

NURSERY RHYMES, RITUALS, AND CULTURAL TRAUMA: A CONNOTATION OF “CHAIR MAIDEN” IN TAIWAN

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The purpose of this study is to analyze the custom of Chair Maiden, a child psychic divination ritual, through local records collected by folklorists in Taiwan since the 1930s. We suggest that the origin of this custom was to deal with collective traumas from similar experiences, mainly through rituals of warning and healing. To achieve self-healing, those participants who invoked the spirit of Chair Maiden also brought their personal traumatic experiences and confusions into the ritual activity, seeking recognition and answers. In Taiwan's rural towns, similar customs were practiced by young unmarried girls before the 1970s. There are five parts to the study. In the middle three parts, we conduct an inductive and qualitative analysis of the relevant rural stories, local nursery rhymes and ritual practices separately, using theories of cultural trauma. With a different attitude of resistance to power or abuse, the young participants were able to share their voices safely and have a friendly network for a reunion on certain days. Chair Maiden, not just a children's game or a folk psychic divination activity, represents collective traumatic injuries and hegemonic resistance among younger generations to release social pressure.

Keywords: Taiwan customs, nursery rhymes, divination activity, domestic violence, cultural trauma, cultural memory

1. Introduction

This paper explores the question of how a custom, Chair Maiden,¹ preserved and reflected a heartbreaking incident of child abuse in early Chinese society. It was

¹ In this study, we use the term “Chair Maiden” (椅仔姑 *yizigu*), which follows David Jordan's research in Taiwan during the 1960s. He mentioned that the more literary and more precise

performed on the fifteenth day of the first month (Shang Yuan Festival) or the eighth month (Mid-Autumn Festival),² which is an important full-moon night in spring and fall. Chair Maiden has its origins in a sad story about a three-year-old girl who finally died on a bamboo stool after a long period of domestic violence at the hands of her sister-in-law. The girl's spirit was tied to the stool with no other options. This story gradually became part of local rhymes and evolved into a way for children and unmarried people to divine after inviting the spirit of this legendary girl to be embedded in a bamboo chair. Chair Maiden was a popular ritual for psychic divination in Taiwan up until the 1960s and 1970s, particularly among young girls. According to the current collection of nursery rhymes in Minnan dialect, before formal divination, unmarried young participants in the ritual performed unique ritual practices to call "maiden" with these specific rhymes. Chair Maiden is also named differently as 關三姑 (*guansangu*) or 三歲姑 (*sansuigu*) to identify a girl's age of three.

Using local records collected by folklorists in Taiwan since the 1930s, we interpret the cultural trauma in multiple retrospective accounts from rural stories, local nursery rhymes, and ritual practices. Previous research suggests that Chair Maiden originated from the belief in the ancient toilet deity Zigu (紫姑) in China (Ikeda 1944, 227; Wu 1943a, 26–29). As we have observed, the belief in Zigu developed into two networks: one was the literary ritual of the gentry class, the so-called "spiritual writing,"³ and the other was the divination of the illiterate class, to which the Chair Maiden belongs. The earliest historical record about the goddess Zigu is from a novel *A Garden of Marvels* (異苑 *Yi yuan*) by Liu Jingshu (劉敬叔, ?–468). It is said that Zigu was a vice-wife/concubine of a family. She was despised by the head wife who used to abuse her and made her clean the toilet. Eventually, Zigu died of abuse on the fifteenth day of the first month, and since then people have been calling her spirit in the toilets or pigsties by making a doll of her on that day. After the Song Dynasty, the image of Zigu was transformed into at least three images such as a goddess of the underworld, a talented woman, and a female immortal (Chao 2008, 94; Chiu 2016, 82; Tao 2016, 54–55). No matter how much her identity changed, Zigu was still described as having a feminine appearance.

term is "lonely maiden" (孤娘 *guniang*), pronounced the same as the term for "young maiden" (姑娘 *guniang*), which refers to a girl who has died in childhood without being married. Having a deceased, maiden daughter is a disgrace to a family in Taiwanese custom. For further details, see chapter 8 in Jordan (1999).

² This custom in Tainan normally took place at the Shang Yuan Festival, according to "Events Calendar of Tainan I" (台南年中行事記 (上) *Tainan nenjū gyōjiki* (jō)) published in 1942. The event was usually held at the Shang Yuan Festival in Taichung and at the Mid-Autumn Festival in Changhua. See Liu (2011, 82).

³ About spiritual writings, see Jordan and Overmyer (1986, 36–88).

This type of female-driven divination is a model for vulnerable women seeking psychological comfort through the ritual process in a society of gender inequality (Xu 2006, 47; Lin 2011, 99).

With an obvious difference, the religious identity of Zigu was localized interestingly in Taiwan. According to the Japanese *Journal of Taiwan Customs* (台灣風俗誌 *Taiwan fuzokushi*), published in 1921, the process of Chair Maiden, namely *guansangu*, is briefly introduced without any information about ritual participants (Kataoka 1921, 845). During the 1930s and 1940s, several folklorists investigated the origins of Chair Maiden and its practicing status in different areas of the Taiwan island (Suzuki 1934; Ikeda 1941; Wu 1943b, 34). Suzuki gives us more details of the history, ritual procedure, and rhyming text of "Chair Maiden" (Suzuki 1934, 301–303). By likening it to a ritual function, Ikeda Toshio demonstrates that Chair Maiden not only came from Zigu, but was also similar to the divination game *kokkuri* (狐狗狸) in Japan (Ikeda 1941, 38).

The narrative context of Chair Maiden demonstrates a common tragedy with the lower social classes in the rural suburbs of Taiwan by presenting three disadvantaged groups: women, minors, and chronically abused individuals. Chair Maiden, in the form of a little girl, even became the patron saint of children. Some scholars also suggest that Chair Maiden is a remnant of a ritual in which under-age women were sacrificed for a good harvest (Chen 2004; Yang 2010). Even Liu (2016, 121) explores the idea that paying tribute to the unfortunate three-year-old sister-in-law is a kind of poignant legend that has been passed down through folklore and beliefs, made up by people to explain its origin. Therefore, whether Chair Maiden is an imitation of Zigu's beliefs or an inheritance of sacrificial rites, we believe that the ritual purpose of this case needs to be further explored.

We propose that Chair Maiden, not just a game for children or a folk activity of psychic divination, represents collective traumatic injuries and a kind of hegemonic resistance among younger generations to release social pressure. As with the mythic traditions in the case of Chair Maiden, we can see a similar linear development carrying voices from the ancient past to the present even across the strait between mainland China and Taiwan. In the following sections of this paper, we consider the ways in which tales and nursery rhymes carry and transport traumatic memories. By re-examining these narratives, which have been collected on Chair Maiden in previous studies, we first attempt to generalize the main appeal or commonality. This cultural phenomenon can be better understood in terms of social psychology. Drawing primarily on theories of cultural trauma, we therefore interpret nursery rhymes and rituals relevant to the theme of Chair Maiden.

Due to the limitations of the current literature and fieldwork, we have collected only Minnan texts for nursery rhymes without other dialectal versions in Taiwan, despite the fact that Hakka and Cantonese versions were also practiced in other

communities in China.⁴ This study hopes to show more memories of women's disadvantaged existence in oral literature. As one scholar reminds us, the exclusion of the lived experience of Taiwanese civil society outside of modernization, especially the lives of uneducated women, has been one of the shortcomings of colonial studies in Taiwan (Hong 2020, 179). Beyond the official records, we need to see more of the daily activities of women and children that have been less well documented and noticed. Traditional customs and songs as a supplement can provide more insight into the will to survive of these underprivileged. In the following parts, the custom of Chair Maiden will be analyzed through stories, nursery rhymes and the ritual itself, these three main aspects.

2. Who is "Chair Maiden": the story and its cautionary character

Japanese folklorists have collected many folk tales in various regions in Taiwan (Kataoka 1921; Suzuki 1941). Despite incomplete information, like an unknown place or the names of the characters in those stories, we see the basic plot of Chair Maiden in Taiwan, a three-year-old girl who suffered chronic abuse at the hands of her sister-in-law. Compared with the story of Zigu, it is the same domestic violence scenario, but the victims have changed from concubines in Zigu to more vulnerable children here. Eventually, it presents the historically disadvantaged position of Chinese women, particularly young girls in families. Even in the story of Zigu and Chair Maiden, both about women, age and power differentials can lead to the re-oppression of younger women by older women who have been oppressed in the past, not just patriarchal oppression of women.

Although there is no obvious difference in the stories of Chair Maiden from area to area, there are still a few points worth noting in the description. According to the folk tales collected by Chen Ching-hao and Wang Chiu-kui in Taiwan (1989), this little girl had a tragic experience before her death:

Chair Maiden, who lost her parents at the age of three, was raised by her brother but was always abused by her sister-in-law. She often ate cold food and had to do housework. Because the stove door was too high and she was small, she always had to squat on a stool to add wood to the fire. Her sister-in-law also insisted that the fire in the stove not be put out, so Chair Maiden had to stay by the stove all day. One night during the Shang Yuan Festival, her sister-in-law went out to watch the lantern festival. Chair Maiden was not allowed to leave the house. She stayed

⁴ Folklore surveys have shown that Chair Maiden was prevalent in the towns of Fujian and Guangdong, as well as in the Chinese communities of Malaysia and Taiwan. In Hakka villages, this custom is known as "Basket Maiden" (籃仔姑 *lan zigu*), and the ritual is to use a bamboo basket as a divination tool. See Shen and Shao (2007).

in front of the stove, facing the fire, and fell asleep, leaving the world in a beautiful dream with her mother.⁵

Another story about Chair Maiden has a similar plot, but has more details about the evil behavior and judgment of her sister-in-law:

After Chair Maiden was born, her parents died shortly after. She was abused by her sister-in-law. When she was only three years old, she had endless chores to do all day long. Once her sister-in-law branded her with fire for breaking a bowl. She died on the stool the next day. Her sister-in-law buried her body under the pig trough where the pigs ate food for fear of her being discovered missing. Later, her sister-in-law often saw the ghost of Chair Maiden sitting in front of the cooker or under the eaves and shaking. Soon after, she died of illness.⁶

From the above two examples, we see a powerless girl, without any dependable persons in her family, silently suffering domestic abuse. Such stories also indirectly illustrate the social status of girls before the middle of the twentieth century in Taiwan. In addition, folktales related to adopted girls or daughters-in-law often have the impression of abuse, reflecting people's collective sympathy and psychological compensation (Chen 2012). Modern experiments have confirmed that prolonged domestic violence at an early age affects physiological development. A smaller hippocampal volume in adult women with major depressive disorders was observed only in those who had a history of severe and prolonged physical and/or sexual abuse in childhood (Vythilingam et al. 2002). When these experiences of suffering were brought into the public discourse of storytelling, they provided collective and inherited memories, carrying what should be remembered as well as becoming a warning.

The story of Chair Maiden is therefore part of the social reality of an agrarian society that favored men over women. Family violence, a crisis of survival for minors, also has a long but obscure history. It forms a collective image of a disadvantaged group of girls in early Taiwan. Such a narrative of abuse told of an unchanging and deep cultural trauma through folk tales, nursery rhymes or

⁵ The original story in Chinese: "椅子姑，三歲喪父母，由哥哥撫養，卻受盡嫂嫂的虐待。她常吃冷飯殘羹，並得擔負全家勞動。燒火時，因灶門高，人矮小，不得不蹲在椅子上往灶裡添柴。嫂嫂又規定，灶裡的火苗不能熄滅，椅子姑只好終日守在灶邊。元宵節晚上，嫂嫂出去看熱鬧，卻不准她離家一步。椅子姑只好仍坐在灶前，面對著火苗，在灶前睡著了，並在夢見媽媽的美夢中離開了人間。" From Chen and Wang (1989, 68–69), cited in Liu (2011, 88–89).

⁶ The original story in Chinese: "椅仔姑生下不久便父母雙亡。兄嫂進門後被兄嫂虐待。她才三歲，成天便有做不完的家務。有一次因打破碗，嫂嫂用火燒烙她。隔天她就死在椅子上了。嫂嫂為了怕人發現她的罪行，就把小姑的屍體埋在豬吃食物的豬槽下方。後來嫂嫂就常看到，椅子姑的鬼魂坐在爐灶前或屋簷下搖晃著。不久，嫂嫂也就因病而死了。" From Hu and Chen (2001, 84–95), cited in Liu (2011, 88–89).

ritual ways. This is also the case for those who accumulate resentment from oppressed groups because of events such as genocide and catastrophic tragedies, as they develop their own collective consciousness and identity. Over the last two decades, cultural sociologists have elaborated on cultural trauma in terms of collective memory and identity, starting from the suffering experiences of oppressed and oppressed African-American individuals and their communities (Alexander 2004; Caruth 1996; Eyerman 2019). Since cultural trauma comes from a variety of sources, more than one way of interpreting what trauma looks like can be observed. In the case of Chair Maiden, it became a process of trauma healing and of vigilance when a traumatic story is told.

3. "Chair Maiden" in local nursery rhymes

During the Chair Maiden ritual process, the singing of nursery rhymes is an essential moment for participants to bond and then make a connection between the real world and the spiritual world. The content of the nursery rhymes, an important basis of the ritual, conveys the state of mind and the wishes of participants. We abridge two nursery rhyme texts from the collection of Minnan language songs in Yunlin, a central part of Taiwan. The lyrics in translation are as follows:

Three-year-old maiden and four-year-old sister.
Lotus flower embroidered words.
You're three years old, Maiden.
You're wearing a white shirt and a black collar.
I'll share good food with you.
It's better to share with you.
Kissing and kissing vines.
The vines are white and white.
A path leads to Nai-Ho
to the bridge of Nai-Ho
My feet and hands are shaking now.⁷

⁷ The original rhyme in the Chinese and Minnan language is:

三歲姑四歲姐 *Sann-hoe ko, si-hoe ji*
金蓮花繡言語 *Kim-lian-hoe, siu-gian-gu*
言語過 姑仔今年你三歲 *Gian-gu koe, ko-a kin-ni li sann-hoe*
穿白衫 烏領腔 *Chheng peh-sa, o-nia khng*
好食分你食 *Ho-chiah pun li chiah*
分你姑仔較是親 *Pun li ko-a khah-si chhin*
親啊親親茗藤 *Chhin-a-chhin, chhin eng-tin*
著藤白波波 *Chhioh-tin peh-pho-pho*
一條小路過奈何 *Chit-tiau sio-lo kue Nai-ho*

The sky is clear and the earth is so bright.
 Please come out, three-year-old Maiden.
 There are flowers and powder in front of you.
 There's also betel nut heart, Ganoderma leaves, and vines.
 It doesn't matter if it's you or me.
 Sharing with our three-year-old Maiden is because we are closer.⁸

One has to recite simple prayers when greeting Zigu (Tao 2017, 59–60). Chen (2004, 143) also called these rhymes “spell songs” (訣術歌謠 *jueshu geyao*), meaning songs with mnemonic and magical power. Nursery rhymes can be used as a subtle form of communication when combined with games or simple rhythms. In contrast to written communication, nursery rhymes gather more knowledge from the bottom up through oral communication. More specifically, these nursery rhymes convey ideas and even sympathy for those children who have also experienced abuse in simple words, while preserving the underlying clues. Nursery rhymes are not only the most traditional form of preschool education but also an important link in the transmission of values and virtues between generations. In addition, children's rhymes often preserve references to cultural entities that have disappeared from contemporary life (Arleo 1997, 399). In other words, rhymes provide transitions to “teachable moments” in children's daily environments (Mullen 2017, 46).

Another kind of resonance is realized through the lyrics of nursery rhymes. From the above two parts of the rhyme lyrics, the most important concept is to make a family out of a three-year-old Maiden by sharing food. In the process of singing, there is an emphasis on the fact that the participants are not separate from each other. This functions as a gathering power, they accompany the three-year-old Maiden during singing in order to focus the main will of the participants. Language play contributes to children's emotional development. Nursery rhymes can serve as a tool to teach children about feelings. Children who have strong, positive relationships with their primary caregivers also experience a world in

行到奈何橋 *Kiann kau Nai-ho-kiau*

腳亦搖手亦搖 *Khak-ia-io chhiu-ia-io*

The rhyme is collected in Hu and Chen (2001, 56).

- ⁸ The original rhyme in the Chinese and Minnan language is:
 天清地靈靈 *Thian-chheng-chheng, te-leng-leng*
 請您三歲姑出頭前 *Chhia lin Sann-hoe-ko chhut-thau-cheng*
 頭前亦有花亦有粉 *Thau-cheng ia-u hoe ia-u hun*
 亦有檳榔心芝葉藤 *La-u pin-nng-sim chi-hiooh-tin*
 毋分他 毋分您 *Bo-hun, bo-hun lin*
 分阮三姑有較親 *Hun gun Sann-ko u-khah chhin*
 The rhyme is collected in Hu (1996, 118).

which their needs are valued, so they can become equipped to show empathy to others (Mullen 2017, 51–52). This kind of sympathy is strengthened by the annual group singing. Reading through the nursery rhymes of Chair Maiden, there is no obvious expression of resistance to power. Instead, these lyrics show the power of acceptance in sharing food together.

Following Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, the speech act is a crucial method for reconstructing traumatic experiences. He focuses on the ways in which trauma becomes and remains public through the mediation and interpretation of trauma by political actors and the mass media (Alexander 2004, 11–12). In this sense, such narratives of suffering in the name of trauma should be neither personal nor individual, but instead shared, collective and communicative. Eyerman (2019, 25) defines cultural trauma as "the memories of a shared past that are passed on through ongoing processes of commemoration." He points out that cultural trauma is a symbolic narrative that reflects the collective consciousness of society, which may include factors such as (1) timing, (2) the political context, (3) how authority is exercised, (4) the content of mass-mediated representations, and (5) the presence and performance of carrier groups (Eyerman 2019, 6).

Nursery rhymes are symbolic narratives with a satirical function, so through rhyming and singing, ceremonies and rituals, narratives, and storytelling about what and how such a violent event in history had happened and how it had affected their communities. Memories can be deeply social in the sense that they are shaped by our interactions with the people, objects, and institutions that make up society, without necessarily being widely shared (Sutton 2008, 158). However, cultural trauma as a collective memory was to be evoked and conjured in the service of formulating an identity. As a result, a set of fixed rituals becomes an outlet for collective cultural trauma.

This kind of cultural trauma was often characterized not only through folklore rhyming and chanting as rituals, but also in literature. Lucy Brisley (2015) elaborates on the Francophone postcolonial experience, arguing that while the rituals of mourning and invoking suffering spirits were meant for the absent narratives of the oppressed in history, the victims were able to speak for themselves in the emergence of folk songs and rhymes. James Mellis (2019) points out how fictive literature could also narrate the African American suffering experiences based on their spiritual traditions such as conjuring voodoo, and hoodoo spirits. The nuanced distinction between fiction and non-fiction narratives of trauma should be delicate and sophisticated, yet both serve the formulation and formation of collective memory and identity.

4. Contextualizing the ritual of “Chair Maiden”

Chair Maiden had survived not only because of stories or nursery rhymes, but above all because of a traditional divination ritual. The practice revolved around young girls singing and holding a four-legged bamboo stool in their hands. In some cases of this custom in Lugang, Taiwan, bamboo baskets were used for divination, therefore, one scholar in Taiwan theorizes that this custom was a common form of artefact worship (Chien 2011, 23). We have seen, however, that Chair Maiden was often used in Taiwan’s ritual practices with a bamboo stool, which was an ordinary piece of furniture in Taiwanese homes. During the divination stage, the questions asked are usually based on the privacy of the main participant, such as their age or month of birth. Further questions would then progressively ask the participants about their concerns. The response from the bamboo stool as answers are simply expressed in terms of “yes” or “no,” or are answered by the number of times the bamboo chair is struck.

Through the accounts of some folklore surveys, such as *Journal of Taiwan Customs* (1921), the general course of the ceremony was as follows:

First, a chair is placed in the center of the hall and covered with clothes or cloth, then several people surround the chair and offer scissors, ruler, powder, rouge, and flowers. During the burning of gold paper and incense, everyone chants a mantra together, and then the center of the chair vibrates. Those standing around can ask about the year’s abundance of good or bad, whether the disease is cured or not, whether there will be loss of money, whether to travel, the age of the people around and so on. If the chair answers that the disease is cured, the legs of the chair will vibrate.⁹

Another text recorded by the historian Lien Heng (1878–1936) also mentions that there was a ceremonial taboo during the ritual process of calling Chair Maiden:

On the eve of the Mid-Autumn Festival, children gathered in the courtyard. Two of them would hold a bamboo chair, cover it with a woman’s dress, put it in a bun, prepare mirrors, flowers and rice, and knives and rulers, burn incense and paper, and recite incantations to greet the “Zigu” (the so-called “Chair Maiden” in Taiwan). When they arrive, their chairs

⁹ The original text in Chinese is:

所謂椅仔姑, 是在陰曆八月十五日夜晚進行的, 先把一張椅子擺在廳堂中央, 在椅子上用衣服或布覆蓋起來, 然後幾個人圍著椅子, 旁邊供奉著剪刀、尺、白粉、胭脂、鮮花等東西, 並且燒金紙和線香, 大家一起唸唱咒文, 這時中央的椅子便會震動起來, 站在周圍的人就可問年的豐凶、事的好壞、疾病的痊癒與否、失財與否、旅遊可否、周圍人的年齡等等。如果椅子姑回答疾病可以痊癒, 那椅腳就會震動一下。

will move, and they will answer any questions about good or bad luck.
If you hear the voice of your sister-in-law, the god will suddenly stop.¹⁰

The above description shows the separation of the same gender but different generations in this ritual. As the legendary sister-in-law is taboo in the ritual, the presence of an elderly woman in the ritual may interrupt the divination or cause it to malfunction. This reflects the fact that the older generation is not welcome to see or participate in it. Young participants usually prepare a rice spoon to dress up as a female figure to invoke spirits before the calling. Similarly, in ancient Europe, folks used to tie grains into female figures, known as Corn Mother and Corn Maiden or boudoir brides, as a symbol of fertility and to pray for a good harvest (Frazer 1922). Because of the similarity of this process, some scholars have suggested that Chair Maiden has the same ritual purpose or even an extended transformation of the living sacrifices (Chen 2004; Yang 2010). Corn Maiden in Europe was a springtime custom of the peasantry, there were no obvious restrictions on the performers and participants of the ritual. Therefore, the biggest difference between the two customs of Corn and Chair Maiden lies in the identity of the participants.

In the field of cultural anthropology, there are still associations of power and status when it comes to chairs. Different materials and uses of chairs also depict different identities. Interestingly, the ancient Chinese customs preferred people to kneeling-sitting position on mats to limit their spontaneous movement in group circumstances. In contrast, it seemingly offered greater room for freedom and individuality while sitting in chairs and stools in Western cultures (Wu 1973). In the case of Chair Maiden, thrones were potent symbols of authority, while bamboo chairs, more precisely "stools" without any support for the back or arms, are substitutes of plebeian life, which were accessible furniture in common families in the south of China and even in Taiwan. Short stools appear in daily life with people doing crafts or temporary rests. In contrast to the literary model of spiritual writings, a chair as a ritual game reflects one of the characteristic pieces of evidence for the participation of the underage illiterate group in the activity. Also unlike the mode of spirit-medium through a physical body as *danggi* in Taiwan (Chao 2002),¹¹ Chair Maiden is much closer to a Ouija board, which is normally used by two or more participants who place their hands lightly on top of a triangular

¹⁰ The original text in Chinese is:

中秋之夕，小兒女集庭中。兩人扶一竹椅，上覆女衣一襲，裝義髻，備鏡奩、花米、刀尺之屬，焚香燒紙，口念咒語，以迓「紫姑」（臺人謂之「椅仔姑」）。至則其椅能動，問以吉凶則答。如聞呼嫂聲，則神忽止。

¹¹ According to Chao's study, *danggi*, also expressed as *jitong* (乩童) in Mandarin, is the Taiwanese term for a type of spirit medium who acts as a mouthpiece for the deity that possesses him or her.

planchette (Andersen et al. 2019). By conjuring “someone” with an object (Soong 2001; Soong 2010; Soong 2014), the spirit that had suffered traumatic experiences in history was to reappear with the absent object (in the case of Chair Maiden, it was the chair).

Participants show fear and anticipation of the unknown during the ceremony. They prepare offerings of female symbols such as rouge and flower to welcome the spirit of the chair, while the crowd chants a song repeatedly until the bamboo chair is animated. To ensure that it is the spirit of the chair and not some other spirit, the authenticity of the spirit will be verified through a question-and-answer session. Most of the divination activities of the world’s peoples have evolved from divination for the group to divination for the individual. The function of the former is to unify the views of the group to support the effectiveness of the social system. The latter, on the other hand, focuses on removing personal doubts and soothing anxiety (Lee 1978). The theater and performance scholar Rossella Ferrari (2020, 212) reports from the East Asian colonial experience that the staging of ‘ghostly’ testimonies of traumatic experiences not only compelled the testimony of past suffering but also disrupted the colonial authority’s determination of present and future narratives, while reshaping the authentic voice of the victims.

Rituals often play the role of handling human affairs and relations while securing and renovating structural and hierarchical orders. By means of rituals and customs, the senior members of the group take responsibility for maintaining the sustainability of their society. In contrast, the juniors, with less understanding of how such rituals and customs apply to society, are unsatisfied with the seniors keeping rituals and customs that were rather “out of fashion” in times of change. Collective representations are “the result of an extensive process of collaboration with a temporal and not only a spatial dimension” (Durkheim et al. 1980). Following the Durkheimian understanding of “organic solidarity,” rituals are seen as a way of encapsulating the collective memory and consensus of the community (Greenwald 1973; Stephenson 2015; Ptacek 2015).

Through rhymes, chants, incantations, and cults, the memories of ancestral communities were spoken and preserved in verbal and non-verbal forms of performance. These forms are even more vital and valuable than the erection of monuments of trauma. For communities that had suffered oppression, such rhymes and lyrics were meant to retell the stories of their suffering ancestors and thus comfort their cultural trauma. Victor Turner (1969) has pointed out that ritual functions socially as a symbolic interaction of individuals and communities, whereas in a historical dimension, rituals play the interfacial and liminal role of exchanging and consolidating communal values, codes, and habits, to resist the structural authority of political oppression. In other words, such rituals represented those who had experienced domestic and state violence. Through the repetition

of songs and the collective mode of sharing during the ceremony, some wounds in the past, in the deeper mind, can be seen and healed in public.

From the perspective of ritual functions, Chair Maiden presents a correct model of self-identification. In this case, firstly, a ritual provides another specific collectivity with which to identify. Secondly, it can provide functional roles that satisfy an individual's core identity or self. Thirdly, it can provide status, both through simple membership and through the provision of specific roles to be played at certain times of the year. Finally, it can provide a sense of inner strength that enables individuals to cope with their increasingly complex lives in an increasingly complex and postmodern Taiwan (Katz and Rubinstein 2003, 13). Chair Maiden is a sympathetic ritual but powerful enough to heal the wounds of participants at the same time. The annihilation of experience at the core of what we think of as personal trauma is never entirely divorced from larger social and political modes of denial (Caruth 2016, 111). As a ritual practice for unmarried girls, we believe that Chair Maiden would fulfill these religious functions and transform a platform for the communication of potential grief and trauma for participants.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to convey the custom of Chair Maiden through the local records in Taiwan. We conduct an inductive and qualitative analysis of the related rural tales, local nursery rhymes, and ritual practices. Situating the discussion into the holistic social and environmental systems, we see the evolution of the ritual Chair Maiden being localized in Taiwan. Analyzed through the lens of cultural trauma, we believe that Chair Maiden is more than just the game that Japanese scholars thought it was.

We consider this special religious phenomenon as well as its historical context. Chair Maiden shows the collective image of an underprivileged group of girls in Taiwan before the 1970s. Like the mythic traditions in the case of Chair Maiden, we can see a similar linear development carrying voices from the ancient past to the present even across the strait between mainland China and Taiwan. Therefore, perhaps in remembrance of the deceased, to achieve self-healing, those participants who called upon the Chair Maiden's spirit also brought their personal traumatic experiences and confusions into the ritual activity, seeking recognition and answers. With a different attitude of resistance to power or abuse, the young participants were able to share their voices safely and have a friendly network for a reunion on certain days.

To conclude this chapter, Chair Maiden, a memory of a death ritual in Taiwan, covered some traumatic experiences, but dealt with them in a positive way. Fortunately, some of the oral literature has been preserved, and one can learn

more about the religious entertainment and healing methods of early Taiwanese women. Through the three interfaces of stories, rhymes, and rituals, a collective pain was transmitted from generation to generation. We observe in the ritual a resistance to the prohibition of adult participation, and a tenderness towards the vulnerable. It is hoped that through the discovery and collection of multilingual texts, further comparative analyses can be carried out by future scholars.

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