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Female Ghost or Worker Heroine? – Gender, Space, and Feminist Intervention in Contemporary Taiwan

Anru Lee¹, and Wen-hui Anna Tang²³

Abstract

The twenty-five Ladies' Tomb was the collective burial site of female workers who were drowned during a ferry accident on their way to work at export processing zones in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in 1973. This essay focuses on the renovation of the tomb in the 2000s, and examines the politics of the feminist movement and the politics of memory as they are expressed through the different meanings bestowed on the deceased women. People involved in the renovation process included the Kaohsiung Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights (KAPWR), the families of the deceased, and the Kaohsiung City government, all of whom had different considerations regarding the purpose and the future of the tomb. This essay argues the KAPWR activism illustrates the fact that specific feminist praxis is dependent on the socio-cultural and political-economic attributes of the society within which feminist groups are embedded. The KAPWR's effort to refashion the image of the tomb resonates with feminist movements worldwide to rectify women's history by rewriting the valorizing the contribution of women. Specifically, it was a critique of the Taiwanese patriliney that treasures sons as true and permanent members, but regards daughters as outsiders and thus temporary associates, of their father's family. This symbolic differentiation has provided a framework on which many gender-based practices are constituted and justified. The approach of the KAPWR activism was therefore a strategic choice borne out of the particular context of Taiwan that, in turn, created the possibility to question patrilineal cultural practices.

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Kaohsiung, the second largest city in Taiwan, is also Taiwan's hub of heavy industry and a world-class port. The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb was the collective burial site of female workers who were drowned during a ferry accident on their way to work at Kaohsiung's export processing zones in 1973. Of the seventy plus passengers all twenty-five who died were unmarried young women. As Taiwanese culture shuns unmarried female ghosts who have no (husband's) ancestral hall to rest in peace, this made the tomb a fearsome place. The Kaohsiung Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights (KAPWR), a major feminist group in Kaohsiung, had for years urged the city government to remove the stigma of unmarried female ghost, renaming the burial site to reflect the productive role of the deceased young women. Their calls went unanswered by the city government until Kaohsiung was hard hit by Taiwan's recent deindustrialization. As a part of an effort to reinvent the city's economy, the Mayor's Office allocated money to remake the gravesite into a tourist-friendly "Memorial Park for Women Laborers."

This essay focuses on the renovation of the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb in the 2000s, and examines the politics of the feminist movement and the politics of memory as expressed through the different meanings bestowed on the deceased women. People involved in the renovation process included the families of the twenty-five deceased women, the Kaohsiung City government, and the KAPWR, who had different expectations regarding the purpose and the future of the tomb.¹ Two threads of concern inform our analysis. To answer why and how the renovation of the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb happened the way it happened when it happened, we situate our analysis against the background of recent global capitalist expansion, in which Taiwan is deeply embedded, initially as a major site of industrial production and later as a postindustrial economy with an emphasis on urban tourism. Accordingly, the KAPWR's quest is seen as a part of global feminist efforts to change the status of women that is grounded in a specific locality (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, 2010; Grewal and Kaplan 1994). We also focus on KAPWR's intervention as an act

of feminist memorializing, and ask how this act was performed and in what sense and to what extent this feminist intervention was transformative. We draw our inspiration from Bold, Knowles, and Leach (2002, 2003) and Leach (2011, 191), who stress that feminist memorializing has (or should have) “an activist and forward-looking intent” that concomitantly seeks to keep memory alive and change the future. However, the task of establishing a historical legacy for the memorialized cannot be accomplished by feminists alone but involves engaging others in the “community of memory” wherein practices of remembrance are contested, fashioned, and strengthened by ideas about the shared meaning of what has happened (Simon and Eppert 1997, 186). We therefore assess KAPWR’s endeavor through a nuanced analysis of how the feminist memorializing affected, and was affected by, the thoughts and acts of others implicated in the renovation of the Twenty-five Ladies’ Tomb.

One of the co-authors of this essay is herself a core KAPWR member and one of the chief instigators behind the KAPWR’s campaign. Her experience and observation helped to ground our analysis. The data on which this essay is based are primarily derived from a month of intensive ethnographic field research (from mid-December 2012 to mid-January 2013) that included formal interviews and participant observation/informal conversation. We conducted formal interviews with families of sixteen deceased women (mostly parents or elder siblings). Three of our interviewees, including Mr. Kuo and Mr. Chuang quoted below, were part of the five-person reclamation committee that represented the deceased’s families in the aftermath of the ferry accident. We also interviewed Kaohsiung City government staff persons involved in the tomb renovation and one core KAPWR member who was active in the KAPWR’s tomb renovation effort. In addition, we engaged in daily, informal conversations and participant observation with the people we met in Kaohsiung and elsewhere in Taiwan which provided insight into the knowledge ordinary citizens have about the twenty-five ladies, their collective burial, and the refurbished memorial park, as well as

how they used the park. We also collected government documents and newspaper and magazine articles in relation to the ferry accident, the Twenty-Five Ladies' Tomb, and the tomb renovation.

Problematizing the Renovation of the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb

Situating our analysis within the context of global capitalist expansion, we argue that the ramifications of the different expectations expressed by the parties involved in the tomb renovation go beyond the immediate physical transformation of the tomb and its surrounding environment. The various stages of the tomb renovation exemplify the contending ideas about what the deceased women stand for and how they should be remembered. In a broader context, they represent different possibilities of remembrance of an era of rapid economic expansion in post-World War II Taiwan – a period when a large number of young single women were recruited to work in global assembly lines. The way the families reacted to the deaths of their daughters incited the KAPWR's interference, which, in turn, propelled the involvement of the Kaohsiung City government. The feminist intervention of the KAPWR thus resonates with feminist movements worldwide to rectify women's history by rewriting and valorizing the contribution of women (which we discuss in detail in the following section).

KAPWR's activism around the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb case illustrates the way globally inspired feminist praxis is dependent on the socio-cultural and political-economic attributes of the society within which feminist groups are embedded (Mohanty 1991; Narayan 2013). KAPWR's effort to refashion the image of the tomb was more than a posthumous recognition of the deceased women. It was a critique of a core feature of the Taiwanese patriliney that treasures sons as true and permanent members, but regards daughters as outsiders and thus temporary associates, of their father's family. This symbolic differentiation has provided a framework on which many gender-based practices, including

the preference of young women for industrial work, are justified. KAPWR's activism therefore represented a strategic choice borne out of the particular patrilineal familial context of Taiwan.

While we agree with the KAPWR's decision to highlight the importance of women's productive labor, we are not as certain about the memorial practice that the KAPWR to which agreed. The literature of feminist memorializing emphasizes the dual mission of remembering particular deaths caused by violence and bringing attention to systemic violence against women (Luger 2009, 73). Bold, Knowles, and Leach (2002, 127-128) postulate that too often a memorializing practice becomes a technology of "active forgetting" when violent incidents are regarded as individual and psychotic – and memorializing is viewed as catharsis – and when the public is reduced to passive spectators. It is therefore imperative that feminist memorializing should promote "active remembering," transcending individual-owned memory into collective memory. Only when the collective takes responsibility for the systemic nature of gendered violence can there be possibilities for actions for social change (Bold, Knowles, and Leach 2002, 2003).

However, this is not a simple task. Too often in feminist attempts to transform individual remembrance into collective consciousness, a specific event involving a few particular deaths is made emblematic. That is, this specific event comes to stand for an array of other acts that are assumed to share certain characteristics and, consequently, the remembrance of (this particular) event signals the remembrance of all (Simon and Rosenberg 2005, 69). Emblemization is vital to the dual mission of feminist memorializing as the very structure of being emblematic – one act standing for all – creates the force rendering a memorial practice significant (Simon and Rosenberg 2005, 70). Yet, paradoxically, emblemization and enclosure - the stabilization of a dominant public discourse that prioritizes certain reading of the event that was being memorialized - are often concurrent processes. Thus all acts of gendered violence become identical and all women victims become

substitutable. Not only are the complex identity formations and power relations embedded in different acts of violence absent (Rosenberg 2003, 14-15), but the particularities of the emblematic event and the life stories of women who died in that event are also minimized. More specifically, the dilemma of emblemization is not just about the terms of substitutability among the dead, but also about how the living are positioned or struggle to position themselves in relation to the dead (Simon and Rosenberg 2005, 70-71). An emblematic memorial practice – and hence an enclosed memory of the dead – could be problematic because it inscribes people into a position that might be accepted by some but rejected by others because they are in conflict with the self-identifications of the latter vis-à-vis the dead. Further, like “active forgetting,” a feminist, emblematic representation of the dead could render the public passive by relieving it of the responsibility for actively reflecting on the dead and the violent act that took their lives (Parkins 2014).

The transformation of the Twenty-five Ladies’ Tomb into a Memorial Park for Women Laborers was a strategic move endorsed by the KAPWR. It was a practice of feminist memorializing as it sought to keep alive the memory of the deceased women and change the public perception about these women. The memorial practice became emblematic as the deceased came to represent all women workers whose labor helped to build the collective fortune of post-WWII Taiwan. Yet, contra KAPWR’s original intention to address the discriminatory patrilineal Taiwanese family by emphasizing the women’s productive role, the emblemization of the twenty-five deceased young women had the effect of dissociating the two causes in the public’s mind. While presenting women’s industrial labor in a positive light, the newly renovated park does not make explicit the intricate relationship between patriarchy and global capitalist production. The physical transformation of the burial site from a tomb to a sanitized park removes the opportunity for its visitors to recall the fact that these women were shunned because they died unmarried. Similarly, the emblemization of the deceased as industrial workers fails to address the tension

in the positionality of the deceased's parents between their sorrow for the unfulfilled lives of their daughters and their sense of propriety towards their patrilineal ancestry.

This last problematic takes us back to our earlier point that globally inspired feminist praxis is always embedded in the socio-cultural and political-economic dynamics of a particular context. Here we offer temporality – not as an object of analysis but, rather, as a method of analysis (cf. Kilma 2002) – to understand the contour of feminist politics. In this case, at the moment of the KAPWR intervention in the 2000s, industrial manufacturing was no longer the primary economic activity in Taiwan as it had been in the early 1970s when the twenty-five young women died. By the 2000s, the Taiwanese economy had been transformed from one primarily based on industrial production to one increasingly service-oriented. In addition, by the 2000s, the parents of the deceased were aging. The effectiveness of the KAPWR endeavor was thus aided by the anxiety of the aging parents worried about the spiritual wellbeing of their deceased daughters and by the Kaohsiung City government's concern to reinvent its deindustrialized city economy.

The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb in the Global Context

One of the “Asian Tigers,” Taiwan had been a global manufacturing powerhouse. The export-processing zones in Kaohsiung, established in the 1960s to attract foreign direct investment, proved crucial to Taiwan's post-WWII economic development. The manufacturing jobs inside the export-processing zones and elsewhere in Taiwan not only contributed to the success of Taiwan's export-oriented economy but also created jobs, including many for young women such as the twenty-five deceased ladies (Kung 1994; Lee 2004). Taiwan is not unique in this regard, however, but a part of the larger phenomenon of global – and gendered - industrialization (Mills 2003). Also ubiquitous is the tendency for people in the societies recently incorporated into the global industrial production to downplay the new economic role of women as a structural result of international capital but understand

this phenomenon via local cultural frameworks. At best, women's participation in the industrial labor market is considered acceptable as it conforms to traditional gender ideologies (Lee 1998; Lessinger 2002); or it is viewed as a transgression of cultural codes and a source of moral anxiety (Mills 1999; Ong 1987, 1997), which has at times led to violence against women. Rape and violent crimes against factory women in Sri Lanka (Lynch 2007) and the mass murders of maquiladora workers in Mexico in the early 1990s (Livingston 2004; Wright 1999) are vivid examples of the latter. Yet, death - especially violent death - could also become a powerful rallying point for feminists. The anti-femicide protests after the mass murders of women workers in northern Mexico (Wright 2007) and the recent rallies to demand for justice for women after the gang rape and fatal assault of the young woman in India in 2012 (Belair-Gagnon, Mishra, and Agur 2013) are cases in point. (Although not a factory worker, the murdered Indian woman similarly signified a female body that, lacking paternal supervision, had crossed moral boundaries.)

We see an analogy between the case in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and these examples. All provoked certain public imaginings as the deaths occurred in public spaces and in the public eye. Although the twenty-five young women in Kaohsiung were not slain but killed in a ferry accident, their deaths – given physical form by their collective burial – also enabled Taiwanese feminists to reshape the meanings of the lives and work of Taiwanese factory women. Of particular importance here is not only how death enables feminist organizing but also how, and in opposition to what, the feminist organizing is strategized. For example, in Mexico, feminists countered the representation of the slain women as morally tainted prostitutes who provoked the killers' attack by portraying them as dutiful daughters who had to travel city streets to work. The feminist efforts thus focused on expanding women's rights to public spaces (Wright 2007).

Taiwanese feminists face a different kind of public discourse and, correspondingly, a different kind of challenge. Previous studies have pointed out that the culture of patriarchy

and that of capitalist industrial production are mutually constitutive, albeit in different configurations in different localities. In Taiwan, the family as a corporate unit, to which family members contribute their labor and income under the authority of the eldest male household head, was a dominant ideology especially in the heyday of rural industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s (Cohen 1976). The recruitment of young women into factory work was a welcome development for rural families. Their daughters were no longer economic liabilities but instead brought much needed cash income (Hu 1984). Female industrial employment was readily accepted, subsumed under the idea of working daughter as filial daughter (Lee 2009). The developmental state of post-WWII Taiwan very much encouraged and capitalized on this cultural-cum-capitalist logic (Hsiung 1996). Female industrial labor was cheap and disposable. Only young, single women were considered suitable productive workers for once they married, their primary responsibility was to bear a son for their husbands' families. In other words, for the Taiwanese patrilineal family, the role of women changed from productive to reproductive upon marriage. One might argue that in this type of family system there is a progression of rights and obligations throughout the lifecycle as well as belated gratification for women. That is, just as a woman's brothers and their wives were enjoying the fruit of her labor, after marriage, she would also be enjoying the fruit of her husband's sisters' labor.

The Ferry Boat Accident and Its Aftermath

Cijin, once a peninsula attached to Kaohsiung, became a tiny island as a result of the expansion of the Kaohsiung port in 1967. For many years thereafter, people had to rely on privately owned ferries to travel between Kaohsiung and Cijin. Traditionally, much of Cijin consisted of poor fishing villages. Local families were only able to raise household incomes when their daughters started manufacturing jobs in Kaohsiung's export-processing zones. Every morning, the young factory workers would take the ferry to work. On the morning of

September 3, 1973, a boat with a maximum capacity of thirteen was carrying more than seventy passengers, many of whom were export-processing zone workers rushing to work, when the boat capsized. Forty-six passengers were saved and twenty-five drowned. The saved passengers, men and women, were all married, whereas the twenty-five who drowned were all young, unmarried women. Many people in Kaohsiung saw this as a sign of supernatural significance. A widespread story tells of one of these twenty-five young women, rescued and sent to the hospital for treatment. Just when everybody thought she would recover and live, she turned to her mother and said “I am going to be late. My sisters, they are waiting for me. I have to go now,” whereupon she died. Along the same line, a married woman was apparently pronounced dead, only to miraculously come back to life (Wang 2006).

The accident also exposed the lax regulation of the ferries. The captain of the overturned ferry did not have a license to drive a boat and there was no lifesaving equipment on board the ferry even though the boat had passed a safety inspection not long before the accident. The Port of Kaohsiung, the central government agency supervising the Kaohsiung-Cijin ferry service, had clearly failed in its job of protecting ferry passengers. The Kaohsiung City government intervened, assisting in the settlement of pension and compensation issues. It also helped to find a plot of land large enough to accommodate the graves of all twenty-five women when their families decided to have them buried in one location so that the spirits of these women could keep one another company. In 1988, when the tomb was relocated because the land on which it was situated had been acquired for yet another expansion of the Kaohsiung port, the Kaohsiung City government erected a memorial gateway inscribed with “The Twenty-five Ladies’ Tomb”. Compared to the original burial ground, which was in a fairly remote corner of Cijin Island, the new location is right beside a main road. It faces the Taiwan Strait, enjoying a scenic view of the water and the coastline while the public land across the road has been made into a part of the Cijin Tourist Port Area.

Deceased Women as Filial Daughters and Enlightened Beings: Families Telling the Story

As far as the Kaohsiung City government was concerned, the ferry accident had come to a satisfactory conclusion. For the families grieving their daughters, however, there was still unfinished business: where and how to place the spirits of those who died unmarried. In Taiwan marriage is particularly significant for women, for it serves as a symbol of, and a gateway to, their ultimate (though subordinate) position in the Taiwanese kinship system (Wolf 1972). Through marriage women are accepted into their husbands' families and permanently integrated into a lineal line, although there are variations of – as well as exceptions to – this practice (Chang 2000; Lee 2008; Shih 2007). Marriage is seen as the means to perpetuate the family line through childbearing and failure to do so is considered a serious breach of filial piety in Taiwanese culture. Marriage also grants some financial support and social security to women as men continue to be seen and act as primary breadwinners in contemporary Taiwanese households. It is also through marriage that a woman earns a place in her husband's ancestral hall in the afterlife, although ancestral authority – and, by extension, ancestor worship – might be declining in contemporary Taiwan. If a woman dies an unnatural death before marriage, she can become a ghost if not properly prayed for. Spirit marriage – where a female ghost marries a living man – has been a strategy adopted by families to insure that their daughters are cared for in the afterlife (Harrell 1986). Together, these concerns – religious/spiritual and economic/material – have made many generations of Taiwanese parents anxious to find their sons and daughters suitable spouses.

The families of the twenty-five deceased women, however, were presented with something other than a spirit marriage to care for their daughters. A few years after the

ferry accident, some members of the grieving families began to report paranormal incidents. Mr. Kuo, the father of one of the deceased, explained the nature of these incidents to us:

I heard this from my wife [...] [It all started with] that mother down the block. She went to consult a tang-ki, a spiritual medium, in our village. The tang-ki told her that the incidents were a sign from her daughter. But she didn't need to worry, because her daughter was now learning to become an "enlightened being" on the side of Kuan Yin [the Goddess of Mercy]. The tang-ki also suggested to the mother that she could have a "god statue" made for her daughter and place the god statue at home.

The idea behind the tang-ki's suggestion was that, as the daughter has become an attendant of Kuan Yin, she was no longer an unmarried daughter spirit excluded from the ancestral shrine, but a soon-to-be deity who could be revered by believers. In other words, this suggestion offered the mother a culturally sanctioned way to provide a permanent – and respectable – residing place for her daughter. Shortly after this incident, other families began to tell similar stories, and, before long, the deceased women received their "god statues." While many of these god statues were welcomed into their fathers' houses, most were placed on a different floor of the house and not in the family ancestral altar along with their patrilineal ancestors and other gods.

The spirits of the deceased women have thus partially made the transition from being maiden ghosts excluded from their patrilineal ancestral shrines to pious beings welcome to join the pantheon worshipped at their fathers' houses. Their low-level deification provided their families (especially their parents) with a culturally accepted solution for their daughters in the afterlife. However, the variations of where and how these women's god statues are placed also reflect the ambivalence many parents felt – and continue to feel – about their daughters' elevated religious position. Taiwanese popular religion has always been highly

flexible and individualistic in the sense that there is no one religious authority or theocratic state that establishes dogma and determines belief (Harrell 1974). Hypothetically, any spirit can attain some godly or god-like standing. Yet, whether a spirit can convince other people of its godly status is related to its spiritual power to answer requests or grant favors. Having a god statue erected for a spirit is a major undertaking as before the statue is erected the spirit should have performed miracles. After the statue is created, the relationship between the spirit – or the deity – and the people who made the statue is stabilized and the bonds of mutual obligations between them are established (Lin 2008). Private (god) statues may be set up in domestic altars. Whether these gods can attract worshippers beyond the private households, and extend their power and develop into deities of a neighborhood, a village or even a bigger locality depends on their ability to perform miracles (Feuchtwang 1993).

Efficacy was evidently an issue in the minds of the families when their deceased daughters requested to have their god statues made. For example, Mr. Kuo was not immediately convinced that this was appropriate. It was his wife who wanted to make their daughter a god statue:

[My wife] came home and told me about the story; and then she went to seek advice from the same tang-ki. The tang-ki told her our daughter has also become a maid of Kuan Yi. After that, [my wife] asked me, begged me, and cried quite a few times in order for me to agree to make our daughter a god statue.

Mr. Kuo did not give in right away. Only when he was cured of a cold after drinking a glass of water obtained from the Ladies' Tomb, did he agree that his daughter had shown the efficacy that warranted a god statue. He was further convinced when the mother of another deceased woman told him that a couple (husband and wife) had been seen paying respect to the tomb on the first and the fifteenth day of every lunar month, because the

twenty-five ladies had saved the husband's life in a shipwreck by directing him to the nearest shore.

Many families cite this story as a proof of the deceased woman's efficacy. Yet, skeptics remained. One Mr. Chuang, who placed his daughter's god statue on an altar separate from the ancestral altar, noted how inappropriate it was for some parents to leave their daughters' god statues at a local Kuan-yin temple on the assumption that the young women had now become a part of the entourage of the Goddess of Mercy. He did not think that the deceased had proven themselves worthy to be worshipped at a village public temple.

Deceased Women as Female Ghosts: Larger Community Remembering

If the families of the deceased continue to show hesitation about their daughters' god status, the larger community is even less convinced. A widely circulated story attests to this skepticism. One late winter night, a taxi driver picked up a young woman near the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb. The passenger explained to the driver that she was getting married early the next morning. She was afraid she would not have enough time to get ready before the groom came to collect her, and had thus decided to go to Kaohsiung early to have her hair done. The driver followed her instructions, and stopped the cab at a dark alley near one of the export-processing zones in Kaohsiung. An hour later, the driver returned to take her home. To keep himself awake, the driver started chatting with his passenger and learned that she came from a poor family, so she had quit school and become a factory worker in Kaohsiung's export processing zone at a young age. Her income supported her family and helped to pay for her brothers' education. Now, after many years of laboring, she finally found a fine man to marry. Her only wish was to lead a good life with her new husband.

When the car approached the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb where the young woman first got into the cab, the driver congratulated his passenger on her upcoming nuptials and asked

where he should drop her off but there was only dead silence. When he looked into his rearview mirror, he saw no one. He began to fear that he had met a female ghost. When he woke up the next morning, he was terrified to find the bills that he received from his mysterious passenger the night before were actually spirit money, the currency that the Taiwanese burned for the deceased to use in the afterlife.

There are other versions of this story. Nonetheless, regardless of the vehicle used, where or how the encounter occurred or how the young woman disappeared, students of Taiwanese culture could easily recognize the motif and empathize with the unfortunate man for the predicament he faced. Young men encountering beautiful young women who turn out to be ghosts is a common theme in Chinese literature, folklore (classic and contemporary) and popular culture. Often these women are said to be waiting to find a husband, especially if they died unmarried. Although coming across a phantom is rarely a welcome event to the Taiwanese, there is apparently something exhilarating about meeting a beautiful female ghost. A survey conducted at a university near Cijin shows that the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb is a popular topic of banter among students (Tang 2013). Male students jokingly remind one another that they should have a female friend occupying the back seat before they ride their motorcycles through the tomb site, otherwise they might have an unexpected "love encounter" with one of the ladies. Yet, it is precisely this mixture of responses (fear, avoidance, teasing, and excitement) provoked by the "maiden" status of these deceased women that propelled feminists in Kaohsiung to voice their disapproval of the way these women were treated and to demand that the Kaohsiung City government rectify the wrongs done to them.

Deceased Women as Worker Heroines: Feminists Framing the Discourse

The development of feminist movements in Taiwan reflects the progress of political democratization in the country. Taiwanese feminist movements began more concerted mobilizing efforts only after the lifting of martial law in the late 1980s, and it made notable

legal and political advances in the two decades following the late 1980s (Chang 2009). Discriminatory family laws were amended and several pieces of major pro-women legislation became law.² Committees of Women's Rights Promotion were established under the central and municipal governments, and representatives of women's organizations and experts and scholars of women's issues have been invited to serve on government advisory task forces. In addition, "gender mainstreaming" became a buzzword among government officials.³ The tendency of Taiwanese feminists to adopt legal means as their principal focus rather than mass mobilization seems to reflect their overall class positions and higher educational credentials compared to their counterparts in other Taiwanese social movements (Fan 2003). Many of the feminist activists are lawyers and college professors and KAPWR is no exception.

On April 2, 2004, before Ching-ming Day, the traditional tomb-sweeping day in Taiwanese society, KAPWR called a press conference, in which members rallied for the reconstruction of the tomb, equating the reconstruction with gender equality. Kaohsiung's status as a progressive city in turn was linked to its support for gender equality. On Ching-ming Day, then-KAPWR Secretary Wen-hui Tang (a co-author of this essay) published a newspaper op-ed article entitled "Women Who Cannot Go Home," in which she commented on the custom that Taiwanese married women could only be commemorated alongside the ancestors of their husbands but not among those of their natal families. The article also highlighted the predicament of unmarried Taiwanese women like those buried at the Ladies' Tomb who not only had a hard life while alive but also lacked anyone to venerate them after their deaths. These women's absence from an ancestral shrine denotes an exclusion from the social order, which extends beyond life into the social realm of the dead.

The timing of the op-ed article was carefully chosen. It came out when many people in Taiwan were returning home, reuniting with their families, and getting ready to observe the most important duty required of offspring in Taiwanese culture. Therefore, it served as a

reminder of a fundamental inequality between men and women in Taiwanese society. The article also resonated with a primary concern of the Taiwanese feminist community at the time. In 2003, the Awakening Foundation, the most prominent women's organization in Taiwan, held a "From Maiden Temples to the Gender Politics of Ancestor Worship" press conference on Ching-ming Day, criticizing the fact that only married women could enter an ancestral hall – and thus acquire a life of eternity – leaving all other kinds of women (e.g., unmarried, divorced, or lesbian) forever uncared for. The press conference concluded that this cultural practice had the effect of endorsing (heterosexual) marriage as the single most important accomplishment in a woman's life, excluding other alternatives. Following the first press conference, the Awakening Foundation continued to call press conferences on the issue of women and ancestor worship around Ching-ming, the latest one in 2009.

Another example of feminist efforts along this line was the publication of *Going Back to My Mother's House on (Chinese) New Year's Day: Culture, Customs, and Gender Equity Education* (2005), a volume of essays reviewing various gender-based customs in Taiwanese culture written by affiliates of the Taiwan Gender Equity Education Association (TGEEA). The title is meant to reflect a strong critique of the cultural practice which dictates that a married woman eat "Reunion Dinner" on Chinese New Year's Eve with her parents-in-law, her husband and unmarried children or married sons and their wives, her husband's brothers, their wives and children, and unmarried sisters of her husband. According to the custom, a married woman can only visit her natal family on the second day of New Year, for she will receive guests with her mother-in-law on New Year's Day. It is said that she would bring bad luck to her natal family if she were to stay with them on New Year's Eve. Since then, the TGEEA has been working hard to raise the general public's awareness about the gender bias embedded in Taiwanese culture and customs.

In this context KAPWR activists seized the chance to combat the cultural bias against deceased unmarried women by emphasizing their role as manufacturing workers who helped

to build Taiwan's economic miracle. They also highlighted the fact that these women died on their way to work, thereby making their deaths job-related casualties. The focus on these women's work roles, as opposed to their unmarried status, was also seen as a way to advance public awareness of the contributions Taiwanese women have made to the economic growth of the country. To accomplish these goals, in tandem with the ongoing involvement in gender equity education of many of its core members, KAPWR recommended that: (i) the Kaohsiung City Bureau of Cultural Affairs commission experts to research the history of the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb, with the goal of recognizing the sacrifice and contribution these women made to Taiwan's economic development; (ii) the Kaohsiung City Education Bureau invite scholars to write up the ferry accident as gender equity teaching materials. This would also provide Kaohsiung City residents with an opportunity to understand the gender and social implications of the urban landscape of their own city; and (iii) the government (central and/or municipal) help publicize these women's economic contributions and the issue of gender (in)equality intertwined with their stories, so that the women could gain the respect they should have had while alive and the reverence their spirits should command at the present time.

On Ching-ming 2005, the KAPWR held a memorial service to commemorate the deceased women at the tomb, attended by KAPWR members and their families. Individual KAPWR members wrote academic articles, newspaper essays, and commentaries on the topic, and incorporated the tomb into their own classroom discussions (Tang 2013). These efforts eventually paid off. The Kaohsiung City government commissioned film director Ke Wan-ching to make a documentary about the lives of the twenty-five women and the tragic ferry accident. Ke's film "The Lost Youth: Women and Industrial Work in Taiwan," which premiered at the Kaohsiung Film Archives in late 2008, is not just about the twenty-five women. It also put their life stories in a larger context by portraying the labor history of women at Kaohsiung's export-processing zones, starting from the 1970s and Taiwan's

economic take off. The film takes the audience through the days when young girls fresh out of elementary school joined the factory workforce contributing simultaneously to their families' livelihoods and the collective fortune of Taiwanese society. After watching the premier, Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu, herself a single woman in her late fifties at the time, commented that "the story of Taiwanese female workers is the history of Taiwan. [Our] society should give [all women workers] the long-awaited recognition that they deserve." "The Lost Youth" was later shown on many occasions, to the general public and on college campuses as well as at subsequent Kaohsiung film festivals.

The concerted efforts of different feminist groups including the KAPWR, the TGEEA, and the Awakening Foundation to critique the gender implications of ancestor worship also seemed to have begun to have an effect at the national level. For instance, on International Women's Day 2010, the Council of Labor Affairs, a central government agency, announced its revised answers to some of the questions in its Mortician License Exam test bank, in order to make the exam better reflect gender equality (*China Times* 2010). Whereas in the previous test bank, the answer to the true-false question "The tablet of a woman who died unmarried can only be placed in a temple" was "true," in the revised test bank it is "false." The old answer to the question "How should the names of the deceased's relatives be arranged on the obituary?" was "Males should always come before females." The revised, correct answer is "It should be based on birth order but not gender." Although this revision effort is welcomed by advocates of gender equality, whether or how it will affect death rituals or funeral services in a practical sense remains to be seen.

From Remembering to Memorializing: The State as the Arbiter

In spite of the positive responses to the KAPWR's pursuit, the Kaohsiung City government was slow to change the tomb's physical appearance. At a municipal press conference in 2006, the Kaohsiung Mayor's Office revealed the "Cijin: An Island for

Tourism” project. As noted above, Kaohsiung had been suffering a high unemployment rate since the economic restructuring of the late 1980s. The Cijin project was a part of the city’s larger plan to reinvent the city’s economy by developing urban tourism. To ensure the Cijin project’s overall success changing the public image of the tomb site was essential. The Twenty-five Ladies’ Tomb was to be transformed into a “Memorial Park Dedicated to Workers Dying of Job-Related Accidents” although where and how the remains of the twenty-five women would be laid after the transformation were not mentioned at the press conference.

This silence suggests several possibilities. It could have indicated the Kaohsiung City government’s determination to eliminate the tomb or it could simply have indicated its indecision about what to do with the tomb at the time of the press conference. It might also have been the government’s intention to leave enough ambiguity so that it could adjust the plan to accommodate the demands of various constituencies that might arise during the renovation process. After all, any project involving the alteration of a tomb or a graveyard is a serious undertaking as the living’s relationship with the dead and the spirit world weighs heavily on the minds of the Taiwanese (Hatfield 2011).

The city government’s plan, however, did not win much admiration from KAPWR members, who pointed out that the Kaohsiung City government still addressed these twenty-five women as “young girls” in its public announcements, in spite of its proclaimed intentions to change the tomb site’s image. Also, the fact that the new park would be a park dedicated to all laborers but not specifically to female workers seemed to indicate the city’s offhand approach to gender issues. After a long process of discussion, in 2008 the city government finally decided that the park should be re-named the “Memorial Park for [All] Women Laborers,” a decision endorsed by the KAPWR.

During the course of discussions, the Cijin District Office, the frontline local government unit in charge of executing the site’s renovation, worked hard to communicate

with the deceased's families about how to redesign the space. Initially, many of these families simply could not understand why the government wanted to dig up their daughters again. Mr. Lin, the Cijin District Office clerk who served as the liaison to the deceased's families, had to come up with a list of talking points to persuade them that the changes would benefit them by (1) raising the question of whether, more than 30 years after the ferry accident, the younger family members would continue to worship and care for their deceased maiden sisters or aunts as parents aged or died; (2) pointing out that the tomb site was susceptible to sabotage – and had been damaged – by gamblers in illegal lotteries or loiterers and, as a result, the tranquility of the deceased was constantly disturbed; (3) noting that the contributions of the deceased to the development of Taiwanese economy were conveniently forgotten because of the emphasis on the negative image attached to their maiden status; (4) asserting that the deceased had elevated their standing in the heavenly order; they were no longer ordinary supernatural beings and thus should be worshipped in a way that reflected their new celestial position; and (5) suggesting that the tomb would look out of place as soon as the “Memorial Park for Women Laborers” was finished.

Mr. Lin's list was significant. His points had to touch the hearts of these families (Points 1, 2 and 4) while addressing the government's policy in a way that they could understand it (Points 3 and 5). This is not to say that the city government always shared the families' concerns or that disagreements between them could always be bridged. For example, initially, the families wanted the tomb to be renovated into something like the Eighteen Lords Temple at the northern tip of Taiwan. The Eighteen Lords Temple was originally “a simple roadside shrine for unidentified bones – the sort that sits unattended and almost unnoticed all over the countryside” but, thanks to the said power and efficacy exhibited by the eighteen lords, since the 1980s it has grown into one of Taiwan's major temples (Weller 1994). From the families' perspective, the Eighteen Lords Temple resembled the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb as its ghostly spirits also suffer from the lack of a

proper place on an ancestral altar. Its success in attracting a large number of visitors seemed to present the best kind of prospect for the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb. The majority of the families also insisted that the name "The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb" – or, at least "Twenty-five Ladies" or "Twenty-five" – should be kept. They also wanted the presence of a tomb or an architectural structure of worship where they could place the urns and/or hold memorial services (Wang 2006); and they wished to keep the memorial gate. The parents were concerned that no one in their families would make regular offerings to their daughter-gods after they passed away. Essentially, the families of the deceased envisioned a refurbished tomb/temple/memorial hall with a redecorated memorial gate, surrounded by the new, friendly "Memorial Park for Women Laborers" with flowers and plants. The memorial gate was important as it was to serve as the gateway to the shrine of the twenty-five enlightened ladies.

However, the Kaohsiung Mayor's Office wanted to remove the unpleasant supernatural aspects of the site and thus to eliminate all traces of the tomb. We were also told by some staff members close to the Mayor that as the mayor eschews anything ghostly, she did not want her administration to be associated with the supernatural world. Hence, there was not going to be anything remotely resembling a shrine or temple, and the existing memorial gate had to go. In the end, the government prevailed. The individual graves of these young women were removed, and trees and meadows were planted. At the center of the park is a sculpture of a Buddhist lotus on a pedestal, chosen after the original design proposed by the government that called for the shape of a vessel was rejected by the families who wanted something symbolizing the afterlife status of their daughters. Below the lotus sculpture is a chamber where the urns of the women's remains collected after the removal of their individual graves are kept. The parents of the deceased had expressed their wish to have a chamber door, so that they could go in from time to time to take care of the urns but

this was rejected on the grounds that if there were a door, anybody could go in and the site could be vandalized again.

On September 3, 2008, 35 years after the fatal ferry accident, the Memorial Park for Women Laborers was inaugurated. Mayor Chen's words, "[Let's] Remember our sisters who labored [and] Wish for a city of happiness," were inscribed on the pedestal of the Buddhist lotus sculpture. The inscription also explains the park's purpose:

Resting in peace here are twenty-five women who gave their lives in the labor front [...]. In 1973, they died while on their way to work. The Kaohsiung City government helped to bury the deceased together at the time, and named the collective entombment "The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb," as an important documentation of the contemporary life of Cijin and a witness to the sacrifices the working-class people made for Taiwan's economic development. However, the term "Lady" carried stereotypical gender ideologies that ignored both the economic contributions of women workers and the urgency of safety issues in the workplace [...]. On the recommendation of the Kaohsiung Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights and other groups, the current Kaohsiung City government decided to rectify the site as the "Memorial Park for Women Laborers" to commemorate the twenty-five martyrs who died on their jobs [...]. We hope that we can work together to build a country for working people and a city of happiness, so that the sacrifice made by the deceased women will not be in vain.

Since then, the Kaohsiung City government has held an annual spring memorial ceremony around the time of Ching Ming in front of the lotus sculpture. In the first few years, only the families of the deceased were invited to attend, along with Mayor Chen Chu and her staff. Since 2012, however, the city government began to mobilize local school

children to perform at the ceremony, playing taiko drums and recorders and reading poetry. The city government hoped that, by participating in the memorial ceremony, the children would not only learn about the history behind the women's deaths and also to enjoy the park. In other words, this was a further attempt of the city government to redefine the site as a "recreational space," not a "home of the dead." The annual spring memorial service is also the occasion that the Kaohsiung City government employs to (re)assert its commitment to workplace safety for all job-related activities including the commuting to and from work.

Conclusion: Assessing the Feminist Intervention

The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb stands at the intersection where capitalist industrial production meets a specific socio-cultural system. It embodies a local story of global capital. The tomb was the final resting place of twenty-five women whose short lives exemplify the generation of Taiwanese women who came of age at the onset of Taiwan's rural, export-oriented industrialization in the 1970s. They were part of the first generation of Taiwanese women who entered the labor market in large numbers. They worked from a young age, often curtailing their education, to help their families and to pay for the educations of their younger siblings, especially their brothers. They were considered "temporary workers" by factory owners, as it was assumed that they would quit their jobs to bear (male) children and take care of their (husbands') families upon marriage. Accordingly, they could be paid less than a family wage because their income was considered supplementary; and they had dead-end jobs, for they were not pursuing a career but primarily working to repay their parents for bringing them up before they got married. The cultural idea behind this industrial design was the smooth transition of a woman through the different stages of her life cycle and, at each stage, she would have a different role, enjoy a different array of rights, and perform a different set of duties.

One crucial distinction between the twenty-five women buried at the Ladies' Tomb and their counterparts, of course, is that these women died young before they got a chance to get married. Their suddenly terminated lives, however, also presented a point of rupture at which KAPWR feminists intervened to challenge the cultural assumption that served to make them a core part of Taiwan's industrial workforce.

KAPWR's activism suggests that similar problems do not necessarily call for similar answers. Issues such as violence against working women or lack of recognition for a female industrial workers cannot be solved using the same solutions but require context-specific interventions. Women's participation in the labor market and their presence in public spaces did not encounter resistance in Taiwan. Instead, the task faced by the Taiwanese feminists was to bring the deceased women from the private domain to the public sphere and give their life stories (alternative) public meanings. Although it took a long while, the Kaohsiung City government eventually responded to KAPWR's call, renovated the tomb site and its surrounding environment, and instated a Buddhist lotus sculpture that carries some religious symbolism relating to the afterlife yet does not look as conspicuous as a crypt. The inscription engraved on the lotus sculpture reflects much of KAPWR's argument that society should recognize these women as industrial workers who contributed to the development of Taiwan's economy and who lost their lives for their jobs. This suggests the triumph of the feminist endeavors.

Yet, questions remain about the socio-cultural impact of this feminist act of memorializing. Might this act of memorializing actually be promoting "technologies of forgetting" or the substitutability and non-specificity of the deceased young women by privileging particular understandings of their short lives? There is no easy answer to this question. The Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb case illustrates the importance of temporal factors in evaluating (any) feminist interventions, which are never isolated efforts but embedded in a web of time-sensitive social processes. KAPWR was one of the three voices along with the

city government and the families of the deceased, albeit a loud and public voice, involved in the Twenty-five Ladies' Tomb renovation. While we credit KAPWR's persistent effort to press the government for change, the city government's commitment was necessary to make any physical transformation of the tomb a reality. Yet, the Kaohsiung City government had its own agenda and different constituencies to respond to. It did not actively act on KAPWR's call to change the appearance of the tomb site until the development of urban tourism in Cijin became an integral part of the city's plan to reinvent Kaohsiung's economy. In addition, the inscription engraved on the lotus sculpture at the refurbished park is revealing for, from the City's perspective it serves multiple purposes. The inscription highlights the economic contribution of the deceased women and recognizes them as a part of the larger history of Taiwan, thereby addressing the concern of the feminists. The inscription also emphasizes the government's commitment to gender equality and workplace safety, which helps to enhance the aura of Kaohsiung as a modern city and its municipal administration a reform-minded, progressive government. On the emotional level, the portrait of the deceased as noble workers dying on their jobs also has the (intended or unintended) effect on promoting Kaohsiung's urban tourism. After all, what could be a better symbol than the image of twenty-five young women dying tragically on their way to work to characterize the romance and pathos of Kaohsiung's past as a blue-collar city? The very act of memorialization, therefore, also embodies the effect of place-making and city-marketing crucial to a successful remaking of Kaohsiung's city economy. What is left unmentioned in this portrayal is the fact that these women were buried together in the first place not because they were factory workers who lost their lives in the same ferry incident. Rather, the collective burial was established primarily because these women died unmarried and thus had no home for their spirits to go back to.

In the public voices of the KAPWR feminists and the Kaohsiung City government, the twenty-five deceased young women became emblems and their individuality is subsumed

under the symbolism they now collectively represent. To give public (and official) meanings to what they stand for, however, does not exclude any private reading of how they should be remembered, such as that echoed in the quiet voices of their families. Thus the park in its current existence allows different interpretations to coexist. The annual spring memorial service deployed by the city government to (re)affirm the official memory of the deceased is also the occasion that gives the deceased the recurring acknowledgement and reverence sought by their individual families. Public memorization advocated by the feminists and private remembrance essential to the deceased's families are both attained via the mediation of the city government.

Notes

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1. We did not include the deceased young women as a party involved in the tomb renovation.

This was not because we do not think, in general, the dead cannot or should not speak.

Rather, it is because we learned from our ethnographic inquiry that the deceased young

women did not voluntarily disclose opinions on this particular matter; neither did they always answer the questions asked of them by the three living parties indicated in the main text through religious rituals. In other words, the deceased young women were passive about the prospect of their resting place. This does not mean that they were always passive, however. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage the expansive literature of ghosts and haunting in Taiwanese culture and popular religion. Suffice it to say that the agency of the deceased young women is illustrated in the interaction between them and their parents when the former came back to ask for god statues to be made for them.

2. These included the Juvenile Prostitution Prevention Law, the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, the Gender Equality in Employment Act, and the Gender Equity Education Act.
3. While the legal and political advancements on gender issues are generally welcomed by the feminist community, some scholars have voiced their concerns about this turn to “state feminism,” i.e., the institutionalization, propagation, and execution of feminist goals by the state (Yang 2004), which could – and would – lead to a situation of political influence and/or presentation for feminist organizations without (the incentive to seek) a mass base (cf. Ho 2006). Similarly, it has been pointed out that how to best collaborate with government agencies while at the same time retaining one’s autonomy presents a great challenge to Taiwanese feminists at the present time (Tu and Peng 2008).

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