UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

Ku-Mo:
Popular Culture and the Impossible Sovereignty of Taiwan

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Jamin Duane Shih

Committee in charge:

Professor Ma Vang
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2020

The Dissertation of Jamin Duane Shih is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2020

For my family

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Acknowledgments

A joke is to a rectangle as an anxiety is to a square, and I have spent much of the last five years joking about precarity. It forms part of the foundation of my analysis on the impossible sovereignty of Taiwan and it has come to be the primary lens with which I have interpreted my experience in academia. Precarity breeds cynicism, hopelessness, and despair, but as I hope to show in the following pages with respect to Taiwan, it also affords a great deal of opportunity. I would not be writing this without the precarity of the academic industry as it stands today and, as admittedly pretentious as it is, perhaps nothing has shaped and supported my path to this dissertation more than the gnawing millennial despair that is precarity.

The industry as it stands today is an increasingly unequal and increasingly precarious beast where even friends and colleagues with multiple prestigious degrees from multiple prestigious universities, with publications, grants, and far too many post-docs are not guaranteed the stability of a tenure-track job, and throughout my writing process this anxiety of what room there is for someone without the prestige and without the accolades has fermented into being what has, paradoxically, gotten me to the end. Without the promise of stability, the disciplinary limits of the institution no longer seem binding. When there is no longer a carrot, you don't have to walk straight. Without precarity, my dissertation would look radically different—probably better, but almost certainly more boring—and my teaching and presentation techniques would be radically more standard and professional and less experimental. So for that, I have to acknowledge the precarity of academia for offering me the circumstances to leave with a dissertation and work experience I am, largely, proud of.

Now that I am off my soapbox, I, of course, need to thank my parents, who have risked everything to move to a new country so their son could make questionable decisions, who have stood with me and supported their queer son through years of child TV acting, playwrighting, forensic osteology, field primatology, and finally academic unemployment. Your love and support is priceless, I am beyond lucky to be your son, and 如果沒有你們, 我真的不知道我今天會在做什麼. I also need to thank my sister Xenia, who is a constant beacon of support and guidance, and who is always telling me what I don't want to hear when I most need to hear it.

I owe so much to my fellow graduate students Michelle Yeung, Amrit Deol, Neama Alamri, and Alex John Quijano, who have essentially been a second academic committee, for keeping me here, pushing me to be at least marginally better, and accompanying me to all-you-can-eat-buffets. Graduate school is inherently isolating, and it would have been impossible to make it through without you all with me. My friends outside of academia as well, in San Jose, Austin, and Columbia, have kept me grounded in the world outside of this institution and been the "life" in "work-life balance." I am also so appreciative of the work my committee, Anneeth Kaur Hundle, David Torres-Rouff, and Nigel Hatton, have put in to supporting my work and getting me to the finish line. I especially have to thank my chair and mentor Ma Vang, for always pushing me to be better and serving as a source of guidance and support, even when it has not been easy. All of your support was necessary and appreciated.

I end with my family once again, because I often find myself returning to them, as I did five years ago after years across state and national borders: I have never known what was next, but I always knew I could count on your love and support. And since there is no true written language to express our native tongue:

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Fresh Off the Page, Onto the Screen: Translations of Eddie Huang and the *Ku-Mo* Illegibility of Taiwanese American Stories **(Submitted, under review)**

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09/2016 – 04/2017	**Committee** | Queer I(ntervention)S Conference
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Abstract

Ku-Mo: Popular Culture and the Impossible Sovereignty of Taiwan
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This project examines the ways Taiwan's contested sovereignty pokes holes in dominant understandings of what it means to be a sovereign nation based on the discourses of Taiwan that appear in transnational popular culture and media. As a result of Taiwan's role as a global economic center, the traces Taiwan leaves behind in transnational media, and the scandals they garner, reflect the larger dynamic of Taiwan as a constant problem and yet a valuable commodity for powerful nation-states. Taiwan is simultaneously a site of transnational profit for states like China, as well as a rhetorical threat to a One China Policy. This liminality represents a kind of *impossible sovereignty*—one that is politically illegible, but functional nonetheless. This form of sovereign absurdity for Taiwan is perhaps best encapsulated by the Hokkien term *ku-mo*. *Ku-mo* is a transliteration of a 台語 colloquialism 龜毛, which describes someone who is slow or high maintenance to the point of inconveniencing others. There is a second definition to 龜毛, one grounded in a Buddhist idiom that represents an absurdity—something that does not and ought not to exist. I argue that Taiwan's impossible sovereignty can be described as *ku-mo* in the sense that it is conceptualized both as an impossibility and an inconvenience that disrupts otherwise uniform and smooth processes of international trade and media production.

Taiwan's contemporary liminal sovereignty presents a profound problem for the very nation-states that attempt to erase it, and as a result of Taiwan's role as a center of transnational capital, the debate over Taiwanese sovereignty is contested and mediated transnationally through culture and the culture industry of multiple nation-states. The relevant question of Taiwan's sovereignty for us is not, "Is Taiwan sovereign?" but rather "What does the discourse surrounding the question of Taiwanese sovereignty accomplish and how does it function?" Examining sovereignty as a discourse and a practice allows us to explore the ways conceptions of sovereignty are defined by documentation, institutions, and bureaucracy that are perpetually attempting to contain that which cannot be contained.

Introduction
Turtle Fur

> *"Taiwan feels like nothing more than an asterisk to the world, a nuisance to be dealt with."*
> -Bessie Chu, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust," in *Chrysanthemum* (2017)

There were two tiny turtles in a small plastic fish tank on the dining room table, crawling over each other as if trying to get out. We had been hounding our parents for a puppy for what seemed like more years than we had been alive. Every happy American family we could barely see through the static of our television had a golden retriever, and most of my friends seemed to as well. A dog was friendly, cuddlable, and the key to the kind of American sitcom life that seemed perpetually just out of reach. But after laying eyes on the clumsy reptiles, I swallowed my disappointment and decided turtles were almost as good as a dog.

The turtles were from Flushing, New York, a neighborhood in Queens known for its bustling Mandarin Town that took off when a huge influx of Taiwanese immigrated into the city. My dad told me he bought them as cheap pets from an almost-certainly-illegal street vendor in Mandarin Town selling definitely-extremely-illegal red-eared slider turtles, which by then were widely maligned as an invasive species and were often illegal to sell as a result of salmonella concerns. They were not supposed to be sold or owned, and they were definitely not the pet of the Tanner or Camden family. The turtles were not supposed to exist as they did in the United States.

Our turtles—creatively named Dumbo and Toadette by a child who should not have been allowed to name them—were not bright and were often the cause of much distress. They seemed unable to find food unless someone led them directly to it by pointing to it, and when one managed to escape the tank, it took several hours to find it lounging on television wires. When we needed to move from the East Coast to the West, from one Taiwanese ethnic enclave to another, there was much debate about what to do with the turtles. It seemed cruel and inhumane to release them into a pond when they seemed far too incompetent to find food left for them in their own tank. And, in retrospect, the abandonment of pet red-eared sliders was the primary cause of their reputation as a dangerous, invasive species. So, without a better option, they came with us on the week-long drive from New Jersey to California—with a brief stop in the Midwest to drop off my college-bound sister. On at least one occasion, I had to hide them in a large empty soda cup to smuggle the definitely-now-even-more-contrabanded turtles into a hotel and, in a precursor to my brazen disregard for my own health and safety, I pretended to drink the soda throughout the check-in process to subvert the hotel's formal no-pets policy. But seemingly against all odds, the turtles made it to California. They survived the impossible car-ride from Ellis to Angel Island and situated themselves on a new coast, in new tanks but still hidden from a U.S. policy that deemed them impossible.

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Image 1 | One of our red-eared sliders, named Toadette.

Taiwanese have a lot of idioms about turtles. When a person completely fails at a task or strikes out in a gamble, they are said to *keng-ku* (槓龜). When a person is lethargic and lazy, they are *tok-ku* (啄龜). And when a person is finnicky and inconvenient to the people around them, they are *ku-mo* (龜毛).[1] These terms speak to the particular representations of turtles in Taiwan as endearing in their failures. It might sound like an insult when someone is said to *keng-ku*—they are, after all, essentially being compared to a foolish turtle. But the image conjured by the phrase of a turtle crawling backwards is not a condemnation of an individual turtle but a recognition that life is complex and we inevitably find ourselves, at one point or another, going backwards. *Keng-ku* is an expression of exasperation, a resignation to the absurdity of the circumstances, and a call to reorient oneself and focus on the challenge at hand. It is an acknowledgement not that the turtle is unsuited for the challenges of the world but that sometimes the world is unable to make sense of the turtle.

I find a great deal of comfort in a Taiwanese conceptualization of the humble turtle and see it as a theoretically generative site to consider the ways Taiwan as an island and Taiwanese as people have been rendered largely illegible to much of the rest of the world. Like the red-eared sliders that are legally invisible and yet require fresh tank water on a far too regular basis, an officially unsovereign Taiwan is simultaneously nonexistent to the world and yet leaves measurable and visible traces behind it (Image 1). But in lieu of a pessimistic view of this political nonexistence, I attempt to turn this liminal space on its back—or its shell, so to speak—and argue that this illegible non-sovereignty might afford more power and agency than we might initially think.

My project aims to convince you of two claims: 1) that Taiwan's contemporary liminal sovereignty presents a profound problem for the very nation-states that attempt to erase it, and 2) that as a result of the increasing power of transnational capital, the debate over Taiwanese sovereignty is contested and mediated transnationally through culture and the culture industry of multiple nation-states. I do this by introducing two terms, one in my native tongue of English and the other in my distinctly-not-native tongue of

[1] Hokkien phrases translated by author. Due to the lack of a formal writing system for Taiwanese Hokkien, the associated Chinese characters are commonly, though not always, chosen based on phonetic similarity rather than meaning.

Hokkien Taiwanese: *impossible sovereignty* and *ku-mo*. And I apply these theoretical terms, which I will explore further below, to various manifestations of Taiwan's illegible appearance in written, filmed, played, and consumed media—from legislation to newscasts to pop music to video games and to food. It is not that Taiwan is unique in this illegibility—red-eared sliders are, after all, now a part of the 100 World's Worst Invasive Alien Species list despite our attempts to cull their numbers. Rather, drawing from a small taste of the epistemological knowledge of Hokkien provides a useful avenue to understand and theorize the contemporary crises of sovereignty of Taiwan. And this framework of the liberatory potential of precarity can perhaps reconceptualize how we define the notion of sovereignty altogether.

Much prior research in East Asian Studies on Taiwan from the United States has centered around questions like: is or should Taiwan be sovereign?[2] What are the implications of a Taiwanese sovereignty on U.S. trade and military goals?[3] What can Taiwan teach us about the trajectory of Asian economies and development?[4] These are

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[2] Chai, Trong R., "The Future of Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 26.12 (1986): 1309-323.; Chen, Lung-chu and W. M. Reisman, "Who Owns Taiwan: A Search for International Title," *The Yale Law Journal* 81.4 (March 1972): 599-671.; Chen, Tung-Pi, "Bridge Across the Formosa Strait: Private Law Relations Between Taiwan and Mainland China," *J. Chinese L.* 4 (1990): 101.; Davis, Michael C., "The Concept of Statehood and the Status of Taiwan," *J. Chinese. L.* 4 (1990): 135.; Downen, Robert L. *To Bridge the Taiwan Strait: The Complexities of China's Reunification*, (Washington, D.C.: Council for Social and Economic Studies, 1984).; Duncanson, Dennis, "What is Taiwan to China?" *Asian Affairs* 17.3 (1986): 288-297.; Gold, Thomas B., "The Status Quo is Not Static: Mainland-Taiwan Relations," *Asian Survey* 27.3 (March 1987): 300-315.; Gordon, Leonard, "American Planning for Taiwan, 1942-1945," *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (January 1968): 201.; Huan, Guo-cang, "Taiwan: A View From Beijing," *Foreign Affairs* 63 (1984): 1064.

[3] Bueler, William M. "Taiwan: A Problem of International Law or Politics?" *The World Today* 27.6 (June 1971): 256-266.; Bundy, Agnes J., "The Reunification of China with Hong Kong and its implications for Taiwan: An analysis of the 'One Country, Two Systems' Model," *Cal. W. Int'l LJ.* 19 (1988): 271.; Bush, Richard, "Helping the Republic of China to Defend Itself," *A Unique Relationship: The United States and the Republic of China under the Taiwan Relations Act*, ed., Ramon Hawley Myers (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1989): 79-118.; Chang, King-yuh, "Partnership in Transition: A Review of Recent Taipei-Washington Relations," *Asian Survey* 21.6 (June 1981): 603-621.; Dunbaugh, Kerry B. & Richard F. Grimmett, "Arms Sales to China: The Limits to U.S.-Chinese Military Cooperation," *Washington Quarterly* 9.3 (1986): 89-99.; Garver, John W., "The 'New Type' of Sino-Soviet Relations," *Asian Survey* 29.12 (December 1989): 1136-1152.; Gregor, A. James & Maria Hsia Chang, "Arms control, regional stability and the Taiwan relations act," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 3.1 (1980): 3-25.; Gregor, A. James & Maria Hsia Chang, "Military power, the Taiwan relations act, and US interests in East Asia," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 8.3 (1985): 247-259.; Hsiao, Gene T., "The Legal Status of Taiwan in the Normalization of Sino-American Relations," *Rutgers L. J.* 14 (1982): 839).; Javits, Jacob K., "Congress and Foreign Relations: The Taiwan Relations Act," *Foreign Affairs* 60 (1981): 54. Nolan, Janne E. "The Role of US Policy in Promoting the Defense Industries of South Korea and Taiwan," *Military Industry in Taiwan and South Korea* (New York: Springer, 1986): 19044.; Panda, Rajaram, "Sino-US accord on Taiwan," *China Report* 19.1 (1983): 3-6.; Ravenal, Earl C, "Approaching China, Defending Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs* 50.1 (Oct 1971): 44-58.; Sheikh, Ahmed, "The United States and Taiwan After Derecognition: Consequences and Legal Remedies," *Washington and Lee Law Review* 37 (Spring 1980): 323.; Van Vranken Hickey, Dennis, "U.S. Arms Sales to Taiwan: Institutionalized Ambiguity," *Asian Survey* 26.12 (December 1986): 1324-1336.; Van Vranken Hickey, Dennis, "America's Two-Point Policy and the Future of Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 28.8 (August 1988): 881-896.

[4] Barrett, Richard E. and Martin King Whyte, "Dependency Theory and Taiwan: Analysis of a Deviant Case," *American Journal of Sociology*, 87.5 (March 1982): 1064-1089.; Chan, Steve, "The Mouse that Roared: Taiwan's Management of Trade Relations with the United States," *Comparative Political Studies*

some of the world's least interesting questions on Taiwan and they reflect the field's roots in East Asian Studies where the primary intellectual goal was contributing to the expansion of the U.S. empire. Studies on Taiwan began gaining traction in U.S. academia by the 1960s but truly skyrocketed in the 1980s, concurrent both with an increasingly complex triadic political relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC), as well as a major wave of skill-based immigration from Taiwan into the U.S. under the 1965 Hart-Celler Act.[5] This combination—transnational U.S.-Taiwan (Kuomintang) political ties; an oppressive period of Taiwanese martial law; the economic incentives of a U.S. advanced degree; and U.S. immigration policy that opened the door for professionals and graduate students from Taiwan—"expedited the exodus of [Taiwanese] talents and labor from the island to the United States," and emboldened U.S. academic and political interests into the island.[6]

In turn, these three constituent parts of the Taiwan Question—(1) whether Taiwan is sovereign, (2) what its implications are on U.S. aims, and (3) how Taiwan might be a model for an analysis of Asian development—came to form the bulk of U.S. scholarship on Taiwan in the mid-to-late 20th century and served largely to justify, explain, or provide next steps for a U.S. political sovereignty project of Taiwan. As a 1972 joint statement between Chairman Mao Tse-tung's China and President Richard Nixon's United States expresses, "The Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States," and as a result the U.S. expressed profound "interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves."[7] Yet this interest was never quite as passive as it tried to frame itself. Because of the political, economic, and military usefulness of Taiwan for the U.S.—the island "served as a base for covert operations elsewhere in the region," such as Laos—scholarship on Taiwan was necessary to produce knowledge both of how the U.S. could use Taiwan effectively but also how this use of Taiwan was actually a benevolent human

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20.3 (October 1987): 251-292.; Copper, John F., "Taiwan in 1986: Back on Top Again," *Asian Survey* 27.1 (January 1987): 81-91.; Gold, Thomas B., "Colonial Origins of Taiwanese Capitalism," *Contending Approaches to the Political Economy of Taiwan*, eds., Edwin A. Winkcler and Susan Greenhalgh (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1988): 101-120.; Greenburg, Keith Elliott, "With New Image, Taiwan Emerging from Mainland China's Shadow," *Public Relations Journal*, 45.10 (1989): 11.; Gurtov, Melvin, "The Taiwan Strait Crisis Revisited: Politics and Foreign Policy in Chinese Motives," *Modern China* 2.1 (January 1976): 49-103.; Hsiao, Frank S. T. and Lawrence R. Sullivan, "The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan, 1928-1943," *Pacific Affairs* 52.3 (Autumn, 1979): 446-467.; Huang, Chi, "The State and Foreign Investment: The Cases of Taiwan and Singapore," *Comparative Political Studies* 22.1 (April 1989): 93-121.; Scobell, Andrew, "Taiwan: The Other China," *The Brookings Review* 6.4 (Fall 1988): 31-37.; Winckler, Edwin A., "Contending Approaches to East Asian Development," *Contending Approaches to the Political Economy of Taiwan*, eds., Edwin A. Winckler and Susan Greenhalgh (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1988): 20-40.; Winckler, Edwin A. and Susan Greenhalgh, "Analytical Issues and Historical Episodes," *Contending Approaches to the Political Economy of Taiwan*, eds., Edwin A. Winckler and Susan Greenhalgh (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1988): 3-19.

[5] Ng, Franklin, *The Taiwanese Americans*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998).

[6] Lien, Pei-Te, "Transnational Homeland Concerns and Participation in US Politics: A Comparison among Immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 2.1 (2006): 62.

[7] "Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People's Republic of China" *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972, ed., Steven E. Phillips, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2006), Document 203.

rights campaign against the horrors of Chinese communism.[8] The suite of scholarship constituting this Taiwan Question have come to be the primary, if not sole, lens through which Taiwan is legible in U.S. academia, and this has grown to constrain how a knowledge of Taiwan is produced even today.

These three components are not mutually exclusive, and scholarship on Taiwan has often found itself dabbling in several, if not all of these questions. The work of Lung-chu Chen and W. M. Reisman (1972), for instance, is a fitting representative of the first frame of the Taiwan Question but also finds itself firmly intrenched in the discourses of the second. In their 1972 law article fittingly titled, "Who Owns Taiwan," Chen and Reisman provide a history of the People's Republic of China and Republic of China in order to evaluate a number of potential legal claims to the island, such as prescriptive title, occupative title, and contiguous title.[9] Like in other scholarship of this type, the knowledge it produces on Taiwan takes on the lens of passive, objective observation that merely describe political and legal realities and offer advice on potential paths forward. Its interest lies in finding a way to provide an answer to the Taiwan Question, not in interrogating the nature of the question itself.

Earl C. Ravenal's (1971) work, too, attempts to create an answer to the Taiwan Question by highlighting the impacts a sovereign or non-sovereign Taiwan might have on U.S. influence and goals in Asia. For Ravenal, "[the United States'] defense relationship with Taiwan is integral to the question of recognizing the governments and states of China," and in turn "[if] the consequences of our defense arrangement are not grasped, and the problems not deliberately resolved… the United States may proceed to underwrite a new order in East Asia that offers at best a tense military equilibrium and perpetual American involvement in the political evolution of the region."[10] Taiwan presents itself in this framework, then, as a herald for all future U.S. interests in Asia and a case study for what U.S. involvement ought to or ought not to look like. In this third and final component, scholars like Edwin Winckler (1988) promised to find ways to use Taiwan as a model to understand a so-called East Asian development paradigm that might futher influence U.S. foreign policy and interests.[11] Together, these three components of the Taiwan Question have circumscribed Taiwan into an eternal academic debate over its sovereignty since the 1960s, which has in turn legitimized and prolonged this never-ending debate in politics as well. Worse, these debates rarely extend beyond the most conservative and traditional conceptions of sovereignty or the nation-state, and thus preclude any possibility for Taiwan outside of these paradigms.

Instead of contributing to either the legacy of an imperial East Asian Studies, I'd like to participate in and help build a growing Taiwanese and Taiwanese American scholarship, along the lines of Wendy Cheng (2017), Emma Jinhua Teng (2006), and Yi-Ting Chang (2019), that is interested in challenging the liberal logics of the nation-state.[12]

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[8] Tucker, Nancy Bienkpof, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1994): 65.
[9] Chen & Reisman.
[10] Ravenal, 44.
[11] Winckler, "Contending Approaches to East Asian Development."
[12] Cheng, Wendy, "'This Contradictory but Fantastic Thing': Student Networks and Political Activism in Cold War Taiwanese/America." *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 2 (2017): 161-191.; Teng, Emma

Wen Liu's (2019) and Chih-ming Wang's (2012) work similarly disrupt U.S. narratives of a Taiwan dependent on or in debt to Western military or economic intervention by highlighting Taiwan's liberatory potential outside of a Western communist-containment framework.[13] And scholars like Anita Chang (2019) envision sovereignty not as something Taiwan is lacking but as something it might help us reconsider.[14] The sooner we can move past the roadblock of the Taiwan Question, the sooner we can begin to ask more complex questions about Taiwan, removed from the interests of a U.S. international relations or foreign policy. To that end, I take it for granted that Taiwan is sovereign without the formal recognition of the international community and instead analyze the inconvenience and absurdity that this impossible sovereignty creates when the normative ideas of the liberal nation-state and sovereign recognition cannot process it. This is not, and perhaps cannot, be a clean cut from the historical literature. But while I must engage and grapple with the legacies of Taiwan Studies in the U.S., I do so not as the main arena of my intervention but as a starting point from which we must pivot. The Taiwan Question exists and will persist despite my objections, so in these introductory pages I acknowledge it so we may begin to move beyond it in the coming chapters. For, when we shift the theoretical framework from trying to determine what Taiwanese (un-)sovereignty looks like to what it accomplishes, we open the door to new questions and solutions to the tanks that we find ourselves in.

Methodology

I deploy my concepts of *ku-mo* and impossible sovereignty as analytics for a discursive analysis of how Taiwan is spoken about and represented in politics, media, popular culture, and the everyday. While in the case of political or military threats from China, rhetoric and discourse might seem largely inconsequential, I see the discursive creation of a Taiwan Question as the foundation for the island's material precarity. Taiwan is not simply a place—a revelation Maile Arvin helps to trace with respect to Polynesia; it is also a concept constructed by a scholastic U.S. political sovereignty project of Taiwan.[15] How Taiwan has been spoken about in academia has created a Taiwan that is both impossible yet inconvenient; non-existent yet disruptive. And in turn, it has trapped us into a Taiwan Question that can never be solved for Taiwan, China, or the United States. Taiwan has become illegible outside of the purview of the euphemism "cross-strait relations," and this has successfully obscured the many ways a Taiwanese sovereignty already exists and already disrupts traditional notions of state sovereignty.

It is for this reason that we turn our attention to how Taiwan is discursively created—not to take for granted their validity but to interrogate the political work

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Jinhua, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).; Chang, Yi-Ting. "Beyond Independence and Nation-State: Archipelagic Ambiguity in Shawna Yang Ryan's *Green Island*." Paper presented at the American Studies Association, Honolulu, November 2019.

[13] Liu, Wen, Paper presented at the American Studies Association, Honolulu, November 2019.; Wang, Chih-ming, "Editorial introduction: between nations and across the ocean," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13.2 (June 2012): 165-175.

[14] Chang, Anita, Paper presented at the American Studies Association, Honolulu, November 2019.

[15] Arvin, Maile, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

political discourses of Taiwan accomplish. I am not interested in proving that Taiwan is sovereign or even that it deserves to be considered sovereign at all. Instead, I examine the ways Taiwan's disruptive impossible sovereignty pokes holes in dominant understandings of what it means to be a sovereign nation based on the discourses of Taiwan that appear in popular culture and media. As a result of Taiwan's role as a global economic center, the traces Taiwan leaves behind in popular culture and media are palpable and reflect the larger dynamic of the project of Taiwan as a constant problem and yet a valuable commodity. Taiwan is simultaneously a site of transnational profit for large states like China, as well as an ever-present threat to a political narrative of a united cross-strait China. If we look into these counter-narratives to a U.S. political sovereignty project of Taiwan in popular culture, media, and the everyday, we find the discursive constructions of Taiwan are much more complex and interesting than simply "good China."

For a project in such a liminal position, it is necessary to ground my theorizing within the Taiwanese and Taiwanese American context. This, for me, is a form of making visible and reclaiming local epistemologies—those which are too often generalized as Chinese or American. For this purpose, I deploy Taiwanese idioms, which often reject accurate translation into English, and instead center the knowledge in 臺語 (*taiyu*). The use of *taiyu*—sometimes called Taiwanese, *minnanhua*, or Hokkien—is a way to talk back to a history where my mother was publicly shamed for speaking her language in school and where my own fragmented *taiyu* is a result of not just second-generation language loss but a legacy of linguistic colonialism. It is also a way to ground this project in its colonial context—to locate which Taiwan I speak of; it is one which, while the subject of Chinese and Japanese colonial rule, is itself the colonizer of the almost thirty recognized indigenous peoples of Taiwan. My use, then, of *taiyu* idioms and phrases is not to claim a sense of indigeneity—a claim that has indeed been a harmful and influential factor in the construction of a new Taiwanese nationalism—instead, it is to identify the historical links between these ideas and the complex colonial relationships that precede and are embedded in them.

But there is an additional layer of impossibility embedded in trying to theorize from colloquial knowledge. Taiwanese Hokkien largely lacks a written counterpart. Written Chinese characters are used to approximate sounds or meanings for many Taiwanese words, but there is a palpable inaccuracy in much of this translation and idioms or vernacular are hit the hardest. There are terms that, even for my native Hokkien and Mandarin-speaking parents, can't seem to be translated into written Chinese at all. In terms of romanization, Pe̍h-ōe-jī (POJ) is perhaps the most developed and was created by Western missionaries but has failed to be accepted widely by native Hokkien speakers and is even less recognized outside of Taiwan. A modified version called Tâi-lô was instituted in 2006 as one of the official romanized script systems by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education, but again has not taken off for speakers who still prefer to use Chinese characters when necessary, or who otherwise claim there is no writing system. In my own attempts to identify how best to transcribe Hokkien phrases, I have seen a not insignificant number of transcriptions that use Pinyin—a Mandarin transcription system that is widely known but lacks identifiers for many of Hokkien's tones and consonants. For the time being, I use POJ here as it is the most legible within academic circles, even

when I feel the consonants clumsily pushing up against the boundaries of romanization. In any case, each of these writing systems fail, in some way, to properly make legible Taiwanese Hokkien for a broader audience, and the language has remained in this position of partial legibility to the outside world. This process of trying and failing to comprehend and translate Taiwanese outside of the island is symbolic, for me, of the precarious political position Taiwan has found itself in since the mid-20th century—as an inconvenience that is recognized but can never truly be processed—and this can perhaps be no better demonstrated than by the ways Taiwan and Taiwanese seem to disrupt global processes and defy political logic.

But before I can further explore the ways Taiwan's illegible international status is mediated through culture and the culture industry, I will explain and develop my theoretical concepts of *impossible sovereignty* and *ku-mo* to demonstrate both how I am thinking through these ideas as well as how I apply it to my cultural sites. Next, I will provide a brief overview of the historical context of Taiwan that has led up to its contested status. It would do a great disservice to the complexity of this history to claim to be able to cover all relevant eras or events in just these few pages; instead, I focus on a handful of key moments in Taiwan's history leading up to the establishment of a modern Taiwan that exemplify the ways the island has been alternatively claimed and rejected by major colonial powers like China, Japan, and the United States. This is to show the ways its contemporary contested sovereignty reflects a historical liminality and not to act as a comprehensive overview of centuries of Taiwanese history. Finally, I will close by walking through how this project is structured and what each of the following chapters interrogates.

Impossible Sovereignty and *Ku-Mo*: The Inconvenience and Absurdity of Taiwan

For ten years, my parents were officially born in China. At the encouragement of a United States naturalization official in New Jersey, my parents officially signed their place of birth to a country to which they had never yet been. They had been warned that a failure to comply might lead to complications including but not limited to being blocked from travel to China. Considering the possibility of a trip to revisit the hometown of my paternal grandfather, they deemed the safest choice was to relocate the past. When we actually stepped on Chinese soil four years later, none of our American passports were even closely examined. This strange homecoming to a foreign home was predicated not only on the transposition of births more than one hundred miles away but on the transposition of citizenship to the United States.

China refuses to acknowledge passports from Taiwan, officially the Republic of China, or passports that list Taiwan as a birthplace. Even the bureaucratic processes of documentation and border checks warp themselves around the ambiguity over the status of Taiwan. Taiwanese passports will not get stamped, as it would be a form of implicit recognition of Taiwan as a separate state. So, when in 2015 my mother was preparing to leave Chinese soil, she considered several options on what airline officials might stamp to approve her exit. Without the legitimacy of a passport and with the thick glossy coating of the official Taiwan Compatriot Permit that would reject the ink, she settled on tentatively handing over her boarding pass, which was summarily given a passport stamp. This boarding pass, doubling as a passport for an island which must not exist, has become

emblematic to me of the kind of impossibility and absurdity that the status of Taiwan creates when it appears.

In the insistence of Taiwan's inexistence, the impact of Taiwan grows only more visible. Like a ghost whose presence is felt if not seen or the distortion of pixels surrounding what must be erased, the very means of not seeing Taiwan produce a political knowledge of Taiwan. It necessitates the creation of entirely new processes to handle what might otherwise be routine procedures. If it is politically necessary to continually affirm the nonexistence of a people, it is evident this existence is as real as its impact. When in 2011 my parents renewed their United States passports, they asked to change their place of birth to Taiwan, a request that was met with confusion—how did where you were born change? I see a parallel, but inverse question: how does a bureaucratic process rewrite a life? This bureaucratic impossibility demonstrates one form of Taiwan's rupture into systems that appear to be airtight.

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Traditional definitions of state sovereignty rely on either recognition-based or declarative ideas of sovereignty—both of which are ultimately at the mercy of more powerful states and rely on a conflation of states as legal individuals with individual rights. The constitutive theory of statehood views state sovereignty as existent only if recognized by one or a group of already recognized states. However this theory, as critiqued by Edwin Borchard (1942), is dependent on the existence of a supposedly objective or impartial body of recognized states to fairly determine which states are recognizable. Since Borchard sees this is logistically impossible, a constitutive theory of statehood fails to accurately describe what the concept of a real state sovereignty is. For Borchard, sovereignty ought not to solely be a product of another state's recognition but should be based in something more concrete.[16] In addition, as scholars like David Strang (1996) argue, the constitutive theory of statehood is itself a product of a Westphalian model and not applicable to states like Greece or China. Non-Western sovereignty was "actively delegitimated within the community of Western states and societies… [which was] crucial in structural conventional routes toward colonial domination, and… sometimes led toward recognition of non-Western polities as sovereign states."[17] As a result of this slipperiness of the concept of sovereignty, Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (1996) deconstruct *state sovereignty* into its two constituent parts: *the state* and *sovereignty,* explicitly to allow for an analysis of contested sovereignties like those of Taiwan's who may be recognized as one but not the other.[18]

The declarative theory of statehood, in contrast, defines state sovereignty as a series of measurable criteria, including the existence of a defined territory, population, and governing body. As codified by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, the declarative theory of statehood views state sovereignty as

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[16] Borchard, Edwin, "Recognition and Non-recognition," *American Journal of International Law 36.1*. (1942): 108-111.

[17] Strang, David, "Contested sovereignty: the social construction of colonial imperialism," *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, eds. Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, (Melbourne: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996): 25.

[18] Biersteker, Thomas J. and Cynthia Weber, "The social construction of state sovereignty," *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, eds. Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, (Melbourne: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996): 19.

"independent of recognition by the other states," and recognition as "merely [signifying] that the state which recognizes it accepts the personality of the other with all the rights and duties determined by international law."[19] However, while a declarative theory is more inclusive of impossible sovereignties and is indeed the rhetoric that many pro-Taiwan advocates have attempted to leverage, it is still limited by a focus on obtaining external recognition. While the declarative theory views state sovereignty as independent from recognition, the goal of such a theory is still, paradoxically, to gain recognition as a sovereign state even through its assertion that recognition is not necessary. This is not to say that the pursuit of sovereignty is not valuable or cannot result in material benefits, but instead to acknowledge that state sovereignty is socially constructed and always being redefined to include some and exclude others. Biersteker and Weber view state sovereignty as eternally evolving from the divine sovereignty of God-sanctioned monarchies to the seemingly natural sovereign borders of mountain ranges and oceans to the declarative theory of the early 1900s. In this sense it is not enough simply to define one's state within the boundaries of recognized sovereignty or to attempt to recreate a more just definition of sovereignty; instead it becomes necessary to analyze the function of sovereignty itself and recognize "the practice of granting or withholding sovereign recognition [as participating] in the social construction of territories, populations, and authority claims."[20] A project of sovereignty "is neither natural nor ever fully 'completed.' It has to be actively propped up and preserved, and its meanings and their referents vary across both time and space."[21]

Contested sovereignties, then, offer a liberating theoretical way out of these traditional definitions of sovereignty. Scholars like Yaniv Voller (2015) identify contested sovereignties as generative sites of democratization as a result of increased international attention and transnational criticism of the government.[22] For Voller, the very circumstances of political precarity that seem to doom a state to complete erasure are what sows the seeds of grassroots social movements that criticize the government, demand change, and uplift people power. David Strang notes the contested sovereignties of an imperial context reframe dominant understandings of state sovereignty by revealing how imperial expansion engages in sovereign negotiation outside of the bounds of political recognition.[23]

The constructed nature of sovereignty lends itself to wildly ambivalent and seemingly contradictory characteristics, which Wendy Brown (2010) dissects by identifying the paradoxes inherent within sovereignty. For Brown, sovereignty "is both a name for absolute power and a name for political freedom… generates order through subordination and freedom through autonomy."[24] Sovereignty is simultaneously the hammer of oppression and the banner that promises liberation. Like a flag, sovereignty is at once inclusionary and exclusionary. Buying into the discourse of sovereignty for

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[19] "Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States," Opened for signature December 26, 1933.
[20] Biersteker and Weber, 14.
[21] Biersteker and Weber, 18.
[22] Voller, Yaniv, "Contested sovereignty as an opportunity: understanding democratic transitions in unrecognized states," *Democratization* 22.4. (2015): 610-630.
[23] Strang.
[24] Brown, Wendy, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010): 53.

unrecognized states, then, is not a truly transformative act, but is instead a request that only other (non-)nations are excluded. This is the sovereignty dilemma that Naeem Inayatullah (1996) identifies where pursuing state recognition for impossible sovereignties "[seeks] permission from the very state agents whose purificatory national agenda may have motivated global humanitarian concerns in the first place."[25] But Inayatullah is not content to dismantle sovereignty completely, for to "erode and delegitimize sovereignty for all states… merely [sidesteps] the sovereignty dilemma rather than [working] through it."[26] Instead, he advocates for a greater focus on the political economy of states and a right to wealth that centers acknowledging sovereignty's origin in imperial economic exploitation and argues for a greater emphasis on the economics of state sovereignty. But while I see eye-to-eye with Inayatullah on the economic and imperial dynamics of sovereignty, we diverge on the value of dismantling the concept of sovereignty; where Inayatullah sees the disruption of sovereignty as avoiding the question, I see it as a generative and liberating space of precarity.

For me, asking the question of whether Taiwan is sovereign is taking the terms of external powers for granted rather than analyzing what the focus on sovereignty accomplishes. It is acquiescing to the validity of colonial histories and the logics of powerful nation-states to determine who or what is sovereign. Instead, I choose to analyze why it might be politically necessary for so many to continually reassert that Taiwan and the Taiwanese do not exist. This is to say that the relevant question of Taiwan's sovereignty for me is not, "Is Taiwan sovereign?" but rather "What does the discourse surrounding the question of Taiwanese sovereignty accomplish and how does it function?" Once we reject the terms that have been placed before us as givens—in this case the conventional wisdom that Taiwan is not sovereign—we are able to examine the processes that are happening not as natural or immutable but instead as flexible, fallible, and always incomplete in its goal. Examining sovereignty as a discourse and a practice allows us to explore the ways conceptions of sovereignty are defined by documentation, institutions, and bureaucracy that are perpetually attempting to contain that which cannot be contained. In this endless pursuit of formal recognition, it is necessary for these processes to create exception upon exception to supposedly universal policies in order to reinforce its own appearance of total control. It is from here that impossible sovereignties arise—by all official accounts these sovereignties do not and cannot exist, and yet their impact in the very processes that seek to erase them are all the more plainly evident.

Taiwan's tumultuous history of colonial occupation and liminal sovereignty is reflected in its contemporary status as an unrecognized but self-governed state. This liminality represents a kind of *impossible sovereignty* to me—one that is politically illegible, but that continues to function regardless, and that must be erased. The process of erasure, here, draws attention to what is being erased. Substituting the ROC flag for the Chinese Taipei Olympic flag, for instance, makes visible the political erasure of Taiwan. It paradoxically highlights the existence of a contested sovereignty through the measures which must be taken and the exceptions which must be made to prevent Taiwan

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[25] Inayatullah, Naeem, "Beyond the sovereignty dilemma: quasi-states as social construct," *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, eds., Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, (Melbourne: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996): 51.
[26] Inayatullah, 51.

from appearing on the global stage. If it did not exist, it would not need to be erased. In a similar manner to the way impossible subjects are able to exist through the documentation and procedures that create them, impossible sovereignties are created by the very language of their exclusion.[27]

I draw inspiration for impossible sovereignty from not only Mae Ngai's (2014) work on impossible subjects, but on Madeline Y. Hsu's (2000) work on Taishanese paper sons.[28] In each context, the documentation and processes that are set up to exclude and reject the citizenship and personhood of peoples become the very venues for which citizenship and personhood can be created. Extensive documentation built to turn away Chinese immigrants to the United States instead created countless lives out of paper, constructing familial relationships and new histories. Despite the ludicrously rigorous and invasive interrogation processes of Taishanese immigrants in the early 1900s, for example, the United States immigration bureau itself estimated a 90% success rate of "fraudulent immigrations."[29] Like a Chinese finger trap, the harder they pulled the more clear it became that the efforts of political bureaucratic processes to stop the movement of people were in vain.

My mother's passport-stamped boarding pass, for example, is a prime example of the impossible sovereignty of Taiwan and the ways the Taiwan Question continues to remain unanswered and unfinished. As a result of a PRC policy of non-recognition, a Taiwanese passport would have been a politically impossibility and insufficient to stamp. Yet, as a result of my mom's lack of Chinese citizenship and documentation, she could not be processed as a domestic citizen. As a result, in the moment of boarding, my mom was neither officially from China nor Taiwan—she was from nowhere. The Taiwanese passport itself represents a kind of paradox, for how can a non-nation have a recognized passport? However, despite Taiwan's limited recognition in the global community, the overwhelming majority of nations do recognize a Taiwanese passport as a legitimate travel document. This once again positions Taiwan in a liminal space between officially recognized sovereignty and non-sovereignty. It impacts the travel procedures and bureaucratic processes of the world around it, despite or perhaps even because of its political non-existence.

But while the idea of an impossible sovereignty is an effective way to describe the ways a neoliberal nation-state framework fails to understand the liberatory potential of alternative forms of sovereignty, this concept is not specific to a Taiwanese context, for which an additional component of inconvenience is needed. This form of sovereign absurdity and inconvenience is perhaps best encapsulated by the Hokkien term *ku-mo*. *Ku-mo* is a transliteration of a 台語 colloquialism 龜毛, which describes someone who is slow or high maintenance to the point of inconveniencing others. In my household, it is the rallying cry for leaving the house. 龜毛 is the feeling of waiting in the car for that last friend before a camping trip; it is painfully watching someone perform a task twice as slow as you could have because they are trying to make it perfect; it is being stuck by the

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[27] Ngai, Mae M., *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[28] Hsu, Madeline Y., *Dreaming of gold, dreaming of home: Transnationalism and migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).; Ngai.
[29] Hsu, 82.

shoe rack with your shoes already on while your partner decides they need to take a shower after all. In short, a person that is being 龜毛 is, inadvertently or not, drawing attention to their presence through their absence—they are forcing those around them to stop and need to grapple with their existence and they are disrupting what might otherwise be a smooth and seamless process.

There is a second definition to 龜毛, one which is grounded in its Mandarin pronunciation as a part of a Buddhist idiom 龜毛兔角 (*gui-mao tu-jiao*). This designates something that is an impossibility or an affront to logic. Literally translating to "turtle fur, rabbit horn", 龜毛兔角 represents hollow logic or an absurdity—something that does not, can not, and ought not to exist. An absurdity carries additional layers of connotations beyond that of an impossibility. An absurdity triggers an emotional reaction, often of bewilderment, disdain, or amusement, in the way that an impossibility does not. It is not just that something does not exist; it is that its existence is wholly inconceivable and altogether antithetical to seemingly natural laws of logic and rationality. The absurd can be seen as a sort of insult to rationality, and is often rebuked as such. This carries complementary yet separate implications for 龜毛 as an analytical framework. I argue that Taiwan's impossible sovereignty can be described as 龜毛 (ku-mo) in the sense that it is conceptualized both as an impossibility and an annoyance or inconvenience that demands undeserved attention and disrupts otherwise uniform and smooth processes.

Wherever Taiwan appears, then, becomes a public venue to contest Taiwanese sovereignty, even and especially when its appearance is not intended as a political statement. Within the realm of the culture industry, the appearance of Taiwan generates outrage as a perceived political statement in otherwise supposedly apolitical entertainment. As in the case of the 2019 film *Detention*, which was banned in China for depicting the ROC government of Taiwan—even in a negative light—and was partially responsible for China refusing to attend the 2019 award show, the particular ways a *ku-mo* Taiwan disrupts the world of entertainment betrays the deeper political contestations that might otherwise go unnoticed.[30] While it is simultaneously an island at the center of transnational profits and neoliberal capitalism for countries like China and the United States, any acknowledgment of its existence garners transnational indignation, ends sponsorship deals, terminates careers, and ruins yet another form of popular culture. Its mere allusion injects politics where it supposedly does not or ought not to exist. Like turtle fur, the status of Taiwan is seen as an absurdity, a waste of time, and an affront to logic and civility.

While the original term is far from a positive descriptor, I employ it in a reclamatory manner and seek to imbue it with an agency and power that might otherwise be overlooked. While the rest of the world, and certainly China, may view evidence of a Taiwan as an outrageous affront to civility and logic, I contend that the ability to disrupt can be recontextualized as a source of strength. In a similar manner to the way that Sara Ahmed (2017) employs her idea of the *feminist killjoy*, I use ku-mo to take pride in inconvenience and revel in the trouble that is caused by the eraser's very erasure.[31] Just as

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[30] Staff and agencies, "China to boycott the Golden Horse awards, Taiwan's 'Chinese Oscars'," *The Guardian*, August 2019.

[31] Ahmed, Sara, *Living a Feminist Life*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017)

the sheepish whispered mispronunciations of my name from those who should know better evokes a feeling of devilish schadenfreude in me, the ability to disrupt and inconvenience through one's own existence allows for a reexamination and deconstruction of that which claims to be the powerful arbiter, the objective viewpoint, the one in control. If all it takes to ruin what appears to be an airtight system is simply to continue existing outside of constructed boundaries of legitimacy and recognition, it merely highlights the fallibility and frailty of these systems in the first place.

In 2017, for example, Taiwanese Digital Minister Audrey Tang participated in the United Nation's annual Internet Governance Forum by telecommuting to the meeting despite Taiwan being formerly unrecognized by the UN. Chinese representatives were predictably upset with what they saw as an inappropriate political statement on the nature of Taiwan's international status, and Tang's remote participation in the meeting—as representative of the mere appearance of Taiwan—was positioned as a radical rhetorical threat to China's claim to Taiwan. This was so contentious that it required the host country of Switzerland to publicly assure the meeting was purely about policy (internet governance) and not politics (international sovereignty). Not only was she condemned for using the internet as a tool of access to an international Internet Governance Forum, as a representative of Taiwan her speech was received as an inherently radical disruption of UN proceedings. This event encapsulates both the impossible sovereignty and ku-mo nature of Taiwan. At the same time as Taiwan's contributions are valuable—Tang foregrounded her speech with Taiwan's continuing international collaborations on information technology and electronic document systems—its appearance is an affront to a global logic that categorizes it as a part of China. For Taiwan to be visible at this meeting—not even as a recognized member but as a speaker—is positioned as an absurd political statement about the sovereignty of Taiwan and a disruption to an otherwise functioning United Nations.

In the framework of *ku-mo*, these seemingly innocuous appearances of Taiwan that spark political outrage highlight the disruptive power of Taiwan as an inconvenience both to dominant state powers, and also to a normative conception of what sovereignty looks like. Just through existing, Taiwan appears to hold the rest of the world back, to force it to wait, and to burden an otherwise nominally functional geopolitical system. Yet simultaneously, the erasure of Taiwan can never be complete, for it is a key site of capitalist modernity both for Asia, and for a United States which profits off its relative wealth. Taiwan both must not exist and is central to the continuation of a neoliberal global economy. As Bessie Chu (2018) laments, Taiwan feels like "a nuisance to be dealt with."[32] But Taiwan's precarious position as a geopolitical inconvenience also highlights the insecurity of Chinese control over the island as well as the limits and failures of a neoliberal politics of recognition. And this disruption is all the more evident when the impossible sovereignty of Taiwan appears in transnational culture industries.

We can locate the start of this particular manifestation of a ku-mo Taiwan in Taiwan's transition into a center of global capital by the 1970s and 1980s. As Aihwa Ong (1999) charts, China's relationship with Chinese-speaking sites of global capitalism like

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[32] Chu, Bessie, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust," *Chrysanthemum: Voices of the Taiwanese Diaspora*, eds., Andrea Chu and Kevin Ko-wen Chen (Blurb.com, 2018).

Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore have been a complex balance between profit and subjugation.[33] While China benefits both economically from a capitalist and transnational Taiwanese economy and politically from the narrative of "[t]he business activities of overseas Chinese from Taiwan" as a link between China and a "Pacific Rim modernity," Taiwanese productivity in a global economy is simultaneously a threat to China's political claim to the island.[34] As a result, "although capitalism increases state revenues, the state must rein in the print and electronic media, which corrode state authority, and seek to tame those overseas Chinese, and the mainlanders they influence, whose self-interested pursuits threaten the state's control of social and territorial integrity."[35]

This is why examining Taiwan's impossible sovereignty within the realm of popular culture and media is so important; it is the symbolic appearance of Taiwan in international media and its connection to transnational flows of capital that is most threatening to the appearance of Chinese control over the island. While external powers like China and the United States might profit off of Taiwan, this profit must appear politically invisible so as not to imply the existence of the very electronics producer, business partner, or military training ground that is being profited off of. Instead, China explains the economic rise of the so-called "four East Asian dragons—South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore" not through the complex processes of neoliberal globalization, but through "a Confucian Chinese modernity… in the East Asian economic miracle."[36]

The economic value of Taiwan and its role in a larger transnational global economy, then, helps construct the island's impossible sovereignty—it is simultaneously sought after yet rejected, celebrated yet ignored. Capital serves as both the venue for Taiwan's legibility and the tool of its subjugation. At the same time as Taiwan produces wealth for itself and external nations, its appearance in transnationally produced media and popular culture threatens the profit of nations afraid of contradicting a Chinese claim to Taiwan. In this sense, Taiwan is both a major economic prize and a dangerous economic liability. Like the red-eared sliders of Flushing, New York, Taiwan is both everywhere and hidden. Yet this complicated impossibility is not new; it is built off of a much deeper history of illegibility, impossibility, and inconvenience that has haunted Taiwan from far before it was known as the Republic of China. It is to this critical history we now turn.

A Brief History of Taiwan and China

The issue of Taiwan's status vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China is highly contentious. From its role in the UN to its conditional appearance in the Olympics, the mere presence of Taiwan in political discourse is a silent reminder of centuries of settler colonialism, martial law, and war that has led up to Taiwan's contemporary political context. As Emma Jinhua Teng (2006) describes, Taiwan was originally considered a

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[33] Ong, Aihwa, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*," (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
[34] Ong, 40.
[35] Ong, 64.
[36] Cheah, Pheng, "Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Two Senses and Postcolonial National Memory," *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 121.

worthless piece of land or "ball of mud" that was unworthy of settlement by the Qing dynasty.[37] Because of this, colonial cartographies of the island tended to depict it as outside the bounds of a natural and divine border—the Taiwan Strait. Through this view, the island was seen as an isolated and separate wilderness from the larger Qing empire. When not explicitly negative, Taiwan was represented by Qing writers as a sort of living museum that offered a fetishistic window into a supposedly primitive and savage past.[38] These colonial writings positioned the island of Taiwan as, at worst, a moral and cultural wilderness, and at best, a marker of China's comparative progress.

However, once Chinese settlement on Taiwan became viewed as a positive and productive process in the 1600s—amidst competing colonial interest from the Dutch—Taiwan's wilderness transformed into virgin land for China, and these cartographic representations shifted towards depicting the island as inextricably tied to the mainland; for example, the island was characterized as 'facing' the mainland and the natural divine border extended to include Taiwan.[39] This shifting symbolic geography of Taiwan functions to create what Stuart Hall (1980) describes as *reconstructed unities*—rearticulated categories that retroactively assert a timelessness that obscures its own glaring recency and ahistoricity.[40] In this way, the switch from Taiwan as external to Taiwan as internal constructed what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls an imagined community that reifies nationalist discourses.[41] A Chinese community, then, has been imagined to both include and exclude Taiwanese, to support certain political and economic claims.

When, following the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Taiwan and the P'eng-hu islands were transferred to Japanese colonial rule, these narratives shifted once again. Leo T.S. Ching investigates the relationship between Taiwanese aborigines and Japanese colonists both during and after Japanese imperialism and identifies that some indigenous Taiwanese were considered Japanese as a result of their strategic coalitions with the imperial power.[42] However, this inclusion was always conditional and fleeting, and was part of a larger rhetorical move towards claiming territory through reconceptualizing the origins of Taiwanese aborigines.

Japanese scholars latched onto the Southern Origin theory of Taiwanese aborigines, championed by scholars such as Hendrik Kern, which posited that indigenous

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[37] Teng, Emma Jinhua, "Introduction," *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 1-30.
[38] Teng, Emma Jinhua, "Taiwan as a Living Museum: Savagery and Tropes of Anachronism," *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 60-80.
[39] Teng, Emma Jinhua, "A Hidden Jade in a Ball of Mud: Landscape and Colonial Rhetoric," *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 81-100.
[40] Hall, Stuart, "Race articulation and societies structured in dominance," *Sociological Theories: race and colonialism*, (1980).
[41] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).
[42] Ching, Leo T.S., *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*, (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2001).

Taiwanese were the descendants of indigenous Indonesian and Austronesian peoples.[43] This view was popular with Japanese colonial scholars because it could be used it to justify their colonial rule as saviors of the oppressed Taiwanese from China. In a similar manner to the way Qing Chinese writers saw their own history in the supposed living museum of Taiwan, Japan saw indigenous Taiwanese as evidence of their own benevolence and just rule. Nevertheless, Japanese colonial rule was brutal and violent, spurring on anti-imperialist movements even while it created a generation of Japanese-educated Taiwanese intellectuals that were largely more sympathetic to a Japanese imperial industrialization and modernization project.[44]

Following the end of the second World War, Japan relinquished control over Taiwan to the Republic of China—one of two competing governments of China, and the island became trapped once again between competing conceptions of what it represented to conflicting powers. The Republic of China (ROC) was concerned Taiwanese—particularly Han Taiwanese—had become "Japanned" and could not be trusted, leading to yet another hierarchical system that positioned Taiwanese as subordinate to an occupying government. In 1949, the Communist Party of China (CPC) took control over mainland China and established itself as the People's Republic of China (PRC). As a result, the U.S.-sponsored Kuomintang (KMT) government of the ROC retreated from mainland China into Taiwan. Only Korea initially transferred its embassy to Taiwan, and most nations followed the Soviet Union in officially recognizing the PRC as the one true government of China.[45]

Unlike previous waves of immigrants to Taiwan, most of the Han Chinese that fled to the island in 1949 were well-educated, politically engaged, and came with a variety of technical, entrepreneurial, and administrative skills in support of the Nationalist government. The ROC quickly instituted a one-party system and a White Terror in the 1950s, where it hunted down and executed thousands of actual or presumed Communists.[46] The impossibility of criticizing the new capitalist and nationalist government as well as the erasure of liberal politicians opposed to Chiang Kai-shek led to what was considered the longest period of martial law in human history until the Syrian coup d'état at more than thirty-eight years. During this period of time, the Kuomintang (KMT) arrested Taiwanese intellectuals and cultural figures for fear of Chinese or Communist sympathizers. Martial law was officially lifted in 1987, though after the death

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[43] Stainton, Michael, "The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 27-44.

[44] Lamley, Harry J., "Taiwan Under Japanese Rule, 1895-1945: The Vicissitudes of Colonialism," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 201-260.

[45] Wang, Peter Chen-main, "A Bastion Created, a Regime Reformed, an Economy Reengineered, 1949-1970," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 320-338.

[46] Chen, Ketty W., "Disciplining Taiwan: The Kuomintang's Methods of Control during the White Terror Era (1947-1987)," *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 4.4 (2008): 185-210.; Cheng, Wendy, "'This Contradictory but Fantastic Thing'": Student Networks and Political Activism in Cold War Taiwanese/America," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 20.2 (2017): 161-191.; Fleischauer, Stefan, "The 228 Incident and the Taiwan independence movement's construction of a Taiwanese identity," *China Information* 21.3 (2007): 373-401.; Phillips, Steven, "Between Assimilation and Independence," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 275-319.

of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975, many of the strictest and most brutal elements of the capitalist authoritarian government's martial law were phased out.

Taiwan and China currently have a policy of deliberate ambiguity with regards to the political status of Taiwan. Taiwan is not officially a sovereign state, yet it is treated in many ways as one by foreign powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom. While many of these countries recognize the PRC's One China Policy, much of their language is intentionally ambiguous and lacking direct support. While the current status of political ambiguity has allowed Taiwan to blossom as a new cultural and economic powerhouse, Taiwan's increasing influence beyond its coasts has simultaneously strengthened and strained cross-strait relations into the new millennium.[47] Though Taiwan's status has entered a relatively stable if ambiguous period of political uncertainty, rising tensions between pro-independence activists and supporters of a One China Policy have only increased over time. The 2014 Sunflower Student Movement, for instance, represents a renewed fervor for Taiwanese independence from Taiwan's youth. Erupting in response to the perceived quick approval of a Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) that some saw as an open door for more Chinese influence, students and young Taiwanese occupied the Legislative Yuan of Taiwan's government for twenty-four days.[48] This uprising represents the continuation of a long line of political contestation over Taiwan's status.

As Ronald G. Knapp (2007) articulates, what Taiwan represents for external forces like China, Europe, and the United States has shifted radically over time. The island's relative location has "been the subject to continual adjustment" and what was once considered "remote or isolated from either the Chinese mainland or Europe or the Americas… has become pivotal in the restructured global economy that has emerged."[49] Taiwan, then, has been alternatively claimed and rejected by multiple imperial powers and these waves of occupation serve as the foundation for Taiwan's contested sovereignty today.

Chapter Organization

This project is split into three distinct parts based on both theme and methodology to explore the ways Taiwan's impossible sovereignty is mediated by culture and the culture industry: Recognition, Impossibility, and Haunting. At the same time as we move from an international Taiwan knowledge production project to Taiwanese disruptions of this project in popular culture to counter-narratives in the everyday, we move from traditional archival research to cultural and media analysis to experimental interdisciplinary methods. In both theme and methodology we start in the realm of traditional knowledge production, but only as a jumping off point to explore the disruptive, the un-serious, and the everyday. Indeed, this tension between the legitimate

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[47] Ong.

[48] Hsieh, John Fuh-Sheng, "Taiwan in 2014: A Besieged President amid Political Turmoil," *Asian Survey* 55.1 (2015).; Jones, Brian Christopher and Yen-Tu Su, "Confrontational contestation and democratic compromise," *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements*, (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

[49] Knapp, Ronald G., "The Shaping of Taiwan's Landscapes," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 3-26.

and the inconvenient, the fantastical and the mundane, is present throughout each of the following chapters. Taiwan's impossible sovereignty is simultaneously a spectacle at the level of international politics, and yet as mundane as introducing yourself, playing a video game, or speaking your language.

Part One focuses on the ways Taiwan has and continues to be constructed in the spaces between nations through state documentation thousands of miles away from the island. In particular, Part One focuses on the United States' legal and political relationship with an island it has both helped to mold and refuses to officially recognize. How Taiwan is and is not able to be seen gives us the space both to critically analyze the impetus for external state recognition of Taiwan and the ways Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans have attempted to leverage this recognition.

We begin in Chapter 1 by interrogating the ways U.S. state legislation and news media helps to craft state and popular representations of Taiwan and Taiwanese people for a U.S. audience and how this frames how Taiwan is positioned in a geopolitical context. In contrast to much of the rest of Asia, Taiwan has been constructed by United States legislation and news media as a bastion of liberal capitalist democracy in an otherwise conservative and primitive continent. Much of this narrative is rhetorically dependent on the legacies of U.S. Cold War anti-communism and neoimperialism, as well as contemporary neoliberal state co-optation of LGBTQ+ rights movements. Here, Taiwan is a useful rhetorical tool to justify U.S. military and economic influence in Asia and contain a Chinese threat, and the discourses of a Taiwanese progressivism and pro-queer sentiment are, despite a U.S. claim otherwise, not the true incentive for what little U.S. support is given to Taiwan, but instead operates as an excuse for expanding and justifying U.S. influence in Asia.

From here, we move in Chapter 2 to San Francisco, where Taiwanese Americans have organized in pursuit of state recognition on the U.S. census by drawing theoretical and symbolic connections to the island of Taiwan. Advocating for a recognized Taiwanese American census category requires both the construction of an essential "Taiwanese-ness" that is separate from a "Chinese-ness" as well as emphasizing an "American-ness" that is legible within a U.S. ethnicity and race paradigm and justifies inclusion into a liberal multicultural U.S. state narrative. Much like the fraught construction of a nation, the construction of a recognizable Taiwanese American community makes legible Taiwanese Americans, but it must also participate in the subjugation and exclusion of illegible Taiwanese histories and peoples in the pursuit of national mythologies of an essential shared culture and horizontal comradeship. Claiming Taiwanese instead of Chinese on the census, thus, functions as a form of transnational nation-building where state recognition by the U.S. acts as a stand-in for an ethnic and national disidentification with China. As such, the fight over question #9 is a foundational tool for Taiwanese Americans to symbolically define Taiwanese sovereignty.

Part Two hones in on the particular ways that anxiety over Taiwan's impossible sovereignty manifest in the realm of popular culture in ways that disrupt popular pre-existing narratives of a separation between politics and popular culture. This section turns towards Taiwanese celebrities in popular music and television sitcoms outside of Taiwan

to trace the ways that the ku-mo politics of Taiwan follows Taiwanese thousands of miles away and is intimately tied to transnational flows of capital and culture.

Chapter 3 examines the international political scandal of 15-year old Taiwanese Korean pop idol Chou Tzuyu as a result of the appearance of a Republic of China flag during a Korean variety show. As one in a long line of what I call *ku-mo icons*, Tzuyu came to embody the ku-mo impossible sovereignty of Taiwan as an affront to the supposed apoliticism of Korean pop idol music despite not only refusing to take a public stance on Taiwan's political status but also merely following the instructions of the production managers and producers who orchestrated the flag segment that sparked the controversy. Nevertheless, she was quickly blacklisted in China and became the figurehead of Taiwanese protests and a talking point for each of the three major 2016 presidential candidates who deployed her as a symbol of Taiwan's precarious status. Here, the role of transnational capital and corporate interests play a strong role in how these ku-mo ruptures are negotiated. The circumstances of her scandal, the backlash from Chinese music markets, and the rush to mitigate further harm to the Korean companies involved all point to the ways popular culture industries have become venues to contest a Chinese/Taiwanese political boundary through what I call the *business of sovereignty*.

Chapter 4 interrogates the memoir and television sitcom adaptation of Taiwanese American chef of BaoHaus fame Eddie Huang. Both memoir and sitcom versions of *Fresh Off the Boat* attempt to grapple with making legible Asian American and Taiwanese American stories within the respective constraints of their mediums. While the memoir is unable to imagine racial liberation outside of reclaimed masculinity and grounds Huang's ancestry in familial immigration histories, the sitcom excises much of Huang's childhood racial anxiety and dehistoricizes his Taiwanese ancestry into impossible anachronisms. The way each version of Huang's life narrativizes his childhood stories speak to the ways Asian American and Taiwanese American stories can and cannot be legible for a mainstream U.S. audience. Together, the memoir and sitcom offer an opportunity to examine how Eddie Huang's stories are made legible for a particular audience in each medium, and how each attempt to navigate a larger Asian American racial illegibility and Taiwanese American political illegibility in the U.S. media landscape.

Finally, Part Three turns its attention to the lingering haunting of Taiwan's political status and the historical foundation for a modern Taiwan state on Taiwanese people around the world. Here, we return to direct an analysis of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty back to everyday people and ask how a geopolitical illegibility of Taiwan impacts and structures Taiwanese lives even outside of Taiwan. While Part One examines the legal and political impacts of a ku-mo Taiwan and Part Two examines the popular and media impacts of a ku-mo Taiwan, Part Three narrows in on the ku-mo traces we can find in familial histories, lived experience, and personal identity.

Chapter 5 focuses on the 2017 Taiwanese video game *Detention* (返校) and the way its digital archive of notes, government documents, and photographs, in combination with the literal ghosts of the Lingered students of Taiwan's White Terror allow for an analysis of the colonial haunting of the creation of a modern Taiwan state. The institution of the school played a key role for the U.S.-backed Republic of China government in disciplining pre-1949 Taiwanese (called *benshengren*) back into appropriately Chinese

citizens and *Detention* blends this structural horror of the White Terror in schools—as represented by demonic monsters and authoritarian symbols—with a much more traumatizing and abstract haunting of distressed familial histories and the legacies they leave behind. *Detention* takes Taiwan back to a past that is too often scrubbed clean in pursuit of a narrative of a progressive, democratic state. But it also takes Taiwanese back to our pasts to examine the ways seemingly disconnected histories of the creation of Taiwan find themselves clawing through skin and bone to resurface in our own familial, immigratory, and personal histories. In demonstrating the deep entanglement of the structural and the personal, *Detention* offers a venue to analyze not only how we have come to be but what it has taken to get here.

Lastly, Chapter 6 questions how second-generation Taiwanese Americans grapple with a self-identity when seemingly disconnected from Taiwan. Using interviews from Taiwanese Americans in the Sunnyvale-Santa Clara-San Jose Bay Area—one of the most populous Taiwanese American communities in the United States—I explore how young Taiwanese Americans navigate the politics of identity, of authenticity, and of national pride for a nation which must not exist. The question of what connects Taiwanese Americans with a feeling of community is complex. Much of a Taiwanese American identity revolves around competing discourses of culinary branding—parsing apart distinctly Taiwanese cultural influences separate from China—and a deep, personal familial haunting of the Republic of China through immigration narratives and stories of Taiwan's multiple waves of colonial occupation. While the constructions of Taiwanese-ness in Part One are tailored towards an external audience of the state, internal constructions of a Taiwanese American identity are far more complex, and traffic in the discourses of cultural and culinary authenticity as well as personal, subjugated family histories. I explore both these narratives themselves and how these narratives function through readings of Taiwanese American food media and interviews with Taiwanese Americans in the South Bay area.

Each of these chapters ask us to consider the disruptive illegibility of Taiwan in cultural sites and the work it accomplishes. When we are able to uncover the ways Taiwan's politics of sovereignty and transnational culture industries are imbedded within each other, we are not only introduced to new possibilities of political organizing but also to greater lucidity about the power of culture and media. Within the context of Taiwan, its mere appearance ends sponsorship deals, disrupts government processes, and relocates life histories. This is in itself its own new set of possibilities. Just as my mother wondered how her passport-stamped boarding pass might operate within a system never designed with it in mind, we might begin to imagine where these apolitical political ruptures might take us.

1. A World Apart
American Representations of a Queer-Friendly Taiwan

"When it comes to gay rights in Asia, Taiwan is a world apart."
– Andrew Jacobs, "For Asia's Gays, Taiwan Stands Out as Beacon" *New York Times*

In the summer of 2016, Taiwan made waves in the U.S. news cycle when reports of its proposed same-sex marriage law became heralded as a turning point for LGBTQ+ rights in Asia. If this were to pass, the narrative highlighted, Taiwan would become the first in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, and the resulting U.S. political and news reaction to this positioned it as a significant win for an island embracing a liberal democratic government as well as a sign of Asia stepping into liberal modernity. Johan Nylander, writing for CNN, praised Taiwan for its LGBTQ+ protections, its annual gay pride parade, and its election of its first female president as signs of the island becoming, "one of the most progressive places in Asia in terms of LGBT rights."[50]

While at a glance, the U.S. celebration of LGBTQ+ human rights abroad might appear to signal a U.S. commitment both to progressive pro-queer causes and support for a Taiwanese people and government, when and how this support manifests reveals the ulterior motives of American neo-imperialism and homonationalism that undergird such praise.[51] Despite the United States' own struggles with instituting meaningful protections and support for its LGBTQ+ population, such as the 2019 Justice Department ruling that Title VII protections do not encompass sexual orientation, the imperial nation has been quick to pay lipservice to LGBTQ+ issues abroad in order to justify orientalist narratives of Asia. Doing so serves a double function of obscuring the United States' own ongoing problems with anti-queer policy and validating anti-Asian rhetoric that positions Asian countries as underdeveloped, unmodern, and thus in need of Western liberal intervention and guidance.

However, in contrast to much of the rest of Asia, Taiwan has been constructed by the United States through both U.S. legislation and news reporting as a bastion of liberal capitalist democracy in an otherwise foreign and primitive continent. Taiwan's progressivism for the United States is inherently relative to the perceived conservatism of other Asian countries; Taiwan's LGBTQ+ movements can only be momentous for Asia by painting it as unique or rare for the continent, necessarily erasing other LGBTQ+ social movements and advocacy in Asia. But perhaps more insidiously, the American framing of Taiwan's LGBTQ+ movements serves a larger rhetorical purpose of validating the economic, political, and imperial systems of the United States by covertly attributing Taiwan's human rights successes to its liberal western-style democracy, capitalist economic system, and status as a global city. Here, Taiwan is "an allied military arm, a trading partner, an international relations pawn… a symbol of victory in the cold

[50] Nylander, Johan, "Could Taiwan Be First in Asia with Same-sex Marriage?," *CNN*. July, 2016.
[51] Puar, Jasbir K., *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

war."[52] In this way, as one of the so-called Four Asian Tigers alongside Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea, Taiwan acts as a proxy for the American process of containment over the perceived Cold War communist threat as represented by its shared values of a free market and a liberal conception of democracy.

I argue that the United States has profound state interests in the representation of Taiwan as a beacon of liberal capitalist democracy in Asia and that this narrative, built on both its formal legislated relationship with the island since the creation of its modern state in 1945 and informal news coverage of Taiwan, says less about U.S. support for queer liberation or Taiwan's political independence than it does the continuation of U.S. imperial power in Asia. Taiwan is conditionally accepted by the United States as a modern state relative to much of the rest of Asia because it is constructed as an exception; it is acceptable because it is except-able, and this highlights the underlying rhetorical motives behind what often appears as sincere bipartisan U.S. support for Taiwan and Taiwanese. What is important here is not the substantive queer protections that may or may not exist in Taiwan or other regions; I am less interested in trying to prove wrong the colonial narratives of a progressive "West" and a barbaric "East," and more interested exploring the labor such narratives perform. For this, I turn my attention instead toward the ways that U.S. legislation and news media are able to frame the conversation through this colonial lens of inherent progressivism and backwardness.

Here I deploy and expand upon Jasbir Puar's (2008) concept of *homonationalism* to our discussion of state cooptation of queer politics for (inter-)national motives. As a form of what she calls "national homonormativity," homonationalism describes the ways imaginations of queer liberation become tied to national and state aims, particularly with regards to the perpetuation of neocolonial and neoimperial wars.[53] Previously stigmatized queer populations become conditionally and temporarily rehabilitated as a way to target perceived extranational threats. For example, gay marriage becomes "yet another marker in the distance between barbarism and civilization, one that justifies further targeting of a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population… who refuse to properly assimilate, in contrast to the upright homosexuals engaged in sanctioned kinship norms."[54] In turn, nations like the United States come to embody the image of liberal queer-friendly leaders that then justifies neocolonial invasion into those regions constructed as conservative, anti-queer, and barbaric. By constructing the Western or Westernized nation-state as a paragon for queer inclusivity and human rights, or what Puar describes as the ideology of U.S. sexual exceptionalism, the United States is able to mark a racialized Global South as inherently antithetical to queer subjectivity and thus backwards and primitive.[55] Western politicians and theorists latch onto instances of anti-queer policy in the Global South to prove that these countries are inhumane, unjust, and need the guidance and intervention of the West. This, of course, ignores the United States'

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[52] Tucker, Nancy Bienkopf, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1994): 6

[53] Puar, 2.

[54] Puar, 20.

[55] *Ibid*.

own complicity in anti-queer policy,[56] its disproportionately high rates of violence against particularly marginalized subsets of the queer community,[57] as well as the Global North's own colonial role in cementing dichotomous sex and gender systems in colonies across the world.[58]

Puar's analysis of the liberal queering of Israel provides us with an apt model to interrogate U.S. narratives of a queer-friendly Taiwan. First, in the case of Israel, the United States positions Palestine "as the site of queer oppression—oppression that is equated with the occupation of Palestine by Israel… [which] effaces Israeli persecution of queer Palestinians… [and] queer Israelis."[59] Israeli settler colonialism and state violence against Palestinians is erased in favor of an image of Israel as a queer oasis surrounded by racialized homophobia. To support Israel, then, is to support LGBTQ+ people, and this justifies whatever military and state violence must be enacted.[60] Cindy Patton (2002) similarly identifies Taiwan as a representative case study of a trend of "emerging democracies that adopt apparently liberal stances on social issues as a means of demonstrating their modernness, or at least their distance from barbaric practices of their neighbors or their past."[61] In Patton's example of Taiwan as an emerging liberal democracy, the first major pro-gay policies (a 1993 policy change allowing openly gay Taiwanese to serve in the military, and KMT party rhetoric that, unlike China, Taiwan would not imprison or execute homosexuals) actually predated a substantive queer identity movement and were instead predominantly discursive tools to appeal to U.S. imaginations of a liberal, modern democracy.[62] In both cases, the appearance of one contested state as progressively pro-gay is contrasted with a representation of its neighbors as comparatively barbaric and anti-gay. However, while there are some broader similarities between the queer rehabilitations of Israel and Taiwan, their particular colonial histories set them apart and demand a closer look at the ways racialization and the logic of colonialism inform a U.S. understanding of their respective homonationalisms.

I extend Puar's theory to an East Asian/Taiwanese context by connecting the discursive dynamic of homonationalist sexual exceptionalism with one of the most salient racial narratives of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States: the model minority myth. The (white, cisgender, wealthy, heteronormative) gay man's conditional acceptance allows the United States to construct and maintain a veneer of multicultural

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[56] Britton, Dana M. and Christine L. Williams, "'Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue',": Military Policy and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity," *Journal of homosexuality* 30.1 (1995): 1-21.; Johnson, Chris, "2nd Circuit (Again) Finds Anti-Gay Discrimination Legal under Title VI," *Sup. Ct. Preview* (2019).
[57] Herek, Gregory M, "Documenting hate crimes in the United States: Some considerations on data sources," *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 4.2 (2017): 143.; Mills, Colleen E., "Gay visibility and disorganized and strained communities: a community-level analysis of anti-gay hate crime in New York City," *Journal of interpersonal violence* (2019): 1-22.
[58] Aldrich, Robert, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, (London: Routledge, 2003).; Hyam, Ronald, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).
[59] *Ibid*., 17.
[60] Schulman, Sarah, "Israel and Pinkwashing," *New York Times*. Nov, 2011.
[61] Patton, Cindy, "Stealth Bombers of Desire: The Globalization of 'Alterity' in Emerging Democracies," *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, (New York: NYU Press, 2002): 195.
[62] Patton.

inclusivity and progressivism while simultaneously refusing protections for transgender women of color, lesbians, nonbinary people, or any other subset of the queer community that otherwise fails to conform to a nationalist idea of respectable queerness. Just as the model minority myth highlights East Asian conditional acceptance and success at the expense of obscuring the systemic oppression and structural poverty of Southeast Asians, Asian refugees, undocumented immigrants, and first generation immigrants siloed into urban ethnic enclaves, the valorization of the homonationalist gay man hides the structural inequalities that queer people face under the shining image of a rainbow flag and a white wedding cake.[63] The nation is able to deploy the image of the gay white man, successfully assimilated into the nation-state, as proof of its own progressivism for (at long last) granting him (some) rights; in turn, it is able to position itself as superior to nations that have not yet done so and its intervention as a form of benevolent human rights championship. While Puar's analysis largely focuses on the function of sexual exceptionalism and the ways the United States deploys the image of liberal progressivism for both itself and states like Israel, the ways Taiwan is praised as exception and yet officially unrecognized by the United States makes clear the flimsy and duplicitous rhetoric of this conditional exceptionalism and adds an additional element worth interrogating—what does the apparent U.S. support for Taiwan's queer movements say about its vision for a Taiwanese sovereignty and how does this international relationship with Taiwan reflect the conditional acceptance and racialized wedging encapsulated by the model minority myth of Taiwanese Americans?

Originating in the mid-1960s United States in response to growing racial justice movements, the model minority myth performs the labor of obscuring structural histories of discriminatory immigration legislation that creates the appearance of disproportionate Asian success in education, erasing the subsets of Asian Americans that fail to conform to the myth, and wedging marginalized racial groups against each other in competition in such a way that a larger racial hierarchy goes unquestioned.[64] This wedging functions similarly to the racial triangulation of Asian Americans against both White and Black Americans. Asian Americans are constructed relative to other marginalized racial groups as racially superior in some ways—often economically and educationally—and racially unassimilable in others.[65] Positioning Taiwan as a model for progressivism in Asia similarly erases the structural history of American intervention and support for nearly forty years of oppressive martial law on the island that led to its contemporary political

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[63] Park; Franke, Katherine, "What Marriage Equality Teaches Us: The Afterlife of Racism and Homophobia," *After Marriage Equality: The Future of LGBT Rights*, ed., Carlos A. Ball, (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

[64] Cheng, Wendy, "'The Asian and Latino Thing in Schools': Academic Achievement and Racialized Privilege," *The Changs next door to the Díazes: Remapping race in suburban California*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2013): 63-90.; Museus, Samuel D. and Peter N. Kiang, "Deconstructing the model minority myth and how it contributes to the invisible minority reality in higher education research," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 142 (2009): 5-15.; Park, Edward JW and John SW Park, "Engineering the Model Minority," *Probationary Americans: Contemporary Immigration Policies and the Shaping of Asian American Communities*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).; Wing, Jean Yonemura, "Beyond black and white: The model minority myth and the invisibility of Asian American students," *The Urban Review* 39.4 (2007): 455-487.

[65] Kim, Claire Jean, "The racial triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & society* 27.1 (1999): 105-138.

system as well as wedges Taiwan against much of the rest of Asia in such a way that justifies continuing U.S. intervention and influence in the region. Taiwan becomes a sort of model minority state which demonstrates the validity and superiority of Western governments and capitalist economies and its conditional acceptance is relative to the constructed inferiority of other states. Here, the model minority state is a tool and its ultimate function is to bolster the legitimacy of existing power structures, in this case the dominance of the Global North. The conditional valorization of LGBTQ+ rights in Taiwan from the United States, then, can be seen for what it is—a liberal appropriation of grassroots social movements for larger state aims.

Thus, the apparent contradiction between the nation-state brandishing its values as a pro-gay leader of human rights while simultaneously endorsing anti-queer policies is not a contradiction at all. Cynthia Enloe (2014) describes this use of human rights rhetoric to justify violence and nationalism as a "masculinized wielding of femininity," which manifests as an ever-vulnerable feminized nation-state that must be protected through violence.[66] As such, human rights become an object that must be debated over and bargained for, and which launches ships, missiles, and bombs. Countries with which the United States seeks to benefit from military intervention and occupation are constructed as spaces antithetical to the existence of proper respectable gays and countries with which the United States can strategically deploy to legitimize its positive influence abroad are constructed as spaces where queer liberation is thriving against all odds.

In the arena of geopolitics, a nation's progressivism is not an objective measure; virtually any country could be conceptualized as either progressive or backwards based on what information is deemed important and relevant. The United States, for instance, could be seen as a paragon for LGBTQ+ rights for its institution of same-sex marriage and the existence of openly LGBTQ+ people in politics or as a conservative and backwards anti-LGBTQ+ nation should the focus shift to the disproportionately high rates of homicide for transgender women of color, the lack of full LGBTQ+ protections in employment, or the rates of LGBTQ+ homelessness and incarceration. Whether the perception of a progressively queer Taiwan is accurate is less impactful for our purposes than why the United States might choose to highlight LGBTQ+ movements in Taiwan and not elsewhere. I compare this dynamic to the model minority myth of the American racial context to describe the ways that the U.S. conceptualizes and uses Taiwan as a racialized model minority (non-)nation. In doing so, I hope to draw a parallel between the insincere, fetishized support of particular nations with the way that Asian Americans are racialized in the United States—as a discardable tool to be used to further dominant state interests, and whose participation in this framing further cements hierarchies that ultimately subjugate the model minority as well.

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[66] Enloe, Cynthia H, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley: U of California, 2014): 31.

Congressional Bills Introduced	Taiwan as Beacon Rhetoric				N/A		Total Bills
	"Shared Values"	*"Key for Regional Peace & Stability"*	*"Liberal Democracy"*	*Total # of Bills using Rhetoric*	*Secondary Bills (Budget, PRC)*	*Other Bills*	
2009	4	6	2	8	5	8	21
2010	4	3	2	6	5	4	15
2011	7	7	2	10	8	1	19
2012	2	2	2	4	4	2	10
2013	3	5	5	8	7	4	19
2014	1	5	1	5	3	2	10
2015	2	4	1	5	4	5	14
2016	2	5	3	5	3	2	10
2017	2	9	5	10	6	0	16
2018	1	7	6	10	2	1	13
Total	28	53	29	71	47	29	147

Figure 1 | Breakdown of Congressional bills dealing with Taiwan introduced into the House of Representatives or Senate from 2009 to 2018. Bills are split into two larger categories: bills that use some form of "Taiwan-as-Beacon" rhetoric and bills that do not. Some bills use multiple styles of rhetoric and are represented in multiple columns. For this reason, a column with an aggregated total of bills using rhetoric is provided. Bills that do not use any "Taiwan-as-Beacon" rhetoric are split into two categories: Secondary Bills, where reference to Taiwan is an insubstantial part of the bill or information to motivate policy unrelated directly to Taiwan, and Other Bills which have more substantive references and policies directly related to Taiwan.

In order to examine U.S. rhetoric surrounding Taiwan, I interrogate two of the major arenas that Taiwan is constructed for the United States in the public eye: congressional legislation related to U.S.-Taiwan policy and mainstream American news media coverage of the island. I identify three major themes I have identified of what I call "Taiwan-as-Beacon" rhetoric that appears in much American news and policy surrounding Taiwan: (1) the shared liberal values of the United States and Taiwan, (2) Taiwan as a key to the peace and security of Asia, and (3) Taiwan as a flourishing model liberal democracy. Using congressional archives, I analyzed and coded all U.S. congressional legislature on Taiwan in the last ten years (2009 to 2018) to track the prevalence of these rhetoric. In each of these three cases, the idea of Taiwan as an exemplar for how the rest of Asia ought to be is embedded within the rhetoric. Within the scope of "shared values," Taiwan is seen as more progressive than its neighbors as a result of its association with broad, symbolic values like freedom and liberty. As a "key to regional peace," Taiwan becomes a civilizing agent in Asia—one that helps to contain the communist threat of China and the supposed barbarism of Islam. This, too, is tied to classic liberal principles like free trade. Taiwan is a key to peace insofar as it prevents the U.S. from needing to threaten violence. Finally, when employed as "a model of liberal democracy," Taiwan is explicitly positioned as a progressive, modern exception to Asia and a model of what other countries' governments should strive for. The "Taiwan-as-Beacon" rhetoric is used as the foundation and justification for trade, military, and foreign policy decisions and thus appears frequently in both congressional legislature and news accounts of Taiwan. These rhetorics are based on an older history of U.S.-Taiwan relations and have been codified in their political relationship. For example, in the mid-to-late 1900s, Taiwan was explicitly viewed by the United States as a potential "strategic bastion against the Soviet Union," and later as a base for military operations in places like Laos.[67] And the narrative of the ROC government in Taiwan as a "Free China" and "a

[67] Tucker, Nancy Bienkopf, "Economic, Military, and Political Developments, 1950-1965," *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1994): 67.

bastion of democracy" was a key rhetorical strategy to positioning U.S. business, military, and anti-communist interests as matters of stability in Asia.[68]

These discursive trends are inextricably linked to the economic evolution of Taiwan into the ROC since the U.S.'s legal relationship is built on a foundation of bills in support of the rebel ROC government, who were very much attempting to leverage U.S. economic interest in Taiwan into political support.[69] These U.S. except-ionalist narratives are employed for specific aims and accomplish a great deal, as can be seen by the frequency of their presence in congressional bills regarding Taiwan. Within the last ten years, I have found roughly 48% (71 out of 147) of bills used some form of "Taiwan-as-Beacon" rhetoric, 71% (71 out of 100) once bills whose reference to Taiwan is secondary are removed, such as bills on U.S. debt to China or bills that merely renew former legislation's payments to the American Institute in Taiwan (Figure 1). That this rhetoric is so commonly embedded in American legislation regarding Taiwan and is used as a foundation to justify American arms sales to Taiwan, military spending, containment of China's influence, and bilateral trade agreements demonstrates the power of such rhetoric. While the United States refuses to explicitly recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state as a result of the pressure against formal recognition from China, congressional bills nonetheless remain sympathetic to the island, which is justified explicitly as a result of perceived shared cultural and economic values, Taiwan's reputation as a modern liberal democracy, and its relative legibility compared to other areas in Asia that are seen as more dangerous and less modern.

However, the very same Taiwan-as-Beacon rhetoric that serve as the basis of major congressional bills outlining the continuingly contested boundaries of a U.S.-Taiwan relationship are found in the news reporting of mainstream U.S. news outlets. For the public, news channels are often the first source of information on ongoing political events and are able to do much of the work of legitimizing or critiquing policy and international relations. As scholars like Leo Chavez (2013) and Gloria Wekker (2016) have explored, rhetoric in news media can have profound influence on public perceptions of the world.[70] As a result, I focus on the way that Taiwan is represented in U.S. news media coverage and tie these representations with past and continuing histories of the United States' economic and political entanglement with Taiwan—an island that the nation both profits off of and refuses to officially recognize. I ask how the United States news media portray Taiwanese social movements for LGBTQ+ recognition and gender equity and how this reflects the ulterior economic and political motives of colonial and imperial domination that rest beneath the veneer of liberal benevolence. This construction is relative in that it positions Taiwan as a liberal exception to Asia, thus justifying and encouraging Western liberal military and economic interventions into the region. So while U.S. praise for Taiwan's democracy and LGBTQ+ social movement at first appears as rare sincere support for Taiwan's impossible sovereignty and political independence, by peeling back the rhetoric of U.S. political policy and news media we instead find a

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[68] *Ibid.*, 78

[69] Tucker.

[70] Chavez, Leo, *The Latino threat: Constructing immigrants, citizens, and the nation*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).; Wekker, Gloria, *White innocence: Paradoxes of colonialism and race*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

tapestry of neo-imperialism that highlights the insidious nature of U.S. representations of Taiwan as a liberal democratic oasis surrounded by an Asia bound by tradition.

Theories of State Co-optation of Human Rights

In his 2007 seminal book, Pheng Cheah (2007) argues that neoliberal globalization has taken the form of a cosmopolitanism that masquerades itself as benevolent while simultaneously creating systems of mass exploitation.[71] Through the construction of universal human rights, the West takes on the position of the well-meaning and paternalistic leader of human rights while simultaneously exploiting migrant labor, ignoring the violence of poverty, and obscuring its own role in the creation of global inequality. For example, rich nations looking to employ the cheapest exported labor implicitly force poorer nations to compete for these jobs; when employers prioritize profits above all else, nations that overlook egregious health and safety standards secure these jobs and profits, which is simultaneously incentivized by richer nations and multinational corporations but also used as proof of the laboring nation's backwardness and incivility. Under the guise of a free and global economy, rich countries cosign, and indeed incentivize, egregious violations of human safety and dignity while simultaneously side-stepping any direct culpability. In the event of a scandal, corporations are able to point to the supposed impossibility of fully identifying any abuses in their supply chain, as Nestlé did in 2018 when charged with using child slave labor, while reaffirming a firm stance on the importance of human rights.[72] The countries that supply labor for these industries, then, are saddled with both exploitative business partnerships and the label of nations with severe human rights violations. In this way, human rights discourses paradoxically perpetuate human rights abuses through the framing of progressivism and conservatism.

However, this neocolonial dynamic of a perceived progressive Global North and regressive Global South is always relational, and its relationality is integral to its rhetorical usefulness. Just as the construction of the Global North as progressive and enlightened necessitates an understanding of the Global South as conservative and backwards, the positioning from the Global North of individual states such as Taiwan and Israel as progressive models for their respective regions validates a larger construction of Asia and the Middle East as inherently or organically conservative.[73] Powerful nations like the United States have discovered rhetorical ways to use these constructions to further their state aims.

Transnational feminist Leela Fernandes (2013), for instance, points us to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who employed imperial notions of women's rights to justify military occupation in Afghanistan—a deployment which contributes to a larger narrative that positions marginalized groups such as women or LGBTQ+ people in the

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[71] Cheah, Pheng, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[72] Purkayastha, Debapratim and Syeda Maseeha Qumer, "DARK SIDE CASE: Nestlé and Modern Slavery," in *Academy of Management Proceedings* 1 (2019): 12656.; Wilkinson, Lindsey E., "Piercing the chocolate veil: Ninth Circuit allows child cocoa slaves to sue under the Alien Tort Statute in Doe I v. Nestle USA," *Vill. L. Rev. Online* 63 (2018): 20.

[73] Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*, (New York City: Pantheon Books, 1978).

Global South as helpless and without agency.[74] The United States, then, is able to construct a narrative of benevolence and wisdom to justify political, military, or economic intervention under the guise of saving women or LGBTQ+ people in an inherently conservative and patriarchal Global South. This is Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critique of the Western narrative of "white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men… [that ultimately imposes] upon those women a greater ideological constriction."[75] Here, the Global North's goal in promoting (limited and conditional) women's rights is not the liberation of women, but instead the exploitation of the rhetoric of women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights to justify war, invasion, resource extraction, and sanctions through its position as the "establisher of the good society."[76] The façade of human rights here justifies egregious violations of human dignity and these narratives inherently rely on colonial dichotomies of the primitive and the modern, the undeveloped and the developed, the traditional and the progressive that simultaneously erase colonial histories and justify them.

By positioning the Global South as inherently, and perhaps unchangeably, patriarchal and conservative, these narratives necessarily erase feminist, indigenous, and pro-queer social movements and consigns marginalized subjects to a subalternity that removes the possibility of agency. Nivedita Menon (2012) contests this portrayal of Indian women as perpetually victimized and agency-less, "when are women to be considered as **victims** needing protection, and when as active **agents** engaging with power and carving out their spaces?"[77] Instead, such narratives ignore larger social movements and focus on individual activists who, ironically, can become racist symbols for the U.S. that prove there is no structural resistance in the Global South, as has been the case with Malala Yousafzai, whose story has been used to simultaneously undermine feminist movements in the West and paint Pakistan as irredeemably anti-feminist. As Fernandes explains, the Global North represents resistance within orientalized contexts as "an aberration within a society that otherwise consists of active oppressors and passive victims."[78] The West, then, becomes the only location wherein genuine resistance can take place—civilians have the agency (and freedom) to critique their state—while in the Global South resistance is seen as individual and oppression is seen as inherent to oppressive, traditional cultures. This is how, as Saba Mahmood (2012) explains, the United States is able to denounce patriarchy and sexism in the Middle East as inherent, unchanging, and cultural while simultaneously restricting women's healthcare, failing to address sexual and domestic violence, and upholding structural misogyny.[79] Oppression in the West, in contrast, is portrayed as a-structural and merely interpersonal.

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[74] Fernandes, Leela, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013).
[75] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds., C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988): 271-313.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] Menon, Nivedita, *Seeing Like a Feminist*, (New Delhi: Zubaan in Collaboration with Penguin India, 2012): 175.
[78] Fernandes, 71
[79] Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

The irony of Western denouncements of heteropatriarchy in other countries is that these denouncements often critique structures that exist in the West as well.[80] For instance, dominant narratives of presumably homogenous Asian cultures as incompatible with queer liberation as a result of a focus on inheritance and strict family structures ignores the fact that much of American anti-queer rhetoric rely on similar arguments that focus on the sanctity of the nuclear heterosexual family, the sole legitimacy of biological kinship, and the innocence of children who remain unexposed to presumably sinful deviant sexualities and genders. However despite these similiarites, "the paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives about the greater homophobia of immigrant communities and communities of color, about the stricter family values and mores in these communities."[81] From this perspective the question moves away from attempting to judge whether a nation or a community is or is not anti-queer and moves towards how the United States is able to use the rhetoric of feminist and LGBTQ+ rights movements to support its own national mythologies and nation-building.

The ways that queer and feminist movements and rhetoric can be employed in service of imperial aims of the state is central to an interrogation of American policy and news representations of Taiwan. Branded as a human rights beacon for Asia by the United States and a pivotal part of a secure Indo-Pacific region, the image of Taiwan as exceptional and model for Asia is used to lay the foundation for bilateral trade agreements, arms sales, defense treaties, and even military decisions. The conditional acceptance of the island as a modern, progressive state comes at the cost of increased U.S. influence and intervention in Asia. Under the guise of a benevolent U.S. investment in Taiwan's political and economic agency, the U.S. is able to capitalize on an image of Taiwan as a liberal democratic oasis in Asia by representing it as proof of American liberal democratic exceptionalism in contrast to an Asia supposedly bounded by oppressive tradition.

Taiwanese Exceptionalism in U.S. Legislation

Rhetoric of Taiwan's exceptional nature in comparison to the rest of Asia is embedded in the very fabric of US-Taiwan legal relations that date back to the creation of the contemporary state in 1945. The United States' current relationship with Taiwan is directly related to a history of intervention in the 1927-1949 Chinese Civil War between two opposing governments who both claimed to be the true government of China, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC). As a result of the U.S.'s concerns over the spread of communism, the United States initially backed the ROC government due to fears that if the PRC won control over mainland China, "they

[80] From then-presidential candidate Donald Trump's speech following the June 13 Pulse Nightclub shooting: "Many of the principles of Radical Islam are incompatible with Western values and institutions. Radical Islam is anti-woman, anti-gay and anti-American. I refuse to allow America to become a place where gay people, Christian people, and Jewish people, are the targets of persecution and intimidation…" Not only does his rhetoric obscure U.S. sexist, anti-queer, and anti-Semitic policy, it presupposes Islam as uniquely incompatible with liberal values while not questioning Christianity's historical and continuing anti-queer influence in the U.S.

[81] Puar, 22.

would lose the profits of trade and manufacturing enterprises, the devotion of converts, or the opportunity to make of China a strategic bastion against the Soviet Union."[82] However, when the conflict began to look increasingly unwinnable and the ROC finally retreated into Taiwan, tensions between the ROC and U.S. over how each envisioned the new government came to the forefront. In the U.S.'s 1949 China White Paper, Washington resigned, "that the United States had done all that it could for the Nationalists. Chiang Kai-shek's imminent defeat… was due [solely] to military ineptitude and political corruption."[83]

Despite this rupture, the United States continued to support the ROC government in Taiwan as it transitioned into martial law as a result of strong ROC lobbying (referred to as the China lobby) and the prevailing image of "Taiwan as a bastion of freedom in Asia."[84] The shared anticommunist interests of the United States and the Republic of China was enough to justify the continuing economic and military support for an autocratic government. Formal U.S. support for the Republic of China ended in the late 1970s as it withdrew official recognition of the ROC government and transitioned towards recognizing Beijing but refusing to take a stand on the sovereignty of Taiwan. This decision led to perhaps one of the most influential documents outlining the relationship between the United States and Taiwan. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act carefully details the extent of the United States' diplomatic interactions with the island so as to both maintain formal relations and avoid addressing the tenuous question of Taiwan's sovereignty. As the starting point for U.S.-Taiwan relations for the following forty years, the Taiwan Relations Act constructs the rhetorical boundaries that frame how later U.S. legislation on Taiwan are presented.

The Taiwan Relations Act is, essentially, an official way for the United States to assert its interests in the island have no bearing on its relationship with the People's Republic of China and that, for instance, selling military arms to Taiwan is not a reflection of support for the island's self-determination. This allows the U.S. to both pursue its economic and political interests in Taiwan without officially commenting on Taiwan's political sovereignty. Notably, the act repeatedly reinforces the value of Taiwan's economy to the United States and makes it clear that it is a priority in the maintenance of U.S.-Taiwan relations. For example, under the heading of section 4 which details the ways U.S. laws still apply to Taiwan despite the lack of formal diplomatic recognition or relations, the act outlines the continuing validity of "contracts, debts, or property interests of any kind… under the laws of the United States heretofore or hereafter acquired by or with respect to Taiwan."[85] This signals that withdrawing official support will not interfere with economic relationships and that the liminal status of Taiwan should not be an impediment for U.S. interests in the region.

The act also sets forth the precedent that peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait are U.S. priorities and that any attempt to resolve the conflict through means the US deems not "peaceful" represent "a threat to the peace and security of the Western

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[82] Tucker, 22.
[83] Tucker, 24.
[84] Tucker, 46.
[85] H. R. Res. 2479: *Taiwan Relations Act*., Sess. of 1979.

Pacific area."[86] Positioning Taiwan (and the status quo of it as a liminal non-nation) as a key to regional peace and security serves as the legal foundation for constructing Taiwan as a beacon in Asia, though this rhetorical shift did not come into full force until the late 1980s when the political dynamic of the U.S.-Taiwan-China landscape changed once again. Following the PRC state violence of Tiananmen Square in 1989, the U.S. conception of the PRC as a communist threat and the ROC as a democratic China worthy of investment re-solidified. For many Americans, Tiananmen Square demonstrated that China was "a rejection of Western values and institutions" and this was contrasted with the perception of Taiwan's "increasing modernization, democratization, and, perhaps, Westernization of politics, economics, and culture;" to that end, Taiwan was seen by the United States as "a promising experiment in democracy" and a key strategic island for the containment of Chinese communism.[87]

U.S. bills regarding Taiwan since the 1990s tend to fall broadly within four major categories: (1) bills to officially recognize Taiwan in some organization, (2) military bills, including both military training and arms sales to Taiwan, (3) trade and economic bills, and (4) appropriations bills that allocate money to the American Institute in Taiwan. Military bills are by far the most common, with bills calling to recognize Taiwan in an observer capacity the rarest. Here, the language of Taiwan-as-Beacon is used predominantly to justify increased military training and arms sales in Asia under a guise of support for a thriving liberal democracy that is key for regional peace and in need of American protection. Perhaps initially surprisingly, 71% of bills in support of Taiwan are authored by Republican senators (74% when secondary bills are removed), though as we will see, this is consistent with the framing of Taiwan as a model minority state wedged against other racialized nations. The rhetoric that many of these bills use to portray the protection of the liberal democracy of Taiwan as necessary for peace and security in Asia points to the ways progressive-sounding language is used to further state aims.

Bills reaffirming the Taiwan Relations Act are introduced to Congress yearly in order to continue the act's policies of maintaining the American Institute in Taiwan, of which an additional thirty-five bills (roughly 24% of congressional bills substantively related to Taiwan introduced in the last ten years) uphold its funding, and restate the United States' Six Assurances to Taiwan which includes substantial American arms sales and military training for Taiwan; the very first of the assurances is explicitly a refusal to "set a date certain for ending arms sales to Taiwan." Two of the three pillars of the American Institute in Taiwan are "security and defense cooperation" and "commercial and economic relations."[88] In this light, support for Taiwan is not posited simply as a result of the economic benefits of, for instance, a bilateral trade agreement; support for Taiwan represents a way to ensure free liberal democracy for an Asia rife with corruption and danger. Notably, these reaffirmation bills for the Taiwan Relations Act and Six Assurances are even more saturated with the language of Taiwan-as-Beacon, as is the case with House of Representatives concurrent resolution 88, titled, "Reaffirming the

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[86] *Ibid*.
[87] Tucker, 2.
[88] S. Con. Res. 40*: A concurrent resolution recognizing the close relationship between the United States and Taiwan and the important role of the American Institute in Taiwan in strengthening such relationship*, Sess. of 2018.

Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances as cornerstones of United States-Taiwan relations." While many congressional bills regarding Taiwan use at least one common rhetorical tool of the "Taiwan-as-Beacon" narrative, H.Con.Res. 88 uses all three. The bill positions Taiwan as a key "anti-Communist ally in the Asia-Pacific" that has led to the shared American and Taiwanese values of freedom, and democracy. As a "beacon of democracy in Asia," Taiwan has fostered a strong relationship with the United States as a result of "mutually beneficial security, commercial, and cultural ties." These proposed ties are not only positioned as evidence of deep shared values, they are framed as a rare element of stability in Asia. According to the resolution, the relationship between Taiwan and United States "has endured for more than 65 years through many shifts in Asia's geopolitical landscape"—or in other words, while Asian geopolitics has shifted dramatically over time, Taiwan has acted as a consistent anchor and thus continued investment into the island is an investment into regional stability. Where Asia may be seen as volatile or uncontrollable, Taiwan is framed as orderly and mature.

Because of this stability, Taiwan is represented as "a prosperous, free, and orderly society with strong institutions, worthy of emulation and envy" that "showed the world again what a mature, Chinese-speaking democracy looks like."[89] Notably, Taiwan is explicitly pivoted against the rest of Asia, particularly the rest of the "Chinese-speaking" world. In order for Taiwan to be prosperous, to be free, to be orderly, and to be mature, the rest of Asia must in turn be impoverished, unfree, disordered, and immature. For Taiwan to be an exceptional Asian success story, the rest of Asia and particularly the People's Republic of China must necessarily be something to be un-except-able. It should be noted that the whereas clause which cites 2016 Secretary of State Antony Blinken's praise of Taiwan as a "mature, Chinese-speaking democracy" is in direct response to Taiwan's 2016 elections, implicitly as a result of the election of the island's first female president. Again, the aesthetics of a neoliberal multicultural society—in this case the election of a woman—are used to set Taiwan a world apart from Asia, and this is executed without a hint of irony that the apparent arbiter of modernity, the United States, has yet to elect a female president of their own.

Yet while the language here purports to be praising Taiwan's inclusion into a new world, the role of the United States is always lurking in the subtext of the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances. It is the "United States economic aid [that] prevented Taiwan from sliding into an economic depression in the 1950s and greatly contributed to the island's later economic takeoff," just as it is the US-drafted Taiwan Relations Act that "[helped] maintain peace, security, and stability in the Western Pacific."[90] Here, the democratization of Taiwan is worthy of praise, but the actual subject of praise is the U.S.'s pivotal role in this democratization. But while Taiwan's democratization is attributed to U.S. aid, its earlier defeat by the PRC and its descent into one-party martial law is framed not a result of U.S. influence, but is instead solely the ROC's "military ineptitude and political corruption."[91] In the same manner that the model minority is given conditional praise that ultimately serves to compliment the benevolence

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[89] H. Con. Res. 88: *Reaffirming the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances as cornerstones of United States-Taiwan relations*, Sess. of 2016.
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] Tucker, 24.

and inherent righteousness of the system that suppresses them, Taiwan is propped up as a beacon in order to reinforce the imperial narrative of the United States' benevolent role as an international peacekeeper and leader in free, just, and liberal democracy.

The legacy of Taiwan-as-Beacon rhetoric that appear in other bills on Taiwan mimic the ideas present in those foundational assurances and resolutions that form the basis of a contemporary U.S.-Taiwan relationship. In 2017, H.R. 271 was introduced by the Subcommittee on Trade in the House Committee on Ways and Means to begin bilateral trade agreements between the United States and Taiwan. The resolution employs much of the same rhetoric of Taiwan as liberal democratic beacon and oasis in Asia, again to reinforce the economic gain a strong, if informal, relationship with Taiwan would have for the United States. It posits Taiwan as "a democracy and free market economy… [that] shares the United States principles and values" to demonstrate a cultural and political value to increased economic relationships with the island.[92] This is paired alongside reports of Taiwan's productivity and influence in the electronics industry as well as the more than $3 billion market for U.S. agricultural exports to Taiwan. This rhetoric uses the language of democracy in order to increase profits; by framing the U.S.-Taiwan relationship as "critical for the promotion of prosperity, democratic values, and regional security throughout the Asia-Pacific region", the bill is able to advocate for an increase in U.S. exports and business investments to Taiwan at great profit.[93] Here, explicitly, the image of Taiwan as a progressive exception to Asia justifies U.S. profits.

More recently, a bill passed in March of 2018, H. R. 535 known as the "Taiwan Travel Act" employs nearly identical rhetoric of Taiwan as "a beacon of democracy in Asia… [whose] democratic achievements inspire many countries and people in the region" in order to advocate for the increased political and economic ties between the United States and Taiwan.[94] That same year, Colorado senator Cory Gardner sponsored two senate bills regarding Taiwan in 2018, both of which rely on the rhetoric of Taiwan-as-Beacon to advocate for foreign policy measures. The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 is an in-depth outline of the guidelines and agreements of U.S. relations with countries across Asia. The foundation of this series of guidelines are the premises that Asia is both "home to some of the most dynamic economies in the world" and "poses security challenges that threaten to undermine United States national security interests, regional peace, and global stability."[95] These two ideological pillars run consistently throughout the act, which attempts to balance the draw of increased economic gain from trade and investment which is "vitally important to the United States economy" and a strategy of containment for governments and groups deemed a "significant threat to the United States, its allies, and its citizens interests abroad."[96] Asia here is represented as a dangerous and volatile region that houses considerable economic potential—one which

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[92] H. R. Res. 271: *Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the United States Trade Representative should commence negotiations to enter into a bilateral trade agreement with Taiwan*, Sess. of 2017.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] H. R. Res. 535: *Taiwan Travel Act*, Sess. of 2018.
[95] S. Res. 2736: *Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018*, Sess. of 2018.
[96] *Ibid*.

the United States can tap into with strategic investment and support. Section 109's focus on Taiwan centers around the idea of strategic, unofficial support for Taiwan to protect against threats from the People's Republic of China while simultaneously avoiding any official recognition or position on the issue of cross-strait relations.

The second of Gardner's bills more specifically focuses on what Taiwan means ideologically and economically for the United States. S. Con. Res. 40, concisely titled "A concurrent resolution recognizing the close relationship between the United States and Taiwan and the important role of the American Institute in Taiwan in strengthening such relationship", posits that Taiwan is both "free, democratic, and prosperous" as well as "an important contributor to peace and stability around the world."[97] Here already Taiwan is positioned as an exemplar of free liberal democracy which is under siege by its neighbors that do not share "the democratic values shared by the United States and Taiwan," most notably the People's Republic of China. By stressing the shared values of democracy and freedom between the United States and Taiwan, the US draws parallels that position Taiwan as comparatively liberal and respectable. Yet this must always be relative; Taiwan cannot be a beacon of liberalism and democracy without necessitating somewhere else be its antithesis. In most of the bills the antithesis is China, whose censorship and labor abuses make it an easy target for U.S.-employed rhetoric of global human rights that ignore American complicity in the maintenance of some of these abuses. However, others draw broader comparisons to Asian governments and groups labeled political threats or terrorists. In these cases, Taiwan is simultaneously represented as an economic powerhouse and a small, defenseless island in need of protection.

The conditional praise of Taiwan embedded in the "Taiwan-as-Beacon" narrative hides an insidious pattern of military spending, economic exploitation, political intervention, and arms sales that serve to generate not insubstantial profits for the U.S. government and independent businesses. While superficially, the narrative seems to promise substantive American support for the island, praise for the island hinges on the continued exploitation of orientalist ideas of Asia that justify US imperial aims in the region. When employed as a model minority, Taiwan is positioned as conditionally civilized relative to an Asia which must then be inherently backwards. Yet like with any model minority, this acceptance is fleeting and superficial and should the narrative cease to be politically useful it will be reneged, as was the case in the U.S. disassociation with the ROC failure to gain control of the mainland. In this way, the deployment of the U.S. rhetoric of Taiwan-as-Beacon betrays not a substantive support for the island but the imperial aim of continued U.S. political, economic, and military influence in Asia.

A New Topper on a White Cake

While the foundation of a legal U.S.-Taiwan relationship is built on the rhetoric of Taiwan-as-beacon, this rhetoric has seeped into broader U.S. representations of Taiwan. The representation of Taiwan-as-beacon also manifests in public political discourse of Taiwan, particularly in mainstream U.S. news coverage of the island. In this arena, the discourses of Taiwan as a progressive oasis in a presumably backwards Asia justifies the

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[97] S. Con. Res. 40: *A concurrent resolution recognizing the close relationship between the United States and Taiwan and the important role of the American Institute in Taiwan in strengthening such relationship*, Sess. of 2018.

United States' rhetorical support for the island and its ensuing policy positions. "Support for Taiwan" often acts as code for containing a racialized socialist threat—particularly against China, for which the United States claims its human rights violations and undemocratic government are the sole reasons for international tensions. Framing Taiwan as a progressive model for the rest of Asia, then, functions less as substantive support for Taiwan or LGBTQ+ rights and more as a justification for pre-existing ideas and policy decisions. Most recently, the United States deployed Taiwan's same-sex marriage movement for this aim.

The issue of same-sex marriage in Taiwan came into the mainstream in the early 2000s when same-sex couples began to be able to be legally recognized as partners with limited rights in certain regions. By the mid-2010s, several bills to legalize same-sex marriage entered the Constitutional Court; if these bills were to pass, Taiwan would become the first country in Asia to legally allow same-sex marriage. Shortly after, various western news outlets such as CNN and the New York Times capitalized on this story with sensationalist titles that seemed to indicate that such bills would be ratified in the near future, though a referendum later in November of 2018 rejected two pro-LGBTQ+ bills including a same-sex marriage bill. By July of 2016, news articles began branding Taiwan as "one of the most progressive places in Asia in terms of LGBT rights" and some explicitly tied this move with the election of the first female president of Taiwan—President Tsai Ing-wen.[98] However, the American media's sole focus on the issue of marriage, rather than on Taiwanese state protections of LGBTQ+ people and the contestations over discrimination in education, trans recognition, and adoption, betrays a media focus on a neoliberal and multicultural view on LGBTQ+ rights movements and the portrayal of this movement finds itself saturated with Taiwan-as-beacon rhetoric.

Some of this language of Taiwan's exceptionalism through its shared values with the United States is explicit. A New York Times article published in November of 2016 boasted Taiwan as "an island of relative acceptance for gays, lesbians and those of other sexual orientations," adding afterwards that "in some Asian countries, including Brunei, homosexual acts are illegal."[99] An article published by the NYT two years earlier, headlined *For Asia's Gays, Taiwan Stands Out as Beacon*, similarly constructs Taiwan as a liberal oasis situated within a foreign and oriental continent bounded by anti-queer traditions and backwards conservatism. In a quote from Grace Poore, the director of the New York based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (now called OutRight), the article promotes Taiwan as "an inspiration for much of Asia… way ahead of their neighbors." Similar rhetoric can be found in Jacob's assertion that "when it comes to gay rights in Asia, Taiwan is a world apart."[100] The idea of pushing Taiwan into another "world" allows the United States to draw upon the Cold War categories of First, Second, and Third World that implicitly carry Western perceptions of development and progress. A Taiwan that is a world apart from Asia is an exception to the presumably underdeveloped and primitive continent and is thus conditionally accepted into the ranks of a modern, Westernized nationhood. As we have seen, this conditional acceptance into

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[98] Nylander

[99] Horton, Chris, "Taiwan May Be First in Asia to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage," *New York Times*. Nov, 2016.

[100] Jacobs, Andrew, "For Asia's Gays, Taiwan Stands Out as Beacon," *New York Times*. Oct, 2014.

nationhood does not translate to support for Taiwan's actual national sovereignty. Yet, this maneuver ultimately attributes LGBTQ+ gains in Taiwan to the trappings of the first world, which reinforces the narrative that U.S. intervention in Taiwan was effective and justified and that a Westernized state is a necessary component of LGBTQ+ rights. Indeed, U.S. representations of Taiwan's progress serve mainly to cement American liberalism as just, inevitable, and ideal. This commitment to an American liberalism and capitalist system manifests through the quantification of Taiwan's progressiveness as shown through capitalist consumerism, such as CNN measuring Taiwan's progressivism by the number of views and relative number of "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" reactions present on a Taiwanese McDonald's advertisement published on American tech giant YouTube.[101] Relying on consumerist markers of acceptance for marriage elide the experiences of queer people in Taiwan outside of the realm of the most palatable of LGBTQ+ issues.

Despite Taiwan's respectable liberalism, however, Jacobs is quick to assert that "in many respects, Taiwan remains a traditional society bound by a sense of Confucian filial duty that emphasizes family and the production of heirs."[102] This highlights that despite Taiwan's conditional inclusion within the First World, it is forever oriental and foreign. That much of the debate on American same-sex adoption and marriage revolves around the legitimacy of gay parenting and non-biological children goes unaddressed in lieu of a thesis that depends on the inherent backwardness of Asian tradition. Jacobs draws direct comparisons between Taiwan's queer rights movements and those in the West by positing a linear scale of queer progressivism, "At a time when laws legalizing same-sex marriage are sweeping the United States, Latin America and Europe, gay rights advocates across Asia are still struggling to secure basic protections."[103] Not only does this rely on positioning same-sex marriage as the pinnacle of LGBTQ+ rights, it also implicitly ranks the world on a scale of progressivism using the logics of modernity. In this scale, the Global North (particularly the United States and Europe) alongside Latin America become the pioneers of progressivism with Asia implicitly represented as bound by backwards tradition and Africa as non-existent in the scale at all. Asia, here, is seen as behind—still grappling with an issue that the rest of the world has seemingly settled. Worse, these representations often draw upon islamophobic ideologies that position Islam as antithetical to gay relationships, with Jacobs specifically addressing the issue of Shariah [sic] laws in nations like Brunei as the primary cause of anti-queer sentiment while simultaneously ignoring anti-queer policies in the United States.

For example, as of 2018, 28 states in the United States have no explicit prohibitions for discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, making it legal for LGBTQ+ people to be fired from their jobs for being openly LGBTQ+. In addition, the gay panic defense, a defense which allows those who have murdered gay people to claim a bout of temporary insanity as a result of perceived sexual interest, has only been banned in three states, and the parallel trans panic defense has even less contestation. That the defense has had success in shortening sentences and altering charges from first-degree murder to manslaughter demonstrates both an embedded

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[101] *Ibid.*
[102] *Ibid.*
[103] *Ibid.*

cultural anti-queer sentiment in the United States as well as legal institutionalized anti-queer policy. That these policies exist concurrent with the celebrated wins of LGBTQ+ marriage and adoption that are conceptualized as proof that the United States is a queer-friendly nation should come as no surprise in a multicultural America that views the existence of Pride not only as a sign that anti-queer sentiment is over but that LGBTQ+ advocacy has gone too far. Yet the largely lipservice wins that the LGBTQ+ community have won are used to mask the de facto and structural violence against the LGBTQ+ community in the United States, which is then packaged and projected abroad as evidence that other countries are less developed or progressive, and thus in need of guidance or intervention from the United States. The state is perfectly willing to make some concessions that will largely benefit only a subset of the LGBTQ+ community if it is able to employ them to their own benefit—in this case the spread of U.S. influence to countries and regions framed as backwards. In such a manner, the state is able to refashion even its own concessions for its own aims.

Indeed, interviews with Taiwanese politicians echoed much of the liberal rhetoric that the United States has presented using narratives of progress and civil rights through state recognition to frame the contestations over LGBTQ+ demands. As Kumonitang party legislator Jason Hsu articulated, "This is an issue that shouldn't be ideological. It's a sign of a society's progressiveness."[104] This focus on measuring a society's progressiveness calls to mind colonial conceptions of linear societal development with societies being ranked on a scale from the primitive to the modern. The modern, in this sense, is the proximity of a society to a Western nation-state with Western ideologies of liberal inclusion, state recognition, and colorblind multiculturalism. By calling back towards these discourses, Taiwanese politicians prioritize neoliberal multicultural markers of societal progressivism over substantively addressing ideological and physical violences lobbed at a vulnerable and marginalized population.

The construction of Taiwan as a world apart from Asia in U.S. news representations is a direct result of the framing of LGBTQ+ human rights movements both in the U.S. and Taiwan. In both cases, particular LGBTQ+ rights movements like marriage as proof of inherent societal progressivism that simultaneously obscures the continuing existence of anti-queer policy and ideologies in their respective states and justifies an imperial paternalism that legitimizes foreign intervention into sovereign states. By positioning Taiwan as a pro-LGBTQ+ oasis in Asia, U.S. news coverage rhetorically sanctions U.S. policy on Taiwan as just and benevolent—effectively translating same-sex marriage protests into arms sales to Taiwan. The purported focus on liberal human rights and progressive values again elides the continuing imperial aims of the United States in Asia.

Conclusion: Sexual Exceptionalism and the Model Minority State

The prevailing narrative of Taiwan's exceptional progressivism in a continent otherwise bound by oppressive tradition is one constructed with ulterior motives from the United States to support its economic and political influence in the region. While American legislation and news outlets praise Taiwan as a model minority state and one

[104] Nylander.

that exemplifies American ideals of liberalism, capitalism, and modernity, its praise does not reflect substantive support. By utilizing Taiwan as an ideological stand-in for American exceptionalism, the United States is able to use orientalist logic and rhetoric to justify military occupation and intervention in Asia, exploitative economic practices, and promote narratives of American and Western supremacy. Under the veneer of benevolence, the United States' employment of Taiwan functions as an excuse to expand its own imperial influence and profit off of the exploitation of Asian resources and labor. Simultaneously, the United States fails to institute substantive policies that protect LGBTQ+ Americans from employment and housing discrimination, address issues disproportionately impacting the community such as homelessness, and put an end to anti-queer policy. In fact, while the United States touts certain places like Taiwan and Israel as progressive LGBTQ+ havens, it concurrently institutes anti-queer policies that strip away protections and rights from the very marginalized groups it employs as markers of its own societal progressivism and moral superiority over the Global South. In this way, human rights is able to be employed as justification for the bombing, separation, detention, and loss of life of countless people outside of American borders.

This is not to say that there are no structural differences between policies impacting LGBTQ+ people in different countries; rather that the way the United States represents these policies inherently flattens the differences into easily digestible and palatable binaries of "progressive" and "regressive," "modern" and "primitive." that align with the military, economic, and political interests of those constructing the categories. I am also not disputing that certain neoliberal pro-queer policies have had some political benefits for LGBTQ+ people. Marriage, for instance, while rightfully criticized for being a policy that does not address the most pressing issues impacting the LGBTQ+ community in the United States and disproportionately benefits LGBTQ+ people that are most palatable and least threatening to the nation-state, does have some meaningful benefits that ought not to be ignored. This is to say that these benefits are always conditional, and always in service of larger aims of the nation rather than true concessions to a marginalized group.[105] What matters to these categorizations is not the actual safety and dignity of LGBTQ+ people, but instead how abstract notions of LGBTQ+ support can be used in service of the needs of the nation-state.

Yet, the American representation of queer movements in Taiwan comes off of a larger trend in American cooptations of rights-based movements across the globe. One such example of U.S. narratives of an oasis of liberal democracy in an otherwise barbaric land is the portrayal of Israel and Zionism in the Middle East by American politicians and policy.[106] Much like Taiwan, the U.S. has highlighted Israel as a pro-LGBTQ+ bastion for queer people in the Middle East in ways that obscure both Israeli anti-LGBTQ+ policy and the U.S.'s political and economic entanglement in Israel. In both cases, a primary cause of this political relationship was through lobbyists, which allowed "weak

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[105] Franke.

[106] Feldman, Keith P, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America*, (Minneapolis: London, 2015).; Jackman, Michael Connors, and Nishant Upadhyay, "Pinkwatching Israel, whitewashing Canada: queer (settler) politics and indigenous colonization in Canada," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42/3/4 (2014): 195-210.; Puar, Jasbir, "Rethinking homonationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45.2 (2013): 336-339.

players like Israel and Taiwan… [to utilize] congressional sympathizers and the voting public to prevent executive branch action inimical" to their respective states.[107] Keith Feldman (2015) notes that Israeli Zionism was framed as an issue of anti-racism, and thus rhetorically and legislatively supporting Israel became a largely bipartisan issue framed as continuing U.S. goals of human rights, multiculturalism, and self-determination. This was paired alongside narratives of Jewish assimilation into the American nation-state relative to the inassimilable Muslim, Palestinian, or Arab.

By utilizing Israel as an avatar for the United States, Israeli military victories against Palestine became marked "as a proxy victory for Americans. The events of the 1967 war were routinely narrated as a story of enlightened Western civilization besting the barbarous inscrutable East yet again, of David's overwhelming victory in the face of Goliath's threat of existential annihilation, a swift and definitive statement of Israel's military strength."[108] This ideological substitution reflects the United States' deep entanglement with Israel and the political motives underlying such a substitution. The construction of America's proxy as the vulnerable David surrounded by the barbaric Goliath underscores the supposed key role of Israel in maintaining peace and security in the Middle East. Similarly to Taiwan, an American support of places like Israel is inextricably tied to notions that it is a progressive oasis for LGBTQ+ people otherwise surrounded by a continent of primitive anti-queer policy. Trump's explicit support of the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December of 2017, as well as his order to move the American embassy away from Tel Aviv and into Jerusalem is rhetorically dependent on constructing a palatable and rational Israel to an irrational Middle East. This is of course contradictory to both the Trump administration's virulent anti-semitism and also Netanyahu's policies to deport LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and reject LGBTQ+ surrogacy births.

Like Taiwan, Israel also became a stand-in for the United State's policy of containment. In the late 1940s, the United States pushed a concerted effort to "create a barrier to Soviet influence in Western Europe and the Middle East."[109] This initiative, according to Osamah F. Khalil (2016), became a key motivator for a host of Middle East Studies in universities across the nation and for increased United States influence in the area. Israel, then, became the foundation for American control in the region and by highlighting ideological similarities and links between Israel and the United States, the nation was able to tie the two's aims together. In this way "the attachment to Israel and protecting and promoting its relationship with America united Democrats and Republicans" and became one of the few issues that were truly bipartisan in American politics.[110]

The underlying current here is the economic interests of the United States, where nations that are economically and politically beneficial to the United States are conceptualized and employed differently than others. Because both Taiwan and Israel are economically valuable to the United States, neoliberal policies of inclusion and

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[107] Tucker, 4
[108] Feldman, 148.
[109] Khalil, Osamah F., *America's Dream Palace Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016): 77.
[110] *Ibid*., 257

multiculturalism become the highlight of their image for the American public, while simultaneously legitimizing an American exceptionalist view of the superiority of liberal democracy. In addition, this construction also serves to justify the invasion and dismantling of countries that are not placed within this frame. These constructions need not be accurate; they just must be widely accepted. As we have seen, the human rights policies of Taiwan are far from substantive protections for LGBTQ+ people, and while a step in a positive direction, are not sufficient. Were Taiwan not valuable for the United States, it would be equally easy to politically conceptualize it as a foreign island bound by Confucian tradition that has failed multiple times to provide legal protections to same-sex couples. In these instances, political proxies for the United States function as a parallel to the Model minority myth—those intermediate figures that are able to receive conditional benefits at the expense of others while simultaneously legitimizing one's own subjugation.

The use of Taiwan as a model minority state here means less for both substantive pro-queer policies and political support for Taiwan than it does for the United States' own interests. By positioning Taiwan as a liberal democratic oasis surrounded by an Asia that is confined by backwards tradition, the United States is able to prop a model of Western capitalist democracy as an integral part of a progressive pro-queer society. Not only is this not an accurate representation, both because this model has failed to create a truly inclusive society and also because a truly just and equal society may be antithetical to capitalism, it also justifies the military invasion and occupation of nations marked as unsuitably modern and progressive. Setting Taiwan a world apart from Asia as a result of its pro-queer movements, does not afford it the privileges and power of the so-called first world, nor does it substantively support radical queer liberation in the United States or Taiwan; instead, positioning Taiwan as a pro-queer beacon for Asia functions simply as a perpetuation of a 21st century imperialism.

2. "Other Asian"
The Politics of a Taiwanese American Community and the Fight for Question #9

> *"The more Taiwanese counted in U.S., the more the U.S. cares about our issues."*
> - "Write in 'Taiwanese'", *US Census 2010*

In Spring of 2010, the community organizing non-profit Taiwanese American Citizens League (TACL) published a campaign to mobilize Taiwanese Americans around recognition on the 2010 government census. Consisting of a video advertisement and an online campaign, the project sought to disaggregate demographic information on Asian Americans further, by advocating for Taiwanese Americans to check "Other Asian" in lieu of "Chinese" on the race question of the census and write-in "Taiwanese" in order to address their estimated 80% undercount of the Taiwanese American population. Being counted on the census was framed as an issue of not only identity or access to government resources, but of existential recognition. In the words of the campaign, "…we need to be counted in the Census in order to prove our very existence."[111] The campaign necessarily engaged in a construction of a Taiwanese and Taiwanese American community that was tailored for a particular audience—in this case, the U.S. state. Using cultural markers of food and language to form a coherent idea of a Taiwanese ethnic culture and abstract liberal values like civic duty and representational politics to appeal to a U.S. image of liberalism, the campaign engaged in the construction of a "Taiwanese-ness" and an "American-ness" for the Taiwanese American community in pursuit of state recognition. In order for Taiwanese Americans to be counted—to prove their existence—they deployed the discourses of cultural claiming and abstract liberalism to create a legible and coherent idea of a Taiwanese American community.

The census has served as a site of contest and negotiation over racial and ethnic categories, and one that Michael Omi (2019) claims, "has had this unintended consequence of really influencing the very discourse, the very categories of race, which we use today."[112] Census categories are always embedded in political constructions of race, ethnicity, and community, and the different ways these categories have been articulated throughout different iterations of the census highlight the political contexts of the era in which they were created. For Omi, "these racial and ethnic categories can really be seen as a kind of effects of political struggle over their meaning and definition and in turn these categories can have political effects in sort of setting the stage for the next round of debates about classification."[113] In this respect, revisions of census categories are not merely efforts to reach a more accurate description of existing racial and ethnic categories, but venues to construct communities themselves.

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[111] "Write in Taiwanese," *Taiwanese American 2010*, Web Addressed (retrieved 11 April 2016).
[112] Omi, Michael, "Berkeley Talks: On racial classification in the census," Speech, Berkeley, CA, March 12, 2019, Berkeley News, https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/03/12/berkeley-talks-transcript-michael-omi/
[113] *Ibid*.

Community is complex, imprecise, and disciplining. It is just as much of a prescriptive process as it is descriptive. To create a community necessitates two components: a narrative and an audience to receive it. A narrative serves as the imagined link connecting an otherwise perhaps disparate population and an audience draws the boundaries around how this population can be legible and defined. If the audience is the oppressor, the narrative is unity. If the audience is the subaltern, the narrative is solidarity. And if the audience is the state, the narrative is all-too-often contribution. Miranda Joseph (2002) asks us to trouble romantic conceptions of community as an easy and uncontroversial way to conceptualize group mobilization. For Joseph, a notion of community is always constructed and gains its power in the idea of its organicity. Yet, despite what she sees as the near-universality of a positive view of community, she asserts that "fetishizing community only makes us blind to the ways we might intervene in the enactment of domination and exploitation."[114] Joseph sees the construction of community as always simultaneously outward-facing and inward-facing. That is to say, the idea of community is about both the portrayal of "that community to itself and to others (the *mainstream*)."[115] It is a process of making legible internal narratives of a community and making palatable to a broader audience external narratives. In the context of her ethnography of a San Franciscan LGBTQ+ theatre company, creating an idea of community is about deciding who is included and who must be excluded in pursuit of a unifying and accessible public image (in her case, gay people of color, bisexuals, and transgender people).

Her conception refutes the essentialism of identity that other scholars such as bell hooks and Judith Butler have critiqued and instead highlights how the construction of community is built on strategic exclusion and invisibilizing dissent.[116] It is in this respect that an uncritical embrace of, for example, an Asian American community, tends to prioritize those members who are the most proximal to privilege—often, East Asians, English-speaking, wealthy, highly educated, citizens—while erasing the pressing issues that impact more vulnerable members in the community—for instance Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, refugees, undocumented immigrants. For Joseph, "to invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and of power" because this bounded construction of community is generated by liberalism, nationalism, and capitalism.[117] Like Benedict Anderson's (2006) conception of the nation, Joseph's community is built on the perception or idea of shared histories, values, and identity and is thus necessarily constructed through exclusion of and creation of a "not us".[118] To appear to represent all, the community must only represent some. As is the case with an imagined community of a nation, even a marginalized community must have borders.

An uncharitable interpretation of this definition of community would condemn any instance of group community-building as a form of shallow identity politics and posit

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[114] Joseph, Miranda, *Against the Romance of Community*, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2002): ix.
[115] *Ibid.*, xiii.
[116] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, (Boston: South End Press, 2000).; Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2006).
[117] *Ibid.*, xxiii.
[118] Anderson, Benedict, "The Origins of National Consciousness," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso books, 2006).

that such movements are at best ineffective or at worst, counter-productive. Yet this would dismiss the measurable gains that community-driven organizations and campaigns have accomplished even when they have deployed potentially harmful discourses of liberal multiculturalism or American exceptionalism. And it would fetishize a romanticized colorblind world where only the needs of individuals are seen and hierarchical structures that target groups are invisibilized. Rather, the language of community must be deployed with a critical eye and with the constant knowledge of its limitations and inadequacies—limitations that Butler has theorized. In her seminal 1990 treatise on gender and performativity, Butler introduced the idea of the *embarrassed et cetera*, or "the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all."[119] It is the necessary failure of attempting to contain what cannot be contained, and to render fully legible what can never be fully disciplined. Yet Butler identifies this *et cetera* as a space of opportunity in which one can interrogate the very construction of identity itself. For in the realization that identity is always uncontained and inconvenient, that it is in some way also ku-mo, we are able to more deeply interrogate how identity functions rather than taking for granted that there is a static, descriptive identity or community.

For our purposes, the *embarrassed et cetera* highlights how group identity is necessarily embedded in power and it reflects the charge of "Other Asian" that the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign actively cultivated and also sought to outgrow. What is primary enough to elude *the et cetera*, especially consistently, is often an unmarked community that is, if not universal, at least unremarkable. It is a community that is assumed and easily legible, one that needs no further explanation than its place within a canonical list, and one that other categories will necessarily be aggregated into.[120] There is no successful avoiding this problem; in my own lists in this chapter and others I relegate the roughly thirty groups of indigenous Taiwanese groups into a single category and an assumed *et cetera*, and even in this pan-indigenous category, indigenous groups are left out of the figure of thirty recognized groups—a community border which has continually been contested. The purpose of this interrogation of community is not to demean any such attempt at detailing or investigating identity, but instead to highlight how the very discourse of discussing identity involves power—how attempting to talk about identity and community illuminates which categories are presupposed as canonical and which are relegated to being "Other Asian." We might also take this opportunity to conceptualize the idea of an "Other Asian" altogether and how it functions. By advocating for Taiwanese Americans to disidentify with the racial category of Chinese and instead identify with the *embarrassed et cetera* of "Other Asian," the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign actively questioned the boundaries around state-legible community categories and brought to the forefront the rhetorical violences of this categorization.

My argument is not that Taiwanese American organizing around the 2010 census is misguided, ineffective, or irredeemably structurally violent. Rather, it is to trace the particular strategies that such a campaign deployed, the political motivations that

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[119] Butler, 143.

[120] That most Asian Americans will, at some point, be confused for Chinese regardless of their ethnicity or that the colloquial racial category for Asian Americans used where I lived in Costa Rica is *chino* points both to larger histories of immigration and questions of how communities are defined.

undergirded these strategies, and the benefits and limitations to such a campaign. It is not to point towards a mythical ideal political strategy with few or no drawbacks, but to affirm that there are political limitations to any strategy, and to encourage us to be aware and critical of the shortcomings of even those tools that are most useful to us in the hopes that we are strategic in our organizing and never too invested in institutions that ultimately do not have our best interests in mind.

To be counted as a Taiwanese American community for the U.S. government census requires campaign organizers to help craft a legible and recognizable ethnic community. And this legibility necessarily subjugates particular Taiwanese histories and communities that cannot be fit into the frames a U.S. state understands or privileges. To be recognized by the U.S. government as a valid and important American community, Taiwanese Americans need to be understood within the constraints of a census-based conception of community. That is to say, to be institutionalized alongside the existing racial categories of "Asian Indian," "Chinese," or "Filipino," the category of "Taiwanese" needs to function similarly to more established categories domesticated by U.S. conceptions of race, ethnicity, and community. And as a national and ethnic category that signifies what does not or cannot exist, "Taiwanese" does not inherently carry the representational legitimacy of "Japanese" or "Korean." If Taiwan is but an extension of China, and Taiwanese are just Han Chinese, "Taiwanese" as a community category exists outside of the margins of the national, ethnic, and racial meaning of census-based community categories.

I am, of course, nowhere near the first person to make these critiques. In addition to the legal, critical race, sociological, postcolonial, and feminist scholars that have critiqued the limits of the use of state institutions for state recognition and social movements, community organizers themselves have been engaged in these critiques and strategic negotiations from the beginning.[121] It is hubris to assume the organizers working on this or other campaigns were or are not aware of the pitfalls of advocating for state recognition through government documentation or that an academic reading of these discourses will be a revolutionary new addition to the Taiwanese American advocacy discourse. Rather, I hope to explore how these discourses articulate with the particular ku-mo political context Taiwanese in and outside of Taiwan find themselves in. How has the state tool of the census played a pivotal role in the construction of Taiwan and Taiwanese since before the modern Taiwan state as we recognize it today even existed? What does state recognition mean for a so-called community that is not afforded the possibility of existing? And what is the political impetus for Taiwanese recognition in the U.S. given the U.S.'s complex and fraught political links and histories with the island?

The perceived impossibility of Taiwan's existence and the rhetorical strategies used in the campaign to advocate for census recognition allow us to interrogate the ways Taiwanese American organizing rhetorically supports Taiwan's impossible sovereignty

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[121] Gross, Ariela J. *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press): 2008.; Joseph, Miranda.; Mora, G. Cristina, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).; Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: Third Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2015).; Rodriguez, Clara E., *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

by appealing to U.S. narratives of an ethnicity paradigm and American exceptionalism. The struggle to have Taiwan and Taiwanese be legible in the United States reflects the ku-mo nature of Taiwan; its existential invisibility becomes the site of its visibility and the inconvenience of managing a Taiwanese existence, through government systems that are not built to, highlight this. As an outward facing construction of community, the Taiwan American Census 2010 campaign provides us an opportunity to interrogate the idea of an "other Asian" both as an *embarrassed et cetera* that leaves out Taiwanese and also as a space where Taiwanese Americans attempt to craft a legible community that necessarily erases complexity. I analyze the rhetoric of the 2010 census campaign and contextualize it with a broader history of the construction of Taiwanese identity through the census in the hopes of identifying the ways a legible, if limiting, notion of a Taiwanese American community is created through advocacy for state documentation. The Taiwan Census 2010 campaign created this community through a legible narrative of a cultural "Taiwanese-ness" as well as through a palatable "American-ness" tailored to its state audience. Taiwanese American community organizations leveraged narratives of this "American-ness" and "Taiwanese-ness" to argue for both domestic political goals and transnational agendas through the creation of a legible community. In this way, the Taiwanese American campaign for census recognition reflects not only a push for material support of the Taiwanese American community, but also a symbolic form of transnational nation-building for Taiwan. That is to say, the rhetoric deployed in the campaign attempts to legitimize an American "Taiwanese-ness" and brand it as distinct from a "Chinese-ness." In this way, the American recognition of "Taiwanese" as a racial category on the census alongside and not subsumed by "Chinese" would function as a form of symbolic transnational nation-building to legitimize the existence of a Taiwan separate from China.

Our exploration of the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign and its historical and political context demands several theoretical interventions. First, we will explore how scholars have conceptualized and critiqued community and identity-making through its relationship with a state that attempts to construct, describe, and discipline community categories. We will interrogate the particular history and boundaries of the state census and documentation processes in Taiwan. In particular, we will look at how these processes are an integral part to the historical development of a Taiwanese community identity and the influences they have had in how we envision Taiwanese and Taiwanese American community today. Next, we will explore the context of the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign, what its major goals were, and how it articulated the discourses of community. Finally, we will look at two major discourses that the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign engaged in in pursuit of state recognition: cultural branding, or the process of creating a canon of Taiwanese cultural markers to legitimize the idea of a coherent ethnic community, and abstract liberal values that pander towards a U.S. self-conception of liberalism, multiculturalism, and global benevolence. These constitute the narrative—the "Taiwanese-ness"—and the audience—the "American-ness"—that make up this conception of a Taiwanese American community. To even begin to consider what a Taiwanese American community looks like requires us to define what we mean by a community and question whether there has ever been a stable and coherent community at all.

The Construction of Taiwanese Community and Identity through State Documentation

State documentation and bureaucracy has had a long and turbulent history of constructing ethnic, racial, and political categories that have shaped how we conceptualize communities. For Dina Okamoto (2014), community and identity are not solely determined by the state or by communities themselves, but by the complex interplay between these sites of power. She notes that Asian Americans, "did not [adopt a panethnic label] simply because the state had assigned them to a racial category that encouraged the expansion of group boundaries. Instead, Asian ethnic groups organized along panethnic lines when they were configured in ways that reinforced racial group boundaries and generated shared interests, identities, and statuses across ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines."[122] In other words, government recognition has immense power in the crafting of new identities, both from the top-down and the bottom-up and the resulting community categories, while retroactively naturalized, are a result of political processes.

State documentation has been not only a descriptive but a prescriptive process of categorization and has created the boundaries around community identity through discrimination, exclusion, and resource allocation. As Yen Le Espiritu (1992) explores, early Asian immigrants tended to categorize themselves and their communities along ethnic lines as a result of historical tensions and linguistic differences. As a form of state violence against Asian immigrants, U.S. anti-Asian legislation could have helped to broaden the scope of Asian immigrant communities in a show of solidarity to other groups racialized as Asian, but in reaction to the Chinese exclusion of the late 1800s, "Japanese leaders went so far as to condone publicly the exclusion of Chinese while insisting that the Japanese were the equals of Americans."[123] Ethnic ties superseded racial ideas when supported by state laws, but when in 1905 campaigns mobilized to include Japanese immigrants within the purview of Chinese Exclusion under a broader Asiatic Exclusion movement, Japanese were legally conflated with Chinese despite their protests. In this instance, racist legislation overdetermined community boundaries and created new categories; in spite of Japanese ethnic disidentification with Chinese, the racial category of Asiatic included both and validated a new legislative community category.

State documentation has also simultaneously constructed the category of the citizen and non-citizen that have had deep racial, ethnic, and imperial implications. Notably, the figure of the undocumented immigrant, one who has been constructed by legislation and documentation as outside of the bounds of citizenship and legibility, is simultaneously, as Mae Ngai (2014) describes, "woven into the economic fabric of the nation."[124] The category of the undocumented immigrant is an impossible problem for the U.S. state—one which cannot be solved—and yet the very existence of this category is a result of U.S. policies designed to exclude. The exclusion and state repression of

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[122] Okamoto, Dina G., "Ethnic Boundary Change and Panethnicity," *Redefining Race: Asian American Panethnicity and Shifting Ethnic Boundaries,* (New York City: Russell Safe Foundation, 2014): 4.
[123] Espiritu, Yen Le, "Coming Together: The Asian American Movement," *Asian American Panethnicity : Bridging institutions and identities*, Vol. 201, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992): 22.
[124] Ngai, Mae M., *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America-Updated Edition*, Vol. 105, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014): 2.

undocumented immigrants has created the political meaning of the category and made real a community that otherwise would not exist. State legislation assigns tangible financial and political outcomes to constructed categories, which result in the development of new communities in acceptance or in defiance of this categorization.

Within the context of Taiwanese Americans, the construction of a modern Taiwanese American community is inextricably tied to a history of U.S. intervention into Taiwan, the malleability of immigration quotas, and the complexities of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty. Prior to the United States' formal recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government, U.S. immigration law counted immigrants from Taiwan and mainland China under the same quota under the guise that the Republic of China (ROC) was the true government of China. It was not until after formal relations with Taiwan ceased and the U.S. entered into a liminal acknowledgement of Taiwan that the island was given its own quota of 20,000 immigrants in 1982, which spurred on an influx of Taiwanese scholars and doctors into U.S. universities per the biases of the immigration quotas. The switch from being included in a Chinese immigration quota to being allocated a separate quota marks a U.S. state change in how Taiwanese are conceptualized—from the true Chinese to a separate, liminally recognized population—and it also reflects a change in how the Taiwanese state saw itself. The KMT-run ROC government saw itself as the only legitimate government of China, despite having retreated from the mainland in 1949, and acquiring U.S. aid to support the ROC was largely dependent on rhetorically positioning Taiwan as a more U.S.-friendly version of China that shared the abstract "Western" ideas of liberalism, democracy, capitalism, and human rights. The slow shift towards a more Taiwanese nationalism came only when victory over the PRC seemed impossible and with the later dismantling of its one-party state.

In the United States, Taiwanese diaspora find themselves legislatively invisible as a category with a liminal history in U.S. immigration, citizenship, and legal documents. Taiwanese American community organizing, then, serves to rearticulate the meanings and boundaries of a Taiwanese identity in the United States. Okamoto demonstrates that while many Asian American ethnic organizations moved towards a pan-ethnic model by the turn of the century, ethnic organizations like Taiwanese American community organizations continued to pop up as a result of what she identifies as the drive "to maintain ethnic practices and… develop culturally relevant and appropriate strategies to serve ethnic-specific immigrant communities."[125] Because Taiwanese Americans are so linked to the discourse of Chineseness and sovereignty, the existence of Taiwanese American organizing is dependent on an ethnic-specific frame rather than a pan-ethnic model. It is as Joseph argues—"communities seem inevitably to be constituted in relation to internal and external enemies and that these defining others are then elided, excluded, or actively repressed"—that an ethnic Taiwanese community is always in relation to a larger history of Chinese influence and Taiwanese sovereignty.[126] In the case of the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign, the identity categories already represented in the government census, and those that the campaign pushed for, are not static or merely

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[125] Okamoto, Dina G., *Redefining race: Asian American panethnicity and shifting ethnic boundaries*, (New York City: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014): 123.
[126] Joseph, xix.

reflections of already presupposed communities—they are malleable imagined communities that are as much prescribed as they are described. While identity and community are created by census categories, these categories are also (re)created by individuals in sometimes radically different ways.

In an effort to bolster a claim to community beyond that of an Other Asian, Taiwanese American activist organizations like the Taiwan Census 2010 have tied their ethnic-based community organizing to transnational political issues such as Taiwanese sovereignty to link the legitimization of a Taiwanese ethnic identity with the rhetorical recognition of Taiwan; this both legitimizes a Taiwanese American identity through the recognition of Taiwan and also legitimizes Taiwan through the recognition of a Taiwanese American identity. This is how Taiwanese American community organizations have worked to create new conceptions of community through the space afforded by the *embarrassed et cetera*. Community is forged through the discourses of nationalism and the nation-state for a (non-)nation thousands of miles away. This form of transnational nation-building becomes the rhetorical crux of a construction of a Taiwanese American ethnic identity, and this bleeds through in both Taiwan Census 2010's attempts at cultural branding and catering to conceptions of U.S. national liberalism. The construction of community here is tailored towards the state as it engages both in the rhetoric of a Taiwanese nation-building and in the tools of a U.S. nation-building. And as such, it necessarily comes up against the limits of nationalism and nation-building in its construction of what it means to be Taiwanese. Yet, this is not the first time Taiwan and Taiwanese have been (re-)defined by the documentation and bureaucracy of an external state. The impact of the census on an emerging Taiwanese identity has its roots far earlier than advocacy in the United States.

From the early to mid-1900s during Japanese imperial occupation in Taiwan, the institution of a census became a key arm in the maintenance of a colonial government that needed to find a way to manage and control Taiwanese. The Japanese authorities believed that state control could be best supported through the knowledge gained through population surveys and the ability to manipulate existing social tensions with this knowledge and "both the colonial authorities and the people of Taiwan were well aware that population surveys were a key measure of state control."[127] This also doubled as a form of state-sanctioned surveillance, because the census's ability to monitor populations and provide insight on the activities of individuals gave Japan a more "firm control over the people and resources of Taiwan."[128] The Japanese imperial census on Taiwan thus explicitly categorized Taiwanese into different groups as well as provided colonial authorities a way to track and disrupt resistance. Starting in 1903, Japanese authorities began collecting census information and divided Taiwanese into three social classes which roughly mapped onto a hierarchy of elites, a large and broad second class, and those with criminal records or "vagrants." These divisions became key to maintaining the functioning of Taiwan under Japanese rule by exacerbating social hierarchies and the level of surveillance was dependent on class—the first class was required to update their

[127] Katz, Paul R., *When the Valleys Turned Blood Red: The Ta-pa-ni Incident in Colonial Taiwan*, (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i, 2005): 43.
[128] Katz

information every year, the second every six months, and the third every month.[129] The census categories did not map onto existing social communities and instead aggregated Japanese Taiwanese, Hakka, Hoklo, and indigenous Taiwanese into the Japanese three-tiered system.

Despite the fact that no Taiwanese were allowed to work in state positions, those categorized as elites were far less likely to participate in anti-Japanese actions. This was largely a result of the conditional privileges afforded to and differential treatment of local elites. Japanese authorities were careful not to irritate local Taiwanese elites so as to keep them from interfering with colonial infrastructure.[130] This division—infringing upon Taiwanese property and forestry industries while attempting, at first, to avoid business decisions that would impact elites—helped to stem unified resistance efforts by incentivizing conditionally privileged groups to maintain governing structures that provided them some benefits relative to other social groups while ultimately subjugating all Taiwanese. However, when Japan did begin to infringe upon the domains of Taiwanese elites, these elites often did defect from a state of complicity with the Japanese government and participate in armed uprisings against the colonial occupiers.

On the other side of the colonial hierarchy, the implementation of the census required instituting new, mandatory standards of recognition that attributed further meaning and power to census categories. The threat of being removed from census documentation for wrongdoing effectively meant erasing a person's existence and their legal claim to citizenship in Taiwan. The fear of erasure from the census rolls was so salient that, after the Ta-pa-ni uprising against Japanese authorities in 1915, "people throughout Taiwan who had nothing to do with [the uprising]… jammed into trains in order to make it home in time to be registered and worried that if they were not counted, they would be labeled as co-conspirators."[131] The Japanese-run Taiwan census, thus, acted as a powerful disciplining force that leveraged state recognition as conditional protection from the state violence enacted against Taiwanese rebels. Yet, simultaneously, the bureaucracy of state recognition itself created the foundation of such violence.

Nevertheless, the formal institution of separating social groups had key impacts to the surrounding social landscape—particularly in the development of what could be considered a national Taiwanese identity. Prior to Japanese occupation and later the flight of the Kuomintang government to the island, Taiwan was primarily divided on ethnic divisions between Hakka, Hoklo, and indigenous groups. However, while these relationships remained strained after these occupations, the threat of government takeover and the institution of documentation lead to a redirected focus on those external threats that sought to wipe out Taiwan through the forces of assimilation. These temporary alliances positioned antagonistic groups together against a larger imperial threat and became foundational in conceptualizing shared Taiwanese interests and values. What cemented the beginnings of a Taiwanese nationalist identity were the Japanese government's attempts to create hierarchical systems of power that would disproportionately benefit Japan over its colony. For example, in the new Japanese system, Taiwanese were disallowed from attaining high-status positions in the police

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[129] *Ibid.,* 43.
[130] Katz
[131] *Ibid.,* 44.

force and "not a single Taiwanese served as captain during the entire colonial era."[132] The result of this was a police force predominantly consisting of a foreign occupying power enforcing policies that disproportionately impacted local populations and were directly responsible for a string of police brutality meant to keep Taiwanese subjugated. Many involved in the Ta-pa-ni uprising—one of the largest armed rebellions of the Taiwanese colonial era—explicitly attributed their rebellion in part to their resentment of the police and police brutality. Alongside this, the Japanese census' aggregation of communities rife with inter-community tension strained existing community categories and exacerbated resentment towards the occupiers.

This combination of hierarchical systems of subjugating Taiwanese and conflating different communities resulted in significant discontent against the Japanese occupiers and spurred on cross-group alliances that lead to organized armed rebellions. Much of the collaboration was between Hoklo Taiwanese, Plains Aborigines, and Mountain Aborigines—and while these alliances were frequently uneasy, the connections between these groups made it difficult for the Japanese government to track down and identify the leaders of many of the rebellions. State retaliation against these different communities spurred on another wave of discontent towards the Japanese government and further cemented the beginnings of a Taiwanese national identity through the resentment of an occupying power that viewed all Taiwanese as the same.

The Republic of China's flight in 1949 exacerbated this burgeoning national identity and its implications on the existence of a Taiwanese community identity through similar means, particularly the violent government suppression of information deemed as antagonistic to the government and nearly 40 years of martial law that lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese. While the ROC saw occupying Taiwan as the welcome return of a younger brother eager to reunite with family, many Taiwanese on the island prior to the ROC retreat had a fundamentally different conception of community that viewed the ROC not as a part of the same community, but as another occupation. The transfer of regimes between China and Japan was a contentious period as a result of the history of Japan's confiscation of private property. To the new Chinese government of Taiwan, this land now belonged to the Chinese government instead of the Japanese government; however, to many Taiwanese who had had their land taken from them, the failure to return land to its original owners was tantamount to a second confiscation. This regime transfer constructed another dividing line between communities through the construction of the categories of *waishengren*, or Taiwanese with ancestry post 1949 from China, and *benshengren*—literally "native province person", or Taiwanese with ancestry prior to 1949. These have continued to be salient political categories and ones that the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign had to grapple with or ignore in pursuit of a legible and coherent image of a Taiwanese community.

Contemporarily, a Taiwanese struggle for ROC state recognition has persisted in Taiwan's continuing nation-building project, for any effort to synthesize population demographic information is necessarily embroiled in the construction of what the nation does or ought to look like. This is particularly true within indigenous Taiwanese communities, for whom state recognition is always a fraught and violent process. To

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[132] *Ibid*., 39.

become officially recognized as a legitimate indigenous Taiwanese community requires going through Taiwan's Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP), founded in 1996, and collecting evidentiary documentation and petition signatures to advocate for the institution of an indigenous community.[133] As a result of the difficult process, only sixteen indigenous peoples have been officially recognized by the ROC government, representing roughly at most half of the existing indigenous groups in Taiwan. And the political value and limitations of state recognition for these groups treads some similar ground to what we see in Taiwanese state recognition contests in the U.S. As Niclas Ericsson (2004) demonstrates, state recognition allows indigenous groups like the Atayal to advocate for land allocation and ownership, but cases like the Tsou Wild Honey case reveal this recognition is often insubstantial and does not afford practical legal agency.

Taiwan Census 2010

A continent away, the government census continues to play a significant role in the maintenance and perpetual recreation of a Taiwanese identity in the United States. The category of "Other Asian" in the U.S. census and the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign's efforts to encourage Taiwanese American disidentification with the category "Chinese" and identification with "Other Asian" offers a chance to examine the category's existence as part of a specific *embarrassed et cetera*. "Other Asian" implicitly connects a variety of demographic groups under the subheading of Asian, regardless of their association with the term. The listed options for Asians in the census are Asian Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese—the six most populous Asian American demographics as of 2015.

However, while this is the justification for selecting these specific categories, the categories themselves obscure the diversity within each of these groups and especially the political contestations that undergird such categorizations. For example, by virtue of having no other option, the demographic numbers of Taiwanese Americans are largely folded under the category of Chinese, which skew the demographic numbers by including a group that may or may not identify with any of the listed racial categories. So while the perceived reasoning behind the census categories appear to be based in pure demographic statistics, the use of population size (as calculated by the census) to determine which categories appear on the census leads to a problem wherein a lack of categories encourages a continued lack of categories. Amusingly enough, the "Other Asian" category also includes its own embarrassed et cetera, with its footnote explaining which groups might fit into such a category.[134]

The Taiwanese Census 2010 movement utilized several rhetorical strategies to make the case for a distinct Taiwanese American identity separate from a Chinese American identity that offer much insight into the curation and maintenance of group identity. Many of these moves rely on creating an image of cultural distinctiveness through cultural markers like food or language in an effort to distinguish between the construction of a Chinese culture and a Taiwanese culture. Others rely on the language of

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[133] Ericsson, Niclas S., "Creating 'Indian Country' in Taiwan?," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 8.1 (2004): 33-44.
[134] The footnote for "Other Asian" on the 2010 census is, "Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on." This ironically creates an embarrassed et cetera within an already embarrassed et cetera.

nations and nation-states to posit a parallel legitimacy of a Taiwaneseness with other cultural groups. The latter, especially, symbolically position the island of Taiwan as equally recognizable as nation-states like Japan or South Korea. These two rhetorical moves, distinguishing a sense of cultural difference and using these distinctions to draw parallels to national distinctions, serve to cement a Taiwaneseness that resists categorization under a presumably umbrella identity category of Chineseness.

However, through prioritizing American government recognition, the Taiwanese American Census 2010 campaign reinforces the validity of the nation-state that simultaneously grants human rights but excludes and restricts rights based on definitions of citizenship and humanity.[135] The campaign deploys the rhetoric of liberal multiculturalism and American exceptionalism to advocate for being counted and inadvertently foregoes reconceptualizing how census information can be used in favor of merely redefining who belongs as an Other Asian. Many of the rhetorical strategies used in the campaign draw upon narratives of neoliberal inclusion, multiculturalism and diversity that remain more non-threatening and palatable to the nation-state. In this way, the construction of a Taiwanese American community relies in part on the solidification of a Taiwanese "American-ness" that is intertwined with nationalist narratives of American liberalism and exceptionalism. This rhetoric serves ultimately to reinscribe state violences in the pursuit of Taiwanese American government recognition and legitimacy. This is not to say that such efforts are not worthwhile or do not have meaningful material outcomes, but instead that constructions of a Taiwanese-ness that are dependent on recognition from China, the United States, or other nations, as they often have been, will necessarily reinforce the political dynamics that create Taiwan's and others' impossible sovereignties.

"Taiwanese-ness": Cultural Branding and the Ethnicity Paradigm

The first step in advocating for group-based recognition and resources is to construct the boundaries around a community in pursuit of a legible, community narrative. This functions as a form of Joseph's community disciplining, where the terms of community identity and branding solidify into coherent mythologies. Much of the rhetoric embedded in the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign does this by employing cultural markers such as food and language to construct an essential Taiwanese-ness that is separate and distinct from a Chinese-ness. The function of this is to assert that to be a Chinese American and to be a Taiwanese American are fundamentally different experiences that must not be conflated under an umbrella category of "Chinese." If they are sufficiently distinct cultures, this helps to legitimize new community boundaries that would recognize Taiwanese as separate and deserving of state resources. The rhetorical impetus, here, is to define a canon of experiences, cultural elements, and ideas that can be marked as specifically Taiwanese and this is as much of a prescriptive process as it is descriptive. In the campaign, this rhetorical move most frequently manifests as references to language as a community boundary or food branded as specifically Taiwanese.

The Taiwan Census 2010 campaign uses English, Mandarin Chinese, and Taiwanese Hokkien to help draw the boundaries around an understanding of a Taiwanese

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[135] Cheah, Pheng. *Inhuman Conditions: On cosmopolitanism and human rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

American community as one that is embedded in the histories of all three colonial languages. Their use is presented largely as pragmatic or factual rather than as a contestation over the relationships each of these languages have with a Taiwanese history or identity. Language functions as a common marker of community and nation-building to the point where the name of a language is often synonymous with a name of a national community and/or derivative of the name of a nation itself. In the context of Taiwan, the coexistence of Taiwanese Hokkien and Mandarin are remnants of a violent process of linguistic imperialism that is key to the development of the contemporary Taiwanese state. And the deployment of both languages in the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign reflect some of the (a)-historicizing that must be done to create a legible, coherent, and recognized Taiwanese community in the United States.

Antonio Gramsci (1918) identifies the creation of a standardized language—as the Republic of China attempted to do with Mandarin Chinese—as an integral part of constructing a national identity. For him, standardization is an always uncompleted process, and the anxiety from state rulers over the impossibility of truly mandating a single national language exposes which class a standardized language primarily benefits.[136] Benedict Anderson (2006), in turn, locates the origins of national consciousness in the standardization of language through capitalist incentives. It is the institution of print languages, for him, which necessitate assembling dialects underneath a dominant, legible vernacular that allows for broader communication but also necessarily legitimizes linguistic hierarchies.[137] As such, the creation of standardized languages and the branding of a canonical language is necessarily an exercise in power.

Hokkien, a dialect originating from Southern China, came to Taiwan as a result of the historical immigration of primarily Fujian Chinese in the 16th century and, through a settler colonial process of subjugating indigenous languages, eventually became the *lingua franca* in Taiwan.[138] As a dialect, it has limited mutual intelligibility with Mandarin Chinese and other Chinese dialects as many differ in numbers of tones, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structure. When the ROC government took control of Taiwan in 1945, it instituted Mandarin as the official national language, imposed traditional Chinese script on the island—in contrast with the simplified Chinese script of the PRC that is still used today—and actively discouraged the use of Hokkien by younger generations.[139] Taiwanese Hokkien was seen as a lesser dialect in contrast to Mandarin which had been actively pushed as a standard Chinese language. Taiwanese's lack of Mandarin fluency demonstrated to the ROC government that the "islanders lacked the qualifications for holding [public government] posts," and thus was instrumental in constructing a stratified society based on language.[140] Mandarin in Taiwan, on the other hand, bore a difference to Mandarin in mainland China both as a result of differing

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[136] Forgacs, David, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, and William Boelhower, *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2012).
[137] Anderson, Benedict, "The Origins of National Consciousness," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso books, 2006).
[138] Wills Jr., John E., "The Seventeenth-Century Transformation," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015).
[139] Phillips, Steven, "Between Assimilation and Independence," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015).
[140] *Ibid*., 287.

writing styles but differing vocabulary and accents as well. And this version of Mandarin became mandatory as the official language of public and political discourse and served as a roadblock in the assimilation process for pre-1949 Taiwanese in the Republic of China. These two languages, Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Hokkien, remain to this day the most frequently spoken languages in Taiwan and have become core to a complex cultural identity of Taiwan despite their complex historical precedents.

As a result of their cultural salience, the Taiwan Census 2010 deploys both Taiwanese Hokkien and Mandarin to help curate a cohesive Taiwanese community identity and attempt to reach a broader Taiwanese community. For example, multiple versions of the Taiwan Census 2010 video campaign were published online and broadcast on television to target different demographics, including ones subtitled with traditional Chinese script and others featuring segments in Mandarin Chinese and Hokkien. This was an effort to target multiple generations of Taiwanese Americans—those who may only understand Hokkien, those who may only understand Mandarin, and of course those who may only understand English. Using all three broadens the idea of a Taiwanese American community by connecting it with transnational histories of linguistic imperialism in Taiwan without necessarily editorializing on the politics of using either language. This construction upholds a Mandarin-speaking conception of Taiwan that has its origins in the Republic of China, yet also caters towards a Hokkien-speaking Taiwan. While internally there was, and to some degree still is some, tension between *waishengren* and *benshengren*, distinguished at times through language use, the campaign highlights a broader Taiwanese community based less on definitions of cultural authenticity (who are the "true" Taiwanese) and more on national ancestry. Using both Hokkien and Mandarin in the construction of a "Taiwanese-ness" naturalizes the contemporary state of Taiwan and puts aside some of the histories of tensions between them.

The speakers in the video campaign use Hokkien phrases such as "agong" (阿公) and "ama" (阿媽) for maternal grandparents as opposed to the Mandarin Chinese "laoye"/"gonggong" (姥爺/公公) and "laolao"/"popo" (姥姥/婆婆). Unlike in English, titles for relatives in both Mandarin and Hokkien are significantly different on the maternal and paternal sides and can be quite complex. As a result, each set of relationship titles is mutually unintelligible with the other language's and knowing one does not guarantee being able to understand the other. This can get particularly confusing for families with both Taiwanese and mainland Chinese ancestry, where both sets of titles may be used.[141] The use of specifically Taiwanese terms for grandparents in the video, then, acts as a signifier for a certain set of Taiwanese experiences that might conjure up audience recognition and affinity. It uses these terms as a cultural marker to include those

[141] In my family, the Taiwanese terms 阿公 and 阿媽 are used for my maternal grandparents while the Mandarin 爺爺 and 奶奶 are used for my paternal grandparents. For many years, I had assumed that the sets were part of the same language and were distinct simply to provide information on which side of the family the grandparents fell on. It was not until I was an adult that I learned that they actually belonged to two different languages and were a result of my 爺爺 fleeing from mainland China with the KMT and his corresponding categorization as a 外省人.

who recognize them within the purview of a Taiwanese community and thus implicate them in the campaign to claim “Other Asian.”

On the other hand, food—both the consumption and production of food—serve as equally salient ways to construct a coherent Taiwanese cultural community within the Taiwan Census 2010 advert. Near the conclusion of the campaign video, various individuals advocate for Taiwanese Americans to engage in outreach within their own communities—several of which explicitly tie grocery stores and restaurants branded as Taiwanese as prime outreach sites. One man, in particular, suggests reaching out to "people you see in Ranch 99" as a viable tactic for recruiting Taiwanese Americans to mark “Other Asian” on the census. Ranch 99 is one of the largest and most recognizable Asian American grocery chains within the country. Though it contains products from China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, it is often branded as a Chinese American grocery store. However, the chain is known within Taiwanese American ethnic enclaves as a specifically Taiwanese grocery store, in part because of the significant number of Taiwanese products and foods that are imported from Taiwan as well as the ancestry of its Taiwanese founder Roger H. Chen. The market exists as part of a legacy of Taiwanese pan-Asian grocery stores serving as important symbols of cultural capital within Taiwanese American history. For example, the first Asian grocery store in the ethnic enclave of Monterey Park, California was founded by a Taiwanese immigrant in 1978 and became a multi-million dollar chain, which launched a trend of small-scale Asian grocery stores importing ethnic foods on a wider scale in the city.[142] Similarly to the Taiwanese American label itself, Ranch 99 exists in a liminal space wherein it is simultaneously Chinese and Taiwanese, pan-Asian and ethnic, inclusive and claimed.

Ranch 99 here functions both as a way to culturally brand food and experiences as specifically Taiwanese and also to frame a Taiwanese community as merely a descriptor of existing cultural differences. It is taken for granted, albeit semi-jokingly, that to be Taiwanese is to shop and consume Taiwanese food and culture. This frames identity and community through the branding of culture and once again works to expand the community boundaries to those who may have some Taiwanese ancestry but may have no issue identifying as Chinese. To be “Taiwanese” and to participate in this campaign, in this light, may not require a political stance on the status of Taiwan vis-à-vis China, but may just be a matter of describing one’s cultural background. Part of this is merely pragmatic; deploying cultural markers, while imprecise, is a useful tactic to target certain demographics. But another part of this is about the rhetoric of creating community—the labor to construct a coherent and legible ethnic community. Framing Ranch 99 as a place that is intrinsically Taiwanese makes Taiwanese Americans merely a subset of individuals banded together through mutual culture and food both in relation to Taiwan itself and in a transnational diaspora context. Being Taiwanese American, then, did not necessarily mean that one needed to personally engage in politics, but could include those who simply shop at a major Taiwanese American grocery store and eat Taiwanese food.

In the same segment, the speaker mentions the Taiwanese restaurant chain Din Tai Fung (鼎泰豐) as another site to recruit Taiwanese for the census campaign. While it

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[142] Fong, Timothy, *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010): 62.

is true that Din Tai Fung has origins in Taiwan and has since become known as a Taiwanese restaurant, the founder of the restaurant was born in mainland China and was part of the wave of Chinese emigration who fled to Taiwan following the Chinese Civil War. Thus, while the restaurant has been claimed and branded as a Taiwanese restaurant, many of the dishes the chain is famous for (such as *xiaolongbao* or 小籠包) have origins in mainland China. The campaign advertisement also references the Taiwanese variation of Chinese *zongzi* (粽子) several times throughout the PSA as comic relief but speak entirely in Hokkien in these segments. The cultural branding of Din Tai Fung and *zongzi* make specifically Taiwanese what others might claim as Chinese; as we will explore in chapter 6, the national origins of food are largely arbitrary and speak more to the boundaries of politics than cuisine. However, by positioning a renowned *xiaolongbao* restaurant or specific foods as Taiwanese, the campaign rhetorically creates a community through shared experience and cultural markers.

The rhetorical value in constructing a canon of Taiwanese culture—whether through food or language—is to naturalize an ethnic difference between Taiwanese and Chinese that sufficiently justifies disaggregation. It is not a disaggregation based on divergent histories, necessarily, but one based in a presumably fundamentally different set of cultures that are mutually unintelligible from each other. There is no discussion, for instance, of the cultural links between Taiwanese Hokkien or Taiwanese Mandarin and Min Chinese or the Mandarin of the PRC. Rather, the cultural differences between Taiwanese and Chinese are emphasized and the cultural similarities between multiple groups of Taiwanese are deemphasized in an effort to create a singular Taiwanese-ness separate from a Chinese-ness.

This aspect of the campaign asks its viewers to first identify with specific cultural markers and then use that identification in pursuit of collaborating on a new community category—that if, for example, you shop at Ranch 99, that if you eat *zong zi*, or that if you use Hokkien honorifics for your grandparents, you might be Taiwanese and thus should disidentify with Chinese and identify as Other Asian, or Taiwanese. And in this process, the participation of individuals helps to determine how the community is defined—which cultural practices or markers successfully become part of a cultural brand is determined not just by what is actively marketed by community organizations but what has become culturally salient. Cultural branding creates community through deploying cultural markers that become a kind of "Taiwanese-ness" or legible cultural canon.

"American-ness": Civic Duty, Contribution, and American Exceptionalism

Community is not solely constructed and maintained through narrative, however. As Okamoto describes, Asian American ethnic organizations expand and retract the boundaries of community based on the particular issues and audiences they are addressing, or what she calls *boundary shifting*. For a community to be legible, there must be an arbiter to whom community is legible. The intended audience of this construction determines the lens with which community is interpreted; in this case, state recognition from the U.S. government necessitates the construction of an ethnic community through the discourses of an ethnicity paradigm and American liberal exceptionalism. So, while the Taiwan Census 2010's construction of a Taiwanese

American community was rhetorically dependent on the narrative created through crafting a cultural canon of "Taiwanese-ness," it was equally necessary to construct a Taiwanese "American-ness" in pursuit of a U.S.-legible community category.

Through the lens of American liberal exceptionalism, the privileging of a Taiwanese "American-ness" allows community organizations to legitimize their complaints to a U.S. nation-state, though it is not without its drawbacks. For one, these strategies often rely on part on narratives of a respectable American citizenship. To be legible as a community to the U.S. state often requires pandering to a politics of recognition that over-values contribution to the nation-state. Madeline Y. Hsu (2008) argues that much of Asian American Studies and the associated Asian American activism "seeks redemption from binaristic othering… [stressing] the heroic railroad builders… Nobel-prize winning scientists, war veterans, tax-paying citizens, and families struggling to establish themselves on American shores."[143] While this strategy helps certain subsets of the Asian American population, it ultimately does not disrupt the dominant American narratives of nationalism and racial hierarchy that disenfranchise groups in the first place and "undoubtedly [contributes] to the more positive but no less distorted" narrative of Asian American experiences.[144] Through bridging national narratives of both the United States and Taiwan, Taiwanese American organizations leverage a respectable and non-threatening American identity. Taiwanese Americans are thus able to marry the ideas of what it means to be an American citizen with what it means to be culturally Taiwanese, but this comes at the risk of reifying American neoliberal rhetoric that, through a lens of supposed benevolence, recognizes some communities at the expense of others.

The question at contention for the campaign—question #9—asks for respondents to specify their racial category and includes multiple Asian options such as "Chinese", "Korean", "Japanese", and "Vietnamese." For the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign, arguing for the need to have a separate Taiwanese option necessitated positioning "Taiwanese" as on par with existing recognized community categories, and this meant framing "Taiwanese" as an ethnic category that referred to an existing and distinct place abroad. To have "Taiwanese" listed separately to and on the same level as "Chinese" in the census would rhetorically legitimize the existence of a Taiwanese ethnic category and, by proxy, a Taiwanese state. However, while the language of the census question at the heart of the campaign is nominally about race, question #9 consists of a variety of community categories that fall into the discourses of the ethnicity paradigm.

The ethnicity paradigm, as codified by the Chicago School of Sociology, has been one of the major frameworks in the United States for how communities have been conceptualized, particularly with regard to government and state recognition and resources. And it has been one that is largely dependent on outdated ideas of ethnic assimilation or the comparative unimportance of race.[145] Within the purview of an ethnicity paradigm, the category of "Taiwanese" is framed through the markers of existing recognized ethnic categories—notably through a group's ethnic connection to a nation-state and through an assimilatory American immigrant melting pot narrative.

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[143] Hsu, Madeline Y., "Transnationalism and Asian American Studies as a Migration-Centered Project," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 11.2 (2008): 185-97.
[144] *Ibid.*
[145] Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

Critics of the campaign, and any movement towards recognizing Taiwan as separate from China, argued that "Taiwanese" should not be counted as a race given the close ethnic history with China and that the activism of Taiwanese Americans for their own census category reflected more of a political move rather than a true ethnic or racial difference. Within a framework of ethnicity-as-tied-to-nation, the construction of a separate community category in the US census contributes to the legitimacy of the group as having origins in a nation-state entirely separate from China, much the same way that those Asian groups from existing recognized nation states (Japan, Korea, Vietnam etc.) have a corresponding racial category. This contestation "sanctions them, sanctifies them, consecrates them, making them worthy of existing."[146] In this way, claiming a race that is not Chinese is a way of supporting the rhetorical nation-building of the island of Taiwan. As such, the fight over question #9 is a foundational tool for Taiwanese American diaspora to symbolically fight for Taiwanese sovereignty more broadly. The campaign advert itself uses this discourse of ethnicity to legitimize a Taiwanese American community. At the midpoint of the campaign video, the advert presents a series of people who assert their proportion of Taiwanese ancestry. Through uniting Taiwanese Americans of a variety of different racial backgrounds (including those who identified as "half-Taiwanese half-Cantonese", "Taiwanese-Persian American", "half Taiwanese, half Japanese-American", and "half-Taiwanese and half African American"), the campaign implicitly bestows the term "Taiwanese" with the same legitimacy as "Japanese" or "Persian," and also makes clear the boundaries of a Taiwanese American community include those with ancestry outside of Taiwan.

In addition to its attempts to legitimize a community through a U.S. ethnicity framework, the campaign also incorporates narratives of American exceptionalism, democracy, and neoliberalism. For example, one man in the campaign imitates then-United States President Barack Obama to underscore the American ideals of freedom and liberty as a compelling reason for Taiwanese Americans to assert a Taiwanese American identity in the 2010 census forms. In his best recreation of the president's voice and mannerism, the impersonator says, "Hello this is Barack Obama. I am Taiwanese American. It doesn't matter if you aren't a U.S. Citizen. Everyone needs to be counted." While short, this segment plays an important role in marrying the narrative of American nationalism with the legitimization of the "American-ness" of a Taiwanese American community identity. By literally embodying the figurehead of the state and proclaiming it to be Taiwanese, the impersonator makes being an American an integral part of being Taiwanese in America.

Calling upon the President of the United States serves to create a link between the activism of census ethnic identification with the institution of American politics as a whole. It reinforces the validity and importance of ethnic recognition by the state by directly alluding to an implicit solidarity with the commander-in-chief. Such an allusion reframes filling out the census as "Taiwanese" into a civic duty—one that exemplifies the values of citizenship and national loyalty in pursuit of an elusive American Dream. This puts Taiwanese American complaints squarely within a broader context of a greater

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[146] Bordieu, Pierre, "Identity and Representation," *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed., John B. Thompson, trans., Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): 222.

American history of activism and nation-building. That President Obama was the first president of color is significant for a campaign built around the idea of liberal multicultural inclusion and ethnic recognition. As the impersonator says, even Barack Obama "is [or can be] Taiwanese American" because being Taiwanese American is wholly complementary to a conception of an American community.

The impersonator also uses the language of counting, and this emphasis on the importance of "counting" is stressed throughout the video as a way to signify both the literal mathematical counting of census demographic numbers and also the necessity of counting as important for the U.S. government. To count, in this respect, is to be viewed as legible and worthy to the United States government as a demographic group that deserves the allocation of government resources. The use of Obama in the ad campaign signifies American national narratives that position state recognition as a form of civic duty and Taiwanese as good, respectable American citizens who have properly assimilated into the U.S. civic and ethnic landscape.

Conclusion

In the construction of a Taiwanese American community legible to the U.S. state, the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign deployed the narratives of both a "Taiwanese-ness" and an "American-ness." A coherent "Taiwanese-ness" functions as a set of cultural markers that unite and define a community which might otherwise be defined by other divisions. And an "American-ness" tailors the boundaries of a community towards the audience of the state in pursuit of recognition by demonstrating the community's fit into pre-existing state paradigms. Fundamentally, the contestation over counting on the U.S. census revolves around the tangible resources afforded by the politics of recognition but also the necessary flattening of a community that state recognition inherently accomplishes.

When printed on a census form, the term "Taiwanese American" is largely devoid of the historico-political processes that constitute the term precisely because of the ways a conception of a Taiwanese American community must be tailored for both internal coherency and external legibility. In much the same way that the external Republic of China government condensed disparate groups under a single convenient category of "Taiwanese" so as best to maintain them, the construction of a census category of "Taiwanese American" erases the conflict within Taiwanese Americans of what constitutes a Taiwanese ethnic or racial identity. Such a category obscures ethnic differences underneath that label, especially indigenous Taiwanese, and instead replaces it with a more accessible view of Taiwan as an island that is culturally distinct from China and Taiwanese Americans as easily legible to a U.S. conception of ethnic community.

These contestations over Taiwanese American identity are undergirded by nationalist and liberal ideologies. In the battle over a separate Taiwanese American ethnic identity, Taiwanese American non-profit organizations actively assert political and cultural independence from a Chinese American identity but simultaneously reinscribe narratives of American exceptionalism, nationalism, and liberalism. This negotiation of a new American ethnic identity, then, is inextricably tied to the rhetorical transnational nation-building of Taiwan; the growing fight for ethnic legitimacy of Taiwanese

Americans in the United States reflects a greater transnational Taiwanese nation-building project. Community categories are as much prescriptive as they are descriptive, and the ways in which states, community organizations, and individuals negotiate these category boundaries are always political processes even, or perhaps especially, when they are framed as apolitical.

For the Taiwan Census 2010 campaign to advocate for disidentifying with a Chinese community and identifying with an *embarrassed et cetera* of "Other Asian," is to solidify an idea of a Taiwanese community that is inherently embedded within a larger political discourse of Taiwan's international status. It is to reject a certain kind of community canonization—that of being recognized as a subset of Chinese—in pursuit of a different kind of recognition through the temporary identification with an "Other Asian." The Taiwan Census 2010 campaign ultimately failed to achieve its largest goal—that of rallying the census numbers to justify to the U.S. state that "Taiwanese" ought to be its own census community category and the TACL has started another campaign directed at the upcoming 2020 census. Yet, while the 2010 campaign was unable to successfully redefine a Taiwanese American community as anything other than an "Other Asian," this ambiguous category is, perhaps, the most accurate descriptor of what a Taiwanese community looks like in Taiwan's current geopolitical context—formally unrecognized and yet present all the same.

3. Better Think About it TWICE
Chou Tzuyu, Ku-Mo Icons, and the Business of Sovereignty

"大家好, 我有話想對大家說."
- 周子瑜, official apology video (2016)

In 2015, 16-year old Taiwanese Korean pop star Chou Tzuyu appeared on the Korean variety show *My Little Television* alongside the other non-Korean members of the pop group TWICE. Premiering one month after the group's formal debut, the appearance was meant to drum up attention for a group that was predicted to become a major presence in a new wave of Korean pop idols. However, the brief appearance of a Taiwanese flag ended up eclipsing the marketing hype, spurring on a transnational political controversy over the concept of Taiwanese independence that embroiled China, South Korea, and Taiwan. During the program, the four non-Korean members were given flags by production of their home countries to hold alongside the South Korean flag. The Taiwanese flag itself is only briefly the focus of the program before the show moves on to dance and game segments typical of Korean variety shows. Nevertheless, the flag's presence was enough to cause a Chinese singer named Huang An to accuse Tzuyu of being pro-Taiwanese independence and anti-Chinese.

This scandal ended Tzuyu's advertising campaigns in China, impacted record sales, and mobilized pro-Taiwan political demonstrations in the lead up to the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election, resulting in political comments from each of the major presidential candidates. In the ensuing Taiwanese election, the liberal more pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidency against the more pro-unification Kuomintang (KMT) in what became the largest winning margin since the first direct presidential election of Taiwan. In addition, the more radically pro-independence New Power Party (NPP) took seats in the legislative branch for the first time. Despite its spectacle, however, Tzuyu's scandal is not unique but is a recurring facet of a ku-mo Taiwan wherein even insubstantial acknowledgements of Taiwan's existence must be erased by China and wherein individual Taiwanese figures in entertainment become ku-mo icons—temporary embodiments of a ku-mo Taiwan that must be financially punished. What sets Tzuyu's scandal apart from others and made it such a salient political event is its position within the specific Taiwanese political context of the 2010s with its increased mobilization of Taiwanese students and youths on the topic of Taiwan's international status and their willingness to contest an enforced boundary between politics and popular culture. As I explore in this chapter, the political fallout of what might otherwise have been an inconsequential segment of an entertainment program shows how popular culture is a site of political struggle over the question of Taiwan's political status.

While in cultural studies and performance studies, we see culture and cultural productions as generative sites of knowledge, within the larger context of society cultural productions are often framed as inherently or ideally apolitical. Eran Shor and Yuval

Yonay (2010), in their analysis of Israeli and Palestinian athletes, describe this as a constructed dichotomy between "clean sports" and "dirty politics," where entertainment, "must be depoliticized and carefully guarded from being contaminated by the sludge of politics."[147] Here, marginalized entertainers are allowed the prestige of stardom on the condition that a strict line is kept between the marketability of their work and any perceived political statement. Of course, what defines a "political statement" is not up to the entertainer to decide and most often amounts to any statement or insinuation that contradicts state narratives. Palestinian players are, for instance, allowed to talk about Arab-Jewish coexistence in such a way that implies it "depends first and foremost on the willingness of the Arab minority to blend in."[148] In this light, a "political statement," is anything that threatens to make the marginalized entertainer anything more than a token.

This can be seen in an American context by the backlash to Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks, who critiqued President George W. Bush in 2003 for the Iraq invasion and faced death threats, blacklisting, and near-universal condemnation by politicians and news anchors. Again, the rhetoric used against the Dixie Chicks was that they had inserted politics into entertainment media where it ought not to be and they should, as is the title of conservative pundit Laura Ingraham's infamous book, "shut up and sing." For Ingraham, again the concern is entertainers (framed as "elites" here), "who… insist on using the fame derived from such activities to discuss political issues… about which they are often woefully ignorant."[149] There is an assumed separation between entertainers, who are perceived as inherently unknowledgeable on political topics, and political pundits or everyday people. An entertainer's job is to perform and never to use their platform for political statements. The production of culture is seen as mutually exclusive with the production of knowledge. Entertainers, then, are punished for publicly engaging in what is described as political—in this case, critiquing U.S. interventionism or uncritical patriotism. Again, what is political, here, is what contradicts the state. It is not political, in this framework, for a country singer to praise the American military. It is only political to critique it.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2007) identify the inherent political work that undergirds the supposed apoliticism of what they term the *culture industry*.[150] For Adorno and Horkheimer, popular culture from the culture industry must be meticulously produced so as to maximize economic and cultural profit as well as ensure the passivity of the masses. Mass-produced popular culture is thus in service of reaffirming state ideals as normal and just; this is how a clearly political statement endorsing U.S. imperialism can be framed as apolitical but a critique is a political statement. One is in accordance with state values, and the other is a threat. It is not that popular culture is inherently apolitical; rather, popular culture is intentionally produced so as to *appear* apolitical to be more easily consumed—which in and of itself performs political labor. Because of this,

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[147] Shor, Eran & Yuval Yonay, "'Play and shut up': the silencing of Palestinian athletes in Israeli media," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34:2, (2011): 230, 235.
[148] *Ibid.*, 235.
[149] Ingraham, Laura, "Foreward to the Paperback Edition," *Shut Up & Sing: How Elites from Holloywood, Politics, and the UN are Subverting America*, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2006): ix.
[150] Adorno, Theodor & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1947, Reprint, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

these ruptures in popular culture—the intrusion of the political in the popular—can provide us with much insight on what is considered politics at all.

Within the context of Taiwan and its impossible sovereignty, the existence of a Taiwan is politically and economically contested and it is considered an affront to China's conception of its nation-state borders. So any appearance of Taiwan in popular culture is seen as a political statement, whether it is an acknowledgement that an entertainer is from Taiwan or a symbolic marker of the island such as a flag or an anthem. When a marker of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty appears in what is supposed to be the most apolitical of places—popular culture and entertainment—the ensuing political ruptures are all the more volatile and impactful. The mandate in these cases has been to force the artist to distance themselves from politics rather than to take legal or extralegal action directly. Taiwanese celebrities are more at risk for blacklisting or public condemnations than state violence, particularly when the affronted state is across the strait or ocean. What this means is the particular circumstances surrounding political ruptures in popular culture function differently from other forms of political disruption. The stakes, players, and consequences are different when involving entertainment icons and it is the construction of politics and popular culture as antitheses to each other that is the cause of this discrepancy.

The scandal of Chou Tzuyu allows us to ask how a teenage Taiwanese pop star in a Korean pop group spurs on a political controversy in China and how the issue of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty finds itself rupturing in supposedly apolitical popular culture. But while this impossible sovereignty is in many ways repressive, there is a degree of liberation and power in its ku-mo precarity. Through the analysis of the contextual leadup and fallout to Tzuyu's stardom and international scandal, I aim to demonstrate how Tzuyu's Taiwanese background has made her another in a line of ku-mo icons—or embodiments of a ku-mo Taiwan—that bring to light the role of transnational capital as a mediating factor in contested sovereignties and how her scandal is the culmination of a larger Taiwanese youth political movement that has deployed popular culture as a venue for politics. I analyze the rhetoric deployed of the event to piece together the narratives that justified her blacklisting and that propped her up as a symbol of an aggrieved island—both of which engage in the logics of a ku-mo Taiwan and a political-popular dichotomy. I focus on the words of her most public detractors—the Chinese singer Huang An that precipitated the scandal—and the ensuing news and political commentary on her scandal. Our interest in this public political rhetoric is not to take it at face value, but to interrogate the dominant narratives surrounding this event, even when the words or statistics themselves may be misleading. How Tzuyu is positioned as a social figure and an embodiment of a ku-mo Taiwan by both China and Taiwan helps us understand how the larger question of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty is navigated on the public stage.

First, we will explore the role of transnational capital in these political ruptures in popular culture to understand why contested sovereignties are increasingly negotiated in the supposedly apolitical realm of popular culture and entertainment. This is what I call the *business of sovereignty*—or the ways transnational capital is economically incentivized to enforce a political-popular dichotomy to be broadly profitable, and thus is able to recuse itself from political responsibility even as it complies with state censorship

of Taiwan or Hong Kong in China. Next, we will extend the theoretical framework of ku-mo to describe the particular dynamic of how it becomes embodied by Taiwanese popular figures in entertainment. This manifests in what I call a *ku-mo icon*, where a public figure in popular culture becomes symbolically transposed onto the political question of Taiwan's ku-mo impossible sovereignty as a result of a perceived political endorsement of Taiwanese independence and thus becomes the subject of international scandal.

Then, we will explore the particular scandal of Chou Tzuyu of the pop group TWICE and the discourses that were directed at Tzuyu herself and the flag she carried. We will cover the international political fallout of her punishment and its affects on the 2016 presidential election of Taiwan. Finally, we will be able to look at Taiwan's political landscape and preceding student and youth movements in the mid-2010s, which will help us understand why Tzuyu's bubblegum KPOP scandal, in particular, was catapulted into the spotlight instead of other similar scandals. The rise of Tzuyu from an unknown trainee to one of the top three most popular KPOP idols of her generation allows us to look at the political ruptures of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty into supposedly apolitical popular culture through the career trajectory of Chou Tzuyu and the scandal that the Taiwanese think-tank 兩岸政策協會 (Cross-Strait Policy Association) claim launched 1.34 million ballots.[151]

모두 나를 가지고 매일 가만 안 두죠: The Business of Sovereignty

Benedict Anderson (1983) identifies capitalism as an integral factor in the creation of national consciousness through his conception of the unifying (and flattening) force of national print-language communication. For Anderson, the standardization of language through capitalist incentives "served to 'assemble' related vernaculars… which, within the limits imposed by grammars and syntaxes, created mechanically reproduced print-languages capable of dissemination through the market."[152] A national consciousness, then, was predicated on unified means of communication of print language that required the institution of dominant vernaculars, a standardized written language, and the spread of the ability to read. Michael L. Silk et al. (2005) similarly view the nation-state "as a cohesive, political, economic, and cultural entity designed to consolidate and regulate capital accumulation within the boundaries of a specific geographic location."[153] Capital, then, appears to serve as a core nation-building force that constructs communities and national borders within geographical regions. In a similar manner to the way Walter Benjamin (1921) conceptualized capitalism as a

[151]王书童 , **"**周子瑜事件 调查：影响 134 万青年投票,**"** 多維新聞**,** http://news.dwnews.com/taiwan/news/2016-01-17/59711314.html (retrieved October 2019).

[152] Anderson, Benedict, "The Origins of National Consciousness," *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (London: Verso, 1991): 44.

[153] Silk, Michael L., David L. Andrews, and C.L. Cole, "Corporate Nationalism(s): The Spatial Dimensions of Sporting Capital," *Sport and Corporate Nationalisms,* (New York: Berg, 2005): 2.

religious structure, I invite us to consider the ways capitalism functions to create communities and borders.[154]

However, as Aihwa Ong (1999) notes, an increasingly transnational and global economy disrupts traditional liberal capitalist conceptions of national sovereignty and suggests examining the ways "the state [is] merely refashioning a new relationship to capital mobility."[155] Silk et al. identify the "contemporary conditions of advanced globalization" as a cause of undermining "the economic and political autonomy that helped constitute the modern nation."[156] That is to say, the increasing influence of transnational capital has a corresponding impact on the construction of modern nations and sovereignty. If the incentives of capital in a geographic region have helped to foster a national consciousness within arbitrary regional boundaries, the incentives of transnational capital rearticulate the boundaries of national sovereignty further.

Naeem Inayatullah (1996), for instance, identifies global capital as inextricably connected with the very definition of sovereignty. For Inayatullah, debates over how to define state sovereignty have all too often excluded a serious analysis of wealth and political economy. As a result, sovereignty has developed a loose meaning; some sovereign states, he contends, have little to no practical state agency as a result of its position in what he calls the global division of labor. And it also functions as a rhetorical way to obscure both the lasting economic motives and impacts of European colonization as well as the ways "Third World states [have been] required to graft their sovereignty on to a productive structure historically constructed to deprive their economies of autonomy, diversity, and robustness."[157] In this perspective, the global political economy—including the historical and contemporary exploitation of colonized states—is baked into how sovereignty is defined and must be grappled with. Pheng Cheah (2007), too, connects global economic inequality with state sovereignty by tracing the ways neoliberal globalization has successfully exploited and, in some cases, exacerbated global inequality while purporting to uphold human rights. Cheah sees the "uneven development" of "economically weak countries bearing the brunt of capitalist exploitation" as a significant impediment towards non-neoliberal forms of globalization.[158] A genuinely transnational world, "requires the removal of the economic divisions of the world… [and] the absence of global consensus about the need for thoroughgoing global economic redistribution" means only that sovereign states who have and continue to be economically exploited by more powerful states will functionally persist as sovereign-in-name-only.[159]

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[154] Benjamin, Walter, "Capitalism as Religion," *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, Edited by Eduardo Mendieta, Translated by Chad Kautzer, (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2004): 259-262.
[155] Ong, Aihwa, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999): 2.
[156] Silk, 2.
[157] Inayatullah, Naeem, "Beyond the sovereignty dilemma: quasi-states as social construct," *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, eds., Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, (Melbourne: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996): 53.
[158] Cheah, Pheng, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 46.
[159] Cheah, 77.

What these theories identify are the ways material economies have structured both how sovereignty is granted and how it is defined. Recognized sovereignty without true political power to participate in global politics is merely the appearance of sovereignty, and the supposed gifts of transnational aid and markets might be simply another manifestation of imperial influence and exploitation. While outsourced labor might appear to benefit foreign markets and economies at the expense of domestic workers, "the high profits generated do not benefit the local economy because capital can be easily repatriated or sent elsewhere." As a result, global markets allow already rich nations to profit off the appearance of globalization, which continues to subjugate poorer states. In turn, what might appear to be a contract between peers reveals itself once again to be the economic and political exploitation of less powerful states through the egalitarian language of globalization, human rights, or state sovereignty. But while these scholars have identified the links between global economies and the politics of sovereignty or nation-building, there is more to be said about the influence transnational media corporations, in particular, have had in legitimizing and erasing contested sovereignties in an increasingly transnational media landscape.

I'd like to extend this connection into what I call the *business of sovereignty*—or the ways the discourses of national sovereignty are increasingly mediated through international corporations and transnational flows of capital. That is, national sovereignty, especially for (non-)nations and states whose national status is precarious at best or actively contested at worst, is increasingly negotiated, affirmed, or erased by the processes of capital accumulation of transnational corporations. This effectively translates political sovereignty into an economic liability for international corporations and transposes state politics for capital. When it is profitable to target a Taiwanese market, for instance, limited conditional recognition of the island's sovereignty can be afforded by trading partners or international corporations for economic gain, but when it is an economic liability to appear to support a contested sovereignty, transnational corporations instead implicitly and explicitly affirm the non-existence of these states by prioritizing and catering towards the demands of more profitable markets and powerful states. It is perhaps the inverse of Aihwa Ong's observation that in a system of "graduated sovereignty," states are increasingly "willing in some cases to let corporate entities set the terms for constituting and regulating some domains."[160] In the business of sovereignty, state sovereignty is not necessarily given to corporate entities to regulate, corporate entities are leveraged against contested sovereignties.

[160] Ong, 217.

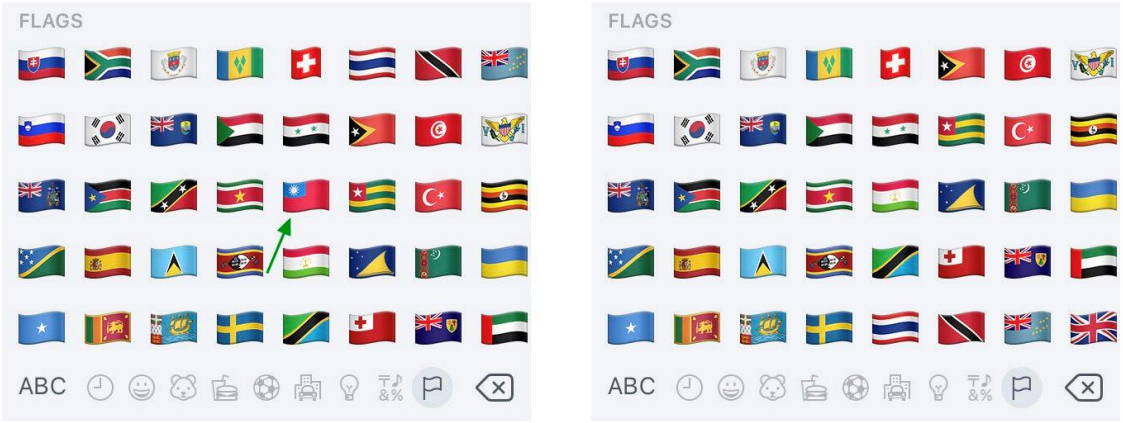

Image 2 | Comparison of flag emojis from USA and China. The ROC flag is missing in the Chinese version, shifting all emojis up and over by one position.

This is accomplished by reinforcing the political-popular dichotomy that lays much of the groundwork of the corporate cowardice of a transnational entertainment industry that wishes to be as broadly accessible (and thus, marketable) as possible and profit from both oppressor and oppressed alike. Fear of political controversy and economic fallout drives transnational corporations and organizations to cave to Chinese demands and skirt around the issue of cross-strait relations. In an effort to continue profiting off of Taiwanese artists or audiences, transnational companies in the center of a ku-mo scandal are quick to backpedal from perceived political statements and assert either the dominant political narrative of a unified China or a disclaimer that there is no political statement being made. In turn, powerful states like China have found ways to deploy this by leveraging the economic power of their market to incentivize transnational corporations to implicitly support its conception of, for instance, Taiwan's sovereignty. If failing to erase a symbol of Taiwan is justification for a major backlash from a large profitable market, transnational corporations will by-and-large choose business over sovereignty. And, in turn, outrage over corporate concession to China and support for impossible sovereignties is framed through the language of commerce—boycott, crowdfunding, and "ethical" consumerism. This is the business of sovereignty—it is the justification, rationalization, and normalization of profit as a primary mode of contesting and negotiating state sovereignty.

Within the realm of Chinese contested claims to other states, this is perhaps best incapsulated by the scandals of both Apple and Blizzard Entertainment in 2017 and 2019. In 2017, transnational telecommunications giant Apple included in a patch the selective removal of the Taiwanese (Republic of China) flag emoji in Apple devices in China to avoid backlash for insinuating Taiwan was a separate nation with its own flag (Image 2).[161] However, the flag was accessible to Apple users outside of China to avoid the also contentious insinuation that Taiwan does not exist. This was accomplished by literally rendering the emoji illegible to devices set in China.

[161] Al-Heeti, Abrar, "iPhone crash? Might have been China's dislike for Taiwan's flag," *Cnet*. https://www.cnet.com/news/iphone-crash-might-have-been-chinas-dislike-for-taiwans-flag/ (retrieved August 2019).

This discrepancy was discovered when it became apparent sending a text message with a Taiwan flag emoji to a device that literally could not recognize it would crash the device. This glitch was not fixed until July of 2018, but by then news of the symbolic erasure of Taiwan through the venue of iPhone emojis had attracted public scrutiny, and this multiplied when in 2019 it came to light Apple had begun censoring the Taiwan flag emoji from iPhones in Hong Kong as well, a territory with its own contentious relationship with China.[162] This move insinuated not only Taiwan's non-existence but a concession to a Chinese conception of Hong Kong as a part of China. Yet again, the process to erase Taiwan paradoxically created the circumstances through which Taiwan could be seen and the illegibility of a Taiwan (through the symbol of an emoji) had the power to disrupt telecommunications, crash programs, and spark media conversation.

Image 3 | Meme of Blizzard Entertainment character Mei styled to look like a Hong Kong protestor in spite of Blizzard's Hong Kong scandal.

International video game corporation Blizzard Entertainment found itself in a similar position in 2019 after they banned a Hong Kongese e-sports competition winner named 'Blitzchung' for a year and revoked his competition prizes for wearing a gas mask and saying in Mandarin, "Liberate Hong Kong. The revolution of our age" in a post-match interview. This quickly resulted in an online backlash where players appropriated Blizzard character Mei as a symbol of Hong Kong protests (Image 3). Though after backlash the company decreased the punishment to a six-month ban and they claimed their business in China was not the cause of the decision to punish Blitzchung at all, Blizzard deployed the political-popular dichotomy to claim that the punishment was not about making a political statement they disagreed with, but making any sort of political statement at all. Blizzard released both an English and a Chinese statement through their official partner company NetEase addressing the situation that took different tones. The English statement framed the punishment purely as a violation of official competition rules on expressing opinions that "[offend] a portion or group of the public, or otherwise damages Blizzard image," while the Chinese statement took a firmer stance: "We express our strong indignation towards the events that took place in last weekend's Hearthstone Asia-Pacific competition and strongly condemn the dissemination of any individual's political beliefs during our event. The athlete will be banned and the ideas will be removed from the event. At the same time, we will as always resolutely defend the dignity of our nation."[163] The discrepancy between the two statements can be in part attributed to the party in charge of releasing the statement (Blizzard's own PR versus its

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[162] Peters, Jay and Nick Statt, "Apple is hiding Taiwan's flag emoji if you're in Hong Kong or Macau," *The Verge*, https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/7/20903613/apple-hiding-taiwan-flag-emoji-hong-kong-macau-china (retrieved October 2019).

[163] "我们对上周末炉石亚太比赛中发生的事件表示强烈愤慨与谴责，并坚决反对在任何赛事中传播个人政治理念。涉事选手将被禁赛，涉事解说将被立即终止任何官方工作。同时，我们也将一如既往地坚决维护国家尊严。" (*translated by author*)

official Chinese representative NetEase) but the fact that these statements both come from official Hearthstone game pages and neither statement has been retracted or disowned by the parent company points to an ambivalent profit-driven motive to minimize scandal by appearing to appeal to any aggrieved party.

In both instances, an international corporation attempting to profit off of a broad array of target markets found itself attempting to frame itself as an apolitical entertainment service that could simultaneously cater to a state demand of censorship as well as a conflicting state demand for recognition. In these and other similar conflicts, transnational corporations treat impossible sovereignties akin to copyrighted characters—profitable and, thus, desirable, but as economic liabilities owned by larger, more powerful corporations. Here, I find it valuable to use the concept of film rights to help theorize the function of these political ruptures in popular culture to demonstrate both the way transnational capital structures these debates over sovereignty but also the conception of ownership that powerful states like China have.

In the case of major studios purchasing the film rights of trademarked or copyrighted characters, the incentive to maximize profits from high-profile intellectual property makes the expiration of film rights a threat to the studio. For example, Sony acquired the rights to the Marvel character Spider-Man in 1999, giving them sole use of Spider-Man and any associated characters in film on the condition that they release a movie at least once every five years. In order to delay the expiration of the claim, the Sony Spider-Man franchise produced two sequels within five years each and, when faced with creative differences with the property, rebooted the franchise two separate times with new casts instead of relinquishing control over the property. In 2019, a battle over the shaky terms of Disney and Sony's joint use of the third iteration of the character spurred on an internet scandal over the fate of both Sony's Spider-Man and his appearance in Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe. What we can learn from film rights, is that a claim to intellectual property must be consistently maintained. If Sony were to stop publicly claiming Spider-Man, control over the property would expire so it becomes necessary to continually and performatively claim the property. This dynamic mirrors China's conception of contested sovereignties like Taiwan's. It is necessary for China to continually contest and reaffirm their claim to Taiwan to retain a symbolic ownership over the "property." And in turn, capital becomes the central incentive for both a Chinese claim of ownership of the island and transnational corporations temporary use or deployment of Taiwan. Apple, or Blizzard, or JYP Entertainment can profit off of Taiwan, so long as it abides by the "copyright" terms of China.

In this business of sovereignty, it is not a surprise why popular culture becomes a venue to contest political sovereignty. As a result of high-profile and profit-driven transnational corporations attempting to invest in a global market, there is a business incentive to cultivate the appearance of being a neutral apolitical party that is merely providing a service to a broad audience. In order to not jeopardize profits in certain markets, international corporations are willing to bend to the censorship demands of state governments and frame this as not tacit support of the state but a pragmatic economic decision. This is how contested sovereignties become mediated through the presumably apolitical realm of popular culture—transnational corporations are incentivized to implicitly support oppressive state regimes in pursuit of profit. In this light, a ku-mo

Taiwan is inconvenient not just to a Chinese discourse of sovereignty, but the profits of transnational businesses in such a way that these two arenas become functionally indistinguishable. Taiwan is an inconvenience to capital as well as to China, and this business of sovereignty has framed the arenas in which its statehood is contested. Taiwan is profitable, yet an economic liability, and this incentivizes for both China and transnational corporations the simultaneous exploitation of and erasure of Taiwan. Yet, just as the erasure of impossible sovereignties is never quite complete in the realm of government documentation, the erasure of Taiwan in a profit-driven business of sovereignty exemplifies its own brand of ku-mo.

내가 너무 예쁘죠나 때문에 다 힘들죠: Ku-Mo Icons

The mass political scandals that occur when the mere hint of Taiwanese sovereignty enters the public domain demonstrate the strong political anxieties under the veneer of apolitical popular culture. In these moments, Taiwan is conceptualized as ku-mo—both as an impossibility, that which does not or ought not to exist, but also as an inconvenience, a disruptive idea that demands undeserved attention. A ku-mo icon, then, is one who comes to represent the larger unresolved issue of Taiwanese sovereignty. Ku-mo icons become temporary embodiments of a ku-mo Taiwan and take on cultural, economic, and political significance even when the figure themselves has not made an intentional political statement. I use the language of *icons* here to acknowledge the anthropological concept of the *fetish* and Marxist idea of the *commodity fetish*, or man-made object that is thought to carry significant and, at times, supernatural power. The anthropological fetish has since been critiqued by many anthropologists who connect the concept with colonial histories of European misunderstandings of African epistemologies and the often paternalistic ways early anthropologists viewed non-Western societies.[164] For that reason, I use *icons* to encapsulate aspects of the fetish concept but with a greater emphasis on the semiotic icon—a sign which stands for its referent—and with a lesser connection to colonial ethnography.

In my construction, ku-mo icons are individual figures or discrete entities whose very name or image becomes synonymous with a politicized Taiwan. They become the center of international controversy and the focus of criticism; yet, they are merely proxies for a larger contest over ku-mo symbols. In Tzuyu's case, for instance, while the ideological concept at debate was the ROC flag, the target of the controversy was the ku-mo icon—Tzuyu—and her wrongdoing, rather than the actual flag itself. In addition, it is unnecessary for these scandals to involve Taiwanese people or even companies themselves. Tzuyu's scandal involved entirely Korean corporations and other scandals such as Apple's involve merely the insinuation of support for Taiwan. What heightens scandals like Tzuyu's is her role as a Taiwanese public figure, who then becomes transformed into an icon for Taiwan's contested status.

These scandals are finite, as the mantle of a ku-mo icon passes from figure to figure, medium to medium, like a ghost possessing an individual. Ku-mo icons become

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[164] Pietz, William, "The Fetish of Civilization: Sacrificial Blood and Monetary Debt," *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology*, eds., Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

suddenly embroiled in international scandal, usually due to some small symbolic recognition that Taiwan exists, either physically or politically. Yet this scandal tends to pass as quickly as it begins and after the icon is punished, usually economically, they are generally allowed to resume their career uninterrupted. The goal is to punish the ku-mo icon as a proxy or stand-in for Taiwan, rather than directly attacking Taiwanese political symbols themselves. In a similar manner to the way Vietnamese protestors of an Orange County Hitek video store focused attention on public figures like city council member Tony Lam for not condemning the display of a Vietnamese flag in the video store, individual "targets were virtually always a proxy" for a larger symbolic political contestation.[165]

The peculiarity of this trajectory leads to intense periods of political conflict between China and Taiwan over a figure in public entertainment, followed by a period of quiet resolution as the figure deals with whatever financial or career consequences the scandal caused and quietly returns to a life pre-scandal. This is the case on a small scale of 2017 Taiwanese beauty vlogger Mii Huang, who faced online harassment for describing a product as "convenient to take overseas" in reference to a trip to Beijing. Her wording, which for some netizens implied Taiwan and China were separate nations, set off accusations that she was pro-Taiwanese independence from mainland Chinese and her solution to resolving this political rupture in entertainment was to reaffirm that her YouTube channel was purely about makeup and was not a place to discuss politics. The initial actions that spark a rupture and the ensuing political controversies do not need to be proportionate. The trigger is not the actual behavior or action of the public figure but rather an underlying symbolic debate between those that see Taiwan as sovereign and those that see Taiwan as inextricably a part of one China.

What ku-mo icons come to function as, then, are venues for China and Taiwan to reinforce and recontextualize the political boundaries of cross-strait relations. In the case Taiwan's ku-mo icons, I see China's consistent public claims of ownership to Taiwan in response to what might otherwise be innocuous moments in entertainment as reflective of the constant work that must be done to maintain legitimate claim to Taiwan and as reflective of the business of sovereignty that frames this rhetorical battlefield. In a similar manner to the way that large film corporations are forced into producing low-return sequels in order to retain copyright, China is put into a position where it must consistently contest the existence of Taiwan publicly in order to maintain the appearance and official recognition of its control over the island. Were it not to do so, the pressure from other countries to avoid acknowledging and recognizing the island of Taiwan would steadily decrease until it had lost symbolic control, especially given the ways Taiwan already exhibits much autonomy economically, politically, and culturally. The work to erase Taiwan's existence is an active, not a passive one, and the resources necessary to affirm this nonexistence point to a Foucauldian conception of omnipresent power and the frailty of Chinese domination.[166] This is not to say that China is not an existential threat to Taiwanese sovereignty, but that there is ku-mo power when merely existing is a threat to

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[165] Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong and David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Incorporation: Vietnamese American Protests in Orange County, California, 1975-2001," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3.1 (2008): 97.
[166] Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, (New York City: Vintage: 1980).

a Chinese nation-state. Taiwan is inconvenient, impossible, an absurdity—and yet, it remains.

With each successive scandal, new terms are drawn up surrounding what Taiwan is or is not allowed to be, and the contestation between opposing ideas results in either a quiet reaffirmation of prior terms or movement of the boundary over Taiwan's status. As Nancy Guy (2002) details, the symbols of a Taiwanese government, be they flags or anthems, serve as "discourses… [that] casts light on the complexity and dynamism of contemporary Taiwan society and its current political environment."[167] For example in 2000, Puyuma Taiwanese singer A-mei was blacklisted from China after performing the Republic of China national anthem at President Chen Shui-bian's inauguration. Despite A-mei's explicit political neutrality at the time and her performance celebrating the inauguration of what is "the most pro-China, pro-unification [political] faction in Taiwan," China had to intervene to maintain its claim.[168] It is because China's discourse surrounding Taiwan's political status must appear airtight that moments lacking radical politics must be shut down regardless; yet, silencing these moments serves only to reveal how perpetually incomplete this process is. As in other cases, this erasure of Taiwan is an active and not a passive one, and it is one that demands much time, money, and energy to accomplish. This process necessarily leaves evidence of its application and, paradoxically, draws attention to what has been erased through the very process of erasure. In a similar manner to the way a poltergeist cannot be seen but is nonetheless responsible for disturbing the appearance of peace around it, the specter of Taiwan haunts popular culture and threatens to inject politics into what is seen as inherently and necessarily apolitical.

In 2018, for example, the Man Booker International Prize became embroiled in controversy alongside nominee Wu Ming-Yi when Wu's nationality was listed as "Taiwan." This caused the Chinese embassy of London to file a complaint implicating the Man Booker Foundation for misrepresenting the status of Taiwan and implying that Taiwan was a sovereign nation.[169] On March 30, 2018, the official website was changed to represent Wu's nationality as "Taiwan, China," outraging Taiwanese. The foundation's Facebook page was inundated with negative comments and calls to reverse the decision. On the mainland, Chinese called for Wu's books to be banned as a result of his public statement that the change from "Taiwan" to "Taiwan, China" did not reflect his personal position. This was in direct contrast to the Chinese embassy's official statement asserting that the existence of a single China that included Taiwan was the "universal consensus of the international community"—a recurring phrase in official Chinese embassy denouncements of the appearance of a ku-mo Taiwan in the public eye. The Man Booker Foundation ultimately found a workaround to the issue that attempted to address both the concerns of Taiwanese and Chinese. They opted to change the categorization of prize nominees by "country/territory" in lieu of categorizing authors by nationality. In this new categorization system, Wu could be listed as coming from "Taiwan", as the island is

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[167] Guy, Nancy, "'Republic of China National Anthem' on Taiwan: One Anthem, One Performance, Multiple Realities," *Ethnomusicology* 46:1 (2002: 99).
[168] *Ibid.,* 105
[169] Flood, Alison and Lily Kuo, "Man Booker prize reverses nationality decision on Taiwanese author," *The Guardian*. April 2018.

officially recognized as a territory, without explicitly claiming that Taiwan is or is not a part of China. Though this resolved Wu's scandal, the process of reconstructing the structure of the Foundation's awards once again represents the transnational ku-mo power and impossible sovereignty of Taiwan.

The scandals that embroil ku-mo icons are used as venues to contest the boundaries of Taiwan's status. With Huang, China argued that crossing the Taiwan Strait ought not to be considered a trip overseas. With A-mei, what was at stake was the legitimization of a Republic of China national anthem and the question of whether a non-sovereign state ought to be able to have a national anthem. With Wu, the central conflict revolved around whether or not Taiwanese could be considered a nationality if it is not a recognized nation. Finally, as we will see with Tzuyu, the question was which flag was appropriate to represent a Taiwan that ought not to exist. These mini-contestations become a venue for defining and redefining what Taiwan is allowed to be, and the ku-mo icons of popular culture and entertainment are merely caught in the crossfire as proxy symbols for a larger political contestation over Taiwan's impossible sovereignty.

어딜 걷고 있어도 빨간 바닥인거죠: *My Little* International Scandal

On October 20, 2015, the nine-member Korean bubblegum pop group TWICE debuted with their first single "Like OOH-AHH" (OOH-AHH 하게). As the culmination of a two-month long reality competition show choosing the members of the idol group, the single's release precipitated a flurry of media appearances for the newest girl group of the entertainment conglomerate JYP Entertainment. On November 22, the four non-Korean members of TWICE appeared on an episode of *My Little Television*, a variety show in which multiple celebrities compete for audience engagement while streaming various games, dances, or activities live. The theme of TWICE's segment centered on the experiences of the foreign members' acclimation to South Korean society and, in line with the theme, each of the four TWICE members were given flags of their home countries to hold alongside the South Korean flag in their introductions (Image 4). While the Japanese flags given to members Momo, Sana, and Mina were uncontroversial, the Republic of China flag given to Tzuyu would prove to be a political inconvenience. What to the South Korean *My Little Television* producers may have just been the official flag of an island neighbor was to Chinese singer Huang An a personal declaration from Tzuyu in favor of Taiwanese independence from China. These conflicting interpretations spurred on an international debate over what Nancy Guy calls the multiple realities of Taiwanese symbols, wherein the same symbol has drastically different meanings dependent on multiple, intersecting but separate discourses.[170]

It cannot be understated how negligible the appearance of the Republic of China flag is to the *My Little Television* variety show that became the center of Tzuyu's international scandal. The full special is approximately three hours long and consists of the four TWICE members sharing stories, dancing, playing games, eating, and chatting on bunk beds. While a persistent part of the show's set, the Japanese and Re public of China flags are rarely the focus of the program, and after an introductory sequence where the members wave them, the flags are largely removed from view.

[170] Guy.

Image 4 | Zoomed-in screenshot of Tzuyu holding both a Korean and ROC flag during My Little Television.

However, as a symbol of a ku-mo Taiwanese nation implicitly positioned as equal to Japan or South Korea by virtue of representing the nationality of a pop idol, the ROC flag necessarily threatens the veneer of a stable Chinese claim to the island. In this lens, it is a political statement not only to say one is Taiwanese, but to acknowledge the existence of a Taiwan at all. There were two major facets of Tzuyu's scandal—criticisms of Tzuyu as a public figure and criticism of the flag itself. The vast majority of criticism was lobbed not at the flag itself as a political symbol, but at the pop idol for tacitly supporting it. As with A-Mei or the Dixie Chicks, the public perception of a political-popular dichotomy framed the major problem presented in the scandal. It was not just that the flag was an affront to a One China Policy, but that a supposedly apolitical figure would disrupt the entertainment industry with a question of sovereignty. Breaching that dichotomy—jeopardizing the profits of JYP Entertainment and an up-and-coming KPOP idol group—and "ruining" otherwise apolitical entertainment was presented as the greatest sin of Tzuyu's scandal. In this light, actual criticism of the flag itself took a backseat.

An himself deployed versions of both of these discourses in his critique of Tzuyu: a gendered and sexualized lens that positioned her as a kind of Helen of Troy that leveraged her beauty to incite political turmoil, and an (a)historical lens that argued the ROC flag ought not to be used to represent Taiwan. The former explicitly maintained a prescribed boundary between politics and popular culture through the accusation that her celebrity would unfairly influence political conversations, while the latter framed her possession of the flag as ahistorical from an entertainer that was necessarily "woefully ignorant."

From his gendered lens, An explicitly tied his conception of Tzuyu's dangerous political power to her status as a beautiful pop idol. While it should be noted Tzuyu was sixteen at the time of this sexualized accusation, the focus on her physical appearance predated her scandal and forms a key part of her role as an idol. In the KPOP industry, each member of a pop group generally serves several roles in the team that help to frame how the group approaches a new single, public appearance, or choreography. These roles are officialized and published through their entertainment agency. Some members may fill the role of a lead vocal and get a larger chunk of a song's lines, while dancers or

rappers are likely to get designated sections of songs to show off those talents. These roles go beyond the structure of a music single though; the face of a group may take charge in public appearances to represent the brand, while the *maknae,* or youngest member, is its own type of role in a culture where age is an important part of social organizing. Tzuyu's roles in TWICE are the *maknae,* Lead Dancer, Vocalist (not a lead or main vocalist), and Visual. The Visual is the member of either a pop group that is deemed the most attractive member, and the most likely to get additional focus in music videos or book solo advertisements. Especially in girl groups, the role of the Visual carries gendered ideas of femininity and beauty, and Tzuyu's assignment as TWICE's Visual demonstrates the ways her physical appearance was pushed front and center in the way she was marketed as an idol. This gendered focus became a dominant way the image of her holding the ROC flag was interpreted.

An claimed that her beauty and fame afforded her more influence than a typical Taiwanese independence activist and would make her history's most effective soldier for Taiwanese independence.[171] For An, the true threat to a Chinese claim to Taiwan was not military resistance or legislation but soft power or cultural power. Cultural power in this case came in the form of a pop star deemed beautiful. He feared that while the general public might not rally behind the political or economic arguments by Taiwanese independence activists, they may be convinced by a conventionally attractive pop idol.[172] Tzuyu was framed as a kind of Helen of Troy, whose beauty sparked international conflict of political significance. This focus on Tzuyu's beauty is, of course, disconcerting considering her age, and it assigns a kind of supernatural undefinable power to a sixteen-year-old that is rhetorically useful in positioning her as a ku-mo icon maliciously twisting her beauty to manipulate nations. Ruby Blondell argues that in the context of the classics of Helen of Troy, "beauty has special meaning for women… [and] a girl's acquisition of erotic beauty at adolescence" is a part of a patriarchal system that views women's worth as beauty, which is transitively a marker of the potential to bear male heirs.[173] She notes that in this framework beauty is objectively measured and the "imaginary perfection" of beauty is exalted as a powerful virtue in and of itself.[174] Tzuyu, for instance, was ranked the most beautiful face in all of mainland China and Taiwan only a month after the scandal by the Annual Independent Critics List's 100 Most Beautiful Faces, and she routinely was the subject of such headlines.[175]

However, while the ancient Greeks saw female beauty as a desirable value, beauty was also positioned as a "a cause of evil in itself," a sentiment echoed by An's anxieties

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[171] "我有錢，我有名，我還長的比台獨好看，台獨都長得醜八怪拐瓜劣棗的，你怎麼辦跟？我是歷史上首選的打台獨獵士，" *(translated by author)*

[172] 民視新聞網, Television Newscast, FTVN Live 53, January 15, 2016.

[173] Blondell, Ruby, "The Problem of Female Beauty," *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 1.

[174] *Ibid.,* 3.

[175] Sun, Nancy, "Chou Tzuyu Named 8th Most Beautiful of 2016," *icrt.* http://www.icrt.com.tw/wordpress/blog/2016/12/28/chou-tzuyu-named-8th-most-beautiful-of-2016/ (retrieved August 2019); "TWICE Tzuyu Is The 2nd Most Beautiful Woman Worldwide So Who Is 1st?" *Kpopmap*. https://www.kpopmap.com/twice-tzuyu-is-the-2nd-most-beautiful-woman-worldwide-so-who-is-1st/ (retrieved August 2019).

over Tzuyu's political influence.[176] Here, female beauty is conceptualized as dangerous for its ability to manipulate the strongest of men, and women are afforded a kind of seductive magic power grounded in a deeply misogynistic reading of sexuality. In Tzuyu's case, she was conceptualized as a kind of political Trojan Horse—intentionally smuggling in politics under the guise of innocence or beauty. She was afforded the malicious intent of a "soldier for Taiwanese independence" with the appearance of a pop idol and was thus perceived as even more dangerous as a result of her perceived combination of beauty and ku-mo. What set Tzuyu's scandal apart from any of the other ku-mo ruptures, for An, was explicitly her position as a popular figure in entertainment. This was both an affront and an impossibility—her violation of the boundary between political knowledge production and popular culture was both seen as deeply offensive and absurd.

From an (a)historical lens, An argued that the Republic of China flag was an inappropriate flag that ought not to represent Taiwan as it implied it was separate from China. But this contestation comes at odds with a com plex history of Taiwan's relationship with multiple flags. There have been a wide variety of flags that have at one point or another been associated with Taiwan and at this time there is no one flag that is universally agreed upon to properly reflect the island. The most well-known outside of the island is the flag of the Republic of China used in the variety show. The Republic of China flag is a predominantly red flag with a blue corner surrounding a representation of a white sun. With its origins in the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government in the late 1920s, the Republic of China flag arrived to the island in 1949 alongside the fleeing government and became imposed upon Taiwan alongside claims from the KMT that they represented the one true government of China. This was in direct contrast to the claim of the People's Republic of China, whose red and yellow flag has become representative of mainland China today and which, as a result of the flag's creation in 1949, it has never flown to represent the island of Taiwan (Image 5).

While the ROC flag remains the official flag of the Republic of China, it is politically contested by many Taiwanese who feel that it fails to represent a modern Taiwan. Instead, the flag is said to represent a KMT government that never saw the island as a separate state but instead as a part of China—just a different China than the People's Republic of China envisioned. This flag is often critiqued as being an outdated remnant of a government that no longer represents the island, and one that flew during almost 40 years of harsh martial law during which the KMT government silenced, imprisoned, and massacred Taiwanese who disagreed with their nationalist or anti-communist ideals. As such, for many radical pro-independence advocates, the flag is an insult to a Taiwan separate from China and a reminder of China's influence and authoritarian rule over the island. Instead, pro-independence rallies ha ve used a variety of other flag designs, many of which expressly reject color palettes that can be confused with the official ROC flag and push to supplant the current flag with one lacking the connection to mainland China.

[176] *Ibid.,* 4.

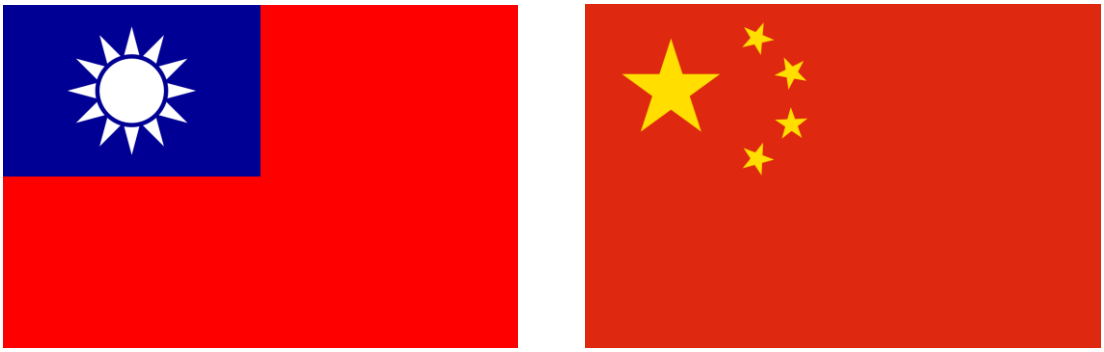

Image 5 | The Republic of China (ROC) flag that represents Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) flag.

The flag displayed on *My Little Television* was the official Republic of China's flag and not, for instance, the flag of the more pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party or any of the explicitly pro-independence flags. How, then, does a flag that by some Taiwanese is seen as a remnant of a government that saw Taiwan and China as the same simultaneously represent to China a rogue separatist government seeking to distance itself from China? Guy's *multiple realities*, again frame the disjointed reactions to Taiwanese symbols. The symbolic meaning of this particular flag, then, is as much dependent on the flag itself as it is on how it articulates with the multiple realities surrounding the nature of Taiwan's status. Put simply, one's radical rebel flag is another's conservative symbol of the system. That this particular flag became the catalyst for TWICE's international scandal is important to understanding the multiple realities of the flag.

From a mainland China's perspective, the Republic of China flag still carries the meaning of that Republic of China government who claimed itself the one true government over all of China. To this end, the flag does represent a form of rejection of the People's Republic of China, even if it does not carry the same context today. By holding the Republic of China flag, Tzuyu could potentially be interpreted as supporting the claim that the Republic of China is the one true government of China. At least three major separate realities exist in Taiwan regarding the Republic of China flag. One views the flag as a largely utilitarian symbol, one that has become more or less synonymous with Taiwan instead of the KMT party. Here, it is not a major priority to contest the symbol when it can be understood as a practical symbol for the island of Taiwan. This is not necessarily tied to an independence mindset—many see Taiwan as distinct from mainland China but may not value or prioritize official independence from it. This is the standpoint of the Mainland Affairs Council, which argued that a Taiwanese person waving a Republic of China flag is simply a matter of patriotism and should not reflect or speak to a separate conversation on the status or independence of Taiwan.

A second reality is evident in the claims from many officials from both Taiwan and China that the Republic of China flag implies support for a One China policy, as a result of its origin with the Kuomintang nationalist government. As one of the largest newspapers in mainland China published in January of 2016, this claim argues that the Republic of China flag itself recognizes that China and Taiwan are both contained in a one China principle, as the flag was originally representative of a government that

claimed it was the one true government of all of China.[177] In this light, they argue the flag should not be seen as proof that Tzuyu is a Taiwanese separatist but instead a supporter of the status quo of cross-strait relations.

In direct contrast, many pro-independence advocates and groups see the Republic of China flag as a conservative, outdated symbol that ties a direct link between Taiwan and China. In this view, it is an inadequate symbol for a Taiwanese nationalism and must be discarded in favor of a new flag which would accurately portray Taiwan as its own nation instead of a derivative of mainland China. Several flags have been proposed to replace the Republic of China flag, many of which explicitly avoid using color schemes that resemble either the blue, red, and white of the Republic of China flag or the red and yellow of the People's Republic of China flag. One of the most notable is that of the Pan-Green coalition, a pro-independence and anti-nuclearization movement, which proposed in the mid-1990s a predominantly green and white flag with a red flower made out of four hearts to represent the four major ethnic groups on the island: indigenous Taiwanese, Hoklo, Hakka, and Taiwanese with post-1949 mainland Chinese ancestry. This Pan-Green coalition flag would be a more accurate symbol for a pro-independence and pro-Taiwanese sovereignty political statement.

That these separate realities come into conflict with one another each time the Republic of China flag crosses the screen has impacted much of the way this flag appears in the global arena. As Guy articulates, the Republic of China flag creates a kind of troublesome ku-mo symbol in its own right, drawing ire from all directions and making it virtually impossible to display. The importance, then, that the flag that was presented was a comparatively conservative one is that it locates the source of conflict not in the explicit political statement that Taiwan is or ought to be separate, but the very presence of any acknowledgement that Taiwan exists at all. The Republic of China flag, here representing Taiwan, becomes both an impossibility and an inconvenience. It is an absurd symbol that is an affront to logic for it represents that which does not and must not exist, yet simultaneously it represents a profound inconvenience that demands undeserved attention—it disrupts an otherwise apolitical and light-hearted broadcast and casts the debut of a new bubblegum pop group under a shadow of Taiwanese politics.

Red carpet 같은 기분: The Political Fallout

Almost immediately after Huang An's accusation, Tzuyu was blacklisted from Chinese television, she was removed from an advertising endorsement with the Chinese company Huawei, and she became the target of an online debate over the legitimacy of Taiwanese sovereignty. Internet engagement with the scandal took off, with Chinese netizens asserting that she was Chinese, that she was ignorant or lying if she claimed to be anything other than Chinese, and that being a political activist ought to result in her removal from the pop group. This, in turn, spurred on a Taiwanese backlash that made mainstream news. Tzuyu, who had previously been only a minor public figure in Taiwan for being a Taiwanese idol abroad, catapulted into the Taiwanese public spotlight as an example of China's infringement on Taiwan's existence.

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[177] Mai, Jun, "'Separatist' label 'unfair for Taiwan's teen pop star Chou Tzu-yu: Chinese state media," *South China Morning Post*, January 18, 2016.

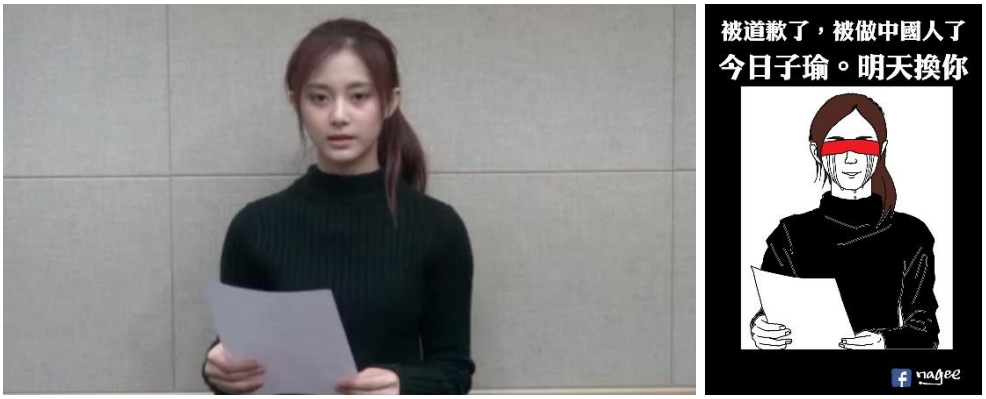

Image 6 | Tzuyu's official apology video and a meme of her apology. The caption translates to, "Forced to apologize, forced to be a Chinese person. Today, Chou Tzuyu. Tomorrow, it'll be you."

As with prior scandals like A-Mei's, Tzuyu's image as a presumably apolitical entertainer exacerbated the scandal on both sides. For China, the fact that she was not a political figure made her transgression an even greater insult; like Ingraham and the Dixie Chicks, Tzuyu was seen as having no basis for holding such a flag on television and as a potential threat of conditioning South Korea into accepting Taiwan as separate from China. For Taiwan, her sanitized apolitical pop idol image made An's accusation even more absurd; that she was not intentionally taking a stance on the issue of Taiwan's political status made it all the more confusing why she was facing any sort of political backlash at all.

Tzuyu interfered with business and capital by becoming a ku-mo icon of Taiwan's contested sovereignty and to minimize loss of profit, the international corporation JYP Entertainment needed to find a way to reaffirm China's conception of Taiwan's sovereignty. Like other idols of the transnational corporation, she was viewed as "a cultural commodity… controlled and strictly managed by [her] entertainment company."[178] Two months after the start of the scandal and just a day before the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election, JYP Entertainment released an official apology alongside a filmed apology video of Tzuyu reading off of a script, both of which declared that Taiwan was a part of China and that Tzuyu is and is proud to be Chinese. The apology video consists of Tzuyu, clad in all black, standing in front of a gray wall and reading off of a scripted apology in Mandarin Chinese. In it, she introduces herself, apologizes for not speaking up earlier, and then asserts that there is only one China and that she is proud of being a Chinese person. She affirms that she should have been more careful as a Chinese person working outside of China to not harm people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Finally, she announces that she will remove herself from the Chinese market and think on her missteps.

[178] Ahn, Ji-Hyun and Tien-wen Lin, "The politics of apology: The 'Tzuyu Scandal' and transnational dynamics of K-pop," *The International Communication Gazette* 81.2 (2019): 164.

Image 7 | A protest sign showing Tzuyu's promotional image from "Like OOH-AHH" promotions with the caption "Taiwanese person."

The scripted nature of the apology and the way it was staged prompted an increasingly salient interpretation on the internet that Tzuyu had been coerced into apologizing on threat of losing her career. Commentators remarked on the low-quality image and audio of the apology and some compared it directly to grainy apology videos of kidnapped victims reading ransom notes or "a hostage video… giving a statement under duress."[179] Memes of Tzuyu's apology framed as a terrorist hostage video circulated pro-Taiwanese independence online circles. Through this lens, Tzuyu became a ku-mo symbol for Taiwan; she was not only conceptualized as the victim of a particular Chinese injustice, but representative of what would happen to Taiwan as a (non-)nation without fighting back (Image 6). The slogan on this meme, "Today, Chou Tzuyu. Tomorrow, it'll be you," speaks to this symbolic abstraction. It locates the stakes of Tzuyu's scandal not merely in the fate of one individual celebrity but in a larger geopolitical struggle between Chinese and Taiwanese conceptions of Taiwan.

Instead of quelling the rising tension, the JYP apology video exacerbated the political rupture, leading to mass public Taiwanese attention to the issue. In many ways, JYP Entertainment's apology video was the cause of more outrage than the initial accusation from Huang An. The apology video was interpreted by many as an acceptance of China's terms through the business of sovereignty—an admission that Tzuyu had done something wrong and was potentially at risk of losing her newfound celebrity, and demonstrations erupted across Taiwan (Image 7). In January, a *yeshi* (夜市, night market) in Kaohsiung held a public rally in support of Tzuyu, where participants waved Republic of China flags to mirror the scandal alongside chants such as "We support Chou Tzuyu! We love Taiwan! We stand by Taiwan! We believe in Taiwan!"[180] The event also served as a charity event, raising resources and supplies for Taiwan's poor population in light of an oncoming cold front.[181] By juxtaposing Tzuyu's international scandal with charity

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[179] *Ibid.*

[180] "力挺周子瑜！我們愛台灣！我們支持台灣！我們相信台灣！" *(translated by author)*

[181] 東森新聞, Television Newscast, CH 51, January 22, 2016.

organizing framed as support for a national community, the *yeshi* organizers positioned support for Tzuyu as a national endeavor.

But while community, online, and news reactions to the scandal reflect the nationalist reactions of many Taiwanese towards a high profile ku-mo icon, the scale of the scandal is perhaps best encapsulated by the ways that Tzuyu appeared in political discourse. Despite political differences, all major Taiwanese presidential candidates released statements arguing the pop star ought not to have apologized, citing for various reasons, the ridiculousness of a Taiwanese celebrity forced to disown her background. KMT politician 朱立倫 (Zhu Lilun) advocated that Taiwanese voters, regardless of their political affiliation, ought to wear the ROC flag when voting as a sign of national support.[182] This was particularly significant given the KMT's disinterest in pursuing Taiwanese independence pointing towards a critique grounded more in nationalism and cultural pride than actual independence advocacy. Punishing Tzuyu for holding the flag was not solely interpreted as an anti-independence move but as an affront to all of Taiwan, regardless of political perspective on independence.

The Mainland Affairs Council of Taiwan published a warning that Chinese attacks on Tzuyu could lead to an increasingly tense relationship between China and Taiwan and the scandal drew national attention and fervor from Taiwanese citizens. The scandal was identified not merely as a political move but as an existential threat to Taiwan. As writer Zhu Xueheng articulates,

> "If you hold the national flag, you're a Taiwanese independence activist. If you don't hold the flag, you're a Taiwanese independence activist. With respect to an emphasis on Taiwanese identity, which includes the DPP, includes the NPP, includes the TSU, Huang An's action have been a bonus. At what other time have all three political parties' presidential candidates spoken up about a scandal? The greatest takeaway here is young people being forced to realize the Chinese Communist Party actually is not interested in discussing the issue in good faith. This is their method. They will not allow any space to express your national identity."[183]

Tzuyu's scandal here was accurately framed not as a scandal limited to the entertainment industry, but as a proxy for a larger contestation over the international political status of Taiwan.

Taiwanese news sites began publishing the results of an online survey by the Cross-Strait Policy Association think tank that, while unable to be independently substantiated, claimed the scandal lead to an estimated 1.34 million voter turnout, mostly from younger voters, which helped to widen the margin of Tsai Ing-wen's ultimate victory.[184] That the CSPA itself has no available public record of this statistic but it proliferated so quickly through news stations like the South China Morning Post speaks

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[182] 民視新聞網.

[183] "你拿國旗也台獨. 不拿國旗也台獨. 這對於強調台灣主體性包含民進黨, 包含時代力量, 包含台聯. 黃安的作為絕對是百分之百加分. 你看台灣甚麼時候有一個議題是三個政黨主要總統候選人每一個人都表態? 最重要關鍵是年輕人被迫覺醒到中共其實沒有要跟你好好談. 他的手段就是這個樣子. 而他的允許就表示你根本沒有認同自己國家主體性的空間." *(translated by author)*

[184] Chan, Minnie, "Teen pop star Chou Tzu-yu's apology for waving Taiwan flag swayed young voters for DPP," *South China Morning Post*, January 17, 2016.

to the rhetorical salience of the scandal and the political fervor with which it took off. Each of the major Taiwanese presidential candidates made official statements about the apology, with newly elected President Tsai Ing-wen referencing the scandal in her victory speech on January 16, 2016:

> "Over the past few days, we have seen news that has shaken Taiwanese society. An entertainer - a young 16 year old girl - working in South Korea - recently attracted opposition after she was filmed holding the Republic of China flag. This incident has angered many Taiwanese people, regardless of their political affiliation.
>
> This particular incident will serve as a constant reminder to me about the importance of our country's strength and unity to those outside our borders. This will be one of the most important responsibilities for me as the next president of the Republic of China." – *President Tsai Ing-wen*, January 16, 2016[185]

That Tzuyu, as a Taiwanese Korean pop idol nearly 1,000 miles from Taiwan became a rhetorical fulcrum for political discourse during a presidential election and the rhetorical foundation for a new president's platform points to a breakdown of the supposed political-popular dichotomy that structures politics and knowledge production as separate from media and entertainment. It also reinforces the power that transnational capital and business has on contested sovereignties. Support for a pop idol group becomes a stand-in for national pride and advocacy and Chinese boycotts of TWICE becomes a way to reaffirm a Chinese rhetorical ownership of Taiwan as property.

Ku-mo scandals like Tzuyu's, then, acts as a site to contest the political boundaries of Taiwan's international status. For pro-unification Chinese, ku-mo scandals offer an opportunity to define and redefine the relationship between China and Taiwan, and for Taiwanese independence advocates they represent both an existential threat of losing ground as well as a chance to reinvigorate public support for Taiwanese sovereignty. Both deploy the supposed apoliticism of popular culture to support their claims; China asserts it is inappropriate for a pop culture entertainer to use their celebrity to influence politics, and Taiwan argues ku-mo icons are not being political and are simply entertainers. In any case, ku-mo icons like Tzuyu get caught in the crossfire and embroiled in intense international scandal before slowly being allowed to return to their life as another rupture occurs.

모두 날 쳐다 보죠: Sunflower Movement and New Power Party

Tzuyu's international scandal is part of a constant stream of ku-mo scandals, wherein Taiwanese public figures or even minor internet celebrities become the targets of mass scandal and outrage over a perceived insertion of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty into the realm of business, commerce, and entertainment. However, given the commonness of these scandals, what elevated Tzuyu's to an international political conversation at first appears confusing. What makes Tzuyu's flag scandal big enough to influence political discourse and, supposedly, influence voters at the ballot box? What separates Tzuyu's scandal from the comparatively smaller Man Booker International scandal? I would like to close with arguing that Tzuyu's scandal was exacerbated by the

[185] This translation is from the official Taiwan DPP.

political circumstances of Taiwan in the mid-2010s that was already contesting the political-popular dichotomy of the business of sovereignty. As a result of a mass student and youth political movement against Chinese infringement upon Taiwanese sovereignty and the ensuing creation of a New Power Party founded by a popular musician that highlighted the false political-popular dichotomy, Taiwan in the months prior to Tzuyu's scandal was already primed for a larger battle over the business of sovereignty. As such, the political reaction to Tzuyu as a ku-mo icon speaks to a larger anxiety over the increasing political engagement of young Taiwanese over the question of Taiwan's sovereignty.

In mid-March of 2014, about a year and a half prior to Tzuyu's flag scandal, Taiwanese students made history by organizing against the quick passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) to the legislative floor without a longer review period to evaluate each clause of the proposed agreement as previously agreed upon with the opposing DPP. When the KMT-party Ma administration claimed approving the agreement was solely the purview of the executive branch of government, a coalition of students, academics, civil servants, NGOs, and young Taiwanese organized mass protests against what was perceived as steps towards dismantling Taiwan's democracy and independence.

In what Brian Christopher Jones and Yen-Tu Su (2017) conceptualize as a moment of "confrontational contestation" that highlights not just a form of civil disobedience from the student movement but a "dueling vision of democracy," students and young Taiwanese in the movement occupied the Legislative Yuan of Taiwan's government for twenty-four days.[186] For the Sunflower Movement, the quick approval of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement from the ruling KMT government reflected an uncritical acceptance of China's terms that could open the island up to undue external influence. Without a careful examination of the terms of such an agreement, the anxiety was China could covertly infringe upon Taiwan's precarious sovereignty through economic incentives. The dual anxieties of economic and security concerns formed the basis of Taiwanese discontent with the Ma administration and the Sunflower Student Movement's alignment of the domestic economic concerns of unemployment, education, and income inequality with cross-strait relations point to a troubling of formerly conceptualized dichotomies between the KMT and DPP parties.[187] While previously, the DPP had taken a less firm stance on Taiwan's independence, given the growing power and influence of the PRC, the Sunflower movement's occupation and criticism of the DPP's ambiguous policy on the issue, "dealt an embarrassing blow to the… Democratic Progressive Party," and pushed the party, "to back the students' [stronger] demand to scrap the current CSSTA version."[188]

While the Sunflower Movement was the work of numerous organizers and student leaders, it cultivated the aesthetics of an organic lack of authorship that reflected

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[186] Jones, Brian Christopher and Yen-Tu Su, "Confrontational contestation and democratic compromise," *Law and Politics of the Taiwan Sunflower and Hong Kong Umbrella Movements*, (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2017): 18.
[187] Hsieh, John Fuh-Sheng, "Taiwan in 2014: A Besieged President amid Political Turmoil," *Asian Survey* 55.1 (2015).
[188] Ho, Ming-sho, "Occupy Congress in Taiwan."

the prevailing feelings that there was "no other option [for young Taiwanese concerned about Taiwan's status] but to forcefully intervene in the democratic process."[189] The Agreement became a symbolic marker for a larger anti-Chinese anxiety over the loss of national autonomy and public opinion "quickly swung in favor of the movement's call for the CSSTA to be sent back for review, with a majority of television poll respondents expressing disapproval of government conduct and support for the students' demands."[190] During the demonstrations, a local flower shop's donation of roughly one thousand sunflowers to the protesting students solidified the flower as the political symbol of the movement, and the image of crowds of protestors holding sunflowers—real and constructed out of paper—became one of the most striking visual icons of the protests. Despite attempts to quell the movement, the protests and occupation spurred on larger nationalist fervor over Taiwanese independence, resulting in the DPP's first political victory in both executive and legislative branches of government less than two years later.

In the aftermath of the Sunflower Movement, the New Power Party (NPP) was co-formed by indie heavy metal band singer Freddy Lim as a third political party focused on left-wing political values, a Taiwanization campaign, and pro-Taiwanese independence. The NPP took a far more radical stance on Taiwan's political status than either the KMT or DPP, asserting that, "Taiwan has already been an independent country named the Republic of China… Therefore, the priority should not be pursuing an independent status but to normalize Taiwan's relations with other countries, including China."[191] This new party "explicitly presented itself as the direct successor of the youth activist movement," and channeled the momentum from this movement into non-standard populist advocacy.[192] NPP legislators, for example, engaged in a hunger strike in early 2018 in protest of DPP policies against worker's rights. The NPP's unconventional origins and the popularity of Lim as both an activist and an artist helped to drive support for the party that helped it secure five seats in the Legislative Yuan in 2016 despite its relative youth.[193] This political context served as the impetus for Tzuyu's scandal and the ways China and Taiwan (both pro- and anti-independence Taiwanese) reacted to it.

Freddy Lim and the New Power Party's engagement with popular music as a venue for discussing politics formed an important part of the political landscape that preceded Tzuyu's scandal. As the lead singer of the Taiwanese Hokkien heavy metal band ChthoniC, Lim engaged in both political organizing and entertainment in ways that highlighted the interconnectedness of these mediums. At the turn of the century, Lim's Taiwan Rock Alliance staged a "Say No to China" concert, later "Say Yes to Taiwan," coinciding with the anniversary of Taiwan's 228 Incident, a monumental rebellion against the KMT government that served as a major catalyst for the Taiwanese

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[189] Ibid., 22.
[190] Rowan, Ian, "Inside Taiwan's Sunflower Movement: Twenty-Four Days in a Student-Occupied Parliament, and the Future of the Region," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74.1. (2015): 9.
[191] Chen, Ian Tsung-yen and Da-chi Liao, "The Rise of the New Power Party in Taiwan's 2016 Legislative Election: Reality and Challenges," *Taiwan's Political Re-Alignment and Diplomatic Challenges*, ed., Wei-chin Lee, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019): 84.
[192] Read, Graeme, "Sharp Power, Youth Power, and the New Politics in Taiwan," *Power*, eds., Jane Golley, Linda Jaivin, Paul J. Farrelly, and Sharon Strange, (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019): 180.
[193] Hsieh, John Fuh-Sheng, "Taiwan's General Elections of 2016," *Taiwan's Political Re-Alignment and Diplomatic Challenges*, ed., Wei-chin Lee, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

independence movement. Yet, even this engagement is tempered by the notion of an inherent separation between politics and popular culture. In an interview with the metal music magazine Heavy, Lim claims, "Actually, I separate these two things… I didn't really write music based on political messages and I didn't try to play my music in the political either. Metal is not that kind of music."[194] Christopher Payne (2014) argues this is a result of a deeper history of black-metal, where politics is rhetorically separated from the music and the music takes precedence. But as he articulates, "this is not to say that it is a music scene that is free of politics but rather that black metal has been quite successful at ostracizing those that 'break the code,' so to speak, and conflate the two."[195] The binary between politics and popular culture must be enforced, at least explicitly, and this is how Lim's work can simultaneously, "awaken, through a pop-cultural form, the consciousness of (young) Taiwanese people in order to make them recognize the distinctiveness of Taiwan's identity… independent of China," and also be publicly framed as apolitical.[196]

Freddy Lim's multiple roles as grassroots activism, political party-leader, and heavy metal musician serve as a salient manifestation of the embeddedness of popular culture and politics, particularly in a Taiwanese context wherein the appearance of Taiwan's political status in popular culture must be subjugated. Rather than distancing themselves from the connotations of an insufficiently political populist movement, the New Power Party has largely leaned in to the associations and garnered youth support in so doing. This primed the political landscape for a ku-mo rupture on a larger scale, and the inevitability of yet another ku-mo rupture ensured that such a dynamic would result in largescale political mobilization from the next appearance of Taiwan in popular culture.

What happened with Tzuyu could have, and continues to, happen to a wide variety of Taiwanese public figures—but what sets Tzuyu's scandal apart from the others is the political context in which hers occurred. Tzuyu's scandal arose shortly after Taiwan's Sunflower Student Movement and the creation of the ensuing New Power Party that mobilized young Taiwanese voters and renewed a growing contestation over the question of Taiwan's political independence. Her public persona as an explicitly apolitical entertainer exacerbated the scandal further and both triggered the question of the role of popular culture and politics as well as drew attention to the absurdity of China's claim of political insubordination. Taiwan's political landscape preceding the 2016 presidential election was already primed for a contestation of what Taiwan ought to be through the lens of a growing youth investment in Taiwan's political future, and the escalation of Tzuyu from KPOP idol to ku-mo icon was the manifestation of a broader sociopolitical history of Taiwan.

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[194] Lim, Freddy, "FREDDY LIM OF CHTHONIC Talks Some HEAVY Stuff," *HeavyTV*.
[195] Payne, Christopher, "Wushe, Literature, and Melodic Black Metal: The 'Nonpolitics' of Wuhe and the 'Political' ChthoniC." *Positions* 22.2 (2014): 416
[196] *Ibid.,* 418.

4. Fresh Off the Page, Onto the Screen
Translations of Eddie Huang and the Illegibility of Asian American Stories

> *"Macaroni is to Chinamen as water is to gremlins, teeth are to blow jobs, and Asian is to American. It just didn't fit."*
> – Eddie Huang, *Fresh Off the Boat: A Memoir* (2013)

In a 2015 editorial written for Vulture, Manhattan chef Eddie Huang recounts the conflict of seeing his memoir *Fresh Off the Boat* adapted to the screen—a conflict exemplified through a prospective voice over line, "America is great."[197] This line, later changed to better fit Huang's vision of "America ain't three fifths bad," encapsulates some of the core tensions between the story Eddie Huang crafted for his memoir and the story network television was prepared to tell. A memoir serves as a site to narrativize and frame life stories for a public audience and Huang actively cultivates a crass, political, and anti-racist frame to understand his childhood. He uses childhood anecdotes of his anger with white supremacy and his grappling with his Taiwanese-Chinese ancestry to illustrate a growing understanding of his own racialization. Huang seems eager to narrativize his life stories with an explicit anti-nationalist and anti-racist lens that frames how he talks about his troubled childhood. The ABC sitcom, in contrast, interprets scenes from Huang's memoir through a liberal multiculturalist framework that positions Eddie as a foil to the model minority myth in ways that paradoxically reinforce this racial narrative. Eddie's angry affect is framed not only as largely ineffectual rebellion but as dysfunctional. He fails to assimilate in Orlando, in contrast with his brothers who succeed academically and interpersonally, and this failure is presented as comedically incongruous with the Asian American experience. Eddie is shown to be the exception to Asian American racialization rather than a sign that this racialization as docile and apolitical is inaccurate.

Yet, while these two interpretations of Huang's childhood may seem divergent, both the format of the memoir and sitcom participate in an active translation of his life stories into a legible narrative of Asian Americans, which necessarily excludes, in different manners, what cannot be legible about Asian American stories. While the memoir struggles to escape patriarchal readings of racial liberation, the sitcom fails to address racism as a structure beyond interpersonal slights. However, despite their limitations, retellings of Eddie Huang's childhood remain an important cultural touchpoint for Asian Americans and particularly Taiwanese Americans, for whom representative narratives on mainstream U.S. media are scarce. As both the subject of what is only the second major Asian American sitcom and as one of the first Taiwanese American celebrities in the mainstream, Huang's stories have a significant impact on the frames Asian American and Taiwanese American stories can be legible in the U.S. ABC's prior attempt at headlining an Asian American family sitcom with Margaret Cho failed to be renewed for a second season largely as a result of its inability to create "a

[197] Huang, Eddie, "Bamboo-Ceiling TV: The network tried to turn my memoir into a cornstarch sitcom and me into a mascot for America. I hated it.," *Vulture*, (January 2015).

universal appeal to a mass audience" with a racialized family.[198] So the decision to try again almost twenty years later marks an important moment for the portrayal of Asian Americans in U.S. media. In the process of translating his childhood through the lens of a crass, anti-racist memoir and a mainstream ABC family sitcom, what cannot be translated between mediums speak to the limited frames Asian Americans, and Taiwanese Americans particularly, can appear in mainstream U.S. media.

To avoid confusion, I refer to the Eddie Huang of the memoir as Huang and the Eddie Huang of the sitcom as "Eddie" to complement how the character is addressed diegetically. Huang's memoir begins with his childhood and continues chronologically to his career as a restaurateur. The sitcom adaptation, in contrast, mainly focuses on Eddie's childhood and draws its textual inspiration from the first half of the memoir. As the show has progressed, Eddie takes on a life of his own, one clearly inspired by Huang's but constituted of a mixture of events that are real, embellished, and fabricated. This is not a critique, but an acknowledgement that an analysis of the memoir and the sitcom is, to an extent, a comparison of two different life stories disguised as one. Huang also identifies this; as the first season of the sitcom ended, he lamented that the show "got so far from the truth that [he didn't] recognize [his] own life," and he left his role as voice-over narrator after this first season of six.[199] As such, I focus specifically on the sitcom's first season, as it most closely follows the memoir and reflects the highest degree of Huang's involvement.

First, we will examine the structural limitations of the genres of memoir and sitcom that translate illegible Asian American and Taiwanese American stories into legible narratives, as well as defining how these frames of illegibility take place. Next, we will explore a gendered Asian American sexual illegibility that structures how Huang's and Eddie's sexual coming-of-age is framed with and without a lens of racialized masculinity. Then, we will look at an Asian American racial illegibility that highlights how elements of Huang's stories are divergently framed within the memoir and sitcom; in particular, Huang's framing of his childhood as influenced by a distinctly political, anti-racist perspective creates a holistically different interpretation of his childhood than the liberal multicultural lens of the sitcom. Finally, the translation of Eddie Huang is complicated further by the political illegibility of Taiwanese Americans; while Huang portrays his Taiwanese heritage as grounded in his knowledge of particular familial histories, the inability for the sitcom to address Taiwan's political status makes Eddie's ancestry anachronistic. As a result of its contested international status, any depiction of Taiwan as distinct from China is impossible within a political landscape where such an acknowledgement would be absurd. Within the dual frames of both an Asian American racial illegibility and a Taiwanese American political illegibility, we find the impossible translation of the life of Eddie Huang, from Washington DC to Orlando, author to subject, page to screen.

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[198] Mark P. Orbe, Ruth Seymour, and Mee-Eun Kang, "Ethnic Humor and Ingroup/Outgroup Positioning: Eplicating Viewer Perceptions of *All-American Girl*," *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media,* eds., Yahya R. Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli, (Albany: SUNY, 1998): 130.

[199] Eddie Huang, Twitter post, April 7 2015, 9:32 p.m., https://twitter.com/MrEddieHuang/status/585661413298933760.

Translation and (Il)legibility of Asian America

Trinh T. Minh-ha (2010) conceptualizes the process of translation not as perfectly replicating the source material, but of going "beyond the mere imparting of information or the transmittal of subject matter."[200] Translating a story, whether from language to language or medium to medium, necessarily alters the context or framing of a story—and this is not a loss but an opportunity to explore the boundaries of each genre's frame. Within the memoir, Maureen Murdock (2004) identifies the genre as "a quest for meaning" that, akin to mythology, is not just a recounting of events but a narrativization that helps an audience understand how to interpret events; the memoir is not necessarily a factual account of a life, nor perhaps should it be, but a sign, "that the author has digested the experience, not just confessed it."[201] Similarly, Ann Laura Stoler (2002) warns against viewing memory as objective or authentic. Instead, she argues analyzing how people remember and narrativize events is valuable not for the purposes of determining factual truths but for identifying how people make sense of the world. For her, "the focus is not only *what* is remembered but *how*."[202] To translate a life into a memoir, then, is to be made to translate illegible life stories into legible narratives through a retroactive lens of meaning.

Within the sitcom, Mark P. Orbe (1998) identifies the genre's standard of prioritizing universal stories built to be relatable to broad, mainstream audiences.[203] This necessarily relegates racialized families to a kind of illegibility, since an exploration of racial violence is incongruous with the need to maintain a comedic and stable status quo for the central family. As Kubey et al. (2012) articulate, "the sitcom world is one in which the most disturbing behaviors of contemporary society and the rest of the TV world—murder, rape, domestic violence, marital breakup, and child abuse—do not take place, and certainly not directly to the central characters… violence is not a regular staple of the sitcom landscape—indeed, it is nearly nonexistent."[204] In a genre where violence is isolated to subplots or side-characters, the portrayal of racial violence presents a compelling predicament for the legibility of families of color.

The boundaries of both genres frame the kinds of narratives that can be told. The ways in which Asian American stories about racialization appear on screen, then, are mediated by a racial (il)legibility or, "the manner in which bodies are recognizable, intelligible, unambiguous and legitimate in relation to normative and performative scripts and speech acts."[205] In other words, the legibility of racialized subjects in these genres is

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[200] Minh-ha, Trinh T., "Other Than Myself, My Other Self," *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism, and the Boundary Event*, (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2010): 37.

[201] Murdock, Maureen, "Telling Our Stories: Making Meaning from Myth and Memoir," *Depth Psychology: Meditations in the Field*, eds., Dennis Patrick Slattery and Lionel Corbett, (Einsiedeln: Daimon, 2004): 130, 132.

[202] Stoler, Ann Laura, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002): 170.

[203] Orbe.

[204] Kubey, Robert, Smita C. Banerjee and Barna William Donovan, "Media and the Family," *Handbook of Children and the Media*, eds., D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2012): 341-362.

[205] Burdsey, Daniel, "Un/making the British Asian Male Athlete: Race, Legibility and the State," *Sociological Research Online* 20:3 (August 2015): 17.

constrained by the dominant narratives of racial categories—here, the representation of Asian Americans as successful model minorities in contrast to other communities of color. Keith Feldman (2006) frames legibility as part of a process of constructing community categories, where political legibility "[requires] non-white populations to organize themselves into distinct homogenous communities, flatting out intra-group difference by coming to consensus around what it meant, for example, to 'be'… Asian American."[206] Exceptions to racial legibility, then, must be presented as outliers or otherwise erased from the narrative; disproportionately high Asian American poverty rates or anti-Asian racism must be discounted. As a result of this necessary illegibility of translation to memoir and sitcom, the retellings of Huang's life stories manifest an Asian American sexual illegibility, Asian American racial illegibility and a Taiwanese American political illegibility.

While coming-of-age stories frequently explore the ways young people grow to interact and negotiate with gendered and sexualized roles, the retellings of Eddie Huang's coming-of-age must be understood within the larger context of racialization. Within Eddie Huang's stories, this comes through most clearly with how he grapples with his Asian American masculinity in his memoir, which reflects a broader racialized, sexualized, and gendered history of Asian America that cannot be reflected in the sitcom's liberal multicultural framing. Many Asian male writers have written at length about the perceived castration and emasculation of Asian men, often in ways that demean or discard Asian women and LGBTQ+ Asians.[207] Frank Chin is perhaps one of the most well-known and critiqued examples of this form of Asian remasculinization. His plays and novels such as *Chickencoop Chinaman* and *Donald Duk* interrogate masculinity and the impacts of an American emasculation of Asian men from both a raced and a gendered perspective. However, in lieu of interrogating the constructs of masculinity and femininity that constrain Asian American men, his writing instead advocates a reclamation of hegemonic masculinity for Asian American men through an entitled sense of ownership to Asian women's bodies as a form of ethnic reclamation or a valorization of elements of racial resistance tied to patriarchal masculinity such as aggression, flashy displays of violence, and virulent anti-queer sentiments. As David Eng (2001) notes, "Chin insists throughout his works that white racism has unfairly imputed to the Asian American male this gross homosexual desire, and he rejects those yellow men who would seem to display any willingness to subordinate themselves to the white man whom mainstream culture deems superior."[208] Anti-racist liberation, from this perspective, is achievable only through domination over whiteness and femininity. To become free is to reach for a white hetero-masculinity that is perpetually out of reach.

In contrast, authors like Hoang Tan Nguyen (2014) challenge "the strategy of remasculinization employed by Asian American and gay male critics as a defense against

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[206] Feldman, Keith, "The (Il)legible Arab Body and the Fantasy of National Democracy, *MELUS*, 31.4 (2006), 35.

[207] Chin, Frank, "The Chickencoop Chinaman," *The Chickencoop Chinaman / The Year of the Dragon: Two Plays*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).; Chu, Louis, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961).; Lee, Gus, *China Boy*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1991).

[208] Eng, David, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2001): 93.

feminization and rewrites male effeminacy as socially and sexually enabling."[209] For Nguyen, an uncritical reclamation of Asian masculinity comes at the expense of Asian women and queer masculinity, which are then viewed as disposable and deviant. In turn, it accomplishes only to reinscribe the misogyny and homophobia in dominant white masculinity under a new skin. Huang in his memoir and Eddie in the sitcom both embody some of this obsession with a reclaimed heteropatriarchal hegemonic masculinity through the use of women as sexual and status symbols that legitimize manhood. However, the ways each frame these parallel experiences reflect the limited frames of racial sexual legibility for Asian Americans in popular culture.

In a framework of racial illegibility, Asian American cultural productions serve "as countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture," where we can see the contradictions between a liberal multicultural inclusion of Asian Americans and the colonial legacies and exclusion core to their racialization.[210] Within a U.S. entertainment industry where Asians are often relegated to comic relief or sinister villains, the appearance of Asian Americans on screen are tempered by the limited representations that preceded them; Asian Americans have historically been excluded from performing certain roles, such as leading ladies or male love interests, and when Asian characters have appeared in U.S. media, they have often been played by white actors, especially until the mid-twentieth century.[211] These yellowface roles, perhaps most famously exemplified by the character of Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, caricatured Asians as bumbling or sinister, and reinscribed anti-Asian racial narratives. For Robert G. Lee (1999), "[y]ellowface marks the Asian body as unmistakably Oriental; it sharply defines the Oriental in a racial opposition to whiteness."[212] Yellowface constructed popular American understandings of Asians and Asian Americans in juxtaposition against (hetero-)normative whiteness and left lasting racial narratives that persist today.

And Josephine Lee (1997) highlights that even after an increased Asian American presence in theater and performance, racialized dynamics persist. For Lee, theatrical realism was built to evoke a kind of authenticity that often trapped minoritized writers and actors. Asian American plays became evaluated based off of their perceived authenticity to a presumably white audience, thus continuing "an American tradition of looking at Asians as if they were curious objects… [reaffirming] in the details of staging and spectacle, the use of accent and vernacular."[213] white audience expectations of Asian Americans in entertainment The representation of Asian Americans in an American culture industry that claims diversity and inclusion as a value, then, is mediated by this

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[209] Nguyen, Hoang Tan, *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2014): 2.; Nguyen, Viet Thanh, "The Remasculinization of Chinese America: Race, Violence, and the Novel," *American Literary History* 12.1/2 (Spring – Summer 2000): 130-157.
[210] Lowe, Lisa, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1999): 4.
[211] Lee, Josephine Dine, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*, (Philadelphia: Temple U, 1997).; Lye, Colleen, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009).; Mok, T. A., "Getting the message: Media images and stereotypes and their effect on Asian Americans," *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health* 4:3 (August 1998): 185-202.
[212] Lee, Robert G. *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999): 2.
[213] Lee, Josephine, 35.

erasure of an Asian American "history of development" through a multicultural lens that "aestheticizes ethnic differences as if they could be separated from history."[214]

Asian Americans are portrayed as model minorities who have been successfully included into the nation-state and no longer experience racism. As Claire Jean Kim (1999) explains, this racialized narrative of the model minority is only legible relative to the racialization of other racial groups.[215] In this way, the construction of Asian Americans as the model minority is simultaneously in dialogue with other racial narratives as well as positioned in competition against other constructed communities. As the dominant frame of understanding Asian American racialization, the model minority myth serves as a central lens for making legible Asian American stories. Stories that are able to cleanly map onto the narrative seem to confirm it, and stories that subvert the narrative paradoxically serve as exceptions that prove the rule. While Eddie Huang attempts to push back on the model minority myth in both memoir and sitcom, each retelling finds it impossible to truly subvert the lens; Huang in his memoir merely embodies the inverse of the model minority myth rather than disrupting it, and Eddie in the sitcom is portrayed as an outlier of Asian American racialization, comedic precisely because he fails to be who he is expected to be. In both instances, the limited legibility of Asian American racialization frames how each retelling is able to tell his story.

This representational absurdity of Asian Americans is exacerbated within the context of a specifically Taiwanese American political illegibility that necessarily engages with the island's contested history. As discussed in previous chapters, the political existence of Taiwan is highly contested by mainland China as a result of a complex conflict between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Kuomintang (KMT)-lead Republic of China (ROC) governments during the Chinese Civil War. Taiwanese sovereignty is conceptualized for China as ku-mo. It is an impossibility and an absurdity—that which does not and ought not to exist. In the context of Eddie Huang's life stories, the ways both memoir and sitcom navigate his Taiwanese-Chinese background speak to the constraints of each medium and the impossibility of depicting the existence of Taiwan in popular culture when the acknowledgement of the island is presented as an absurd political statement.

This apparent absurdity of a Taiwanese and Taiwanese American subjectivity reflects the broader racial illegibility of Asian American narratives in entertainment. Here, we can deploy the logic of transnationalism, which Aihwa Ong (1999) describes as "the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of 'culture'" and Karen Shimakawa (2002) positions as "anathema" to an Asian American identitarian claim to a multiculturally inclusive "American."[216] For our purposes, the creation and maintenance of Taiwan is transnational; the political status of Taiwan informs Taiwanese American racial formation, and the ways Taiwanese Americans are allowed to appear in U.S. popular culture, in turn, (de)legitimizes the existence of a Taiwan. In this way, Taiwan's international illegibility in the political

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[214] Lowe, 9.

[215] Kim, Claire Jean, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27:1 (March 1999): 105-138.

[216] Ong, Aihwa, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1999).; Shimakawa, Karen, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

sphere is transposed onto the racial illegibility of Taiwanese Americans who must be divorced from history in order to maintain the official narrative of Taiwan's political non-existence. It is this additional frame of Taiwanese American illegibility that further complicates the representation of Huang's Asian American family. Huang's Taiwanese heritage poses a ku-mo problem for the sitcom where it is unable to insinuate the existence of Taiwan by accurately portraying his ancestry. The translation of *Fresh Off the Boat* into memoir and sitcom gives us an opportunity to interrogate the (il)legibility of Eddie Huang by analyzing the retellings of his life stories through both a broader lens of Asian American sexual and racial illegibility and a more specific Taiwanese American political illegibility.

Asian American Sexual Illegibility: "Half the reason I came to this country is so you could have lots of sex."

In the Season 1 episode "Persistent Romeo," Eddie attempts to jockey for social status amongst his male friends by claiming to be familiar with and own pornographic videos. After promising to host a pornography watch party, he first attempts and fails to steal a pornographic video from a video store, and later screens an HR sexual harassment video instead at his sleepover, under the assumption that it is pornography. When his parents find the video, Louis is forced to finally give Eddie a sex talk. Though both Louis and Jessica are initially hesitant to do so, Louis decides to be honest with Eddie and avoid a purely biological or reproductive understanding of sexuality typical of sexual health course material. In contrast to several of his classmates, who receive sanitized explanations of reproduction, Eddie has a frank conversation about sexuality that culminates in a montage of sexual advice from Louis that is presented as simultaneously awkward and endearing (Image 8). Louis goes in-depth on consent, his experiences with STIs, and most notably prioritizes sexual pleasure in the conversation, such as when he enthuses, "Spring Break, my God. I am so excited for you."[217] For Louis, sexual freedom is a key draw of the United States, and this culminates in him telling Eddie, "half the reason I came to this country is so you could have lots of sex." In juxtaposition with a Taiwan that he sees as too conservative, the United States becomes a place of sexual liberation. As a result of the frankness of his father's sex talk, Eddie gains social status among his friend group of young schoolboys, as one of the few boys in his class able to speak confidently about sex and sexuality.

Like several of the other scenarios in the sitcom, this appears to be based in a scene from the original memoir, though reframed to fit the sitcom genre constraints. In the memoir, his father's sex talk comes in response to Huang's increasing disillusionment from growing up in an America that sees him as foreign and emasculated. After a visit to Taiwan to see relatives, Huang begins to grow resentful of what he sees as what would have been a better and more fulfilling life in Taiwan. For Huang in his childhood, his racialization in the U.S. is an insurmountable roadblock towards employment, opportunities, and personal happiness and his parents attempts to tell him coming to America is about gaining opportunities does not resonate with him.

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[217] *Fresh Off the Boat*, "Persistent Romeo," Directed by Lynn Shelton. Written by Sanjay Shah. ABC, February 17, 2015.

Image 8 | Louis explains sex to Eddie from *Fresh Off the Boat* episode "Persistent Romeo."

Learning that his father was in a street gang and had a collection of knives and guns simultaneously exacerbates his resentment of growing up in the U.S. and becomes the catalyst for a pride in his Taiwanese heritage and marker of a form of masculinity that seems unattainable for him in the United States. Despite his struggle with his own racialization, learning that his dad was "a gangster" affirms a potential Asian masculinity that makes a young Huang "proud to be who [he] was."[218] In response to this disillusionment, Huang's father decides to withdraw the parental platitudes and tells him that part of what makes growing up in America great is that Americans can "sports fuck."[219] Sports fucking, for his father, is casual sex, which like in the sitcom, is positioned in contrast with his description of a more conservative Taiwan where he claims sex requires a relationship.

These two scenes from the memoir and sitcom bear striking structural similarities. Both involve Huang's father giving him a surprisingly frank and pleasure-oriented sex talk, and both result in a kind of coming-of-age for a young boy. However, Huang's account is framed by a particular context of Asian American masculinity and gendered racialization that Eddie's is not. While Louis eschews abstract metaphors of sex in favor of prioritizing sexual pleasure and behavior, this sex talk is not framed by a discussion through Eddie's anxiety over his own racialization. Eddie's excitement over gaining sexual knowledge is not about grappling with a racialized sexuality and the sex talk itself is not positioned as compensation for growing up as a racialized Other in the United States. Eddie's narrative largely excises the racial element to Huang's sex talk and instead draws its comedy from a whitewashed lens of the awkwardness of a sexual coming-of-age. Here, sexuality is discovered amongst an all-male friend group through explorations into pornography and largely serve as a gendered form of gaining status relative to each other.

However, for Huang the concept of sports fucking is not just a social currency to use to gain status amongst his male friends, it is also, at least initially, a panacea to his dysphoria surrounding his own racialized sexuality. Being able to sports fuck in the

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[218] Huang, Eddie, *Fresh Off the Boat: A Memoir*, (New York City: Spiegel & Grau, 2013): 53.
[219] *Ibid.*, 54.

United States is positioned as the redeeming factor for Huang of living in a country that views him as racially inferior, and his choice of presenting this moment in the memoir as the pioneering shift in his outlook on the value of being an American speaks to the particular articulation of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and Asian American racialization. That the benefit of growing up in the United States that finally resonates with Huang is not economic or prestige-based but is based in male sexual pleasure speaks to a larger sexual anxiety of the memoir and an uncritical longing for the privileges of a white hegemonic masculinity. Sex is conceptualized akin to a game that is drenched in the macho language of sports teams and sexual conquest. However, in the words of Hoang Tan Nguyen, "showing that straight Asian American men can and do fuck, too, merely points to the limits of an inclusionary politics based on the remasculinization of heterosexual Asian American men, achieved at the expense of other Asian American subjects."[220] While appealing to a hegemonic masculinity does indeed reject on a surface level the dominant racialization of Asian American men and can feel individually empowering, it ultimately fails to avoid legitimizing the larger societal structures that undergird this racialization and gendering.

Huang's memoir is largely uncritical of the process of finding racial pride through masculinity. The consistency of its valorization of exaggerated gendered traits such as violence, aggression, sexual dominance, and strength comes through in Huang's interactions with other men and with his romantic interests. In response to racist bullying from one of the only other children of color at his school, Huang develops an aggressive defense mechanism where he, "was determined to get even. [He] wanted to hurt people like they hurt [him]."[221] Sexually, Huang's memoir struggles with this dynamic consistently as he jockeys for social status by trying to find a white girlfriend, which again reflects a particular racialized and gendered response to the construction of Asian American masculinity. As if to merely invert the racialized and gendered dynamics of the 1907 Expatriation Act, this Asian American remasculinization project positions the sexual demands of heterosexual Asian men with white women as racial liberation. Huang, himself, mentions in his memoir his understanding of the status of having a white girlfriend and the implications it has on maintaining an Asian masculinity, such as when he recalls looking up to his cousin Allen for being knowledgeable, popular, and "even [having] a white girlfriend."[222] And this fetishization extends to his young adult life, where it translates into an obsession to see "pink nipples" and a corresponding fear and anxiety over crossing the racialized sexual boundary. For Linda Williams (2004), racialized fears of crossing the racial, sexual border lead to a commodity fetish of racial desire, particularly between men of color and white women.[223] In this perspective, the fear of punishment for a man of color engaging in a sexual or romantic relationship with a white woman not only builds off a legacy of racist policy that branded black men rapists of white women by default or revoked citizenship for women who married Asian American men, but it becomes the societal taboo that fuels sexual desire. Huang, in his

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[220] Nguyen, 6.
[221] Huang, *Fresh,* 90.
[222] *Ibid*., 45.
[223] Williams, Linda, "Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation, and Interracial Lust," *Porn Studies,* ed., Linda Williams, (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

memoir, is surprisingly lucid in understanding even at a young age how this racial sexual taboo operates in a similar fetishistic fascination. He recounts an "irrational fear" that being with a white woman put him at risk of "some parent or cop… bust[ing] in and arrest[ing] me for infecting them with yellow fever."[224] This fear of crossing the sexual color line, as Williams theorizes, ultimately has less to do with fear of white women as it does fear of white men's patriarchal protection of white women.

Yet, despite his racialized fears of crossing the racial sexual boundary, being with a white woman proves a temporary escape from his racial dysphoria. For Huang, "I liked what I could be with her. I needed to get away from my family and Orlando. There was an individual inside me that wasn't Chinese, that wasn't American, that wasn't Orlando."[225] Beyond social status, having a white girlfriend is positioned in the memoir as affording Huang a rare moment of racelessness, where he is finally neither Chinese nor American, but his true authentic self. In a memoir rife with a struggle against gendered racialization and identity, sexuality again is positioned as a respite and key to racial liberation. As portrayed in his memoir, Huang's childhood comfort in the United States as a racialized Other is predicated on the concept of sports fucking and on attaining a white girlfriend. In both cases, the pursuit of heterosexual male pleasure is in part a reaction to racialization and is framed as its solution.

Though the parallel lines in sitcom and memoir, "Half the reason I came to this country is so you could have lots of sex," and "In America, you can sports fuck," function similarly—as humorous and unexpected ways to approach a sex talk with a young boy—the translation communicates a great deal on how the authors' view masculinity and sexuality. Huang's experience is graphic and aggressive—fucking is a competitive game in a way that Louis's description as centered on mutual pleasure is not. And though Eddie's masculinity carries some of the markers of Huang's—in his affect, anti-authority attitude, and casual misogyny—the most salient aspects of a hegemonic masculinity are missing in the sitcom. Unlike the sex talk in the memoir, Louis and Jessica's sex talk emphasizes consent and respect for women as important parts of the sexual experience. Casual sex and misogyny are, of course, not mutually constitutive, but the manners in which both conversations navigate the boundary between sexuality and misogyny reveal the gendered dynamics that undergird both the sitcom and Huang's memoir.

The ways Huang's and Eddie's sex talks are framed reflect the ways in which Asian American sexuality and masculinity are legible in each format. Huang actively cultivates an anti-racist image throughout his memoir, and his embodiment of a particular brand of reclaimed Asian American masculinity, as manifested through aggression, sexual domination, and the objectification of (particularly white) women feeds into a larger narrative of racial rebellion and liberation through hegemonic masculinity. However, Eddie's masculinity is contextualized as part of a coming-of-age that is disconnected from his racialization and is instead parallel to those of his white peers. In this light, while both Huang and Eddie traffic in sexual objectification, they are framed through different lenses. As a result of the sitcom's inability to utilize Huang's framing of sexuality as temporary relief from a racial anxiety, the particular articulations of race,

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[224] Huang, *Fresh*, 128
[225] *Ibid.*, 129.

Image 9 | Child Protective Services visits the Huang family in *Fresh Off the Boat* Episode, "Very Superstitious."

gender, and sexuality that the memoir struggles through fail to appear onscreen. This is not to claim that the memoir is more authentic than the sitcom, but instead to point to the question of Asian American legibility in popular culture; within the context of the mainstream family sitcom, and indeed much of American media more broadly, the rare appearance of Asian American sexuality and gender performance is only legible within a narrow racialized and gendered lens.

Asian American Racial Illegibility: "Sometimes a little white lie is okay, if it's for a greater good."

In the season one episode "Very Superstitious", family patriarch Louis Huang purchases a mechanical bull for his restaurant without the knowledge of his wife Jessica. Eddie trips on the cord of the mechanical bull and breaks his arm, and a panicked Louis tells his sons that their mother cannot find out about the cause of Eddie's injury. When confronted by his kids about the ethics of lying, Louis tells them little lies are sometimes acceptable if the truth "would be unnecessary and hurtful."[226] This serves as a setup for a common sitcom plotline: a relatively small miscommunication or mistruth at the beginning of an episode ends up spiraling further and further out of control in increasingly absurd ways until the initial transgression is addressed and resolved. "Very Superstitious" follows this story arc, with Louis's initial lie leading to a series of more ludicrous lies that result in winning Eddie the position of class president and Child Protective Services coming to the family house to investigate the cause of the injury (Image 9). But while its details are exaggerated for comedic effect and is portrayed as simply an absurd misunderstanding, the situation draws from several scenes from Huang's memoir that reflect a much darker tone of the themes of lying, injury, and child endangerment.

In Huang's memoir, he recounts the pattern of physical violence inflicted on both him and his brothers as punishment for misbehaving. While his father was the harsher

[226] *Fresh Off the Boat*, "Very Superstitious," Directed by Alex Hardcastle. Written by Ali Wong. ABC, April 7 2015.

punisher, the incident that appears to have inspired the sitcom scenario began with his mother throwing a steel brush at his brother Emery, who was running away from corporal punishment. The brush cut his face and, like in the sitcom, was ultimately noticed at school. This led the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) to conduct extensive individual interviews with each of the sons at school and ultimately take the investigation to the family home, where each family member was interviewed separately. Huang recounts the fear they would be taken away from their parents if the HRS discovered the pattern of physical beating. Without being able to communicate verbally with each other under the watchful eye of the social workers, Huang and his brothers were able to craft a series of lies to explain the injury and cover for their parents. While the school continued to monitor the family afterwards, including periodically strip searching Emery for any further injuries, these lies never unraveled, in stark contrast to the situational comedy. But like in the sitcom, Huang frames his lie as for a greater good—to keep his family together.

These two scenes from the memoir and sitcom bear striking structural similarities. Both involve one of the Huang children suffering a visible physical injury that is, at some level, a result of a parent's negligence. Both involve the injury raising red flags for school administration when they are noticed at school. Both involve government investigators arriving at the Huang family house on suspicion of child abuse. And both involve lying "for the greater good." Yet, the change from the CPS visit from memoir to family sitcom encapsulates some of the impossible translation of Eddie Huang's story through its impacts on the racial framing in both mediums.

Huang attributes corporal punishment with growing up in an immigrant family, which he asserts is incompatible with a white American family structure. He believes, "[t]o Americans, [corporal punishment] may seem sick, but to first- or second- generation Chinese, Korean, Jamaican, Dominican, Puerto Rican immigrants, whatever, if your parents are FOBs, this is just how it is."[227] Though it is important not to essentialize punitive beatings as endemic or unique to immigrant or Asian family structures, Huang positions his corporal punishment as part of a suite of shared experiences that connect him with other second-generation immigrant kids whose "parents are FOBs." He constructs a racial solidarity in family structures that are pathologized as racially barbaric and uncivilized; this racial lens fits in with the broader anti-racist, political image he cultivates and interprets his childhood through in his memoir.

In contrast, Eddie's injury in the sitcom could not be framed as domestic abuse—whether purely condemned as wrong or softened as a kind of racial solidarity—because it fails to conform to the racially legible image of the productive, non-violent model minority family; while the representation of a successful Asian model minority family may include strict tiger moms, a visit from CPS over suspected child abuse is incongruent with the valorized narrative of Asian immigrant success and strong family values that are used to position Asian Americans as separate from and superior to other communities of color. In addition, if a white orientalist view of Asian American family and gender roles is already conditioned to view Asian American families as pathological and foreign, there is a palpable fear in representing Asian Americans in the public domain as anything other

[227] Huang, Eddie, *Fresh Off the Boat*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013): 47.

than normative. When the Huangs are the only Asian American family airing on primetime family sitcoms, there is pressure not to inadvertently imply unsavory racial links between Asian Americans and abuse. However, this inability to translate Huang's life story to the screen has unforeseen impacts beyond simply the presence of domestic abuse. A notable side-effect of this difference in racial framing is how it impacts both Huang's and Eddie's engagement with hip hop. Excising the abuse transforms Huang's reading of hip hop as an expression of his childhood trauma and assertion of racial solidarity into Eddie's joke of juxtaposition between the seemingly incompatible racializations of African Americans and Asian Americans. Instead, the sitcom deploys the racial illegibility of Asian Americans as its punchline.

In his memoir, the impact of Huang's experiences of domestic abuse become central to his affinity towards hip hop and anti-racism, where his emotional connection to the lyrical content reflects the abuse of his upbringing, his growing frustration with structural racism, and a burgeoning conception of an interracial anti-racist solidarity. For Huang, "[p]eople in Orlando never understood why two Asian kids were rocking polo, Girbauds, and listening to hip-hop. We didn't do it because it was cool… [they] looked down on us for listening to hip-hop. It was a 'black thing,' downward assimilation."[228] Huang frames his love of hip hop as a result of drawing connections between his racial marginalization as a child to the anti-nationalist and anti-racist lyrics of hip hop artists. While Asian American engagement with hip hop has been rightly problematized by scholars like Imani Perry (2004) as a result of a cultural fetishism that often deploys blackness as a shorthand for cultural capital, others like Vijay Prashad (2002) and Crystal Anderson (2016) have argued against a politics of authenticity in hip hop for a polyculturalism that focuses on how seemingly discrete cultures build off one another in generative ways.[229] Jeff Chang and DJ Kool Herc (2005) identify hip hop as a unifying force that bridges cultural gaps. For Chang, the conception of a Hip-Hop generation, "brings together time and race, place and polyculturalism, hot beats and hybridity," and for DJ Kool Herc, hip hop has universal appeal because "it has given young people a way to understand their world, whether they are from the suburbs or the city or wherever… it brings white kids together with Black kids, brown kids with yellow kids… East west, north, or south—we come from one coast and that coast was Africa."[230] For both Chang and DJ Kool Herc, hip hop is not solely about the music, but about the unifying messages of political activism, anti-racism, and community building.

Huang's engagement with hip hop is, indeed, embedded in fetishism, especially vis-à-vis the performative racialized masculinity he embodies in his memoir, as we have seen; however, the ways he connects hip hop to conceptions of his own trauma and racialization become his primary focus over a general consumption of blackness. For example, he acknowledges the often shallow way non-Black people of color and white

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[228] *Ibid*., 60

[229] Perry, Imani, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).; Prashad, Vijay, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).; Anderson, Crystal S., "Hybrid Hallyu: The African American Music Tradition in K-Pop," *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, ed., Shilpa Dave, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren, (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

[230] Chang, Jeff, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005): 2.; D.J. Kool Herc, introduction to *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005): xi.

people engage with hip hop by identifying a "point of diminishing returns" where it can be appropriated and then discarded when convenient. Huang compares this strategic affinity to a kind of "upward assimilation," and critiques Asian Americans who attempt to join "the ascendance into whiteness" in this manner.[231] According to Huang, hip hop, like his brief conversion to Islam, was foundational to an interracial race consciousness, and it played a role in his understanding of racism not as interpersonal slights but as a structural system. An active rejection of the model minority myth and engagement with other communities of color formed the core of his racial lens, and he recounts being called a "slant-eyed Malcolm X" by his father as a result of trying to articulate an Asian consciousness connected to a larger racial structure.[232] In his racial construction, his "only goal… was to stomp the life out of the model minority myth and present a side of [him] to audiences that crushed their expectations of what it was to be Asian-American."[233] As with his remasculinization project, Huang frames childhood trauma and abuse as a result of and a response to the limited lens of legibility—the model minority myth—that Asian Americans find themselves in and positions a rejection of this narrative as racial liberation.

The sitcom, in contrast, presents Eddie's love for hip hop as a symptom of a delinquent personality and largely frames racism as an individual or interpersonal phenomenon. Racism becomes defined not by the racist impacts of systemic or institutional inequalities but by individual racists. And in turn, the source of Eddie's childhood anger and rebellion cannot be structural racism, which he harnesses into masculinist rebellion, but is simply a product of a troubled rebel without a cause. When presented as a symptom of childhood rebellion instead of a reaction to his own racialization, Eddie's love of hip hop in the sitcom becomes a punchline and the image of an Asian American face surrounded by an African American artform is presented as incongruent and laughable.

In the footage for the series launch trailer, which is taken from the first episode, a montage of close-ups of garments stereotypically associated with hip hop artists—rings, vibrant loose jackets, hats turned to the side—is juxtaposed with the audio screeching to a stop as it settles on the visage of a young Eddie Huang. The joke here is that the appearance of an Asian American in such clothing is unexpected—a kind of absurdity or impossibility that taps into the larger perceived "racial inauthenticity" of Asian Americans in hip hop culture.[234] What draws Eddie to these clothes and the African American Vernacular English he deploys, is solely a desire to look cool. That this sequence was chosen to be an audience's first introduction to the series and the principle character demonstrates its central thematic importance to the sitcom's identity.

As a result of genre constraints, the sitcom frames Eddie's love of hip hop separate from Huang's history of domestic violence and a growing anti-racism, and instead attributes it as a comedic racial juxtaposition of an Asian face with elements of

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[231] Huang, 110.
[232] *Ibid*., 158.
[233] *Ibid*., 234.
[234] Wang, Oliver, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Ethnicity, and the Asian American MC," *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed., Mimi Thi Nguyen, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Black pop culture that renders them as incompatible. Asian American racial illegibility becomes the punchline of jokes that contrast a perceived Asian foreignness with the aesthetics of Black music. Rather than serving as a tool to rhetorically connect the racializations of Asian Americans and African Americans, as Huang attempts to do in his memoir, the sitcom's frames positions Asian Americans and African Americans as, to some degree, fundamentally incompatible. To support the initial white lie—to cover up the unpalatable domestic abuse Huang ties to his immigrant upbringing—necessitates rframing Eddie's love for hip hop and racial consciousness, which has lasting impacts on the kinds of stories the adaptation is able to tell. So while the changes made to Huang's life story are in service to the greater good of a legible television narrative, they ultimately relegate Huang's account of his life history to racial illegibility.

Taiwanese American Political Illegibility: "China! China! China!"

The illegibility of Huang's life history comes to a peak with the foregrounding of a ku-mo Taiwan in the season 1 finale of the sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*, appropriately titled "So Chineez". Here, Jessica grows increasingly concerned that the family is losing their connection to their heritage. Out of fear that the family's acceptance into a local country club and the children's lack of Mandarin fluency reflects an American assimilation at the expense of cultural knowledge and identity, Jessica institutes a comedically exaggerated cultural resurgence; she enrolls her sons in a Chinese language school, begins to solely wear a qipao and hair buns, and serves only Chinese delicacies like chicken feet. While Jessica's search for authenticity is clearly played for laughs—her husband Louis comments that some of her reclamations more closely resemble white fetishizations of Chinese culture rather than cultural resurgence—what is particularly notable here is what heritage she is seeking to reconnect with. This heritage is explicitly stated to be Chinese, culminating in a passionate speech about the global contributions of "China! China! China!" as well as the (temporary) adjustment of Eddie's World Heritage Day project to the PRC to extol the contributions of his heritage (Image 10).[235] Yet, the Huang family is explicitly said to be from Taiwan in both memoir and sitcom. Both interrogate Eddie Huang's Taiwanese-Chinese ancestry through familial links to Asia, but the complexities of this ancestry are negotiated in different ways; while the memoir explores the political ambiguities of his Taiwanese-Chinese background by tracing the specific lineages of Huang's parents and grandparents in Taiwan and China, respectively, the sitcom frames a Huang family reclamation of a Taiwanese and Chinese identity as interchangeable. However, despite the sitcom's erasure of a politicized Taiwan in its negotiation of Eddie's background, hints of a ku-mo Taiwan rupture through the resulting cultural anachronisms this erasure creates.

In his memoir, Huang's familial history and the complex history of Taiwan are visible throughout his writing and it is clear from his knowledge of his own familial history that the kind of anachronistic Taiwanese-Chinese heritage portrayed in the show is not a result of his own ignorance or ambivalence. He is the son of Taiwanese parents and the grandson of Chinese immigrants into Taiwan; he identifies himself and other

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[235] *Fresh Off the Boat*, "So Chineez," Directed by Chris Koch. Written by Sanjay Shah. ABC, April 21 2015.

Image 10 | Eddie's World Heritage Day project to celebrate his ancestry. He is representing the People's Republic of China (PRC) in *Fresh Off the Boat* episode, "So Chineez."

members of his family as Taiwanese-Chinese, perhaps a reference to the Mandarin 外省人 (*waishengren—foreign born person*), a term for Taiwanese with mainland ancestry. Huang's conception of his ancestry is intimately tied to his family's interactions with the creation of a modern Taiwanese state in their immigration legacies—his paternal grandparents immigrated to Taiwan prior to Chiang Kai-shek's flight into the island and his maternal left in response to the Chinese cultural revolution. He identifies several of these divides between the different branches of his family: he positions his mother's family as "bougie" in contrast to his father's "strong, sharp" family, which he attributes in part to different class backgrounds and relationships with the ROC Taiwan government.

His mother and her family, as *waishengren* who immigrated after 1949, were particularly attached to Chiang Kai-shek and the ROC government. According to Huang, his mother recalled "[crying] for days [after his death because]… for the Chinese people of Taiwan it was like the Kennedy assassination."[236] In contrast, his paternal grandfather, as was common for Taiwanese present prior to the ROC's 1949 retreat, had a more antagonistic relationship with the new regime, and he ultimately resigned from his lucrative government position as a result of what he saw as ROC injustice to Taiwanese natives (likely referring to pre-ROC Han Taiwanese, not indigenous Taiwanese). Growing up in poverty as a result of this resignation, Huang's father also took issue with the "horrific acts during Chiang Kai-shek's reign" and distanced himself from the party.[237] These distinctions highlight the ways Taiwan's political history is embedded in Huang's specific knowledge of his familial lineage and how these histories are made visible in Huang's framing of his childhood conception of his ethnic identity as a Taiwanese-Chinese American.

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[236] Huang, 49.
[237] *Ibid*., 136

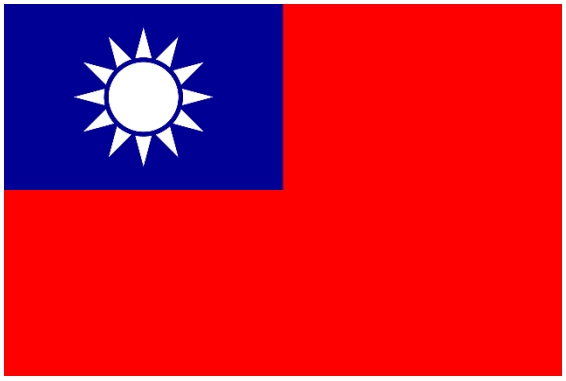

Image 11 | The Republic of China (ROC) flag.

While the sitcom also uses familial history as a venue to interrogate a complex Taiwanese-Chinese identity, it is grounded in ideas of a Taiwan or China that is incongruent with the details of Huang's family history. For example, Eddie's World Heritage Day project culminates in a haphazard display of soy sauce and pandas atop a giant PRC flag. The flag of the People's Republic of China has, in the words of cinema critic Anthony Kao, "never flown in any ruling capacity over Taiwan" and thus its use as a representation of the Huang family's reclamation of their cultural identity is more absurd than the family simply calling themselves ethnically Han Chinese.[238] Jessica's pride in the PRC flag is at direct odds with her real-world counterpart's admiration for Chiang Kai-shek and the ROC government, as exemplified by her period of mourning after his death. *Waishengren* who immigrated after the Cultural Revolution, such as Jessica's family, often supported the ROC government as the true government of China; in this respect, while many *waishengren* of this generation may have seen themselves as Chinese, the PRC flag is an anachronistic symbol for Jessica to use as a way to reignite her family's cultural pride and in fact the flag stands for the negation of the China she recognized.

Adopted in 1949 to symbolize the creation of the People's Republic of China, the flag is inextricably tied to a history of the Chinese Civil War and the communist PRC's claim of ownership over Taiwan. In contrast, the current flag of the ROC was adopted from a mainland Chinese Navy flag in 1945 and became imposed on Taiwan by the ROC government when it fled from mainland China into Taiwan and took control in 1949 (Image 11).[239] However, the ROC's flag has been the subject of what Nancy Guy describes as multiple realities, wherein the same symbol has drastically different meanings dependent on multiple, intersecting but separate discourses.[240]

While to some, the ROC flag is simply the official flag of the island of Taiwan, and for others the flag is a remnant of a violent occupying government that took over Taiwan, for the Chinese Communist Party, the flag represents a rogue separatist state whose existence is an affront to a One China Policy. As a potential signifier of the

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[238] Kao, Anthony, "Are the Huangs in 'Fresh Off the Boat' Chinese or Taiwanese?," *Cinema Escapist*, https://www.cinemaescapist.com/2015/04/are-the-huangs-in-fresh-off-the-boat-chinese-or-taiwanese/

[239] Wang, 314-332.

[240] Guy, Nancy, "'Republic of China National Anthem' on Taiwan: One Anthem, One Performance, Multiple Realities," *Ethnomusicology* 46:1 (Winter 2002): 96-119.

existence of Taiwan, the ROC flag has functioned as a ku-mo symbol that must be continuously erased by China outside of the island. For example, Taiwan is allowed to compete in the international Olympics separate from China provided it competes under the name "Chinese Taipei" and flies a unique Chinese Taipei Olympic flag in lieu of its official ROC flag. Which flags are used as shorthand for a Taiwanese-Chinese heritage, then, are necessarily embroiled in the ku-mo impossible sovereignty of Taiwan. The implication of the display of the PRC flag as a representation of Eddie Huang's ancestry renders his Taiwanese background as anachronistic. This maneuver paints the PRC as the subject of a Huang family cultural reclamation, regardless of the fact that neither side of his family was present in China at the time the flag was flown and likely would have strong political opinions on its use. This conflation of the ROC and PRC flags thus erases the long history of tension between multiple groups and governments, including between pre-1949 Taiwanese and the ROC government, and inadvertently draws attention to the impossible question of Taiwan's international sovereignty through the anachronisms its erasure creates.[241]

However, the conflation of an ethnically Chinese identity in the sitcom becomes even more absurd with a closer look at the details of the episode. The Chinese language school that Jessica enrolls the kids in uses simplified Chinese, as is common in mainland China after it transitioned to the new script in the late 1950s; however, Taiwan has continued to use traditional Chinese script and the two have limited mutual intelligibility. As Taiwanese living in Taiwan prior to and during the ROC retreat, the Chinese script Eddie's parents would be familiar with is traditional Chinese, and indeed Chinese language schools in the U.S. are split between traditional and simplified Chinese curriculums that often map onto the demographics of the immigrant community that maintain and attend it. Even more egregious, while Jessica specifically asks her children to learn and speak Mandarin, which is indeed the language spoken on Taiwan after the ROC imposed it on the island, Evan later speaks Cantonese in the episode, a dialect that is not only uncommon in Taiwan and has limited mutual intelligibility with Mandarin but also is not spoken in their grandparents' ancestral homes of Hunan or Shandong. What the troubled depiction of the Huang family ancestry in "So Chineez" amounts to is an inability to ground their ethnic identity in familial history. The Huangs speak of immigrating from Taiwan, but use simplified Chinese, speak a mixture of Mandarin and Cantonese, and identify with the flag of the PRC. While the Taiwanese-Chinese ambiguity in the memoir is anchored by the specific immigration patterns and political opinions of Huang's family, the sitcom portrays a ku-mo Taiwanese ancestry that is depoliticized through ambiguity yet visible through the anachronisms its erasure creates.

Taiwan's ku-mo status complicates Huang's heritage, especially when juxtaposed with the family returning to Taiwan to visit extended family in the Season 3 premiere episode.[242] What the combination of the Season 1 finale and Season 3 premiere implies is that while Taiwan is indeed a physical location, it remains politically and ethnically the

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[241] Phillips, Steven, "Between Assimilation and Independence," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 269-313.; Tucker, Nancy Bernkopf, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States 1945-1992*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

[242] *Fresh Off the Boat*, "Coming from America," Directed by Nahnatchka Khan. Written by Nahnatchka Khan. ABC, October 11 2016.

same as mainland China. However, the absence or removal of Taiwan as a political space, in these instances, paradoxically draws attention to Taiwan as a political absurdity. In juxtaposing a geographical place with a sociopolitical space which is denied the possibility of existing, *Fresh Off the Boat* the sitcom creates the window out of which Taiwan can be seen. The ku-mo political inconvenience of Taiwan and Taiwanese Americans in the sitcom highlight subjugated familial histories, and the histories that cannot be told or that must be reframed are indicative of an impossible sovereignty that speak to the contested political status of Taiwan.

Conclusion

The frames of Asian American sexual illegibility, Asian American racial illegibility and Taiwanese American political illegibility mediate the translation between the written memoir and sitcom adaptation of Eddie Huang's *Fresh Off the Boat*. In the process of adapting Huang's life story into the political, anti-racist frame he actively cultivates in the memoir and the more accessible liberal multicultural frame of the sitcom, what was left out were the elements of an Asian America and Taiwanese America illegible in these frames, notably a more nuanced queer critique of Asian American masculinity, a history of domestic abuse that disrupts a model minority narrative, and the complexities of the perpetually incomplete erasure of a ku-mo Taiwanese sovereignty. Huang's and Eddie's lives are framed radically differently for different audiences and motives—Huang's to reject dominant racializations of Asian Americans and Eddie's to serve as a an accessible mainstream comedy. In his translation to memoir and sitcom, Eddie Huang comes to embody the absurdity of Taiwanese Americans on the page and screen—subjects whose sexual illegibility is grounded in deep racial and gendered histories, whose racial illegibility is bounded by the narrative of the productive model minority, and whose political illegibility is precipitated by the impossible sovereignty of Taiwan.

5. Sating the Lingered
Colonial Ghosts and the Haunting of the White Terror in *Detention*

"若遇魎阻去路供腳尾飯引來食屏息擦身速速離."
-返校, Illustration: Food Offerings

Death is not the end in the ghostly halls of 翠華中學 (Greenwood High School). Not only do the deaths of its students leave behind lingered spirits that stalk the halls, when protagonist Ray is captured and killed by one of the many nightmarish conglomerations of school authorities and eldritch demons, she simply reawakens by her warped school with only the cryptic advice of a ghostly elderly woman to help her overcome her previous failure. This cycle of death and the continuing impact of the deeds of the past on the world of the present is a consistent theme in Red Candle Games' 2017 Taiwanese survival horror video game *Detention* (originally 返校—"return to school"). The ghostly presence of the past on the present speaks to the larger political messages embedded in the game—that of highlighting the continuing legacies of Taiwan's White Terror, an almost four decade long period of martial law.

Through its narratives and game systems, *Detention* highlights the lingering ghosts of Taiwan's White Terror in the present. While the contemporary image of the modern Taiwan under the official Republic of China name is of "a bastion of democracy" or a "Free China," the state is haunted by the institution of martial law, censorship of communist ideas, and the subjugation of indigenous and *bensheng* Taiwanese that serves as the foundation for a modern Taiwan[243]. As representative of impossible histories that must not exist in order to maintain the image of liberal progressiveness, these ghosts come to be embodied in the living and manifest themselves in personal, familial, and life histories. In this way, the subjugated histories of Taiwan's bloody history are visible in their absence—in the distant relatives who one day disappeared, in the languages spoken and lost, and in the geography of communities. To be Taiwanese in this context, then, is to be a living ghost—to live the specter of multiple colonial histories that resist the convenience of legibility or formal recognition; merely through continuing to exist, living ghosts bring to life subjugated histories. By disrupting the simplistic narrative of a bloodless democratization and bringing to light the lingered spirits of lives and futures lost, *Detention* makes visible the colonial ghosts that undergird the origin stories of the modern Republic of China. In combination with a digital archive of notes, government documents, and photographs, the Lingered in *Detention* allow for an analysis of a colonial haunting that impacts the setting of its story, the life history of its protagonist, as well as Taiwanese experiences outside of the world of the game.

A ghost story is necessarily a story about the ways past histories continue to influence the present and refuse to die quietly. In her seminal 2008 book on the topic,

[243] Tucker, Nancy Bienkopf, *Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States, 1945-1992: Uncertain Friendships*, (Woodbridge: Twayne Publishers, 1994): 78.

Avery Gordon introduces the concept of the ghost and the ways the sociohistorical past continues to haunt the present both invisibly and tangibly. As "a constituent element of modern social life," haunting "describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities[244]." The ghost that haunts, then, is more than just an individual, but a "social figure"—one which signifies the simultaneous absence and presence of histories, realities, and lives incompletely buried by the weight of time.

Gordon identifies three features of the ghost's haunting: (1) an unsettling property in the location or space it resides in, (2) its status as a symptom of what remains unaddressed or lost, and (3) its vitality and right to dignity and justice[245]. This ghost of Taiwan's history is *ku-mo* in that it disrupts simplistic narratives of a linearly progressive Taiwan or a unified Taiwanese population and finds itself rupturing when most inconvenient into both political discourse and the personal lives of Taiwanese. It manifests in the topics which must not be broached among certain family members or the confusion of why particular conversations spark anger at home. As Shawna Ryan Yang (2016) identifies in her novel *Green Island*, the transition to democracy for Taiwan was not bloodless as it is often mythologized.[246] Despite national and international narratives of Taiwan that construct simplistic origin stories of the Republic of China as the democratic and liberal counterpart to the People's Republic of China, the nearly four decades of harsh martial law belie a more complex story.

For Gordon, the ghost is not simply a remnant of an oppressive past which has yet to be addressed but also an opportunity to create a new future. We can often find Gordon's ghostly opportunities in stories as well—where the acceptance and acknowledgement of histories lead to growth and spiritual peace for the living and dead, as is the case in Toni Morrison's (1988) *Beloved* and the Netflix adaptation of Shirley Jackson's *Haunting of Hill House*.[247] Within the spiritual bounds of 翠華中學 too, we find this opportunity for redemption, for justice, and for dignity for the victims of almost forty years of one-party Kuomintang (KMT) rule over the island of Taiwan; this is told through the trials and tribulations of the player character 方芮欣 (Fang Ray Shin), who we later find has much to atone for herself.

Ray is a student at Greenwood High School during Taiwan's turbulent 1960s with a troubled homelife and a history of depression. During counseling sessions with the school guidance counselor Chang Ming Hui, she begins developing romantic feelings for him and the two start a covert pseudo-relationship, which Chang ends sometime after, seemingly due to judgment from other teachers. In the midst of her depression, she befriends a student named Wei, who tries to comfort her and is a member of an underground illegal book club that consists of texts the new nationalist government has outlawed for contradicting the social and economic ideologies of the government.

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[244] Gordon, Avery F., *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008): 7-8.
[245] *Ibid*.
[246] Ryan, Shawna Yang, *Green Island,* (New York City: Vintage, 2016).
[247] Morrison, Toni, *Beloved. 1987*, (New York City: Plume, 1988).; *The Haunting of Hill House*, "Silence Lay Steadily," Directed by Mike Flangan. Written by Mike Flanagan. Netflix, October 12, 2018.

But shortly after their meeting, torrential downpour from a typhoon traps the two in the school at night and they find themselves separated in a twisted version of their school, filled with demonic monsters and rivers of blood. What Ray discovers through her attempts to escape her haunted school is that the past that haunts her is just as much a personal history as it is a larger structural history of martial law. It is revealed the haunted school is a form of karmic purgatory, and that in her life she revealed the existence of the illegal book club to nationalist authorities to get back at a teacher who identified her relationship with Chang as a problem. This resulted in the exile, arrest, and execution of several of her teachers and classmates, including Wei, prior to the start of the game's narrative.

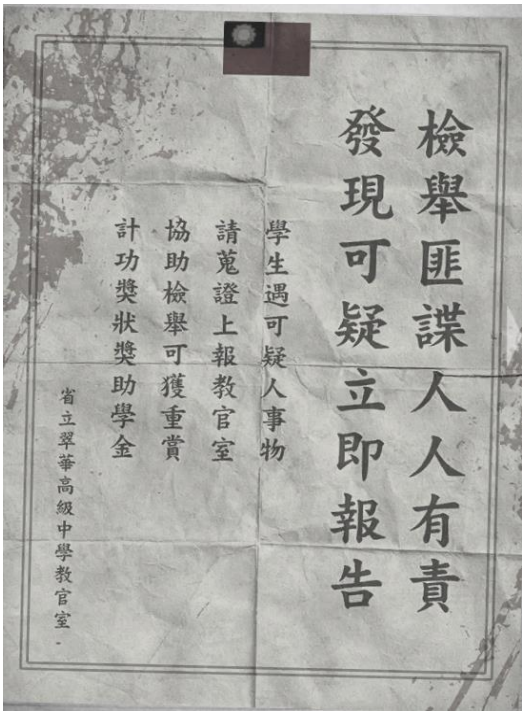

Image 12 | In-game propaganda flyer calling for citizens to report suspected communists.

The literal ghosts that Ray encounters in the nightmarishly warped version of her high school are not the only ghosts that haunt her world, though; the remains of student-scrawled notes, letters and documents from school and government administrators, and mythological texts line the deserted desks and shelves. These too are the ghostly hauntings of a history scrubbed from a national narrative. Yet these documents perform a kind of double haunting—they haunt both the world of the fiction and they form a fictional digital archive that brings the specter of Taiwan's White Terror into popular culture. When Ray discovers a bloodied and crinkled flyer with the Republic of China flag advocating for the reporting of suspected communists (Image 12), it speaks not only to Ray's own guilt in setting off the horrors of the game's narrative, but also to a sordid Taiwanese history of violent oppression from the ROC government and anti-communist hysteria that forms the foundation of what we now recognize as the contemporary Taiwan state.

Historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) highlights the power of projects to historicize national narratives[248]. He argues that all histories and narratives contain silences, lest they be unrecognizable as coherent stories, and thus reading history becomes a process of identifying what silences are contained within and why. Despite his work in the archives, he is quick to point out that what is documented is not necessarily what is most important or influential. He draws connections between seemingly disparate sources in order to reveal the silences imposed on texts. This, for me, is what highlights the value in examining not just what exists in government records but what *could* exist—what can a fictional or subaltern archive tell us about a world and a time which existed

[248] Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon, 2015).

but whose story still appears incomplete? For his part, Trouillot puts into dialogue documented history and folk legend on the Haitian revolution to determine what parts of a narrative have been fictionalized, whether it matters that people know they are fictionalized, and what purpose it serves.

Part of where these histories are created and maintained, both for Ray and a wider Taiwanese history, is within the realm of national education. Thus, the institution of the school becomes an integral part of nation-building. School is a foundational part of national knowledge production and citizenship-making and thus performs much of the labor of creating and maintaining national myths and master narratives. As a result, the school has historically been the site of political struggle and has played a large role in both political repression and liberation. As Wendy Cheng (2013) articulates, "of all institutions of civil society, school occupies the dominant position in contemporary capitalist societies" and thus, "school can inculcate a sense of national culture and ideologies that mold students to enter the working world as productive and loyal citizens[249]." From reeducation camps in China to Native American boarding schools in the United States, school has been used to mold and influence cultural identities, values, and life possibilities to conform to the demands of dominant cultures or authoritarian governments. In contrast, schools can also be a place to contest these dominant narratives and fight for structural changes, as can be seen by the East Los Angeles Walkouts and anti-war student protests of the late 1960s.

In the context of mid-1900s Taiwan, the new nationalist KMT government was tasked with constructing a new nation from the ground up aimed at assimilating peoples feared to be unassimilable to a Chinese national identity as a result of fifty years of Japanese rule, and the institution of education became an important part of that process[250]. During the White Terror, schools were an important tool for the government to reproduce ideology that maintained its power and the histories that become reproduced or subjugated are continuing legacies of that process of creating what Taiwan is and is not allowed to be today. Even after the death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975 and the ensuing relaxation of some of the KMT's more brutal policies, Taiwanese graduate students in the United States, like my parents, were heavily encouraged to identify as Blue Party members (in support of the KMT) or risk missing out on job opportunities and incur political harassment. That *Detention* grounds its thesis of the lasting legacies of Taiwan's White Terror in the setting of the school invites us to interrogate haunting not just generally, but in a specific contextual setting that is intimately tied with the maintenance of Taiwan's White Terror.

The institution of school serves not only as backdrop for Ray's haunting but as an integral part of the context of her story, and it is her personal interaction with the institution in the context of the White Terror that gives the colonial ghosts their meaning. Her role as a student, then, is not incidental; while the central conflict in her story is reflective of many other young adult narratives set in schools, the political context radically recontextualizes the setting, her motivations, and the consequences of her

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[249] Cheng, Wendy, *The Changs Next Door to the Diazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): 65.

[250] Teng, Emma Jinhua, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

actions. This ties the larger political haunting of the White Terror to a more personal and intimate look into the lives of individual people and how these smaller histories also reflect a kind of colonial history. By presenting this haunting on both a macro historical level and an intimate personal level, *Detention* implicates the personal in the understanding of the political.

Here, we employ an autoethnography in tandem with a broader historical analysis to understand the reach of these colonial legacies. Autoethnography, which Carolyn Ellis (2011) describes as a connection between the realms of the personal and the political and cultural, provides us with a framework with which to perceive the lasting impacts of History on history—that is, how larger canonical histories shape unrecorded familial histories passed on through dinnertime stories and unmarked habits[251]. These are often histories that go unnoticed; it was not until decades later that I realized on a more intimate level that the circumstances of my upbringing, the languages I (half)-spoke, the states and regions I lived in, and the familial relationships my family had were all intricately connected to larger unspoken histories of Taiwan. It is, in a sense, the inverse of the strange phenomenon of living through a momentous historical event or period while primarily experiencing the day-to-day mundanity of living. We are accustomed, and at times encouraged, to continue separating larger canonical history with personal and familial life histories—a process which fosters a kind of apathy of distance where the personal history becomes a refuge from the anxiety of political history. Yet these larger Histories remain present, if unseen, and find ways to disrupt and inconvenience the lives we live. While the politics of a liberal multicultural immigrant assimilation narrative attempts to erase global histories, I reweave personal histories and canonical History together to show the interconnectedness of these seemingly disconnect stories. Reinserting personal histories allows us to open up our analysis to complexities previously hidden from view. It is from this locus that we can see the lasting legacies of colonial haunting and it is from my and my family's experiences in the institution of school that I see the legacies of Taiwan's complex colonial history.

On a metanarrative level, *Detention* itself haunts a master narrative of Taiwan which frames the island as inherently more progressive and humane than its mainland counterpart by emphasizing the bloody, violent histories and lives lost in the decades after the Republic of China first entered Taiwan. In much the same way that Republic of China's propaganda portrayed the People's Republic of China as inherently more violent and oppressive than its own 38-year long authoritarian regime, other countries such as the United States have continued to perpetuate this myth and ignore Taiwan's deeply violent and troubling histories. Taiwan, in this light, is seen to have been inherently progressive—and the nationalist government is seen to be inherently just as a result of its US-backing and anti-communist sentiment.

But the intermingled worlds of the past and the present do not only manifest within the narrative of the game itself; instead, the structure of the game oscillates between the present and the past, often with no prior warning. One chapter of the game explicitly requires the use of past and present knowledge to solve problems in a different time. By extending the themes of the haunting of history into the very construction of the

[251] Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams & Arthur P. Bochner, "Authoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12.1 (2011)

text, *Detention* builds a coherent ludonarrative that resists linear understanding and calls to mind a Deleuzian and Guattarian (1987) rhizomatic structure[252]. Such a structure rejects hierarchical linearity and relishes in the connections across time, space, and ideas that exist and persist despite rationality's attempt to deny them. From this perspective, Ray's flight throughout her own history at the turn of a radio dial is not surrealist, but a reflection of a rhizomatic way of engaging with H/history.

Through this frame I invite us to interrogate the text of the video game, a medium which far too often within the gaming industry is analyzed as disparate narrative and gameplay elements, as if the two could be cleanly separated. Ludonarrative dissonance, a term coined by Clint Hocking (2007) of the video game developer Ubisoft, refers to the discrepancy between the narrative of a text and the mechanics of its gameplay that create contradictory themes.[253] Common examples of this include many first and third-person shooter titles like the *Uncharted* series that narratively treat their protagonists as fundamentally opposed to murder when unnecessary but mechanically force the player to slaughter hundreds of unnamed enemies and destroy entire inhabited towns; the fallout of these behaviors go unaddressed meaningfully in the games' narratives and create a disjointed separation of cutscene and gameplay. While the game's cinematic narrative treats the protagonist as a pacifist hero, the mechanics of the game demand the protagonist slaughter hundreds of enemy combatants, and this disconnect is not acknowledged within the game proper. Narrative and gameplay, are functionally, two separate stories. However, many games find ways to avoid this and instead build mechanics in service to the narrative's themes. Examples include the 2013 indie title *Papers, Please* where the mechanically tense and technical gameplay both synergizes with the narrative's themes of hopelessness and bureaucratic violence and simultaneously highlights the dehumanizing nature of border checkpoints.[254]

Throughout the nightmare reenactment of the White Terror, Ray is haunted and haunting in several important ways. Firstly, she is presented with graphic depictions of the ghosts and history of Taiwan's White Terror. These come in the form of ghastly demons that manifest as a hybrid of mythological monsters from Taiwanese folklore and colonial and educational administrators. Secondly, she is haunted by the consequences of her own actions and her complicity in perpetuating egregious state violence. Here, she is

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[252] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, "1. Introduction: Rhizome," *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[253] Hocking, Clint, "Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock: The problem of what the game is about," *Click Nothing: Design from a long time ago*, October 7, 2007, https://clicknothing.typepad.com/click_nothing/2007/10/ludonarrative-d.html.

[254] *Papers, Please* is a 2013 simulation title where the player controls a border checkpoint employee who must process entry visas amongst the increasingly difficult and bureaucratic processes of a fascist totalitarian government. Contrary to many video games, which solve the problem of an overwhelming number of interchangeable non-player characters by reusing identical generic portraits and foregoing character names, *Papers, Please* randomly assigns each visa applicant with a procedurally generated, unique portrait, name, and background. While titles that use generic portraits and no names mechanically dehumanize certain characters as unimportant to the plot, *Papers, Please* gives everyone humanity and in turn highlights how the very process of border processing performs that same dehumanization; over the course of the maximum thirty-two days of work, it becomes impossible for the player to treat each character with dignity. The characters are still dehumanized, but not by the limits of game code but by the actions of the player and the structure of the institution.

forced to reenact the very actions that inadvertently lead to the deaths of her peers to fully grasp the impact she has had. Yet, in this transition the literal ghosts, monsters, and jumpscares of the initial haunting largely fall away to be replaced by a more personal, more intimate haunting. Finally, she becomes a haunting figure in the present too—becoming a ghost that leaves its lingering traces in the halls of 翠華中學 long after the school has been abandoned and fallen into a state of disarray. In this final narrative switch, it becomes evident that she herself is a ghost that haunts, endlessly punished in her own guilt.

Each of these forms of haunting in *Detention* (originally 返校 or literally "return to school") serve to force Ray to recognize her own culpability in maintaining a violent system and highlight the ways larger histories and personal life histories interact and leave traces within each other. In transitioning from being haunted by history to haunted by her actions to haunting the present herself, Ray's story demonstrates the disruptive ghostly impacts of Taiwan's colonial past on its democratic present and its romanticized present on its silenced past. While the world of the haunted school and the world of Ray's past home life at first seem disconnected, the ways in which the narrative oscillate between them begin to highlight the interconnectedness of Ray's past, present, and future. The game not only takes Ray back to the past, or Taiwan back to its past; it beckons its audience to examine their own histories that continue to impact their worlds today through the lens of colonial horrors. In essence, in engaging with this text, it is necessary for us to 返校.

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I first learn I am Chinese when I am in high school. To be fair, I thought I was Chinese for much of my life before that, but only insofar as the ambiguity of a Chinese-Taiwanese identity eluded my understanding. I know my family lived in Taiwan and I know I had never been to China but I also know that I am what people call ABC or American Born Chinese, that I speak Mandarin Chinese, and that 台語 is reserved for conversations my parents do not want me to understand. When I move to California, I move into a thriving Asian American community where I am presented for the first time, the sociohistorical factors undergirding what it means to be Taiwanese.

One day in Math class[255] a friend of mine from mainland China asks me, "How do you feel about China? I know some people from Taiwan hate China or something and I don't get it."

Amidst the panic of being put on the spot I spit out, "Yeah, me neither."

I am viscerally uncomfortable with the question for reasons that are completely beyond me. I feel as if somehow Taiwan has been delegitimized and I should feel offended on behalf of my family's home, and yet I have no understanding of what a conflict between Taiwan and China is or even the details of what such a relationship is like. All I now know is that there *is* some conflict between China and Taiwan and there are supposedly some troublesome Taiwanese that make a ruckus over it. And I know I don't want to be this troublesome inconvenience so I keep my mouth shut and agree with the premise of the question.

[255] Because of course any story of my Asian American identity self-discovery that I tell white people has to coincidentally take place in a math class.

I later ask my parents about my background and my dad tells me his dad is from China during the ROC's flight into the island and his mom is from Taiwan. My mom's side of the family is from Taiwan and some claim some ancestry from indigenous Taiwanese groups although the jury is out on whether this is accurate or part of a continuous project of violent Taiwanese assimilation narratives. He also tells me there's a chance there may be a Dutch person or two in our lineage somewhere far back which, at the time in the height of my existential angst of color I am excited about, but he later claims this was a half-joke and a half-possibility given the colonial history of the island.

I walk away with more questions than I have answers. If I am Chinese like my classmates, why do I have no relatives in China? If I am Taiwanese, why do I speak Mandarin Chinese? If I am part-white, does this mean I have a shot at being attractive? For years afterwards, I inhabit an ambiguous space between China and Taiwan. I say my family is from Taiwan, but when people call me "Chinese" I do not correct them because I am unsure if that is untrue.

History of the White Terror

The history of the modern Taiwan state is inextricably tied to a history of multiple colonial occupation projects and nearly four decades of martial law. During the nearly twenty-five years of intermittent conflict of the Chinese Civil War starting in 1927, two governments claimed to be the true government of China—the Communist Party of China and the Kuomintang. At the time, Taiwan was a subject of what would be half a century of Japanese colonial occupation, and the two Chinese governments postponed their conflict for four years to combat an encroaching Japanese imperial army. This Second Sino-Japanese War ended in 1945 with Japan relinquishing control of several previously Chinese territories, including Taiwan. Following Taiwan's liberation from colonial Japanese occupation and institution of Kuomintang rule, Taiwan inhabited an ambiguous status as 'Asia's Orphan' (亞細亞的孤兒) or "a place cast off by China and accorded second-class status by Japan[256]." As a result of its fifty years of Japanese occupation, Taiwan was seen as simultaneously a valuable modernized economic asset and a culturally compromised island that may be too "Japanned" to be loyal to China.[257] So while some Taiwanese saw this government transfer as a welcome change from Japanese occupation, which despite its economic and infrastructural improvements was characterized by second-class citizenship, a harsh police state, and state massacres of Taiwanese protestors, others saw this transfer as a replacement of one violent authoritarian government with another[258].

For example, many Taiwanese were outraged that land seized by the Japanese government now belonged to the Chinese government and would not be returned, and the existence of a Taiwan-specific currency and language (or worse, the use of Japanese) made them seem tainted and unassimilable to the Chinese. Taiwan became seen as developmentally advanced as a result of Japanese improvements, but less culturally

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[256] Phillips, Steven, "Between Assimilation and Independence," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007): 277.
[257] *Ibid*., 276.
[258] Katz, Paul R., *When Valleys Turned Blood Red: The Ta-pa-ni Incident in Colonial Taiwan*, (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2015).

developed than the mainland. Rising resentment towards a new government that theoretically better represented Taiwan but also enacted brutal state violence and repression festered and many Taiwanese began to believe "the new regime compared unfavorably to the old[259]." This conflict finds its legacies within the structure of Taiwanese families even outside of Taiwan, such as my own family for whom the question of the Republic of China nationalist government's rule over the island is a contentious issue. For my mother, whose working-class family faced tremendous economic and political concerns during both regimes, at least the Japanese regime appeared not to target those who kept their head down. For my father, whose more economically stable family has some of its roots in the KMT government retreat to Taiwan, loyalty to Japan is absurd and romanticized in the face of the cultural similarities between the ROC and pre-1945 Taiwanese.

While the narrative of the Nationalist government taking control of Taiwan was one of an older brother reuniting with a younger brother, in practice the new government was responsible for egregious state violence for any who appeared to be disloyal to the Republic of China. In 1947, anti-state organizing in pursuit of Taiwanese self-governance spurred on brutal government repression from the KMT government leading to an estimated 10,000 dead and 30,000 wounded in what would become known as the February 28 incident (sometimes 228 Incident). The KMT's harsh response to 228 organizing became the start of Taiwan's White Terror, a nearly forty year period of martial law spanning from 1949 to 1987. Critics of the government were killed, forced to flee, or otherwise silenced or disappeared. Anti-state actions became more and more pronounced in favor of local self-government. The Nationalists cracked down on these rebellions, arresting and killing suspected communists, communist supporters, and critics to the extent where "people dared not criticize the government, make comments on current politics, or voice grievances to strangers[260]." This became so severe that some Taiwanese fled to Japan, their former colonial occupier, as a safe haven for those "who found that they could not live under Chiang's government[261]."

Within a short span of time after their arrival, the Nationalist government took control of all major institutions and began instituting political change from the top down, aided by its existing influence in the years prior to its retreat. As Taiwanese were barred from public positions, the cultural, military, and political overhaul of the island was enacted without the perspectives of its former inhabitants—both earlier Han Taiwanese immigrants and indigenous Taiwanese. As a result of the Nationalist government's obsession with the image of stability, prosperity, and legitimacy in comparison to the People's Republic of China in the eyes of the rest of the world, the government "failed to consider other, much-needed basic political and cultural issues" in lieu of funneling its money into military projects[262]. Instead, Taiwanese "had little opportunity to share

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[259] Phillips, 290.
[260] Wang, Peter Chen-main, "A Bastion Created, A Regime Reformed, An Economy Reengineered, 1949-1970," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007): 330.
[261] Phillips, 301.
[262] Wang, 335

political power in the central government" and were systemically locked out of the Nationalist's idea of China[263].

The Nationalist government was particularly highly concerned about student political movements in schools across Taiwan which lead to the creation of the Chinese Anticommunist National Salvation Youth Corps that was responsible for student-oriented propaganda programs. The program cracked down on suspected disloyal students and attempted to prevent disruptive student movements which threatened to destabilize the government's control over the population. As with many authoritarian government regimes, education became an important target in creating and maintaining national narratives of prosperity and superiority. Propaganda framing the Republic of China as culturally, economically, and politically superior to the People's Republic of China was commonplace and literature and ideas that threatened to disrupt that narrative were censored or otherwise excised from the national narrative.

Programs and systems like these were reinforced not only in schools but on a governmental level as well. Taiwanese were seen as unqualified for governmental positions both as a result of their lack of Mandarin language skills as well as due to the image that they were not yet loyal to the Chinese Nationalist government. This was due, again, to Taiwan's former status as a Japanese colony, which symbolically tainted the island and its inhabitants as culturally compromised. While much of this was based in harmful narratives of Chinese ownership over the island, some of it was based in the complicated dynamics of a serially colonized island. In response to these claims of a secret Taiwanese loyalty to Japan, however, many Taiwanese "vigorously rejected the charge that they had been incurably infected by Japanese education or culture because this would delegitimize their participation in politics[264]."

Despite this violent history, the legacy of Taiwan's white terror is obscured under the contemporary representations of the island as a progressive beacon of liberal democracy in Asia. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Taiwan is applauded by the United States for its "momentous transition to democracy" without recognition of the United States' integral role of funding and supporting the nationalist-run White Terror.[265] As a result, contemporary mythologies of Taiwan often neglect the history of state violence; Taiwan's "'bloodless' transition to democracy" appears to suddenly occur out of nowhere and retroactively erase "the quiet revolution that had taken place for decades," or worse justify, "the tens of thousands who had died in the streets, by the interrogator's hand, or in prison," by a party that continues to exist.[266]

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[263] Ibid., 336.
[264] Phillips, 269.
[265] Tucker.
[266] Ryan, 376.

Image 13 | My mother's elementary school. Photographed by author in 2018.

There was something wrong with his face and it was instantly recognizable to everyone around them. While she had brought a female friend home from university as well, there was no mistaking that the man with the 外省[267] features was her boyfriend, which stirred a wave of controversy she would only hear about a decade later. There were a multitude of reasons that a face or a meticulously masked accent like his might have caused alarm. Stories both real and possibly mythologized told of mainlanders marrying Taiwanese women and then one day hearing back from a wife they left behind in China during the split. Others condemned a dynamic of violent colonial occupation that found its way manifesting in the home. If nothing else, a face like that begged the question of what was wrong with any of the many Taiwanese faces that could have taken its place.

Over the years of growing up in a 眷村 or military dependents' village, where military dependents of the fleeing KMT government lived, he developed a sharp insecurity that his mainland accent would tip off other kids that he was different. At an age where the last thing anyone wants is to be different, he learned the local Taiwanese language and masked the rolled vowels characteristic of mainland Mandarin in school. There, propaganda was particularly prevalent. He learned that the Chinese who stayed in mainland China were poor and destitute, that the KMT which his father had fled to Taiwan with were righteous, that things were much better here.

In the south, she struggled with avoiding government propaganda disguised as a deceptively polite "請說國語" ("Please speak the country's language") sign passed from kid to kid (Image 13). If anyone was caught speaking 台語, the language Taiwanese kids spoke at home with their families and friends, they were forced to wear the sign until they were able to catch another kid speaking it. At the end of the day, the child with the sign would be fined or have to commit to wearing it the next morning depending on the school. Naturally, when she did bear the sign the other kids would avoid her for the day so as not to be the next victim. The message was clear: 台語 (Taiwanese Hokkien) was not suitable for the public sphere and certainly was not the national language or 國語 even though it had unofficially been for quite some time. Instead, 中文 (Mandarin Chinese) was the country's language and it would be enforced even at the level of elementary school.

[267] *Waisheng*, or "foreign born."

So when they first returned from school together, the weight of decades of colonial history invited itself in as well, and what was at first whispered in Japanese[268] became years later translated into the retroactive revelation of disapproval. In that moment, his face was more than just a face but evidence of a complex history of immigration, occupation, and martial law. It was the silent implication that not only was there not one China, but that there might not even be one Taiwan.

The Lingered Ghosts of the White Terror

The 2017 Taiwanese video game *Detention* (返校) is a 2D survival horror video game by Taiwanese indie developers Red Candle Games that was first released on the gaming platform Steam and later ported to the PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch. The game is set during the 1960s Taiwanese White Terror, right in the heart of what was at the time the longest period of martial law in history. Chronicling the stories of two students, Wei and Ray, attempting to leave an increasingly hellish and warped version of their high school, *Detention* interrogates notions of memory and haunting over a backdrop of the anti-communist terror following the Republic of China's flight into Taiwan in 1949. The first instance Ray notices something is different about her high school is when a severe typhoon batters its walls, causing a massive flood that blocks the path towards the rest of town. Here, Ray is not presented as the protagonist of this story, but instead as a non-playable deuteragonist to the playable Wei, who she follows as they attempt to find a way out after he finds her sleeping in the auditorium. When there appears to be no option other than to wait out the storm, the two take refuge in Wei's homeroom and Wei sets out to search for a phone to call for help. Yet, help does not arrive and Ray wakes up once again in her school auditorium—this time greeted by the corpse of Wei hanging from his feet on stage.

What ensues is a nightmarish escapade through Ray's warped high school, crawling with the whimpering ghosts of lingered students and ten-foot tall lantern demons. These ghosts, while at first appearing to be standard monsters in a ghost story, are amalgamates of Buddhist and Taoist cosmology and White Terror-era colonial figures. That the inhuman demons that hunt Ray down throughout the school bear resemblance to the police officers, government administrators, and rebellious students that characterize the nearly-forty year period of martial law in Taiwan points to what *Detention* finds frightening and dangerous—the lasting impacts of a violent and subjugated history.

[268] I find that the language with which multilingual parents speak when attempting to hide something from their children often reveals much about histories of colonial and imperial power. Just as for many Taiwanese Americans, *taiyu* is the unintelligible remnant of a history of Chinese linguistic imperialism in Taiwan, for many Taiwanese, Japanese is that ghost of colonial history "past".

Image 15 | A Lingered student approaches Ray.

Image 14 | How to survive the Lingered.

The first of these demonic horrors she encounters are the Lingered, who resemble undead students that cackle and bend unnaturally backwards when in pursuit of Ray. The Lingered (or 魍魎) patrol different areas of the school in predictable patterns—usually going from one set of classroom doors to another like hall monitors (Image 14). Though Ray is able to avoid some of these confrontations, such as by ducking into a nearby classroom and exiting through its backdoor, there are occasions where Ray is forced to walk right by a Lingered. In these instances, and in other similar instances when Ray must avoid detection from a ghost, the only way forward is for Ray to cover her mouth and hold her breath while she walks past or, in some more dire circumstances, to leave a bowl of rice on the ground to distract the ghost. In both cases, she must cover her mouth and remain silent so as not to attract unwanted attention from the student.

Though the papers Ray collects detailing the mythology of the Lingered and how to escape them depict these ghosts as adult women (Image 15), each of the Lingered she encounters take the form of a female student clad in the same uniform she is wearing. In this twisted school, other students are a danger and speaking or even audibly breathing near them results in a loud screech and a mad chase to capture and eviscerate Ray in punishment. Yet, these elements of supernatural horror still find the traces of Taiwan's real colonial history embedded within them.

During the period of martial law after the KMT government fled from the mainland in 1949, the government instituted Mandarin Chinese as the official 國語 or national language. At a time when much of the island spoke what is now referred to as Taiwanese Hokkien (colloquially just 台語 or Taiwanese), instituting Mandarin Chinese as the language of the public sphere was a major cultural undertaking—one filled with clumsy vowels and hybrid dialects. As a result of the island's recent status as a Japanese colony, the nationalist government viewed the use of Mandarin Chinese as "a symbol of one's Chinese-ness'… [and] the inability to speak, read, and write the official language suggested a lack of patriotism and backwardness to mainland Chinese." The successful adoption of a new national language became a "symbol of political and educational development required for the implementation of self-government[269]."

[269] Ibid., 285.

Starting in schools, students were forced to only speak Mandarin Chinese or risk public humiliation in the form of a sign that was worn to designate someone that had been caught speaking 台語 (Image 16).[270] Notably, this process was maintained by students themselves; because the only way to remove the sign (which, depending on the school, could ultimately result in a financial punishment should the student still be wearing it at the end of the day) was to catch another student speaking 台語 and afflict the sign on them. This created a system of self-policing where students were incentivized to punish each other for speaking their native language and avoid whichever student was wearing the sign at the time.

Image 16 | Example of a linguistic punishment sign. This one translates to "I won't speak dialects."

Of course, this is not to say that 台語 was never spoken in school, particularly during breaks, as young students who had grown up only speaking their native tongue were now tasked with becoming fluent in the mandatory language nearly overnight. Instead, the system created a dynamic of public silence and private chatter, which parallels Steven Phillips' notion of Taiwanese "public support and private reservations" regarding the new occupying government. In order to avoid the social and financial punishments of the institution of a colonial language, students would avoid speaking to and around the afflicted student and only feel free to talk when the student was out of earshot. Silence around the afflicted both created an additional layer of punishment for wearing the sign (where one's peers may actively avoid being around or speaking to you) and also reinforced the colonial ideology of 台語 as a language that was to be spoken in private or in whispers, while 中文 was the only proper language for the public sphere.

I use this language of affliction to underscore that the processes of linguistic colonialism is not something that *happens to* people but that is *intentionally afflicted* onto people for the benefit of the affliction—that the transformation of Taiwan into a Mandarin-speaking island was not a natural and gradual process but a forced one which spread through the intentional breakdown and reorganization of societal institutions and systems. The fear of Japanned Taiwanese was described as an infection, one which relegated Taiwanese to what was considered a grotesque state in-between Chinese and Japanese. Like the Lingered's trapped state between the living and the dead, Taiwanese were a political impossibility, neither capable of being assimilated into the new China nor rejected as a foreign threat. In addition, afflictions spread to the people around the afflicted and implicate everyday interactions in its survival; an affliction can only survive off of the bodies of its hosts and the other potential hosts it may come into contact with.

The Lingered, here, can be read as symbolic of both the self-policing of students enforced by the occupying government and as victims of the dynamic of public silence

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[270] Chen, Tsung-Ting, *The Perpetual Colonial Situation: Language and Dominance in Taiwan*, Master's thesis, University of Gothenburg, 2018.

and private chatter that characterized the institution of a colonial language in schools. In this early section of the game's narrative, the greatest threat of harm and violence comes not directly from the agents of the government but from Ray's peers. These lingered students do not attack her on sight; instead, it is the proximity of the sound of her breathing that triggers the attacks. When caught by an afflicted student, Ray must run away and leave the area, lest she be killed as well. Only by completely covering her mouth—literally silencing herself around her classmates—is she able to avoid becoming a target. As we will see, throughout the game, Ray survives by being silent—forcing her mouth closed and she ultimately dies (and indirectly kills many) when she speaks up.

Ray's survival around her peers is entirely dependent on her public silence. For all intents and purposes, she is free to move throughout the school, including to administrative offices like the counselor's office and nurse's office—the only threat to her life in the early portion of the narrative comes from the monitoring of the lingered students. Yet while public silence is endemic to survival here, neither she nor her peers are silent when outside the earshot of other students. Ray spends much of her time exploring the distorted version of her high school talking—to herself, as well as to the memories of her loved ones. Likewise, it is not uncommon for her to hear the giggles and chatter of her lingered peers long before she comes into contact with them. The only instance where silence is required is for her own survival when she comes into contact with one of the demonic amalgamates of colonial authority.

Perhaps one of the most interesting of these authorities is the unnamed eldritch abomination that bears resemblance to Instructor Bai (白), a military officer assigned to the school. Bai, whose name literally means "White", functions as the arm of the White Terror that characterized the KMT government's authoritarian rule in the second half of the 20th century. Identified through his brimmed hat, Bai appears throughout the narrative in a variety of forms: as an otherworldly demonic figure, as a memory of the actual man, and as a manifestation of Ray's haunted past. Most of Bai's initial appearances come in the form of references to the actual man's presence and role in the colonial hierarchy. Because the human Bai is rarely seen until later in the narrative, it is initially unclear that the impossibly tall and grotesque demon in the brimmed cap and the human military officer represent the same figure, especially given the game's abstract art style. In these early sections, the demonic Bai appears sporadically to underscore the histories of martial law surrounding otherwise innocuous acts. For instance, the two major appearances this demonic Bai makes in the first half of the game are shortly after Ray attempts to enter the counselor's office (the site of her own personal transgressions) and after she makes a phone call for help. In each of these cases, the demonic Bai appears to arrive to punish Ray for her actions. As a posted military officer, he is responsible for enforcing the laws of the Nationalist government in Greenwood High, particularly in the realm of ensuring loyalty among faculty and students and identifying and removing suspected communists or Chinese supporters. He ultimately receives a tip of an underground book club which leads to the imprisonment and execution of students and faculty that precede the events of the game.

Image 17 | One of several appearances of the president's statue.

In one of his appearances, his voice is heard on the phone thanking Ray for her support for her country before his impossibly large demonic shadow passes by the window and attempts to enter the room that Ray is hiding in. When the shaking stops, he is nowhere to be found outside of the door, but in his place lies a puppet in the shape of a militarized police officer. That he becomes a puppet of a policeman is relevant not only because it links the role of the posted military officer with the political executions of an authoritarian government, but because it highlights his role as a puppet—a tool of a larger system that functions and is maintained through many individual arms of power. While Bai is the closest to a true antagonist that *Detention* has, his antagonism is a result of the symbolic role he plays as a representation of the horrors of the White Terror as a system of political and military subjugation.

In this way, Bai acts as part of a larger symbolic colonial haunting of Ray's school, consisting of the omnipresence of government-approved patriotic music, propaganda flyers, and giant statues of Chiang Kai-shek that loom over her school courtyard (Image 17). Amidst the demonic warping of her high school, what serves as perhaps the most oppressive haunting comes from artifacts of the government grounded in a secular world. The president's statue does not need to creak to life and attack Ray for her life to be in danger; its very presence is antagonistic.

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I'm 22 in my first year of graduate school, quickly realizing I don't belong in my field. I hate everything and everyone around me. This is to be a consistent part of the graduate school experience. After all, on a campus, nothing can be said to be certain, except posturing and depression. I find it difficult to connect with the material when the canon reflects so little of my experience. While the ultimate process of disillusionment takes far too long, it begins early. The field is not what I thought it was, and the realization that it is not imposter syndrome but that I am legitimately, fully unprepared and unknowledgeable about the field I thought I knew tears away the fantasy of returning to an institution that I once felt competent in. So nearly immediately, I turn to look at my other options and I find one that promises to be the opposite: a space where my experiences are reflected in the text. Perhaps that is too much the case.

Academia gorges itself on trauma. In an industry where only an unmarked white male universal subject is allowed the authority on many topics, one of the only ways academia seems to be able to listen to people of color is through recounts of their trauma,

whether it be personal, familial, sociological, or historical. So in transitioning to a new field, one in which I might finally belong and finally be legible, it becomes evident from the advice around me that the easiest option for me to be understood is to write about Taiwan for people that might never have heard of the island, were it not for the labels on products around their houses. So here I say what they want to hear: "I am Taiwanese." And many, many, *many* white people tell me they love my project and want to work with me, each bearing more and more of a resemblance to the onslaught of white Grindr blips that tell me all about their love for anime, their trip to teach English in South Korea, and their disturbingly long list of Asian ex-boyfriends. To reveal this part of my identity to the university begins to leave a familiar foul taste in my mouth.

At a conference the same year for a field I have already decided I will leave, a young woman of color in the sciences advises me, "don't let them push you into Ethnic Studies." At the time I took issue with her well-intentioned advice, and at some level I still do. Yet I understand better what she meant by that now: if your own history and your own trauma is all the university can stomach about you, then despite any intellectual rigor or academic insights, you will be digested or you will be discarded. Once they think they understand your island, with an expertise that you do not even afford to yourself as a result of your western accent and American upbringing, they will move on to a different, academically sexier region filled with ripe "new" trauma. And perhaps the only option is to follow, to write about someone else's trauma, someone else's history. To take the government bribe to travel to someone else's story and become an expert on them as they have become an expert on you. When you become a keyword, you will only show up when they want you to. I tell the university that I am "Taiwanese" and I do not know what they hear, but the grins on their faces warp that word and make me reconsider what business I have claiming it.

The Lingering Ghosts of Ray's Past

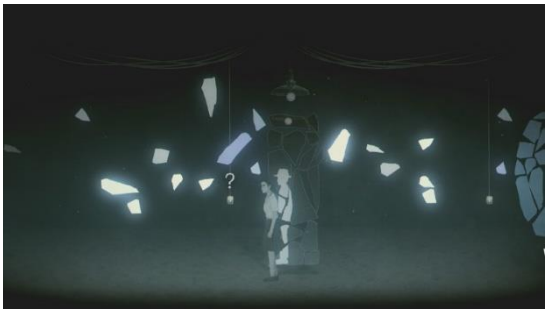
While Ray initially appears to be haunted solely by ghostly versions of the authoritarian government she lives under, it becomes steadily apparent by the game's second act that she is also being haunted on a more intimate, personal level. In this second half of the game, the jumpscares and horrifying monsters typical of horror are replaced with the haunting of guilt and familial history. As a result of a forbidden love affair and a conflict of misunderstanding between her and a teacher, Ray sets a series of events in motion that lead to the arm of the White Terror firmly finding its way into the halls of her school. This ultimately culminates in the recognition that Ray's personal traumas and misguided angers lead her to rat out an illegal book club to the occupying KMT government prior to the start of the game, leading to the arrest, exile, and deaths of several teachers and her classmates who have violated the strict propagandistic reading lists enforced by the Republic of China. The haunted world of her high school, then, is a purgatory of her own guilt and radically recontextualizes prior interactions with the demonic Bai, with whom it is slowly revealed appeared at the request of Ray. It is through facing the consequences of what she's done, both through confronting the ghosts of her classmates and excavating the causes of her misguided actions, that she is finally able to achieve a sense of peace in the afterlife.

Image 18 | Book Club Reading List

One of the items that Ray receives in her exploration of the past is a Book Club Reading List, which notably takes the form of a handgun (Image 18). This is the only received item in the game that presents itself differently from its namesake and the discrepancy is never explicitly addressed. The significance of this Book Club Reading List lies in the violent KMT government censorship of materials that brand a person as a communist or Chinese sympathizer. However, haunted versions of Ray employ the gun throughout one of the many nightmare sequences. Directly prior to obtaining the item, Ray enters a hall of mirrors where she is presented with her teacher and the leader of the book club Ms. Yin, who is bound to a chair (Image 19). While the ghostly Yin asks her why she did what she did, the reflections of the pair behind them show a bound and bagged Yin at the mercy of a gun-wielding Ray. That this scene never took place in the real world of the game is irrelevant; Ray used the book club reading list as a weapon, and effectively sentenced Ms. Yin to death with it as the trigger. By blurring the lines between knowledge and power, the ghosts force Ray to recognize her culpability in the slaughter of her classmates and teachers and reject an abstraction that would allow her to preserve her innocence.

The other instance where it becomes explicitly apparent that what is visible may not be what is real occurs when Ray is forced to walk through a different hallway with several mirrors sporadically located throughout. In the first mirror she sees only her reflection, moving alongside her as would be expected. However, each subsequent mirror shows a reflection of Officer Bai in her place, moving alongside her as if he were her own reflection (Image 20). Eventually, the reflections of Officer Bai begin moving in the opposite direction, forcing Ray to strategically lead him further and further down the hallway in order for her to progress. In this instance, the ambiguity between Ray's own identity and Officer Bai's highlights the functional indistinguishability of the perpetrator of violence as well as the intentionality with which she lead the demons of the White Terror to her peers and teachers. Just as the book club list she receives carries the appearance of a handgun she never actually held, her reflection as the arm of the state highlights her own responsibility in the arrest and execution of students and faculty involved in the book club.

Image 20 | Ray symbolically killing Ms. Yin.



ge 19 | Bai as Ray's reflection.

In addition, that Bai must be lead to the room with Ms. Yin inside through a series of puzzles indicates the intentionality with which Ray acted in ratting out the book club. Officer Bai would not have been able to make the charges on his own—it was necessary for someone to specifically and intentionally lead him to the conclusion that the book club was taking place, and Ray was the person to do it.

At the height of her realization, the game begins flashing frames of fictional photographs depicting the aftermath of Ray's accusations. These photographs are fleeting, visible for only a brief moment, and are not saved in the game's digital archive. In addition, they are interspersed with images from Ray's own memories, as can be seen by the frame taking a first-person perspective. Two images in particular are relevant here. The first, from Ray's perspective, shows a small group of students being arrested by government officials for being involved in the illegal book club (Image 21). From the position of the roof which she would later jump off of to commit suicide, Ray sees this scene from above, blocked only by the roof's railing and her own hands, opened in horror. The students, in this perspective, are separated into two groups of four, separated by gender. Each group is rendered in the exact same position, appearing to be exact copies of one student. The second, which flashes directly afterwards, is a fictional photograph of the same scene from the ground, where six students stand in front of an official holding a gun, preparing either for arrest or execution (Image 22). This scene is rendered in a much more realistic style, with the cartoonish features of the Lingered replaced with individual faces distorted by decaying film and harsh lighting. Here, the students are individuals—of varying heights, with varying body types, and standing in various ways.

Despite depicting the same event, the two images hold contradictory details. For one, the photograph shows a mixed-gender group that appear to be organized not in two groups of four but in at least one larger group of at least six. The students are not in identical positions, as one bows in the foreground and another stares at the officer's gun while still another stares straight forward with pursed lips and a stoic bravery. Ray's memory of the event elides the details and individual horror of the event, instead preserving the larger structural terror of her wrongdoing. In contrast, the photograph privileges the individual experiences that constitute the event and memorialize the individual lives ruined by her actions.

By juxtaposing Ray's own fallible memory with what appears to be a photograph of the same event, *Detention* makes explicit connections between her own subjective experience with the historical reality of the White Terror. It is not just that her actions in snitching on the illegal book club played a role in maintaining the abstract idea of the White Terror; her actions lead to an event that has been documented and preserved in the

Image 22 | Ray's perspective of book club arrests.

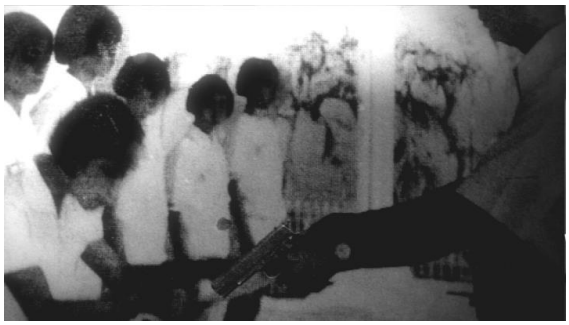


Image 21 | "Photograph" of the arrests.

photographs, news clippings, and government documents that she collects throughout her punishment. She has helped to constitute what the White Terror is recorded to be. This again links the structural circumstances of the White Terror to individual experiences. What appears to be a broader narrative about a historical point in time is revealed to also be a more particular story about individual actions—yet these actions are inextricably contextualized by the setting they arise from. Without understanding the larger history, Ray's personal actions and their consequences are incomprehensible, yet without understanding her life history, identifying the continuing impacts of the history of Taiwan's creation as a modern state appears to be abstract and largely insignificant.

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His motorcycle fails to wake me even as he parks right next to my mesh window. I don't drink coffee so I take less time to get ready in the morning. I only leave myself time to stuff a fistful of dry cheerios in my mouth, throw on a decaying shirt, use the restroom, and play a level of Candy Crush so I can start to feel like a human. All the lights are on, but it is completely silent save for the bubbling of the coffee pot and an internal voice that screams at me for not becoming an accountant. But the path towards yet another degree required this sacrifice—I had been soundly rejected from all graduate programs my first attempt; only the most extreme of research conditions could guarantee my entrance back into the ivory tower. So I trekked across state and national borders to chase wild primates through a biological reservation for upwards of fourteen hours a day all while living on-site. I forego bugspray. What's the point? To lose a few precious seconds of stillness to repel a few dozen bites when you will surely find three hundred anyway seems an unworthy trade-off. Besides, it's actually the ten-part harmony mosquito choir beside your ear that is the main annoyance and no amount of spray will stop that.

We set off far before the sun rises. It will be at least a forty-five minute hike before we find the right tree and there's no telling for sure whether they're even still there, so having a buffer before the sunrise sprint to food is the difference between wandering aimlessly through the forest all day and wandering somewhat less aimlessly through the forest all day. When the monkeys take their mid-day nap and data-collection is at its easiest, we chat—me in my broken Spanish and him in his considerably less broken English. Conversations flow back and forth between lingual boundaries, letting both of us practice a language that just eludes our grasp. On occasion he asks me about my family and my background.

I tell him, “Mi padre y mi madre están gentes taiwanesa. Es una isla cerca de China.”

“Ah, sí Taiwán.”

I’m a little taken aback that his eyes light up in recognition. Growing up in areas with a high proportion of Taiwanese immigrants and still running into confusion on where and what exactly Taiwan is made me resign myself to always needing to explain myself again and again. *“No, that’s not where Pad Thai comes from”*, *“No, it’s complicated but China and Taiwan are different depending on who you ask”*, and of course, *“No, I don’t really watch anime”*.

He explains somewhat sheepishly, “Usamos ‘*chino*’ para todo el mundo pero conocemos Taiwán.”

I later learn that Taiwan gifted a bridge to Costa Rica in the early 2000s which is important for the region I’m in and I come into contact with many Chinese and Taiwanese Costa Ricans throughout my time there. The next time it comes up is in a restaurant in San Jos*é*’s small Chinatown where, over-the-moon that a customer knows how to speak Mandarin Chinese, the owner asks me all about my background and gives me a significant discount. It comes as a surprise, though perhaps it shouldn’t, that the people I meet seem far more knowledgeable about Taiwan than any of the white Americans I encounter there or at home. Perhaps for the first time in my life, people accept I am Taiwanese instead of Chinese. And to compound that, it is also the first time people assume I am American instead of Asian.

How Ray Lingers

While Ray spends the first two-thirds of the narrative being haunted by the specter of the White Terror and by her own culpability in the events of Greenwood High School’s arrests and executions, the last section of the game highlights that she herself is haunting the spaces in which this disaster took place. Throughout the ending chapters of the game, a strange older man is seen stalking the corridors and entering rooms just to disappear without a trace. It is easy to assume in these instances that this man is yet another ghost—some remnant of the oppressive and authoritarian regime. However, as Ray becomes more and more lucid about the circumstances of her detention, she realizes that the man is actually an adult Wei, returning to school decades later after finally being pardoned for his participation in the illegal book club.

Here, the stylistic choices surrounding the game emphasize Ray’s haunting. The game is presented in a highly desaturated style, which mimics photography of the era and matches the fictional photographs in the game’s archives and menus. Characters are nearly black and white, and the use of vibrant colors is reserved mostly for deep reds, signifying either the momentary respite of a save point shrine or the immediate danger of blood. However, by the time it becomes clear that Ray herself is a ghost and the world around her is but a warped nightmarish afterlife, the game begins to adopt stylistic palettes that reject this desaturation. The game’s good ending uses a lush palette of vibrant yellows and deep greens (Image 23). Even the burnt wood and rusted metals pop and add texture to the scenery. This third act juxtaposes the almost completely desaturated Ray with the warmer and more human skin tones of an adult Wei.

Image 24 | Wei returning to 翠華中學 decades later.

Image 23 | Wei on the roof of his school upon his return.

In the moment of revelation, Ray follows the adult Wei up to the roof where she killed herself out of guilt and watches as he looks out over the grounds of his old school while smoking (Image 24). In this shot, she stands behind him unseen and unseeable. When contrasted with the subtle blues of the night sky, the warm glow of his cigarette, the deep undertones of his skin, and even the muted blue of his shirt, Ray looks out of place. She is so desaturated that there is virtually no difference in the whiteness of her shirt and her skin. Here, Ray is behind Wei not only physically but in the sense of being a part of his past that, while no longer visible, is still always with him. The world of Wei's present is not styled to match the black and white photographs of the 1960s; that Ray remains uncolored places her firmly in the past—just as much of a remnant of the 1960s height of Taiwan's White Terror as the Lingered students she was hunted and haunted by.

Ray's final moment of closure and what ultimately sets her free from her torment occurs when she follows Wei back to the classroom they met up at decades earlier (Image 25). Sitting across from each other with Wei's desk between them, the two look directly at each other for the first time, reliving a part of their history that continues to exist in the space they are in. Here, not only is Wei's deep coloring contrasted with Ray's desaturated photographic appearance, she is partially transparent. Ray's presence in the decayed and abandoned halls of Greenwood High School continues to be felt, even when it defies both the physical and temporal constraints of the living.

The significance of Ray's own haunting of the school is twofold: it makes colonial haunting personal rather than merely historical, and it once again implicates Ray's individual actions in a larger context of the White Terror. In a similar manner to the way the photographs of student arrests highlight the individuality of the students in lieu of presenting them as an indistinguishable mass, by having Ray herself haunt the world instead of just being a victim of colonial haunting, *Detention* takes the White Terror out of the abstract and into the personal. Here, the mechanical limits of humanization and dehumanization in game code are employed to demonstrate the impersonal and personal impacts of authoritarian rule. The stories are both events and memories—structural and personal, collective and individual.

Image 25 | The present and past reconcile the History of the White Terror and Wei and Ray's personal history.

The narrative ties these two realms together by detailing the impact of the individual on the structural and the structural on the individual. Ray's decisions spurred on a manifestation of the Republic of China's authoritarian rule and yet they were constrained by the boundaries of such rule in the first place. Her individual actions simultaneously reflect and impact the histories of Taiwan from before she was born, and the legacies of her memory continue to have meaning decades after her death. Wei, too, has the histories of Taiwan's White Terror embedded in the very fiber of his existence; he becomes a sort of living ghost, demonstrating the haunting that persists even in the existence of the living.

In the same way that Black British immigrants asserted their embodiment of colonial histories through the charge, "We're here because you were there", we can find the ways that histories of colonialism, imperialism, and state violence have come to mold our own life and family histories[271]. Nearly seventy years after the end of Japanese occupation in Taiwan, my family still has ties to the language and these histories persist; a generational disagreement over the correct pronunciation of the Japanese word for "milk" is as much a haunting remnant of the past as the Japanese courtyard and now tourist attraction just a block from my aunt's apartment. The impossible histories of Taiwan—those that must not be for the proper maintenance of a narrative of a liberal progressive island—find themselves embodied in living ghosts whose very existence signal the impact of colonial histories past and present.

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[271] Kushnick, Louis, "'We're Here Because You Were There': Britain's Black Population," *Trotter Review* 7.2 (1993): 17-19.

Image 26 | The University of Missouri in the 1980s and 2010s.

I first step on campus with my sister, and I feel the weight of time knead itself into my shoulders. I didn't want to come here, but it seems almost inevitable that I would. Though we stand out in the predominantly white halls of this Midwestern university, my family has found itself here again and again. A few years prior, my sister first stepped foot on the busy half-circle drive, and decades earlier my parents found themselves here—both invited and restrained by the promise of a graduate education in the United States (Image 26). My parents are underpaid and overworked in a mall food court Chinese restaurant, and even the impending arrival of my sister is not able to offset the need to bus tables.

I never step foot in that restaurant, though, both as a result of a youthful apathy and a strong desire to fit in. I'm suspicious of the Chinese food that can be found here. When I need a reminder of home, I stick to the local Taiwanese powder-based boba shop or the ambiguously pan-Asian dining hall that students continue to advocate should be turned into another pizza joint and which shuts down the year after I leave. As routinely the only Asian person in any given group, I become as pan-Asian as the most unpopular dining hall on campus; I answer questions about everything from Chinese food to Japanese media. My white friends have varying reactions to boba when I introduce it to them, but it gives most of them a stomach-ache. Over the next three years, I am introduced to the famous Springfield Missouri Chinese food, I am assumed to be a Madame Butterfly-esque souvenir from a friend's trip to Japan, I am touched and asked if all my people have such nice hair, and I turn down an invitation to join the local Asian American Association.

I tell my white friend, "I understand the value of LGBTQ+ associations but I just don't feel oppressed for being Asian."

That would change.

But as I try to forge a new path on this campus, I find myself running into my family's history again and again. Some of my friends are the younger siblings of my sister's classmates—building friendships in part on experiences and weddings I have never been to. Programs that did not exist decades ago for my parents have sprung up to address problems of the past in the form of on-campus food pantries and more inclusive housing. In a way, my status as a legacy student is seen to some degree as an absurdity. As, presumably, a metropolitan Asian immigrant who doesn't speak English, how can I

be anything but foreign? What legacy can there be? I show my college friends where I am from and I am told that it looks like a foreign country. By the time I leave campus unceremoniously[272], I realize it is not that my community looks like a foreign country, but that Americans do not know what their country looks like.

Conclusion

Detention demonstrates the ways Taiwan's complex colonial histories continues to haunt institutions, people, and the everyday. By transitioning from a broader story of a student haunted by the White Terror to a personal story of being haunted by one's own past to a reversal of how one participates in haunting, *Detention* calls attention to the ways histories manifest in our own lives. The narrative implicates everyday seemingly innocuous experiences as part of larger ongoing histories. Ray's complicated love story is a typical narrative found in much young adult media set in school—its outcome as a tragedy of unforeseen proportions is a result of the historical legacies that undergird it and the context in which she finds herself. The game repoliticizes the setting of the school by drawing connections between what could have been a standard high school drama with the colonial underpinnings of the school system.

The setting of the school is a foundational part of a nation-building and citizenship-making project insofar as it cultivates a national common set of knowledge and social practices. And indeed, the school has been integral to colonial and imperial processes—from the institution of boarding schools for Native Americans of the 19th and 20th centuries to the structural segregation of educational funding and resources in the United States today. Within the context of Taiwan's White Terror, as is the case in many authoritarian regimes, school becomes a primary institution of legitimizing oppressive government rule. Despite this reality of political oppression, for many people, school life continues to appear mundane. My father does not recall much of the violence during the White Terror, despite having lived through much of it, as a result of both his positionality and the particular confines of school. As an institution of indoctrination, the school benefits from being seen as apolitical.

Yet while my parents recall mainly abstract propaganda or stories passed down from their parents as evidence of the Republic of China's martial law, it is in the realm of everyday, seemingly innocuous incidents that the extent of the colonial influence on schooling appears. My mother's experience as a Taiwanese speaker being forced to speak Mandarin of course demonstrates this, but my father's experience as a half-Chinese child attempting to fit in with his peers also reflects these histories, even if they may seem removed. We can continue to see these legacies in our own lives and experiences in school; the impact of colonial haunting can be subtle and personal. By returning to school, we are not only able to uncover the histories of what has taken place there, but what has taken place to get there. As an institution steeped in the histories of colonization and imperialism, the school acts as a conduit to the past—the past that is taught and the past that is maintained. What we have learned is just as important as how we have come to arrive.

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[272] I'm advised if I don't walk in graduation I'll regret it. I have never regretted it.

In bringing to life (and death) the haunting of Taiwan's White Terror to Greenwood High School, *Detention* challenges us to consider the ways historical events have impacted our own personal histories and how the pasts that are taught, suppressed, or maintained continue to haunt our institutions and our lives. We come to embody these haunting histories and our presence carries with it the sociohistorical circumstances that have led us to this point. Like living ghosts, histories that have been suppressed, erased, or forgotten live on through the ku-mo traces the very existence of people leaves behind. While these hauntings may not be legible to traditional conceptions of knowledge production, they persist regardless—an invisible specter of personal and familial histories that is always just beyond the sight of canonical history. After all, the White Terror did not cease to exist when Wei became pardoned or as the history became more abstract, distant, or hidden; indeed, the decaying halls of his former high school show not an institution that has disappeared but one whose presence grows ever stronger as the veneer of its benevolence crumbles to dust.

6. Culinary Claiming
The Politics of Authenticity in the Creation of a Culinary Canon

> *"How did I not think about boba until now? I feel like a failure. You're gonna write this up and you're gonna be like, 'I interviewed Thomas and he did not think about boba until 50 minutes—53 minutes into the conversation.' [Laughs]"*
>
> – Thomas

Wendy is rocking her baby in her arms as we reminisce about Taiwanese beef noodle soup (牛肉麵). Though it was introduced by mainland Chinese immigrants into an island where eating beef was previously uncommon, it has quickly become synonymous as a national dish of Taiwan. She recalls, "And so I only kind of just realized [it's Taiwanese]. I kind of just thought… beef noodle soup is at any Chinese restaurant but then one time we were in San Francisco in Chinatown and just walking about and went to stop at some place to eat and I couldn't figure out what I wanted. I asked for beef noodle soup and the woman was like, 'We're not a Taiwanese restaurant. We don't have that here.'… And I was like, 'Oh, alright. Oops.' So that kind of triggered a kind of 'Oh yeah, I guess that's Taiwanese, apparently.'" In that moment of culinary confusion, food became a site of constructing a coherent idea of the cultural and culinary boundaries between Taiwan and China and navigating a complex history of Taiwan—one that is constantly negotiating influences from centuries of successive waves of colonialism and immigration.

Throughout this project, I have argued that the transnational rhetorical nation-building of Taiwan has been mediated through culture and the culture industry: from foreign policy to the census, from popular music to sitcoms to video games. The creation of the category of ethnic food is yet another cultural site to negotiate how Taiwan is visible, to construct the boundaries of a Taiwanese-ness, and to legitimize the concept of a Taiwanese nation-state. And this process of culinary nation-building reflects a larger question of what Taiwanese sovereignty is allowed to be, and offers us space to question a normative conception of culinary authenticity or national sovereignty altogether. In my interviews with second-generation Taiwanese Americans in the South Bay, food was often at the forefront of cultural connections to Taiwan and served as a key form of rhetorical nation-building for the island. Whether it was the focal point of childhood memories traveling to Taiwan or a primary connection point to family and ethnic identity, food in many ways mediated a conception of Taiwan and a Taiwanese-ness. This is perhaps unsurprising. If we are, as the platitude goes, what we eat, then the construction of a supposed authentic or genuine cultural identity is based in part on the act of consumption.

I argue these politics of food and the ways that it interacts with discourses of nation-building manifests into a kind of culinary claiming, or the practice of attributing specific sociohistorical origins to food in ways that rhetorically legitimize a conception of the nation-state. This rhetorical nation-building can be seen in how we claim food and

locations as authentically Taiwanese in discourse, food media, and recipe books to take up space both in the world and on the dinner table. Creating a canon of Taiwanese food necessarily means that there is a Taiwan that it belongs to; there must be a Taiwan for there to be Taiwanese food. This is where cultural labor is performed, where a couple drops of 麻辣油 is mixed in with a recognition and narrativization of cultural history. So when one deploys boba or 牛肉麵 as Taiwanese food, there is an implicit understanding of a Taiwan as, at least culturally and historically, distinct from China even if the rhetoric why is unclear. Indeed, while many of my interviewees were quick to acknowledge that a particular dish was an integral part of a Taiwanese culture or national identity, for instance, parsing apart exactly what made it Taiwanese was necessarily a contentious and political process.

The act of constructing a canon of Taiwanese food is necessarily marinated in the discourses of authenticity which scholars like Martin F. Manalansan IV (2013) have previously bitten into. Manalansan identifies authenticity as centering on "the idea of the essence and purity of origins and selfhood that are conventionally understood as unchanging or static."[273] Culinary authenticity, then, is always unintentionally a reference to a perceived prelapsarian palate where distinct cuisines took form in relative isolation without the tainting influences of trade or hybridity. Like a genetic ancestry test, determining culinary authenticity is comparing the present to an imagined past and imposing supposedly objective racial and national meaning to a gradient. It is, in effect, drawing nation-state borders with a kitchen knife.

Manalansan recalls a Filipinx American Christmas dinner where each of the major dishes contained hot dogs as the central protein, which set off a difficult conversation about what constituted authentic Filipinx food. For some of the guests, hot dogs were a low-class protein and not representative of the true cuisine of the Philippines, which would use chorizo. For others, hot dogs were indeed a staple meat introduced by the United States and would be considered "authentic" in the sense that it would commonly be used in the Philippines. And for even others, even chorizo could not be said to be from the Philippines as a result of its origins from Spain. Determining what was *really* authentic Filipinx food, then, was as much a historical project as it was a nationalist one; what ingredients or dishes were claimed as authentic food from the Philippines says as much about what is commonly eaten in the Philippines as it does what raced, classed, and gendered national mythologies one might wish to emphasize. Authenticity, then, is constructed not in the preparation of a dish, but in its consumption; in the words of Manalansan, "authenticity emerges from the shifting standards, conventions, cultural, and class backgrounds of the person authenticating the phenomenon at hand."[274]

It is useful to explore this question of how culinary authenticity is rhetorically supported in the gastronomic discourses of Taiwanese Americans or Taiwanese American food media not because we are searching for an objective answer of how to define authenticity; rather, we are interested in how the discourses of authenticity

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[273] Manalansan, Martin F. IV, "Beyond Authenticity: Rerouting the Filipino Culinary Diaspora," *Eating Asian America*, eds., Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, & Anita Mannur, (NYC: New York University Press, 2013), 290.
[274] *Ibid*.

function as a form of rhetorical nation-building and how it serves both as a useful tool and also a limiting framework. I would like to propose that the culinary claiming in pursuit of authenticity is a microcosm for the academic and political pursuit of Taiwanese sovereignty: a pragmatic and, in some ways, meaningful endeavor that is ultimately trapped by the bounds of recognition and legibility that will always remain just out of reach. Just as we have spent fifty years debating whether a government is a government or an island is an island, the paragraphs of debate under any news article or social media post that references one of Taiwan's National Dishes™ is an ouroboros that would sooner devour itself than reach a static conclusion.

Authenticity is a tool for legitimization through the search for a supposedly objective historical origin in a similar manner as sovereignty is a tool for legitimization through the search for a supposedly objective nation. In both cases, authenticity and sovereignty can never be truly found; they are not objects. They are defined, rhetorically legitimized, constructed, and granted by the very agents who deny them. What I would like to suggest is that in a similar manner to the way this overall project has attempted to decenter the sovereignty debate—to take for granted a sovereign Taiwan and to instead chart the ways Taiwan's impossible sovereignty disrupts the seemingly objective and airtight concepts of nation-states and state recognition—that we attempt to decenter the authenticity debate by circling around it. We ask the question of what authenticity is, not to evaluate the answer but to see what it does and to see the generative ways that Taiwanese Americans can both engage in and subvert normative definitions of authenticity. It is a recognition that there is, and perhaps must be, a way out of authenticity—even as we leverage it for material gain. And it is an acknowledgment that the project is always unfinished, and perhaps its value lies in this unboundedness. For, if we were to actually achieve a normatively defined authenticity or sovereignty, what would we lose in the process?

Exploring this uneasy connection of how Taiwanese Americans rhetorically nation-build through the discourses of authenticity runs the risk of coming across as a condemnation of what Sunaina Maira (2008) describes as self-orientalizing.[275] In this uncharitable reading, it might appear that I am arguing that the culinary claiming of Taiwanese Americans is shallow and that the pursuit of culinary or cultural authenticity is itself a marker of a diasporic anxiety at best or inauthenticity at worst. However, I am not trying to argue that culinary claiming is inherent to Taiwanese American or Asian American rhetoric and that thus any transnational comfort Taiwanese Americans find in Taiwanese food is invalid. For many Asian Americans whose cultural identity is wrapped up with familial cultural traditions and foods living in a United States that shames and mocks perceived racial difference, a tightly-held ownership over cultural foods is an assertion of ethnic and racial pride. Parsing apart the rhetorical substance behind authenticity frameworks that Asian Americans may deploy is not an effort to critique such frameworks as shallow—indeed, as I will argue, all discourses of authenticity are political processes—but instead to explore the generative political work food performs and how this discourse connects the seemingly disparate realms of food and a Taiwanese (non-)nation.

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[275] Maira, Sunaina, "Belly Dancing: Arab-Face, Orientalist Feminism, and U.S. Empire," *American Quarterly* 60.2. 2008: 317-345.

Through analyses of the rhetoric of culinary authenticity from my interviews with second-generation Taiwanese Americans in the South Bay and food media on or by Taiwanese Americans, I analyze the cultural narratives surrounding culinary claiming and authenticity that performs the cultural work of rhetorical nation-building. How do we determine what foods are authentically Taiwanese and how does this legitimize the political existence of Taiwan? How does even this very tool of authenticity trap us within the limits of an ever-unattainable recognition? Within the context of Taiwan, food and foodways are another cultural site where the politics of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty manifest and an authentic transnational Taiwanese-ness is constructed and negotiated. First, I will explain what led me to writing this chapter and the methodology I used to analyze these concepts. Next, I will delve into how scholars have conceptualized the idea of culinary authenticity and its relation to rhetorical nation-state building and sovereignty.

Then, I will explore two major discourses of culinary authenticity that frame the conversation about Taiwanese food and trace the political work these discourses perform. These are *authenticity-as-nostalgia* and *authenticity-as-historical*. In each of these cases, how Taiwanese Americans and other consumers of Taiwanese food conceptualize what authentic Taiwanese food is engage in a larger political process of constructing Taiwan as a legible nation-state through its material culture. And each of these frameworks offer a window into the discursive work authenticity performs and how we might both leverage them and set them aside as simply tools and not goals. Finally, I will close with interrogating the work these discourses of authenticity perform and how we might find a way out of them, even as we deploy them when useful. How we produce food reflects how we produce knowledge, and for a nation which must not exist, the discourse surrounding a constructed canon of authentic Taiwanese food speaks to larger discourses of the nation-state and sovereignty.

Why food?

As my aggrieved yet endlessly patient committee might tell you, I was highly resistant both just to writing about food and to engaging in interviews to collect data about food. This was for several reasons, not the least of which is the potential reinforcement of a racialized connection between Asian Americans and food. From the phenomenon of food descriptors for darker skin tones (particularly in literature or makeup) to the racialization of sexual preference (such as the term, "rice queen"), people of color have long been associated with food in increasingly dehumanizing ways and this is even more pronounced within an Asian American context. Mark Padoongpatt (2017) highlights these ways Asians and Asian Americans are racialized in the United States as indistinguishable from consumable cuisine and ties them to histories of U.S. military invasion and occupation in Asia.[276] Whether through the colonial occupation of Asian nations, the exploitation of Asian labor in the U.S., or the sexualization of Asian women proximal to U.S. military bases, Asians have too often been constructed as objects to be used, imported, exploited, and then deported.[277] In fact, this violent racialization runs so

[276] Padoongpatt, Mark, *Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America*, (Oakland: Univ of California Press, 2017).

[277] Imada, Adria L., *Aloha America: Hula circuits through the US empire*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).; Lee, Erika, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*,

deep that, as Hoang Tan Nguyen (2004) explores, in the case of one of the first notable Asian American gay porn stars Brandon Lee, the consumption of the racialized Asian body in American media was predicated on its association with food. Lee's mythological porn origin story surrounds a likely false story of his tenure as a Chinese food delivery boy sent to a porn shoot where the directors were impressed with the size of his "egg roll."[278] Even at our most vulnerable or exposed, Asian Americans are inseparable from food.

In this way, the association between Taiwanese Americans and food is part of a larger racialized connection that frequently obscures the political and historical factors that "have circumscribed Asians materially and symbolically… in restaurants and other food service and processing industries."[279] It relegates Asians as commodity products that can be sold, bought, and consumed. Several of my interviewees were also hesitant about reinforcing this racial association of Asian-ness with food and found ways to address it on their own terms. For example, when laughing at how different his fond memories in Taiwan were compared to what he expected most would answer—he talked at length about his visits to military and government locations—Matthew apologized, "[*Laughs*] Sorry, no food or night markets for you. Just naval bases."

In this sense, the answer to "why food?" is because food has and continues to be a salient way Asians and Asian Americans have been legible within the United States and as such to ignore food is to ignore a central frame we are seen through, however dehumanizing it may be. And it is because we are linked to food, that our sovereign existence is and has also been linked to food. If the development of a legible Thai American community is in part a result of the colonial relationships the U.S. crafted through culinary contact, what insights does culinary contact have with a cuisine that does not exist?[280] In this way, I am interested in the way Taiwanese Americans express and articulate their relationship with food and how they envision their relationship with themselves and a larger Taiwanese identity. For this chapter, I interviewed eleven Taiwanese Americans who had grown up in or currently live in the San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara Bay Area in California—one of the hotspots of a Taiwanese American immigrant community in the United States—to analyze both how they saw their relationship with Taiwanese food and a Taiwanese diasporic identity.

These conversations were not limited to food, and in fact covered a wide scope of Taiwanese history, racial and ethnic identity, and personal political opinions, but food tended to be an anchoring point that we would return to. I held these interviews, whenever possible, in Taiwanese cafes, like boba shops or shopping centers in the South Bay, to get a sense of the physical spaces we lived in and this often ended up in

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(Oakland: The University of California Press, 1991).; Ngai, Mae M., *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).; Young, Wynn, "Poor Butterfly!," *Amerasia Journal* 17.2 1991: 113-119.; Yung, Judy, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1995).

[278] Nguyen, Hoang Tan "The resurrection of Brandon Lee: The making of a gay Asian American porn star," *Porn Studies* (2004): 223-270.

[279] Ku, Robert Ji-Song, Martin F. Manalansan IV, & Anita Mannur. "An Alimentary Introduction," *Eating Asian America*, eds., Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, & Anita Mannur, (NYC: New York University Press, 2013), 1.

[280] Padoongpatt.

reminiscing on the restaurants and cafes that once existed but had since been shut down. However, because many of my interviewees had since moved—to Taiwan, to Hong Kong, to Canada, or even simply the East Coast—many of our conversations happened over video calls across time zones and oceans. In many ways, the transcontinental and transnational nature of these interviews reflected another constant part of the Taiwanese American experience—a kind of unboundedness that resisted conventional understanding.

But individual interviews would be an insufficient site to analyze the rhetoric that surrounds Taiwanese American food, so I locate another major site of culinary discourse: Asian American food media. Within the context of Asian American food media, these discourses of culinary authenticity intersect with the particular racialization of Asian Americans and diaspora. Lori Kido Lopez (2016) highlights the importance of the image of cultural authenticity for Asian American food bloggers to the marketability of their online personas or recipes.[281] For Lopez, one of the key draws of Asian American food blogs for their audience is the perceived insider knowledge and experience of the Asian American author. Here, food blogs perform the work of national and ethnic identity that both makes legible a population often invisibilized but also reinscribes Asian Americans within the trap of a forever exotic authenticity.

Lopez highlights this preoccupation with Asian American authenticity with Asian food in several ways: through the racial branding of the author or shop owner, through the insertion of personal narratives and histories into the food and through aesthetic decorative decisions. Racial branding, as Lopez defines it is, "a process in which racial identities are carefully managed and packaged for consumption while simultaneously reifying and essentializing racial difference."[282] In other words, racial branding is how Asian American food bloggers frame their racial and ethnic identity as authentic insiders or native informants in order to legitimize the expertise of their perspectives and work. Being authentic affords the expertise to designate what commodities are authentic, and this can be quite profitable for Asian American food bloggers with both Asian and non-Asian audiences. It is, "the business of exposing stories behind their food and elucidating how their food is made, offering an authentic personal connection" between the food and the image of an authentic culture.[283]

Recipe books, too, frequently include lengthy introductory stories and narratives that explain the familial and cultural significance of a particular dish, sometimes with explicit references to how it connects the author with their ethnic identity or pictures that tie the dish to a romantic image of another land. While at its core, recipes are simply a collection of measurements, ingredients, and instructions, these too are "carefully managed and packaged for consumption," with certain ingredients or flavors emphasized, pared down, or substituted depending on the perceived desires of the core audience.[284] What a consumer of recipe books from another culture seeks, then, cannot be contained solely within the recipe; one consumes not just the literal food, but the cultural narratives

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[281] Lopez, Lori Kido, "Asian American Food Blogging as Racial Branding: Rewriting the Search for Authenticity," *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, eds., Shilpa Dave, Leilani Nishime, & Tasha Oren, (NYC: New York University Press, 2016),
[282] Lopez, 159.
[283] Lopez, 156.
[284] *Ibid*., 159.

and aesthetics of authenticity that go along with it. It is almost equally common to find a white person that is utterly disgusted by, say, the Taiwanese delicacy stinky tofu, as it is to find a white person so seduced by the image of cultural literacy and knowledge that only the stinkiest of tofu will do. Much in the same way non-latinx people may loudly sing the praises of a taqueria that makes their own tortillas, outsiders prize the arbitrary standards of perceived authenticity and are willing to pay more to consume it.

This takes us to the politics of authenticity and the ways it structures the larger conversation about sovereignty, particularly for a nation which must not be recognized. Perhaps no other academic concept inspires as much apathy in me as authenticity, and yet like sovereignty I cannot seem to escape it. From the onslaught of Buzzfeed-style listicles and comments on social media to a particularly exasperated conference authenticity roundtable I attended where every participant spoke against the theming of the panel, the concept of authenticity seems ubiquitously loathed and yet endlessly deployed. So, if you will bear with me one last time, let us explore what authenticity has meant, how it can be useful, and why we might, alongside sovereignty, relegate it into a tool and not a goal.

The Politics of Authenticity

"What does cultural authenticity mean to you?"

Though many of the questions I asked in my interviews danced around the question of how a community defines what is a part of its cultural narrative, I quickly discovered explicitly asking how to define cultural authenticity carried with it much more intellectual baggage. The question of cultural authenticity is thorny, to say the least, and engages with the political discourses of identity, culture, and nationalism. Cultural anthropologist Richard Handler (1986) conceptualizes authenticity as a product of a "modern Western world," which deploys an ideology of possessive individualism to reaffirm a broader nationalism through the consumption of fetishized objects.[285] In the cases of both museum artifacts and ethnic cuisine, Handler is interested in how these presumably authentic objects affirm our own sense of authenticity. This is explicitly a national project and in response to the "anxiety [that] is particularly apparent where national or ethnic groups find themselves in a struggle for recognition… national sovereignty or equal rights," the politics of authenticity "seeks to prove the existence of a nation… [by defining] the cultural and historical substance or attributes upon which national existence can be said to rest."[286] In other words, engaging in the politics of authenticity for non-nations is about rhetorically building a nation from its material culture.

In response to Handler's intranational view on authenticity, Arjun Appadurai (1986) conceptualizes authenticity as primarily the product of those outside of the nation and uses cuisine as his site of interrogation. For Appadurai, authenticity "measures the degree to which something is more or less what it *ought* to be" and thus is less often the chief concern of what he calls "native participants in a culinary tradition, except when they (and the food) are far from home."[287] What he identifies here is the particular ways in which questions of cultural authenticity are embedded both within the politics of

[285] Handler, Richard, "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today* 2.1. 1986: 2.
[286] Handler, 3.
[287] Appadurai, Arjun, "On Culinary Authenticity," *Anthropology Today* 2.4. 1986: 25.

diaspora and within conceptions of external authority. If the determination of (in)authenticity occurs in the space *between* nations—in export, in tourism, in translation—rather than in the creation of the object itself, then perhaps what is most fruitful for a discussion on authenticity is not a ruling on what is or is not authentic—for instance, determining the historical veracity of boba's Taiwanese origins—but instead what political work authenticity accomplishes. Who is afforded the ability to determine authenticity—whether it is the chef or the diner, the native or the tourist—has much to say about the ways foodways are embedded in the discourses of nationalism, diaspora, and the nation-state. While we retroactively apply static cultural labels to cuisine, the actual historical legacies of dishes often resist easy categorization. For example, the fortune cookie, which has become a staple of Chinese American restaurants and is heavily associated in the United States with Chinese food in general, likely has its origins either in Japanese *tsujiura senbei* or perhaps California restaurants.

There is value in both Handler and Appadurai's conceptions of culinary authenticity, and I would like to build on both here. It could be argued that, in a sense, all food is fusion food. We often think about history in discrete bits, much like comic book titles under the same company; monarchs, countries, and regions seem to exist in pristine isolation from each other except in momentous crossover conflicts before returning largely to the status quo. However, this way of thinking belies the constant interregional trade, conflict, and cultural exchange that has been consistent through virtually all human history. In this way, to determine the origins of a food is as much a project of social memory as it is history. Italian pasta, for example, has been alternatively mythologized as having come from Asia alongside Marco Polo, from the Greeks, or from Arabs. For our purposes, what matters is not which of these narratives is most historically supported, but the kinds of political work these culinary mythologies perform, and what pasta's origins say about our conceptions of nations. When we easily attribute pasta as we know it to Italy, there is a recognition of Italy as a generative site and that, whether or not its ingredients have been imported or inspired by other cultures, there is something particular about Italian pasta that has taken on its own brand inextricably linked to the concept of an Italian nation. How we historicize and narrativize food is often done through this lens of nation-states, even if the existence of these states as we know them are inapplicable to the time period.

Mapping foods to their locations of origins, then, is a process of drawing boundary lines on a gradient—of arbitrarily deciding where and when something came to be. Here we might think of the eternal thought experiment of the chicken and the egg. While it is possible to take this paradox at its most literal of terms—if all chickens come from chicken eggs and all chicken eggs come from chickens, there is no possible solution—the thought experiment points to the ways humans categorize spectrums into binaries. What makes this paradox impossible are the limits of our categorization system; what we define as a chicken from a vast range of evolutionary variance determines the boundaries of the question. Just as the chicken and the egg is, at its heart, a question of where the arbitrary line defining what constitutes a true chicken is, the question of authentic cuisine is necessarily a retroactive process of determining where and when a food item began.

Self-proclaimed "angry food [blogger]" Mandy Lee (2019) dissects the messiness of authenticity with cutting, sardonic precision in her cookbook *The Art of Escapism Cooking*. As a young Taiwanese, Lee recounts being "fed through both mother's milk and the stringently designed public education system a heavy dose of negative propaganda against 'mainland China,'" and her cross-continental move from New York to Beijing precipitates a transformation in how she sees the production of food as an escape. Lee identifies the narrativizing inherent to the production of food when she notices she "stopped making meals but, instead, [began] making fantasies."[288] Escapism cooking, for Lee, is an antidepressant not a comforting reconnection to culture, and this perspective tears apart the supposed sacredness of cultural cooking as a kind of homecoming bound by strict adherence to presumably "true" national recipes.

While Lee recognizes the pragmatic existence of cuisine as a marker of national identity—she laments that "if somebody says Taiwanese beef noodle soup [is a culinary ambassador of Taiwanese national identity] one more time, I'm going to cry over my boba tea,"—she irreverently rejects the politics of authenticity as it pertains to her recipes. For example, Lee incorporates cheese soup into her Din Tai Fung-inspired dumpling recipe as a substitution for creating a time-consuming stock aspic and is unapologetic about this culinary innovation. Likewise, though she recognizes that "Taiwanese people… are about to skewer [her] on a spike" for her "sacrilegious sedition" of trying to introduce *rouzao* to a non-Taiwanese audience by using Italian meatballs and parmesan cheese, she is ultimately irreverent to perceived cultural or national calls for a strict adherence to "traditional" ingredients.[289] She recognizes her dishes, such as her Bastardized Hainan Chicken Rice, as valuable not despite a perceived inauthenticity but as a result of it. With total disregard for the "national prides" of dishes prized for their "integrity and authenticity," she asserts her "bastard version, vile and misbegotten… delivers far more complexity and sustenance than one of more legitimate blood."[290]

However, her critique of culinary authenticity is not limited solely to an Asian diasporic lens. In her recipe for truffle lard-infused ramen, she lambasts the culinary impetus for authentic ingredients: "get over yourselves, you narcissistic pricks. So we can't like or use stuff that's not real now? Especially when the real shit can cost thousands of dollars per pound? So what if truffle oil has nothing to do with real truffles?... As long as you fucking like it—and the irony is that plenty of chefs liked it a lot before they realized the facts—then what is the fucking problem?"[291] Similarly, in her recipe for pizzas, she argues,

> "Pizza has the potential to be Italy's ramen, a democratic arena of creativity, progressivism, and tolerance, if only the Italians could just chill the fuck out about it. Is it really pizza? Who says so, and who cares? Neither the tomato itself nor baking stuff on top of a fermented dough was an original Italian idea, and if the Italians from a few hundred years ago were dumb enough to give a shit about that, then there wouldn't even be such a thing as pizza today. All the dishes we

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[288] Lee, Mandy, *The Art of Escapism Cooking: A Survival Story, with Intensely Good Flavors*, (NYC: William Morrow Cookbooks, 2019), 3.
[289] Lee, 207.
[290] Lee, 225.
[291] Lee, 97.

> eat today were fusion at some point in history. And to say that this progression should stop and freeze at an arbitrary point for the sake of national pride is both dangerous and dumb-sounding."[292]

What Lee articulates here is the way even the idea of authenticity upholds nationalist concepts of state borders and sovereignty. To police the borders of what constitutes a pizza is, in a very real way, to police the spatial and temporal borders of what constitutes Italy—to determine which ingredients are native enough to be part of a mythologized origin and which are too invasive to be anything other than fusion food. It is perhaps for this reason that no amount of Asian American clamoring to disown Panda Express as inauthentic Americanized Chinese cuisine will accomplish anything other than branding Asian Americans themselves as inauthentically Chinese. Chinese American ingredients and dishes can never not be foreign to a white American palate and thus can never be claimed as an authentic part of American cuisine; it lays outside of the gastronomic borders of the United States and thus must be foreign—Chinese.

In a 2015 Buzzfeed video *Chinese People Try Panda Express For The First Time*, for example, first and second-generation Chinese Americans taste-test various dishes from the American Chinese fast food chain Panda Express and respond with their thoughts on the flavor or authenticity of the dish.[293] Many of the commenters of the video remarked that the second generation participants would dismiss food as inauthentic Chinese food that the first generation participants may compliment as authentic, including one who remarks the 炒麵 is about the same as Chinese 炒麵. Buzzfeed's audience were quick to jump on this perceived discrepancy, with many critiquing the second-generation participants for being rude, snobby, and too American to know what real Chinese food is, while their older counterparts were framed as more authentic, and thus more qualified to speak on the topic.

These interpretations are not insinuated; they could not be more explicit. One commenter under the username Andy Martin noted, "You can tell who's Chinese like from China, and who's Chinese like from San Francisco. 😂😂" with replies adding on, "the Chinese people who are from San Francisco are trying to look like actually Chinese people." Here, authenticity is embodied solely by the first generation of Chinese American immigrants, and every successive generation is rendered an incomplete facsimile of the first—bearing only the physical racialization but devoid of a true essence of Chineseness. Trying to claim authority over what constitutes authentic Chinese culture as a second-gen Chinese American, then, is worthy of mockery. Implicit in this construction, is that Asian Americans born in the United States are neither able to claim expertise or authority in the culture they were born in or the culture they have ancestry in. They are not "actually Chinese," nor would they be thought of as all-American in any other context.

What the construction of the video and its corresponding comment reactions point to is which bodies are given the authority to declare something authentic. While initially it may appear that the power to authenticate lies within first-generation Asian Americans, it is actually non-Asian audiences who determine what foods are considered authentic

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[292] Lee, 214.

[293] BuzzFeedVideo, "Chinese People Try Panda Express For The First Time," YouTube Video. Posted January 2015. https://youtu.be/Fo59LlkTDe4.

through the bodies they deem authentic. As one commenter usernamed Cancer Police articulates, "Hmm whose opinion should I value more… The wannabe critic teen who was clearly born in America or the elderly grandpa who is speaking in actual Chinese and most likely lived in China for most of his life." The opinions of American born Chinese Americans are not to be taken seriously because they lack the experience of growing up in China—however, the authority of non-Asians to make the judgment about who and what is authentic goes unquestioned. This is not, though, truly an act of non-Asians deferring to the perspectives of first-generation Asian Americans. First-generation Asian Americans are the embodiments of a white-defined authenticity only insofar as they support whites' pre-conceived conclusions—which is to say, that whatever versions or aspects of Asia they consume are authentic and that their consumption of it is appreciated.

What disrupts the simplistic narratives of an insecure inauthentic second-generation and a more authentic first-generation in the Buzzfeed video are the many instances when first-generation Chinese American participants critiqued the food. Particularly, several of the Mandarin-speaking participants remarked that unlike Panda Express, "Chinese people don't have egg rolls" or that some foods are better suited to an American palate and do not resemble their idea of traditional Chinese food. One first-generation participant flatly answers a question of whether she would eat it again with a simple "不 (no)". Also unmentioned is when any of the American-born participants say they like any of the foods or deem it "pretty authentic." These instances do not fit the narrative of a content first-generation and an uppity American-born second-generation that help to legitimize non-critical consumption of Asia by non-Asians and so must be disregarded. What much of the audience discourse centered on was less a complex and nuanced breakdown of what authenticity might mean or consist of in different contexts, and more a desire for validation that however they already consume Asia is correct and genuine. It must be authentic because it can never be American in much the same way that Asian Americans must be foreign because they can never be domestic.

This dynamic mirrors the gastronomical Orientalism of Akihiko Hirose and Kay Kei-Ho Pih (2011), which describes the process in which the presence of racialized bodies increases the perceived authenticity of food, especially for outgroup diners.[294] For Hirose and Pih, culinary authenticity is necessarily tied to a racialized Other when constructed by out-group members and relies upon racial ideologies that are inextricably linked to the colonial conceptions of modernity and development. Out-group consumers interested in a kind of cosmopolitanism through consumption fetishize food conceptualized as foreign, strange, and exotic. Consuming ethnic food, then, becomes simultaneously a process of elevating the consumer as a progressive *food adventurer*, as Lisa Heldke (2011) argues, as well as a process of constructing ethnic food as deviant and alien; it is only though the devaluation of ethnic food that food adventurers can gain status through their willingness to consume.[295] It is through this process that "food is dis-embedded from its original cultural practice and meaning and transplanted and

[294] Hirose, Akihiko & Kay Kei-Ho Pih, "'No Asians working here': racialized otherness and authenticity in gastronomical Orientalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34.9: 2011: 1482-1501.
[295] Heldke, Lisa, "'Let's Eat Chinese!': Reflections on Cultural Food Colonialism," *Gastronomica* 1.2: 2011: 76-79.

transformed instead into someone else's cultural capital."[296] This transplantation is necessarily dependent on the idea of an essential authentic and exotic culture. For Hirose and Pih, the gastronomical Orientalism of the restaurant-goer is as much about the exotification of food as it is the racialization of Asians. Something is only exotic if it is authentically foreign; and if Asians are perpetually foreign, "Asian exoticism is… highly commoditized and marketed in the form of cultural consumption… [and] the decisive factor that continues to authenticate the otherness of Asian Americans is their racialized alterity which is supported by the discourse of Orientalism." In other words, the racialization of Asian Americans as inassimilable and perpetually foreign bears striking resemblances to the process of defining ethnic food as authentic, in that both rely on the creation and essentialization of a racialized Other as foreign and distinct from the national body.

There is a political goal, then, in branding a food as authentic (or radically inauthentic), regardless of who is doing the branding. Culturally claimed food reifies the existence of a discrete foreign nation or a perceived motherland that not only validates one's own identity but also legitimizes the nation of ancestry. Claimed food symbolically creates the nation that it is said to be derived from. Growing up, there was little distinction for me between what foods were Taiwanese or Chinese—much less a distinction between foods from Taipei or Tainan, Szechuan or Hunan. The process of parsing out the history and associations behind regional food differences was as much a political process of asserting a Taiwanese identity as it was a practical process of trying to find where to get 滷肉飯. In this way, the act of identifying a dish or ingredient as Taiwanese is inherently a political act of claiming that there is a Taiwan. As Esther said, "Even saying that you are Taiwanese American is a bit of a political act in itself, I would say. Because why not just say, 'I'm Chinese American?'" In this light, claiming Taiwanese—whether as personal identity or to create a culinary canon—is necessarily a political act of making legible a coherent Taiwanese national sovereignty through culture. Ultimately, the question of what constitutes authentic Taiwanese food is the question of, "why not just say… Chinese American?"

Here, we might use the discursive unboundedness of authenticity and its tether to nationalist discourses of sovereignty as a way to consider the political pursuit of sovereignty. Aihwa Ong (1999) reconceptualizes sovereignty not as a fixed or static concept but as a highly flexible and increasingly differentiated idea molded by globalization and late capitalism.[297] The logics of transnationalism and global capital, then, point to the insufficiencies of sovereignty as defined by nation-state borders or economic independence. Yet the vision of sovereignty, like authenticity, that we have so often reached for is one that is bounded and contained in the very way that Taiwan cannot be. I would like to demonstrate the possibilities leaving behind sovereignty grants us through first showing the conditional benefits and limitations of its sister concept of authenticity, and then expanding these limits to the larger question of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty.

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[296] Hirose & Pih, 1484.

[297] Ong, Aihwa, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*," (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

Within the context of culinary claiming, I have identified two major rhetorical patterns in how Taiwanese Americans attribute authenticity to food in my interviews and in media—as a result of personal and familial connection (*authenticity-as-nostalgia*) and as mediated through historical processes of immigration and transformation (*authenticity-as-historical*). Notably, these rhetorical patterns are not mutually exclusive; many of my interviewees deployed both at different points. In this sense, categorizing these rhetorical strategies is not to position them as incompatible or at odds with one another, but instead to demonstrate some of the complex ways these discourses interact to construct an authentic Taiwanese culinary canon. Perhaps there is no clear answer to the question of authenticity, but the ways we navigate and negotiate this concept reveals much about the processes of culinary claiming and Taiwanese American transnational rhetorical nation-building. So I ask again: what does cultural authenticity mean to you?

"It has to do with, like, genuine importance to you."

When I met with Penelope at a coffee shop in the South Bay Area, she recounted fond memories of the food in Taiwan and the personal connection that this food brought to a conception of being Taiwanese. Part of what made her feel connected to her ancestry were the nostalgic memories of street food, *lu rou fan*, and boba. However, what made something authentically Taiwanese was a more difficult question, and one that she worked through as we talked, "So first, I'm going to start with—I think there is a distinction between the authentic and inauthentic. I don't think I'm the type of person that would say, 'Oh, if a person is doing it or seeing it or using it or feeling it or eating it, then therefore it's authentic just by itself. I don't think that that's necessarily true… It has to do with, like, genuine importance to you."

Like many of my interviewees, Penelope located authenticity in the realm of personal importance and nostalgia. That is, what makes certain foods authentically Taiwanese, rather than Chinese, is the positive memories and feelings that are elicited from the dish and that are attached to "genuine" personal experiences with Taiwanese family in and out of Taiwan. This discourse of authenticity places the origin of authenticity in personal and familial memory. Culinary authenticity is about memories of food linked to familial experiences, such as growing to love stinky tofu, getting *lu rou fan* in a typhoon, or trying to get *niu rou mian* in a Chinese restaurant and being shot down. What makes Taiwanese food Taiwanese is not necessarily Taiwanese culinary history, but a nostalgic reminiscing of familial history. For an *authenticity-as-nostalgia* framework, a culinary canon of authentic Taiwanese food is built through personal and familial meaning and importance. Often this diasporic identity is framed within the idea of Manalansan's *diasporic return*, where "the sensual experiences of food often become events of both imagined and real diasporic homecomings" and this food "transports eaters to places and times associated with happiness or unhappiness."[298] In this sense, the cultural connection afforded by authentic food is the affective effects of food—that is, how food makes us *feel*. What is authentic is what makes us feel connected to home—even, or especially, if that home is a home we have not been to for some time or might never return.

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[298] Manalansan, 292.

An *authenticity-as-nostalgia* framework is one of the reasons why food is such a visible and important cultural touchpoint for many second-generation Taiwanese Americans. Many of my interviewees expressed their degrees of confidence in Mandarin or Hokkien language fluency through their ability to read or order off of Taiwanese menus, and those that spoke some Hokkien were often limited to food-related terms and phrases, such as the names of particular dishes. In response to her Hokkien language fluency, Penelope laughed, "Very fittingly I know how to say, *jiah pong* ['Let's eat']—because that's what all of us learn." It is taken for granted, and often pragmatically factual, that Taiwanese Americans who have limited Hokkien fluency are primarily familiar with food and eating-related terms, which highlights the arena of food as a primary site of cultural connection.

Tammy, for instance, noted, "I think the food culture is very strong [in Taiwan]… Everybody you meet who goes to Taiwan is like, 'Why do you go to Taiwan? Go there to eat.'… I think that's a very distinct part of the culture." What Tammy articulates is the perceived centrality of food for Taiwan, particularly from the perspective of Taiwanese diaspora. In this light, to be immersed in Taiwanese culture—or even to be Taiwanese—is to consume foods claimed as Taiwanese, such as *lu rou fan*, *niu rou mian*, or *chou dou fu*. The authenticity of the food is then tied to the authenticity of the consumer. Taiwanese eat Taiwanese food, and Taiwanese food are that which are eaten by Taiwanese. For Penelope, being Taiwanese meant "starting with food, immediate recognition and love for all things that are Taiwanese… or like, really loving stinky tofu, really just appreciating the Taiwanese food and understanding some of those distinctions and just like having those sit in a special place in your heart." What defines Taiwanese cuisine is food that has "a special place" in the hearts of Taiwanese Americans.

Wendy similarly recalls fond memories of Taiwanese wax apples as a way her extended family connects with her and a way she connects with Taiwan: "I love those [wax apples], and my aunt knows I love those. So, whenever I go back, my aunt will buy—she doesn't usually buy them—but she'll buy a bunch and just wash and cut them for me all the time. So, I sit there and eat it all day every day that I'm there. So, that to me is very Taiwanese." Tammy, too, had specific culinary memories with her extended family that helped to define Taiwanese food: "My grandma on my dad's side used to make hand-pulled noodles and dumplings… when you're a kid, you kind of take it for granted… and now I kind of regret we didn't tape her more. [*Laughs*] Cause now it's sort of like a rare trait to have especially when you don't live very close to Taiwan. You want those flavors and you want those tastes and home and where you came from."

In these cases, the importance of food, and what helped to link it to an idea of Taiwan, was the personal importance for Taiwanese families rather than the specific culinary history of a dish; Tammy, in particular was quick to note that that branch of her family originally immigrated from China, but the memory is nostalgic of Taiwan nonetheless. What made food authentically Taiwanese was the formative memories of eating it in Taiwan with family. It is as Appadurai says, "when [natives] (and the food) are far from home," what brings us close to home is food.[299]

[299] Appadurai, 25.

This rhetoric can be seen within Taiwanese American food writing as well, which often prioritizes personal and familial connections to cuisine as evidence of the food's or the author's authenticity. Cathy Erway's (2015) *The Food of Taiwan* is a recipe book that markets itself as "an insider's look at Taiwanese cooking" that intersperses Taiwanese recipes with familial histories, photographs of Taiwan's landscape and cities, and historical overviews of the creation of the modern Taiwan. Described as a mixture of "cultural insight as well as instruction" for the cuisine of "an island nearly obsessed with food," Erway's recipe book serves both as a collection of recipes as well as a primer on the history and cultural context of its cuisine.[300] Erway's familial and cultural memories of Taiwan served as an impetus to write her cookbook. For Erway, "when deciding to write this book, it really comes down to this picture. The proud, hopeful faces of my grandparents holding my infant mother are profound to me. I will never forget the courage and audacity that my forebears demonstrated when they decided to move away from their families to a strange island, in which their future was unknown."[301] By deploying the image of her grandparents and their immigration history as a catalyst for her own personal exploration of a Taiwanese identity through her cookbook, Erway explicitly links familial histories and memories with a cultural reclamation of Taiwanese food.

For example, she begins her recipe on stinky tofu with the anecdote, "For anyone who's ever been to Taiwan, you'll know the smell. You'll hear the words. And you may even try a taste. But unless you're truly from Taiwan, you might not understand the incredible allure of this classic street food snack: stinky tofu."[302] Here, stinky tofu is tied directly to a concept of an authentic Taiwaneseness. A person can only have a true connection to stinky tofu if "you're truly from Taiwan;" otherwise, she insinuates, it may just be too foreign of a food or you too disconnected from a genuine Taiwanese identity. Erway is quick to acknowledge, however, that stinky tofu is not unique to Taiwan and has its analogous delicacies in other parts of Asia, such as Japanese natto. But this is tempered with the assertion that "nowhere else but in Taiwan does stinky tofu hold such commonplace appeal."[303] By asserting the uniquely Taiwaneseness of this form of stinky tofu, Erway is implicitly branding the food as derived from an authentic Taiwanese culture which legitimizes the existence of Taiwan as a sociopolitical site. Though she suggests stinky tofu may have originated in Beijing, the sheer love of stinky tofu in Taiwan is enough to claim it as uniquely Taiwanese.

An *authenticity-as-nostalgia* framework defines Taiwanese food based on what Taiwanese Americans grew eating up, what familial memories serve as sentimental connections to trips to Taiwan, and what genuine personal importance they place on it. In this sense, Taiwanese food is what Taiwanese people love to eat and this rhetorically constructs a coherent community based on conceptions of shared memories and culinary touchpoints. It is imagined that the affective culinary memories of Taiwanese Americans

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[300] Erway, Cathy, *The Food of Taiwan: Recipes from the Beautiful Island*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), ePub edition.
[301] Erway, 21.
[302] Erway, 212.
[303] *Ibid*.

from Taiwan are roughly analogous to each other and at least partially distinct from China, which reinforces the notion of a coherent and culturally distinct Taiwan.

While this is indeed a useful rhetorical framework to address the nebulous concept of authenticity, its limiting factor is the way it excludes Taiwanese diaspora without strong connections to family in Taiwan. By positioning familial memories and meaning as the validating factor for a genuine Taiwanese identity or connection, we draw the boundaries of Taiwan over those who have either been to Taiwan or have close familial relationships in Taiwan. The risk for a solely *authenticity-as-nostalgic* framework is the gradual disappearance of these cultural connections as the wave of first- and second- generation Taiwanese Americans that make up the majority of Taiwanese American communities are replaced by later generations with less direct connections to the island or family that live there. Positing authenticity as personal renders it highly precarious, and also potentially serves to delegitimize large subsets of current and future Taiwanese Americans. As Erway says, if *chou dou fu* is appreciated only by those who are "truly from Taiwan," what does that mean for Taiwanese Americans who do not feel connected to these cultural culinary markers? With that in mind, perhaps a framework of authenticity that is grounded in something more concrete might offer another perspective.

"Maybe it's more of the story of how it got to be where it was and how it got to be."

While Wendy's realization centered on *niu rou mian* being categorized as a specifically Taiwanese dish as opposed to a more broadly Chinese dish, Susie saw *niu rou mian* as a questionable example of Taiwanese cuisine as a result of its historical ties to the 1949 KMT retreat into the island. For Susie, "*niu rou mian* is one of those things where I'm like really on the fence cause I'm like, I get that it's Taiwanese. But it's also to me a *waisheng* thing. So it *is* Taiwanese but it's also not. To me that's a distinct bucket that's separate from *o a chian* [蚵仔煎]." Here, Susie deploys the discourse of *authenticity-as-historical*, a rhetoric that frames culinary authenticity as a reflection of Taiwan's complex historical lineages. In this light, authenticity is not defined by the nostalgia of food that might connect a Taiwanese American to Taiwan, but broader historical changes and movement of food. This, of course, also requires a national narrativizing of the origins of foods and nation-states; determining whether a dish is truly Taiwanese requires determining when and where constitutes a true Taiwan. In other words, to determine that *niu rou mian* is a liminally Taiwanese food requires a conception of an essential Taiwan that existed prior to the KMT retreat into the island and the creation of a modern Republic of China.

Many of the second-generation Taiwanese Americans I interviewed in the Bay Area grappled with negotiating a complex lineage of Taiwan's colonial history. For Taiwanese Americans with more of a knowledge and investment in the political history of Taiwan prior to the ROC, historical literacy was a particularly important part of a Taiwanese American identity. The *benshengren* and 外省人 *waishengren* distinction, as defined by those with Han Chinese ancestry dating from waves prior to or after the ROC government moved into Taiwan, respectively, encapsulates some of the difficult histories of Taiwan that are often obscured by the ease of the label Taiwanese. In much the same way that Susie describes mainland Chinese people's unawareness "that Taiwan has a separate identity, has a separate history," she identifies that a similar conflation of history

happens between *benshengren* and *waishengren*: "A couple months ago, one of [my *waishengren* friends] was like, 'I recently found out there's a thing called 228' and I'm like 'Yes, that's something I've been well aware of for a very long time ago because my family's been a victim of that.' So yeah, just like for me it's probably very intimately tied to the history more than anything else."

Niu rou mian, a common Taiwanese dish and perhaps the dish most associated with Taiwan, is in a complex position with regards to the question of cultural and culinary authenticity. Believed to be an invention of KMT military villages, *niu rou mian* blends flavor and spice palettes from several Chinese regions into an iconic beef national dish for a (non-)nation which traditionally did not eat beef. Prior to the 1949 influx of the KMT and the ensuing occupation of the Republic of China, cows were viewed as primarily strong production animals that were important to the maintenance of farms, rather than as food themselves. As a result, common sources of protein on the island prior to the ROC were primarily chicken and pork—which had little value in terms of farm labor—and seafood, and this is reflected in the broad array of dishes in Taiwan that are built around coastal seafood flavors, including Japanese-influenced sashimi.

Susie's separation of *niu rou mian* from the construction of an authentic Taiwan, then, performs the rhetorical labor of denaturalizing the history of the Republic of China as the sole history of Taiwan and prioritizing the history of Hoklo Taiwanese, whose oyster-based dishes tended to be high on my interviewees' lists of authentically Taiwanese foods. Matthew, too, remarked that while *niu rou mian* was a typically Taiwanese dish, its "cultural origins… [could be] the subject of another dissertation." Through this lens, what makes food culturally authentic is its historical links to another imagined community of Taiwan. This is, perhaps, the inverse of defining authenticity via personal history; instead of rhetorically building a nation through the existence of material culture, it is defining material culture through the framework of a nation.

To categorize, say, *o a chian* or *o a mi sua* as more (or a different kind of) Taiwanese as *niu rou mian* is to rhetorically position a Hoklo Taiwan as a more authentic or essential Taiwan to the contemporary ROC Taiwan. This is not necessarily a judgment or devaluation of a Taiwan defined by the ROC, but instead a narrativization of Taiwanese history that chooses a different starting point. Susie, for instance, is quick to note, "I'd probably never argue that my particular cultural history is the one that is, that should prevail because there's also—I would never say that the people who have lived here since 1945 don't have a place on the island because it's part of their story. Like it's not like, just because you were the first one there makes it so that the entire island's history is yours. Even my ancestors are very much the oppressors of certain other groups that were there before."

Part of this focus on a pre-ROC Taiwanese history often involves defining an authentic Taiwan through its status as a former colony of Japan. As a result of its imperial occupation by Japan, Taiwan has accumulated a myriad of Japanese influences in its food, culture, and architecture and these persist to this day. While the Japanese occupiers relegated Taiwanese to second-class citizenship and largely viewed Taiwanese as comparatively uncivilized subjects, this period has been remembered by many Taiwanese—especially those antagonistic towards the later occupying ROC government—as ultimately positive given the institution of Japanese infrastructure and

resources.[304] One of the most common answers from my interviewees to my question on what is distinct about Taiwanese culture was the appreciation of Japanese culture. Esther identifies this Japanophilia as unique to Taiwan, "I don't think any other Asian country views Japan with as much of a level of favorableness as Taiwan does." Yichun, too, mentioned her grandma continues to speak Japanese and remains pro-Japan.

Matthew identifies the legacies of Japanese occupation and Taiwan's unique favorability of Japan in the realm of Taiwanese media. On the differences between cinema trends in different Asian film industries he notes, "Another thing is perceptions of Japan, whereby Taiwanese media and cultural output and popular sentiment have a far more sympathetic and nostalgic and also positive view of Japan, whereby you have popular movies like *Cape No. 7* that romanticize connection between Taiwan and Japan. There's many other examples of this. But then in China, on the other hand, you have the whole subgenres of anti-Japanese war dramas which are super sensationalized and trashy." Here, romanticized ideas of Japan's influence on Taiwan and how it sets it apart from China pervade the remnants of Japanese occupation on the island.

This discourse of a uniquely Taiwanese appreciation for Japan manifests in the realm of culinary claiming through the multiple origin stories of 波霸奶茶 or boba. Boba is a Taiwanese drink that was invented in the late 1980s that has since spread throughout Asia and into the Western world. There are two primary origin stories of the beverage. One asserts that the tea was created by a teahouse in Tainan and the other claims a Taichung teahouse drew inspiration from Japanese cold coffee. While it might be assumed that a narrative of boba as endemic to Taiwan might be the only origin myth rhetorically supporting a distinct Taiwanese culture and nation, a boba origin narrative that locates Japan as its original inspiration actually performs a similar rhetorical maneuver away from mainland China. It emphasizes a colonial history separate from Taiwan's relationship from China. Indeed, this was a dominant fear for the Republic of China government when they first began asserting their government regime on the island in 1945. The concern that Taiwanese had become too "Japanned" and may no longer be loyal to China or capable of reassimilation was an important reason for keeping pre-ROC Taiwanese out of government and emphasizing any relationship with Japan plays into this Taiwanese narrative.[305] In this way, locating the origin of boba in Japanese influence does not delegitimize a Taiwanese culture or nation-state, but instead reifies existing discourses of Taiwan's unique Japanophilic identity that separates it from China. However, while both boba origin narratives support a Taiwanese national culture or identity, they rhetorically function differently. Framing boba as endemic to Taiwan performs the political labor of positioning Taiwan as a culturally generative place, while framing boba as a legacy of Japanese influence draws on distinctions with China as a result of a history of colonization. In either case, the culinary mythologies of boba are used to affirm the historical, cultural, and culinary existence of Taiwan and the attribution of boba's increasingly popularity in, for example, the United States to a growing Taiwanese cultural influence rhetorically support this. The growth of a Taiwanese

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[304] Phillips, Steven, "Between Assimilation and Independence," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015).

[305] Wang, Peter Chen-main, "A Bastion Created, a Regime Reformed, an Economy Reengineered, 1949-1970," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 320-338.

American (and increasingly Asian American) boba scene perpetuates this culinary claiming. As Thomas's sheepish realization that he had forgotten about boba indicates—("If there's any dish that will probably cause the most white—actually, I would say boba too. I would say probably—boba's a pretty big export, pretty significantly, yeah pretty uniquely Taiwanese. How did I not think about boba until now? I feel like a failure. You're gonna write this up and you're gonna be like, 'I interviewed Thomas and he did not think about boba until 50 minutes—53 minutes into the conversation [*Laughs*]")—boba has become a significant part of a Taiwanese American cultural identity and an important touchpoint to anchor a conception of a generative Taiwan.

The *authenticity-as-historical* framework locates culinary authenticity in the realm of national histories. In this way, defining what foods are truly a part of a Taiwanese culinary canon is a political act of determining what an authentic or essential Taiwan is and who is and is not included. For a contemporary geopolitical debate over a Taiwanese nation, Taiwanese food is most often defined by a mixture of national dishes like *niu rou mian* or boba that help to draw geographic and temporal borders around a Taiwanese nation. But, for many of my respondents with *bensheng* ancestry, an essential Taiwan is located farther back and the privileging of Hoklo Taiwanese dishes reinforces a national image that sees itself as wholly separate from a modern ROC. This historical contestation over an authentic Taiwanese cuisine, then, help to define not only spatial, but temporal national borders.

However, the trap of an *authenticity-as-historical* framework is in its very need for legitimization or recognition from a presumably objective source. While it draws its strength from its appearance of empiricism, it is always at the mercy of the ways historical knowledge is produced and thus is resting a coherent image of a culinary canon on the fragile and unstable legs of historicizing. If we were to, for example, discover a new origin story for boba that located it elsewhere and was historically supported, would it undermine the culinary authenticity of one of Taiwan's national dishes, and would it thus undermine a conception of an existing, culturally generative Taiwan? This risk of defining an authentic Taiwanese-ness through presumably static empirical measures mirrors the larger liminal question of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty and offers us an opportunity to try to locate the possibilities outside of these terms altogether.

"I think the strive to find authenticity is a lost—it's just sort of a directionless journey."

If an *authenticity-as-familial* framework runs the risk of making an authentic Taiwanese culture a gradual disappearing act and an *authenticity-as-historical* framework traps the existence of a generative Taiwan at the mercy of external legitimization, what are the possible alternatives? Like many of my interviewees, I would like to suggest reconceptualizing authenticity as a concept that is unbounded, one that is always a process of finding itself rather than an already fixed and static idea. This is not to say that either a familial or historical framework of authenticity is not useful—they are both extremely useful in different contexts for different audiences—but instead to see the definition of authenticity not as an end goal to itself but as merely a rhetorical tool that can be deployed only when it is useful. Given the unboundedness of a conception of a Taiwanese nation and the liminal nature of a Taiwanese diasporic identity, many

Taiwanese Americans already do this and my interviewees often simultaneously defined cultural authenticity and critiqued the term altogether.

Peter, for example, expressed a lot of confidence in his conception of his Taiwanese American identity and positioned it in contrast with other Taiwanese Americans, whom he felt were more likely to agonize about a perceived unsettled liminality of identity. For Peter, the question of cultural authenticity was less about defining an objective rubric with which to judge something as a true or genuine reflection of a static culture, and more about a personal resolution of seemingly disparate identities. The search for an objective authenticity is, in this light, necessarily exclusive: "To say that any one thing is more authentic than another kind of invalidates someone else's experience or whatever… Whereas, everyone does have a story, everyone does have a background and an experience and I'm more curious about that… I think you have to define what it means for yourself."

Peter's perspective on authenticity mirrors both the definitions of Handler and Appadurai, where he attributes a kind of insecurity to the search. If authenticity implies a degree of cultural static-ness that often eludes actual patterns of cultural authenticity, rejecting the search for an objective authenticity and instead viewing it as a result of a transnational search for meaning and community rearticulates the connections between the motherland and the diasporic home. Esther, for instance, makes the claim that although General Tso's Chicken may be less authentic than Ma Po Tofu, "there is the argument that General Tso's Chicken is also authentic to the Asian American experience, which I guess has diverged from the non-Asian American experience."

What Esther articulates is the disconnection of the notion of authenticity from a perceived motherland; that is to say, that authenticity as we define it may not be a useful term. Both a Handler and Appadurai definition of authenticity rely on definitions external to the boundaries of the nation-state, be they from tourists or diaspora. In contrast, a conceptualization of authenticity as plural and omnipresent positions the arbiters of authenticity as those living in and embedded in a respective culture. In this sense, Taiwanese Americans are the determiners of an authentic Taiwanese American cuisine or experience, and Taiwanese are the determiners of an authentic Taiwanese cuisine or experience—and neither is a devaluation or derivative of a supposedly more pure culture. Authenticity here is less about conforming to a prescriptive ideal but merely a descriptor of what exists. Authentic Taiwanese food, then, ought not to be a standard to which food is held to but rather a fluid category describing that which exists. This perspective takes for granted the natural existence of Taiwanese culture and food and does not question where these boundaries might be defined.

However, even this definition of the non-existence of authenticity draws national borders. If authentic Taiwanese food is any food that exists in Taiwan, we are already speaking within the borders of a pre-existing Taiwan. And if authentic Taiwanese American food is any food produced or eaten by Taiwanese Americans, we are already speaking within the language of diaspora. In either case, this view of authenticity is not so much removing itself from the larger political questions of sovereignty and nationalism but assuming it to be true. These discourse of authenticity—and indeed even the attempt to reject a discourse of authenticity—necessarily engage with national logics.

But while there may not be a way to fully remove ourselves from the rhetoric of authenticity, there are ways to talk around it.

By the end of our meeting, Thomas was engaged in crafting a new conception of authenticity that attempted to negotiate all of his prior definitions, "Like, my big question is like 'culturally authentic' is such a hard thing to grasp because cultures are always changing, they're like living things, right? You really can't say that there is one representation of a single culture in any way… I wonder if there's something about just kind of letting the people and the things and the food and all the different parts, all the different customs, the religion, to just kind of be a cacophony of sound that really kind of give you an idea of where this culture is, kind of the larger, broader kind of perception of it." Thomas advocates for an embrace of the messy unboundedness of culture and authenticity—one that does not reject the existence of the concept altogether but that sees it as limiting and disciplining. And this messiness, or lack of ordered definition, can itself be a generative site of understanding culture and authenticity.

This, for me, mirrors the larger project that I have attempted to grapple with. To assert to the world that Taiwan is sovereign is not truly stepping outside of the frame of sovereignty, a frame I had bitterly and futilely tried to excise when I first began this project. Instead, it is an embrace of the "cacophony of sounds" that form an illegible, uncontained, and unrecognizable Taiwanese sovereignty. It is to reject the need for legitimization and recognition and thus to focus not on trying to prove an authenticity or sovereign existence but instead to embrace a liminality that is so often framed as anathema to liberation within a conventional framework of sovereignty. This is how we can talk around authenticity and sovereignty—to use it when useful but to avoid becoming chained to a framework that will ultimately never afford true unconditional liberation. For even if Taiwan were to one day be recognized as a sovereign state that was culturally generative, this process would necessarily require the increased exclusion of multiple versions of Taiwan—its indigeneity, its anti-imperial, its anti-capitalist—in favor of a legible, neoliberal progressive capitalist state. And this too would leave behind other states for which sovereignty is in flux in similar and different ways—Hong Kong, Tibet, Palestine, and others. Reframing authenticity as a tool and not a goal is akin to embracing the messy inconvenience of ku-mo. Perhaps we do not need to prove ourselves as authentic or sovereign to anyone. Perhaps we just are, apropos of nothing, and the world's need to warp itself around the cartographic outline of Taiwan is not a sign of a failure of Taiwan's sovereignty but a failure of the concept of sovereignty at all.

To claim that something is from somewhere, in even the loosest definition, is a way to affirm the existence of that to which it belongs; for an island which is not meant to exist, the existence of and visibility of Taiwanese food rhetorically supports the existence of a coherent nation. Food and foodways are a key site for Taiwanese Americans to rhetorically construct a coherent national narrative of Taiwan by naturalizing a canon of cultural foods that presuppose the existence of a distinct Taiwanese culture, assigning cultural authority to Taiwanese outside of Taiwan, and tying cultural foods to larger histories and origin narratives of the modern Taiwanese state.

Like Benedict Anderson's (1983) fluid nation, cuisines are never fully coherent, but they must necessarily be imagined to be.[306] They are imagined because the boundaries between dishes and cultures are fluid and constructed. They are limited because no singular definition of a cultural cuisine, whether through spice palate, primary ingredients, or cooking methods can encompass all dishes claimed by a culture in isolation. They are sovereign because the creation of a canon of culturally authentic dishes necessarily reifies nation-state borders. And they erases histories of colonialism and exploitation in service of coherent culinary mythologies. This is how dishes attributed to *waishengren*, Hoklo, Hakka, and the dozens of recognized indigenous Taiwanese tribes can be wrapped together into a singular Taiwanese cuisine.

The discourses of culinary authenticity are necessarily embroiled within a larger politics of nation-states and nation-building, particularly for a nation which must not exist. The existence of Taiwanese food presupposes a Taiwan, and each of these frameworks construct a canon of Taiwanese food in different ways. In an *authenticity-as-nostalgic* framework, positive memories of familial or childhood dishes create a notion of authentic Taiwanese food. And in an *authenticity-as-historical* framework, geographic and temporal nation-state boundaries attribute create a canon of Taiwanese food that legitimize a national conception of community. Food acts as a mediating force between the rhetorical nation-building for and support of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty. It is in this arena, seemingly far from the influence of political and public policy, that Taiwanese Americans negotiate the construction of a Taiwanese-ness and what it means to be Taiwanese.

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[306] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

Conclusion
Impossible Sovereignty

> "所以對每個國家而言，台灣應該是一個夥伴，而不是一個議題。這一次選舉結果，揭露了一個重要的意義，那就是：我們的主權和民主，被大聲威脅的時候，台灣人民會用更大的聲音，喊出我們的堅持。"
>
> -蔡英文, Victory Speech, January 11, 2020

I have often struggled with how to think through the conservative streak that finds itself in some parts of the Taiwanese American and broader Asian American community. How can a community that is racialized as an invasion, as deviant in gender and sexuality, and as inherently and perpetually foreign see itself as beholden to or in partnership with a government that fails even to acknowledge the existence of the island they are from?[307] However, I have come to realize that this is not a paradox at all and I have instead begun to think of it as intimately tied with the search for recognition and a legible and normative sovereignty for Taiwan that my project has attempted to write around. As we have seen in Chapter 1, U.S. legislative and executive support for Taiwan began as a manifestation of U.S. imperial influence in Asia and anti-communist interests during the Cold War; and as a result, much historical and contemporary U.S. legislation on the island continues to carry these conservative and nationalist undertones. Support for Taiwan is less often a proactive alliance with the people of the island as it is a reactive tool against the racialized threat of China for the U.S. and these discourses of communist containment, racialized economic threats, and the unquestioning superiority of U.S.-style economies and government more often (but not exclusively) are championed by American conservative politicians.

It makes sense, then, for Taiwanese Americans who see international recognition for Taiwan as a solution to the island's problems to support conservative politicians even when their domestic policies harm our immigrant communities, increase U.S. military spending and imperial might, and embolden anti-Asian racism. If Taiwan were to finally be seen as an independent sovereign nation, the logic goes, we would win. And anything or anyone that can lead to this legally recognized separation from China is a fair tool to use for the greater good. If we were just able to prove that Taiwanese Americans were good American citizens, as we saw in Chapter 2, then perhaps the U.S. would finally recognize us once more and solve our existential problems. After all, we have made in-roads with the U.S. as a sympathetic, modern, progressive, and democratic capitalist (non-)nation worthy of acceptance and inclusion into the so-called First World.

I am perhaps more sympathetic to this line of thinking than I might initially seem, after spending more than two hundred pages critiquing the limits of sovereignty and

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[307] Hsu, Madeline Y., *Dreaming of gold, dreaming of home: Transnationalism and migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).; Fung, Richard, "Looking for my penis: The eroticized Asian in gay video porn," *A companion to Asian American studies* (2005): 235-253.; Gu, Chien-Juh, *The Resilient Self: Gender, Immigration, and Taiwanese Americans*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018).; Kim, Claire Jean, "The racial triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & society* 27.1 (1999): 105-138.

recognition in media from or about Taiwan. Taiwan's liminal status is legitimately precarious and it has legitimate and tangible material impacts on the culture, economy, and everyday lives of Taiwanese people in and out of Taiwan. Even being symbolically erased is a form of violence, and more often than not it is the smoke for the fire of deeper, more threatening erasures. However, while I understand and sympathize with the material constraints that lead some Taiwanese Americans towards U.S. conservatism, my understanding should not be confused for agreement.

I see prioritizing sovereign recognition from more powerful states as a capitulation to the rhetoric of U.S. nationalism and exceptionalism, which for me is equally constraining and precarious in the long-term. While it may appear that the U.S. is willing to support a culturally distinct, modern, and liberal Taiwan, we have seen how quickly the U.S. is willing to turn on its supposed allies when politically or militarily convenient. And while there is some truth to the idea that a lack of officially-recognized sovereignty puts Taiwan at the mercy of more powerful nations, nations like the United States have demonstrated themselves perfectly willing to trample over even the recognized sovereignties of nations with which they may benefit from military engagement or political assassination, as in the case of the U.S.'s extrajudicial assassination of Iranian military leader and Major general Qasem Soleimani in 2020. I do not believe that however much Taiwanese Americans lean into the idea of the conservative, hard-working model minority or the liberal capitalist nation-state that we will ever truly be free in the U.S. The model minority myth is an asymptote—it can never be reached.[308] So while the radical right online hub 4Chan may, alongside Taiwanese Americans, rally behind the Taiwanese American neoliberal presidential candidate Andrew Yang, they will still probably call him a chink.[309]

When I first began this project, I rather defensively tried to "remove the question of sovereignty from the table" altogether because this hyper-focus on whether or not Taiwan is sovereign in U.S. academic and political discourse has managed to accomplish what the PRC on its own was never able to—making mainstream the taken-for-granted assumption that Taiwan's sovereignty is up for debate at all. In these spaces, Taiwan has been steadily subsumed by a Taiwan Question that is always being addressed and yet will never be answered.[310] My thinking on this has evolved since I began this project. It is not

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[308] Poon, OiYan, Dian Squire, Corinne Kodama, and Ajani Byrd, "A Critical Review of the Model Minority Myth in Selected Literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education," *Review of Educational Research Month 201X,* 20.10 (2015): 1-34.

[309] Yang, Andrew, "Andrew Yang: We Asian Americans are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure," *The Washington Post*, April 2020.

[310] Chai, Trong R., "The Future of Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 26.12 (1986): 1309-323.; Chen, Lung-chu and W. M. Reisman, "Who Owns Taiwan: A Search for International Title," *The Yale Law Journal* 81.4 (March 1972): 599-671.; Chen, Tung-Pi, "Bridge Across the Formosa Strait: Private Law Relations Between Taiwan and Mainland China," *J. Chinese L.* 4 (1990): 101.; Davis, Michael C., "The Concept of Statehood and the Status of Taiwan," *J. Chinese. L.* 4 (1990): 135.; Downen, Robert L., *To Bridge the Taiwan Strait: The Complexities of China's Reunification*, (Washington, D.C.: Council for Social and Economic Studies, 1984).; Duncanson, Dennis, "What is Taiwan to China?," *Asian Affairs* 17.3 (1986): 288-297.; Friedman, P. Kerim, "The Politics of Explaining Taiwan," *anthro {dendum}* (blog), December 2017, anthrodendum.org.; " Gold, Thomas B., "The Status Quo is Not Static: Mainland-Taiwan Relations," *Asian Survey* 27.3 (March 1987): 300-315.; Gordon, Leonard, "American Planning for Taiwan, 1942-1945,"

that Taiwan's sovereignty itself is not a valuable academic discussion, but instead we must reevaluate the terms that we are accepting when we engage in it. It is perhaps irresponsible not to grapple with the tangible precarity Taiwan finds itself in, but I think it is equally irresponsible to assume that this precarity is natural or that it must be solved through conventional channels.

If you will humor me with one of my tangents for just a bit longer, I would like to analogize Taiwanese American investment in U.S. conservatism and nationalism to the diverging strategies of academics in response to the current precarity of academia and graduate school, for just as my academic theory has invaded my acknowledgements, my personal experiences have invaded my academic theory (as perhaps the personal always does). Academia has quickly transitioned towards relying on contingent adjunct labor since the late 1960s in the United States, perhaps not-so-coincidentally lining up with the increase in scholars of color in the industry.[311] As a result, roughly three quarters of faculty positions at the time of writing are adjunct—that is, overworked, underpaid, contractually precarious, and sans benefits.[312] I have seen scholars far more passionate, prestigious, and prolific than I am burn out on the job search, increasingly disillusioned by the lack of a stable outcome to their decade or more of labor in graduate school, post-docs, and adjuncting. And I have seen promising social scientists with far more degrees than any one person should have the mental capacity to have, jump to the very same industries they critiqued for being destructive and neoliberal because, understandably, they needed to eat. And this academic precarity has led to highly divergent strategies of survival even in the earliest stages of the career path.

In graduate school, I see two major strategies that graduate students use to stay in the industry, though there are many granular variations and many more strategies that lead students to walk away from the industry altogether. The first is to look at the increasing material precarity of academia, evaluate the odds of success, and position oneself as best as possible to compete for a spot. Graduate students dig their heels in, sharpen their claws, nurture the fire of their internal drive and push themselves to the limits to prove they are worthy of the coveted tenure-track position. As Jenny Odell (2019) theorizes in her absolutely stunning *How to Do Nothing*, "…students aren't

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Pacific Historical Review 37 (January 1968): 201.; Huan, Guo-cang, "Taiwan: A View From Beijing," *Foreign Affairs* 63 (1984): 1064.

[311] Curtis, John W. and Sabrina Thornton, "Here's the News: The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2012-13," *Academe* 99.2 (2013): 4-19.; Feldman, Daniel C. and William H. Turnley, "Contingent employment in academic careers: Relative deprivation among adjunct faculty," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 64.2 (2004): 284-307.; Jacoby, Daniel, "Effects of part-time faculty employment on community college graduation rates," *The Journal of Higher Education* 77.6 (2006): 1081-1103.; Meloncon, Lisa and Peter England, "The Current Status of Contingent Faculty in Technical and Professional Communication," *College English* 73.4 (2011): 396-408.; Red, Joanne R., "Community college dilemma: Adjunct faculty," *Community & Junior College Libraries* 14.4. (2008): 295-298.; Townsend, Barbara K. and Susan B. Twombly, *Community College faculty: Overlooked and undervalued*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc Pub. 2007).

[312] Thedwall, Kate, "Nontenure-Track Faculty: Rising Numbers, Lost Opportunities," *New Directions for Higher Education* 143 (2008): 11-19.

workaholics for the sake of it; the workaholism is driven by a very real fear of very real consequences that exist both within and outside of school."[313]

In the process, peers are put down, leisure is eradicated, professional networks are created, and social media feeds are slowly transformed into CVs. This can be, but does not need to be, comorbid with a mean and competitive streak as "students are either locked in isolated struggles with their own limits, or worse, actively pitted against each other."[314] These are the new scholars in graduate school around whom you might feel you need to embellish your ideas or accomplishments because it is clear you are being evaluated as either a True Scholar Auteur™ or a hack. If you are the auteur, you are lavished with praise and compliments until it is no longer convenient, and you inevitably transform into the hack—just one of many who do not belong in the institution and cannot make it. For me, transformation from Gentleman Scholar™ to card-carrying member of the Hack American community was because I do not know what it means to be queer, am insufficiently radical, and refuse to check my work e-mail after 7:00 pm or on weekends.

However, this strategy of investment in a precarious institution in pursuit of recognition and inclusion is not necessarily caustic to others; it can be just as internally destructive. It is also the complete destruction of the boundary between work and life that academics are encouraged to accomplish. It is the incentive and the practice of turning any and all personal work into an academic CV-line, for we are told labor is only valuable if we allow the university to co-opt it. It is the normalcy of being expected to answer and respond to work e-mails at 2 or 3 in the morning or risk being reprimanded at a meeting you might be the only one on time to. It is the slow, but steady atomization of a bright-eyed fresh-faced graduate student community into one where there are colleagues, not friends, and all conversation must inevitably result in the invasion of Derrida. It is the transparent promise that however dire the industry might appear to be, if you just put your head down and work hard enough, you will be the lucky one to make it. But of course, we are all told that.

The second strategy I have identified, and the one that I have simultaneously tried and failed to embody in my tenure as a graduate student, is to disinvest in academia as an institution altogether and embrace the precarity that comes with the position, in perhaps an analogous way to the way Hoang Tan Nguyen (2014) reconceptualizes queer bottomhood as liberating and disruptive to normative, constraining definitions of masculinity, racialization, and agency.[315] In a precarious institution, disinvesting recognizes that there is no longer even the convincing illusion of a reward for putting your head down and cosplaying as a respectable and deserving laborer. It is to reject the academic ultimatum that posits academics, especially junior ones, as either exciting up-and-coming workhorse-scholars or insufficiently disciplined and waiting to be weeded out. It is to refuse to contribute to the expectation that "flexible work hours" means stretching work to cover all hours. It is to be self-forgiving when milestones are delayed

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[313] Odell, Jenny, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2019): 96.
[314] Odell, 96.
[315] Nguyen, Hoang Tan, *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

or not met, because agonizing over a failure to submit to one more conference or one more job is, at this point, purely an exercise in academic self-flagellation and not a realistic loss of opportunity. It is a defiant and unapologetic refusal of the identity of "good scholar," which so often comes with participating in the perpetual posturing that must be done to maintain the thin curtain between one's ego and the onslaught of millennial existential despair. It is to blatantly pirate academic literature from behind paywalls for your students and to pass on these tools of literally stealing from the university.[316] It is to reject the primacy of the institution and instead embrace the primacy of the self and the community or, in the words of one of my mentors, it is the call to "be selfish with your time."

This is, naturally, a position that demands a certain amount of privilege. To embrace precarity is also to both acknowledge that remaining in the institution is more than likely a financial and occupational dead-end but to refuse to leave regardless. This is not a strategy that everyone can take. While I have found it personally rewarding to use the precarity of academia as an excuse to write the dissertation that I wanted to write rather than the safer dissertation I was accepted to write, to teach and present in ways I feared would be called unprofessional and undisciplined, and to fund a suite of creative passion projects far outside of the institution, this is simply not financially feasible for many young academics. And this leaves the only logical path as a complete exit of academia in pursuit of anything that pays better. But the fact that this position is not one that is readily available to everyone is, for Odell, even more reason to participate in this refusal: "it's even more important for anyone who *does* have a margin—even the tiniest one—to put it to use in opening up margins further down the line. Tiny spaces can open up small spaces, small spaces can open bigger spaces."[317]

You do not need me to explain how the precarity of academia leads to a loss of new ideas and perspectives or how it normalizes unhealthy work dynamics that then justify their own existence.[318] But in a similar manner to the way my mother's passport-stamped boarding pass reveals the disruptive power of precarity or the way the embarrassed whispered mispronunciations of my name elicits in me a kind of wicked schadenfreude, we might come to see this precarity as a site of agency. In this light, disinvestment in academia, while not an effective solution for getting a job, is perhaps an effective solution at disrupting the naturalness of academia's current paradigm of precarity. It is a Bartleby the Scrivener-esque shrug at the false incentives of an institution that gains its power through the perception that it is powerful and a suggestion that we ought to see the world of possibilities outside of this dominant, seemingly eternal model.

My goal here is not truly to delve into the specific dynamics of the failures of the academic institution—though I do take a bit of pleasure officially archiving in an

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[316] Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013).

[317] Odell, 100-101.

[318] If looked at a certain way, it might appear that our current system really is an adequate meritocracy, for those who make it tend to be inhumanly exceptional on paper, even while their adjunct colleagues share similarly ridiculous qualifications and any attempt to achieve a functional work-life balance is heavily disincentivized.

academic library a middle finger to the university, even as it will co-opt it as proof it is self-reflective. Instead, I see the strategies graduate students use to navigate the precarity of their existence as a fitting parallel to the strategies Taiwanese Americans use to navigate their own brand of existential precarity and how we might similarly shrug at the concept of internationally recognized sovereignty.

In both cases, we have on one hand a heavy investment in an institution—academia or the U.S. nation-state—that ultimately has created the constraints that threaten existential eradication and this is done in the hopes that recognition and inclusion will act as a panacea to the very problems investment in the institution has created. And on the other hand, we have a rejection of the institution and an embrace of a kind of liberatory in-betweenness that cannot be contained within normative understandings of either scholarship or sovereignty. As in Chapter 3, a ku-mo Taiwan disrupts conventional notions of sovereignty and reveals, through its erasure, the possibilities that lay just outside of these constructed boundaries. The divergent paths of investment and disinvestment, then, come to not only frame our responses to the challenges we are faced with in these institutions, but they come to shape these institutions themselves. A desperate search for inclusion legitimizes the institution which includes, and a disinvestment from an institution robs it of some of its seemingly infallible power.

When we refuse to dig in our heels and sharpen our claws, we often find we have far more power and agency against seemingly impenetrable and immortal institutions than we might think. In a similar manner to the way the disciplining boundaries of academia fall away when the institution's true precarity reveals itself and opens the door for new scholarly, pedagogical, labor, and human paradigms, the seemingly insurmountable barriers of officially recognized sovereignty disappear when we realize it is not a fortress but a lone wall we do not have to scale, as Audrey Tang demonstrated when she digitally attended that fateful UN meeting that revealed the fragility of national and sovereign control. Embracing precarity—realizing that the promise of one day achieving internationally recognized sovereignty is at best conditional and at worse a lie—affords us the tiny space to begin tearing down the concept of a natural, inevitable, and just sovereignty altogether.

What might be truly transformative, in the case of Taiwan, is to disinvest in the idea of sovereignty at all—to embrace that sovereignty might never have been liberating for Taiwan and instead to celebrate the ways our very existence destabilizes normative structures. In Chapter 4, for instance, we saw the ways normative storytelling structures in the family sitcom have been wildly unequipped to handle narratives about racialized Asian Americans and politicized Taiwanese American, specifically. And while there have been valuable attempts to wrap these stories within genre constraints, there is perhaps more potential in questioning how the inability to represent Taiwanese Americans requires not a need for increased representation but a need to reconceptualize representation altogether. This acknowledgement of the power of being unrecognizable can help reconceptualize what might otherwise be seen simply as precarity.

The question of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty is an unsolvable problem for normative understandings of sovereignty and nation-states and is mediated through its ku-mo appearance in media and the culture industry as a result of the political precarity it

finds itself in. But in lieu of merely seeking recognition as a cure to this precarity, we might begin to conceptualize a Taiwanese precarity as a kind of ku-mo strength all on its own. Without the promise of international sovereign recognition, this political precarity affords us an opportunity to question the validity and naturalness of sovereign nation-states, to focus not on also being included but on tearing down and rebuilding what an international global order could look like.

In doing so, the conversation moves away from proving whether or not Taiwan fits the definition of a sovereign nation-state and towards a kind of flippant confidence that Taiwan is not the problem—it is the entire structure of liberal nation-states that relies on the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of states.[319] Flippancy on its own might not transform the liberal nation-state that perpetuates global inequality but it is the kind of minor inconvenience that ku-mo encapsulates and that normative logics cannot actually suppress. Flippancy highlights the fragility of power—that whatever structural power an institution might have, it ultimately fails at being airtight and infallible and sometimes that can be a kind of liberation in and of itself. When we refuse to take China's terms as a starting point—when Taiwan's sovereignty is not an argument or mantra but instead is just a taken-for-granted fact—we rob the question of sovereignty with the power it has been given.

Taiwan is not the only impossible sovereignty in the world. Within an Asian context alone, Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet have been sites of Chinese political erasure and contested sovereignty and in each of these cases there have been similar ku-mo disruptions of hegemonic Chinese political rule through the mere inconvenience of existence. For Hong Kong, a territory "forever living with the uncertain prospect of a precarious balance between China and Britain," increasing encroachment from a Chinese *One Country, Two Systems* paradigm has led to mass Hong Kongese mobilization and protests since mid-2019.[320] And like Taiwan's social movements over its contested sovereignty, Hong Kong has seen figures in popular culture like video game character Mei from the 2016 first-person shooter *Overwatch* become rallying icons for sovereign liberation as a result of their own encounter with the politics of a business of sovereignty.[321] Like Taiwan, Macau's complex history potentially offers "a completely new invention or the reiteration of an older, more fluid notion of sovereignty that… had allowed the city to attain—its moment of glory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[322] And in Tibet, veterans in the Tibetan resistance to the PRC continue to assert the existence of a resistance history "to be socially known and widely taught, to be officially endorsed and publicly recognized" but are accepting of the "delayed form of historical time" that acknowledged such recognition might be postponed but inevitable

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[319] Cheah, Pheng, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[320] Chan, Ming K., "Introduction: Hong Kong's Precarious Balance—150 Years in an Historic Triangle," *Precarious Balance: Hong Kong Between China and Britain 1842-1992*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994): 8.
[321] Carpenter, Nicole, "Protestors are trying tog et Overwatch banned in China, using memes of popular hero Mei: Overwatch hero Mei is being turned into a symbol of resistance," *Polygon*, polygon.com/2019/10/9/20906320/overwatch-mei-blizzard-hong-kong-protest-banned-memes (accessed October 2019).
[322] Clayton, Cathryn H., "Introduction," *Sovereignty at the Edge: Macau & the Question of Chineseness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 6.

nonetheless.[323] In these cases, traditional definitions of sovereignty appear out of reach and unattainable, yet they open the doors for new and disruptive sovereignties that exist despite their illegibility and find strength "in solidarities with others elsewhere, to wrestle individually and collectively with the pains of belonging."[324]

Outside of Asia, we can see parallels of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty and ku-mo disruption in sites like Palestine, where acknowledgement of the existence of a people is so contentious and politicized it is even exempt from the bounds of academic freedom. Steven Salaita, of course, is one of the most well-known examples of a scholar whose criticism of the state of Israel, the occupation of Palestine, and Zionism resulted in the withdrawal of his employment offer at the University of Illinois.[325] A Palestinian contested sovereignty has, like Taiwan's, ruptured in popular culture as well, as is the case in a 2020 episode of American game show *Jeopardy*, where a contestant lost money as a result of identifying the Church of the Nativity as located in Palestine.[326] While this mistake was corrected and she was refunded her money during a commercial break as if she had not answered at all, the mistake was not addressed by the show's host and she was not given money for the correct answer, as is typical for when the show reevaluates an answer.

What each of these impossible sovereignties embody is a very real precarity that threatens the annihilation of states and people. Taiwan's own history of grappling with its impossible sovereignty is deep and bloody, and yet despite decades of attempts no state has yet succeeded in fully erasing it. Here we might embrace the precarity that threatens to destroy us as an opportunity to see what is possible beyond the normative boundaries of state or nation. Doing so will not be easy, and may not even ultimately be successful in a way legible to China, the United States, or the transnational corporations that profit off of Taiwan's precarity, but embracing the ku-mo inconvenience of an island which must not exist affords us the space to radically disrupt dominant taken-for-granted understandings of nation, state, and sovereignty.

In many of my interviews with fellow second-generation Taiwanese Americans, there was a kind of resigned hopelessness with the question of what would happen with Taiwan in the coming years. Between the economic incentives of the business of sovereignty to the ways Taiwanese sovereignty has been co-opted by conservative policies, many of my interviewees expressed a sense that Taiwan would at some point be absorbed or subjugated by Chinese military or political might and not be able to rely on its supposed allies to support it. This would be yet another external government takeover—one of many since the 17th century, including the island's current government. And like in Chapter 5, this perpetual precarity has found its way influencing the immigration patterns and national mythologies of canonical and familial history. In both my familial history and the familial history of many of my peers and interviewees in Chapter 6, the question of Taiwan's impossible sovereignty is a dominant organizing

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[323] McGranahan, Carole, *Arrested histories: Tibet, the CIA, and memories of a forgotten war,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 9-10; McGranahan, 6.
[324] McGranahan, 6.
[325] Salaita, Steven, "An Honest Living," *Steve Salaita: No Flags, No Slogans* (blog), February 17, 2019. https://stevesalaita.com/an-honest-living/
[326] *Jeopardy* "S36 E90," ABC, January 10, 2020.

principle that divides political parties, separates generations, and categorizes immigration histories. It has become the primary, if not the only, way Taiwan is visible in politics and media and it has circumscribed all understanding of what else Taiwan is or can be.

But as dire as it might seem, what I find comforting and motivating is the Taiwanese spirit of ku-mo that refuses total erasure through inconvenience, impossibility, and absurdity. Taiwan has been unrecognized by the United States since 1979 and yet it persists. China's attempts at political, economic, and cultural erasure of Taiwan merely proves that there is something to be erased. And while this kind of ku-mo disruption might seem insignificant, there is agency in the slow, unassuming power of the Taiwanese turtle. Just as some turtles and tortoises may live for centuries away from the reach of human contact, we might take comfort in the strength, persistence, and disruption of our own communities.

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My family's turtles have often been lovingly described as kind of useless. They are not cuddly, they do not provide the emotional support one might expect out of pets, and they are too dull to ever survive anywhere other than their respective tanks. They are, in a very real way, a constant ku-mo inconvenience that have required us to rearrange the layout of our living spaces, to drive rather than fly the nearly 3,000 miles in our move across coasts, and to double the cost and space they require when they became too territorial to share a tank. But despite the very real inconvenience and uselessness they have come to embody, they have given me a useful way to think about larger theoretical questions of the value of disruption. If I may be permitted to temporarily excite academic orientalists for a moment, there is a story in Zhuang Zhou's *Zhuangzi* of an oak tree that I find particularly useful to think about here:[327]

A carpenter wanders through a forest and comes across a particularly large and gnarled tree, whose thick branches are too knotted to be used as boats and whose trunk is too twisted to be fashioned into lean planks of wood. Any feasible value it had is disrupted by yet another flaw, something that stops it from being recognized as useful. It would, in fact, be far more trouble to cut it down than it is worth. How did such a useless tree end up taking the space dozens of more useful trees could have used? It could hardly be counted a tree at all, for what is a tree if it cannot do what a tree ought to do? The carpenter goes home, irritated at seeing such a large, purposeless tree taking up so much space.

However, at night the carpenter is visited by the gnarled oak tree in a dream who tells him that he has, in fact, not realized that the tree's uselessness is the very reason of its old age and health. Edible trees have been cut down and processed. Fruit trees have been stripped bare. Strong, thick trees have been turned into buildings and boats. But the useless tree has survived in its own inconvenience and persisted as a result of the very features that have been deemed undesirable. It has been allowed to fulfill a purpose that is unrecognizable. The gnarled oak tree has instead cast shade down on the oxen who rest below it, or a lone, tired traveler looking for respite. The tree's perceived uselessness has become its own strategy for survival and liberation. The carpenter is shocked at the gnarled oak tree's wisdom and realizes that his own perception of usefulness is not

[327] Zhuangzi, "In the Human World," *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings: With Selections from traditional Commentaries*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009): 30-32.

objective or static, but separate from, or even sometimes in contrast with, what usefulness means to others.

What I find valuable about this story is the way it not only demonstrates the disciplining limits of recognized usefulness, it shows the unvalued potential of existing outside of normative definitions of value—value that is not as easily co-optable by a profit and commerce-focused paradigm. And this is a useful way to think about the ku-mo struggle between Taiwanese recognition and impossibility that I have tried to interrogate. While the Taiwan we know today finds itself at the center of economic, political, and cultural contestations between powerful nations, for most of its history it was seen as little more than a "useless ball of mud."[328] From the Qing to the Dutch to the Portuguese to the Republic of China, Taiwan was repeatedly viewed as a waste of investment—it was a prime strategic base, but its indigenous populations were too volatile and difficult to negotiate with; it was a new, uncharted island territory but its land was infertile and its mountains disruptive; it was a cultural homecoming but its inhabitants too Japanned to be reincorporated.[329] Taiwan has consistently been a site of inconvenience that the carpenters of the world have examined and then abandoned. Is there any question why the problems of sovereignty and recognition have been exacerbated once Taiwan is finally seen as economically and politically useful?

By circling around sovereignty, we can embrace inconvenience, disruption, impossibility, and uselessness through the idea of ku-mo. We can revel in the ability to hold the world back merely through existing, and in so doing draw attention to the constructed nature of global systems of nation-states and sovereignties in the first place. Being recognized and included as normative, sovereign, and useful just might be the root of our problem, and from this we see Taiwan's ability to exist outside of the margins as simultaneously precarious and liberating. Once we refocus our attention away from attempting to prove our contributory potential to other nations and towards the critical political work we have been and have yet to do, we can instead start to open up new spaces of liberation for ourselves and others. When we can finally step away from the omnipresent Taiwan Question, we find far more generative, nuanced, and critical questions waiting just outside the boundaries of scholarship and political advocacy. In this light, perhaps our goal ought not to be inclusion within the institution of international sovereignty but recreating our concept of nations in the image of an unrecognizable ku-mo Taiwan.

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[328] Teng, Emma Jinhua, "Introduction," *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 1-30.

[329] Knapp, Ronald G. "The Shaping of Taiwan's Landscapes," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 3-26.; Teng, Emma Jinhua.; Wang, Peter Chen-main, "A Bastion Created, a Regime Reformed, an Economy Reengineered, 1949-1970," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 320-338.; Wills, Jr., John E., "The Seventeenth-Century Transformation," *Taiwan: A New History*, ed., Murray A. Rubinstein, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2007): 84-106.

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