
ELI STUDENT VOICES

Volume 7, Issue 2

Summer 2003

My Old Home (1st Place)

Ching-yao Yang

R/W 60

Several years after leaving, I returned to this small village, Man Chow. It is a very small village located in southernmost Taiwan. I was driving and looking for the house where I had spent my early childhood. Following the ever-familiar path, I saw the tree whose branches I liked to sit under and dream about my future.

I was very excited when I found the house near the tree was still there. Suddenly, all my memories came out and my mind was flooded by waves of nostalgia. In my memory the house was full of the smell of wood. The Japanese style house was made of wood. The walls and the floor were also wood made. My father and I often played games on the floor. On the small table near the kitchen, my mother used to put a jar of candy; that was my favorite place. Out of living room windows, I can see a big garden. Many beautiful flowers used to bloom, and many butterflies flew among them. In the summer clamorous cicadas climbed all of these trees, and they sang loudly.

But now the windows are broken. Instead of clean glass, many spider webs are blown about in the wind. A big part of the tree in front of the house has been cut, like the man who has lost his hands. The flowers are gone, and butterflies cannot play in their playground. However, I am surprised to find the small table, covered with dust, standing alone in the corner of the house. The cicadas are still singing hard. That is the one and only memory that didn't change.

After seeing this scene, I feel a little sad, but I know I have to accept it because in the world only one thing has never changed; that is change itself.

A Day in the Life of a Typical Student in Japan (2nd Place)

Tetsuya Shinagawa

R/W 500

Taro usually wakes up at 10 or later in the morning. He has two classes in the morning, but he seldom attends the classes. Participation is required for students, but it does not necessarily mean that he has to attend the classes because he always asks one of his friends to answer the roll for him when they check attendance at the beginning of the classes. Naturally, he cannot do so good at the tests; he has to take test

by himself. Another reason for not attending the classes in the morning is to avoid crowded trains in the rush hours.

He leaves his apartment without eating breakfast at 11, and takes not crowded trains for about an hour. He first goes to a cafeteria to eat brunch with his friends who do not eat breakfast, either.

After brunch, he has two classes and a seminar. He sits on a seat toward the back, and pretends to listen to the lecture earnestly, actually sleeping. He does not take any notes in the class because he can borrow excellent notes from his friends before his tests. He does not study until just before his test, and always crams for the test. He seldom fails the test, but cannot get A's, either.

Although he does not like most classes, he enjoys attending a seminar. The seminar is a small class consisting of a professor and about ten students. In the seminar, he has to read various papers, submit many reports, give presentations, and answer questions. This is why he likes the seminar because almost all the classes in Japan are only lectures given by professors and passive to most students, which does not interest him. He likes to work with his friends for their research or project.

After he finishes the seminar at 6 in the afternoon, he joins a tennis club, his extracurricular activity. Certainly, he likes to play tennis, but he enjoys talking to young girls most. He always tries to take some attractive girls out for dinner, but in vain in most cases.

Even if he fails to take some young girls out, he goes to an *izakaya*, a Japanese-style bar, to drink alcohol with his male friends. He drinks any kind of alcohol, including beer or whisky, but his favorite one is *sake*, Japanese alcohol made from rice. The most popular way of drinking is to drink alcohol up in a single draft, competing with others for its speed. Someone who loses the competition must drink another glass of alcohol again, so some people finally drink several glasses in a short time, which sometimes leads them to acute alcoholism. He often stays at an *izakaya* till midnight, and takes the last train to go back home.

He does not go to bed soon after he arrives at his house. He watches midnight TV programs at random or plays TV games by himself, eating snacks. Finally, he goes to bed at around 3 in the morning, when he cannot stay awake.

The above is a day in the life of a typical student in Japan. He does not study as hard as when he was a high school student, and focuses on his extracurricular activities, so he often wastes his time. Needless to say, not all the Japanese students lead their student life like this, but the words "the life of a typical student" remind me of such a fruitless university life. After entering the real world, most people regret that they hadn't studied much harder. It is too late!

Impact of Economic Recession in 1997

Kawin Temtriratana

R/W 60

In 1997, most of the Thai population was shocked by an economic recession. It was definitely a rough time for everyone. In three months, more than 1.5 million people lost their jobs, and more than 5,000 companies had to be shut down, especially businesses involved with imports and money lent from other countries. At that time, the “baht,” Thai currency, seemed to be money of no value. People suffered from a few mistakes which caused huge impacts that no one could imagine. These mistakes were caused by a small number of people in the government who were responsible for financial policies. Since then, Thailand has not experienced a prosperous economy as it was before 1997. The way of living has changed significantly. People feel that they will never have the chance to live in a thriving era again. They just keep wishing and hoping that healthy signs of economy will show up soon.

Before the recession, the Thai economy was one of the most flourishing economies in Asia. Because of this prosperity, students graduating from universities got good jobs and happily started their careers. With the perfect economic atmosphere, not only did they get paid high salaries, but they also got good bonuses twelve to fifteen times per year. Because of the double-digit growth in the economy, most of the new white-collar employees spent a great amount of money, leasing luxurious merchandise. Everyone seemed to have delightful moments.

Unfortunately, in July of 1997, the government announced the revaluation of the Thai currency from twenty-five baht per dollar to fifty-five baht per dollar. No more nice dreams for anyone! All economic systems were collapsed by the floating currency policy. Having expected high salaries, new employees now painfully suffered from the new policy. Some were laid off from their jobs, and some had to go on unemployment as their companies went bankrupt, but either way, they had no chance to continually afford what they had already financed, such as houses, cars, and apartments. With no way out, most of them decided to go back home and ask for help from their parents as when they were young again.

As with new employees, the immense differences resulting from the recession also changed the way people lived in Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. Before the crisis, people used to go out and spend their money on anything that they wanted; most of them were lavish goods only for pleasure and satisfaction. As a consequence of this behavior, businesses could survive, make profits, and keep providing jobs for hundreds of thousands of people.

However, when the recession happened, people stopped using their money as they used to. They tended to put all of the money that they earned into bank accounts. They quit their extravagant behavior and became frugal. As a result of this situation, a great number of businesses which depended on luxurious commodities were likely to die as fast as anyone could imagine. Moreover, numerous people were laid off, and this again caused social problems. With this vicious cycle, it

was hard to form a mental picture that our economy would ever be as healthy as it was before 1997.

In conclusion, many lives have been critically impacted by the economic downturn of 1997. The biggest change since the crisis has been the way people live. They used to do whatever they desired, as money was everywhere, but not after the economy collapsed in 1997. The nation had to accept the ferocious cycle of the economy and acclimatize to it. If people want to get the economic system as healthy as it was in 1997, they will have to be one of the parts in the machine that will fix, maintain, and nourish the economic system, no matter how much they have to suffer.

About Hakka

Kai Cheng Pu (Ken)

R/W 500

In this essay, I want to talk about a special language. Most people know that there are two languages that are spoken in Taiwan. These are Mandarin and Taiwanese. But actually there still exists the third language that is called “Hakka”. Hakka is a word of Cantonese origin that literally means “Guest People”. Why is Hakka not so well known in this world? Where did they come from? All the answers of these problems have to be found in their history.

It seems that the origin of Hakka is a mystery. There are several arguments. In western encyclopedia, Hakka were somehow from north and central China. In the 13th century they moved to Kuangtung and Fukien province because at that time north China was occupied by Inner Asian tribesman. Some articles of Hakka scholars claimed that Hakka were originally from north China. The thesis is based on Hakka’s “family tree books”. But in recent studies that are based on anthropological, social, and linguistic evidence have a different idea. They say that Hakka originated primarily from south China.

Most of the Hakka moved to Taiwan during the war between the Ming and Ching dynasties. After the war was finished, the Ching dynasty had some special infamous immigration rules to Taiwan and those caused Hakka’s population in Taiwan to be much less than before.

Everything seems to stop Hakka from development. During the period of Japanese occupation, everyone in Taiwan was forced to speak Japanese; after the Kuo-ming tang moved into Taiwan, they used Mandarin to be the official language. All of these above didn’t let Hakka people have any chances to use Hakka to speak. Although there still are people who know how to speak their mother tongue, there are few mass communication media such as television or radio that play Hakka program. There are 3 million Hakka in Taiwan, but the group who really knows how to speak Hakka is much lower.

Because the main population in Taiwan speaks Mandarin or Taiwanese, the culture of Taiwan turns to have more flavor in Mandarin and Taiwanese. Most Hakka people who married to the other two language speakers would change their lifestyle or habit be the same as their husband or wife. For example, my mother is a Hakka but she speaks Taiwanese because she married a Taiwanese speaker. Almost everyone

around her speaks Taiwanese, too. She already forgot how to speak Hakka because my grandparents didn't even tell her how to speak Hakka.

There still are some people who insist on speaking Hakka in Taiwan. The most famous Hakka town in Taiwan is Mei-lun. They keep the whole lifestyle of Hakka including building, food, and language. For example, the most famous Hakka traditional food "Thunder Tea" is still made in Mei-lun. It is a kind of special snack that looks like a cup of tea but actually it has lots of stuff inside it. The specific buildings where Hakka make Thunder Tea are still standing on this island. Most of them were built more than 50 years ago. It is obvious that only one small town is not enough to keep this language alive because the big environment still gives them pressure. It seems that the government is aware that we might lose a language if they still have nothing to do with it. So in recent years, the government has used lots of ways to revitalize Hakka. For example, we can hear Hakka on mass transportation system. Now I can take a course about Hakka in college (and I did it last semester). Children who are Hakka are encouraged to speak Hakka and there are some special classes for them to study.

It is fortunate that Hakka still exists on this earth. If there was nobody speaking Hakka anymore, we could lose a language, even a culture. When it becomes a dead language, everything we do to revitalize it would be useless. We should try to make it alive. We can accept this language to let it become a part of Taiwan culture.

Is English the Route of Puerto Rican Evolution?

Diana M. Acevedo
R/W 500

What are the limits of prosperity? Could the search for prosperity and wealth make a society forget their native tongue and culture? There's no better example than Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island which was discovered and conquered in 1493 by Spaniards and in 1898 became a property of the United States. For the well being of their people, they had to learn a different language and now, they have to learn another one.

Escaping from the mainland in the search for adventure, liberty and gold, some Spaniards left their homes to live in the colonies. The conquest and connection to the mainland made the island, known by the aborigines as Boriken, change their name to San Juan Bautista in honor of a religious saint. Then this name was changed to Puerto Rico, which means "rich harbor" because of the strategic location of the island.

Here we can see some examples of cultural and linguistic imperialism from the Spanish: Before the 1500's the island now known as Puerto Rico was called Boriken. Inhabited by an Indian group called Tainos, their language was Arawak and their style of life was primitive and cooperative. The conquest by Spain and the great immigration of Spaniards and African slaves extinguished the existence of Indians on the island who fought until the end for the emancipation of their country. The Arawak language and the Taino beliefs waned.

The few survivors were obliged to learn Spanish and convert their spiritual polytheist beliefs to Catholicism, the belief in one God, to survive this new kind of life that would bring them prosperity and wellness.

Actually, anthropologists don't know much about Arawak, just a few words like "hamaca" (hammock), "yucca" (cassava) and "huracan" (hurricane) were the only ones which survived from this primitive culture. Others remains of the Taino culture can be appreciated in museums or in preserved areas where some ruins were discovered.

In just a few years, Spanish became the official language and Catholicism the official religion of Puerto Rico. The Spanish culture wasn't the only culture that influenced the island in that time; we can't forget the African culture. Some African words are still present in our language the same as their folklore, music and dance called "bomba y plena," and the food based on rice, beans and stews.

In 1898, after the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico became part of the United States. In the following years, the English language was implemented. All schools began to teach everything in English but first, after class, all the students had to sing the anthem of the US and show reverence to the flag. Students didn't understand why their English books made reference of the different seasons of the year because in Puerto Rico, it is always summer. Why is Christmas associated with snow and what is the relation of flowers and bunnies with Easter? Also, all communication about political and economical relations between the United States and Puerto Rico has to be in English. For that reason, it became a necessity. After the creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in the 1950's, the English language was added to our list of official languages. Now we have two: English and Spanish. Ironically, Puerto Rico has English as one of the official languages when just 20 of the 50 states of the US have it as their official language.

Actually in 2003 Puerto Rico speaks "Spanglish," a mix between our two official languages. Also, this country has more holidays than any other country in the world because we celebrate Spanish, American and our own holidays. For Christmas season, Puerto Ricans receive gifts on December 25 and January 6, the tree kings day. The language used in most of the public schools is Spanish but the majority of the textbooks are in English. Our culture has been "Americanized," we aren't very religious anymore, the unity and respect for the family is missing and we prefer Burger King instead of rice and beans, our typical food (that isn't our typical food either because it came from Africa).

Our culture, the same as others, suffers a constant evolution influenced by other cultures or languages. Now it is the English turn: advertisement, media and Internet add new English vocabulary to our own and we aren't doing anything to protect our Spanish language. There have been movements supporting the use of the Spanish language but nobody cares about that. To understand a language, we have to learn about the culture because there are a lot of phrases such as idioms and slang that are related with the manners and history of that country. If a Puerto Rican wants to be someone in this life, like being a wealthy person, he needs to lean English for diverse

reasons such as economical, political, social and cultural. Unfortunately, it could cause a change in our culture but it seems that prosperity is more important than culture and no matter what would happen with our language and culture next, there will be some indelible actions and words that would remind us about where we came from, our roots.

My Dream

Ching-yao Yang

R/W 60

I had a dream. I hoped one day I could travel in other countries. This was a dream, only a dream. It sometimes appeared in my night dreams but had never happened in my real life before. I doubted whether it would come true because I had too many burdens in my life. These burdens, like ropes, bound the wings of my dream. Many people told me the dream was always just a dream. In the real life I had to give up my dream that was not easy to reach because I had to focus on too many things. A lot of people chose real life and gave up the dream that just appeared in their dreams, so I did the same thing.

Once, I thought I had made the right choice, and I thought this was my whole life, but the scene still appeared in my night dreams. I wanted to deny the feeling and I told myself this was just a dream. In the future I would have to finish more things. If I just thought about it, I could not do anything well. This was my real life and this was the right choice.

After working several years, I was tired of my life. Too many burdens were suffocating me. Too many things were hard to understand. I started thinking, "Is this my life, my whole life?" I was a little afraid, but I knew I could not make a lot of changes. If I changed, I would lose all effort that I had ever done. When the scene appeared in my dreams again, I knew I could not ignore it. I decided to change my life even though it was not easy. This was the first time I could feel myself. I thanked some friends who doubted my change because it gave me more chances to reflect upon myself, and I thanked some friends who encouraged me and gave me the best wishes.

Now I am sitting in the bus. The scenery out of the windows is passing my eyes—the same blue sky but some eagles dots in the distance. The same houses but different shapes, the same people but different colors, the same air but different smells and the same me but a different soul. Like the eagle, I can fly in my real life. It is not only a dream.

Do We Need English?

Shao Shiuen Yen (Hope)

R/W 500

The English-speaking countries are the dominant power of the world. These countries influence the economy, politics and culture of the whole world; meanwhile, English is almost the second language of most countries. When people are doing business with the people from different countries or the global conferences and meetings are held, the people use

English for international communication. Globalization is the world trend so English is more and more prevalent. Therefore, English education is required for the countries' survival in the world and could strengthen their competitiveness.

Nowadays, the world is dominated by the English-speaking countries. Moreover, these English-speaking countries are advanced countries having strong and stable economy and politics. In the aspect of economy, they have great consumption and demand and most countries in the world have to do business and international trade with the English-speaking countries, then people start to be aware of the importance of English. Today, most people in the world learn English and English becomes the international language for international communication. Therefore, learning English is following the trend of the world and English education could make the people and their countries have stronger competitiveness and survival in this world.

People learn a lot of information from the English-speaking countries and are considerably affected by the culture of these English-speaking countries because English-speaking countries are the commanding power of the world and their culture is popular now. In addition, learning English makes people learn the information and culture from the English-speaking countries easily and quickly so it brings significant influence on or even changes the culture and tradition of non-English-speaking countries. In this case, many people of non-speaking countries confuse the purpose of learning English and even doubt the value of their own culture, tradition, history and language. However, just because the English-speaking countries have a lot of merits to make them stronger and more powerful, it does not mean that other countries have no merits at all. Therefore, the schools and governments of the non-English-speaking countries have to notice that their own culture and language are as important as English education, or even more important; moreover, emphasizing the value of the culture and language of one country could avoid the language extinction, when another language is popular in this country or in the whole world.

In many Asian countries, people are significantly affected by the culture of English-speaking countries. However, many English learners accept all the information from English-speaking countries whether it is good or bad. Afterward, they start to doubt the value of their own culture and language and young people start to behave and think like Western people. Although the languages of these non-English-speaking countries still exist, they begin to ignore the importance of their own culture and tradition and even lose the confidence in their own culture and country.

Globalization is the world trend, and English becomes an international language. Therefore, English is a stepping-stone of globalization. Moreover, English is necessary for the countries survival in the world. However, the governments of non-English-speaking countries have to notice that teaching their people the importance of their own language and culture are also very important, besides English education. Although English education strengthens the competitiveness of one country and brings many advantages for this country, traditional culture and its own language makes a country unique.

