

## OYSTER OMELET AND MEATBALL ARE THE RECIPE FOR LOVE

**For President Huang, Profs. Li-Chuan Hsu, Sarina Chien, Jingling Lin and the students of my class at China Medical University, Taichung, 9/19 – 12/16, 2009. I thank them all.**

It is a privilege of advancing age that one can travel. I always wanted to and actually did travel a lot during my active time, but frequently found myself tied to the laboratory and, of course, my collaborators, not to mention -- my family. Now, with the laboratory gone and the children becoming independent, the one missing me the most is *Luna*, my faithful Labrador, and I miss her. E-mail and the telephone keep me in touch with my wife at home. The excellent quality of Taiwanese telephone transmission and low international rates make it easy.

The flight from Europe to Taiwan lasted 13 hrs and was most pleasant. Crews on Asian Airlines are dressed like women, not employees, and they make you feel at home. Everything about them is nimble. The darkness of the night seen through the window was complete, but when we flew over India, the city lights stretched for hundreds of miles. We crossed the Taiwan Strait (formerly the Strait of Formosa), saw the high-towering mountains in the East of the Island (3,900 meters), and arrived at Taipei International Airport at 6 o'clock in the morning. My host, Professor Li-Chuan Hsu and her lovely assistant Chia-Yao, awaited me, excited, and took me to a chauffeured limousine. Off we went on a 200 km drive to Taichung. Highways in Taiwan are built on high pillars, as the name suggests, and so are the tracks for the high-speed train.

When we entered Taichung, I reminded myself that "parachutes and human minds better stay open." The outskirts and much of the city are so different from Western cities that you need a reality check. Advertisements are everywhere; in the evening they light the streets. I have the fortune of living not far from the University, in a cozy hotel that my host found for me. I have a large beautiful room with a desk, king-size bed, oversized LC TV screen, refrigerator, and European sanitary installations in the bathroom. My window overlooks a small park, where people can be seen exercising in the morning. I learned how to say *Zao An* (Good morning) and *Wan An* (Good night) and a few more essential phrases. In addition, I bow a lot. Meanwhile, I wish I had gone to language class as the native language sounds nice and soothing to my ears. Breakfast in my hotel is buffet-style with soup, dumplings, spinach or cabbage, tofu, bamboo, salad and fruit, sometimes fish. I particularly like the curry stew with large chunks of potatoes and carrots. There is always hot rice, sometimes noodles. Soy sauce and shredded ginger accompany every meal. There is also bread, croissants, fried eggs, sausage, and ham for those who prefer a European-style breakfast. I usually last until early in the afternoon.

After breakfast I buy the *Taipei Times*, the only copy on sale, just for me. It is an excellent newspaper, with critical coverage of world affairs and minced with biting British humor. On Sunday, the paper runs a highly enjoyable column on *News of the Weird*, which I clip out for my friend in Sacramento, CA. Their sports pages even report on German soccer games. The climate debate is a big issue. Al Gore is one of the newspaper's heroes, whereas many local politicians are villains. President Ma is accused of unnecessarily appeasing Mainland China. The cartoons about them say more than words. Recently, they had an article describing a small population of humpback dolphins near the coast that are at risk of extinction. A science park, supposed to be environmentally friendly, would threaten their survival by releasing waste water into their habitat. That seemed unacceptable. A second article described widespread soil contamination in Taiwan from companies illegally dumping heavy metals on farmland. The ducks that went to the market tested positive for dioxin, arsenic, and zinc with a

value up to 10 times higher than allowed. What is good for ecology is also good for economy, the newspaper proclaims. But will the government listen?

I usually sit on a bench in the shade of the park when I am reading the paper. Ever so often, a musical tune interrupts my reading. This is the garbage truck announcing, "I am coming, get your garbage out, quick." Sometimes an elderly lady shows up next to me. She climbs on a swing and exercises for some 15 min with a vigorous stride. When I do the same, I feel like a sailor leaving ship.

There was a religious procession on the day when I arrived. It was organized by the temple that protects us. Five-meter high gods "walked" along the street to the temple, to fight the ghosts. Their arms were swinging wildly, and I was tempted to grab one and say hello. There was a huge firework afterwards. It took me a while to adjust to the time, the weather, the food, the language, the customs, and ... and. After a few weeks, I feel quite at home. Granted, Taichung is a different world, yet so friendly, open, and warm. People smile a lot, are hospitable, courteous, and peaceful. I yet have to see a single brawl. My host cares for me like a mother and supports me in every respect. Everything had been organized before my arrival, and all hurdles had been removed. She and her husband took me to a Japanese-style restaurant for hotpot, where I struggled with my new eating tools. I have become much better since. She urged me not to undertake dangerous missions and warned me from going unescorted, lest I might get lost. Little does she know that men are looking for the unexpected.

On my first Saturday evening, I went to the night market not far from the University. The crowd of mostly young people was such that one could hardly walk. There were loud voices everywhere together with myriads of lights from brightly colored signs. Small roadside kitchens offered every variety of food; other stores sold shoes and clothes and all sorts of paraphernalia. This is how I imagine a bazaar in Istanbul, where you are expected to haggle for best price. There were shops for foot, neck, and shoulder massages, acupuncture, face make-up, and a shop where you could have your ears cleaned. After two hours I was "spat out" from the mass of people, wondering how to get back. I spotted a giant 14-story high department store, stretching the length of 3 buildings, perhaps the largest in town, and went. It offered everything one would ever want to buy. All the international fashion labels were represented. The prices were several times higher than at the night market, although the two places were less than half a mile apart. There are two worlds even in Taichung. When I left the store an hour before midnight, a haunting voice sang (in Chinese) "Too Early to Say Good Bye."

Festivals are big in Taiwan, and fireworks typically accompany them. There is a firework somewhere almost every other week. The *Moon festival* in September lasted for four hours. Elderly citizens and parents with young children had been invited, several hundreds of them. They sat under the open sky, ate, talked, watched performances on stage, had their blood pressure taken, then got up for prayer (which sounded like our *Vater unser*). I arrived late, when a young lady brought me beef noodle soup and motioned me to eat. She was from Vietnam and her mother, without speech, was sitting in a wheel chair next to her. I bowed to thank her and took her hands. I still see that lady and her mother on and off in the small park not far from my hotel. We greet each other and smile -- we need no words.

When the prayer finished, the congregation started chanting, while moving their arms and body in the most enthralling manner. It was like a sea of flowers all in tune with some mysterious choreography. In between we touched hands, again and again, feeling a sense of strong togetherness. I was told the theme of the song was "We are family." Thereafter, I was called on stage, introduced and asked to draw the straws for a lottery. I will always regret that no video of this event was taken. It reminded me of a church service in Uppsala, Sweden, when parishioners, who did not know each other,

embraced one another after the sermon to thank for the harvest. The moon festival closed with huge colored paper moons being slowly released into the dark night sky. The sight of these large balloons fired by a candle and alighting gracefully was unforgettable.

For the *Mid-autumn* festival, my host Li-Chuan and her husband Y-min took me to friends in the countryside. On the way was a kiln for making pottery. We stopped and Li-Chuan ordered two nice cups made for my wife and me. When we arrived, I got to know three generations of the host family, their many guests, and learned a lot about survival. All their houses had been damaged during that terrible earthquake 10 years ago. They tore them down and rebuilt. That took courage. The grandfather was a little older than I and looked a lot younger. So did his wife. The food at the picnic was memorable, and the young women who served it were strikingly beautiful. I played soccer with the children. Wei Wei, my host's little son, touched my beard and arms, trying to determine whether I was Neanderthal or monkey. Taiwanese people have no body hair. You rarely find family events like this one anymore in our Western society. Two weeks later, Li-Chuan and Chia-Yao took me to an art street in Taichung with many small stores. It reminded me of Berkeley. We went to a Japanese-style restaurant that evening and felt very special.

The trip to historic *Lugang*, an hour away to the North, introduced me to one of the most magnificent Chinese residences in the country. The gardening, the architecture of the buildings, the exquisite furniture, everything was tastefully done in the style of by-gone centuries. This was a home, which stood out by its quiet nobility. What a difference to the stereotype architecture of modern houses in some places. If I could have settled in the smallest of rooms, I would have stayed. Life is so precious in appropriate surroundings. How much we have lost by the hustle-bustle of our daily lives. Where are we going? What are we accomplishing? My host's husband Y-min took photos of Li-Chuan and me impersonating Romeo and Juliet. Thereafter, we went to the famous *Matsu* temple and in one of the nearby restaurants had oyster omelet and meatball for lunch. They say this is the recipe for love.

When I go to work from my hotel, I walk on the pebbles half-buried in the ground to massage my feet. There are large, medium-sized, and small pebbles. Taxi drivers observe me, nod, smile, wave, and probably think – what a funny man. When the taxi in front moves out of the line, they all get up from their chairs, walk to their cars and push them forward, manually, one by one, to save on gasoline. While the quality of the air in Taichung is said to be low, the cleanliness of the taxis is hard to match. Seats are covered with a white bib, and cars are being constantly wiped and polished. Every morning somebody takes an old-fashioned broom, made from brushwood, and cleans the ground. There is no paper or food to be found on the pavement, no graffiti or scratched windows anywhere. There are no beggars on the street. The only person that seemed to be really poor was an old woman walking her bicycle with four plastic bags bulging out from it. Yet, I saw some middle-sized dogs chained to their cages, a jacket covering their body even in the summer, and no water nearby. Those dogs have no easy life.

Although Taichung is on its way to modernity, with many high-rises for residents and vast residential areas in Taichung County, some sections have moved faster than others. An example is China Medical University (CMU), which strives to become the foremost academic institution for traditional Chinese and Western Medicine. Their *rector magnificus*, Prof. Jong-Tsun Huang, is a former Minister of Education who was instrumental in rebuilding the city after the devastating earthquake 10 years ago. He is a man with a vision, a passionate and tireless worker, and – a psychologist. Moreover, he listens. During my first week, he invited me for *shabu shabu* in a Japanese restaurant. We talked about face-blindness in Taiwan and the Molyneux question. It so turned out

that Richard Held from MIT had just returned from India where he had tested children born with a milky cornea (leucoma) or a turbid lens (cataract) on their ability to match touched and seen shapes after ocular surgery. The Principal had been at Harvard, with Duncan Luce, and knew Held from a long time ago. He was delighted to receive a copy of his study together with his biography. Since then he has invited me and the students several times to exceptional places, including a restaurant, where all the furniture was made from cardboard. I do not know how to thank him.

CMU is well organized. Our offices are modest and the laboratories small, but classrooms are superbly equipped, with lecterns connected to the Internet. There is a fascinating atmosphere of higher learning. The first day I met a Puerto Rican from Manhattan who studied old Chinese script. When I expressed surprise, he said "Why not". Classes go on all day, often on Saturdays and Sundays, and at night. A musical tune sounds the beginning and end of class. When I hear it, my feet perform a little dance. Last week was exam week, and no one was playing basketball on the campus yard. I thought of my daughter taking tests at her university in Chemnitz, Germany. This week was the Darwin conference. There was widespread concern that the coral reefs surrounding Taiwan may be beyond recovery. On the other hand, cormorants are not endangered. (Our fishermen on Lake Constance shoot them as they are considered a pest.)

The University has a 24-story hospital, a brand new cancer hospital and a modern emergency hospital. It also has a great museum for traditional pharmacy with acupuncture needles made from gold. When a small artery broke in my right eye due to high winds, I decided that I needed medical help. It was a Saturday evening, and people, many with young children, were streaming into the hospital. I showed my UCM-library pass, was dutifully registered, my blood pressure taken, before I was sent to a senior doctor close to the entrance of two large halls. One hall was for internal medicine, the other for everything else. Some 15 patients were stretched out on either side with physicians attending to them and relatives nearby. For a European used to privacy, the atmosphere was at first reminiscent of another continent. These were all sick people in need of help, and I was one of them. Nurses were "flying" back and forth. My eye hurt, but not enough to not notice that these were young, pretty women and highly competent. The senior doctor spoke good English, instilled an anesthetic in my eye, told me that the attending ophthalmologist would soon come, and that I would be fine.

While I was waiting, they put a band around my wrist for identification, and kept a close watch on me. My number was 60, and there were 10 people ahead of me. I decided to walk outside and around that hospital which looks like the *Hotel Dubai*, just to find out that when I came back, they were already looking for me to put me on a stretcher and flush my eye. After a short while, the eye doctor arrived, checked me out using state-of-the-art equipment, prescribed eye drops and eye gel and proclaimed me fit for discharge. The payment was minimal. Everybody carries health insurance here. Would I come back for a control on Monday? They offered to take me home, but I felt strong enough to manage on my own. I was very impressed by that hospital. I have since frequently returned to it and listened to the classical music played in the large foyer. There is a coffee shop, a fine bakery, a pharmacy, and a shop for those things one needs when one is forced to enter a hospital unprepared. There are also two small restaurants serving Chinese and Japanese food.

The library of CMU is said to be one of the finest in China. In front of the two entrances, large color photographs of the 100 most highly ranked universities are displayed on the wall. I was impressed when I saw the red sandstone *Kollegengebäude 1* of Freiburg University among them. At the same time I felt a nostalgic yearning to go to all those famous universities, many of which I had visited before, and pretend that I would be a student again. Two floors below are impressive

posters documenting the efforts made last year by CMU to win a large grant. I am among the first beneficiaries of these efforts.

Strangely, superstition runs high in some places. Days may be good for calling a friend, buying a car, or taking a trip, but bad for getting married, buying a house, or placing a corpse in a coffin. The use of the number “4” is barred from campus as it means evil. For example, there is no fourth floor in the hospital. Also, opening an umbrella in a closed room may spell bad luck. There are photos and life stories of people who have donated their body to the Department of Anatomy. At the beginning of the term, medical students clad in white shirts and black trousers assemble, chant and speak prayers and send delegations to the families of the deceased to pay tribute.

Elderly people enjoy great respect. I am considered a “Master” due to my age. Looking at pictures taken of my students and me, I can see that we are almost two generations apart. CMU is located next to a large park where devote members of *Falun Gong* may occasionally be seen doing their exercises. It is my favorite resting place in the evening, which I share with joggers, mothers, their children, and stroke victims in wheel chairs. It is a great symbiosis. Another favorite place is the herb garden near the hospital with hundreds of specimen of medicinal plants. And then there is a large balcony overlooking the river and the distant mountains, where I can be found, when I am not in my office. But nobody knows.

Life in Taiwan for Westerners is cheap. However, income is low. I ordered copies of my book (Wolfgang Metzger’s *Laws of Seeing*) and gave them to the students for free. I also obtained for them a small number of textbooks by writing to friends and asking for used or earlier editions of their books. Periodically, I print out reprints to accompany my lectures. Faculty members and students are grateful for this, as they are not so well connected to researchers in the Western hemisphere. By introducing them to *ColorVision net*, our principal source of vision-related information, I am helping students to get in touch with researchers abroad. In this way they gain self-esteem and find it easier to reach out and communicate in the future.

Language is a problem when you teach, but body language, gestures, and facial expressions -- everything helps. I admire the students’ courage: A new field of study, a foreign language, a retired teacher from another continent, and the pressure of being scored for credit. When my acting becomes too explicit, the audience erupts in laughter. Faculty members offer translation into Chinese and summaries when needed. Yet, I should speak more slowly and pause more frequently for everyone to better understand. Students are eager to learn. Their presentations contain beautiful animations, testifying to their skills in computer graphics. Metzger would have been delighted. In a few years, with exposure to research papers and attendance of a few international conferences, they should be on their way. Plato, who is a bit older, got interested in the twinkle aftereffect, Kitaoka’s rotating snakes, and the motion quartet and developed some modifications of his own. Classes are conducted using multimedia, and condensed versions of students’ talks in English are written up for later use and preserved on a CD. This will give them a sense of accomplishment.

The rewards are manifold. When have you last experienced a handful of students listening to you for 2 hours, trying to understand what you say? When have you been invited after class to a wonderful dinner that took another 2 hours, and given small presents? When have you been handed a large document acknowledging your services to the University on *Confucius Day* – with charming comments by students written onto it? When did the President’s secretary – a young woman out of a painting by Gauguin - bring you chocolate truffles to welcome you? And when did students put a nametag around their neck, using their English names, so that you would more easily recognize them? What would I have done without Chia-Yao’s unending patience, concern, and

support and all my students' cooperation and enthusiasm: Bingo, DongDong, Mei-Chen, Moon, Peter, Wei-Ming, and Jenny.

One day, a faculty member took me out for dinner in her favorite eating spot and showed me the house of the former governor. His wife tragically lost an arm in a traffic accident. The house is now open to the public and a memorial to Taiwanese life. In the Museum of Natural History I learned about Taiwanese women and their new "liberated" role in modern society. It is said that between the years 2000 to 2004, many Taiwanese men went to Vietnam to look for women willing to take care of children and household, paid 8,000 US Dollars in broker fees, married the women *Las Vegas style* and took them back home to Taiwan. The faces of those brides did not look happy. The other day, I saw a woman in our hospital, wearing the conical hat known from Vietnamese rice paddies. When she left, she tied her small child to her back using a long shawl. The child was anencephalic and blind, possibly due to *Agent Orange* dropped during the war in her home country. Two Mormon elders from Utah in white shirts approached me trying to peddle their belief of God. I pointed to the woman and her child and said, which God?

CMU has a group of counselors for handicapped students. My host booked me on a daytrip with some forty men and women all under the age of 35. We drove into the mountains, stopped at several places along the way, saw an eagle high in the sky, found a giant spider and an ant nest in a tree, tasted cinnamon leaves, learned about *green* farming, the threatened environment, traditional handicraft, and the use of paper in building a paper dome. In one place, we painted man-made frogs, cooled our feet in water reputed to be the best in Taiwan, had a sumptuous lunch, and drove home.

The handicapped students were fully integrated, participants helped them piggyback out of and back into the bus, and changed roles in pushing their wheel chairs. We were a happy lot, with much laughter and pictures taken endlessly along the way. Never before was I asked to pose with as many lovely young women. Should I confess that I felt especially close to one of them? On the return trip, people started singing karaoke-style, an entertainment invented in Taiwan. Some of the handicapped students sang also. I am not easily touched, but this was the most moving group excursion, I have ever been on and certainly one of the highlights of my stay in Taiwan.

Taiwanese food can be glorious, depending on where you go and how much you spend. For 1 US Dollar per meal you eat like a student. The number of informal eateries on the roadside must be in the hundreds. People running these places work from early morning until late at night with their families. Eating-places are open seven days, as are other businesses. The fare is simple, but the variety is overwhelming. Buffets with 15-20 entries alternate with simple rice and noodle dishes. And there are petel nuts. Once a day I splurge and have coffee at *Starbucks*. The coffee shop is in the hospital, and Carol is my friend. On my first try to read the Chinese menu, she surprised me by saying: *Wo kommst Du her* (where are you from)? Her knowledge of German comes from studying a book that she bought in Taiwan and now, our daily conversations. Carol is always cheerful and fun to talk to. So are her colleagues, who giggle when I mix up their names.

Still, I feel like a sinner, remembering that spirited high-school student in Davis, CA, who confronted every customer entering the shop by saying that *Starbucks* treated their people miserably and paid an unfair price to coffee farmers in South America. I greatly admired her eloquence and courage. When the shop's manager asked her to leave, she bravely stood her ground and said that she was standing on public property. I now sometimes buy my coffee from another place, called 85. Their pastries and garlic baguettes are fabulous, but I feel like a traitor.

All food including salad is always cooked, yet the hygienic conditions of preparing food in the immediate neighborhood of an armada of cars and scooters may shy

foreigners away. Also, vegetables and dishes are washed under cold water from a faucet outside the house and placed in a pan or on large leaves on the ground. Our food inspectors at home checking for hygienic conditions might have a problem here. On the other hand, meat is never eaten raw. No uncooked ground beef (*steak tatar*) is on the menu in Taiwan; there is no *Mad Cow* disease either. But this may change, as the US is prodding the Taiwanese government to drop the ban on beef imports. Americans do not eat innards and intestines; they grind them up for fertilizer. Taiwanese customers promise a new and profitable market. If they knew that much of American beef comes from Argentina, adding to the destruction of the rain forest and worsening the climate balance. I dread the day when I see China burgers replacing vegetarian food in Taiwan.

Have you ever eaten marinated octopus, roasted chicken feet, tripe, or glazed duck heads served with the beak in place? Blood cake? Stinky tofu? Not everything that one eats is identifiable. I decided I would eat and live like a native, trusting my inoculations against polio, typhus, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria. They are now offering shots against seasonal influenza and swine flu. Dengue fever is a risk when you travel south. And then there is air pollution: a facemask for people suffering from respiratory problems is recommended. For the second time in my life (after Mexico), I drink only bottled water and juice, probably an unnecessary precaution. There are large fruit stands with great varieties of freshly prepared fruit juices in many places. And there are teahouses. At the University and in the hospital, bottles with disinfectant are attached to the wall next to the elevators, but are rarely used.

The weather started to become pleasant in mid-October. Up to then, it was very hot, humid, and uncomfortable. A set of underwear lasted for 3 hours, a shirt a little longer. Fortunately, my hotel takes care of all my laundry. When it rains in Taichung, it feels like a warm shower. The water comes down not in strings, but in torrents. Dry riverbeds fill quickly, and the roads are flooded. The wind almost lifts you off your feet. An earthquake of 6.4 on the Richter scale woke me up at night when it moved my bed 4 cm to the side. People immediately rushed to the street. Paradoxically, despite the abundance of seasonal rainfalls, water in Taiwan is at a premium. Faucets give off a sprinkle, and long showers are discouraged.

The loss of lives from the latest typhoon and the destruction of property in the so-called fire belt between Japan and Vietnam are indescribable. Some people along the coast and in the mountains have lost many of their family members due to flooding and mud slides. Whole villages have disappeared. Help from the outside is slow. They say that some 7 million people in Taiwan, Samoa, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have lost their homes. Equally dreadful, survivors may not be allowed to resettle where they lived, for fear of yet another disaster in the future. Yet, there seems to be a sanguine attitude despite the misery. I watch *CNN* every night, Jim Clancy, Jonathan Mann, and the engaged Christiane Amanpour. The frequent repetitions of the same stories can be unnerving, but they provide representative and in-depth coverage of world events. The reports on human tragedies due to typhoons are heart-breaking.

There are few tourists here. I am one of a handful of non-Asian persons on campus, if not in our section of Taichung. Still, I frequently go through dark alleys late at night, where sweating men can be seen unloading half carcasses of pigs from trucks and carrying them into butcheries for partitioning and sale the next morning. Most houses in that neighborhood have protective cages in front of the window against burglary and theft. Yet, I feel perfectly safe, although Taichung is said to have the highest crime rate in Taiwan. In fact, I feel safer than at the railroad station in my village in Germany.

The cacophony on the markets is deafening. In between the open stalls drive numerous customers on their scooters. The heat is unbearable, the air thick, and the smell extraordinary. Yet, the richness of the produce spread out on the tables and floor

is beyond imagination. Speaking of scooters, hundreds and hundreds of them are everywhere, on the streets and parked in unending rows, wherever there is space. Sidewalks are treacherous and blocked off by narrow gates to keep scooters away. Traffic is wild and daring with vehicles swarming all over the place. However, I have seen only one minor accident so far. When you walk in the street, you just go and do not pay attention, hoping that nothing will happen. Marked crossways for pedestrians are not respected, the speed is high, yet nobody honks. Drivers anticipate where you go; therefore, you never slow down or stop, as this may cause a collision. Mothers can be seen on scooters together with up to 3 children or a dog. I saw a mini-scooter, comparable to a fold-up bicycle for a mother and her child. Traffic lights signal the number of seconds you have for a crossing.

The other night, my bubbly friend and I went for dinner and some soul-searching about future research. A glass of red wine would have meant a lot, but none was in sight. It seems Taichung has few bars and lounges. On our way home, we passed by the Performing Arts Center. We heard noises, went in, walked up the stairs, and found an open door leading into a magnificent concert hall. There was a performance by a local senior high school on occasion of their school's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. From high up, we saw some 30 dancers rushing back and forth across the stage in various groupings, accompanied by the low sound of drums. The audience cheered and clapped, and huge bouquets of flowers were given to the director of the troupe and the principal of the school when the show was over. We happened to meet him and his wife on our way out – a very courteous man.

To finish the day, I sat down in the small park next to my hotel, with a bottle of beer in my hands. In Greenwich Village they once almost jailed me for the same thing. But this is Taiwan. Ten minutes before midnight, a lady arrives out of nowhere, calling meow, meow. Three slender cats jump out of their hiding places and run towards her. She picks three bowls from underneath the bushes and feeds each cat. I keep at a distance. That lady is as shy and grey as her cats. She cleans the grounds, removes every trace and disappears. The next night, she comes again, at the same time. I am curious who she is.

When I was invited for a talk, I went to Taipei on the high-speed rail. The train goes 300 km/hour. National Taiwan University is the top university in the country, and they appear to be at par with the better European and US universities. Their campus is impressive. The capital of Taiwan is a busy, breathtaking metropolis. The metro takes you everywhere. If you have not seen the famous *Shilin* night market, you have not seen anything. I was fascinated by the variety of small stands selling clothing, fruit, vegetable, meat, and fish, among them small sharks and parrotfish. Those are endangered species and should be left on the reef. The market is a heaven for food. I particularly liked the chunky seafood soup. Yet, the number of stores stocked with fine clothing astonished me. It seems an international clientele has invaded Taipei.

I was saddened by the sight of a large adult snake of the constrictor type kept in a small wire cage and waiting for the knife. Its coiled body was twice as thick as my arm and it must have been several meters in length. If I had been more courageous, I would have bought it for release in the wild. Its body was beautifully colored, and I could not understand why one would want to kill such a great creation of nature. The sight was pathetic, and the memory of that doomed snake did not leave me all night. They told me only tourists eat snake steak and soup. What am I going to do when I see poultry, rabbits, quail, deer, and pheasants for Christmas sale in our markets, after I go home?

The visit to the National Palace was the absolute highlight of my stay. I spent 6 1/2 hrs wandering with a friend from exhibit to exhibit and never got tired. What a great documentation of mankind's inspiration, creativity, ingenuity, and resourcefulness, reaching back over a period of 5.000 years. If I had not already fallen in love with the

Taiwanese/Chinese people, this visit certainly would have made a difference. I hope some day to be able to come back to visit this outstanding museum.

*Taipei 101*, at 500 meters the second-highest tower in the world, was a sight to behold. The evening air was crystal-clear and the wind warm. The view of the brightly lit city below was breathtaking. It was a perfect ending of two glorious days of excitement and rewarding talks and encounters. From the taxi, I saw the stately rows of royal palms lining the wide avenues of Taipei and felt privileged.

My two children arrived in the morning. We went to the hot springs and waterfalls of Wulai, the breathtaking marble canyon in Taroko (*Teiluge*) Gorge, the untamed beach at Hualien, and the magnificent mountain scenery at Sun-Moon Lake. The trip had been lovingly organized by Li-Chuan and Chia-Yao, our most faithful hosts at CMU, and introduced us to the great natural beauty of the island. Can we ever thank them?

Taiwan is a world leader in high-tech: computers, laptops, and cameras, as far as the eye can see. When I looked for a charger to my iBook, that is no longer on sale, the salesmen at NOVA found it. People are very resourceful. Employment is high, the birthrate at an all-time low, and concerns that Mainland China may take over Taiwan are expressed every week in the newspapers.

There are 1600 missiles aimed at Taiwan.

Lothar Spillmann (away from Freiburg)