

New Experiences for an Old Visitor

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Although I have visited Taiwan countless times since my first trip in August, 1963, this visit had two features that were unique for me.

First, it was the only time that I stayed on a university campus. Student life is emphasized, as on an American campus—Internet, consumer goods, sports facilities are provided. I enjoyed the cheap, good food in the quick-food court, especially the Chinese-style breakfasts. Different from a U.S. campus, however, is the presence of many dogs, apparently not owned by anyone but somehow cared for collectively and living in peace with one another and the students. At Columbia,

dogs are not welcome, with the exception of seeing eye dogs for blind people. Some large mid-western campuses in the U.S. are full of dogs, but they are the pets of individual people. An un-owned dog will be rounded up and taken away.

I understand—or perhaps I misunderstand—that Tsinghua's hospitality for independent dogs is part of the campus's commitment to living in harmony with nature. This also helps explain something else that struck my attention, the untended look of the campus vegetation. On an American campus lawns are treated with chemicals so that weeds don't grow and the grass is carefully trimmed to present a homogeneous expanse of the same color and height. In wooded areas trees are culled and pruned to present an orderly, park-like look. At Tsinghua, I had the impression that people want to feel as though they are living in a mountainside retreat that is untended rather than cultivated, perhaps like the hermits in old Chinese paintings who can better contemplate the *GDR* of the universe in the midst of nature.

Teacher-student relations on a Taiwan campus are different from what they are on an American campus—or so I would generalize from my limited experience. The American university experience involves an element of a commercial transaction. The student pays tuition (or has it paid for him via fellowship) and purchases instruction. The

professor provides this hired service. A friendship may or may not form, based on mutual choice, not obligation on either side. Even though teachers are older than students and have the power to evaluate them and affect their careers, the culture of the American campus favors a spirit of equality, especially in graduate programs, the use of first names, and an informality that minimizes differences in age.

The feeling I got as a teacher on the Tsinghua campus was quite different. The students seemed grateful that I was willing to teach them. They liked to come and see me in pairs or groups as if it would be too scary to see me alone. Their demeanor was shy, and since I encountered no disagreements or contentious questions, it was easy to slip into pontificating, and to begin to feel very wise. I was treated with great care, as if I was fragile. All this made me feel much more respected than I am allowed to feel in my own society. It was easy to get used to this quickly!

The CfCC has a special spirit. It has the mission to bring Taiwan's society a new, deeper understanding of mainland China based on grassroots contact and research. This is an innovative project that requires tremendous effort to get off the ground, so that everyone connected with the Center is working hard in a team effort. This feels different from the situation of American graduate students, who are each pursuing an individual project within an established discipline. While American graduate students are developing a personal academic profile in order to promote their individual careers, there is a strong sense of collegiality and common enterprise among the CfCC's students and between them and faculty and staff.

The second thing that made my visit unusual

was that I had never before visited Taiwan with children. My wife and two kids—ages 5 and 8—joined me after I finished lecturing, and we spent another ten days as tourists, both with friends and by ourselves. I discovered a whole new layer of Taiwan life, directed at kids, that I never noticed before.

The morning after the family arrived we went for a walk in Da'an Park, and ran into some old friends who happened also to be walking there. The friends took us to the flower market under the Jianguo Expressway overpass, and bought some souvenirs for the children. We visited the Taipei Water Museum and the kids went wading with what must have been hundreds of other children in the water park there. Friends took us to the American Club where the kids ate hot dogs, hamburgers, and ice cream and participated in a water sports competition. One night when friends invited us to dinner they brought their own children who brought along board games and card games to help entertain our children—and to try to keep them awake, since they were jet-lagged—an effort that ultimately failed, as they went to sleep on the restaurant chairs. Several times, friends who took us to dinner brought bags of gifts for the children, which made them feel very special.

Outside of Taipei, we went to the Huanlien Ocean Park, where the kids watched dolphins perform, enjoyed water rides and a roller coaster, and—again—ate hamburgers and ice cream. The children also greatly enjoyed wading in a wild river in Taroko Gorge—Oliver ended up falling into the river and getting completely wet—and eating at the buffet in the Grand Formosa Hotel. At the Hotel Royal in Chih-pen, we met a lot of children from other places in Taiwan who were also vacationing

there with their families, and who spoke excellent English and were interested in playing in the water with our kids.

Back in Taipei again, we visited the Taipei Children's Recreation Center in the big park on Zhong-shan North Road, which is full of fascinating exhibits of Chinese crafts and culture. When I had the opportunity to pay a call on Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, he was closely familiar with this center and glad to hear that we had enjoyed it. Suddenly I realized that to succeed in Taiwan politics you need a policy not only on cross-Strait relations but on children's play places.

Now, several months later, our kids still talk about their friends from Taiwan, remember many details of the visit, can say "*QLKDR PD*," and are proud of their knowledge of Chinese culture, especially including cuisine. Isabel still doesn't understand, though, why the waiters thought it was

funny when she ordered white rice and soy sauce as her main dish.

Although it is a cliché, I cannot resist saying that Taiwan has changed enormously in the thirty-plus years that I have been visiting. It is a joy to see the prosperity, vitality, and sense of freedom that Taiwan's citizens have earned for themselves. On the campus, students can devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge, if they chose to do so, in an atmosphere of freedom and with the instruction of the most excellent faculty. In society, people can devote themselves to the arts of living, including the art of raising children. You have to know the history, to understand the effort and sacrifice that this has taken, since on the surface, this easy way of life appears so normal and smooth. All I wish for my friends in Taiwan is that this precious way of life will continue.