



LEARNING OF PRIDE

by Glenn Chen

There were about a hundred and fifty people milling about in a large crowd outside the San Francisco Sheraton Palace Hotel. Most of them were holding various signs with slogans like "Taiwan for Taiwanese" or "Free Political Prisoners" painted on them. I stood at the edge of the group, waiting for the demonstration to start. After a few minutes, we gathered ourselves into a long line, ready to begin our march. Assigned to a banner, I took it and went to the end of the procession.

I took part that day in a mass demonstration, which was held outside the Republic of China Consulate office. We were protesting against the injustices that the government of Taiwan had done to the Taiwanese people. We marched down Montgomery Street to the Consulate office. We waved the signs at passing cars and at the people on the streets. Outside the office, we shouted in unison, "Junk Martial Law!", "Taiwan for Taiwanese!", and "Free Political Prisoners!". Drivers stopped and stared at the signs, blocking traffic behind them. Pedestrians gaped at us in curiosity.

A few hours later, the last of the signs had been put away and the remaining people went home. As we were driving home, I sat in silence and pondered about my feeling during the demonstration. I found that, despite the fact that I was hoarse from shouting so much, I had enjoyed participating in it. I laughed to myself when I thought about the scene we must have made, yelling and waving those signs. But I didn't feel the least bit embarrassed or self-conscious that I was making a fool of myself.

The last thought made me pause for a moment. I realized that I hadn't always felt this way. Not long ago, I would have refused to join the protest, because I was afraid of being laughed at; today, I had abandoned all my inhibitions and joined in with the others. What had changed my attitudes? I asked myself. I mulled over this for awhile. Then the answer came to me, strong and clear: I had gained pride in my Taiwanese culture and heritage.

This realization of a hidden pride in me was a slow and arduous process. I had to face many conflicts, and had to solve each one myself. These conflicts were both physical and emotional. I was led astray many times, yet in the end, I managed to succeed.

I arrived in this country when I was one year old. I knew nothing of the vast cultural differences between Taiwan and America. Among other small children, though, it did not matter. The kids in my neighborhood accepted me like anyone else.

I was soon to find out, though, that I was not like everyone else. I was Chinese, while they were white. I found out the significance of this difference when I went to school. I was not "Glenn", but a "Nip" or a "Chink", and other names. The bullies around school constantly picked on me, until I got so fed up with their mocking that I fought them.

Throughout my elementary and junior high school years, I had to face such unfair treatment. There wasn't much I could do -- it would be impossible, as well as impractical, to punish everyone who taunted me. I was frustrated, because I wanted to be treated like anyone else. Others treated me as not being "part of the group", and as a result, I felt like an outcast. I was resolved to change.

I didn't want to be Chinese. I rejected anything which identified me as a "Chink". It was a rule in our house that I had to have short hair, a carry-over practice from Taiwan. I grew my hair long. I didn't want my parents to speak Chinese when they were around my friends. I wanted to stay away from Taiwanese group activities. I followed the fads that went around my school. I avoided questions about where I came from, or where I was born. I lied when others asked if I knew any Chinese, saying that I couldn't understand a single word of it.

Gradually, however, I started to abandon these childish attitudes. With the oncoming of real mental maturity, I found out that it is most important to be what you really are, without pretense and attempts to hide one's individuality. I grew to be less self-conscious about being Taiwanese.

I started to see around me other people who had also shared my feelings. I took a class about American minorities, and read and saw movies about Indians, or Blacks, or Chicanos, who were proud of what they were, and were brave enough to show it, despite oppression and racial prejudice. My own, latent self-identity was stimulated, prodded, and started to grow

Looking out the car window, I said to myself, "Yes, I'm proud to be Taiwanese". Then I remembered something else. Recently, Dr. Kuo Yu-Hsin, from Taiwan, stayed at our home. He was touring the United States to gain support for his campaign to be the next Taiwan President. Although I did not see him much during his stay, he did leave me with a few parting words on my mind. In Taiwanese, he said, "Remember, you are from Taiwan! Don't forget that!!!". I can truly say now that I never will, Dr. Kuo.