Women in-between the Place: A Pilot Study of Two Military-Related Women

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This study was part of the research results sponsored by the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences of National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. It was first presented at Crossroads in Cultural Studies 2012. Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle University and UNESCO. The paper submitted here is a revision.

Abstract

This paper intends to re-examine the sense of place of Anping, a tourist historical site of Taiwan, by the case studies of two local women, in order to argue for the notion of the progressive sense of place as proposed by Doreen Massey. A harbor district whose history can be traced back to the 12th century, Anping has developed over various Chinese dynasties and western imperial powers. Demographically, it was multi-ethnic; geographically, its boundaries have changed, moving always more inland and including more people. However, past researches tended to take Anping as a fixed inhabited location—a given—and explore its uniqueness through seeking common patterns. To describe Anping as a progressive place, this paper examines two women’s migratory routes in terms of their social relations and indicates that Anping as a place is not defined by stability and rootedness but by flows and movements.

Keywords: nation-state, migration, women’s studies, cultural studies.
In “A Global Sense of Place,” Doreen Massey coins the term, “a progressive sense of place” to indicate that with “time-space compression” (1991, p. 24), place can no longer be regarded as one of a single and homogenized identity, but rather as a manifestation of flows and movements. For Massey, the “reactionary sense of place” that holds on to the “introverted, inward-looking history . . . for internalized origins” (1991, p. 27) can hardly address how a place is related to other parts of the world because of the dynamic mobility of people. Observing the Kilburn High Street in north London where she lives and where she sees its connections to other parts of the world, Massey argues that place should not be viewed as an “authentic” history of a single, inevitably fictionalized and homogenized local community, but rather as a manifestation of dynamic “local and global social, economic, and communications relations” (1991, p. 25).

However, while Massey looks at the positive effect of the flows of commodities, idea, and people, she also points out how “time-space compression” involves a politics of mobility and access. For it does seem that mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power. It is not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, and that some have more control than others. It is that the mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak. The time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others. (1991, p. 26)

Take women travelers for example. In the 19th and 20th centuries, “it was far more demanding for a woman to wander now than ever before . . . . for a complex mix of colonialism, ex-colonialism, racism, changing gender relations and relative wealth” (1991, p. 25). This means that, how these women travelers experienced space is affected not only by where they moved from and to but also by what entitled/enabled them to move to what places. Moreover, how women as the subject experience the place has to be considered to make the sense of place.

A harbor district whose history can be traced back to the 12th century, Anping has developed over various Chinese dynasties and western imperial powers. Demographically, it was multi-ethnic; geographically, its boundaries have changed, moving always more inland and including more people. However, most past researches tended to rely on what Massey calls the “introverted obsession with ‘heritage’” (1991, p. 27) to emphasize the importance of Anping as a place, which is why it’s being claimed and reclaimed as a “historical site.” Then, is it possible to explore Anping as a “meeting place” (Massey, 1991, p. 28) where its linkage to the “outside” reproduces its sense of place?

To describe Anping as a progressive place, this paper examines two women’s migratory
routes in terms of their social relations. The migration of both women is either directly or indirectly related to the Chinese Civil War, which caused men’s and women’s migration from mainland China to Taiwan in the late-1940s and has thus changed the local social landscape of Taiwan. The first woman, Mama Niu, came from a distant county to be married to a mainlander veteran. She and her husband and children lived with the mainlander community whose village was forced to move twice but remained in the outskirts of Anping. Mama Niu has done various paid jobs to support her family. The other woman, Lieutenant Liu, was a mainlander officer in charge of medical inspection who moved to Anping when the military hospital where she worked was ordered to retreat from Shanghai to re-station there. Later, she was married and retired from the work post and moved to the downtown area. Their movements reproduce the sense of Anping.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the social political landscape of Anping changed significantly. In 1858, the Treaty of Tianjin entitled foreigners the rights of movement in the internal regions of China, including Taiwan, for the purposes of travel, trade or missionary activities (Ming-yong Wu, 1998, p. 148). Anping then became an entry point where foreign firms were set up to trade goods such as opium, camphor and sugar (Shui-ping Zheng, 1998a, p. 692-695). Domestic immigrants flooded in to do fishery and manual work (Shui-ping Zheng, 1998a, p. 695). After Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Treaty of Maguan as a result of the first Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese government monopolized all international trades. In the meanwhile, Anping harbor gradually got silted up so that eventually all western firms in Anping closed in 1911. Under the rule of Japan, in addition to sugar, salt industry became so dominant that many Anping residents became workers in salt related professions and indentured household servants (Shui-ping Zheng, 1998a, p. 740). In 1945, following the end of World War II, the Republic of China led by the Kuomintang (KMT) became the governing polity of Taiwan and thus began migrations of the mainlanders.

Migrations of the mainlanders brought enormous effect on the demography and the social landscape of Taiwan. Although this mass migration started in 1946, it was in 1949 when the number of Mainland migrants reached its peak—600,000 in total in one year, taking up 9.9% of the entire population of Taiwan (Jen-hui Hsieh 2008, p. 1& 6). These people included KMT officials, soldiers, businessmen, and various other intellectuals. With KMT’s retreat from mainland China to Taiwan in the Chinese Civil War, the government of KMT built villages to settle the military and its family dependents down, which are called Military Dependants’ Villages (hereafter referred to as the Mainlander Village).

For most first-generation mainlanders, the Mailander Village is a cohesive community
where they found a sense of belonging. According to Association of Mainlander Taiwanese, in the early years, the KMT government aimed to use Taiwan as a military base for a quick restoration of their power in China. With this national policy and the belief that they would soon return to their home land, early mainlanders hardly bothered themselves much with getting along with local Taiwanese (Prequel to the Military Dependents’ Village, 2014). Furthermore, the Mainlander Village was administered and substantially supplied by the Ministry of National Defense of ROC so that it was relatively self-contained and enclosed (Prequel to the Military Dependents’ Village, 2014). In this enclosure, residents became more identified with one another because they were more like each other in comparison with the “outsiders” in terms of the mainlander dialects and life styles (Xin-yi Wu, 1996). As a result, it was common that most second-generation mainlanders in the village were blind to Taiwanese experiences unless their mothers were Taiwanese (Xuan-fan Huang, 1993, p. 100-101).

While earlier studies of the Mainlander village focused more on the identity issue of men mostly, a few studies on women were related to this study. While Antonia Chao (2001) examines the bio-political mechanisms that the first-generation women mainlanders (women exiles in her terms) and holds that they developed discursive devices for survival strategies, she points out that these women lived under the patriarchal domination. Nevertheless, according to Yuan-ping Kuo (2002), in comparison with Taiwanese women who came to live in the Mainlander village after their marriage with mainlanders, the first-generation mainlander women were more privileged. These Taiwanese women had to re-orientate themselves into the village culture in terms of language and national identity before they could be recognized as “insiders.” Research also showed that Taiwanese women in the Mainlander Village could develop their social networks which better connected the Mainlander Village with local communities (Ku-ping Chen, 2006, p. 77).

When the KMT government started their governance, Anping changed, too. In 1895 (during the Japanese rule of Taiwan), there were 6,067 permanent residents in Anping; in 1936 (still during the Japanese rule), there were 6,175 permanent residents in Anping; in 1947, two years after the mass migration of mainlanders, there were 8,222 permanent residents; in 1949 when the mass migration reached its peak, there were 9,890 permanent residents in Anping (Shui-ping Zheng, 1998b, p. 134 &136). As the summary above indicates, in the first four years of the mainlander migration, the population of Anping increased almost half of the Anping population in the last decade of the Japanese rule.

The mainlander migrants brought about not only the demographical change but also
economical change in Anping. To settle these mainlanders, two villages were established, the Vanguard and the Righteous. Given that the space for housing was very limited in the main area of Anping, both villages were built in the outskirts of the area, most of whose residents were the staff and workers of the Combined Logistics, a manufacture factory of the daily production of 6,000 rubber shoes for the use of armies. Supplies for these workers’ daily life, including meals and necessities prompted the local market (Shui-ping Zheng, 1998a, p. 786). Also, the factory hired local people, too, so that the number of employees of this industry ranked the 6th between 1954 and 1966; even it remained an important industry in the 1980s (Jung-yi Kuo, 2004, p. 83).

Even though the newly settled mainlanders contributed to the economical growth of Anping, they were unwelcome in the early years. As an elder remembered, Anping locals prepared themselves to receive the KMT army when they came to take over the harbor town. But they were disillusioned by the shabby appearance of the KMT soldiers who were so much unlike the disciplined Japanese ones (Shi-zhong Ho, 2009, p. 84). Worse still, some of these newly arrived soldiers robbed civilians of their goods and treasures (Shi-zhong Ho, 2009, p. 84). As a result, Anping locals forbade women from getting married with these mainlanders.

To a certain extent, the marriage of Mama and Papa Niu was a typical one where a much older mainlander married a young Taiwanese woman. As Mama Niu revealed in her personal communications with the researcher, Papa Niu, at the age of 22 in 1950, came from the Honan province of China to Taiwan as a janitor rather than an enlisted soldier. He left the army after he landed in Taipei. A fellow Honanese in Taipei referred him to another Honanese in Tainan who helped secure him a menial job in the Combined Logistics in Anping. Since he was not a soldier and he was single, he was not provided housing. As a common practice among mainlanders like him, he built himself a cabin in the beach area apart from the mainlander village. As a single poor mainlander man in a place where local people held stereotypical views of mainlanders, it was difficult for him to get married with an Anping woman. When he was 40 years old, through match-making he finally came to marry Mama Niu, a young woman from a rural Hakka place in the farther south of Taiwan.

For Mama Niu, whose poor family wished to marry her off to a mainlander in the hope that she might have a better chance for a better future since they believed that mainlanders were better taken care of by the KMT government. After she married to Papa Niu at the age of 19, Mama Niu started a journey of reorientation. These Taiwanese women had to re-orientate themselves into the village culture in terms of language and national identity before they could be recognized as “insiders.”
Later, Mama Niu started to work in the Combined Logistics in 1970 until she retired in 1991. The gendered division of the domestic/private and the public spheres has been an issue of gender studies. As Linda McDowell points out, “industrial capitalism” developed in the West “had a huge impact on women’s lives and status. . . . For women, who were encouraged (and forced in some circumstances) to identify with and restrict themselves to the home, the home ‘is alternatively a site of disenfranchisement, abuse and fulfillment.” (1999, p. 73). But the division of the space here involves a complicated intersection of factors. First of all, even though the Mainlander Village is male-dominated (the fact that almost all housewives are addressed by their husbands’ last name is one of the proofs), it took both the husband and the wife to work to support the livelihood of the family (Yuan-ping Kuo, 77-82). Since she worked for the Army, she was able to send her children to the daycare in the factory. This means that her work not only helped her financially but also better orientated her into being a mainlander.

However, we have to notice that even though wives had to work to support the family (Ching-hua Guan, 2008, p. 207; Jing-wen Yang, 2008, p. 213), there were just “a few” wives who were married to mainlanders in Anping (Ching-hua Guan, 2008, p. 207). It means it was even more difficult for Mama Niu to get adapted to this stranger culture. To sum up, as a first-generation mainlander dependant who identified herself as a mainlander, she felt herself different from the Taiwanese (this sense of difference is also felt by male mainlanders, Jing-wen Yang, 2008, p. 213; by Anping locals Ani, 2009 and Ren-wen Zheng, 2009). In the mainlander community, Mama Niu was emotionally trapped between two worlds.

In the interview, more than once, Mama Niu distinguished herself as a mainlander and thus was not a Taiwanese. She said, “Ye, ye, ye, [I] seldom [got along with the locals]. [I] went straight to work in the factory and after work returned straight home, [the Village]. Whatever happened, all villagers stayed together, all were mainlanders. But there were locals, too, and wives who came from Mainland” (Niu, personal communications, 2009). Furthermore, she said, “in the old days they Taiwanese went to [see the doctor] Tainan Hospital and Feng-Chia Hospital. But we mainlanders went to the 804 Army Hospital or the Air Force Hospital. All mainlanders here went there [to see the doctor]” (Niu personal communications, 2009). Even though Mama Niu hardly considers herself an Anping local she moved (with her family) in the Anping district. Nevertheless, her sense of Anping is embedded in her sense of home, which is bound with the community of the Mainlander Village. Still, she as well as Papa Niu are outsiders of Anping.

The Tainan Air-Force Hospital authority took over the Japanese Tuberculosis Treatment
and Prevention Station, which was situated at the conjunction between the City of Tainan and Anping in 1949. It attracted patients of serious sickness because of its state-of-the-art facilities, but Anping locals would prefer not to go there for medical treatment unless they had to. This was due to poor language communication (Taiwanese vs Mandarin). To accommodate with the dependants’ needs, a huge complex of the air-force village was constructed.

Lieutenant Liu’s migration is quite a different story from Mama Niu’s. As her elder daughter remembered (Kai-kuen Liu, 2009, personal communications), she said she was an adopted daughter-in-law. But it remained a mystery because she didn’t mention it in her autobiographies written for job applications. Anyway, she graduated from a nurse school which was affiliated to the Medical College of the Honan University in 1939. Then, she went to work in various places in the provinces of Gansu, Anhui, and Jiangsu. Later, she became an enlisted warrant officer in the Shanghai Air-Force Hospital in 1947. When the unit was ordered to re-station in Anping, Taiwan, she came, too. In eight years (1954), she was promoted three times from warrant officer, second lieutenant, first lieutenant, to captain, with a specialty in epidemic prevention lab work.

Lieutenant Liu was proud with her capability and work status, both of which brought her social status and self-identity as a nationalist (mainlander) military officer. This can be seen in an autobiography manuscript probably written before she married Papa Liu (1954); in her elder daughter’s interview where she mentioned that years after she retired and moved to a public housing complex apart from the Air-force mainlander village, neighbors liked to come ask for her opinions whenever they had health problem. Mama Niu, being a young friend of Lieutenant Liu’s, also confirmed that Lieutenant Liu always liked to tell her about her work in the hospital.

Nevertheless, things got changed after her marriage. But we have to say something about Papa Liu. He was a major general before he made his way to leave China two years after the KMT lost its battle with the Communist party (1951). In 1958 he became a staff in the KMT Tainan office and later became the director of that office. Between 1964 and 1968, he served one term as a Tainan City Councilor. As his career developed, he requested that Lieutenant Liu retire so that she could fully support him as a housewife (Kai-kuen Liu, 2009, personal communications). Though reluctant, Lieutenant Liu retired in 1960 and became fully dependent on her husband financially and emotionally because they moved the family out of the mainlander village of the air-force. In other words, while she was independent and free of movements because of her access of power to the national mechanism, she became subjected to the traditional patriarchal family structure when she lost that access. She stayed in one of
the mainlander community outside of Anping. She didn’t live in a mainlander village but stayed in contact with her old colleagues who lived in the air-force mainlander village.

Concerning women’s migration, Raghuram argues that “[m]igrant women are caught between an undervaluing of their maternal and other familial roles because of the overprivileging of the public sphere . . . and a reinscription of their paid work in the private realm because of the private nature of the workplaces in which many of them are employed” (2004, p. 196). The use of social relations helps us understand Mama Niu and Lieutenant Liu’s sense of place. The sense of place we see here is even more progressive than what Massey proposed because it’s more than a hybrid juxtaposition of diversity. It’s a “meeting place” where people’s sense of place is constructed by the “politics of mobility and access” in varied scales. The two cases indicate that Anping as a place is not defined by stability and rootedness but by flows and movements.
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