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### Subways as a Space of Cultural Intimacy: The Mass Rapid Transit System in Taipei, Taiwan

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## **Subways as a Space of Cultural Intimacy: The Mass Rapid Transit System in Taipei, Taiwan**

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In the summer of 2004, Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) sent a delegation of junior staff from the Party's headquarters and congressional offices to attend a diplomatic workshop in Washington DC. All of the delegates had been born in Taipei during the late 1970s, and had grown up there. They all had a college or Master's degree, mainly in social sciences; they were well-versed in Western critical social theories. For many of them, this was the first trip overseas. After the official function, they visited New York City before going back to Taiwan. During the delegation's stay in New York, "they grumbled all the way through", observed their local guide, the DPP's spokesperson from the New York office who happened also to be pursuing an advanced degree in urban studies in the United States. "They complained the subways were dirty, with trash and even rats! They said the passengers were rowdy; they didn't stand in line but pushed others away in order to get into a carriage. The delegates kept comparing New York's subway with Taipei's Jie-yun (literally 'Rapid Transit'), and made comments about how clean, advanced, and orderly Taipei's Jie-yun was".

New York appeared to be a disappointment to these visitors. How could the subway in the Big Apple, presumably the pinnacle of Western modernity, be so shabby and disorderly? The city was not at all like what they had imagined. Taipei, by comparison, was obviously more modern, and its people more civilized. Their local guide, my informant, continued: "I was annoyed and eventually lost my patience, and began to tell them what they meant by 'modern' and 'civilized' was a result of social control instigated by the government. It was a government-propagated ideology, and they were buying it! After I said that, they stopped complaining". While pleased with what he accomplished with his young protégés, he added: "I have to admit, however, that I do like to ride a clean subway system and I do appreciate having polite fellow passengers. Taipei's Jie-yun is indeed wonderful". He laughed at his self-contradiction.

This article addresses two questions related to the above incident. Why do the majority of residents of Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, hold a highly positive view about their Jie-yun, officially known as the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system? Why do they put up with the many regulations imposed by the Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation (TRTC), a city government agency in charge of the daily operation of the MRT, even though they may behave differently outside the

subway system?<sup>1</sup> Taiwanese scholars who write about the MRT have criticized the TRTC for heavy-handedly pursuing a sanitized and aesthetic look that speaks primarily to middle-class lifestyles and desires.<sup>2</sup> Some have commented that the TRTC's aggressive campaign to educate passengers was paternalistic at best and authoritarian and undemocratic at worst.<sup>3</sup> In part, this critical attitude derives from these scholars' awareness of previous civility campaigns undertaken by the Chinese State. The New Life Movement in the 1930s, for example, was an expansive operation waged by Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang* 国民党) aimed at personal hygiene and polite behavior.<sup>4</sup> This campaign drew partly on Western ideas of civility and citizenship, but interpreted these concepts in an authoritarian manner in order to impose discipline.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the New Life Movement's goal was to extend government control into the "micropractices of daily life", so that the state could remake the citizens' identity "in ways that would be both modern and malleable to the will of the government".<sup>6</sup> More recently, during the late 1970s and 1980s, the "Line-up Movement" (*Paiduiyundong* 排队运动), a highlight of the KMT's Taipei City's "Rich with Civility" (*Fuerhaoli* 富而好礼) campaign, illustrated a similar intent.<sup>7</sup> Under then-Mayor Lee Teng-hui not only were ordinary Taipei City residents urged to line up while waiting for buses, but high school students were also sent out by their schools—at the request of the city government—after school and on weekends or holidays to stand around street corners or bus stops to help persuade citizens to follow the campaign. Similar to the New Life Movement, the Line-up Movement used bodily discipline to enact the virtues of social order, efficiency and civility.<sup>8</sup> In both cases civility was not democratic. Instead, it was appropriated by the government "to promote a docile populace [but] not to guarantee an independent one, and to enhance the scope of the state [but] not to support a distinct civil society".<sup>9</sup>

Given these precedents, it is not surprising that some Taiwanese scholars look critically at the current MRT campaign. There is a difference, however, between the previous campaigns and the current one: while earlier campaigns tended to be unsuccessful, the TRTC's regulations are now followed by the majority of MRT passengers. To explain this success, I argue that the lived experience of using the MRT matters more than the ideology behind its rules of use. The criticisms of Taipei's MRT do not sufficiently take into account the significance of the MRT as, first and foremost, a means of public transportation in the lives of Taipei residents. The shared experience of people as daily MRT riders has shaped a common practice that is now considered as a central part of the city's culture. Furthermore, the behavior of Taipei people has to be understood in the current global economic context. The completion of the MRT coincided with Taiwan's economic restructuring (namely, capital outflow and deindustrialization) and increased competition among Asian cities in the global economy. At the same time, China has become global economic power, posing great challenges to other national economies in the region. To behave in a civilized manner, as well as to keep a positive image of the MRT, resonates with Taipei residents' efforts to keep their city competitive and to thrive under these uncertain circumstances.

Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy<sup>10</sup> illustrates these issues. Characterized as "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality",<sup>11</sup> cultural intimacy presents a tool to comprehend the complex feelings toward the MRT articulated by people I met in Taipei and elsewhere. Here I refer specifically to the deeply seated belief in government corruption and the consequent distrust in public authority among Taiwanese, resulting from the KMT's half-century rule based on authoritarian clientelism and often recognized in the

literature on Taiwan's political culture.<sup>12</sup> It is widely shared cynicism, I argue, that helped Taipei residents to cope with the many problems caused by the MRT's decade-long construction, for "something is bound to go wrong and citizens will naturally have to suffer the consequence", as a Taiwanese would say. Yet, it is also this same lack of confidence in the government that delighted Taipei residents and gave them pride when they discovered how their city and their own lives had been transformed in a positive way by the completion of the MRT. The MRT thus serves as a space of cultural intimacy wherein the people of Taipei reiterate or reconstruct their ambiguous and contradictory relationship with the state as well as their collective identity.

This process of reiteration and reconstruction is ongoing and responds not only to tensions between the state and its citizens but also to multiple layers of identification. The content of cultural intimacy is thus relational and highly labile.<sup>13</sup> In the past, government civility campaigns were unsuccessful because the KMT regime was itself uncivil and was thus in a weak position to promote civility,<sup>14</sup> and because the lack of sufficient public investment in social service and infrastructure rendered many of the campaigns highly ideological but deeply impractical.<sup>15</sup> During previous campaigns Taiwanese (including Taipei residents) had vented their frustration at corrupt government and the lack of popular representation by (intentionally and unintentionally) ignoring public rules. The cooperation evident among the MRT riders, on the other hand, reflects a shift of reference in Taipei residents' self-identification to both an increasingly globalized world and the Taiwanese economy. The increasingly globalized Taiwanese economy, however, has also exacerbated the long-existing internal disparity between Taipei, the political and economic center of Taiwan, and the rest of the country, especially the south,<sup>16</sup> which in turn has heightened the feeling of difference between Taipei City residents and people living outside Taipei. While people in the capital are enjoying the convenience and comfort brought about by their newly inaugurated subway system, as well as being amazed at their fellow city dwellers' orderly conduct, their shared Taipei identity is further reinforced by the embarrassment they feel when watching out-of-town visitors commit misdemeanors due to ignorance of the MRT regulations.

### **The Inception of the MRT Project**

Taipei's MRT is the first subway system ever built in Taiwan; currently, it is also the only system in operation.<sup>17</sup> The process leading to its completion was long and arduous, and sometimes tarnished the system's image among the Taiwanese. The idea of building a mass transit system in Taipei first appeared on the central government's agenda in the 1960s as a solution to the capital city's potential traffic congestion expected because of the fast-growing population. Yet the decision to build it was only made in the late 1980s, when traffic jams in Taipei became unbearable.<sup>18</sup> There were many reasons for this delay. The scale of coordination required between different levels of government (for example, central, municipal and county) in order to complete an infrastructure project as vast as the MRT, as well as conflicting interests between government agencies, impeded the readiness of state officials to undertake the project.<sup>19</sup> One major disagreement involved the issue of routes. The Taipei City government preferred to have a small system with one or two lines that served downtown Taipei—which would require less money and a shorter construction period and involve fewer intra-government negotiations—whereas the central government of Taiwan desired a more comprehensive network that would cover the surrounding Taipei County as a whole. There were also different opinions voiced by Taipei City Council members regarding the route plans.<sup>20</sup> The astronomical budget needed to build a mass

transit system scared off many policy-makers until the government's revenue greatly improved in the 1980s as a result of Taiwan's successful move to an export-oriented economy.<sup>21</sup> The Executive Yuan finally approved the first stage of the MRT network in May, 1986. It would consist of six lines, including the south-north Danshui-Xindian Line (淡水-新店线) which would be the longest and most scenic route, the east-west Ban-Nan Line (板南线) which would cut across the heart of downtown Taipei and was likely to become the busiest route, and the only medium-capacity Muzha Line (木栅线) which would run entirely above the ground. This initial network covered primarily Taipei City but also some parts of Taipei County (for example, Danshui and Xindian).<sup>22</sup> The Department of Rapid Transit Systems (DORTS), under the Taipei City government, was established in 1987 to coordinate and contract MRT building projects to private companies; this was followed by the groundbreaking ceremony on March 28, 1988. DORTS made the decision to start building the six MRT lines all at once. This decision enabled DORTS to secure a combined budget of NT\$400 billion (roughly US\$13 billion) from the central government for construction and demonstrated the city's determination to complete the project.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of a slow and difficult start, DORTS officials announced that the first line was scheduled to open by the end of 1992, and that the entire initial network should be completed by 1998. After its completion, they promised that traffic conditions in metropolitan Taipei would be greatly improved. For example, it would take only 35 minutes to travel by the MRT from the Taipei Main Station to Danshui (approximately 22 kilometers) as opposed to more than an hour by car or bus during rush hours. By extension, this should have the effect of reducing people's reliance on private auto vehicles and motorcycles, which in turn would help to lessen the city's need for parking lots, reduce the level of air and noise pollution and increase the city's green space. Residents of Taipei were assured that the MRT would be convenient, fast, safe and comfortable,<sup>24</sup> that they would have a better quality of life, and that their city would be modern and international.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Dark Age of Traffic**

If people in Taipei had once welcomed the coming of the MRT and viewed the system as a manifestation of the city's bright future, enthusiasm was soon dampened by the seemingly endless construction. "It took hours every day just to go to work. We all wanted to flee from the city. Real estate developers even used this as a selling point to persuade people to buy a property outside Taipei City", a female artist in her late thirties said to me half-jokingly. Her sentiment was obviously widely shared among commuters, as the long years of construction were nicknamed by both Taipei residents and the media as the "Dark Age of Traffic" (*Jiaotong heianqi* 交通黑暗期).<sup>26</sup> The decision to launch the construction of all six MRT lines at the same time was bitterly criticized not only by the city's daily commuters but also by the businesses along Taipei's main boulevards on which the project was taking shape. A large number of shops went out of business during the MRT's decade-long construction. However, most city residents agreed that these business owners were bearing an unfairly large share of the cost. They lost customers because their storefronts had become noisy, filthy and often invisible, and access to their shops became inconvenient or difficult.<sup>27</sup>

Public support for the MRT fell to its lowest in the early 1990s when some of the highest-ranking DORTS officials were charged with corruption and when the Taipei City government was plagued by legal battles over payment with Matra Transport, the French company contracted to build the MRT's Muzha Line.<sup>28</sup> A survey conducted by *Xinxinwen* (*The Journalist* 新新闻, a major weekly news magazine) in 1993 indicated that seventy per cent of the survey participants had a negative impression about the MRT, and sixty per cent of them did not have any confidence.<sup>29</sup> The once hopeful "Jie-yun" (捷运) was now registered in most of the Taiwanese minds as the homophone "Jie-yun" (劫运), a network of an ill fate. Lin Jui-fu (林瑞图), a Taipei City Councilman at the time, built a career by exposing MRT frauds and earned himself a reputation as the "MRT Terminator" (*Jieyun shashou* 捷运杀手).<sup>30</sup> From his efforts, aided by relentless news reporting and political commentaries, people learned that Taipei's MRT was one of the most expensive urban rapid transit systems in the world.<sup>31</sup> Although the numbers given varied from one source to another, it was established that the MRT cost at least twice as much as Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and other urban transit systems around the world.<sup>32</sup> This was in part due to the fact that the MRT project was taking place while Taiwan was experiencing a bubble economy with a soaring real estate market; DORTS had to spend a substantial amount of its construction budget on land acquisition—or, as many journalists and officials of other government agencies pointed out, paid too much for land rights in exchange for cooperation from landlords. Other factors also contributed to the high cost of Taipei's MRT. Much money was spent on high payments to international consulting firms, whose expertise DORTS claimed to require. Government officials were also hoping for technology transfers, but many reporters and social pundits concluded that the results were too slight to warrant the amount of money spent.<sup>33</sup>

There were also many instances of waste,<sup>34</sup> the most notorious of which was the trash cans inside MRT stations that allegedly cost NT\$28,000 (more than US\$800) each—a piece of public lore recited by nearly everyone I know, Taiwanese or foreign, who lived in Taipei in the early 1990s. DORTS was also said to have used imported construction materials (such as steel products, granite, marble, glass floor tiles and bathroom fixtures) instead of cheaper, locally available products. The elevated ceiling in some of the MRT stations on the Ban-Nan Line also raised many eyebrows. It was considered luxurious and unnecessary, and cost much more than a lower ceiling. Similarly, the Jiantan (剑潭) Station on the Danshui Line, designed to be one of Taipei's landmarks, "was erected on two huge concrete columns and suspended, forming an overall image of the 'dragon-boat', an important feature of Chinese culture".<sup>35</sup> With Datun Mountain (大屯山) in the background, Jiantan Station, together with the nearby Grand Hotel and the Jiantan Youth Activity Center—both of which are of a traditional Chinese architectural style—and a neighboring ferro-concrete bridge, was meant to project a vivid, sculpture-like image.<sup>36</sup> It cost DORTS more than NT\$ 1 billion to build Jiantan Station, an amount far greater than the annual budget of many towns and villages in Taiwan.<sup>37</sup> The media blamed most of these extravagances on the vanity of Ch'i P'ao-cheng (齐宝铮), the first DORTS director-general.

Safety was another issue.<sup>38</sup> Many of the scandals exposed by City Councilman Lin Jui-t'u involved flawed design or substandard materials that caused problems such as leaking, cracking or cave-ins. Two years before the grand opening of the Muzha Line (the first of the MRT routes to open), people in Taipei as well as the rest of Taiwan watched uneasily as a fire, three incidents of

burst wheels and one derailment made news. They were further outraged by the cracks found in the cap beams (the transverse beams that carry the track bed on top of the supporting pillars) of the elevated Muzha Line. It was also widely circulated that Matra, the French company, was using the Muzha Line as an experimental ground to try out four-car trains on their medium-capacity system originally designed for two cars only; and this was said to be the root of the many problems the Muzha Line encountered at its testing stage. In the 1994 Taipei mayoral election, the Muzha Line became the greatest source of dissatisfaction among voters, and indirectly led to Mayor Huang Ta-chou's (黃大洲) fall from office.<sup>39</sup> During the campaign, both opposition party candidates voiced fervent disagreement with the Muzha Line. One vowed to stop its construction and to turn the entire structure into a huge parking lot, while the other pledged to keep the space but saw it making a nice track to run an annual city marathon.<sup>40</sup> The MRT project seemed to be in jeopardy. Ultimately, an independent inspection was carried out to assess whether the project could be salvaged. Over a hundred improvements and reinforcements were implemented as a result.<sup>41</sup>

After these improvements, the Muzha Line finally commenced service in the summer of 1996, almost four years after DORT's original schedule, the end of 1992. To attract Taipei residents the TRTC offered them free trial rides, but the public remained initially reluctant. A journalist from the *Sinorama* Magazine reported a conversation she overheard:

"From today, every time you ride the MRT you have a chance to get NTS 1.2 million!" said a man, mimicking the advertisement. "Really? Is the MRT giving away prizes?" asked his female colleague innocently, not realizing the twist [sarcasm] in his words. "No" , came the reply, "that's how much their insurance pays out if there's an accident!" At these words , everyone in the elevator burst into guffaws of laughter.<sup>42</sup>

The Muzha Line was initially opened for merely two hours per day; only three weeks later did it begin to run at full capacity.

The experience that DORTS engineers gained from constructing the Muzha Line, however, helped them with the other routes. The Danshui Line, the first heavy-capacity route, was inaugurated in March 1997; this was followed by the opening of the north section of the Xindian Line and the Zhonghe Line (中和线) in the winter of 1998. The southern section of the Xindian Line and the Ban-Nan Line started service at the end of 1999, three weeks ahead of schedule, and this concluded the first phase of MRT construction.<sup>43</sup>

## **Disciplining and Disciplined Passengers**

Owing to Taipei residents' deep skepticism, DORTS and its managerial counterpart TRTC spent much time communicating and explaining the MRT to the general public. A Public Service Center, the first of its kind among Taiwanese government agencies, was set up to answer questions raised by individual citizens. Staff at the TRTC Public Relations Department also engaged in zealous promotional campaigns. They invited many prominent Taiwanese writers to join the trial ride of the Muzha Line, in the hope that these writers would be impressed enough to write positively in the future.<sup>44</sup> Starting from 1997, after the inauguration of the Danshui Line, TRTC staff also actively sought the cooperation of social service agencies (governmental and

non-governmental) and private organizations (profit and non-profit) to co-sponsor cultural and recreational activities.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the TRTC installed permanent public art works both inside and outside MRT stations, and invited museums and cultural institutions to utilize the hallways, walls and other spare spaces in the subway for exhibitions.<sup>46</sup> Even live performers were mobilized by the TRTC: starting in 1998, the TRTC created the MRT Street Artist Program to recruit artists, including singers, dancers, musicians, painters, folk artists and craft makers, to perform on TRTC properties.<sup>47</sup> In addition, also in 1998, the TRTC worked with the Taipei Bureau of Cultural Affairs to initiate a “Poetry in Motion” annual competition.<sup>48</sup> The winning pieces were posted inside the MRT carriages (and buses) and published separately in magazines such as *Taipei huakan* (*Taipei Reading* [台北画刊], a Taipei City government monthly publication) as well as collectively in an annual anthology published by the Taipei City government.<sup>49</sup> All of these were strategies to popularize the image of the MRT.

TRTC employees also worked hard to educate passengers about “proper” MRT behavior and etiquette.<sup>50</sup> A few years prior to the completion of the Muzha Line, in the early 1990s, people in Taipei began to read in newspapers that there were rules to follow while riding the MRT.<sup>51</sup> During the Muzha Line free trial period, while experiencing firsthand Taipei’s newest public transportation system, passengers were also shown step by step how to act in the subway when purchasing tickets from a vending machine, swiping the ticket at the turnstile, following the signs to the right platform, waiting on a safe spot on the platform, forming a line while entering a subway car. Before long, signs were erected at the top and foot of nearly every escalator inside MRT stations to remind passengers that they should stand on the right, leaving the left-hand side for those who were in a hurry to pass by. Lines were drawn on the platform so that people could stand in line while waiting for the MRT; the lines ensured that passengers would get on the train in an orderly manner. Furthermore, to keep the environment clean, passengers were—and continue to be—barred from spitting, smoking, eating, drinking, or chewing gum or betel nuts in the stations or inside the train cars. Concomitantly, the Legislation Yuan passed the Mass Rapid Transit Act (*Dazhong jieyunfa* 大众捷运法) to provide a legal foundation for the TRTC regulations; passengers who violate these regulations are fined from NT\$1,500 (US\$50) to NT\$7,500 (US\$250),<sup>52</sup> Loudspeakers were also used to repeatedly broadcast information and warning messages to passengers.<sup>53</sup>

In the first few months after these regulations were put in place, one often saw TRTC employees guiding passengers and correcting deviant behavior. At first, their task was not easy. In spite of the TRTC's ongoing media campaign and frequent TV and newspaper coverage, many passengers misbehaved, particularly when they thought that MRT workers were not watching. In response, the TRTC intensified its efforts. It added more on-site personnel, raised fines and installed surveillance cameras. Offenders who got caught were often put on the spot, as a woman, who was a college student at the time, recalled in her conversation with me: “Sometimes, while riding the train, out of nowhere one heard the conductor's voice on the public speaker, ‘The young lady in car so and so, please put away your food’. How did they know who was eating in what car? It was embarrassing!” The TRTC also secured the support of the Ministry of Education, which encouraged schools in Taipei as well as in the rest of Taiwan to make MRT etiquette a part of the civic education curriculum.<sup>54</sup>



These disciplinary efforts eventually paid off. The number of transgressions dropped gradually.<sup>55</sup> As an effect, passengers were delighted to see that it was really clean inside MRT stations. Unlike what one saw in many of Taiwan's bus and railroad stations, there was simply no littering inside the MRT.<sup>56</sup> Another visible change in behavior occurred on the escalators, where, however crowded, passengers would automatically move to the right-hand side, leaving the left-hand side unoccupied. On many of the occasions when I mentioned this observation in my talks on college campuses, students in the audience would cheerfully add that everybody knew the right-hand side was for those who were not in a hurry, whereas the left-hand side was for people who had to rush. If one were really racing against time, one would not ride the escalator but, instead, choose to run up or down the stair adjacent to it. The personal story of a Taiwanese colleague further confirmed the significance of this common knowledge. She had graduated in the United States in the 1990s and returned to teach in Taiwan after 2000. As a result, she missed the early stage of the MRT's "socialization". She described her later experience of learning the rules as "just like a foreigner":

At first I didn't have any idea of what I was supposed to do. How was I to know that I should only stand on the right-hand side of the escalator and keep the left-hand side free? But then people began looking at me with irritation or even loathing. That's when I started to get the message.

I have seen quite a few times that a mother pulled her child back from stepping to the other side, and then told the child that s/he should give people space to pass. Once at the Taipei Main Station, I was standing right below two young men who were standing side by side; they didn't seem to be aware that they were blocking the way. After a while, people pushed closer and closer to them [from below]; they also began making impatient noises, or avoided looking at them out of embarrassment. I guess people just couldn't understand why these two guys were so rude and didn't give way. One of them finally sensed that something was wrong. He turned to his friend, and said, in English with an American accent, "I think we are not supposed to stand on this side". Then I knew they were probably Taiwanese American kids who came back to Taiwan only for a summer visit.

### **The Forming of an MRT Culture**

Over time, the term *Jieyunzu* (捷运族, literally "the MRT Tribe") was coined by the media, and quickly adopted by the public, to (self-)describe people who rely on the MRT for their daily commute or use the MRT as their chief-or preferred—means of transportation and who thus know the ins-and-outs of the MRT. They all know how to behave in the subway.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, *Jieyunzu* carries a sense of intimacy. Collectively, these individuals are fashioning a new culture—or reinventing the Taipei's old culture—centered on the MRT.<sup>58</sup>

The MRT has made life easier for people in Taipei.<sup>59</sup> The system now serves around 900,000 passengers every day<sup>60</sup>—a number far exceeding the TRTC's initial estimate of 600,000 to

630,000 riders per day<sup>61</sup>—in a metropolitan area with slightly more than 6.5 million people. Although the MRT charges a higher fare than other means of public transportation such as buses, the TRTC's *2003 Passengers' Satisfaction Survey* indicates that the price does not appear to be a major concern. In the first year of its operation, the TRTC actually lowered the fare several times, and introduced other discount fares, in order to entice a broader ridership; the current rates are the result of those changes.<sup>62</sup> Taipei residents appear to be well served with respect to their transportation needs.

Since I started my subway research in 2000, most of what I have heard is praise, “Convenient”, “comfortable”, “rapid” and “reliable” are just some of the adjectives that I have most often heard associated with the MRT, echoing the promotional language used by DORTS officials over a decade ago. Equally revealing is the fact that 86 per cent of the passengers gave a positive evaluation to the MRT in the TRTC's *2003 Passengers' Satisfaction Survey*. A civil engineer who participated in the planning and construction of Taipei's MRT described the system as “brutally precise”, as the MRT always runs on schedule, to the extent that passengers feel entitled to complain when the train is a minute or two late. Digital billboards placed in nearly every station and on platforms inform passengers to the second how long they will have to wait for the next train. The MRT also runs frequently, especially during rush hours. Morning commuters are no longer compelled to leave home half an hour earlier than normal, as used to be the case, in order to get to work on time. However, one also loses the claim of bad traffic as an excuse to be late for dates or appointments, as I was warned several times. Some passengers have also begun to dress up for the ride, wearing designer clothes or coordinated outfits purchased in department or brand-named stores, instead of casual and frequently mismatched garments from vendors in a night market, and walk more gracefully (especially when wearing high heels). A fashion-sensitive white-collar professional in her late twenties told me that this was because they no longer need to race frantically to catch a bus. I also noticed that passengers nowadays are more willing to yield their seats to the needy or the elderly, for their trips are short and pleasant even if they have to stand. This is a great departure from riding Taiwan commuter trains in previous decades, when people would not hesitate to climb through the windows of a train to get a seat. In Taiwan's subtropical climate, the fact that both the MRT stations and carriages are air-conditioned also contribute to making the ride comfortable.

The impact of an MRT culture on the behavior of Taipei residents has also gradually extended beyond the subway's confines. Compared to the days before the MRT, people are more frequently observed standing in lines while waiting for buses as well as getting on the bus in order. “No Eating, No Drinking” signs, similar to those posted inside MRT cars, can now be seen in all Taipei City buses. Even though there is no legal foundation to this prohibition and no formal sanctions against those who fail to comply, passengers are by and large cooperative. They will also toss their garbage, if there is any, in the trash can provided by the bus company, usually placed next to the driver at the front of the bus. More influential are MRT escalator manners, which are now practiced widely in the city. In the words of a woman in her early forties, “No matter where we are now—be it inside the MRT or at a department store—people immediately move to the right-hand side of the escalator, even when they are the only soul riding it! It has become a habit for all of us”.

The MRT has also made the city more accessible. It has increased the mobility of Taipei citizens of all ages. It is particularly useful to women who, along with young students, are

traditionally the users of public transportation. In answering my question of how the subway system has changed their personal lives, two long-time female Taipei residents in their mid-thirties both replied that the MRT has extended the distance of their travel—as well as their willingness to travel—and broadened their knowledge of the periphery of the city. “I would not go to Danshui by car, and certainly not by bus. It takes too long to drive, and road traffic is usually bad”, one of them explained, “and I probably would have never got to visit Xindian, had it not been for the MRT”.<sup>63</sup> A lady in her late sixties happily waved her Senior Citizen Discount EasyCard (*Jinglaoka* 敬老卡)<sup>64</sup> while telling me how much she had enjoyed riding the MRT on her weekly journey to her singing class, an activity she had taken on to rebuild her life after her husband’s passing nearly a decade before. She had rarely traveled on her own but had mostly been driven by her husband before his death; when she had to go out alone, she added, she was often afraid of staying out after dark, as taking the bus home would take too long and taxi drivers were not trustworthy. Now, however, she often takes the MRT for a shopping detour after her singing classes.

An anthropology graduate student in her twenties told me that her father recently gave in to her teenage sister’s request for an EasyCard (*Youyouka* 悠游卡) so that she could travel freely with friends after school:

It’s sort of like her allowance. My dad would put in money every month and then give the card to my sister. They [her sister and her friends] all have an EasyCard, and they use it constantly. I often hear my sister saying to her friends, “Let’s take a ride with Xiao-jie today!”

To call Jie-yun “Xiao-jie” (小捷) is like calling Robert “Bobby” or James “Jimmy”. It is a nickname given to the MRT as if it were someone with whom one is intimate. For these young people who grew up after the completion of the subway system, the MRT is a familiar and intimate part of their lives; it’s just like one of their friends. This graduate student continued:

My father feels comfortable letting my sister travel by the MRT. He thinks it’s safe. He just allowed my sister to travel to Danshui with her friends for the New Year celebration. The MRT extended its service to 2am [from the regular midnight closing] on New Year’s Eve, and resumed service at 4.30am [instead of 6am] on New Year’s Day, so that people could be out late but get home easily in the early morning.

The issue of safety was reiterated by a car service driver with whom I chatted on my way home after midnight one night. I had missed the last MRT train and had no choice but to call for a car service. As someone who usually started his shift late at night, he had observed a decrease in business soon after the MRT opened:

Ladies would usually call for a car service if they had to go home at late hours. [Before the MRT,] most of the buses terminated the service around 11pm, and taxis were looked upon as so dangerous.<sup>65</sup> Car service was considered the best alternative. This was particularly true if you were going in the Danshui direction. But now it’s no more. Not that the MRT runs 24 hours ... But people feel safe, you know. They would choose to wait on the subway platform.

Some of the most dramatic remarks I heard, however, came from colleagues who grew up in Taipei yet spent most of their adulthood studying overseas in North America or Europe. Their prolonged absence from Taiwan, unable to follow the gradual transformation of Taipei, contributed to their surprise when they saw the MRT for the first time. A comparative literature professor in her forties who lived for most of the 1980s and 1990s in New York was in raptures while telling me her first impression of Taipei's MRT: "Oh my God, my jaw almost dropped. Am I really in Taipei? This is too good to be true". A fellow anthropologist coming back from London said that he was honored, and felt a sense of pride, that Taipei could have a rapid transit system just like that of major European cities. He likened Taipei's MRT to the metro in Washington DC, because they were both new and clean, whereas the one in London was old and dirty. Yet, new or old, clean or filthy, he commented, in these Western cities "the moment when an immigrant starts using public transportation to get around is also the moment when his integration [into the adopted society] begins."

To say that the MRT helps solve Taipei City's traffic problem is an understatement. The vital role that the MRT plays in the lives of Taipei residents was driven home when northern Taiwan was struck hard by Typhoon Nari in September, 2001, roughly two years after the grand opening. After enduring an evening of nasty wind and wild storms, Taipei residents woke up to discover that the MRT system was flooded. The city was paralyzed in the morning rush hour, when hundreds of thousands of MRT commuters and students had to rejoin the already crowded ground traffic flow to dash to their destinations. In the following months, the Ban-Nan Line (the busiest line, cutting across the heart of the city) was nicknamed "the Grand Ditch of Taipei" (*Zhongxiaodagou* 忠孝大沟) indicating both residents' disbelief in and amazement at their predicament. Yet, if the TRTC embarrassed itself by having to shut down its flooded subway system, it also redeemed itself when the TRTC staff managed to pump out the water, repair damaged control panels, and get the MRT back in operation in less than six months. In the process, the media dutifully played the role of cheerleader by reporting the progress made by the TRTC engineers. "We called [the progress of repair] '*guangfu*' (光复 'retrocession' or 'recovering one's lost land')", a woman in her late thirties told me, with a big smile on her face. This disaster ultimately aroused a sense of solidarity among Taipei residents.

### **Subways as a Space of Cultural Intimacy**

Cultural intimacy is both inclusive and exclusive. Also conveyed in the previous escalator story is the subtle but unmistakable distinction between those of "us" who know the regulations or code of behavior and the "others" who do not. While general compliance has increased, TRTC statistics show that now most violations occur on weekends when many of the passengers are not daily commuters but tourists.<sup>66</sup> As the MRT has begun to enjoy a towering reputation, the system has attracted passengers not only from metropolitan Taipei but also from all corners of the country, who come to ride it as a main part of their touring itinerary. It seems reasonable to conclude that many of the weekend offenders are out-of-town visitors—most likely from central and southern Taiwan—who just do not know how to behave in the MRT. An unpleasant encounter with TRTC employees for an informant from my previous field site in central Taiwan, a single woman in her late thirties who spent most of her working life toiling at her father's textile factory, attested to this. Like many Taiwanese living outside the city, in the early days she took a trip with her teenage

niece to Taipei to ride the famed MRT. Without thinking, her niece naturally took the food she had bought from a street vendor into an MRT car, and began eating as soon as she sat down. My informant said, “An MRT employee suddenly appeared, and started yelling at us. She accused my niece of breaking the law, and forced her to put the food away. I got so mad. I said to her that my niece was only a kid; she didn't break the law on purpose. We simply didn't know. That person shouldn't have made such a scene. She should just tell us that food was not allowed”. Four years after the encounter, my informant still seemed angry. The transgression seemed only to affirm their inadequacy, and, by comparison, the sophistication and social superiority of the people of Taipei.

Such incidents have led some Taiwanese authors to comment that the Taipei City government's pursuit of a sanitized and aesthetic image addresses middle-class lifestyles and desires that are exclusive.<sup>67</sup> Some argue that the TRTC's aggressive campaign to educate passengers is paternalistic at best and authoritarian and undemocratic at worst, leaving little room for civil society to thrive.<sup>68</sup> Many of my North American colleagues to whom I had the opportunity to present my MRT research quickly agreed with both of these points. Yet, however politically appealing these critiques may sound, they are theoretically misconceived.

To say that the Taipei residents' orderly behavior in the MRT is a direct result of authoritarian government overlooks the agency of the residents in Taipei and, by extension, the citizens of Taiwan. Such an explanation refuses to take seriously people's own answers to questions of whether the regulations are necessary or why they are willing to cooperate; it is also too ready to accept the assumption that people in this newly industrializing country with an authoritarian recent past much have been forced into complying with government regulations.

To understand the current pride that many Taipei residents feel in their MRT, one has to compare the opinions they held back when they doubted both the determination of the Taiwanese government and the ability of Taiwanese technocrats to complete the project. It was only in 1993 that the Taipei MRT scandals were caricatured in *Newsweek* magazine as an “international laughingstock”, along with the infamous fist-fight among legislators in Taiwan's Legislative Yuan.<sup>69</sup> From a joke to something of a gem, the process has not been easy.<sup>70</sup> Even today, every time the MRT reaches a milestone—be it the ridership of two billion (13 August 2005), the MRT's tenth birthday (16 March 2006), or its ranking as the world's best metro system carrying fewer than five million passengers—TRTC officials cannot help but remember the series of incidents during the Muzha Line's testing.<sup>71</sup> The image of burning cars is still too fresh to be forgotten. This is not simply because it happened less than fifteen years ago, but also because people are constantly reminded of how far their city and they themselves have come—and how little guarantee they have that they will not fall back or fall behind—if they allow the misdemeanor of those weekend out-of-town visitors.<sup>72</sup>

There is indeed a discrepancy between Taipei residents and these out-of-towners, but it is one of region rather than simply one of class. Historically, although Taiwan's urbanization initially started in the south, the introduction of industrialization since Japanese colonization in the late 1800s steadily shifted urbanization to the coastal cities in the north; in this process Taipei gradually established its prominence as Taiwan's political, economic and cultural center.<sup>73</sup>

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The primacy of Taipei was further reinforced during Taiwan's post-World War II economic development, when the Taipei metropolitan area garnered a lion's share of manufacturing activities and attracted a large number of rural migrants from central and southern Taiwan under the Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI) in the 1950s and 1960s, when the city transformed itself into a trading center that served the vast number of small-and-medium-sized enterprises in Taiwan's highly decentralized industrial system under the Export-Oriented Industrialization (EOI) in the 1970s, and when it served as the site of corporate headquarters and the marketing center for the high-tech industry in the Taipei-Hsinchu corridor since the 1980s.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, as the capital city of Taiwan and a special municipality (*yuanxiashi* 院辖市), Taipei has always been the jewel of the central government and privileged is the allocation of resources. Accordingly, public infrastructure is better developed, and social programs are better funded; the building of the MRT is just one example. Though there are rich families and successful entrepreneurs and industrialists outside Taipei City,<sup>75</sup> Taipei City residents still enjoy better public service and tend to be more current with urban amenities than Taiwanese citizens in other locales.

Current global economic processes have made the inequality between Taipei and the rest of Taiwan even more obvious. The timing of the completion of the MRT coincided with Taiwan's economic restructuring on the one hand,<sup>76</sup> and the emergence of global cities as the main site of global economic competition on the other.<sup>77</sup> While Taiwan's hinterland is losing its industrial sector to China as well as countries in Southeast Asia, the function of Taipei as Taiwan's commanding center is reinforced as a result of the need to serve overseas Taiwanese capital.<sup>78</sup> Taipei is also competing with other cities in the Asia-Pacific area to be a regional hub.<sup>79</sup> Suddenly, the MRT features and fixtures once considered as pointless luxuries are now a strong selling-point of the city.<sup>80</sup>

In this context, the misbehavior of Taipei's out-of-town visitors carries larger implications. It symbolizes the rise of Taipei as an Asia-Pacific economic center and the demise of other parts of Taiwan as a manufacturing base. Yet, even among those young, highly educated, white-collar professionals who are the chief beneficiaries of Taiwan's current economic restructuring and who constitute the core of *Jieyunzu*, there exists intense fear of not being able to keep up with the global competition. A recurrent theme in many of the conversations I had with people in Taipei has been the emergence of South Korea as a global economic power. Specifically, constant reference was made to the South Korean GNP per capita that was once lower but has quickly surpassed that of Taiwan since the country's economic reconstruction after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The recent change in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, seems to be the best manifestation of its nation's growing economic strength, which, under its recent mayor, has experienced significant urban renewal. A civil engineer in a leading transportation consulting firm in Taipei whose founders helped to build the MRT commented that Seoul has now become their model city, possessing one of the best-developed urban transit networks in Asia. The comparison between Taiwan and South Korea—or between Taipei and Seoul—is particularly significant given these two countries' shared path of economic development (mainly export-oriented industrialization) and often fierce competition in the past few decades. The recent success of Seoul or South Korea, therefore, only heightened the sense of urgency among Taipei people. A similar sense of urgency was observed toward China, as it has now fully entered the ring of global economic competition and appears to siphon away a great amount of the world's capital.<sup>81</sup> A woman in her late thirties working for a major publishing house in Taipei who makes frequent

business trips to China made a half-joking, self-mocking remark while commenting on how the MRT has improved traffic conditions in Taipei: “Of course there are no traffic jams in Taipei; all the cars have gone to Shanghai!” Her words unequivocally reflect the deep-seated anxiety of Taiwanese about the precarious nature of the global market economy. To behave in a civilized manner, as well as to keep a positive image of the MRT, therefore, resonates with the Taipei residents’ efforts to thrive under these uncertain circumstances.

## Conclusion

This article sees Taipei’s newly inaugurated MRT as a space of cultural intimacy wherein Taipei City residents (re)shape their collective identity against Taiwan’s shifting politics as well as within the ever-changing global economic context. Characterized as “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality”,<sup>82</sup> the notion of cultural intimacy helps to disentangle the multiple-layered and highly volatile process of identity formation. Nationally and politically, the TRTC’s efforts to regulate the MRT passengers’ behavior is not the first government civility campaign in modern Chinese history, but it is one of the few embraced by affected citizens. The cooperation evident among MRT riders indicates the effectiveness of the MRT as a means of public transportation, around which Taipei residents are forging a collective identity based on their shared—and largely positive—experience of daily commuting. This communal experience, in turn, has helped them to reconsider their relationship with the Taiwanese state. Once a manifestation of governmental incompetence and corruption, the MRT has now become a symbol of civic pride. Yet the MRT’s positive image is not only a result of government coercion but, rather, has emerged with the active involvement and collaboration of its daily riders.

Globally and economically, the willingness to cooperate observed among MRT riders reflects a shift in reference of Taipei residents’ self-identification to an increasingly globalized world. The completion of the MRT coincided with Taiwan’s recent economic restructuring on the one hand and the emergence of global cities as the main site of global economic competition on the other. Behaving in an orderly way and keeping a positive image of the MRT, therefore, resonates with Taipei residents’ efforts and desire to keep their city economically competitive. Yet, the increasingly globalized Taiwanese economy has also exacerbated the long-existing internal disparity between Taipei, the political and economic center of Taiwan, and the rest of the country, especially the south. The contrast between the refined manners of Taipei’s daily commuters and the recurring misdemeanors of out-of-town visitors on the MRT seems only to confirm the growing discrepancy between a globalizing Taipei and Taiwan’s deindustrialized hinterland. Yet the anxiety seeping through some of the self-deprecating comments indicates the precarious nature of the current global economic system and the resulting challenges faced, and uncertainties felt, by the Taiwanese people, including the resident of Taipei.

The trepidation felt by Taipei residents, I would further suggest, is not unique but widely shared by inhabitants in other larger cities, if not by the whole population, in the Asia-Pacific region. As a matter of fact, like Taipei, many Asian cities have lately been observed engaging in major investment in urban infrastructure. The current study of Taipei’s MRT thus bears broader significance; it offers comparative possibilities for work not only on other recently constructed

urban mass transit systems across the region, but more generally on other emerging global cities in a globalized economy.





## Note

\* A previous version of this article was presented at the “Public Culture in Contemporary East Asia: Global Flows, Cultural Intimacy, and the Nation-State” Workshop at the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University (May 2006). I was encouraged by the enthusiastic reception of my paper and benefited from the comments and suggestions that other workshop participants gave me. Special thanks go to Steven Goldstein and Ya-pei Kuo, who served as discussants for the panel that included my paper. This article also benefits greatly from the many conversations and discussions I had with fellow scholars at the “Transformative Cities” seminar at the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics at CUNY Graduate Center (2004-05): Neil Smith, Ida Susser, David Harvey, Emily Pugh, Ashley Dawson, Effat Eizenberg, Stephane Tonnelat, Poyin Auyeung, Valerie Imbruce, Stephanie Sapiie, Bill Solecki, Janet Ng, Cheryl Fish and Paula Massood. I also thank Chien-hung Tung who generously shared his insights on Taiwanese politics with me, Avi Bomstein for his suggestion on the issue of civility, Keith Markus for his editorial comments, as well as Andrew Kipnis, Luigi Tomba and the two anonymous reviewers of *The China Journal* for their invaluable critiques.

1. This paper emerges from my research in Taiwan since the summer of 2000. My involvement with Taipei’s MRT was as both a passenger and an ethnographer. That is, the MRT constituted the nearly exclusive means of transportation during my stay in Taipei, except for the times when I took a taxi or was driven by friends or families. To acquire a broader understanding of the system, however, I also rode the different routes of the MRT at different hours of the day as well as on different days of the week, to observe who rode from where, and how and when. The MRT also entered into literally every conversation I had with people, both native Taiwanese and foreign-born residents and visitors, in Taipei and elsewhere in Taiwan (and frequently also in North America). My fieldwork was fortunate because the MRT was, and continues to be, a novelty in the social life of Taiwan; almost everybody had something to say about their personal experience with, or perception and knowledge about, the MRT. By extension, with few exceptions, my MRT project seemed to generate genuine interest among the people I met, who were often eager to talk to me about it. In addition to participant observation, I also had formal interviews with (past and present) government officials in charge of the MRT construction and of the making and implementation of Taipei City transportation policy prior to the MRT, and with civil engineers and urban planners involved in the planning and building of Taiwan’s subway systems (in Taipei and Kaohsiung).

2. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui! Jie-yun yidong jingyan yu Danshui kongjian de guanguanghua* (Travel to Danshui! The MRT Moving Experience and the Tourist-ization of Danshui) (Master's thesis, Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2005); Wang Chih-hung, "Liudongdijing yu shikongcaoyan: Taibei jieyunxitong yu xindushijingyan" (Landscape of Flows and Spatial-Temporal Performances: New Urban Experiences through Taipei MRT), *Dilixuebao* (Journal of Geographical Science), Vol. 31 (2002), pp. 83-115; Chih-hung.
3. Yang Tzu-pao, Personal interview (2004).
4. Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1975), pp. 945-80.
5. Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities: Democracy and Culture in China and Taiwan* (Boulder: Westview, 2002), p. 44.
6. Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities*, p. 44. Similar government programs were observed in Taiwan under the Japanese colonial administration around the same time period. See Lu Shao-li, *Shuiluoxiangqi: Rizhishiqi Taiwanshehui de shenghuozuoxi* (Daily Routines in the Taiwanese Society under the Japanese Rule) (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1998), referred to in Wang Chih-hung, "Taibeishi wenhuazhili de xingzhi yu zhuanbian, 1967-2002" (The Cultural Governance of Taipei City, 1967-2002), *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* (Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies), Vol. 52 (2003), pp. 104-06.
7. Wang Chih-hung, "Taibeishi wenhuazhili de xingzhi yu zhuanbian", pp. 121-86.
8. Wang Chih-hung, "Zhixu, xiaolii yu wenhuasuyang: Taibeishi 'paiduiyundong' fenxi" (Order, Efficiency and Civility: The "Line-up Campaign" in Taipei), *Zhengzhi yu shehui zhaxue pinglun* (Societas: A Journal for Philosophical Study of Public Affairs), Vol. 14 (2005), pp. 95-147.
9. Robert P. Weller, *Alternate Civilities*, p. 45.
10. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2005)
11. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, p. 3.

12. Chen Tung-sheng, *Jingquan chengshi* (The City of Money Power) (Taipei:Juliu,1995); Shao Chuan-cheng, *Taiwan diqu de xinzhongshangzhuyi* (The Neo-mercantilism of the Taiwan Area) (Taipei: Guojia zhengce yanjiu zhongxin, 1989); Ching-ping Tang, “Democratizing Urban Politics and Civic Environmentalism in Taiwan”, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 176 (2003), p. 1035; Chien-hung Tung, *Planning in a Democratized Domain: Democratization and Planning Bureaucrats in Taiwan* (PhD Dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 2006); Fang Wang, “The Political Economy of Authoritarian Clientelism in Taiwan”, in Lui Roniger and Aysc Gunes-Ayata (eds), *Democracy, Clientelism, and Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp. 181-206; Wang Jcnnn-hwan, *Shei tongzhi Taiwan?* (Who Governs Taiwan?) (Taipei: Juliu, 1996).
  
13. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, p. 57; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Hugh Raffles, “Intimate Knowledge”, *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 173 (2002), pp. 325-35,
  
14. Robert P, Weller, *Alternate Civilities*, p. 45.
  
15. For example, the failure of the Line-up Movement, particularly around bus stops, had a lot to do with the inadequate supply of the means of public transportation in Taipei City at the time. As a result, buses were usually crowded, and commuters in metropolitan Taipei had to compete—by pushing and shoving past others—to get on a bus so that they could get to work on time. Also, many bus stops were not located on the sidewalk but on an island in the middle of the road. As a result, there was not enough space to queue, which made it difficult for commuters to stand in line waiting for buses. See Wang Chih-hung, “Zhixu, xiaolii yu wenhua suyang”, p. 124-25.
  
16. Jinn-yun Hsu and Lu-lin Cheng, “Revisiting Economic Development in Post-warj Taiwan: The Dynamic Process of Grographical Industialization”, *Regional Studuies*, Vol. 36, No. 8 (2002), pp. 897-908
  
17. The second subway system is currently under construction in Kaohsiung, the second largest city in Taiwan.
  
18. Liu Baojie and Lit Shaowei, *Taipei jieyun baipishu: 4,444 yi de jiaoxun* (The White Paper of Taipei’s MRT: A Lesson of 444,400,000,000 NT Dollars) (Taipei: Shibao, 1994), pp. 9-12.

19. Yang Tzu-pao, "Taiwan dushi jiaotongzhengce de zhengzhijingjixue" (The Urban Political Economy of the Metropolitan Transportation Policy in Taiwan: A Critique of Taipei Mass Rapid Transit System Program'), *Taiwan shehuiyanjiu jikan* (Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies), Vol. 3, No. 2/3 (1990), pp. 59-66.
20. *Caixim* (Wealth Magazine), "Jieyun weihe fengpo buduan? Qibaozheng de xiuliqiankun" (Why Does the MRT Continue to Have Problems?), No. 65 (1987), pp. 176-81.
21. Yang Tzu-pao, "Taiwan dushi jiaotongzhengce de zhengzhijingjixue", p. 66.
22. New or extended routes have been planned, however, in order to serve Taipei County residents; some of these extended lines are currently under construction. See the DORTS website (<http://www.dorts.gov.tw>).
23. *Taipei Times*, "Fresh Hope for Taipei's MRT" [html document] (11 November 1999). available from: [http://th.gio.gov.tw/show.cfm?news\\_id=2085](http://th.gio.gov.tw/show.cfm?news_id=2085) (accessed 11 April 2006). US\$1=NT\$33 at the time of the MRT construction.
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26. Wang Chih-hung, "Duzhi liudong weiji de lunshu yu xianshi: Taibei 'jiaotong heianqi' de fenxi" (The reality and Discourses of Urban Flow Crisis: An Analysis of the "Dark Age of Taipei's Traffic"), *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan*, Vol. 3, No. 2/3 (1991), pp. 105-82
27. *Tongling zazhi* (Leader Magazine), "Jieyun? Jieyun!" (MRT? A Network with an Ill Fate!). Vol. 73 (1991), pp. 60-64.
28. *Haiwaixueren* (Overseas Scholars), "Taipeijieyun mixin" (The Inside Story of the Taipei

- MRT), No. 299 (1998), pp. 71-72: *Ziyoushibao* (Liberty Times), “Muzhaxianjiejyun, Matelashengsu, beishi yaopei 16.4 yi” (Matra Won the Suit over the MRT Muzha Line) [html document] (23 July 2005), available from:  
<http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2005/new/jul/23/today-p9.htm> (accessed 23 March 2006);  
*World Bank*, “Study on Urban Transport Development: Final Report” [html document] (2000), available from:  
[http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/transport/utsr.nsf/5d346125687632dc8525684d006437be/619c4b339aa740cb8525694b005c76da/\\$FILE/Padeco\\_Final.pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/transport/utsr.nsf/5d346125687632dc8525684d006437be/619c4b339aa740cb8525694b005c76da/$FILE/Padeco_Final.pdf) (access 11 April 2006).
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  30. *Xinxinwen*, *Jieyun = Jieyun* (Rapid Transit = 111 Fate: A Special Issue on the MRT Scandals), No. 329 (1993), pp. 63-81.
  31. *Xinxinwen*, “Wujieshizhang, liangjiejuzhang, yibilanzhang” (Five Mayors, Two Directors, and a Fuzzy Number), No. 347 (1993), pp. 62-71; *Caixun*, “Yigonli zaojia bashiyiyuan: Jieyun huafei zaidu shuaxin shijiejilu” (One Kilometer Cost NT\$8,000,000,000; Taipei’s MRT Made the World Record, Again), No. 139 (1993), pp. 164-67.
  32. For example, it was reported in the *Caixun* Magazine (1993) article that it cost NT\$8 billion to build a kilometer of Taipei’s MRT whereas it only cost NT\$3 billion for Hong Kong, NT\$800 million for France, and NT\$1,100 million for Baltimore, Yokohama and Singapore to build the same distance. Liu Baojie and Lii Shaowei noted (*Taipei jieyun baipishu*, p. 80) that it cost NT\$5 billion for a kilometer of Taipei’s MRT, approximately NT\$3 billion for the Metro system in Washington, DC, NT\$4,139 million for Hong Kong’s MTR, and NT\$1,166 million for the system in Singapore.
  33. *Caixun*, “Yangguwen zuolinggaoxin chidingjiejyunju” (International Consultants Got Huge Salaries), No. 110 (1991), pp. 166-69; *Caixun*, “Jieyunju dangkaizi, zongguwen linggaoxin” (Foreign Consultants Got Huge Salaries), No. 123 (1992), pp. 166-69.
  34. Liu Baojie and Lii Shaowei, *Taipei jieyun baipishu*, pp. 80-105.
  35. DORTS, “Architecture: The Special Characteristics of Metro Station Design” [html

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Liu Baojie and Lu Shaowei, *Taipei jieyun baipishu*, p. 86.
37. Liu Baojie and Lu Shaowei, *Taipei jieyun baipishu*, p. 86
38. *Xinxinwen*, "Jieyun, nidemingzi jiaokongbu" (MRT, Your Name is "Terror"), No. 329 (1993), pp. 62-67; *Liishenghuo* Magazine (Green Life), "Taiwan diyiweixiangongcheng" (The Most Dangerous Building Project in Taiwan), No. 67 (1994), pp. 26-31; *Yuanjianzazhi* (Global View Magazine), "Jinseganxian, heisejieyun" (Gold Network, Black MRT), No. 101 (1994), pp. 44-50.
39. *Sinorama* (*Guanghuazazhi*), "All Change! The Fickle Fortunes of the Mucha MRT" [html document] (June 1996), available from: <http://home.sina.com/sinorama/0696/article03/english/l.html> (accessed 28 March 2006).
40. *Sinorama*, "Zhuang Yongming de 'yiqianlingyiye': Cong changminjiaodu jiedu Taiwanshi" (Fanfare for the Common Man: Chuang Yung-ming's "Take" on Taiwanese History) [html document] (October 2003), available from: [http://www.sinorama.com.tw/en/print\\_issue.php?id=2003109210030E.TXT&mag=past](http://www.sinorama.com.tw/en/print_issue.php?id=2003109210030E.TXT&mag=past) (accessed 16 April 2006).
41. *Sinorama* "All Change! The Fickle Fortunes of the Mucha MRT".
42. *Sinorama* "All Change! The Fickle Fortunes of the Mucha MRT".
43. Taipei Times, "commuters Get a Christmas Gift" [html document] (25 December 1999), available from: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/1999/12/25/print/0000016990> (accessed 16 March 2001).
44. *Sinorama*, "All Change! The Fickle Fortunes of the Mucha MRT". This campaign appeared to be successful, judging from the comments of some of the participating writers. Yin-di, "who at one point had given up all hope in the MRT system and even saw it as 'a fraud from start to finish, a monstrous fraud and blunder'", was noted praising the Muzha Line with the words

“carrying away Taipei’s doubts—looking down at Taipei from a new angle” (See *Sinorama*, “All Change! The Fickle Fortunes of the Mucha MRT”).

45. *Free China Review*, “The Miracle Maker” [html document], No. 36 (26 October 1999), available from: <http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/881026/881026f2.htm> (accessed 16 March 2001). For a list of activities co-sponsored by the TRTC, see Chen, *Liudong dao Danshui!*, Appendix 2-4. This effort appeared to be quite successful. Corresponding to the MRT’s rising popularity, TRTC staff no longer need to look for external sponsorship. Rather, many groups in both the public and private sectors are now seeking to use the MRT’s positive image to promote their own causes. In late December 2002, I had a phone conversation with the head of the TRTC Public Relations Department with regard to the company’s outreach endeavor. He started by telling me that not long ago they had to turn down a request by students of Yan Ping High School to help with their science fair; these students thought that the MRT would make an excellent centerpiece for the fair. He told me that over the years the MRT had become so popular that his department receives more requests for co-sponsorship than the staff could handle: “We are thinking of changing our [marketing] strategy. We no longer need to look for outside support; we can now wait for people to come, and pick and choose. It’s time for us to reprioritize our mission”.
46. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, pp. 46-49, Chih-hung Wang, “Modernization Ideo^capc”; *Jiangyi* (Syllabus Magazine), “Dajieyun, kanbiaoyan” (Watch Performances While Riding the MRT) (October 1998); *Wenhuashenghuo* Magazine (Cultural Life), “Gcmggongyishu zai Taibeijieyunxitong\*\* (Public Art at Taipei’s MRT), Vol. 2, No.1 (1996), pp. 16-19; *Xinchaoyishu* (Art China Magazine), “But Is It Really Art? Afterthought on the Public Art Project of the Rapid Transit System”, No. 6 (1998), pp. 104-05. As an example, the National Palace Museum, which is known worldwide as the guardian of the royal court treasure of the Qing Dynasty, has been cooperating with the TRTC to set up display windows at the MRT Taipei Main Station since the early spring of 2003.
47. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Damhui!*, pp. 51-52; *Taipei Times*, “Finding a Stage on the Street Corner” [html document] (9 August 2003), available from: <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archivcs/2003/08/09> (accessed 11 April 2006)
48. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, p. 56.
49. The Taipei City government also held a poetry competition for foreign workers, and posted the



winning works on the MRT. See Taipei City government, “The Sun, Liveliness, and Taipei: The Promise of a Healthy City” [html document] (5 February 2005) , available from: <http://english.taipei.gov.tw/TCG/index.jsp?catid=2702&recordid=2142> (accessed 15 April 2006).

50. *Taipei huakan*, “Fangwen Huang Txmg-liang,Taipei Jieyun Gongsichoubeichu chuzhang” (Interview with Huang T’ung-liang, Director of the TRTC Preparatory Office) (1992); DORTS, “Whitebook” [html document] (2004) , available from: <http://www.dorts.gov.tw/brief/whitebook.asp> (accessed 14 April 2005).

51. CheitPei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, p. 84.

52. Taipei City Government , “Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation (TRTC) Instructions to Passengers” [html document] (2006) , available from: <http://english.taipei.gov.tw/law/index.jsp?recordid=2224> (accessed 31 March 2006), The enforcement of the regulations appeared to involve a learning process for MRT passengers , TRTC staff and society at large. Since the early 1990s, the Legislation Yuan has passed several amendments to address some of the confusion caused by different interpretations of the earlier Mass Rapid Transit Act. For example, the earlier Act banned spitting gum or betel nuts inside the subways, but did not pronounce the behavior of chewing itself a transgression. As a result, TRTC staff had problems stopping passengers from chewing gum or betel nuts. This was corrected in late 2004 , when the Legislative Yuan passed an amendment that made unequivocal the intention of the law. See *Liberty Times*, “Xiufabulou , jieyun jinshi kouxiangtangbinlang” (The law has been amended. It’s prohibited to chew gum or betel nuts inside the MRT) [html document] (28 April 2004) , available from: <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2004/new/apr/28/today-lifel.htm> (accessed 31 March 2006).

53. Chih-hung Wang, “Modernization Ideoscape”, p. 212.

54. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, p. 84.

55. From March 1996 to early 2002, the TRTC issued 11,000 tickets, with the amount of fines totaling over NTS20 million. Since 2002, however, the number of rule violations has decreased over time, to fewer than 1,000 cases in 2003 (see Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, p. 85).

56. *Taipei Times*, “No Hitches for New TRT” [html document] (10 November 1999), available from: <http://www.taipetimes.com/news/1599/11/10/story/0b00010148> (accessed 29 April 2001).
57. Chen Pci-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*, pp. 82-91.
58. Yang Tzu-pao, “Kuashiju chengshilianpu, Taibei 2000” (The Face of a City at the New Millennium, Taipei 2000), *Taibei huakan*, No. 372 (1999), pp. 43-46; Zhangyangyuekan, “Ma Yingjiu rang jieyun zhanxian Taibeiren de xinwenhua” (Ma Ying-Jeou Uses the MRT to Show Off the New Culture of Taipei), Vol. 35, No. 3 (2002), pp. 52-56. Yang Tzu-pao, an accomplished transportation engineer and ardent lover of urban public transit systems who authored several popular readings on the subject, advocated the formation of an MRT culture in which both Taipei residents and the Taipei City government would “perceive MRT carriages as part of the public space, utilize MRT stations as a place for meeting with friends or lovers, see the MRT architectures as the city’s landmarks, enjoy the cultural exhibitions in the MRT, and, most importantly, appreciate the MRT itself as a piece of art work” (Yang Tzu-pao, “Kuashiji, chengshilianpu”).
59. *Taipei Times*, “Sustainable Subways” [html document] (13 July 2001), available from: <http://www.taipetimes/news/archives> (accessed 20 March 2005).
60. DORTS (2005), available from: <http://www.dorts.gov.tw/humna/transportation.asp#> (accessed 16 April 2006). The TRTC recently predicted that they will have 2.2 million passengers daily after the completion of the expanded network in 2006 (See *Taipei Times*, “Sustainable Subways” [2001]). However, quite a few of the civil engineers I talked with had voiced the concern that, with the current rate of increase, the system would soon not be able to accommodate the citizens’ needs.
61. *Taipei Times*, “No Hitches for New TRT”.
62. *Shangyeyzhoukan* (Business Weekly)<sup>5</sup> “Jiangjiacelue, ba chengke tongtonglajinlai” (Strategies to Lower the MRT Fare, to Pull in Passengers), June (2000), pp. 90-92. The MRT charges its passengers according to the distance they travel. For a single-journey ride, the basic fare (5km and below) starts at NTS20 (roughly US\$0.60), whereas the highest fare (31km and beyond) is NT\$65 (roughly US\$2); these rates have remained the same since 1999. If one uses an EasyCard ( *Youyouka* ) however, the fare charged will be 80 per cent of the regular fare

(TRTC [2004] [[http://home.trtc.com.tw/web/download/ticketfare\\_e.pdf](http://home.trtc.com.tw/web/download/ticketfare_e.pdf)], accessed 20 March 2005).

In addition, the first MRT-to-bus transfer is free. In comparison, one single bus ride costs NT\$15 (US\$0.50) or NT\$30 (US\$1) depending on the distance traveled. One can choose to store money on the EasyCard, so that there is no need to purchase a token or ticket for every single ride. The fare will be automatically deducted from the value of the EasyCard after each trip, until the card runs out of value and has to be replenished.

63. Danshui and Xindian occupy the two ends of the MRT's longest and most scenic Danshui-Xindian Line. Danshui is a harbor town north of Taipei whose sunset has attracted generations of visitors since the Japanese colonial period; it is currently the No. 1 domestic tourist destination thanks to the MRT (see Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*). Xindian is at the foothill south of Taipei Basin, and is known for its mountain views.
64. If the rider is a senior citizen (65 or older), or a citizen with disability, living in Taipei City or Taipei County, they can apply for a special EasyCard. With that card, the fare charged will be only 40 per cent of the regular fare (TRTC [2004] [[http://home.trtc.com.tw/web/downloadZticketfare\\_e.pdf](http://home.trtc.com.tw/web/downloadZticketfare_e.pdf)], accessed 20 March 2005).
65. The implication here is that taxi drivers were considered as potential sexual predators.
66. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao. Danshui!*, p. 85.
67. Chen Pei-hsin, *Liulang dao Danshui!*; Wang Chih-hung, "Liudongdijing yu shikongcaoyan"; idem, "Modernization Idcoscape".
68. Yang Tzu-pao, Personal interview (2004),
69. Wang Yi-ding, "Jieyunbiduan yicheng guojixiaobing" (The MRT Scandals Have Become an International Laughingstock), *Shcmgyezhoukan*, No. 288 (1993), p. 9.
70. *Taipei Times*, "Sustainable Subways" [html document] (13 July 2001), available from: <http://www.taipeitimes/news/archives/>(accessed 20 March 2005).
71. *Taipei Times*, "MRT Celebrates 2 Billionth Fare" [html document] (14 August 2005), available from: [http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/08/14/2003267\\_6B5](http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/08/14/2003267_6B5)

(accessed 28 March 2006); *Zhouyangshe* {Central News Agency}, "Taipei's MRT is ten years old!" [html document] (16 March 2006), available from: <http://www.gov.tw/news/can/life> (accessed 23 March 2006). The honor of being the world's best metro system was bestowed by the Nova International Railway Benchmarking Group, which conducts a project that compares urban transport systems of cities around the world.

72. It is not only the Taiwanese who recalled the Muzha Line burning car incident. I discovered that it is deeply ingrained in the minds of anyone who lived in Taipei in the early 1990s. After a presentation at a conference at Washington University in St. Louis in 2000, an American historian specializing in modern Chinese history commented on the days in the 1990s when he was studying Chinese in Taipei and had to travel across the city to attend classes: "That was a nightmare, with six MRT lines under construction at the same time. And I remember the Muzha Line burning car incidents. After that, people simply lost their confidence, and could only hold their breath while wishing for the best from the seemingly hopeless. But look at the MRT now! Who would have thought that this was possible?" From him and other audience members I sensed a feeling of nostalgia, not so much for the good old days when everything was nice and wonderful, but for an era of cynicism when the success of the MRT construction was greatly in doubt.
73. Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (with Jinn-yuh Hsu), "Introduction: Asian Dragons, South China Growth Triangle, Developmental Governance and Globalizing Taipei", in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (ed.), *Globalizing Taipei*, p. 2; Su Shuo-pin, *Kandejiart yu kanbujian de Taipei: Yibu guanyu kongjianzhili de liangzhong butong de chengshizhexue* (Visible and Invisible Taipei: About the Spatial Governance under Two Different Kinds of City Philosophies) (Taipei: Zuoan, 2005).
74. Chia-ho Ching, "The Development of Economic Structure: Producer Services and Growth Constraints" , in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (ed.), *Globalizing Taipei*, pp. 35-45; Tsu-tung Chou, "The Transformation of Spatial Structure: From a Monocentric to a Polycentric City" , in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (ed.), *Globalizing Taipei*, pp. 57-63; Jinn-yuh Hsu, "The Evolution of Economic Base: From Industrial City, Post-Industrial City to Interface City" , in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (ed.), *Globalizing Taipei*, pp. 16-34.
75. Hill Gates, "Dependency and the Proletariat", *Modern China*, Vol. 5 (1979), pp. 381-407; Gwo-shyong Shieh, *"Boss" Island: The Subcontracting Network and Micro-Entrepreneurship in Taiwan's Development* (New York: Peter Land, 1992).

76. Anru Lee, *In the Name of Harmony and Prosperity: Labor and Gender Politics in Taiwan's Economic Restructuring* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).
77. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism", *Antipode*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2002a), pp. 349-79; Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Preface: From the 'New Localism' to the Spaces of Neoliberalism", *Antipode*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2002b), pp. 341-47; David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism; The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism", *Geografiska Annaler*, Vol. 71B (1989), pp. 3-17; Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, and Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
78. Jinn-yuh Hsu, "The Evolution of Economic Base"; Saskia Sassen, "Introduction: Locating Cities on Global Circuits" · in Saskia Sassen (ed.), *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-38.
79. Suc-ching Chou, "Domestic Politics in Urban Image Creation: Xinyi as the 'Manhattan of Taipei'", in Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (ed.), *Globalizing Taipei*, pp. 120-140; Reginald Yin-wang Kwok (with Jinn-yuh Hsu), "Introduction", pp. 1-15; Jenn-hwan Wang, "World City Formation, Geopolitics and Local Political Process: Taipei's Ambiguous Development", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004), pp. 384-400.
80. Alan Smart and Josephine Smart, "Urbanization and the Global Perspective", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 32 (2003), pp. 263-85.
81. Anthony D. King and Abidin Kusno, "On Be(ij)ing in the World: "Postmodernism"/Globalization/ and the Making of Transnational Space in China", in Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang (eds) · *Postmodernism and China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 41-67.
82. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*. p. 3.