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**The intellectual's image
of the city in Taiwan**

James Chan

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PREFACE

An earlier draft of this paper was presented at a workshop on urbanization that was part of the Ninth Summer Seminar in Population, sponsored by the East-West Population Institute. Research for the paper was conducted during a summer internship at the Institute. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Robert W. Gardner and Professor Forrest R. Pitts for their assistance.

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ABSTRACT As Taiwan becomes increasingly urbanized, its popular literature begins to emphasize the quality of urban life. A strong anti-urban bias is evident in contemporary Taiwan literature, which is a persistent theme in China's intellectual history. This paper is based on a content analysis of selected works of some of Taiwan's prominent writers, particularly works that focus on urbanization. The analysis reveals three major sources of antiurbanism, namely, the erosion of traditional rural values, the environmental quality of life in the city, and the challenge of the West. In turning the disconcerting aspects of urban life into fiction, the writers express the untold frustration and anxiety of their readers. The tensions of urban life seem more tolerable to people when they realize that others share them.

Taiwan was in essence an agricultural country at the end of the Second World War. Its exports were primarily of rural origin. Less than half of its population lived in towns and cities. Taipei, the capital and largest city, had a population of 30,000. Over the last three decades, the situation has changed dramatically. Taiwan has joined the ranks of industrial nations and now exports predominantly manufactured goods. About 70 percent of its total population of 17 million resides in urban areas (Ministry of the Interior, 1976, 1977). Taipei's population exceeds two million, and it is still growing. People continue to migrate from the countryside in response to rapid industrial growth in the urban areas, particularly the large cities. Between 1961 and 1970, the population of the five largest cities of Taiwan grew at an average yearly rate of 5 percent, as compared with a national average of 3 percent (Ho, 1978:140). These five cities—Taipei, Kaohsiung, Taichung, Tainan, and Keelung—account for more than one-quarter of Taiwan's total population (Lung, 1972). This rapid rate of urbanization, discussed in detail by Ho (1978), has created many problems of national significance. The public media constantly emphasize environmental pollution, traffic congestion, urban housing shortages, unemployment in the cities, and rural depopulation. Each year 50,000 people, on the average, leave the countryside for the city (China Publishing Company, 1977:163). One must keep in mind that the city plan of Taipei in the early 1960s was still based on one devised during the period of Japanese occupation (1895–1945). Only recently has urban and regional planning attracted serious attention in government and academia (see Hua, 1975; Republic of China, Hsing cheng yuan, 1975).

Although many studies have measured the physical impacts of urbanization in Taiwan, few have been devoted to exploring the psychological reactions to urban growth. Taiwan has had to come to grips with urbanism as a way of life. The agrarian mentality that was still deeply rooted in the society a generation ago is now viewed as obsolete. It seems that the changing urban society denies the long-held values of the agrarian past. The same cannot be said about Mainland China, where three-quarters of the population lives in the countryside.

THE CITY AS A LITERARY THEME

The preeminence of the city over the countryside in modern societies is reflected in literature (Rockwell, 1974:133; Lowenthal, 1957). In Taiwan this is particularly true among the younger writers who are maturing in its rapidly urbanizing society. Reminiscences of life on Mainland China before 1949, which are the dominant theme of the works of the older generation of writers, have become less and less of concern to these young writers. Instead, they write about the uncertainties they face in an age of rapid economic and social change. It is this "city" literature that I shall examine to assess the psychological impacts of urbanization in Taiwan.

There is a persistent antiurban strain in China's intellectual history. The eminent scholar in the late Ming Dynasty, Ku Yen-wu (1613--82), stated flatly: "Goodness resides in the countryside, evil in the city. The city is a place for commerce and trade. People relate to one another with an end to making profits. They are superficial and pretentious. Hence, the city is the sink of iniquities" (Chan, 1977:115). Numerous comments of the sort can be assembled, and Ma has written a succinct article on the issue (1976). The city and the countryside are often looked upon as antithetical social entities in Chinese political thought, to which Chang (1976) gave the labels "urbana" and "rural." Murphey (1972) described the polarized images of the city and the countryside as two opposing ideologies. The countryside is shown in a benevolent golden haze, the city as cold and ruthless. This is not to say that there are no pro-city sentiments, but China's intellectual tradition on the whole tends to enshrine the countryside and suspect the city. Nor are the Chinese unique in this respect. White and White (1962) have discussed at great length a strong antiurban bias among eminent American intellectuals. Strauss (1961), Handlin and Burchard (1963), and Cook et al. (1973) have documented extensively the unfavorable images of the city in American literature. Dyo and Wolff (1973) have recently compiled a monumental work on images and

realities of the Victorian city, in which they state that the city in nineteenth-century Britain was more often censured than extolled. (See also Coleman, 1973.)

The literature of Taiwan as late as 1960 did not in general single out the city as a central theme. One can argue that even today "city" writing does not dominate the literary world of Taiwan. Nevertheless, some of Taiwan's prominent novelists, poets, and essayists have begun to write about the city as a unique geographical personality. Rapid urban growth and the problems it produces are intensifying a latent anti-urban attitude among the intellectuals of Taiwan. In fact, quantitative studies (e.g., by Hwang, 1976) have been done to gauge social stresses and psychopathological symptoms in urban communities in Taiwan.

EXAMPLES OF ANTI-URBANISM IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

I shall examine writings on the city by six Taiwan novelists, poets, and essayists.¹ Four of them are acclaimed as among the best in the literary world of Taiwan. Ssu-ma Chung-yuan is a prolific writer of novels and short stories. Ya Hsien is an accomplished poet. Lo Men is another prominent poet who enjoys an international reputation, especially in Southeast Asia. Ch'i Teng-sheng is considered to be one of the ten major novelists of Taiwan. His *The Myth of the City* epitomizes his anti-urban stand. The remaining two writers, Hsu Chia-shih and Chang Chien, are essayists. Chang Chien's essay "My Twenty Years in Taipei," translated by John McLellan, is a candid narration of his feelings toward the rapid growth of Taipei. Hsu Chia-shih's essay "Rice Fields" is included because it seeks to remind young city dwellers of Taiwan's agrarian heritage.

The images formed of the city by individual writers in Taiwan are diverse; but if one probes into the concerns that lurk behind the images, it is not difficult to discern a few recurrent themes. Perhaps the most pervasive theme is the erosion of deep-seated agrarian values in the onslaught of urbanism. This is best reflected in a short story, "Flight from Marriage," by Ssu-ma Chung-yuan (1977). The story focuses on two young lovers, A-hsiang and his girlfriend Kuei-chih. Both grew up in a fishing village not far from a city. They were content with

1 In both the text and the references for this paper, Chinese writers who have published their works in Taiwan are referred to by their family names, which precede their given names. In the references, therefore, no inversion of their names is necessary. The names of Western authors and Chinese authors published in the West appear in inverted order in the references, however.

their lives until a modern harbor was constructed near their village as the city expanded. Mechanized fishing fleets in the harbor captured the fish market of the village. Roads connecting the new harbor drew the city closer to the village. Cafes, restaurants, gambling houses, and prostitution crept into the daily lives of the village men. As city fashions and cosmetics came to the village, the women began to look different, and they started talking about the city. Ambitious young men and women began to migrate to the city in search of jobs to support their families in the village. They were lured equally by the excitement and the opportunities in the city. The fad finally came to affect the lives of A-hsiang and Kuei-chih:

“I can’t see what’s good about the city,” A-hsiang grumbled to people in the village. “The city people busy themselves with games they play to grab money.”

“It’s nice that people know how to earn money while they’re alive,” people in the village retorted, as if they intended to put A-hsiang on the spot. “How could a young fellow like you be so square? Not only people from our village are going to the city; even those who are richer than us are swarming toward the city, and particularly the girls. There they can find jobs easily and they can buy nice clothes and eat well; and if by chance they marry the merchants, they’ll become instant shopowners.”

Yet A-hsiang did not feel like probing into these matters he did not fully comprehend. . . . Sundry electrical appliances continued to pour into the village, and the rattling and clattering noises of trucks and automobiles spread farther afield. Nevertheless, stories of the bustling city did not affect him; his daily life remained as simple and old-fashioned as before. He never walked close to the village cafes and restaurants, as he never got used to alcohol and gibberish. He found the music from the amplifiers in those tiny containers disgusting—unpleasant and inscrutable humming voices, shrieking and hoarse at times, like the howlings of horny wild cats.

Instead, A-hsiang was passionately fond of his guitars. On moonlit nights he sat leaning against the creels listening to the sound of waves. He wanted nothing more in life than the sea and Kuei-chih, the rhythms of his life. Meanwhile, a friend of A-hsiang, Hei-chai, had decided to go to the city like everybody else. Hei-chai’s girlfriend, A-t’ao, had already gone to the city, and her parents refused to let A-t’ao marry him because he was poor. By this time, the parents of Kuei-chih

had already sent her to live with an aunt in the city so that she might get a better job.

“Think about it, A-hsiang,” Hei-chai’s voice was full of sincerity, and with the air of one who had seen the world. “You can’t be this stubborn. If you want to marry Kuei-chih, you must follow her to the city. . . . Let her work in the factory and you drive a cab; and you should make a nice couple.”

A-hsiang responded to Hei-chai’s persuasion with a sardonic smile. He admitted the truth in what Hei-chai said; but he simply could not accept it. To A-hsiang, the village was indeed a bit desolate—a stretch of bleached sands and clumps of pitch-black boulders. Even the creels and fish nets covered with scales lacked color. But he was used to such simple life and the open space. He had no wish to crowd into the ant-hills in the city, where the teeming mass of people were like fish trapped in fish nets. Those moving bugs in the streets, pigeon holes in rectangular caskets, the chimneys and their thick smoke, and the endless boisterous city noises—he could not believe that Kuei-chih would get used to it, even if money was there. One could only pity a woman who thought all her dreams could be painted on a colorful shop window.

Kuei-chih went to the city because she obeyed her parents’ wishes. She resented the boastful prattling of her aunt about the city. She did not like rubbing shoulders with the people in the streets. Soot and sweat fouled the city air. The noises in the city were intolerable. “Now you’ve seen the city and you won’t miss the countryside anymore,” her aunt said with an air of self-assurance. “Having been battered by the sun and rains, and having survived a half-fed subsistence on those tiny creatures scooped up from the sea, I still feel a twinge of hunger now I come to think of it.” And Kuei-chih’s aunt went on to tell her how many girls from the village had left the countryside in recent years to get away from marriages arranged for them by their parents. Most of them came to the city on the pretext of looking for work, but secretly they came to look for husbands. Kuei-chih knew that her aunt was well-intentioned. Work in the textile factory was not hard. She took the bus to work every morning and returned after work to her aunt’s store, which sold dried fish products.

One day Kuei-chih got wind of her parents’ plan to marry her to someone in the city. Meanwhile, A-hsiang had formed the mistaken impression that Kuei-chih was just another of those girls from the

village who changed their hearts as soon as they got to the city. Hei-chai, who followed his girlfriend A-t'ao to the city, had already broken up with A-t'ao, for they no longer found each other compatible. Kuei-chih's impression of the city worsened as she learned of the news.

From early summer to early winter, she buried herself in that city where she could hardly breathe. The short time she spent in the city was enough to pollute the immaculate memories of her life at the seashore. The city had given her too much filth and displeasure. Next to the adjacent vegetable market was a maze of narrow, winding lanes. Above one's head criss-crossed scaffoldings of bamboo poles heaped with clothes, some of them unsightly. If one were to watch out for the clothes one would step on fruit peels or dog droppings, and also human excrement. The women in the marketplace hung down their hair, trudging in the market as if their joints were about to be dislocated. . . .

She had seen different kinds of women in this vegetable market. Their slightly bloated faces showed that they had just got up, and some of them kept their wrinkled pajamas on, staggering languorously in the soggy marketplace, flaunting in public untold affairs of the night before. She never admired these women, no matter how rich they were. If she were to listen to her aunt, she would become one of them. She could hardly imagine such dissoluteness.

Of course, not all the women in the city were listless. But that was nevertheless her general impression. Kuei-chih came to the conclusion that man must be deplorable if he had to live in such limited space. The public vehicles were like moving containers, into which people were stuffed day in and day out. Women in the buses showed the public almost everything except a corner of their colored underwear. New waves of mores put strange men and women rubbing their bodies in the bus, a thought which gave her instant nausea. Those rundown houses in the alleys were like pigeon holes. Married couples should have enough privacy to raise children; but in such places they had merely one bed surrounded by cardboard. Even her aunt who flaunted her riches had lived in such places for a great part of her life. Kuei-chih thought of the open ocean and the deep azure sky. She felt an urge to dive into the sea and let the ocean rinse her soul.

No sooner had Kuei-chih returned to the village than she learned

that A-hsiang was missing and presumed drowned. Standing at the sea-shore where the villagers were noisily mourning the death of A-hsiang, Kuei-chih overheard a woman passing judgment on his death:

“Nobody cares about you if you’re poor. He should have known by now that money is a good thing after all, and lost no time grabbing it. A person as devoted as he was, who went to the sea in a fit of frustration, and died for a woman not worth his love, died a worthless death.”

Kuei-chih pretended that she had not heard the woman. She raised her head and gazed at the horizon beyond. A strange sensation came to her; she felt that she had become more knowledgeable about the world. People who love the sea may not get to live there; and people who live on the sea may not understand it. These people around her lived with the sea but never became part of it. What made this woman so different from those who lived in the narrow streets in the city? The people in this village never learned the magnanimity of the sea. In contrast, she believed that A-hsiang and herself loved the sea and felt for it. The sea was in her heart and its waves in her eyes.

She ran to the edge of a cliff and in the midst of the confusion plunged into the sea below. She thus escaped the marriage arranged for her by her parents, and in this respect was like the other village girls. But the important difference between Kuei-chih and those girls was that she rejected the city to come back to where she felt she belonged. “After all, there are people who love the sea,” a line that ends the story.

In this story, Ssu-ma Chung-yuan dramatizes the erosion of traditional, agrarian values as people migrate from the countryside to the city. The story is not a denial of the value of the city as an institution. It was partly out of necessity that people left the village for the city. As Kuei-chih’s parents argued: “Who can find fault with a person of ambition?” Yet the story does not portray the city as a place of glamour. It contrasts the dreams of young people with the squalid reality in the city. Poor as the countryside may be, there is beauty in it which people tend to forget.

“Rice Fields,” an essay by Hsu Chia-shih (1977), has a similar theme. It bears upon the author’s regret about the apathy among his contemporaries toward the countryside, symbolized in the essay by rice fields.

For a long time, I have not looked at the fields, though they can be seen outside of the window. Every day I go past them

but it never occurs to me that they are there. I have forgotten about their existence over the past year.

The croaking of frogs in the rice fields awakened me. As I rediscover them, I try to recall what they looked like to me in the past. Circular? Square? Octagonal?

As I recall that I once was oblivious to the fields, it dawns on me that our generation has forgotten about them. T'ao Yuan-ming knew of rice fields and so did Tu Fu. For thousands of years, they lived in the hearts of the Chinese people—the moving waters, the humble seedlings.

Recently, a letter came from a friend in which he wrote: "Our family has farmed the land for many generations, and I am about to retire from the army. I suppose this is the end of my career. Although I have never thought of making a fortune, I cannot help feeling depressed to have to settle down in the middle of the fields." Feeling depressed! We may be the ones who should feel depressed. I did not realize until now that our generation has alienated itself from the land, not that they have forgotten about it. Some people fall prey to this material world, others choose to go for it. I wonder how many are really content with their lives.

The material world referred to in this essay is the city. The essay conveys a sense of anxiety over the demise of a great agrarian tradition. Hsu Chia-shih feels the Taoist ambivalence about life in the city, in which constant striving is not a means to an end but the end itself. City life is life in transition, and the future is rarely known.

Such ambivalence about city living is best seen in an essay by Chang Chien, written in 1969 about the author's impressions of Taipei as a long-time resident. Chang Chien came to Taipei in 1949 when he was nine years old. The traffic in the city then was very light, and the city still had a rural atmosphere typical of a small town in South China. The school he went to was like a big family. Worries about examinations were rare, and there was no cramming in school and few extra classes. In his gradeschool days, the Seven Seas Company Building, "a three story, Western-style building," was one of the landmarks of Taipei. Acquiring sophistication was not of major concern to teenagers. By 1969, the "radio and television have given young people the feeling that they know a lot about life and the world. . . . The children in Taipei now know much more at the age of six than I did at the age of ten." On the other hand, the younger generation is "unable to appre-

ciate the beauty of nature . . . and reading books, except for the purpose of 'getting ahead,' is very much a secondary matter."

In recent years, the city has become more and more crowded. . . . The blue sky has become less and less visible. . . . Every day ant-like droves of people pour out of buses and trains into every nook and cranny of the city. The noise and bustle of election campaigns also move swiftly through all parts of the city. . . . Every time I squeeze sidelong into one of the (subterranean) passages and push my way along through people jammed together, cheek by jowl, going in both directions, I recall with nostalgia the old, quiet, rural atmosphere this street once had. Alas! The price we have had to pay for civilization is high indeed.

When you walk in the streets, a confused pandemonium of sounds invades the ear. When you return home, a layer of coal dust has gathered on the table in no time. Fewer and fewer trees are seen lining the streets. The house where I live was originally a quiet corner amid the city's bustle but the clamor of the surrounding area has gradually invaded it.

Whenever I came home on leave I had the feeling I couldn't get used to this place. My eyes, my ears, my nose—all registered vigorous protests. Only after a few days did the idea again register that, after all, this was the place where I had lived practically all my life.

Chang Chien's reactions to the growth of Taipei are not totally negative, for he quotes Walt Whitman's remark that even in city crowds there is "a beauty unique through all ages." Yet the essayist began to "feel a distaste for Taipei" when he went to college. He was convinced that, even though he was "no disciple of Rousseau, for young people permanent residence in the city is more of a blight than a blessing." The ambivalence of Chang Chien toward the city is epitomized in two remarks:

If I ever have any children, I want to find some way for them to live in the country during the years when they are growing up and go to high school there.

I really cannot understand why so many families from the central or southern part of the island want to send their children to highschool in Taipei, no matter what happens. How do they know that the children are not losing much more than they gain?

A more radical view of the city, common among authors who perceive the countryside as a land of moral purity, is portrayed in a novel by Ch'i Teng-sheng (1977), *The Myth of the City*. The novel describes the experience of a young novelist who went to Taipei, where he had received his college education, after an absence of five years. The protagonist of the novel, A K'o-lien, lives in the countryside. K'o-lien came to Taipei to negotiate with his publisher on the royalties of his novels. The experience with the publisher was an unpleasant one. But before he returned to his rural home he visited a former lady friend who worked in an art gallery in downtown Taipei. This woman, Fei-meï, wanted K'o-lien to stay in Taipei. She introduced him to her friends in the city and finally persuaded K'o-lien to stay in the city for a year. The novel is about K'o-lien's experiences and impressions of the city of Taipei and its people.

Shortly before he left his country town, K'o-lien had speculated on the nature of city life in Taipei, as reflected in part of a poem he wrote:

The winds of midsummer bring in the message:
the big city in the north is now unusually prosperous
its lights are bright as if its streets were paved with gold.
This is a strange era
people no longer care for the fragrance of the land
they forego simplicity in search of ostentation.

While he was waiting for the publisher, K'o-lien wandered into the nearby commercial area of Yuan-huan, where he found that many changes had come about in the last five years. Even the spirit of the people in the street had changed, particularly the young people, who sauntered in the streets in groups, looking arrogant and callous. To K'o-lien, these people looked like "models in shop windows," in which one found no "blood circulation." That his dealings with the publisher were unsatisfying strengthened his preconception of the city as a place where people "strive for power and gains," a place infested by "a kind of hidden viciousness which decidedly alienates genteel virtues." As K'o-lien came to the art gallery where Fei-meï worked, he was shocked by the mixture of commercial enterprises crammed together on one floor of a building. The offices of book publishers were like "the stores in fish and meat markets"—chaotic, devoid of a solemn atmosphere. There was "no respect for books," "no courtesies toward scholars"; instead the place was contaminated with an air of "mutual degradation among the people." Coming from the countryside, he found it difficult to adjust to the new character of a rapidly

Westernizing city. The night life of Taipei was outside his realm of comprehension. Temporarily, the "bright lights convince him of the charms of the city, and he feels sorry for the crudeness and isolation of rural life." But in the long run, the crowds in the bars, the barmaids, the liquor and the lights evoked in him a sense of icy loneliness. Having got used to being alone in the countryside, he was not bothered by the monotony of rural life as much as by loneliness in the crowded city.

A prominent character in *The Myth of the City* is a person named Chao-lin. Chao-lin is an enterprising, ambitious, and sophisticated man of less than thirty years old, who recently returned to Taiwan with a Ph.D. from America. Before Chao-lin left the country, the director of an academic institute had promised him a job at the institute upon his return from America. But when he came home the director was equivocal and indefinite about his promise. Meanwhile, Chao-lin had become so Americanized that he began to notice great differences between his new outlook on life and the nature of his native society. Toward the end of the novel, Chao-lin was about to return to America, having become disillusioned with the plan he had formerly envisioned. A remark from K'o-lien summarizes the anguish of Chao-lin very well: "Even his youth and courage and education are inadequate to grapple with this complex society. Someone has to pave the road for him so that he can apply himself. The American spirit transplanted into our local society will encounter many unusual and insoluble problems, because even though this island is small, it has hundreds of times more burdens than America's." The end of the novel sees Chao-lin return to America, and also contains a summary view of the protagonist's impression of the city. "Why can't a city as big as this keep you?" asks Fei-mei. K'o-lien replies: "You needn't blame this beautiful city because of my problems. This city has its own charm. Since I accepted your request to stay here, I have acquired a wealth of experience, which I no longer need to dream about. There are characters in the city who touch our souls and make us realize that behind its beautiful facade lie all kinds of frustration and difficulties. This city has at least acquired a graceful outlook. It accommodates a diversity of people; it gathers a variety of thoughts; and it produces a powerful pattern of life. . . . The zealous idealist will soften into debauchery if he stays in the city, although the city suits particularly well the lifestyles of many other people." As for K'o-lien, he is glad to "return to nature," the countryside where he resides. The last paragraph of the novel reveals the secret feelings of Fei-mei, the able and sophisticated city woman, who confides to K'o-lien that she will join him in the countryside.

The character Chao-lin deserves special attention. In a way, he is an example of Western influence in Taiwan. One should note that rapid urbanization in Taiwan is to a great extent a Western phenomenon. Such terms as urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and Westernization are related in meaning. In business as in culture, much of Taiwan's urbanism is a copy of contemporary Western culture, particularly that of America, whose political and economic influence in Taiwan has been strong. This is not to say that Chineseness is lacking in the cities of Taiwan. But the mere sights and sounds of Taiwan's urban society—the buildings, the factories, the billboards, the bars, and the restaurant—bear strong Western imprints. Most educated people in Taiwan are fluent in American English, and few can resist the temptation to come to America. Walt Whitman and Ernest Hemingway are read perhaps more assiduously in Taiwan than Li Po and Tu Fu. There can be no denial of the tremendous impact the West has had on Taiwan society, however superficial and momentary it may be against the enormous backdrop of Chinese history. To accept urban living in Taiwan is to acknowledge strong cultural infiltration from the West, which is a perennial source of internal conflicts among the more self-conscious of the Chinese writers. This Western influence is reflected in a poem by Ya Hsien (1977:85–8), "In the Streets of China," written in 1958.²

Blotting paper for dreams and moonlight
 — poets clad in corduroy.
 Pay phones cannot reach Nu Wa
 thoughts ran along the lines on oracle bones.
 Sup with the Muse on pot-cooked wheat
 forgetting sandwiches and beefsteak
 . . . poets clad in corduroy.
 In battle dust the Yellow Emperor charges
 electric cars make rusty our chariots.
 Now that we have gas and neon lights
 our ancient sun no longer lends itself for use.
 Remember the bloody war with Ch'ih Yu
 remember the beautiful weaving songs of Lei Tsu
 . . . remember the times when poets were not clad in corduroy.
 No parliaments, nothing much ever happened
 Confucius never worried about Lao Tzu's royalties.
 Roaring airplanes dart through willow smoke

² The poem appears in English translation in Wai-lim Yip (1970). The translation in this paper is my own.

waves of student movements pound on the crumbling palace
 walls.
 Without coffee, Li Po could still write poems
 and he made no revolutions
 . . . let alone wear corduroy.
 The works of Whitman come not from the grotto of Tun Huang
 Steamships tell of oceans even beyond our outer seas.
 Beggars in subways wave their grubby bowls
 Sailors flirt with girls in minis
 Traffic lights to the left of us
 traffic lights to the right of us
 . . . and poets clad in corduroy.
 Quinine posters pasted on the face of Shen Nung
 on spring nights everyone talks of travel in space.
 Workers killed by steam whistles, pamphlets on democracy,
 bus stops, attorneys and electric chairs
 heads of the guillotined are no longer raised on the city wall.
 The Eight Trigrams of Fu Hsi
 cannot cope with the Nobel Prize.
 Purple cypress from Ch'u Fou County
 is now made into railway ties
 . . . wear corduroy if you like.
 Blotting paper for dreams and moonlight
 – poets clad in corduroy.
 Those guys even deny the truth of dragons
 let's dine with the Muse on pot-cooked wheat
 let our thoughts run along the lines on oracle bones.
 Just wait till sensuous movies close for the night
 we'll clothe ourselves in corduroy.

The idea of "poets clad in corduroy" is absurd to one who has
 grown up in the Chinese culture. But today the young writers in Tai-
 wan cannot escape Western influences. In fact, this poem itself is "clad
 in corduroy," as its appreciation requires knowledge of both Chinese
 and Western literature. Ya Hsien mocks his own corruption by the
 West. In the cities of Taiwan, the glory of China's past has faded. Few
 people pay much attention to traditional culture (chariots, weaving
 songs, and the glory of the Yellow Emperor). The Nobel Prize has cast
 a deep shadow on ancient Chinese wisdom (represented in the poem
 by the Eight Trigrams of Fu Hsi). Such an elegant commodity as pur-
 ple cypress from Confucius' hometown is made into railway ties, trod
 upon by a modern, foreign invention. Steamships from distant seas

have convinced people that the Central Kingdom is no longer central. Such a cultural symbol as the dragon has been debunked. And "our poets" are clad in corduroy, an imported fashion.

Not only Western culture but also commercialism has made its marks on the Chinese city. The face of the God of Agriculture, Shen Nung, is pasted over with a commercial poster, which signifies the decay of an agrarian society. Stresses and strains and problems of urban living are symbolized in the poem by traffic lights, bus stops, attorneys, electric chairs, beggars in the subway, foreign sailors, and girls in miniskirts. The poem is like a scenario in a kaleidoscope, in which the whole of the city in Taiwan is depicted by its parts. There is a strong cynicism in the poem bordering on resignation, as in the line "Just wait till sensuous movies close for the night, we'll clothe ourselves in corduroy."

Another of Taiwan's leading poets, Lo Men, has written an extensive collection of poems bearing upon the city and city living in Taiwan. One of his longer poems, "The Death of the City," has been anthologized in a collection of modern Taiwan poetry translated by Palandri (1972). Below are three poems I have translated from Lo Men's *Selected Works* (1975), which express the poet's impressions of the city through imagery.

Downfall of the City

Brakes gnash at axles
 streets like acute appendicitis
 red lights: strokes, ulcers
 road junctions are hearts cut in half
 only the green lights are life tubes inserted for breath
 City, you are full of sickness
 panting in high calorie food supplements
 paralyzed on elevators
 benumbed for want of shock treatment
 only your bed can withstand
 your weekend madness
 Dishing up ox-tail soup, pop music like tap water
 such wine always finds its death behind that sort of face
 everyday stores in the streets unbutton themselves
 darkness in that street corner aims at your release
 every night your polar star is the House with Green Lights
 shedding light on the last leg of the tourist's trip
 at sunrise another kind of bird comes to take over
 the world outside of Hilton's windows
 no one knows where you have gone on the garbage truck

Weekend Incident

7:30, by the clock on the railroad station
 night, along the hanging trail of Saturday
 drops colorful flares of neon lights
 into a crystal iris arena
 aside from those in dazzling dead men's clothes pursuing
 fashion's death
 wine and Mary are the statue and the lone market fountain
 wine and Mary are the waves and the boat of Saturday
 carrying a weekend of smiles on sale
 frolicking on a stream of meandering maidens
 dangerous whirlpools
 once swept in, sure death in its pit
 When wine and faces, Mary and him
 finish their story of fire
 the streets are cleared of wheels and footprints
 the meteor
 casts Hemingway's fishing hook
 seizes the bleak, empty city

Five-Cornered Kiosk

He holds deadly onto the city
 the city holds deadly onto him

1. The Newspaper Boy

Yesterday has not been executed
 yesterday sneaks back on the printing press
 That is before the rattling of milk bottles
 before Ann swims out of arms' cove
 his bicycle runs ahead of the sun's wheel
 he brings back the garden of yesterday
 the eyes of the public polished into shiny vases
 waiting for flowers of various kinds
 flowers of civilization, flowers of destruction
 flowers that God may or may not want to see

II. The Shoeshine Boy

He and his box of tools
 rest like the L of a vacuum cleaner
 rest like a miniature desert
 in the sandstorms
 his hand is an endless string
 pulling the sun to its old quarters
 when those ships loaded with sunshine
 set sail one by one
 he can no longer tell whether his hand is
 a sail
 or a cactus

III. The Waiter

Always hunched over,
 a sideways V
 Waiting, the black butterfly perched on the white collar
 flies to a gentleman with a number
 in the gales and waves of cognac and laughter
 the launch and the foam leave him only a trace of bubbles
 facing a room of chaotic dishes
 he touches the black butterfly, barred from the garden
 touches the numbers on his chest which are not lottery
 numbers
 touches himself
 he casts his face away from the light

IV. The Singer

At nightfall
 they call her for massage
 or come in for shock treatment
 in an air highly inflammable
 she is a Ronson lighter
 the night is a joint
 a rise in her voice
 sends her into that busy promenade
 farther ahead is Fifth Street
 onward her garden
 onward the fountain
 onward the lone market dead in fog
 onward like her face deserted by its powder
 the next morning

V. The Scavenger

He smells a tiny blue sky in the light
 his nostrils are two sewers
 even in such places there is a kind of knowledge
 more able than his hands to analyze the future
 carrying a city that eliminates
 carrying a cemetery that flowers
 in a wilderness without a heaven
 he walks with his own radiant cloud
 on the stopped face of the clock of death
 he wakens into life a portion of time

The image Lo Men forms of the city in Taiwan reflects the poet's view of the role of the artist. In his *Selected Works*, Lo Men recognizes three facets in man's world, which he terms the first, second, and third environment. The first environment is mother earth, a natural environment only slightly marred by man's influences. The second is our man-made environment, especially an urban setting which, in Lo Men's view, is becoming the dominant environment in Taiwan. The third is the perceptual world of man, a realm in which the poets and artists may have the role of beautifying an otherwise ugly reality. In their works the artists and poets create an imaginary world in which the

drudgery and dreariness of ordinary life and the urban environment become more livable and colorful. Lo Men states that "as man has become rapidly materialized by the twentieth century, a heavy smoke has so blurred his inner vision that he is going blind. The presence of the poets and the artists is like sunrise in heavy fog, which illuminates the fate of man and points to his spiritual future." Lo Men thinks that the task of the poets and artists is like that of a truly awakened Taoist or Buddhist, which is to assuage the pains and dilemmas of modern living by pointing to the beauty behind the ugliness of life, to call attention to the distant light which somehow provides a kind of religious solace for dissipated souls. For this reason, the city in Lo Men's poems is often personified, and the sufferings of people in the city, for example of those in the "Five-Cornered Kiosk," are presented in such poetic language that they are more aesthetic than painful and more distant than imminent. It is this spirit of transcendentalism, the creation of a third environment from a second environment, that Lo Men forms his images of the city. Lo Men's image of the city bears a strong antiurban strain, as can be seen in "Downfall of the City," in which he describes the modern city as "the tight web" which "stifles breathing." The city is the place where "steps do not carry souls," where "God is dead," where "all forbidden places turn into marketplaces, all eyes turn into vulture's eyes." The city begets stresses and tensions because people have "to look at change with no time to look, to think in the vortex with no time to think, to die in the hour with no time to die." Hence, "in the rock-n-roll music and dim lamp shadows, you are a faceless beast who steals and eats life without leaving wounds." "City, you are full of sickness."

In spite of their diverse literary approaches to city life, these contemporary writers of Taiwan are at least intellectually antiurban. Their antiurbanism is not a total rejection of the city, however. Rather, it reflects their feelings of anxiety, frustration, and uncertainty about contemporary Taiwan society, whose tone is set by city life. The city in traditional China was not as pervasive a force as it is in Taiwan today. Whereas it can be said that in the past, the city and the countryside lay side by side but lived in different worlds, the city today affects all corners of the countryside. Urbanization in Taiwan is not only a geographical phenomenon, it challenges the very foundation of Taiwan society.

The writers' images of the city are their responses to the problems of social disorganization which have followed rapid urbanization. They lament the erosion of agrarian values. They express their am-

bivalence about city life. They chronicle the stresses of urban living. And they portray the cultural challenge of the West staged in the city. These writers live in the city and are therefore sensitive to the linked threats of urbanization, industrialization, and Westernization. Through writing about the city, they transform the private nightmares of many into art—something the society can live with, examine, and use to survive. By warning the public of the imminent consequences of urbanization, they provide an intellectual framework for dealing with those consequences.

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