

CHAPTER 1

Taiwan's Great Transformation

Taiwan was a colony of Japan from 1895 to 1945. It was ceded to the Chinese government, led then by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (KMT, short for Kuomintang [國民黨]), after Japan lost the Second World War in 1945. Although only a province of the Republic of China (ROC) upon the retrocession, Taiwan became the de facto ROC after the KMT was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War and retreated to Taiwan in 1949. The relationship between the KMT and the local society of Taiwan has been rocky. To rid the Japanese influence and to establish its supremacy, the KMT implemented Mandarin-centered cultural and educational policy on the predominantly Japanese- and Taiwanese-speaking population. Politically, a martial law was imposed. Authoritarian rule based on repression and coercion was the norm. Epitomized by the February 28 (2-28) incident in 1947 and the subsequent White Terror in the 1950s, the KMT quickly eliminated most of the dissidents and many of the Taiwanese elites, and suppressed the rest of the society into silence. In the first few decades after WWII, the KMT had an iron grip on the Taiwanese society, under which the state, the central/national government, and the KMT were essentially synonyms. Yet, interestingly, in contrast to its tight control over the political sphere, the KMT had a rather lenient attitude toward economic activities. Despite the fact that the KMT-led government owned the majority of the large, capital-intensive enterprises in heavy industries, it left most of the small businesses unregulated and to thrive on their own. It was a widely shared sentiment among the Taiwanese then—though with a tint of cynicism, or practicality—that one could be left alone, make a lot of money, and have a good life, as long as one did not make trouble and was well behaved.

But things were gradually changing. This book tells a different story starting in the late 1980s. The late 1980s was a time of great transformation—a time of both confusion and turbulence, and new possibilities—after the past few decades of forced calm in Taiwan’s post-WWII history. After several decades of struggle, with many lives lost and individuals persecuted and imprisoned, the political tension in Taiwan gradually abated. The government began to consider 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, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), 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. This was particularly so after the lifting of martial law. 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. In addition, consumer advocates, retired and aged veterans, aborigines, farmers, teachers, and college students all added their agenda to the already highly volatile social milieu (Hsu and Sung 1989). 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 postwar 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 the 1980s.

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 this 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. 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, *tsi li chiu chi* (自力救濟), 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, particularly when compared to the earlier quiet and orderly era, when the government had tight control over the society.

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 criticizing, depicting the Taiwan government as “lacking public authority and power” (*kung ch'uan li pu chang* [公權力不彰]). They charged that the government was incapable of purging 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; 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 withdraw from 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. 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 was 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 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 socioeconomic circumstances in which these events took place and the bleak future in store for the majority of these laid-off workers.

When I started this research in the early 1990s, 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 this 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 to 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.

It seemed that only labor activists were concerned about these issues. Many of those with whom I had conversations¹ indeed pointed out that the new jobs laid-off workers were able to find were usually marginal, less stable, and 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 investigation in the Taipei metropolitan area, confirmed their observations. Bo's (1993) research on the plant closings 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" (i.e., unregistered) factories, and many became homeworkers. Needless to say, the wage and working conditions of most of these new jobs were worse than the old ones. Furthermore, labor activists with whom I talked were very concerned about the extensive scale of plant closings. They were particularly critical of the fact that many large firms in or near metropolitan areas were shut down not because the production costs were too high to be profitable, but because the lands on 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 to 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 factory owners frequently used plant closings as a means to escape from paying workers' retirement pensions, which were frequently twice as much as the severance pay in plant-

closing cases (Hsia 1993; You 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-oriented industrialization, were approaching this "deadline" at the end of the 1980s. They were anxious about the enormous expenditure for retirement pensions they would have to pay. They considered it to be a great financial burden, particularly under the soaring global competition. Some evaded 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 then announced to the workers that they could no longer 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 forties or early fifties. They were not only forced to give up their retirement pension and accept lower severance pay instead, but they also had great difficulty in finding new jobs due to their age and seniority.

Subsequently, the unemployment rate began to soar after the mid-1990s (Table 1.1); and one-fourth of the unemployed fell between age thirty-five and forty-nine (Table 1.2). Together, this gradually aroused a concern in Taiwan, where people had enjoyed nearly full employment until very recently. A newspaper article in 1997,² entitled "To become

Table 1.1
Unemployment Rate by Sex (%)

<i>Average of Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
1966	3.02	2.28	4.91
1971	1.66	1.47	2.10
1976	1.78	1.59	2.19
1981	1.36	1.21	1.65
1986	2.66	2.75	2.53
1991	1.51	1.50	1.53
1996	2.60	2.72	2.42
1997	2.72	2.94	2.37
1998	2.69	2.93	2.33
1999	2.92	3.23	2.46
2000	2.99	3.36	2.44
2001	4.57	5.16	3.17

Source: Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics (DGBAS) (July 2002). Adapted from *National Statistics: Social Indicators* (<http://www.dgbas.gov.tw>).

Table 1.2
Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment (%)

<i>Average of Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Primary & Below</i>	<i>Junior High</i>	<i>Senior High & Vocational</i>	<i>Junior College & Above</i>
1966	3.02	—*	—*	5.03	2.58
1971	1.66	—*	—*	4.55	2.62
1976	1.78	—*	—*	4.63	3.46
1981	1.36	0.46	1.69	2.72	2.23
1986	2.66	1.12	2.85	4.41	3.76
1991	1.51	0.56	1.61	2.16	2.04
1996	2.60	1.40	2.77	3.00	3.13
1997	2.72	1.77	3.25	3.02	2.76
1998	2.69	1.65	2.97	3.09	2.80
1999	2.92	1.99	3.28	3.23	2.93
2000	2.99	2.05	3.50	3.34	2.80
2001	4.57	3.56	5.75	5.12	3.72

Source: Adapted from DGBAS (2002).

*Data not available.

middle-aged is not a mistake. The mistake was to have chosen the wrong vocation” (*Chung nien pu shi ts’uo, ts’uo tsai tang nien ju ts’uo hang?* [中年不是錯，錯在當年入錯行?]), attributed the climbing unemployment rate to an enlarged population of middle-aged male workers³ who lost their jobs due to plant closing or factory relocation. 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, 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.

Nonetheless, the disheartening news of a mounting unemployment rate did not dominate the society’s attention; neither did the labor activists’ organizing efforts to counteract the impact of plant closing and relocation. There were only sporadic reports that made it to the newspaper headlines that helped to raise temporary interest of the society. For the most part, the discussion of labor shortages led the popular discourse. Taiwanese industrial producers were complaining vehemently that they could not find workers, and according to them, one of the major causes for this was the Taiwanese’ declining work ethic, especially that of the New New Generation (*Hsin hsin ren lei* [新新人類]). The expres-

sion, 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 to describe the generation of rich and carefree urban youth born after 1965, when the Japanese excelled in the world economy.⁴ In Taiwan, where the course of economic development trailed after Japan, the phrase was used to judge the generation of young people who were born after the 1970s, when Taiwan began to win the name of “economic miracle.” Government statistics seemed to support this “New New Generation” moral discourse. According to the Council of Labor Affairs (1995), the labor force participation rate reached a peak of 61 percent of the whole population in 1987 but has dropped since then. Subsequently, Taiwanese employers urged the government to find workers for them. Otherwise, they would be left with no choice but to leave the country and make their investment elsewhere.

In response, the Taiwan government legalized the hiring of foreign labor in the early 1990s, but employers continued to complain that the allowed quotas were too low, and the procedures for hiring foreign laborers were too cumbersome. Under local employers’ pressing threat to move overseas, the government responded by introducing more open policies regarding foreign labor employment. Even after the labor unions of some of Taiwan’s leading corporations (mainly in the petrochemical industry) reported that their companies were deliberately replacing the Taiwanese workforce with foreign workers to reduce the labor cost, the government’s increasingly lenient policies were not challenged. Yet, 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.

Theoretical Premises

What intrigues me are the ways in which the logic of capital engages the logic of culture, based on which individual decisions are made and their daily practices are informed. 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 calculation common to all players in the global economic system. But this line of analysis is insufficient at least in two respects. Cross-culturally, a full understanding of the issue in question must elucidate the differences in response and strategy, or the different meanings associated with similar strategies as observed around the world, which distinguish the Taiwanese

case from others. Concomitantly, at the societal level, one also has to be able to explain the formation of dominant discourses that allows for the rise of certain industrial strategies in spite of and according to the social stratification and differentiation.

Answers to these concerns can be obtained only by looking closely at the articulation of culture, history, and economy, as shown in the expressions of people involved (Blim 1992; Cairoli 1998; Nash 1989). A linkage between the following two theoretical endeavors, I believe, will be informative to the current pursuit.

Culture and Economy in Asian Capitalisms

Ever since the global economic restructuring after the 1960s, East Asian nations have been in the forefront of scholarly attention. The East Asian NICs witnessed not only 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 contributed most to the East Asian "economic miracle" and whether the experiences of these countries provided qualitatively distinct forms of capitalist development from the West. In the case of Taiwan, the focus of discussion has been on an array of social, political, and economic activity lying between family and state (Bosco 1990; Skoggard 1996). Recent literature identifies the Taiwan state as a major factor because of its prodevelopment policies, and its strength and autonomy from foreign influence and from the intervention of vested interest groups in Taiwan (Deyo 1987; Gold 1986; Wade 1990; Winckler and Greenhalgh 1990). The role of the family is also acknowledged. Specifically, the desire for family security and prosperity has been recognized as a powerful motivation behind entrepreneurial activities (Harrell 1985; Niehoff 1987; Stites 1982, 1985). This has contributed to the flourishing of small businesses, 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; Gereffi and Pan 1994). Lately, the term "Network Capitalism" has been coined to illustrate the emphasis on personalistic ties (both within the family and among business partners) in Chinese societies including Taiwan (Hamilton 1998; Hefner 1998).

Labor, Gender, and Global Industrialization

Though with a different theoretical pursuit in mind, the effort to understand the culturally specific patterns of Asian capitalisms has

reinforced the recognition that these economies are part of the current global economic system typified by capital accumulation. Consequently, changes in Taiwan's industrial sector exemplify the larger process of flexible accumulation in the current global economy (Harvey 1989), which is characterized by the employment of increasingly heterogeneous workforces and the utilization of multiple modes of production. The variety of industrial situations linked to flexible accumulation raised anew questions about workers' relations with, and their responses to, capitalist transformation (Ong 1997). Specifically, as women emerged to be the major force in the global assembly line, models of regulation based on gender ideologies have been developed to control labor (Fernandez-Kelly 1994; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Safa 1995; Ward 1990). These ranged from direct despotic labor management in large firms (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Kim 1997; C. Lee 1998; Ong 1987) to paternalistic control in small-scale, family-centered factories (Greenhalgh 1994; Hsiung 1996). The latter is particularly common in Taiwan, where young women's role in the family made them an ideal source of cheap labor essential to Taiwan's early export-oriented industrialization (Arrigo 1980; Cheng and Hsiung 1992; Diamond 1979; R. Gallin 1984a, 1984b, 1990; Kung 1994; Salaff 1995). In response, women workers seeking improvement in the workplace and in their lives adopted strategies both within and outside the traditional realm of class struggle, drawing inspiration from their individual cultures. Despite the fact that most of the tactics adopted by women workers were ineffective in challenging the hegemony of capital, these cultural struggles often engendered a new sense of self and community for the workers, thus imposing potential challenge to the constitution of civil society (Ong 1997:86; also see Cairoli 1998; Mills 1997, 1999).

I believe that changes in gender roles and gender ideologies are keys to understand Taiwan's recent economic 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. It is through gender that production is organized; it is also through the language of gender that the labor-management relations are largely defined. Gender is therefore an interlocutor of the dynamics between culture and economy, of structure and agency, and of the processes of global, national, and local, that this book seeks to understand. To make clear these points, I will examine the labor and gender politics in the textile industry in Homei, by making connections among capital accumulation, shifting of work organization and discourse on work ethics, and the formation of women's subjectivity.

Homei: The Field Site

Homei 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 colonization (1895–1945). The choice of Homei was more a result of accidents and coincidence than a conscious selection.⁵ Yet, because of its residents' extensive engagement in the textile production, Homei turned out to be an ideal site for my research. Textile production was one of the first few industries pursued by the Taiwanese in the post-WWII era, and with the assistance from the government it soon became Taiwan's leading industry. The development of Homei's textile industry thus stands for Taiwan's post-WWII economic history, signifying the process of Taiwan's incorporation into the global economy. Although the scale of production is sharply reduced, and local capital and labor have both become transnationalized, textile continues to be the most important industry in Homei even today. The local residents' long engagement in textile production, in relation to Taiwan's short history of industrialization, made the industry an integral part of the local culture and memory. Almost every individual I met in Homei had a story to tell about textile. They were either working or once worked in textile factories, or they knew someone who was or had been a textile worker. Their families might have owned or ran a textile factory, or they were suppliers of raw textile materials. Some of them sold or repaired machines. Still, there were others who were representatives of local, national, or international trading companies. Local women of almost all ages had been part of the textile workforce. Grandmothers in their sixties were veterans from the initial stage, while their teenage granddaughters just entered the trade 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 Homei began with a small weaving factory owned by the Wang family, whose two youngest daughters, Mei-hua and Meiling, became my best guides and companions during the course of my research. I treasure their friendship to these days. 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 beginning of the heyday of the local export-oriented textile manufacturing—relying on family assets accumulated and converted from agriculture for initial capital. Their production scale was small (never exceeding a hundred semiautomatic looms), and the nature of their business was subcontracting. Although

they had always hired workers, family members made up the most essential core of the workforce. Like the majority of their counterparts in Homei, the Wang factory has always been, and will continue to be, a family enterprise. It depends on the will and wits of family members to sail through economic ups-and-downs.

Through the introduction of the Wang family, I then moved into the dormitory of another local textile company, where I lived and studied for the next nine months. This second home of mine, which I call Treasure Island, was different from the Wang factory and atypical of the local textile industry in many respects. First and foremost, the company was not a family business but had multiple investors. Second, its size was comparatively large by the local standard. At the time of my research, Treasure Island consisted of two production units, one for spinning and the other for weaving. The company employed roughly 150 shop floor workers, a number far exceeding that of workers hired (usually fewer than 30) in most of the local settings. Third, instead of being just a subcontracting firm like most of the local operations, it had 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, was painted high on the front gate of the company for every passer-by to see. Likewise, the company kept a trading office in Taipei City to take charge of its trading business. However, its weaving section was still under subcontracting operation. Fourth, benefiting from its relatively large size, the company was still able to attract young single women who were nearly absent in small factories. Among the company’s 150 shop-floor workers, two-thirds of them were Taiwanese, with half of them young single women and the other half married women with children. The other one-third of the workforce comprised of foreign workers from Thailand, a common practice adopted by many of the local textile factories to supplement the short labor supply since the early 1990s.

In spite of these differences, the company shared many things in common with other local manufacturers in this “sunset” industry (夕陽工業)—a metaphor widely used in Taiwan to refer to its labor-intensive industries, whose best days are over and will never come back again. Local textile factories all faced intensified competition not only from entrepreneurs in the rapidly rising industrializing countries in Asia but also from their fellow Taiwanese businessmen who had relocated their production to these countries. The margin of their profit was further squeezed by the competition from these overseas Taiwanese producers, who shared the same customer base as well as a similar level of machinery, technology, and business skills as their Taiwan-based counterparts. Also, like Treasure Island, many of the textile manufacturers in Homei

relied on foreign workers, at least as a temporary arrangement, to relieve them both from the pressure of rising labor costs and the difficulty of finding workers.

Studying Treasure Island granted me certain advantages. This opportunity was especially precious for me at the beginning stage of my research. Thanks to the size of the company, 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 in the later stage of my fieldwork. Specifically, 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 that of small firms or family factories. I learned from the management of Treasure Island 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, staff, and management personnel in this company came from different villages near Homei, with a few exceptions who came from less industrialized regions in central Taiwan. Whereas many workers had already worked at Treasure Island for more than ten years, others had just joined this company. Some of the workers never changed their jobs; Treasure Island was their first and only workplace thus far. There were still others who had rich experience with local employers, however, either because they were veterans from previous plant-closing incidents or simply because they chose to change jobs often. Therefore, even though the labor pool at Treasure Island was not big enough to be a microcosm of the larger industrial community, it certainly covered a wide range of workers and worker's experiences. Moreover, it is worth noting that mothers and/or mothers-in-law of many of the employees also worked (and some were still working at the time of my research) in textile factories. Their experiences and those of their daughters and daughters-in-law provided a valuable transgenerational comparison of the workers' profile. A cross-generational comparison of working women's lives is especially meaningful in the Taiwanese context. Taiwan witnessed a swift transformation in less than four decades, from being a poverty-stricken agrarian society, to one based on full-fledged, successful export-oriented industrialization, and now to one experiencing the decline of industrial manufacturing as well as the booming of the service

sector. The experiences of different generations of women workers are thus manifestations of the evolving global economic system, as it intertwines with Taiwan's local culture and economy.

The experience 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. Here I draw my inspiration from Nash (1985), who identified two categories of firms with distinct types of labor-management relations in advanced capitalist economies: those in the monopolistic sector and those in the competitive sector. In the U.S. context, 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 groups, such as women and minorities, for labor. Also, smaller firms depend on commonsense approaches to labor recruitment and tenure, while large corporations develop more explicit and rationalized personnel relations (Nash 1985:60). Although the difference between Treasure Island and the Wang family factory is not equivalent to that of the monopolistic and competitive sectors—both of these Taiwanese firms are in the competitive sector—the existence of multiple forms of labor control was quickly observed. These two places 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, in addition to 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.

After Treasure Island and the Wang family, I moved around in the town and conducted interviews in various neighborhoods and villages at the later stage of my research. This later stage of fieldwork broadened my understanding of the labor and business practices I had observed in the previous 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).

On Doing Native Anthropology

My status of being a native anthropologist—i.e., someone who was born and raised in the culture she studies—proved mostly positive in understanding the practices, motivations, and emotions of people in my research in Homei, 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 that shape one's living experience. More significantly, it is through their comparison of and comments on my ways of life that I saw most clearly their perception 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 Homei 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 diplomas, 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 by leaving my husband unattended in New York City, which included taking care of the daily chores and my husband's sexual (and to a lesser degree, emotional) need for companionship. As a matter of fact, many married women at 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 over my grant money to my husband for deposit. She cautioned that I would never see the money again because my husband would most likely use it up for vulgar purposes.

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 to toil under the sun]." My hands were apparently not hands of those who had to sweat for a living; nor were they hands of a wife and mother who had to labor to keep her house and children tidy. My clothes were clean and spotless; there were no oil stains on them. I often wore white T-shirts. 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 one of them 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, as soon as 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 for my accomplishment—but both women workers and I knew well that I would not have easily gone this far had my family 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 family. As evidenced in the life stories presented later in this book, I have very little doubt that, if these women had been given the opportunity, they would have chosen a very different life trajectory. Why should anyone choose to work in a textile factory as a teenager if she does not need to?

My closeness with Taiwanese workers, unfortunately, also diverted my attention from foreign workers. As 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 people in my research. 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 more often than not warmly welcomed. Also, not foreseeing the relevance of the foreign component of the current manufacturing workforce, 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 Homei. Without a common language to bridge the communication gap, my contact with foreign workers in Homei was mostly limited to daily greetings, although on a few occasions I did manage to engage in short but superficial conversation in English, if they happened to come from the Philippines or were educated to understand the language. Nevertheless, none of these encounters resulted in fruitful understandings.

Plan of the Book

This book consists of seven chapters. Between this Introduction and the conclusions in Chapter Seven, Chapters Two through Six address different issues, as they are related to Taiwan's recent economic restructuring. Each chapter also engages in dialogue with one theoretical concern relevant to the question of East Asian development. Together, this book intends to show that any static understanding of the relationship between culture and economy fails to capture the important dimensions of the relationship. It is precisely the fact that culture and economy change both as a result of the other and also in response to other forces outside the other that demonstrates the complexity of issues under study. As such, in the broader context of anthropological theory, this book develops a dialectic approach to culture and economy. This stands in contrast to reductionist approaches that attempt to subordinate one to the other.

Chapter Two, "From Sunrise to Sunset," deals with the development of the textile industry in Homei. This chapter aims to elucidate the rise of a decentralized production system in the local area and the specific relations of production embedded in it, a topic much discussed in the past study of the Taiwan economy. While past literature focuses mainly on the economic implications of Taiwan's decentralized production system in the country's advancement in the global economy, this chapter emphasizes the significance of its cultural ethos. The decentralized pro-

duction system, itself a historical product, built up a set of dispositions from which Taiwanese factory owners and workers drew their understanding and strategies in response to the latest economic changes. It also helped to fashion dominant discourses in the society. Specifically, this chapter argues that the “black-hand becoming boss” cultural ideal, which was made into reality concurring with the success of the decentralized production system, facilitated the legitimacy of the factory owners’ claim of labor shortage and the society’s declining work ethic that was said to cause the labor shortage.

It is at this juncture that we begin to observe the mutually transforming effect of local cultural beliefs and economic practices, as they are affected by the conditions in the global economic system. Chapter Three, “The Waning of a Hard Work Ethic,” looks at the interface of these issues. To problematize Taiwan’s recent economic predicaments as an issue of work ethic not only had a cultural root but in turn implicated the strategies factory owners might adopt to solve their problems; this in turn shapes the path of their future. Yet, there was always a possibility that, knowing how labor costs could undercut one’s profit, factory owners were simply exploiting the common sentiment of the society to their own advantage. Whether or not it was motivated by a calculated move, the discourse of the labor shortage and of the declining work ethic (which I named the “New New Generation” moral discourse in chapter Three) had asserted an encompassing effect—or a hegemonic status—that informed the Taiwanese’ thoughts and actions. Subsequently, the discourse did not exist in a void but was continuously supported by a material reality.

On the other hand, in spite of its hegemonic nature, the New New Generation moral discourse was by no means free from challenge or oppositions. Chapter Three also examines the different accounts given by people in Homei of Taiwan’s recent economic restructuring, focusing especially on the conflicting notions surrounding the moral discourse. This theme is further elaborated in Chapter Four, “The Meaning of Work,” which personalizes and contextualizes these diverse views through the lives and subject formation of female textile workers. By way of the life stories of three Treasure Island employees, who differed in age and marital status and belonged to different generations, Chapter Four documents the rapid transformation in Taiwan’s wage labor market, the cultural and socioeconomic forces that brought about the transformation, and the dialectical relationship between the structural change and women workers’ personal lives. Most relevant to the current economic restructuring, the tight labor market has increased the employment opportunity of married women, who were previously considered as less

dependable because of their domestic responsibilities but now are regarded as more reliable, since young women are no longer available. Young women who choose to work in factories also tend to have a strong sense of economic independence, for industrial employers eagerly seek after them. Some even felt that they could choose to remain unmarried and support themselves with their wages. Why these women should want to remain single, and how they managed to do it without risking being ridiculed as abnormal or antisocial—both of which are cultural questions—are two of the foci of this chapter.

As I am essentially engaging in translation between an objective world and a subjective one (Ortner 1989:18), I adopt the concepts of practice and agency to aid this task. Originally crafted by Bourdieu (1977) and later refined by Ortner (1984, 1996), practice emerged as a theoretical tool to bridge the gap between symbolic analysis and political economy, by which sociocultural life is considered to be a product of both societal structure and individual agency (Knauff 1996:105–140; Pinches 1999:5). That is, on the one hand, “individual practices are seen as constrained and orchestrated by collective structures of cultural logic or organization,” but on the other hand, “individuals are also seen as agents who reinforce or resist the larger structure that encompasses them” (Knauff 1996:105–140). Borrowing Ortner’s own words (1989:18),

One observes actors in real circumstances using their cultural frames to interpret and meaningfully act upon the world, converting it from a stubborn object to a knowable and manageable life-place. At the same time one observes the other edge of their process, as actors’ modes of engaging the world generate more stubborn objects (either the same or novel ones) that escape their frames and, as it were, reenter the observer’s.

However powerful a culture is as a guiding force of behavior, it can at best be a partial hegemony (Ortner 1996:17), leaving sites of practices and perspectives that may become the bases for resistance and transformation. The erosion of longstanding patterns as a result of individual alternative practices is revealed in Chapter Five, “Between Filial Daughter and Loyal Sister.” Chapter Five details the rise and fall of the Wang family factory, whose success relied primarily on the seamless cooperation of its family members. The family has long been an important area of research in Chinese studies, and it is often considered as a corporate unit within which members contribute to advance its collective welfare under the leadership of the household head, usually the father of the family. This chapter challenges this cultural assumption by highlighting the conflicting views and interests of people—especially the two

youngest daughters—in the Wang family. In resonance with the previous chapter, the appropriate roles for women had been redefined as a result of the past economic development, which fostered a demographic recomposition in the wage labor market. This in turn challenged the existing gender ideologies that had helped to impose moral imperatives to the social division of labor until the recent economic restructuring. Yet, paradoxically, while young women have obtained more employment opportunities outside the traditional industrial sector, daughters of small-scale, family-centered factories also face new contradictions in their lives. Specifically, in a time of labor shortage, family loyalty is continuously evoked in order to keep daughters to work for their family factories. This frequently calls for an altered course of action from young women's own expectation, thus subjecting them in a moral dilemma.

If the previous chapters demonstrate the importance of culture in shaping the specific pattern that a local economy adopts to respond to the conditions in the global economy, thus suggesting the possibility of plural forms of capitalism, Chapter Six, "Guests from the Tropics," coming to a full circle, attends to Taiwan's conformity to the logic of capital accumulation in capitalism. Chapter Six tackles the issue of foreign labor, one of the most dramatic trends in Taiwan's recent economy. In spite of their constant lament of young Taiwanese' waning work ethic, textile producers in Homei articulate the hiring of foreign labor largely in economic terms. They calculated the labor cost they could save from employing foreign workers. They continued to explore new sources of foreign labor by going further inland in both continental and island Southeast Asia, where the workers were said to be cheaper, less sophisticated, and more obedient. They also urged the Taiwan government to certify foreign labor from an increasingly long list of countries including China. Unique to the current global economy is "the particular circuits of capital and labor that have resulted from competition over time" (Fernandez-Kelly 1989a:152), and labor and capital migrations across national borders represent two contemporary aspects of the same process. Taiwanese manufacturers, including those in Homei, are apparently taking advantage of both, in spite of their limitations.