

# FROM TAIWAN TO THE WORLD AND BACK: A MEMOIR BY LO FU-CHEN 榮町少年走天下

A Taiwanese in the United Nations—where Taiwan could not enter, he found a way in. As an economic expert, he has travelled around the world, providing his expertise.

During the 1960s, when Lo Fu-Chen was working on his doctorate degree at University of Pennsylvania, he joined a pro Taiwan independence march and was thus blacklisted by the Kuomintang government—not only was he forbidden to return to Taiwan, but he also became a man without nationality. In the 1970s, he was recruited by the UN to work at Nagoya's UN Centre for Regional Development where he helped developing countries to establish their economies. For twenty-seven years, with a UN passport in hand, he flew around the world working for the well-being of everyday people.

Just as he was preparing to enjoy his retirement, the government in Taiwan changed hands. The new government wanted to use his connections as well as his economic expertise, and appointed him to the position of Taiwan's top representative to Japan.

Through his eyes, we are able to experience his world of the past half century.

## Lo Fu-Chen 羅福全

Lo Fu-Chen was Taiwan's top representative in Japan from 2000 to 2004. Born in Sakae-machi, Chiayi, in 1935, Lo graduated with a bachelor's in economics from National Taiwan University, a master's in economics from Waseda University, and a Ph.D. in regional science from the University of Pennsylvania. Among his many outstanding contributions to the field of economic research, Lo has worked in the United Nations Centre for Regional Development as Chief of Comparative Studies and in the United Nations University as Senior Academic Officer.

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Narrated by Lo Fu-Chen. Text by Chen Jou-Chin. Translated by Yew Leong Lee.

## A Three-Year Old Gives Away the Bride

One day, when I was just three years old, I was dressed up like a miniature grownup. I became what people back in 1938 called 'a little prince,' decked out in my Western jacket and pants, with a gold-buttoned, double-breasted vest to boot. Attached to one of these buttons was the gold chain of a pocket watch tucked elegantly into a vest pocket.

It was my cousin Hsu Hsiu-Luan's wedding day. She was the daughter of my fourth aunt on my father's side. According to tradition, her splendid wedding procession should have begun at the Hsu household, but my aunt's husband, a doctor, had died early, leaving her widowed at the tender age of twenty. She had been closest to my father, and it had been decided that she and her dependents would move in with us. Since Hsiu-Luan had more or less been brought up under our roof, she naturally wanted to be 'married out' of the Lo household.

In the 30s, the Taiwanese still cared deeply about arranging marriages within class boundaries. My cousin Hsiu-Luan, who studied medicine at a university in Tokyo, should naturally be matched with someone of exceptional background. The bridegroom was Lai Hsun-Chang, a gifted law student at Chuo University, also in Tokyo. His father, Lai Yu-Jo, was the first lawyer ever to have come out of Chiayi City, and was even better-known here than we were.

Lai Yu-Jo had been born into a wealthy family; his father, Lai Shih-Kuan, had even passed the Imperial Exams. When Taiwan came under Japanese rule in 1895, Lai Yu-Jo was already seventeen or eighteen years old. Normally, someone who had an education in literature and the Confucian classics would have idled at home after his studies, living off rental income. Yet Lai Yu-Jo decided to pursue a different fate altogether.

When he was about the age of a contemporary college freshman, Lai Yu-Jo enrolled into the National Language Institute of Learning, which had been founded by the Japanese, to study their language. He picked it up quickly, and after graduation became a court interpreter.

Most people who got stable government jobs relaxed the pace of their self-improvement, or stopped learning altogether, but Yu-Jo had more ambition than that. When the exams to enter the highest echelons of government became open to Taiwanese people for the first time in 1905, he took them and passed. He was appointed to a position as Court Secretary, yet that wasn't enough for him. He wanted to defend his fellow countrymen on the floor of the court as a lawyer. So he left Taiwan and studied law for three years at a Japanese university. Twice, he sat for the bar exams and failed; in 1923, he tried for a third time and succeeded. Of the forty-two new lawyers in Japan that year, three were of Taiwanese origin. Lai Yu-Jo was one, as was Cai Shi-Gu, another eventual pillar of the Taiwanese state.

Becoming a lawyer cost Lai Yu-Jo sixteen years of effort. By the time his dream came true, he was forty-five years old. Although the journey had been difficult, its final outcome

proved that where there is a will there is a way, and it earned him the respect of the citizens of Chiayi. By the time Hsiu-Luan returned from Japan to get married in 1931, Lai Yu-Jo had strengthened his reputation even further as an elected member of the Tainan City Council. This position was similar to a modern-day senator, except that Council members were appointed by government officials, not chosen by the electorate.

Lai Yu-Jo's son's wedding was therefore a big deal for the city of Chiayi as well. After the wedding rites were over, everyone gathered for the customary memorial photograph. Powerful businessmen and government officials from Chiayi stood in the back row, while the families of the bride and groom sat in the front. Lai Yu-Jo, seated to the left of the groom, represented the groom's family—sixty years old, powerful and authoritarian. Seated on the bride's right and representing her family was tiny, three-year-old me.

That a toddler might give away a bride might seem unfathomable to a Westerner, but to the Taiwanese, it was the next natural step to take in the calculus of tradition.

Taiwanese society in the 30's privileged men, and in the old order the bride's mother was not considered of sufficient status to give away her daughter. A man had to be chosen to undertake the role. By rights, that man should have been her uncle, my father. Yet my father had contracted a contagious disease when I was ten months old that killed him in a matter of days. As his only son, I was his natural representative, so I ended up next to the bride that day.

Age is no consideration in the Taiwanese family structure. One's identity is determined by one's relation to the rest. A one-year-old infant could be a forty-year old's 'grand-uncle,' and a twenty-year old woman might call a two-year-old girl 'grand-aunt.' In Taiwan, this would not seem strange at all.

As a child, I was frequently given adult responsibilities. I gave the bride away when I was three, and became head of the household at thirteen. My mother and older sister lived with me and were technically my charges.

## **A Child With Two Mothers**

There is a strange entry in my accounts booklet that has a story behind it. In the field for 'Mother' is the name Chu Lien, yet just beside it is another name, Ch'en Kui, with the word 'mother' scribbled above it. It is another reflection of the traditional customs of the past.

In the year 1736, two hundred years before I was born, my ancestors sailed from Changchou in Fuchien Province to Taiwan. Many Chinese people were leaving China at the time, going not only to Taiwan, but also to Malaysia and Thailand (it is said that 80 percent of Bangkok natives have roots in Fuchien).

There is a hundred-year-old hotel called the E&O in Penang, Malaysia. Tombstones in the cemetery near it bear dates from the early eighteenth century, around the same time our ancestors first arrived in Taiwan.

They settled in Chiayi because it was a city. Newly established on foreign soil, the migrants didn't know one another, and there was a lot of fighting. In fact, unrest became typical of Taiwanese society in that era. There's an old story in our family from the days when ours was the only surname in our village about Lo An, a hot-tempered villager who stood up for the clan and died for it. The idiom 'Lo An saves a thousand men, but a thousand men couldn't save Lo An,' refers to this event.

In this new land, my ancestors endured great hardship and, by the nineteenth century, managed to amass great wealth. They also had a reputation for being ill-tempered. It was

common in the past for landowners to think themselves superior to everyone else. Once, on the first day of the Lunar New Year, a paddy farmer paid a visit to my grandfather's house bearing the customary gifts of chicken and vegetables, and hoping to get the lease on his land extended. My grandfather, a Qing-dynasty scholar we referred to as Ah Gong, was sitting in the main hall of the ancestral home, deeply absorbed in a book. The creak of the approaching farmer's shoulder pole snapped him out of his reverie; furiously, he leapt up and kicked the farmer like he were a dog. The long-suffering farmer had likely experienced worse in his hard life, but this humiliation was the final straw. He bought betel nuts to bribe the other farmers to stop working my grandfather's land. The following year, forty hectares of paddy fields went untended. Today, we say that Ah Gong 'felled forty hectares of paddy with one foot.' Back then, if you owned ten or twenty hectares of land in Tainan, you were considered wealthy; forty hectares was quite a lot. We retold the story every year on the day we commemorated Ah Gong. The food offerings were plentiful, but as if to prevent Ah Gong's bad temper from being passed on to me, my mother forbade me to eat any of it.

My father was born at the end of the Qing Dynasty and grew up during the peaceful period of Japanese colonization. He moved from the countryside into the city of Chiayi and established himself there.

Called Lo Ch'eng (or Lo Chang-Ch'eng, according to family genealogy), he was the youngest of three brothers, and without an heir. His brother Lo Ya, on the other hand, took a second wife after his first wife died, and had a household full of children. He had four sons and two daughters, and I was the youngest child. At the time of my birth, my biological father Lo Ya was forty-eight years old, and my uncle Lo Ch'eng, forty-four. He was still childless, which was a problem.

Chinese tradition demands that every male member of a family should produce an heir. Even if your brother already has one, the onus was still on you to give continued form to shapeless human life. Men were like relay runners, tasked to pass the baton to the men who follow them; if you dropped it, the race was over and your house would 'collapse.' An heir needed to be procured by any means necessary. In cases where it was not biologically possible to do so, families would sometimes cheat by adopting the children of other relatives.

My uncle Lo Ch'eng married my aunt in 1919, and after having tried for more than ten years, they were resigned to their infertility. After my biological mother became pregnant for the fourth time, my aunt said, 'If it's a son, you must give him to me!' Given the situation, my biological mother could hardly refuse. When I was seven months old, on the first day of the Western New Year, I was carried to my aunt's home.

Thus it transpired that the entire course of my life changed while I was still in baby clothes. I would henceforth call my father 'uncle,' and my aunt, 'mother.'

This dramatic switch might not sit well with people nowadays; one might feel bitter about being separated from one's birth parents, I suppose. But the truth was my life did not change for the worse as a result. On the contrary, I received even more affection.

My biological mother having given birth to two pairs of sons and daughters, my adopted father Lo Ch'eng said to her, 'Since you're giving me a son, how about a daughter as well?' Thus my sister, Chao-Jong, who was only two years than I, also followed me to a different household. Remaining at the side of my biological mother were my brother Fu-Hui, and my sister Chao-I.

Who would have thought that fate would continue to inflict pain on my biological mother?

Fu-Hui was seven years older than I and extremely intelligent. When he was only in fifth grade, he built a darkroom to develop his own pictures. He was admitted to the very

prestigious Taihoku High School, Taiwan's only high school at the time (its campus on Heping Road is now used by Taipei Normal University), and a playground for future elites. Lee Teng-Hui was one of its many famous alumni. Admission into this school was seen as a ticket to the nine Imperial Universities open to people living in Japan and its colonies. The university entrance exam was particularly competitive: forty people passed the year Fu-Hui enrolled in school, thirty-four of whom were Japanese and only six Taiwanese.

Fu-Hui happily packed his bags for Taipei. Before the first day of school, however, he suddenly came down with a gallbladder illness, and was hastily admitted into Taipei Hospital. My second uncle's son, Fu-Yüeh, happened to be working in the same hospital as Professor Du Ts'ung-Ming's assistant, and he took care of him. The following day, back in Chiayi, my uncle was reading a book when he came across the phrase 'a father cries over his son,' which he took as omen. Sure enough, news of Fu-Hui's sudden death arrived in Chiayi a day later. His body was cremated in National Taiwan University Hospital; I don't know why they didn't give him a standard burial. I still remember being brought to the hospital and scooping up his ashes with a pair of chopsticks. I was only five years old.

Fu-Hui's departure put my aunt beyond grief. No one at home dared mention his name. The words 'Fu-Hui' seemed to have burned away with his body. I never heard them again.

When my aunt lost her only son, I became his substitute, and the sole object of her affection. That was how I became a child with two mothers.

### **My Mother, the Telephone Operator**

Thinking back on my youth, it seems as if I was always filling roles that were incommensurate with my age. At the age of six, for example, I went to study abroad in Japan.

At the end of 1941 Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, declaring war on America. Before that, Japan had been fighting China for years; one might say that Taiwan was also at war. However, my mother brought me to Tokyo not to evade war, but so I could get a good education. Nothing was more important than education, and she wanted only the very best for me.

Compared to the other women of her generation, my mother was considered liberal, and rich in experience. She hadn't had a sheltered childhood; her father bought and sold mountain property, and worked as an escort for goods in transit. At end of the Qing Dynasty, there were still gangs of thieves in the mountains, and merchants worried their goods would end up in the wrong hands. As a result, people like my grandfather were in demand as escorts for property. Once, when I was in fifth grade, I rubbed my grandfather's back. He showed me the tools he used to make his living, two knives, and even pointed to a deep scar on his shoulder, where he said he'd been shot by a thief. My mother must naturally have inherited a wild spirit from him.

She was also intelligent. She graduated top of her class in primary school, and she could even speak Japanese. It was a pity that she was born at a time when higher education was still not an option for women. Chiayi's High School for Girls had not been set up, so there was no way for her to continue her education. Around the time she finished primary school, Taiwan was embarking on a series of reforms to modernize its villages. Upon leaving school, she entered a society on the brink of significant change. She was one of Taiwan's first generation of career women.

Mother was born in 1900, the same year the first telephone was seen in Taiwan. 15 years later, outstanding grades and her teacher's encouragement gave her the confidence to

apply to be a telephone operator at the Chiayi Post Office.

At that time, poor women worked in the fields, and rich women stayed home and did nothing; either way, they were not expected to take outside jobs. No so-called 'career women' back then, no female typists, bus conductors, saleswomen, or factory seamstresses. As a phone operator, my mother blazed a trail for the women who came after her.

The telephone as an object was both modern and Western. While one might easily imagine my mother wearing a starched white blouse to work, she dressed the way all Taiwanese women dressed in that decade, which was in the imperial Chinese style. She wore a blouse that went all the way to her thighs and a dress that covered her ankles. Cloth shoes, embroidered with silk, peeked out from beneath the hem.

My adopted mother was a capable, savvy woman, very different from my biological mother. They had been classmates in primary school; the former was the top student, the latter second-best. They got along very well, and then became sisters-in-law. During the day, though they might be in the same room, my biological mother would be doing needlework, while my adopted mother would busy herself with accounts, or talk business with outsiders. Yet at the end of the day she was a mother through and through – her children were the center of her world. She didn't aspire to start her own business, nor did she wish for status or wealth.

When I was small I often complained of stomachaches, and the doctor told my mother to give me cooling foods. She remembered this piece of advice well.

While my cousin Hsiu-Luan was studying medicine in Tokyo, my mother decided to take my sister and me to Japan so that we would receive a better education and have a brighter future.

In May of 1941, we boarded a ship and left for Japan. My mother was 41 years old; I was six, and my sister eight. Completely on her own, she guided us across the sea to settle in a foreign land.

During the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan sent students to Japan for advanced study. In 1925, there were some eight hundred Taiwanese overseas students in Japanese universities, and by the time I was born in 1935, this figure had grown to more than two thousand. When the former Editor-in-Chief of Mandarin Daily Newspaper Hong Yan-Ch'iu opposed the Japanese, his son, in an act of desperation, stole money from his father's bank account and escaped to Japan for a better education. The opera singer Lü Ch'üan-Sheng was inspired by the main character in Natsume Soseki's *Sanshiro* to start his life afresh in Tokyo. In the forties, Lee Teng-hui graduated from Taihoku High School and chose to study abroad in Tokyo's Imperial College. I was just a six-year-old boy amid this tidal wave of students headed abroad, but my mother took my hand and jumped into it with me. To date, I still think of that as my mother's greatest achievement, an unthinkable act for a widow in those days.

### **My Father as Businessman and Builder**

You had to be from a rich family to study abroad. I was no exception.

Lo Cheng, my father, was by all standards a successful businessman. I don't know the details of his education, but I do know that he was once a teacher at a public school in Meishan (formerly Hsiaomei) during the Japanese colonial period, when only those who had come out of Sotokufu Mandarin School or the High School for Girls could enter that vocation. I think it likely that my father was qualified to teach Chinese because he had a Chinese studies background: my

grandfather Lo Yu-Dien and my fifth grand-uncle had both been imperial officials, and other men in the family had sat for the civil service exams.

At the end of the 1910s, Chiayi was on the cusp of exciting developments. It had once been a small city of just over 20,000 people. In the spring of 1919, the Chiayi School for Agriculture (now a part of National Chiayi University) was opened, and the year after, work began on the Chianan Reservoir, a mammoth construction project that would span ten years, and whose offices and dormitories were located in Chiayi. These projects fueled Chiayi's transformation into a major city and caused an influx of people. By the end of the 20's, Chiayi had doubled its population, making it Taiwan's fourth largest city after Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Tainan. It held this position until the end of the Japanese colonial period. It was even more prosperous than Keelung, Taichung, and Hsinchu.

Word of Chiayi's population growth spread, and it began to be known as a place of opportunity. People moved there hoping to make it big. In 1922, a man named Lin Bao came from the nearby town of Pu-tsi. According to Mother, although he hadn't had much formal education, he was savvy and full of ideas. He saw a notice for a Court Sale, and reported it to my father; the two of them started a business trading real estate, and even bid on a movie theater at one point.

After this, my father conducted a whole series of new and fashionable ventures. In 1924, he was the first to import over ten machines that produced socks. At that time, more and more women were taking on work outside the home, and women's fashion was being revolutionized. Chinese-style dresses were getting shorter and shorter, and the ankles now being revealed beneath the hems of the dresses needed to be covered. Female students began to abandon the long skirts of the Meiji period for shorter and more modern ones, which meant that they too needed socks. Naturally father's business proved lucrative. According to news reports, six sock factories mushroomed up in Chiayi within two years. Each factory produced more than a hundred dozen pairs of socks every day, for a combined output of one thousand five hundred per diem, to be sold to all of southern Taiwan.

In 1925, cities like Chiayi and Hsi-lo were suddenly infected with a 'rice futures' craze. It was not unlike the futures trading we engage in today, except that rice was the subject of speculation. People who traded in 'rice futures' committed to investments pegged to a future price. Father started a brokerage devoted to rice futures and earned a commission from each trade. The price of rice was volatile, which meant only the smartest traders could survive. By 1927, the number of brokerages in Pu-tsi, for example, had shrunk from seven or eight to two, one of which was my father's. This was a testament to his business acumen. In 1934, the city of Dachia in Taichung saw a spate of bankruptcies related to rice futures trading that resulted in quite a few suicides. A newspaper editorial noted that rice futures created wealth for only a few; for the rest, it brought disaster. Luckily, my father belonged to the former camp. One day, after my mother dreamt of fireworks raining down from the sky, a seventy-thousand Taiwan dollar dividend fell into father's lap. To put this in context: the monthly salary of a policeman or a bank employee was only twenty dollars; two thousand four hundred dollars represented ten years of work. To earn seventy thousand overnight was unimaginable.

A decisive man, my father knew he should quit while he was ahead. In 1927, he closed the brokerage and launched into a completely different direction by opening a bus company.

Nowadays, bus transportation seems like small change compared to airlines, subways, and high-speed rail. Yet one must remember that it was only in 1912 that a Japanese hotelier in Taipei brought the first car to Taiwan, and only in 1914, when a cinema owner started a bus route between Hsingang and Chiayi that the people of Chiayi saw their first automobile. How

many could afford such a newfangled, monstrous object? People walked the fifteen-kilometer journey. The automobile was still a rare sight.

For a while, car ownership increased at a snail's pace; twenty years later, there were only forty automobiles in all of Tainan. At the end of 1927, when father bought a bus in Tainan and drove it back to Chiayi, people looked at the vehicle like it was a UFO. According to my mother, because there were no bridges at that time, father had to drive on the banks of the Bahjang River; fortunately, it was in the middle of winter, and the banks were dry. Back in the Chiayi countryside, a boy who had never seen an automobile before was so scared by my father's bus that he jumped into a ditch. Seeing the boy, my father hit the brakes. Moments later, the kid's mother had pulled him out of the ditch and was 'recovering his soul' using different patting motions. One wonders if she thought of the bus as a god or a demon.

已註解 [1]: I think this is a better place to stop.