

surrender on the radio and Japanese military bases in the city emptied, my young grandparents began to attend buxibans to reshape their tongues once more—this time to the contours of the Mandarin-speaking Kuomintang as their warships sailed into the island.

Our luck no. 1: because my grandparents were a pair of humble farmers who ate a whole lot of rice harvested on their own land and took their children to the clinic on the back of bicycles, we skated by the worst of Kuomintang's brutal campaign that imprisoned and executed Taiwanese elites. My father was the eldest child in the family of five, and he grew up practicing the intricate strokes of Chinese characters at school; in their farmhouse, he tricked his younger sisters out of their lunch money in Mandarin for a heartwarming bowl of goose noodle soup in Ximending. My mother, on the other hand, spent her moonlit evenings in a Zhongshan apartment memorizing classical Chinese texts for her entrance exams.

My father's family came into financial comfort in a wild strike of historic fortune. Our luck no. 2: my grandfather's seemingly insignificant plot of farmland sat on the dirt road that would become Xinyi Road, now a major thoroughfare tumbling with Mercedes and Teslas toward Taipei 101. In the mid-seventies, he sold it to a developer, moved his family into an apartment with running water, and retired from his job at the police bureau. For a decade afterwards, riding the wave of Taiwan's economic miracles, going to the airport became a blacktie affair for the emerging middle class: My aunts and uncles lifted their heads toward the Pacific skies as they, one-by-one, flew to the United States to pursue their graduate degrees. They picked English names out of a book for their children that their parents never learned to pronounce. With that fortune, before any of us could comprehend it, before we could know exactly what it would cost us, came our reality: three generations of my family were educated in three different languages.

I was nine-years-old when we left Taipei for my father's job in Los Angeles. On the plane, I didn't cry. I wasn't excited. I was just a kid holding a stuffed Japanese macaque with a red butt, following her parents across the Pacific.