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The Phantom Slasher of Taipei: Mass Hysteria in a Non-Western Society

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of any of its natural body functions, why do you need separate toilets? Thus, even the physical ecology of the nudist camp is designed in a way that will be consistent with the organization's definition of modesty.

CONSEQUENCES OF A BREAKDOWN IN CLOTHING MODESTY

In the introductory section of this paper it was stated that common-sense actors anticipate breakdowns in clothing modesty to result in rampant sexual interest, promiscuity, embarrassment, jealousy, and shame. The field work and interview data from this study, however, indicate that such occurrences are not common to the nudist camp. The social organization of the nudist camp provides a system of meanings and norms which negate these consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results make possible some general conclusions regarding modesty: (1) Covering the body through the use of clothes is not a necessary condition for a pattern of modesty to exist, nor it is required for tension management and social control of latent sexual interests. Sexual interests are

very adequately controlled in the nudist camp experiment; in fact, those who have visited nudist camps agree that sexual interests are controlled to a much greater extent than they are on the outside. Clothes are also not a sufficient condition for a pattern of modesty; the manipulation of clothes and fashion in stimulating sexual interest is widely recognized. (2) Except for clothing immodesty, which represents one cell of our typology of immodesty, all other forms of modesty are maintained in a nudist camp (e.g., not looking, not saying, not communicating erotic overtures). This suggests that the latter proscriptions are entirely adequate in achieving the functions of modesty when definitions regarding the exposure of the body are changed. (3) When deviance from the institutionalized patterns of modesty is limited to one cell of our typology, (i.e., clothing is dispensed with), and the definition of the situation is changed, the typically expected consequence of such a breakdown in this normative pattern does not occur. Rampant sexual interest, promiscuity, embarrassment, jealousy, and shame were not found to be typical of the nudist camp.

THE PHANTOM SLASHER OF TAIPEI: MASS HYSTERIA IN A NON-WESTERN SOCIETY

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I

Description and analysis of instances of mass hysteria have been well documented in western societies.¹ Do such

affairs also occur in non-western societies and, if so, are they different from their counterparts in western society?

While I was teaching in a university in the city of Taipei, Taiwan (Formosa), China, during 1956 an instance of mass hysteria occurred. Although, for political reasons (to be discussed

¹ See, for example, Donald M. Johnson, "The Phantom Anesthetist of Matoon: A Field Study of Mass Hysteria," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XL (April 1945), pp. 175-186.

subsequently), I was prevented from interviewing the major participants and gaining the necessary information upon which to make a personal, psychological field study as, for example, Johnson was able to do, I was able to follow the affair carefully in the daily press and to discuss the affair in sociologically meaningful terms with many individuals in the local society. Consequently, although I concede obvious limitations, I feel the case study adds something to the general literature on mass hysteria.

The narrative of the case study follows the affair as it was unfolded in the local press. I have selected three newspapers, each of which is representative of a particular point of view (to be discussed in the conclusions); namely, the (Chinese) vernacular *China Daily News*, the English language daily *China Post* (both published in Taipei) and the Hong Kong *Tiger Standard*, an English language daily printed in that city but distributed among non- and anti-Communist Chinese throughout Southeast Asia, including Taiwan.

II

The incident made the press on May 4, 1956 with a simultaneous announcement in many Taipei city newspapers that a number of children of both sexes from the ages of six months to eight years had been the victims of slashings with what appeared to be razor blades or similar weapons. The slashings apparently has been occurring for a considerable time prior to the May 4 report date, although the newspapers did not agree as to precisely when the first case had happened. Claims ran from as late as about a month previous² to as early as three months previous³ to May.

The newspapers clearly differentia-

ted between those cases based upon hard evidence and those cases which had been reported without supporting evidence, although the number of alleged authenticated cases varied from a low of eight⁴ to a high of more than thirty.⁵ The slashings were reported as having occurred to various parts of the body and under varied social circumstances. For example, one account described a youngster being cut on the left arm while he was being carried, Chinese style, on the back of his mother. Another report described the infliction of two cuts on the back of a hand and one on a shin while one child was waiting to board a public bus. A gash across the back (interestingly, reported elsewhere as across the head⁸) was stated to have occurred to a child playing in the vicinity of its home. Even a case of castration, resulting in the death of a victim, was recorded.⁹

There was general agreement that the attacks had originated in a single district in the northwest sector of the city, although one newspaper claimed that incidents also had occurred elsewhere in the city further to the east and south.¹⁰ There was some disagreement as to who first reported the incidents to the proper authorities, i.e., the municipal police. Although the papers agreed that attending physicians in hospitals and eager reporters were the primary source, it was disputed whether or not any of the parents of the victims had added to that knowledge. One paper suggested that parents would not readily report a case since this would be an admission of carelessness on their part, with a consequent loss of prestige (or

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *China Post*, May 4, 1956.

⁶ *China Daily News* and *China Post*, May 4, 1956.

⁷ *Hong Kong Standard*, May 4, 1956.

⁸ *China Post*, May 4, 1956.

⁹ *China Post* and *Hong Kong Standard*, May 4, 1956.

¹⁰ *China Post*, May 4, 1956.

² *China Post*, May 4, 1956.

³ *China Daily News*, May 4, 1956.

"face"), a serious matter in China.¹¹

Opinions varied on the reasons for the slashings. In addition to the obvious possibility of sex sadism, certain unusual reasons were advanced: for example, to facilitate theft by drawing the attention of potential victims away from the true motive of the offenders, since loss of bracelets and other articles were reported to have accompanied the infliction of the cuts in several cases.¹² One source offered the possibility of blood ritual. This apparently was prompted by the old local superstition that the drawing of blood from a given number of small children brings good luck.¹³

Who had committed such foul deeds? Neither the parents, the victims, or anyone else for that matter, was able to offer any positive identification. The interviewed talked vaguely of a "teenager with a sad smile" and "suspicious looking men and women" as having been "around" at the time of the incidents. But since all the victims under questioning admitted that they had not actually seen the slashings being inflicted, they were unable to state positively who the slashers might be.

By the morning of May 3, the police considered the affair serious enough to investigate it formally, which brought the matter to the attention of the press. Hence the first newspaper report on May 4. The Director of the Taipei City Police Bureau charged the Director of the (Northwest) Sub Police Bureau to carry out a thorough investigation and to make every effort to apprehend the unknown slasher or slashers. The effort was to be pursued around the clock, an approach, the press noted, that was very unusual for such a matter. The police requested the press to caution the populace

not to believe unfounded stories and to reserve judgement until an official report could be made on the case. Nevertheless the press reported that the people were aroused over the incidents and that children were being kept indoors as a self-protective measure.¹⁴

On the morning of May 3 the police found a "hysterical" woman with knife in hand wandering about in the center of the city. When the police questioned her, she claimed that she carried the knife for self-defense because she recently had been in an argument with a pedicab driver who had threatened to beat her. Her neighbors corroborated her story. However, since the woman was an aboriginal Taiwanese from a tribe which, in the good old days before "pacification," had been noted for head-hunting and other strange ways that *might* conceivably have included blood ritual (which had been suggested as a possible motive for the slashings), the police held her for further questioning.¹⁵

The next day, May 4 (as recorded in the press on May 5), an incident was reported outside the northwest sector of the city. An eleven year old in the southern part of the city reported receiving a cut on his left arm without knowing how or when it had been inflicted. In addition, a two-year-old boy, the son of a farmer, living in a northern suburb of Taipei also was reported as cut in the leg while playing in the front of his house. Stories of widespread slashings at a number of girls' primary schools around the city were claimed, but the police could only authenticate one case. It was obvious that parents were becoming more and more nervous over the safety of their children. The smaller ones increasingly were being kept indoors, while those of school age were being accompanied to and from school by

¹¹ Compare the China Post and the China Daily News, May 4, 1956.

¹² China Post, May 4, 1956.

¹³ Hong Kong Standard and China Post, May 4, 1956.

¹⁴ China Daily News, May 4, 1956.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

adults.¹⁶ In consequence, the newspapers were asked by the Director of the Taipei Bureau of Education to record that he had sent an investigator to the various primary schools in the city who had reported that very few students were absent from class and that nervous parents should not believe rumors that the schools were being emptied of pupils and thus add to the hysteria by removing their youngsters from school.

The police became more active in the affair with the entrance of the *Provincial* (Taiwan) Department of Police, and especially of its Criminal Investigation Division (CID) into the case. These agencies appealed to the populace to remain calm, assuring the people that all the victims were being visited and questioned carefully and that a full report would be issued shortly. The police were visibly annoyed at what were referred to as "unfounded rumors and absurd stories" built upon the superstitions of ignorant people who were spreading ridiculous stories in the streets. The police chief himself called in the members of the press and demanded that they "clarify" the previous day's claim that some of the victims had died. But, when questioned, the chief refused to state officially that deaths had not occurred. Police service was increased with the dispatch of a number of plain-clothes detectives to market places, theaters, schools and other such places where numbers of people congregated and which conceivably might be tempting to the slashers,¹⁷ and six mobile police jeeps were ordered out on a constant alert throughout the city.¹⁸ The Taipei City Council discussed the incidents and passed a resolution to urge the harassed police authorities to "solve the mystery as soon as possible."

Two aspects of press reportage of

this date are worth noting. First, the vernacular press referred to the affair as a "terror," but the English language press did not. The paper far removed from the location persisted in its claim that all victims had died, in spite of local press coverage to the contrary. Second, the pictures of the victims appeared for the first time on this date in the English language press, while the Chinese press had published portraits in its columns the previous day. And to sum the progress of the affair on this date, new incidents were being reported now throughout the city and even in the suburbs and various authorities up to the provincial level were becoming interested and involved in the affair.

May 5 (reported in the press on May 6) may be characterized as a day of government discussion, reports, and action. The Commissioner of the Provincial Police Department met with the mayor of Taipei. As a result of this meeting, the mayor appropriated Taiwan \$10,000 (then approximately U.S. \$250) as an extra fund for use of the city police to carry out its investigation.¹⁹ The Chief Public Prosecutor of the Taiwan Supreme Court held a conference with the Taipei City Police Commissioner. It was decided at this meeting that the police would report all cases immediately to the Prosecutor's office for further investigation.²⁰ The chief of the city police, who had been engaging in an intensive inquiry of the affair for the previous few days, made public the results and conclusions of his study. He emphasized that he was aware of the necessity of investigating all reports of slashings as soon as possible and that his office was hard at work to this end. But after close examination and investigation, he could report that a number of alleged cases were due to accident, innocent misrepresentation or deliberate hoax.

¹⁶ China Post, May 5, 1956.

¹⁷ China Daily News, May 5, 1956.

¹⁸ Hong Kong Standard, May 5, 1956.

¹⁹ China Post, May 6, 1956.

²⁰ China Daily News, May 6, 1956.

For example, it had been proven beyond doubt that the cuts of three of the children had been due to objects other than that of a razor; namely, a silver pin, a twig, and a tin plate respectively. That is, objects children were apt to be cut with while at play. He also pointed out that most of the wounds reported in this and in other cases were on exposed parts of the body, especially the hands, legs and faces, also to be expected of children at play. However, he did admit that there still were under investigation ten cases of alleged slashing for which no adequate explanation could be given at that time. Of the cases attributable to deliberate falsification, one example was the case reported on the previous day involving the seventeen-year-old male which proved to be an instance of a self-inflicted injury while resting an elbow on a piece of broken counter-glass. Rather than face a mother's admonition for carelessness, the youth, impressed by the affair, had reported the source as a razor slash. However, someone who had seen the cutting taking place, reported the facts to the police when he read the false account in the newspapers. (Presumably the police hoped that this would encourage similar reactions in the future.) It is interesting to note that although the tale obviously was false and the boy was fined for falsely reporting a crime, the newspapers, along with the official version, once again presented an account of the lad explaining how he had suffered the injury, with appropriate photos!

An obvious case of innocent misrepresentation due to hyper-suggestibility was the case of a middle-aged man who had reported to a doctor that he had been slashed by a male of about thirty years who was carrying a mysterious black bag. The doctor who examined the wound concluded that it had been caused by some dull object and could not possibly have been the result of a razor slash. Under in-

tensive questioning the victim admitted he did not know how or when the cut had been made but he had assumed it had been by a razor because of all the talk going around about razor slashings. Also reported was a case of a boy who had been reported by a neighbor as having been slashed by a razor while at play. When the police arrived, the mother of the boy supported the razor story of the neighbor, embellishing it considerably. When, upon intensive examination, it was proven that the boy inadvertently had been cut by a waste can, the mother was forced to admit the hoax. The Commissioner also described the case of an old man who came to a doctor with a bleeding wrist. The man was advised by the doctor to report the case to the police after the man casually mentioned that a suspicious stranger had touched him about the time that the bleeding began. The police, upon examination of the victim, concluded that the wound in fact was an old one that had probably opened by innocently scratching it. Finally, a report was made on a waste collector who had been dragging a cart containing a crying girl. The people in the vicinity immediately assumed that she was a razor victim and the man was the much sought after slasher. They hauled the man, the girl, and the cart to the police station. The man readily admitted that the child was not his and that he had picked her off the street, but he vehemently denied that he had done any bodily harm to her. It appeared that the police once again had lost a potential suspect in the razor case, although it had obtained custody of a kidnapper who might otherwise have escaped the law but for the public's concern over the razor affair.

In concluding his report, the Commissioner promised continued vigilance, but in the light of his disclosures, he suggested that the people were being unnecessarily frightened by

baseless stories and he cautioned them about spreading false rumors which might add to the hysteria.²¹ He hinted that certain mysterious rascals might be behind all these happenings, perhaps even Communist agents who might be trying to create an atmosphere of confusion and uneasiness in connection with the (Communist) May Day season. Yes, it was true that ten suspects were taken into custody that very day, including some who were found to have razors on their person, but it was wrong to assume that any necessary connection existed between this fact and the still unsolved razor cases.²² Nor, he stated, were these arrests to be connected with the case of an eleven-year-old girl in the city of Keelung (forty miles north of Taipei) who had been reported as being wounded in both legs soon after a man who had been hanging around her for a while passed her very closely. It was true that the man had been described in great detail, but the case was still being investigated.²³ It is to be noted that in spite of a decline in the number of reported cases on this date and the official police report, the local English language press for the first time referred to the affair as a "terror," following the vernacular press in this description by one day.²⁴

On May 6 (as presented in the press on May 7), the police were able to report that an alleged cutting on May 3 had been disproved as the result of an on-the-spot investigation. The victim, an eight-year-old girl, in fact had only suffered a bruise on her ankle which she had acquired while playing with an iron rod in her father's shop.²⁵ The publication of this and other investigations, however, apparently had not dampened down the affair. Three new cases claimed to have taken

place in Keelung on May 5 were brought to the attention of the police officially on this date. Three youngsters individually asserted that they had received razor-blade cuts from assailants unknown while on the way home from school. The police, as usual, promised to check out the reports.²⁶

A bizarre incident occurred on May 6. Sometime during the very early hours of the morning, a pedicab driver who resided in the northwest district of the city where the first incidents had been reported noticed, upon arising to go to work, a sheet of Chinese style letter paper fastened to the wall of his house. Scrawled in blue ink across the top of the paper was a representation of the pirate skull and crossbones with a legend (in Chinese) "A notice—a good knife." The driver's first reaction to the paper was that it was part of a practical joke played on him by his granddaughter. But upon learning of her innocence, he reported the incident to the police, thinking, perhaps, that it was connected with the razor incidents he had been hearing so much about. The police refused comment, pending investigation.²⁷

The Chief Prosecutor of the Taiwan Supreme Court continued to be active in the case. He ordered ". . . the police and court authorities *all over the island* (my italics) to conduct an extensive and thorough investigation into alleged cuts inflicted by unknown assailants on young victims from unknown motives." Though the incidents seem to have been more or less contained to certain areas of Taipei and Keelung, news and rumors of incidents apparently had brought "terror" to communities all over the island. Hence, the Chief Prosecutor urged the people not to get excited, and to await the presentation of the facts by the authorities.²⁸

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² China Post, May 6, 1956.

²³ China Daily News, May 6, 1956.

²⁴ China Post, May 6, 1956.

²⁵ China Post, May 7, 1956.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ China Daily News, May 7, 1956.

²⁸ China Post, May 7, 1956.

In the May 8 press, it was reported that the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Section and the Deputy Director of the Taiwan Police Department had held a news conference the previous evening at nine o'clock. The two officials stated that, as of that date, only twenty-one authenticated reports of slashings had occurred, regardless of the recording of "scores" of slashings in the press. Of these twenty-one cases, seventeen had originated in Taipei, one in a suburb (Peitou), and three in Keelung. Of all these, five already had been proven false (and so reported in the press) and seven more now could be reported as false. Of the remaining, one individual could not be located and doubt was expressed as to his very existence let alone his slashing and eight still were under investigation. Of the seven cases that now could be reported as false, the alleged razor assaults, as in other cases, had been found to be the result of such causes as cuts while playing or self-inflicted wounds on glass.²⁹ As the lesson to be learned from the affair, the officials suggested that the press be more responsible in its reporting so as not to create "uneasiness" in the minds of the public. The officers revealed that the seventeen-year-old youth who had previously been reported on had been turned over to the Taipei District Court for prosecution according to that section of the criminal code which applied to the spreading of rumors under conditions of martial law, a very serious offense in wartime Taiwan.³⁰

The vernacular press of May 9 described a May 8 police report of a second strange note incident. It seems that the day before (May 7) the police were attracted by a crowd reading a note attached to the fence of a house. The note contained a drawing of three

pairs of knives, each pair in the shape of a cross, followed by a signature and an address in the city of Keelung. The police became aware of the presence of a suspicious looking youth loitering about. In the course of interviewing the boy, his family, and his teacher, the police discovered that the boy's handwriting matched that on the note. Confronted with this evidence, the youth broke down and admitted his crime, stating that he had written the note in order to avenge an insult. The name on the note was that of an acquaintance with whom he had quarreled while playing cards and whom he hoped to involve with the authorities through the latter's interest in the razor cases. It may be noted that all the May 8 press coverage was that of the vernacular press alone.³¹

No further mention of the affair occurred in any newspaper until May 12. On that date it was reported that a spokesman of the Provincial Police Department had announced the previous day that, as a result of a thorough investigation, all twenty-one cases reported officially to the police had been proven false. Of these cases, five were innocent false reports, seven were self-inflicted cuts, eight were due to cuts other than razors, and one was a complete fantasy. The self-inflicted wounds and the wounds due to other than razor cuts were described in detail. For example, the baby who was wounded while waiting for a bus, in one of the cases described previously, turned out only to have been scratched by an umbrella. It seems that it was raining the day of the incident and many umbrella peddlers were out attempting to sell their products at the bus depot, and one such peddler inadvertently had scratched the baby. The police hoped the people would finally realize that the spreading of unconfirmed rumors was an unnecessary disturbance of the peace. And so

²⁹ China Daily News, May 8, 1956.

³⁰ China Post, May 8, 1956; Hong Kong Standard, May 9, 1956.

³¹ China Daily News, May 9, 1956.

once again they appealed to the populace to cooperate and not spread sensationalism.⁸²

But on the very day that the razor blade case was being clarified by the police and the affair was being (hopefully) officially closed, the most sensational incident occurred. Significantly it was not reported in the press until May 13 and May 14. On May 11 a mysterious "woman in red" was arrested in the now familiar northwest part of the city. The woman was accused of cutting a nine-month-old baby girl with a razor blade. It seems that a mother and baby in arms were on the street. Suddenly the baby cried. Looking about, the mother noticed that a girl in a red jacket was immediately behind her. The mother cried out, whereupon the strange girl fled, and the mother chased after her. People began to collect about the mother to help her in pursuit of the girl. As the pursuers and the pursued passed a theater, a bystander shouted "get the girl in red." The girl, aware of her tell-tale red coat, dropped it on the road and attempted to lose herself in the crowd as the swelling mob continued to chase her. The girl discarded a small packet which was retrieved by someone in the crowd in pursuit. Eventually a police officer joined the pursuers and succeeded in stopping the girl and taking her to a police station. The retrieved parcel was found to contain a razor blade. The milling crowd which had followed the policeman and the girl to the police station became increasingly angry and threatening, as the investigation proceeded inside. Upon being interrogated the girl stated that, as it was about to rain, she had opened her umbrella, and in so doing, had innocently caught hold of the baby's sleeve. When the mother suddenly cried out, the girl panicked and fled. Fearing that she might be

taken for the razor slasher, she decided to throw away the parcel with the potentially incriminating razor blade. The mother however contradicted the girl's testimony. She claimed that the girl had held her daughter's arm and did not release it until she (the girl) was conscious of the fact that the mother was aware of her presence. The mother denied that it was raining at the time of the incident. She further stated that the girl had the umbrella and a basket in one hand and another object in the other hand. The girl denied that she had taken the baby's hand, but stated that she only was trying to loosen the iron frame of the umbrella which had caught in the baby's sleeve. The girl further stated that she had told this to the woman when the latter had turned around and discovered her near the child. Then why did the girl run if she was innocent? Because she became fearful of the woman and did not know what to do. What of the razor blade? She was a seamstress and used it in her work. She reminded the police that the razor blade had been discovered wrapped in a piece of paper and hence could not have been used as claimed. Her only "weapons" were her long finger nails and her umbrella, which, as she had already stated, probably had accidentally caused the cuts. Then why had so many believed that she had slashed the baby? She didn't know. A doctor who was called in to examine the child stated that the wound could not have been made by a razor, and that the umbrella story seemed reasonable to him. The girl was released and the irate mob was dispersed. As the papers had wisely noted in their account, the incident had nearly revived the "terror" but fortunately the fever was short-lived.⁸³

I am aware of only one further reference in the press after the "lady in

⁸² China Daily News, May 12, 1956; China Post, May 12, 1956.

⁸³ China Daily News, May 13, 1956; China Post, May 13 and May 14, 1956.

red" incident. On May 17, the local English language press carried a report that the *National* Control Parliament (the "watchdog" branch of the Chinese national government) had decided to review the razor affair. Other than the statement that this august body considered the incident "serious" no rationale for the discussion was provided. To the best of my knowledge no report was ever issued of the discussion.³⁴ In any case after this date, the phantom razor-slasher(s) never appeared again on the streets of Taipei, or anywhere else in Taiwan for that matter.

III

The Taipei affair exhibited most of the salient characteristics which have been noted in mass hysteria case studies in western societies, namely:

(1) The action profile may be characterized by (a) a rapid and steady buildup in the number of reported incidents and a growing intensity in the uncritical and hyper-suggestible nature of the cases reported; (b) a period of stock-taking and sober analysis with a consequent decline in reported incidents; but then (c) a spectacular but short-lived revival of interest; and (d) finally, a rapid cessation of the affair.

(2) The major participants predominantly were drawn from those elements in the society most susceptible to hyper-suggestibility, namely, the lower income, lower educated stratum, and within that stratum, women and children.

(3) The motives of those who claimed to be the affair's victims were varied. Some individuals were well aware that their claims were conscious hoaxes, born of a desire for personal publicity or for personal advantage. But others were the victims of innocent error or psychogenic hallucination, brought about by the heightened suggestibility during the affair.

(4) The victims' descriptions of

the actual infliction of the wounds under alleged mysterious circumstances by allegedly mysterious individuals acting out of allegedly mysterious motives were both a product of, and helped further to intensify, the hyper-suggestibility and mass hysteria so characteristic of the affair. The assimilation of all potentially related incidents (that is, any cutting, no matter how innocent) that occurred during the time of the affair into the mainstream of the affair may also be noted.

(5) Rumor-mongering which played such a vital part in spreading the hysteria and heightening suggestibility was carried on (a) by gossiping in centers where people, especially women and children of low income, low education stratum of the society were apt to congregate; that is, at the market, at the entertainment centers, and at public transportation centers, which spread the affair *within confined areas* of the city, especially in the northwest part of the city, and (b) by the mass media—in this society the newspapers—which were instrumental in spreading the affair *from one confined area to another*; successively to the whole city of Taipei, to the suburbs, to other cities on the island, and ultimately to a Chinese community outside the island. Significantly, as elsewhere, face-to-face rumor spreading was a negligible factor in maintaining the affair.

(6) The press reflected the respective social affiliations of the various audiences, although exceptions can be noted; as for example, in the initial May 4 reportage. The vernacular press which catered to the low-income groups was the most sensational, was most apt to describe the mythical incidents, was the most complete in its coverage (both in details and in number of incidents recorded), and was the most prone to carry contradictory reports without later retraction. The local (Taipei) English language press whose audience primarily was either the well-educated Chinese or the foreigner was the most conservative in

³⁴ China Post, May 17, 1956.

reporting the number and character of the incidents and was more apt to report the details of the police investigations and the appeal of the authorities for calm and the dampening down of rumor-mongering. Finally the English language Hong Kong newspaper, removed from the immediate situation, reported fewer incidents and fewer details over a briefer time span, but made up for this deficiency by presenting the most sensational, garbled and far-fetched version of the affair.

(7) The affair continued after, and in spite of, all the efforts that responsible members of the society were taking to discount the rumors and alleged incidents. The final incident of the "lady in red" occurred even after the newspapers obviously had been "persuaded" by the authorities to play down or even ignore reporting new incidents. It can be said then that any affair of this sort, since it is one of mass hysteria which may be exaggerated further by an existing situation of social and psychological insecurity (to be discussed below) has to spend itself regardless of the weight of so-called counter forces of reason operative in the society at that time.

IV

Apart from these general social and psychological characteristics, the specific patterning of this affair is a reflection of the specific societal and cultural influences of the Taiwanese situation which may be contrasted with those influences bearing on other mass hysteria affairs in other social or cultural contexts.

(1) The low-income and poorly-educated stratum of Taiwan society, is made up almost exclusively of the local-born Chinese, or as they have come to be termed, the Taiwanese. During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945) the Taiwanese, as colonial subjects, were given for the most part disproportionately less access to the privileges of the society, es-

pecially to the organs of political, economic, and social security. The situation, although it improved especially for the well-educated and for the rising generation, with the return of the island to Chinese control in 1945, did not drastically change the status and prerogatives of the uneducated, lower-income mass of adult Taiwanese. This was especially true for the urban Taiwanese, when (with the Communist take over of the mainland in 1949) over a million essentially urban refugees swarmed into Taiwan and claimed the desirable positions in the society. However, even before that date, in 1947, a particularly ugly incident occurred between mainlanders and local-born, which made it clear to the latter that the former were willing and able to enforce their desires on the Taiwanese, if need be through violence. In brief, within Taiwan society, the insecurities and frustrations of the locals, especially the urban, lower-stratum locals, make them especially susceptible to mass hysteria. And not surprisingly, it is in the area(s) of the cities of Taipei and Keelung in which these individuals predominantly reside that most of the incidents originated.

(2) Taiwan in 1956 was the nominal seat of the government-in-exile of the (Nationalist) Republic of China (as is has been since 1949). Technically, this government has been at war with the mainland (Communist) People's Republic of China since 1949. Consequently, the island of Taiwan simultaneously is both a staging area for a claimed potential Nationalist reconquest of the mainland and also is under constant siege in defense against any invasion threat from the mainland. Through the various media of mass communication the people are continually reminded of these two possibilities. The government, in order to stir the people (especially the mass of locals who have no *obvious* loyalty to a program of reconquest of the mainland, whatever their feelings about a local

Communist conquest) to greater economic and political support of the present regime and its goals, has from time to time circulated reports of impending action in both directions, keeping the people's nerves on edge in the international political game of confrontation. Such a campaign of mass mobilization existed at the time of the Taipei incident.

(3) Significantly, although the government is ever conscious of the value of maintaining a state of heightened suggestibility among the populace to serve its own political purposes, it simultaneously recognized the need to control mass-hysteria movements that might get out of its control or be used by its enemy across the Taiwan Strait toward its destruction. For obviously if the population is placed perpetually in a psychological state in which it is tuned to receiving and accepting incidents of heightened suggestibility from official Nationalist sources, it also might be tuned potentially to receiving and accepting Communist inspired mass hysteria campaigns. But perhaps even more dangerous would be incidents which, although ostensibly innocent of Communist influence, still functioned to destroy confidence in the regime's ability to overcome enemies and to continue to provide security to the island. I believe this hypothesis helps to explain the unusual interest and concentration of the political apparatus and its counterintelligence

agencies in the affair, as noted in the case study. Significantly the unusual interest was to some degree self-defeating, as it only incited the imagination of the uninformed that something was up to which they were not privy.

(4) The razors and other cutting objects which played the key role in this incident form part of the general Chinese pattern of using physical mutilation as outlet for frustration and aggression. Various acts of mutilation are periodically reported in the press, as for example, the incident of a young lover who threw nitric acid in the face of the girl who spurned him.³⁵ The association of blood-letting with certain local, aboriginal (pre-Chinese) inhabitants has been mentioned in the body of the study.

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In summation and conclusion I would say that at least this incident seems to bear out the hypothesis that the basic circumstances which give rise to mass hysteria movements and the trends that they take appear to be similar regardless of the specific social and cultural contexts in which they occur. However, the social and cultural contexts are most important in defining why they take place when they do and where they do, and the specific media which they use.

³⁵ China Post, March 24, 1956.

PROBLEMS OF TOMORROW KAPOW!!: AN ARGUMENT AND A FORECAST

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AN ARGUMENT

The themes which characterize the American culture scene include force,

speed, and violence. These themes appear in virtually every aspect of public life. Brutal murders which arouse