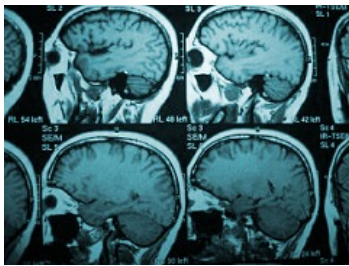




**BURT WOLF**  
**TRAVELS & TRADITIONS**  
**A SENSE OF PLACE - TAIWAN**  
**NURTURE VS. NATURE PART II**

**A** while back I read a book titled *The Genius In All Of Us*. It summarized a lot of research and concluded that people who are very successful are not born with a set of rare genes that make them great. Success is usually the result of the interaction of your genes with your environment, plus relentless dedication and faith in your ability to succeed. It also pointed out that stressing your mind like stressing a muscle will cause a biological change that improves performance. Most of us



live with a considerable amount of stress.

This program looks at what happens to you when you grow up in one cultural environment and are suddenly put under an enormous amount of stress by moving to a new one. It focuses on a group of Taiwanese who grew up in a traditional Chinese culture and then suddenly moved to the United States and what that move did to them.

I talked to Chen Ming Wong who came from Taiwan to play baseball for the New York Yankees. Doctor Henry Lee one of the world's most famous forensic scientists. He had become the youngest captain in Taiwan's police force when he decided to move to New York. Steve Chen the cofounder of YouTube who came to Chicago when he was a child and then moved to California because he loved computers and internet technology. I was particularly interested in what they liked about Taiwanese culture, how they thought it affected them and what they did when they went back to Taiwan for a visit.

**JUSTIN LIN**

The first person I talked to was Justin Lin. Justin was born in Taiwan in 1973 and moved to Orange County, California when he was eight years old. Justin became a director and one of the most accomplished and promising young



film makers in Hollywood. He directed *The Fast and the Furious Tokyo Drift*, *Fast and Furious Four*, *Finishing the Game* and *Better Luck Tomorrow*. Justin gives considerable credit to his Taiwanese background.

Justin pointed out that as an Asian American immigrant he was exposed to the concept of underdog. And his response was a feeling that he could do anything.

He didn't have any potential investors for his first film, *Better Luck Tomorrow*, so he took ten credit cards and used them to make his movie. The film went to Sundance and was bought by Paramount and everything in his life changed. He made his next film on a 25 million dollar budget. He jokes that he spent the entire budget for his first film before lunch on the second one. Then his budget went from 25 million to 100 million. But no matter what the budget, he was still just trying to tell a story. The more money he had, the more tools he had to do the job.

Justin has some great memories of Taiwan. After his first independent film, he went back to Taiwan for a film festival. And as soon as he took his first bite of food, all of the memories of his childhood came rushing back. He misses stinky tofu, but can't seem to get anyone to share it with him.

He also went back for the premiere of *Fast and Furious*. The studio took him to Taipei's most elegant restaurants. One day, he was able to sneak out for three hours and eat the simple meals that he loves.

**JUSTIN LIN, FILM DIRECTOR**

*I love exploring, just walking, it's the thing that I really enjoy about Taiwan. I love getting lost. I pride myself on finding a little hole in the wall, like this little dumpling place where everyone would just go to eat at lunchtime. It was amazing, you get 12 dumplings for about 50 cents.*



*I love the street carts, and I remember when I was a little kid, my dad would take me and we would find little street carts for beef noodle and stuff like that. I'm partial to that kind of eating.*

**GIANT BICYCLES**

Justin suggested that I get out into the country side and do a little biking, which makes sense. Taiwan has a number of

unspoiled national parks and bike paths that run from one end of the country to the other. It also has the world's biggest manufacturer of bicycles.

In 1972, a young Taiwanese named King Liu began manufacturing bicycles. Even though he built the bikes they carried the brand names of the companies that sold them to the public--- Schwinn and Nishiki were the most famous.

Tony Lo is the company's Chef Executive Officer.



**TONY LO, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GIANT BICYCLES**

*We have been making all kinds of bicycles for different kinds of people. We focus on quality, but secondly we really make use of the technology and try to make breakthroughs in bicycle design.*

*In the past a bicycle was either for mobility, transportation or for people to compete in races. But actually, for most people to enjoy bicycles, bicycles need to be very light, very strong and functional.*

*In 1981, Giant decided to start selling their bikes under their own name. Today Giant is the largest bicycle maker in the world. They make over 5 million bikes a year which are sold in over 10,000 stores in 50 countries.*

*We are lucky, lucky because Taiwan is a small country. We have all kinds of industry, we have all kinds of materials, and we have all kinds of technology. We have to work with German companies and*

*Swiss companies and US companies and Japanese companies, but finally we are the ones to bring everything to one place and make it happen. Taiwan is small, but small actually becomes an advantage. We integrate all the technology and make things happen.*



The fact that Taiwan is not a sprawling giant is a distinct advantage in the development and integration of the nation's industries but it is also a benefit for tourists. You can see the entire country in a short time.

**CLOUD GATE DANCE COMPANY**

Everyone I spoke to about the performing arts in Taiwan recommended the Cloud Gate Dance Company. It was founded in 1970 and immediately became an important part of Taiwan's creative community. Cloud Gate blended Asian mythology and folklore into modern dance with constant references to tai chi, meditation and the martial arts. The company spends most of its time performing throughout Taiwan. But from time to time they perform in Europe and the Americas. I first saw them in New York. The founder and creative force behind Cloud Gate is Lin Hwai-min.

**LIN HWAI-MIN, FOUNDER  
CLOUD GATE DANCE COMPANY**

*Cloud Gate is the oldest known Chinese dance. We took this historical name as the name of our modern dance company.*

*We started the company in 1973, thinking that we would draw inspiration from our own culture to create something that is contemporary.*

*Most of the time I ask the dancer to improvise because their bodies are so rich, they are multi-lingual.*

*Now a days I live in Taipei, I tour around the world, but Taipei is a fascinating city. You have the influences of different cultures. We have our espresso at Starbucks but still we love our tea that takes time to make, and an even longer time to sip. So we can have both.*



*Visitors to Taipei should take the subway and get to meet the people. The people in Taiwan are very nice. We have journalists from China and they write me that even before they leave the country they are already homesick about Taipei. This doesn't look like any*

*Chinese city.*

*Cloud Gate performs in its theater and has 3 outdoor performances each year. We attract about 50-60 thousand people in different cities of Taiwan, and we tour around the world with works inspired by our own culture but in contemporary forms.*

*I think people should come to Taiwan. They will find something very fascinating.*

**TAIWAN HIGH SPEED RAIL**

For centuries the rugged mountain range that runs down the center of Taiwan pushed the population centers to the western shores of the island.

As the population and economic activity increased, transportation along this north-south corridor became more and more congested.



I have a distinct and painful memory of setting out to drive to a town about 50 miles south of Taipei. I had a map and it showed an expressway and it looked like I could knock it off in about an hour.

What my map did not show was the fact that there was nothing express about the expressway. It was more like the nation's longest parking lot. After three hours of getting nowhere, I just turned back. Apparently, this was life in the fast lane for everyone in Taiwan.

To solve the problem, the government developed Taiwan High



Speed Rail. The stations are modern, clean and highly efficient. The yellow lights in the floor tell you that the train is arriving or departing

They offer both standard and business class. In business class the seats are a little bit wider,

they have a radio entertainment system, and an electronic plug-in system for all your portable electronics. And the announcements and the signs are in Chinese and English.

The Taiwan High Speed Rail is based on the technology used by the Japanese bullet train. The line runs north to south for just over two hundred miles and has a top speed of about 190 miles per hour. It will take you from one end of the island to the other in 90 minutes instead of four and half hours. The train makes it possible for people living in Taipei to commute to the South for work, or vice versa. The total cost for the project was 15 billion dollars which made it the largest privately funded transportation project of the time.

And, it's environmentally responsible. The New York Times reported that a passenger traveling on a fully loaded train will use a sixth of the energy that they would use if they drove alone in a car and release only one-ninth as much carbon dioxide gas.

The high-speed trains have successfully out-competed planes. Domestic air travel has fallen by almost half. And there was a similar drop in long distance bus travel.

### GUANGHUA ELECTRONICS MARKET

Dr. Lee suggested a visit to the Guanghua Market. Guanghua Market started out as a gathering spot for antique dealers offering old books and toys. Today it is a market for the latest electronic and computer products. There are things here that won't get to North America and Europe for months. And some of the stuff will never be offered outside of Asia.



### NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRADITIONAL ARTS



Another recommendation from the people I interviewed was the National Center for the Traditional Arts. The part I liked best was a row of buildings constructed in a traditional style. I have seen streets like this all over Taiwan. There is a shop on the street floor and the

family that operates the shop lives upstairs. The shops at the National Center for Traditional Arts are occupied by artisans practicing traditional crafts.

One shop specializes in objects made from bamboo. Unlike the

wood that comes from trees that takes decades to grow, bamboo is a grass that is harvested every 18 months. It is an ideal sustainable material. The artisans who operate this shop make bamboo bowls, and chopsticks, teacups, cutting boards, vases and bowls. Very time-honored stuff.

But they are also very busy keeping up with the needs of their 21<sup>st</sup> century customers. They offer a bamboo holder for the I-Phone. Confucius would have loved it. And a USB thumb drive.

Another shop makes old fashion Chinese candy. There's a shop that makes wooden sandals. And they cut the straps to fit while you wait. And everyday there are street performances based on age old folktales.



### TEMPLES

As I traveled around Taiwan, one of the first things I noticed was the number of Temples. There are over 10,000 places of worship in Taiwan and the dominant form is a folk religion that blends elements of Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian philosophy.



Chinese folk religion maintains that the human world and the supernatural world exist side by side and are in constant contact. They also believe that it is the responsibility of humans to send things to the inhabitants of the supernatural world in the form of offerings.

The most common offering is food. And what kind of food is being offered can tell you a lot about the relationship between the person making the offering and the being in the supernatural world that it's being sent to. If the food is ready to eat it is probably being offered to a relative or a friend and was something that the dearly departed liked during his or her earthly existence.



If you are making an offering to a really important god the food will be totally unprocessed – a raw chicken, a vegetable pulled out of the ground with its roots on. The idea is to show the distance between you and the deity. The god does not need your help to feed himself.

And the gods are very practical. They don't actually eat the food. They just inhale the essence. The food rests on the offering table for a while and then it's either picked

up by the person who brought it here, taken home and eaten or

distributed to the poor by the monks. It's a win-win for everybody.

Some people come to the Temples to get advice. The equipment used for soliciting guidance from the gods is a set of crescent divining blocks. You ask your question and drop the blocks on the floor. If they land with one round side up and one flat side up the answer to your question is "yes". If they land with both round sides up the answer is "no". If they land with both flat sides up it means that all of the deities are busy assisting other worshippers and you should ask again later.

#### STREET MARKETS

Like the residents of most major industrialized nations, the people of Taiwan do most of their shopping in modern supermarkets. But like Paris and Rome alongside the supermarkets in Taipei there are traditional street markets. In many cases, the families of the vendors have been in the same spot for generations.



Hot peppers are used in the cooking of Szechuan and Hunan dishes, but they are not indigenous to China. They were actually brought here by the Portuguese traders who picked them up on the pacific islands.



The noodle maker has been here as far back as anyone can remember. There's a variety of different shapes with different ingredients and they are made fresh every morning.

Chinese noodle making got started during the Han Dynasty which ran from about 200 BC to 200 AD. Cooks had mastered the technique of grinding wheat into flour and mixing it with water to produce noodle dough. Cutting the dough into strips made

the noodles cook faster and therefore use less heating fuel. It's the most basic of foods and cooking techniques and you'll find it in one form or another in every culture that developed flour.

Justin Lin making movies in Los Angeles. Tony Lo running the world's largest bicycle manufacturer. Lin Hwai-Min developing the Cloud Gate Dance Company. The engineers who designed Taiwan's High Speed Rail system. The extraordinary programmers who got 5,000 ancient Chinese words onto a modern computer keyboard.

In each case you have people who grew up in the traditional Chinese culture of Taiwan and where challenged by moving and working in a very different environment.

What we are is the result of the interaction between our genes and our environment. The people I interviewed are a clear example of what can happen when a structured Taiwanese childhood is topped off by the creative energy of the United States.

## TO LEARN MORE...

#### TAIWAN'S GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OFFICE

[WWW.GIO.GOV.TW](http://WWW.GIO.GOV.TW)

#### TAIPEI ECONOMIC & CULTURAL OFFICE IN NEW YORK

[WWW.TAIPEI.ORG](http://WWW.TAIPEI.ORG)

#### NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRADITIONAL ARTS

NO. 201, WUBIN ROAD SECTION 2

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#### TAIWAN HIGH SPEED RAIL

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#### CLOUD GATE DANCE COMPANY

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[WWW.CLOUDGATE.ORG.TW/ENG/](http://WWW.CLOUDGATE.ORG.TW/ENG/)

#### GIANT BICYCLES

[WWW.GIANT-BICYCLES.COM](http://WWW.GIANT-BICYCLES.COM)

#### *THE GENIUS IN ALL OF US: WHY EVERYTHING YOU'VE BEEN TOLD ABOUT GENETICS, TALENT, AND IQ IS WRONG*

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