

City| Tai Wan



"Couple", Photographed by Ray Lei

"Hualian Night Market", Photographed by Ray Lei



Rebecca LIN

The Things That Part and Connect Us

I was born and grew up in Quanzhou, Fujian. Fujian province is in southeast China, and Quanzhou is in the southeast coastal region of Fujian. Across the Strait, it is Taiwan. Quanzhou is the hometown for many Taiwanese. Since I was a child, I was well aware that my hometown and Taiwan have a strong connection. We are adjacent in geography, share the same blood and speak the same dialect: Minnan dialect. I also knew that though we were looking forward to see our relatives in Taiwan and they were also badly missing their hometowns, couldn't manage to see each other because of the tensions of cross-Strait relations. The Minnan dialect songs, the poems about hometowns, and the stories about families which were apart all fill me with passion for the island across the Strait. I like going to seaside, looking across the Strait and wondering what the other side of the Strait is like. I also hoped I could cross the Strait one day and have a look at the island that I always looking at.

Finally the chance came. In 2008, the policy relaxed so people could go through Mainland China and Taiwan with easier terms. In the summer of

2013, I went to

Taiwan for a six-day trip. Though it was not a long time, I felt how strongly I was connected to the island and how excited the Taiwanese were to meet people from their hometown, especially when I came across Mr. Chen in Yeliu Geopark on the northern coast.

Yeliu Geopark is a scenic spot which is famous for the special landform created by the erosive actions of waves and wind. Many rocks are in different shapes and most of them have names according to their shapes, such as "Queen's Head," "Fairy's Shoe" and "Sea Candles". It was noon when I arrived there. The sun was scorching and the temperature was high on a noon of July. There were not many tourists at that time, but I saw some people in uniforms. They were staff in the Geopark whose jobs were to remind tourists not to cross the security cordons. Mr. Chen was one of them. It was when I was taking photos of the "Queen's Head" that I met him.

"The photos you take in this position can't turn out well. See the footprint and red line on the boardwalk there? That is the best shooting angle." He suggested to me.

I had been too anxious to take photos and didn't notice the red line hinted for shooting. I thanked him and queued after some people behind the line. The photos took from this angle turned out to be very nice. I showed them to Mr. Chen happily.

"I said it." He smiled with pride. "Follow me, I'll show you something more special."

What can that be? I thought and walked after him with curiosity.

"Here we are. The beautiful flowers, you see? Take them home with your camera."

"Wow," I exclaimed, "that's really amazing!"

"Here," he said. I was busy taking photos of the flower when he pointed out another one. "One more," said he, "and here." I followed his suggestions and took photos one by one.

After I finished shooting all three, I asked, "what are they? Are they really flowers? I think they are something like fossils."

"Yes, you're right. These are fossils of sea urchins. Here used to be sea thousands of years ago."

I know that due to the crustal movement, some lands used to be sea millions of years ago. However, when I was standing at that spot, viewing those fossils so closely, I felt very impressed.

I was satisfied with my photos, thanked Mr. Chen again for his kind

guidance

and we started to chat.

“So, where are you from?” he asked.

Somehow I sensed that he was expecting to hear one place, and it was exactly what I said, “Quanzhou, Fujian.”

“Quanzhou. Oh, that’s my hometown,” his eyes widened, “these years many people from Fujian came to Taiwan for travel or visit relatives. I have met many people from our hometown.”

He then asked, “So you can speak Minnan dialect, right?” to which I answered, “of course.”

Then we naturally switched to talk in Minnan dialect immediately, a way both of us felt more comfortable. “When did you come to Taiwan?” I asked.

“Oh, it’s a long story,” he said.

“I’m all ears.” That was just what I was looking for – a person from my hometown with a story.

“Actually, I was born in Taiwan. It was my father who came from Quanzhou. He was a Kuomintang officer. You know, after the Chinese civil war, he retreated to Taiwan as other Kuomintans. Several years after, I was born. When I was still a child, my father told me that our hometown was on the other side of the Strait. In my memory, he often talked about how Quanzhou was, how it meant to him and how much he missed being there. We were all eager to go back to our hometown one day. But you know, the cross-Strait relation was so tense for so many years,’ he recalled.

That is a story similar to many others which I have heard from fellows at home. Those stories are all about family members being forced to part and people who retreated to Taiwan missing hometowns day and night. Mr. Chen’s father had similar situation as other people in stories. However, when I stood in front of Mr. Chen and heard him talking about his father, I felt as if I had known such an old man. I could sense his unwillingness to leave, his attachment to his hometown and his sadness of being away from home and not allowed to go back.

“The situation is getting better now, maybe you can pay a visit,” I

comforted him. “Yes, but not my father,” he said sadly, “all he had been looking forward to was

the opportunity to go back to his hometown. But he couldn’t wait until that day.”

My heart sank. I felt so sorry and sad for his father. I tried hard to contain my tears. I had heard some sad stories like this, but I had hoped Mr.

Chen's father could fulfill his wish.

We stood side by side, looking at the sea quietly.

"Just the Strait carries so many sad stories like this," I broke the silence after a while.

"So be it," he replied, half relieved and half helpless.

A breeze blew in from the Strait. Taking a deep breath, I felt as if I smelled the same scent as in my hometown. The distance is three hundred kilometers across the Strait. Not far, at all.

"Cross the Strait, come back home. Come back to Quanzhou, to visit the place where your father lived before. See things for him and tell him what our hometown is like today."

"I will. Some day I'm bound to go back," he replied determinedly.

Setting my sight again on the sea, I couldn't stop wondering. The Strait parts Fujian and Taiwan, or, looking at the bigger picture, mainland China and Taiwan. Due to historical and political reasons, people had been forbidden to cross the Strait and go to the opposite bank for several decades. Thus we can only look over the Strait and imagine the opposite bank instead of getting together. However, people on both sides of the Strait are all Chinese. The blood that flows in our bodies is the same. At that moment, standing on the land of Taiwan, I felt an invisible string that tied me to the opposite bank as well as a strong will of the two sides to get closer. It was the same feeling that I had when standing at the seaside in Quanzhou.

Now, I still like standing on the coast, staring above the enormous, crystal blue sea in front of me at the west side of the Taiwan Strait. I can't see the opposite bank, neither in Quanzhou nor in Taiwan. However, there is a strong connection between the two. We are all Chinese; we have the same blood; we share the same language and dialect; we are family. We speak and write in Chinese, and Taiwan still keeps the traditional Chinese characters now. We place great importance upon family history, which gives us identity and sense of belonging. Many Taiwanese are eager to trace their ancestors in Mainland China and many of them have succeeded. The Strait parts us, but at the same time, it witnesses how we are willing to get closer. Our origin, our passion, and our attachment all soak in the Strait. We are parted by the Strait physically, but we connect with each other culturally and emotionally. When I first arrived in Taiwan, I found that everything there is so amiable and felt that Taiwan is my second hometown. Not only because we share the same dialect and customs, but also because of our strong connection dating back to as early as the twelfth century.

Maybe we are powerless in the face of politics, but we will never forget where we come from and who we are, just like Mr. Chen and his father and many other people. There is always something deeper and profound in our heart, named home.