

## How This Book Was Written

I have witnessed nearly a half-century of Taiwan's history. And I am blessed by having many friends who have been willing to help in my project of writing my biography. Of course it is not just my individual biography that they have feeling for, but the great hopes of the 1970-80s democratic movement of Taiwan. Chen Chu, now in her second term as mayor of Kaohsiung, pulled me into the fray in 1975.

After Lynn Miles and I finished our anthology on foreigners in human rights work, *A Borrowed Voice: Taiwan Human Rights Through International Networks, 1960-1980*, our Taiwanese friends asked why there wasn't a Chinese version they could read. By luck, Sue L. Yang, a Taiwanese-American in New Jersey who was involved in the overseas rescue campaign of 1980, agreed to translate Chapters 5 and 6 covering the 1978-79 movement and the subsequent trial. However, this account might be a rather dry read, except to those who remembered the times of state-sponsored terror.

Fortunately, I met Rose Chia-yin Lin, young in age but experienced in several ways. Her undergraduate degree is in political science, so she understands radical sociology; and she worked with the Democratic Progressive Party in Tainan elections. She also interviewed former political prisoners for an oral history workshop and completed her master's degree in public health. But it is Rose's own bubbly zest for candid engagement which made her the right author for my biography. She said we should write a story the younger generation would read for fun while learning history on the way. Armed with Sue Yang's translation of the facts, and after 60 hours of interviews with me mostly in Chinese, Rose was able to outline my life with a breezy intimacy, embedding the moments of decision in semi-fictional colloquies. That tone fits, because in putting together my life story, I did have a certain in-your-face intent, springing from irritation with the conformity and superficiality of Taiwanese society these days. But I myself certainly could not have written such a rollicking story – though now in my mind, that was nearly the way it happened. Rose wrote it in six months and took off for her Rotary Club scholarship in Japan.

Dennis Huang, an avid film fan and editor, was intrigued with the feminist angle, and brought me together with Yeh Li-ching of Vista Publishing. Together they easily persuaded me to fill in some salacious detail. To me, candid revelation of my life's motivations and missteps is more of a gift to readers than a depiction of smooth success; some might even say I flaunt a gleeful disdain for pretense and propriety. And I was delighted that Vista saw this publication not as a dry scholarly account but as a colorfully illustrated and personalized book with photographs and art, more human than my usual strident political rant.

Then we were committed to production, but again my lucky stars were shining, because I found Una Hsiao-hsuan Chen, a devotee of English literature well read in the surrealist literature of revolutionary Latin America as well. She quickly took on an intensive second phase of injecting more of my thinking on social and political issues into the text, which I hope gives this biography an intellectual depth despite the racy tone. And she has translated my English additions into rather lyrical Chinese.

For the graphics, Chiu Wan-hsing, a longtime photographer for opposition movements, and Jason Kennedy, a writer from England, resident in Taiwan, applied their skills to digitally capture my photo albums and embellish the book with handicrafts I've done over the years – crochet, macramé, beading, even rehabilitation of Barbie dolls. Here too are my darling cats who love me just because I am a warm body. I hope these personal images give the book immediacy and let readers know this really is my own life story.

Linda Gail Arrigo  
艾琳達



Linda Gail Arrigo, Taipei, October 1, 2011

*A Beautiful View from the Brink:  
Linda Gail Arrigo and the Taiwan Democratic Movement*

English Synopsis

The true story of an American's in the human rights struggle of a faraway Asian country may, I hope, pique the interest of other globe-trotting foreigners. Running through the narrative of this biography is the misery wreaked upon civilian populations by the short-sighted US foreign policy of supporting convenient dictators, an approach that should be recognized as a crime against humanity and resolutely resisted by all who have hope in the dignity of the human spirit. For ease of international sharing, I am providing here a synopsis of the book, chapter by chapter, in English. Who knows, you might even be inspired to learn Chinese to read it, and to embark on an odyssey into another language and culture as I did.

Prologue: The Decision

Linda Gail, age 28, sits in her sweet fruit-tree lined house not far from Stanford University where she is a graduate student in anthropology. It is 1977. Her Taiwan-born husband now has a good job in defense industry, and her lively little boy is eight. But fired by the internationalist idealism of the Kennedy era, as well as feminism, she yearns for more than the life of a suburban housewife. A letter from a young woman dissident in Taiwan, Chen Chu, spurs the decision to leave her cocoon of security – a feeling as if staring down from the brink of a cliff. After that moment of decision, we return to the historical account.

The domino effects of that decision led her to marry a former political prisoner who became a leader of the Taiwan democratic movement of 1978-79 – Shih Ming-deh, hero of the 1980 trials. But looking back from the present and Shih's 2006 campaign to depose the popularly-elected president, his lawyer in the trial, apparently to the benefit of the old regime and even to China, Linda can only wince at the ironies of history and the decay of idealism on all sides.

Chapter One. A Package from Asia

Major Joseph Arrigo, son of Sicilian immigrants, volunteered right after Pearl Harbor and commanded black troops in the invasion of Normandy. After World War II, he was first sent to the Pentagon; daughter Linda was born January 16, 1949 in Virginia. But he was soon packed off to the Korean War, to the occupation of Japan, and then later to logistics support for Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, 1957-58. Linda, more than her two sisters, was intrigued with the exotic textiles and trinkets he sent from Asia. Joe's smart uniform and Latin lover charm seemed to captivate Asian women. His marriage to Nellie Gephardt, an independent-minded school teacher, did not long survive his sojourn in the States in 1956. The family lived in the San Francisco Presidio then, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. Linda loved wandering in China Town, and started learning Chinese at age 12. After 20 years' service, he retired as Lt. Col. Joseph Arrigo in 1961, to pursue get-rich-quick international business schemes.

Chapter Two. Young Linda in Taiwan: The Paranoia of the Chiang Kai-shek Era

In 1963 Joe took Linda with him to Taiwan; a young Shanghainese woman there awaited his return. Linda, fired by the missionary spirit of Catholic school in the Kennedy era, dove into the language and culture with every intention of going native. The Cold War paranoia of the Chiang regime was ubiquitous. Meeting lecherous old generals and avaricious dragon ladies, Linda developed a sharp sense of social disparity and the suppression of the native Taiwanese. After graduating from Taipei American School as valedictorian in May 1966, Linda attended a year at National Taiwan University. She met overseas Chinese who knew the world outside the anti-communist propaganda of Taiwan, and became near-fatally entangled with an evil Indonesian Chinese. Rescued by love at first sight with a decent young Taiwanese man whose family imported English magazines, she eloped with him to the United States in June 1968 and escaped her racist father.

Chapter Three. Sweet Wife, Staid Taiwanese-American Community

Linda's maternal grandfather, Robert Gephardt, addressed the home wedding gathering: According to teachings

of his Theosophical Society, a higher stage in man's spiritual development would emerge from intermarriage of East and West in California. Linda's son Roger was born not long after. Linda and George passed quiet years in university housing in San Diego. But in 1971-72 political winds of change were blowing among Chinese around the world. Students from Taiwan protested Japanese occupation of the Senkaku islands; crimes of Chiang Kai-shek were finally unearthed, including the February 28, 1947 massacres in Taiwan; Nixon went to China. Native Taiwanese overseas, braving spies and infiltration, formed the World United Formosans for Independence. George was a supporter of this, but Linda further became committed to the progressive causes of the day, both anti-Vietnam war and feminist. Personally liberated by her studies of anthropology at Stanford University, she studied Marxism, seduced a professor, planned her thesis fieldwork in Taiwan – and faced leaving her marriage under an irresistible compulsion to experience the real world.

#### Chapter Four. Abandoning Husband and Son, Off to Fieldwork and Human Rights Mission

Embarking on the topic set by her advisor, family change when young women become wage earners, Linda in Taiwan in summer 1975 saw instead labor exploitation by multinational corporations and abuses frozen under a US-supported dictatorship. But an opposition movement was beginning to stir, and Linda was inducted into human rights information smuggling by an audacious young Taiwanese woman her age, a pudgy gadfly named Chen Chu. Despite the overt policies of President Jimmy Carter, Linda was soon blackballed by the US Embassy, which heeded complaints against her by the Taiwan authorities. After she witnessed and reported on an electrifying event – a crowd burning down a police station in Chungli in November 1977 to protest election fraud – Linda faced the prospect of being deported, and set on the ploy of marrying a political prisoner to waylay that.

#### Chapter Five. Revolutionary Lovers: A Match Made by the Taiwan Garrison Command

Through Chen Chu and other foreigners concerned, Linda met with a charismatic election campaign manager with *nom de guerre* "Worth just a shred". Tall, thin and dark, with a strange narrow jaw, he looked the name. His real name was Shih Ming-deh, Japanese nickname "Nori". He had just been released from 15 years imprisonment in June 1977, but worked frenetically to spur resistance to martial law, as if he would not be free long. When his arrest seemed imminent on June 15, 1978, Linda married him. Linda saw herself as a comrade, if an intimate one as well; she did not anticipate the violence of her own emotions when she found Nori was continuing a frivolous dalliance with a previous American girlfriend. But their public role was set in motion, and no feminist protest could undo her being seen as his asset, the long-suffering wife. The arrest of Chen Chu on June 23 challenged them to a new phase of open human rights appeal; Chen was released a month later. Nori became one of the opposition leaders and set a militant agenda. Their wedding party in October 1978 was the occasion for forming an opposition campaign coalition to challenge the ruling Kuomintang in December. It was in effect a political party reflecting Taiwanese anxiety over the uncertain future.

#### Chapter Six. Democratic Movement Snowballs: Riding the Tiger

President Jimmy Carter's announcement of impending recognition of the Peoples Republic of China shook the legitimacy of the regime on Taiwan, while giving Chiang Ching-kuo an excuse to indefinitely postpone the election. The campaign coalition regrouped to again demand the end of martial law and full popular election of the central government. In response, the authorities arrested the retired Kaohsiung county head Yu Teng-fa who had laid plans with Shih to bankroll a new campaign for these goals. The dissident leadership core of five set off a lightning protest march on January 22, 1979, and a mass movement snowballed from there, soon structured around a new magazine, *Formosa (Meilidao)*, with Shih as general manager and Linda as English public relations. While showcasing talk of reform, the government through its security agencies applied threats and attacks. Shih again evaded arrest, but Linda's dogs were killed with time-release nerve poison, while an embarrassing personal letter of hers was printed in newspapers. Mass rallies of up to 30,000 were mustered to counter escalating security agency pressure; but the opposition leadership was unprepared for deliberate action by agent provocateurs, and the Kaohsiung Incident of December 10, 1979, provided the government the pretext for a full roundup with sedition charges – though Shih miraculously escaped out the back. Linda was deported a few days later; she defiantly donned the three-color sash of that night.

#### Chapter Seven. International Spotlight on the Kaohsiung Incident Trials

Even distraught on the plane, Linda was planning her next move. She got off in Japan and went to Hong Kong to make a full account of the events to Chinese and international media there. Fortuitously, she had recently

expanded international contacts in April 1979, through attending an underground human rights conference in the Philippines. Then, supported by the Formosan Association for Human Rights and full mobilization of the Taiwanese-American community, she spurred international media pressure for open trials in Taipei. Linda's mother Nellie Gephardt Amondson joined the effort and canvassed Congress with a flier, "Has my son-in-law been executed?" Then the two set out to brief foreign journalists in Hong Kong before the March trial. The infamous day of February 28, 1980 brought tidings of an atrocity: the twin daughters and mother of Lin Yi-Hsiung, one of the five imprisoned dissident leaders, had been stabbed to death in their home. Hearing this, the defendants were struck like a knife to the heart; still Shih faced the court with a devil-may-care grin and an argument for their cause. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, seven others to 12-14 years, thirty more to lesser terms. But the democratic movement had won public opinion through the unprecedented domestic newspaper coverage of the trials.

#### Chapter Eight. Linda in the Overseas Taiwanese Movement; and Personal Life

The harsh repression in Taiwan raised a question: Should the cause think in terms of violent revolution? In August 1980 Linda took a trip to Nicaragua to understand the July 1979 uprising against Somoza. Unexpectedly, she learned much not just from the Sandinistas, but from a chance encounter with a Palestinian. Taiwanese-Americans, however, had a narrow pro-American perspective. She joined with *Melidao* exiles Hsu Hsin-liang and Chen Wan-chen in the Los Angeles publication of *Formosa Weekly*. However, Linda felt she needed a deeper intellectual basis for political action, and in 1983 took up graduate studies a second time, now in Sociology at the State University of New York at Binghamton, a lightning rod for Third World studies. Meanwhile, she finally shook off her fixation on her heroic but remote husband, and found personal happiness for some years with a German mathematician. In 1985-86 she was part of the push by "the California gang" of Taiwanese-Americans to return to Taiwan like Benigno Aquino and Kim Dae-jung; and the Democratic Progressive Party was founded in Taipei in September 1986, in defiance of martial law. Then Linda's life took a turn when she met an incredibly intelligent Chinese student studying at the New School for Social Research in New York; he professed a commitment to democratic change in China. She imagined intellectual achievement, emotional hopes, and political action could be attained together with him. But both the aftermath of June 4, 1989, and the control of the authoritarian Chinese family – his mother – showed that Chinese intellectuals are unable to throw off Confucian conformity and cowardice. Not long after, in early 1990, Taiwan's student movement demanded reform, and Linda could anticipate that Taiwan political prisoners would be released soon.

#### Chapter Nine. Return to Taiwan – And a Political Marriage

May 1990, after ten years *persona non grata*, Linda was granted an ROC visa when her husband was released. The airport arrival was a media event. She landed with him in a tumultuous protest against the new military premier and a clash with riot troops. Two weeks after, she wandered barefoot among the sharp coral rocks at the south seaside tip of Taiwan, alone in her thoughts. Privately Shih was not welcoming; he took little interest in her analysis of international political and social currents. Still, he seemed more principled than most of the leadership of the DPP, and a large body of liberal professors were in his retinue. She found the rapid political evolution in Taiwan, with grassroots groups staking out public grounds, fascinating. No need to part yet; she was still working on her Ph.D. in Binghamton. Soon Shih became a national legislator and chairman of the party, a presidential hopeful. With 25 years imprisonment behind him, he was compared to Nelson Mandela in South Africa. But it was a trip to South Africa in July 1994 that drove the wedge. Linda did advance relations with the African National Congress and COSATU – whose international officer was jailed for three years in a prison built with ROC funds –, but Shih and the DPP didn't know the difference between these forces on the side of peoples' rights, and Taiwan's past relations with the likes of Buthelezi and the white generals. Six DPP legislators were on the trip, among them Parris Chang, a professor of international relations with Rand Corporation connections, who colluded with the ROC embassy. In November, Shih appointed Parris Chang to serve as DPP representative in Washington D.C. For Linda, this was the last straw, an affront to international human rights solidarity. She withdrew from the DPP, and divorced Shih on June 15, 1995, seventeen years to the day since they had signed a handwritten marriage agreement professing common ideals.

#### Supplement for Foreign Readers: Political Events in Taiwan, 1995-2006.

A defense lawyer in the Kaohsiung Incident trials, Chen Shui-bian, won the first popular election for Taipei mayor and took office in 1995. Linda assisted Richard Kagan in writing a popular biography for him in English. In

1997, Linda's article on money brokering within the DPP, "From Democratic Movement to Bourgeois Democracy," finally appeared in Chinese in her book of collected articles, embarrassing her former comrades. A major transition to real democratic process occurred when Chen Shui-bian won the presidency of the Republic of China in 2000, and was re-elected in 2004. Meanwhile, Shih strangely drifted towards his former jailors, and in 2006 led a bizarre anti-corruption campaign leading a red-shirted mob – some with pro-China slogans on their T-shirts – to overthrow Chen.

#### Chapter Ten. Reflections on a Beautiful Adventure

Taiwan society has changed incredibly in the last three decades. Aside from relative freedom of speech, gender equality has greatly advanced; Linda can trust to tell her life story with intentional candor now. But at the same time, globalization has brought a new tyranny of the world market, with Taiwan's elites blindly competing to ride the trends, regardless of the social costs. This is particular clear to Linda since she formally entered academia, Taipei Medical University, in 2007. Intellectuals have been coerced to turn away from social engagement, to pure research. Youth, immersed in an electronic virtual world of material consumption and image, have little inkling of the history that preceded them. Linda does hope that her biography can infect young readers with social conscience, and encourage them to buck authority and conformity.

Though deeply dismayed by the compromise of ideals among her comrades in the past decades, she does recognize the broad democratic progress of Taiwan's society. She has adopted a lighter attitude while continuing sociological and anthropological observation: The people of Taiwan must face the choices they have made. At TMU, she sometimes teaches Taiwan social history and illustrates it through the nearby public graves of Liuzhangli. Here there is the monument to the anti-Japanese socialist doctor Chiang Wei-shui; mainlanders soldiers buried by their army buddies far from their families; small rough stones marking those executed as communists during the White Terror. All of these remind her of her early years in Taiwan. And it may be a fitting hope for an anthropologist, a foreigner and a divorced woman who is outside any lineage, to eventually be enshrined as a local ghost or deity – which one is which often being ambiguous in Taiwan folk religion.