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A Phenomenological Approach to Taiwanese Mothers' Recollections of the Sudden Deaths of Their Children in Taiwan *

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This study aimed to understand mothers' recollections of the sudden deaths of their children in an earthquake that hit Taiwan on September 21, 1999. A phenomenological approach to mothers' recollections was conducted through person-centered process (Rogers, 1961, 1980) of data collection, and a Moustakas's (1994) data analysis that led to a composite textual-structural description. This experience is unique in a way that has made Taiwanese mothers seemingly torn between the contradictory forces of their natural tendency to recall their deceased children and the widespread hearsay that recollection ought to be forbidden for the sake of the deceased's benefit in the afterworld. The paradoxical nature of mothers' recollections and the issues of cultural differences and religious beliefs were discussed.

KEY WORDS: mothers' recollections, sudden death of a child, Taiwanese mothers

Despite the fact that the body of literature on sudden death has expanded, relatively few studies have explored parental grief caused by a natural disaster. The nature of a natural disaster, from the perspective of research, is that death occurs almost simultaneously, so that subsequent grief processes of the bereaved inhabit the same course of time. Moreover, deaths caused by a natural disaster are usually of no purpose (Raphael, 1983), and all unexpected, and no target, like killers to a homicidal event, exists for them to blame or accuse. The purpose of this study is to understand mothers' recollections of the sudden deaths of their children in an earthquake in Taiwan.

Experts have found that bereaved parents consider the loss of a child the most difficult and unbearable encounter in adult bereavement (Parkes, 1986; Yeh-Ho, 2003). In the case of sudden death in

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particular, the bereaved might engage in more self-reprimands or be blamed (Thompson & Range, 1992). Within the rubric of reactions of parental grief, gender differences vis-à-vis grief reactions are noted (e.g., Bohannon, 1990; Lin, 1999; Murphy et al., 1999; Rubinstein, 2004; Yeh-Ho, 2003). Mothers express grief more intensely over time (e.g., Bohannon, 1990), although it may also be due to the expressive nature of women (Stroebe, 1998). Bereaved mothers tend to lack understanding and support from their social contexts such as partners, family, social networks, medical staff, cultural ideology, and they even blame themselves for not protecting their children (Farnsworth & Allen, 1996). In Taiwanese society, mothers are usually the primary caretakers of the family, while fathers are the financial providers. Mothers have more time than fathers to look after and interact with their children. This may also lead to variations in the intensity of grief experienced by mothers and fathers following the death of their child. This study, therefore, aims to specifically understand mothers' experiences of grief.

The concept of "continuing bonds" suggests a new paradigm of understanding human bereavement since the late 1980s (e.g., Klass, 1993; Pine & Brauer, 1986; Rando, 1986a, 1986b; Rubin, 1993; Sanders, 1986; Schatz, 1986). The post-loss ongoing relationship with the dead has been recognized without being seen as pathological (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). This relationship has a transforming and long-lasting effect in a symbolic and/or internalized form, and possibly throughout the life of the bereaved, even though the physical bond has ended (Rubin, 1999; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). While a focal discussion rests on the function of continuing bonds to the adaptation of bereavement (e.g., the 30th volume of "Death Studies" in 2006), the values of continuing bonds from different cultures are also stressed (Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

From my experience working with bereaved mothers, no mothers can stop themselves from missing their lost children, when being genuinely experienced in their inner worlds. Nevertheless, people tell them not to touch or cry for their deceased children. One mother says, "...People said that missing him and crying are no good to him, so I dare not to (do it)." Another mother says about the night of earthquake, "I called her name, sometimes I kissed her and cried. But people said it was no good and told me to cover her (under the sheet). They said it's no good to kiss her and cry for her." The contradiction between restive recollections of their beloved children, and the possibly pervasive hearsay of refraining from recollecting the deceased, has become a reality that Taiwanese bereaved mothers frequently encounter. This study therefore seeks to initiate a basic understanding of the bereaved continuing her relationship with the deceased, specifically, an understanding of mothers' recollections of their sudden dead children in Taiwanese culture, where two contradictory forces manifest their influences, is under investigation. Mothers who lost one of their children in an earthquake were invited to the interview. Multiple deaths in the family were excluded.

This study contends that recollection presents the spontaneous aspect of sustaining a relationship with the deceased, whereas in continuing the bond, the bereaved may deliberately and consciously maintain or establish the relationship with the dead. Recollections lead the bereaved, who is unable to restrain her cognition, from thinking of, imagining, or desiring to draw near to, or talk to her child. Besides this, the contrast of recollection and continuing bonds could also be found in the perspectives of the intention to maintain bonds with the deceased, and the subsequent direction of emotions. That is, if the bereaved deliberately maintains bonds with the dead (e.g., chooses to become a volunteer at the hospital where the child had died), there exists the implication that continuing bonds with the deceased

could result in benefits to the bereaved's resolution of grief. On the other hand, the pangs of recollection, occurring at any time without prior clues or preparations, may have both positive and negative emotions. Consequently, subsequent actions (e.g., crying, reviewing the photos of the deceased, or talking to the dead in their minds) taken by the bereaved seem natural and imperative. As for this contrast, since the deliberation and benefit of maintaining a relationship with the deceased are not the focus of this study, the spontaneity of continuing bonds will be accounted for by their recollection in this study. Moreover, although contemporary literature on continuing bonds that focuses on the investigation of ways or forms of continuing bonds with the deceased (e.g., Field, Nichols, Holen, & Horowitz, 1999; Klass, 1993; Normand, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), this study proposes to explore the bereaved's recollection by discerning the essence of profound and absolute bonds with the dead. This study views recollection as a natural and spontaneous phenomenon that presents part of the essence of maintaining bonds which are concomitant with both positive and negative affects.

The research question is, "What is the essence and meaning of the recollections of Taiwanese mothers who lost their children in an earthquake?" The present study implements a phenomenological approach to collecting and analyzing data to answer this question.

Methodology

Participants

Puli, a town with a population of 80,000, had a death toll of over 200, caused by an earthquake, rated 7.3 on the Richter scale, which lasted approximately 40 seconds. Among the victims, 49 were minors under the age of 20 (the legal age of adults in Taiwan) belonging to 40 families. Twenty-three families lost a single child in the earthquake, while other families suffered multiple deaths. The researcher contacted 18 families, either by phone or personal visits, and screened 11 families which had suffered the death of a single child. Of the 11 families, 8 mothers were successfully interviewed.

**Table 1 Mothers successfully interviewed by the mother-child dyad,
and the number of deceased children by age and gender**

18 families contacted*		Invitation accepted (8 mothers)
Age of the deceased	Gender of the deceased	
under 6	male: 1(0) female: 3(1)	1
6-12	male: 6(1) female: 4(3)	4
12-15	male: 2(1) female: 2(0)	1
15-20	male: 2(1) female: 1(1)	2

* The number in the parentheses is the mother who actually accepted the invitation for an interview. The number on the left of the parentheses represents the number of deceased whose family members were invited to interview by the researcher.

The eight mothers belonged to the 35 to 51 age-group, while the ages of their deceased children ranged from 4 months to 19 years - one child under 6 years of age (4 month-old; preschool), four children between the ages of 6 and 12 (elementary school), another deceased child was 13, ranged in the group between 12 and 15 (junior high school), and two other deceased teens between 15 and 20 (high school till the legal age of adult). There were three boys and five girls.

Regarding heterogeneity in the age of the deceased child, it does not appear to make distinctions between the grief of the bereaved. Rando (1986a) reports that, from the perspective of bereaved parents, losing a young child may not be different from losing an adolescent child or an adult child as a determinant of their grief. Arnold, Gemma and Cushman (2005) studied parental grief after losing their children, who at the time of death were aged from less than 1 to 48. It is fair to say that ages of the deceased children do not necessarily define the difference in mothers' recollections.

All eight families performed rituals in accordance with Taiwanese folk religion of Taoism, which along with certain Buddhist concepts have been intertwined. Among them, there are three families that had a single surviving child, while other families had, at least two surviving children. There are newborns in three families, subsequent to the child's death. Among them, one respondent was a grandmother and the others were mothers. Three of the families were extended families.

The Researcher as a Human Instrument

This researcher had been totally naïve about death and bereavement before the earthquake. She had neither experienced the death of a significant person in her life, nor had she received any training in the field of grief counseling. The researcher's acquisition of knowledge in the field of grief and bereavement has been through reading a tremendous amount of literature and interacting with the bereaved. Communications skill training in the field of counseling helped the researcher establish relationships with the bereaved mothers. The beliefs and practice on which the researcher bases her profession (research, practice and teaching) utilize the philosophy of the person-centered approach developed by Carl R. Rogers (Raskin & Rogers, 1995), and that is founded on phenomenology, which fits well in the perspective and purpose of the present study.

Procedure and Analysis

In January 2002, a preliminary contact was initiated for mothers to understand this researcher's purpose for the study. After being granted an appointment, the researcher paid a visit to each mother with an invitation letter and an Informed Consent form. More detailed information was released and doubts were relieved. When a mother agreed to be interviewed, she signed an Informed Consent form and then decided on a date for the first interview session which was then confirmed.

There were different time intervals, and a number of interview sessions for the mothers. The time lag between interviews varied from less than a day to 148 days, while the length of an interview ranged from 110 to 325 minutes. Table 2 shows the possible reasons, from the researcher's perspective, that impacted the time lag for each bereaved mother.

**Table 2 Number of interview sessions, time intervals,
and possible determinants of time intervals for each bereaved mother**

Mothers	Interview (minutes)	Number of interviews /time interval (days)*	Possible determinants of time interval
M1	325	4/100	The respondent gave birth to a new baby.
M2	220	3/130	The respondent went abroad for business.
M3	135	3/43	The respondent's unstable schedule due to running a business
M4	225	1/0	The respondent was reluctant to reminisce; the respondent assumed interviews were assistance to the researcher.
M5	110	2/148	The respondent had irregular but intensive working hours, then she moved.
M6	170	3/92	The respondent had irregular working hours and kept interviews a secret from husband. Taiwanese mourning rites due to the death of a relative
M7	315	3/29	The respondent had irregular working hours.
M8	210	2/23	The respondent assumed interviews were assistance to the researcher.

* the time period between first and last interviews

The researcher carried out interviews using the person-centered approach. One of the characteristics that distinguishes the person-centered approach from other theoretical frameworks is that the therapist (here, the researcher) follows the client (here, the respondent) (Bohart, 1995; Wang, 2005). Keeping in mind an outline of the themes for the interview, this researcher trusted the bereaved mothers, in terms of their ways of telling their stories, their verbal rhythms, and the contents they were willing to express. Respondents led the researcher to whatever details of the story each would like to share. This was in keeping with the person-centered approach that Rogers (1961, 1980) posits. Moustakas (1994) also asserts that the interview outline may be varied or set aside, in a phenomenological interview, when the respondent shares her story.

When interviews proceeded successfully, they were simultaneously recorded and then transcribed unless mothers requested confidentiality for some part of the interview. The transcribed verbatim were returned to the mothers to ensure accuracy, and once again the text was reaffirmed to be released and returned to the researcher. The researcher based these oral texts on phenomenological analysis.

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological analysis approach will be used for data analysis. He proposes four phases of phenomenological analysis as follows. In the Epoché, one's prejudgments, biases, and preconceptions of an investigated phenomenon have to be set aside. The researcher's "presence" and "concentration" in an absolute manner and all alone are important. Identical with the interview process where person-centered principles are applied, it is "the story leads and I follow" in the process of data analysis.

In phenomenological reduction, the researcher pays attention to the "textural quality" of the experience explored (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). The researcher reflects on the phenomenon and then reduces it to "what is texturally meaningful and essential in its phenomenal and experiential components..." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93). "Bracketing" and "horizontalizing" are prior parts of the phenomenological reduction procedure. Horizons are clustered into themes. They are followed by a textural description of the phenomenon.

Following this phase, several themes emerged from the transcribed verbatim. They are *remembering forever or pain forever; the content of recollection; the way to recollect; the time to recollect; recollection appearing as a paradox; a wish; envisioning the current existence of the deceased child; mentioning important events to the deceased; a replacement child; and feeling the existence of the deceased child in a certain form*. Appendix One shows the themes which emerged from each of the respondents. For each respondent, the researcher wrote a textual description of her recollection. For the preclusion of long passages, the textual description of each respondent was not used in favor of the textual-structural description after synthesizing meanings and essences.

In the phase of imaginative variation, the researcher uses imagination and diverse perspectives or frames of reference to seek possible meanings of the experience. "The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced..." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The structures of *religious beliefs, the dissolution of time and space, and the omnipresence of the child in the inner and outer worlds of bereaved mothers* are presented in the following composite textual-structural description of mothers' recollections, which was preferred over the structural description of each respondent for the preclusion of long passages, as in the phenomenological reduction process.

In the final step of the process, the synthesis of meanings and essences, there is “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Therefore, these resulted in a unified statement describing the recollection of bereaved mothers.

Results

In order to synthesize the meaning and essence of mothers' recollections of the sudden deaths of their children, this researcher will attempt to integrate the features and byproducts of this experience by using a Moustakas's (1994) method of acquiring a composite textual-structural description.

A Composite Textual-Structural Description of the Experience

“Paradox” represents the essence of mothers' recollection per se. Mothers' recollections commence at the onset of the death of their children and last an eternity. The accompanying recollection is naturally ongoing, subtle and will always be there. A mother's recollection of her deceased child is like a needle jabbing into her heart. It is right at the core of each mother's ultimate desire that her child to return alive. However, her desire is coated by courage. A mother needs to break through her courage to recollect her dead child.

Recollection presents itself as wishful thinking. Mothers fully understand that their children can never come back; however, the absolute recollection causes them to pine for their children to return home. It is as if the mothers have been wrestling against the irreversibility of death, while hope and disappointment are interspersing with each other. While the resurrection of their deceased children cannot come true, mothers turn to the hope that their children can go to wherever they want to go for a better life without troubling over mothers.

The paradoxical nature of recollection changes a mother's sense of time, reinterprets the meaning of life and death, and completes the mother's world. Time suspends at some point, but also lasts forever. On one hand, the endless recollection of her child brings back the occurrence of that night, from looking for and making efforts to rescue the child, through the time when he/she was buried (or cremated). It is so vivid as if it just happened. On the other hand, recollection goes back to a time when the earthquake had never occurred; all the life details of the child, when he/she was alive, are so real in the mother's mind, a world where she did not lose her child. No matter how much time elapses, mothers understand that their children have died, but their children also live long in their minds. Although the child has died, his/her presence is strongly sensed so that the mother can still hear her child calling, “Mom...,” and can feel the warmth of his/her hands. A deep and eternal recollection of their children, dead or alive, resides in each mother's inner world. The existence of the child is authentic in this world, while each mother understands well that her child is gone forever. Recollection weaves the symbolic connection of mothers to their children. A relationship exists exclusively for just the two in this world.

Recollection has also changed the essential meaning of space. Recollection exists ubiquitously through which the image of the child is relived. Recollection leads mothers to sense the presence of their children at all times and wherever they are. Although courage has to be broken through to recollect, a wave of recollection would come unbidden into mothers' minds at a particular spot where mothers and their children used to go, at a time when important events (e.g., birthday, family gathering, etc.) are approaching or when they browse through the children's belongings. Both interactions with, and observations of, either acquaintances or passers-by of the children's ages, and any tragic news accounts may trigger the bereaved to recall their children. The mother might imagine that her dead child is now as old as a young person at whom she is looking. If a mother is alone, or it is late at night, recollection is just like a box which opens and overwhelms her till the end of time.

The paradoxical nature of recollection presents itself when mothers encounter religious beliefs. The mothers were advised against having the desire to talk to their children, touch them, kiss them, and cry over losing them on the spot of the disaster, for the souls of the dead children to feel free to depart. Likewise, mothers manage not to miss their children because they do not want their children to worry about them and then become reluctant to leave, or because the dead may not be living well in the afterworld. Moreover, such paradoxical recollections torture mothers; however, it has to be compromised by life's secular demand: mothers need to look after their surviving children and their families. They need to be strong for their families. Consequently, it is hard for mothers to ponder over the deceased all the time; they have to numb themselves to care for the living.

The paradoxical recollections present a way for mothers to remonstrate with God about their children's fate and their struggle with God, although they know they cannot argue with the supreme power that decides the coming of death. Mothers refuse resignation. They understand that people live their lives advancing toward death, and that all they encounter is ordained; however they refuse to regard death as a natural phenomenon, especially sudden death. The only choice mothers have is to accept the fact they refuse to accept. Concerning the fact of losing her child, each mother may ask God, "Why did you choose me?" "Why was he/she taken away?" However, paradoxically, mothers are grateful. "Thank God for taking only one child from me. He was not taken all my family..." They have thought that they are lucky enough when compared with some others.

Since the ultimate desire for resurrection of the child is impossible, recollection is borne with compensatory wishes, beliefs, affects, and expressions; however, their totality does not account for mothers' absolute recollections. In terms of wishes and the realization of mothers' whole-hearted imaginings, they hoped that the deceased has died without being experiencing too much pain. Some mothers wish they could share the frightening experiences of their children before they died. Some people believe that the deceased children are currently little Buddha ascetics - they may have it simple and easy in the afterlife because every time they come back, in dreams, they look good and happy. Their mothers believe they are studying somewhere in the afterlife. It is hoped that the child can reincarnate into a fine family, so that they will be much adored. Some mothers believe that their children have returned to be their babies again. Furthermore, the baby is reborn out of a wish that her dead child's characters, appearance, or behavior will be reproduced in the newborn.

Mothers' recollections awaken multiple feelings of depression, rue, love and warmth. They have to accept all these paradoxical emotions. Heartbreak presents itself when mothers understand that they can

never see their children again. Regrets overflow when mothers think of having punished their children and to have fulfilled their children's dreams with conditions. Joy and pain emerge when a mother recalls the good old days when her child was alive; however he/she is already gone. She chagrins that others' children can grow up healthily, while hers is gone forever.

Recollection expresses itself in mothers' actions. Some mothers occasionally look at their children's photographs, but others do not have the courage to do so at all. Sometimes a mother dreams of her child and will visit his/her grave. They will inform their dead child about important incidents in the family. Mothers impart the message of permanently remembering the deceased sibling to their surviving children. Some mothers make efforts to figure out, via folk religion (e.g., going to the temple, asking a psychic), why their children died young, and to contact the child (e.g., via a séance) and ask about his/her life in the afterlife. Using the disaster compensation, some mothers can afford new houses, which might be regarded as memorials, or they will allocate a room to contain the deceased child's possessions. Sometimes they will play with the toys or dolls that the children left behind.

This composite textual-structural description of mothers' recollections reveals that "paradox" is the universal essence of this experience. Each mother's ultimate wish to reunite with her deceased child initiates the sense of paradox that penetrates each mother's subjective and physical world.

Discussion

The present study maintains that recollection composes a certain aspect of continuing bonds. In this respect, the bereaved connect with the deceased spontaneously in daily scenarios without prior anticipation. In continuing bonds, what recollection cannot explicate is the deliberate management of bringing the deceased to one's mind. This study suggests that the intention to maintain bonds with the deceased, and the subsequent direction of emotions, constitutes one of the features that stands out from the continuing bond between the bereaved and the dead. The endless pining for their children's "resurrection" and the implicit prohibition from ruminating the deceased encompass the contradictory forces that make Taiwanese mothers' recollections both unique and paradoxical.

Mothers' recollections start with the deaths of their children and last forever. The altered sense in time reflects the mothers' endless recollections of their children – this resonates with the findings of Shuchter and Zisook (1993) and Cook and Bosley (1995), so as the altered sense in space. The blending of the senses of time and space in the bereaved mothers indicates that the relationship between the dead and the bereaved is permanent (Klass et al., 1996; Rubin, 1993) and ubiquitous. Mothers may visualize all occurrences from the disaster to the burial, as well as the good old days when their children were alive, and they maintain a sense of presence of the deceased on every possible occasion.

Recollection is experienced through the senses, mind, and spirit, and in various states of consciousness (Datson & Marwit, 1997; Klass, 1993; Lindemann, 1944; Murphy et al., 1999; Parkes, 1986; Rubin, 1999). Memories, dreams, linking objects (e.g., photos, belongings), and visiting the grave are various ways by which Taiwanese mothers recall their children. These forms mirror those in the literature on continuing or maintaining bonds (e.g., Becker & Knudson, 2003; Farnsworth & Allen, 1996; Hsu, Kahn, Yee, & Lee, 2004; Klass, 1993; Wheeler, 2001). Moreover, despite the death of their children,

mothers talked to them as if they were still alive. Some mothers would also inform the deceased of important family events, for example, the birth of a newborn or moving. That mothers communicate to their deceased children seems to become a part of their recollections. With respect to communicating with the deceased, Shuchter and Zisook (1993) report that the bereaved regularly talk to the deceased, which is also true for bereaved widows and children in Taiwan (Hsu et al., 2004). Clark and Franzmann (2006) studied a group of bereaved people who manage to build up a roadside memorial, which is “material evidence...that communication with the deceased takes place, and that the deceased is believed to be present in some way and capable of receiving the communication” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 589). It seems that in Clark and Franzmann’s study, the bereaved deliberately communicate with the deceased while the fact that Taiwanese mothers converse with their deceased children occurs naturally whenever critical matters come up. It appears that by communicating with the deceased, deliberately or naturally, a common approach or psychological need for the bereaved to maintain a relationship with the deceased exists.

In the present study, several bereaved families in Taiwan rebuilt their houses on the disaster site. One mother descends into her grief when she returns home after work, and another mother would have determined to leave, if she had lost her husband simultaneously, along with her daughter in the disaster. Mothers may desire to converse with their dead children; however in this study, a memorial house for a bereaved mother indicates women’s powerlessness in a patriarchal society: Although a mother may be reluctant to live in a place where her child passed away, she has limited choice, because this location is ancestral property on the husband’s side. Parkes (1986) reports that, in Wales, mothers of children deceased in a disaster tend to move back to the original place because they wanted to stay closer to their children. This does not seem to be the case for bereaved mothers in this study. Perhaps Taiwanese mothers would also return for the same reason, if they were free to move away without concern for the tradition of the restriction of ancestral property. Perhaps different meanings of this phenomenon of staying close to, or away from, the spot of disaster, exists in the two cultures, so even though they exhibit differences related to recollections of their dead children, no evidence exists that mothers in the two cultures respond differently.

Mothers express their recollections through the interaction and presence of offspring. Some mothers tell their surviving children to remember their dead sibling forever. After having a newborn, some mothers believe it to be the reincarnation of the dead child – this gives the mothers great comfort in their grieving process. A “replacement child” in this study coincides with other forms of maintaining bonds, which bring comfort or solace (e.g., Datson & Marwit, 1997; Klass, 1993), but this element contradicts the notion of the adaptive connection, that a “replacement child” should not serve as a substitution for the dead one (Cain & Cain, as cited in Rubin, 1993). One mother in this study hoped that her newborn would be of the same gender as the dead child. Although contradictory to her wish, she considered the looks and the eyes of the newborn to those of the deceased. Months later when I visited her, she said to me that the newborn was unique. The newborn may serve as a “replacement child” at the beginning; however, it was this mother’s flexible attitude toward her newborn that helped her to cope better in a overt relationship with the new baby, and a covert relationship with the deceased child (Rubin, 1985, 1999).

Paradox marks the nature of mothers’ recollections in Taiwan. After her child’s death, a mother’s ultimate hope is reunification, through the resurrection of the child, to the mother. This obviously is not

possible to achieve; the mother then paradoxically hopes for her child to have a free and fine future in the afterlife. She will be strong and resilient for secular demands, and for fulfilling her hope for the deceased.

The paradox presented itself in maternal grief in many ways. In terms of beliefs or thoughts, a mother believes that it is fate that her child was taken away. Meanwhile, it is hard to accept death as a natural phenomenon, especially since it was her child that was taken away. While mothers mourn for their deceased children, they are simultaneously grateful that God took only one child from them. In terms of expression, paradox is accounted for by the circumstance of the bereaved. Usually, she is composed, but when left alone or late at night, she would be completely overwhelmed by rumination. Her inner recollections of the child, although persistent, have to be concealed or suspended by the repeated daily demands of family. Whether mothers cry or talk about the deceased, these reactions do not represent the essence of their recollections. In terms of the contradictory responses about linking objects, not all mothers are able to confront every kind of linking object. For example, one mother keeps the photos of her dead child in her purse, and glances at them whenever she feels like it; however, she dares not go through photo albums of the child. While some mothers can bear viewing photos, others express that they are not ready for it. Volkan (as cited in Wheeler, 1999) develops the concept of "ambivalence" to describe the attitude of the bereaved toward linking objects, which is in accordance with the attitude of mothers in this study. The concept of ambivalence represents "the ambivalent feelings of the survivor toward the deceased. By keeping the object available but at a distance, the mourner symbolically keeps the deceased available but at a distance" (p. 290). The significance and meaningfulness of linking objects to the bereaved in this study conforms to Wheeler's findings. Moreover, unlike the notion implied by Volkan that linking objects is associated with pathological grief, the function of linking objects from the mothers' perspective goes along with Wheeler's position that it serves as one of the bereaved parents' ways of adapting to grief and carrying on with their life.

From a clinical perspective, Brice (1991) identifies mothers' mourning as five interrelated unresolvable paradoxes. The irreversibility of the child's death causes mothers to demonstrate various paradoxical phenomena in terms of their world, their perception and coping, as well as the relationship to others and, especially, to the deceased. One of the identical paradoxes in Brice's description and this study is that mothers are torn between accepting the fact and refusing to believe it. All the Taiwanese mothers reported that they still expected the children to come back home in the evening around the time near the fourth anniversary of the disaster. The rest of the similarities between Brice and this study are: mothers intend to search for reasons why their children died, but no reason can be persuasive enough. Moreover, the paradox of maternal envy and jealousy (Brice, 1991) is also found in the current study - mothers wished that it was anyone else's, but not their child who should have died.

There are several findings in this study that are distinguished from Brice's (1991) understanding of maternal bereavement. Taiwanese mothers are fully aware that they will never forget their lost children. The data does not suggest that mothers deceive themselves by substance abuse, or misrecognition of others to be their deceased children, nor does data reflect the mothers' efforts at fulfilling some of the unfinished projects of their children. That Taiwanese mothers do not easily express their true feelings for their children is different from the bereaved mother in Brice's study who "accomplishes her mourning by engaging in dialogue with others" (p. 5).

Pennebaker and O'Heeron (1984) also report a significant negative relationship between rumination about the spouse's sudden death and "confiding in others" (i.e., talking about the death with close friends and other support systems). It mirrors the tendency in Taiwan that the griever barely talks about the death of a loved one. Perhaps their finding explains the tendency of Taiwanese mothers' continuing recollections of their children. Mothers support the notion by claiming that talking about the dead cannot bring them back. They then conceal recollections inside their hearts. However, one needs to be cautious about the results of Pennebaker and O'Heeron, because both variables are composed by only two items.

Returning to the discussion on the nature of the mothers' paradoxical recollections, one sees that this paradoxical feature of Taiwanese mothers' recollections may be mainly accounted for by religious beliefs in Taiwan. The families of all respondents in this study performed rituals in accordance with the Taiwanese folk religion of Taoism. In contemporary Taiwan, however, Buddhism, as a dominant religion that believes in an afterlife (Walker, 2000), is intertwined with Taoism. According to Buddhism, the involvement and the direction of reincarnation are partly determined by one's previous lives. A "newly dead" person's soul is believed to linger in the intermediate phase of the dichotomous world of life and death (i.e., the *Bardo*, in Tibetan) for 49 days (Master Shih-Liao, 1993; Rinpoche, 1992/1996; Yu, 1977). During the phase in the *Bardo*, the state of mind of the deceased plays a crucial role in impacting him or her in the direction of reincarnation, or even redeeming him or her from reincarnation, and transmigrating to the Pure-Land (Master Sheng-Yen, 1992, 2004; Tseng, 1979). Buddhism also maintains that a mourner's deeds have a great impact on the state of mind of the deceased (Master Hong-Yi, 1997; Master Shih-Liao, 1993; Master Yin-Guan, 1997; Rinpoche, 1992/1996; Yu, 1977). To assist the deceased to maintain absolute concentration of mind, a mourner then ought to refrain from crying and missing the deceased, for the well-being of the deceased in the afterlife (Hui, 1984; Wang, 2006).

In Taoism, however, people believe that the mourner is allowed to cry after the death of a loved one, specifically at various points of time during the funeral rites (Chen, 1999; Hsu, 1999; Wu, 1998), that exhibit recollections of the mourner. However, the mourner has to be cautious not to shed tears onto the deceased's remains, and not to touch the deceased (Chen, 1999; Hsu, 1999; Hwang, 2000). He or she has to hold back the desire to kiss or caress the deceased, even though he or she is grieving, and it is the very last time to see the deceased. There is also an overtone of Taoism that forbids parents from attending the funeral service of their dead child. Besides these, most Taiwanese believe that Taoism hinders the bereaved from missing the dead and crying (Wang, 2006). Most Taiwanese mothers (respondents) held such beliefs and were willing to suppress their recollections with a hope that their children could be free to go anywhere and have a brighter future. They surrender their desire for reunification and contend with secular demands in an incomplete world, and make efforts to be happy to prevent the deceased from feeling troubled over the living.

Although adaptation to a loss as the function of continuing bonds is not the intention of this study, a phenomenological approach to Taiwanese mothers' recollections shows that the mothers' recollections of, or sense of connecting with their children, seems to be a positive element. It resonates with the findings of Hsu, Kahn and Hsu (2003), Parkes (1986) and Rubin (1985) in their studies of the bereaved population. However, Brice (1991) elaborates that the preoccupation with thoughts or images of the deceased is both comforting and, paradoxically, frustrating, because of the realization that the deceased is never coming

back. Besides the exploration of the function of continuing bonds, Rubin (1999) asserts that we ought to look beyond the function and approach a fuller understanding of human experiences of grief.

One of the themes that emerged in this study was *envisioning the current existence of the deceased child*; the dead child is perceived in some way as living his or her life in some space. This perception does not seem culture-specific. Bereaved Australians in Clark and Franzmann (2006) erected a roadside memorial where the dead were believed to be present in some way to inter-communicate with the bereaved. Becker and Knudson (2003) take the perspective of archetypal psychology, "the dead exist primarily as images... as immaterial figures that behave 'as if' they were real persons" (p. 694). It seems that, in some way for some time, both the bereaved and the deceased coexist in a world where a relationship is maintained as before. The eternity of recollection makes sense out of this view. Walker (2000) investigated medical staff and university students in the American society and found 85.1% of the respondents with a hope for a certain form of afterlife. It suggests an implicit desire to maintain a continuing bond with a significant person, irrespective of whether they are dead or alive. Neither cultural differences nor the diversity of religious beliefs successfully account for the bereaved's perception of the dead's existence. The hope or desire for reunification with the dead may be universal among humans.

This study explores the recollections of the bereaved mothers for their children, who died in a natural disaster, which took place in Taiwan. It marks the combination of elements of bereaved population, simultaneous death, cultural diversity, and the complexity and profundity of human bereavement. Besides the understanding that mothers' recollections as a natural and spontaneous tendency, which could also be universal, religious beliefs may be comprehended as a determinant of how the bereaved experience their recollections. In terms of the limitation of this study, the method of collecting data by interviews may limit the understanding of mothers' recollections of their children to those who are capable of orally expressing themselves. Phenomenological observation may extend the understanding to those who have had experiences, but do not orally express them (Keen, 1975).

Another possible limitation may originate from the characteristics of phenomenological inquiry. One should be reminded of Moustakas's (1994) notion that,

The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon. (p. 100)

Therefore, the present textural-structural synthesis of mothers' recollections of their deceased children is meant to specifically delimit a certain time and space, by the author as a researcher. A different researcher, having a unique imaginative variation and reflection, may yield variation in the syntheses.

Likewise, the person-centered interview may elucidate the uniqueness of the study, because being person-centered is a state of art (Freire & Tambara, 2000). The way of being person-centered is to express one's trust and attitudes of openness, acceptance, and reflection, which may vary from one to another, and that makes replication of the study less likely. Nevertheless, more research is suggested on the various combinations to understand the nature of human bereavement.

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Appendix 1**The core themes of Taiwanese mothers' recollections reflected by each of the respondents**

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Remembering forever; in-pain forever	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recollection content	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Method of recollection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time to recollect	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recollection shown as paradox	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A wish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Envisioning current existence of deceased child	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Informing deceased of important events	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
A replacement child	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Feeling the existence of the child in a certain form	✓	✓			✓		✓	

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台灣母親對驟逝子女的思念— 一個現象學取向之研究

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本研究旨在理解母親對驟逝子女思念經驗之本質。本研究驟逝之子女乃因台灣九二一大地震而喪生；母親對已逝子女的思念，具體而微地呈現在本研究的哀傷田野中。本研究以現象學取向理解母親對驟逝子女的思念。在資料蒐集步驟，研究者以個人中心取向（Rogers, 1961, 1980）對八位喪子女母親進行個別深度訪談，在資料分析方面，本研究採用 Moustakas (1994) 所發展的現象學分析步驟，研究結果以一綜合性的脈絡性—結構性的描述（*composite textual-structural description*）呈現母親對驟逝子女思念經驗之本質。台灣母親對驟逝子女的思念的獨特性表現在兩股力量的拉扯：母親自然而然地思念著自己的孩子，宗教民俗「為了孩子在另一個世界過得好，不要思念他，也讓他走得開」的相信反而阻卻了母親對孩子的思念。本研究針對母親思念的重要本質—兩難，以及文化差異與宗教信仰進行討論。

關鍵詞：子女驟逝、台灣的母親、母親的思念

