

EPILOGUE



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Gordon Su was born in Taipei, Taiwan, and came to the United States in 1968 as a graduate student in business administration. A graduate of Southern Illinois University's School of Business, he sees himself and the other Taiwanese who came to the United States after 1965 as the "second wave" of Chinese immigrants to enter the country.¹⁸

When I was young, America seemed almost a paradise. People never had problems there. On the material side, they were always sufficient. It seemed just like a utopia—America, the land of possibilities, the land of wealth, the land of opportunities. But not everyone could go [to America] at the time. The only way to go was to study there. But you had to be an excellent student to be admitted by a university. It seemed out of reach. By the time I was in college, many of my classmates were going, and suddenly it seemed possible. We realized it would still be tough. We had friends who went and wrote us of their experiences. We knew it would be tough. But when we considered that after graduating we could have good jobs and all the material things we dreamed of, it seemed worth the effort. What we didn't take into account, though, was the enormous cultural shock. Everything would be different.

I came over in 1968. I [often] tell people, I came to the states twice. The first time I came, I saw all the differences. How differently [Chinese and] Americans live. The second time I came, I saw how similar Chinese and Americans are.

I had one suitcase [when I arrived]. I was one of the few students who brought lots of jeans and casual clothes. Most Taiwanese students brought very formal dress. But that's the only aspect of American life I was prepared for. Everything else was shockingly new and disturbing.

When I first arrived, American people seemed astonishingly beautiful to me. The Caucasians represented the standard [for beauty]. Even today, you know, Chinese beauty tends to be modeled on Western beauty. [Everybody wants a] high nose, high brow, fair skin. Plus, American movies—Hollywood—promoted beauty in their standard, and the style was Western. That was the only way to go. And, in most cases, American people *were* beautiful. They were wholesome, healthy, and energetic. They had good nutrition. The women were tall. They had good bodies. The Caucasians seemed very impressive.

In our time, nutrition was a serious problem. After the war [World War II], Taiwan was extremely backward. We lacked in every material thing. There wasn't enough food, enough meat, enough clothing. So we had many stunted or deformed people because of poor nutrition.

Also, Americans in a small town are very friendly. They say hello, they smile at you, and they are always courteous, even though you are a stranger. In Taiwan, in the cities, people are rude. It's impersonal. If you go to a shop, you hardly get any service. On the other hand, the Chinese always seem to have a way of getting what they want. If a shop closes at five and you arrive ten minutes late, you can usually talk your way in, and the proprietors give way. There is also a thing called "a personal touch." You can use your personal relationships to accomplish things. In America, I would say, people went more by the rule. And the guy who seemed so friendly the first time you met might forget you completely the next day. Taiwanese people didn't make friends easily. But when they did, it meant a lifelong friendship. You could almost ask for anything if you were having [serious] difficulties.

That first time I came, I also found it hard to adjust to the American way of study. The system I attended in my early years in Taiwan was harsh. Our elementary and secondary schools didn't try to develop your "individual talent." There was one system. They taught it, and you learned it. And you didn't talk back. If you got in trouble, you were punished. They flogged you with a ruler or a stick. There were some very, very strict teachers who really punished you. This wasn't "symbolic" punishment. They really beat you, because at that time the teachers were under the influence of the [old] Japanese system, and the Japanese system is very severe. They take corporal punishment for granted. And our parents, of course, approved. They said, "Oh, this teacher is so good. He is severe and he punishes the students so hard."

Our schools were pretty much modeled on army discipline. We boys had our heads shaved, and the girls had their hair cut short. We wore khaki and had an insignia on our shirt, with a number on top of our pocket. And each morning we stood at attention, sang the national anthem, and raised the flag. Then we'd drill, exactly the way they do in boot camp. We'd do aerobic exercises and listen to speeches about expected behavior. So it was a harsh system. School was not a place you went to enjoy yourself. You had to be careful in school. You had to be cautious. And it created a strong sense of insecurity in a lot of Chinese people. That's my personal feeling. But because of those harsh early days, you were always looking over your shoulder. You always felt that you were being watched, and so you [had] better behave. I think I have overcome that feeling, but I know a lot of people who haven't.

Regimentation continued on the college level. There was no corporal punishment, of course. There was no need for it. We were well indoctrinated by then. And in college, the work was hard. We always had a lot to do. But the curriculum was fixed. All you really had to do was study the text and pass the tests. And the tests were uniform. Everybody took the same exam. You didn't have to do much creative thinking, for instance, to understand cost accounting or auditing. You had to solve problems based on the textbook. But here in America, you had to do a lot of creative problem solving. You had to come up with your own ideas, you had to do your own research, and you *had* to make presentations and be witty when you did it. All this was especially hard for foreign students who hadn't mastered the language.