



Simon Pulse, 2017

2017 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/High School

Culture Notes

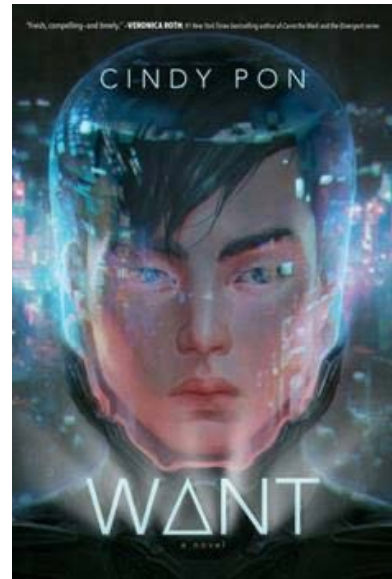
Want

By Cindy Pon

Fiction, set in Taiwan

Introduction to the Story

In this speculative fiction set in “Taipei in an alternate near future” where decades of rampant pollution wreaks havoc on the environment and public health, the population is divided into those who “have” (*you* 有) and those who are “without” (*mei* 沒). As protagonist Jason Zhou (pronounced: “joe”) explains in the opening pages, “This is what it meant to be *you*, to *have*. To be genetically cultivated as a perfect human specimen before birth—vaccinated and fortified, calibrated and optimized. To have an endless database of information instantly retrievable within a second of thinking the query and displayed in a helmet. To have the best air, food, and water, ensuring the longest possible life spans...” (pg. 3) *Mei* form the other 95%—who “want and are left wanting” for not only material wealth but also basic human needs—and have an optimal life expectancy of forty years. (pg. 3)



When it becomes evident that Jin Corporation—manufacturer of the customized smart gear on which all the *you* depend for safeguarding their health and well-being—systematically perpetuates environmental degradation in order to maximize profits, the teenage protagonists hatch a daring plan to dismantle this malicious corporate empire from within. Daiyu (pronounced: “dye-you”), the young woman the protagonists randomly kidnap in order to fundraise for their venture, turns out to be the scion of Jin Corporation and, eventually, love interest to Jason Zhou, the story’s first-person narrator.

The plot unfolds over several months and reveals corporate greed, political corruption, murder, deadly viruses, digital surveillance and cyber attacks, decadent lifestyles and grotesque excesses side by side with glaring poverty and fatal diseases, complex family histories, plus evolving friendships and budding romances. A multicultural cast of primary characters include: Arun and his mother Dr. Nataraj, who are Indian and fluent in Mandarin; Victor, who is Filipino; Jin Daiyu, Lingyi, and Jason Zhou, who are ethnic Chinese; and Iris, an orphan who is Taiwan-born and Asian.

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Taiwan—relevant background

Today's Taiwan is a multicultural society with nearly twenty-four million residents, a democratic government, and distinct identities that set the island apart from its neighbors. Its citizens include indigenous peoples who began populating the island millennia ago, ethnic Chinese whose families migrated from China's mainland over the past few centuries, and recent migrants from Southeast Asia. Mandarin, Taiwanese Hokkien, and Hakka are the most widely spoken languages, and traditional Chinese characters are used in writing. English is prominent in signage and public announcements.

Geographically, Taiwan is an island located about 100 miles/161 kilometers from China's southeastern coast. Human inhabitation on Taiwan dates to the Paleolithic Era, and archaeological findings suggest multiple sources of migration and confluences of cultures. As far back as 4,000 BCE, the island's indigenous populations have been part of the Austronesian language family. Portuguese sailors dubbed the island "Formosa" in the 1500's; during the first half of the seventeenth century, Dutch and Spanish traders established ports in southwestern and northern Taiwan, respectively. Although the Dutch dominated, they were driven out by the 1660's, when China's Ming Dynasty loyalists, escaping Manchu rulers (who founded the Qing/Ch'ing Dynasty in 1644) (pronounced: "ching"), fled mainland China and set up a base in Taiwan. In the subsequent two hundred-plus years, Taiwan remained an outlying, somewhat unruly, territory of the Qing empire. Most migrants from mainland China to Taiwan during this period were from the coastal Fujian province, and their mother tongue, Hokkien, gave rise to the local vernacular that became known as "Taiwanese." Later, descendants of these early settlers were identified as *benshengren* 本省人 (natives; pronounced: "BEN-SHENG-ren"), differentiating them from the mid-twentieth century arrivals from China, and their descendants, commonly referred to as *waishengren* 外省人 (outsiders; pronounced: "WHY-sheng-ren"). In the twenty-first century, such identifiers are useful primarily for establishing historical context.

In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan after China lost the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Japanese colonial rule lasted fifty years, until Allied forces defeated Japan in World War II. China's Nationalist Party (Guomindang/KMT) government then took possession of Taiwan, later imposing martial law that lasted for nearly four decades,

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during which all political dissent—perceived or proven—was systematically silenced through a campaign known as the White Terror. In the post-WWII years leading up to 1949, nearly two million Chinese from all over the mainland sought refuge in Taiwan as the KMT was losing the civil war to the Chinese Communist Party, which established the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. The KMT regime proclaimed Taiwan as the temporary headquarters of the Republic of China (ROC, founded in 1912), continuing observance of National Day on October 10 (Double Ten), and retaining international diplomatic recognition as the legitimate government of China until 1971.

The PRC continues to claim sovereignty over Taiwan as part of its national territory. Taiwan maintains “Republic of China” as its formal name and has a directly elected president as well as multiple political parties.

The English-language term “Taiwanese” has different connotations and, depending on the context, it might be: a reference to a spoken language or one’s personal identity; a signal of ancestry, birthplace, or residency; a declaration of political affiliation; or a hybrid of these identifiers.

Chinese language, naming conventions, and terms featured in this book

Chinese language consists of diverse spoken vernaculars, of which Taiwanese (a variation of Hokkien) is one. In its written form, Chinese comprises “characters” or Hanzi that appear in two versions: **Simplified** 汉字 is a modern format adopted in the mid-1900’s in the PRC and subsequently in Singapore; **Traditional** 漢字 is retained in Taiwan and Hong Kong to this day. [“Kanji” (漢字) used in Japanese writing is derived from Chinese Traditional characters with some modifications.]

Over the years, a number of romanization systems evolved to notate pronunciation of Chinese characters based on standardized spoken Mandarin, or Putonghua. Hanyu Pinyin (or Pinyin) currently is the most common and is used in *Want* with a notable exception: “Taipei” (which is based on Wade Giles system of romanization, rather than the Hanyu Pinyin *Taipei*) where the story takes place.



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Chinese names begin with the family name followed by the given name, e.g. Jin Feiming (pronounced “jin FAY-ming”), the story’s archvillain and founder of Jin Corporation. His daughter’s given name, Daiyu (refers to jade and uncommon beauty), conjures the tragic heroine Lin Daiyu of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, an iconic Chinese novel dating to the eighteenth century. The first-person narrator of *Want* is known only by his surname Zhou (sounds like “Joe” and written as “Chou” in Wade Giles) which assures the anonymity he desires (pg. 31). Zhou’s English-language name, Jason, only surfaces as he prepares to infiltrate Jin Corporation by posing as *you*. It is common for people in Taiwan to adopt foreign-language monikers while studying English or other languages, or when joining specific workplaces. Likewise, it is customary for teachers to assign Chinese names to students from other cultures learning Chinese language.

Key words used in the book to refer to the population groups:

有 *You* (pronounced: “yo”): to have.

沒 *Mei* (pronounced: “may”): without.

Perhaps coincidentally, the Pinyin spellings suggest an opposing binary of Us vs. Them (**Mei** vs. **You**) and create a visual impact that prompts the reader to sympathize—if not identify—with the have-nots.

金 Jin (as in the Jin Corporation and Jin Daiyu) (pronounced: dye-you) means “gold.”

Culinary morsels named in Taiwanese or Mandarin:

Chua bing 礮冰 or 剉冰 (Taiwanese) shaved ice treat with sweet toppings (pg. 2).

Chou doufu 臭豆腐 / 臭豆腐 (Mandarin) stinky tofu (pg. 4).

Rousongbao 肉鬆包 / 肉松包 (Mandarin) brioche-style bun with pork floss (pg. 17).

A few places and practices mentioned in the story (in order of appearance)

Shilin 士林 (pronounced: “SHUR-lin”) **Night Market** (pg. 1) is an iconic venue for street food and shopping in northern Taipei. A veritable feast for the senses, night



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markets emerge in the evening as carts, stalls, and makeshift shopfronts open for business, and continue until the wee hours. Visitors can choose from a variety of quick meals, regional foods, snacks, drinks, as well as a wide range of merchandise such as clothing and accessories, shoes, music, stationery, appliances and other household goods, electronics, knickknacks, even pets. While there are many popular night markets throughout Taiwan, Shilin Night Market is perhaps the most famous among tourists and international travelers.

Yangmingshan 陽明山 (pronounced: “young-ming-shun”) (pg. 8) is a mountain range in northern Taipei named after the Ming Dynasty scholar Wang Yangming and home to [Yangmingshan National Park](#) (covering approximately 11,338 hectares) as well as private residences, several educational institutions, a former diplomatic district, and erstwhile American military housing. The Yangmingshan in *Want*, however, is deserted following apocalyptic transformations resulting from typhoons, a devastating earthquake, and fires. After kidnapping Daiyu at Shilin Night Market, Zhou transports her to his abode on Yangmingshan where he lives in an abandoned laboratory (pg. 13).

Longshan Temple¹ (Longshan Shi 龍山寺; pronounced: “lone-shun-SHUH”) (pg. 44) was originally constructed in 1738 to worship Guanyin, the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion and mercy. In the ensuing centuries the temple was rebuilt or restored numerous times following natural disasters, fires, or war-inflicted damage. Along the way, additions were made to house major deities in folk religion and Taoism/Daoism, including Mazu 媽祖 / 妈祖 the patron saint of seafarers (who is also known as: Heavenly Mother 聖母, Tian Fei 天妃, Tin Hau 天后). Today’s Longshan Temple is a vibrant center of spiritual and civic life, as well as a top tourist destination in Taipei. In *Want*, expressions such as “thank gods” or “my gods” reflect the plurality of deities in the popular pantheon.

¹ There are numerous other Longshan (or Lungshan) Temples; the one in this book is also known as Bangka Longshan Temple, Longshan Temple of Manka, or Mengjia Longshan Temple—all referencing 艋舺, the traditional name for Wanhua 萬華 / 万华, the district in Taipei where the temple is located. Diagram of the [temple layout](#).

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Early in the story, Jason Zhou stops at Longshan Temple on Qingming (Ching Ming) Festival 清明節 (pg. 43) which is one of the four major observances in Han Chinese culture, along with Spring Festival (New Year), Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Moon Festival. Also known as Tomb Sweeping Day, Ching Ming Festival occurs fifteen days after the vernal equinox and typically falls on April 4 or 5.² In keeping with the practice of commemorating ancestors, Zhou burns incense in tribute to his deceased mother and the recently murdered Dr. Nataraj who was like a mother to him.

Liberty Square (Ziyou Guangchang 自由廣場; pronounced: “ZUH-yo gwung-chung”) (pg. 158) was named in 2007 and refers to the outdoor plaza adjacent to the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial, National Concert Hall, and National Theater in downtown Taipei. Historically associated with public demonstrations and political protests ever since martial law was lifted in 1987, gatherings in this space often symbolize the democratic project in Taiwan. Although Jin Feiming’s announcement of a more affordable model of the protective suits (pgs.164-5) may appear benign in making the life-saving product accessible to more people, his ploy to release a highly contagious killer virus on that same occasion is both ironic and insidious.

Author: Rachel Wang, Kirkus reviewer; translator/writer

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² Chinese traditional holidays are based on a lunisolar calendar system of which the Twelve Animals of the Chinese zodiac are components. In *Want*, Jin Daiyu was born in the Year of the Goat (pg. 302) which makes her a year younger than Zhou, born in the Year of the Horse. (pg. 12) In addition to the years they represent, the Twelve Animals also have corresponding time periods within each day and each month; for example, the rat represents the 11pm-1am interval that marks the beginning of a new day. In continuous use now for over two thousand years, the Chinese lunisolar calendar incorporates timekeeping systems embodying precise calculations based on centuries of meticulous recordings of astronomical phenomena.

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