and gender roles. Under these circumstances one needs to examine

whether one can continue to use classic notions such as labor-capital conflict and class consciousness to conceptualize the effects of the latest capitalist expansion. As a matter of fact, instead of direct labor-capital confrontations, recent research often finds workers' resistance "in their oppositional tactics, embodied desires, and alternative interpretations and images" (Ong, 1997:78). Multiple sites of contradiction emerge in late capitalism as diverse social formations are impacted by, and brought into tension with, the encroaching global economic processes (Lowe and Lloyd, 1997:24-25). This is particularly the case in competitive capitalist productions, such as those of Taiwan, where traditional family loyalties and responsibilities as well as relationships between friends and neighbors are drawn upon as a means for labor mobilization. Within such systems the emerging consciousness of young women workers is often an awareness of how their status as daughter and young woman is linked to domination by family, industry, and society. Therefore, in Taiwan, where class consciousness was denied as immoral for workers, by manipulating, contesting, or rejecting their families' claims, women were able to re-access and remake their identities and lives in important ways. This is particularly the case for the most intensely exploited workers in family businesses - young unmarried daughters -- as my research has revealed.

One important question remains, however. That is, how or under what circumstances is women's agency consciously constructed or enacted? To answer this question, if only partially, I would like to go back to my previous

discussion of the concept of hegemony.

As discussed in the previous section, whatever the hegemonic order may be in a society, it can never guide all aspects of social life, neither can it exhaust all possibilities of social dynamics. At most it can be a "partial hegemony" (Ortner, 1996:18), leaving sites of alternative practices and perspectives that may become the bases for resistance and transformation. Accordingly, as Ortner (1996:17) has suggested, it is thereupon in the lapses in social reproduction, the erosions of long-standing patterns, and at the moments of disorder and of outright anger and obstruction that the subaltern agency including that of women is most likely discovered.

My research in Hai-kou shows that women's agency was most expressive at the moment of disjunction when a young daughter broke away from the culturally sanctioned life trajectory to marriage and pursued a course of her own outside the traditional family spectrum. Against the background of patriliney, a woman's refusal to marry upsets the balance of obligations and rights that she and her natal family have over each other. This generally disrupts the formation of the ideal patrilineal family, as illuminated in the case of the Wang household, for the woman in question is subjected to a state of ambiguity and insecurity that often leads to her parents' concern about and need for special arrangements for her future.

This kind of cultural transgression is particularly meaningful under Taiwan's current economic circumstances. This is not simply because it shows

Taiwanese women's desire and individual points of view, as opposed to the roles expected of them in the culture, though this fact is certainly in itself important. It is significant because the society's need for industrial labor provides a material base for women's decision to remain single while being able to be self-sufficient. Moreover, it is crucial because through the need for special arrangements for unmarried daughters, we may begin to see Taiwanese parents' aberration from the patrilineal cultural ideal, forming a potential site for challenging the patrilineal hegemony. Last and most importantly, it elucidates the paradoxical yet dialectical relationship between the cultural ideal and practical economic consideration. Given the current tight labor market and the soaring international competition faced by Taiwanese manufacturers, parents and brother(s) in a small factory-owning family may feel ambivalent about their unmarried daughter-sister. On the one hand, the young woman's single status likely brings social pressure and stigma to the family, but on the other hand, she can make up their urgently needed production labor. A young woman who chooses to seek a future of her own may find herself caught in a dubious state of freedom to pursue personal advancement and exploitation due to the increasing family need for workers. Both of these have a root in Taiwan's changing economy, and both of these reckon their claim through patrilineal family ideology.

Appendix 1

Taiwan's Outward Investment by Region, 1952-1993
(in thousands of U.S. dollars)

Year	Asia	Americas	Europe	Oceania	Africa	Total
1952-79	43,057	13,576	142	2,074	441	59,290
1980	3,170	35,130	1,000	2,781	24	42,105
1981	6,738	1,795	2,231	-	-	10,764
1982	9,132	2,500	-	-	-	11,632
1983	6,561	2,858	-	144	1,000	10,563
1984	6,551	32,178	-	134	400	39,263
1985	4,206	35,830	891	7	400	41,334
1986	8,412	46,738	194	717	850	56,911
1987	21,302	80,250	199	-	1,000	102,751
1988	69,299	130,335	12,005	6,134	963	218,736
1989	296,372	624,431	2,333	-	7,850	930,986
1990	602,910	838,711	96,176	1,397	13,012	1,552,206
1991	929,819	658,958	60,289	2,441	4,523	1,656,030
1992	369,929	449,096	45,933	5,426	16,875	887,259
1993	663,514	739,610	255,913	983	415	1,660,435

Source: Investment Commission, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taipei, Statistics on Outward Investment, various issues; in Schive, 1995:71.

Appendix 2

Taiwan's Investment in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
and the People's Republic of China (PRC), 1959-1993
(in millions of U.S. dollars and number of projects)

Year	Thailand		Malaysia		Philippines		Indonesia		PRC
	Taiwan approved	Local	Taiwan approved	Local	Taiwan approved	Local	Taiwan approved	Local	(Contract basis)
1959-86	15.2 (29)	577.5 (157)	7.3 (19)	50.4 (138)	27.5 (12)	7.8 (54)	10.1 (1)	170.0 (3)	-
1987	5.4 (5)	307.6 (102)	5.8 (5)	91.0 (37)	2.6 (3)	9.0 (43)	1.0 (1)	8.4 (3)	100.0 (80)
1988	11.9 (15)	859.9 (308)	2.7 (5)	313.0 (111)	36.2 (7)	109.9 (86)	1.9 (3)	913.0 (17)	420.0 (355)
1989	51.6 (23)	892.2 (214)	158.6 (25)	815.0 (191)	6 (13)	148.7 (190)	148.7 (1)	158.0 (50)	517.0 (547)
1990	149.4 (39)	782.7 (144)	184.9 (36)	23,83.0 (270)	123.6 (16)	140.7 (158)	61.9 (18)	618.3 (94)	984.0 (111,7)
1991	86.4 (33)	583.5 (69)	442.0 (35)	1,314.2 (182)	1.3 (2)	11.6 (109)	160.3 (25)	1,056.5 (57)	1,392.3 (1,735)
1992	83.3 (23)	289.9 (44)	155.7 (13)	602 (137)	1.2 (3)	9.3 (27)	39.9 (20)	563.3 (23)	5,547.9 (6,430)
1993	109.2 (19)	215.0 (61)	64.5 (18)	346.5 (86)	6.5 (12)	5.4 (21)	25.5 (11)	131.4 (21)	9,965.0 (10,948)

Sources: Investment Commission, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Statistics on Outward Investment, various issues; Board of Investment (BOI), Thailand; Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (MIDA), Malaysia; Board of Investment (BOI), the Philippines; Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal (BKPM) [Investment Coordinating Board], Indonesia; compiled in Schive, 1995:72-73.

The numbers in () beneath the dollar amounts denote the number of projects.

Appendix 3

Taiwan's Outward Investment by Destination, 1952-October 1994 (On Approval Basis)

Location of Investment	Number of projects	Amount (U.S.\$ million)	Rank	Distribution of Taiwan's outward investment
PRC	10,605	\$4,405.4	1	33.8%
Hong Kong	274	599.2	3	4.6%
Singapore	92	231.5	6	1.8%
Thailand	196	568.9	4	4.4%
Japan	75	101.7	7	0.8%
United States	660	2,432.8	2	18.6%
Panama	11	106.6	8	0.8%
United Kingdom	38	286.3	5	2.2%
Oceania	23	47.6	-	0.4%
Other areas	727	4,268.2	-	32.7%
Total	12,746	\$13,048.2	-	

Source: Investment Commission, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Taipei, Statistics on Outward Investment, Indirect Mainland Investment, various issues; in Schive, 1995:79.

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