Asian 204
Unit 08: Short Stories from Taiwan

Basic Information
• Bai Xianyong 白先勇 (Pai Hsien-yung), “Winter Nights” (“Dongye” 冬夜), 1970, from the collection Taipei People (Taipei ren 台北人, 1971)
• Huang Chuming 黃春明, “The Drowning of an Old Cat” (Nisi yi zhi lao mao 溺死一隻老貓), 1967
• Zhu Tianwen 朱天文 (Chu T’ien-wen), Fin de Siècle Splendor (“Shiji mo de huali” 世紀末的華麗), 1990

Historical Background
Taiwan: Early History
• Malayo-Polynesian aborigines
• Chinese settlers from Fujian, 16th/17th century on
• European colonists
• Base for Ming loyalist resistance to Qing, late 17th c
  o Spurs imposition of central authority, 1683
  o Historic/mythic dimensions of loyalist stronghold

Japanese Colonial Rule 1895–1945
• China’s defeat in Sino-Japanese war, 1894–1895
• Treaty of Shimonoseki cedes Taiwan
• Imposition of Japanese culture, language, education
• Economic development

The Republic of China on Taiwan 1945–present
• 1945: returned to Chinese sovereignty
• 1949: becomes seat of ROC government in exile
• Both ROC and PRC claim sole legitimacy
• United States support for Nationalist government
• 1971: voted out of UN
• 1979: United States recognizes PRC Nationalist Party Rule on Taiwan
  • Martial law until 1988
  • One-party rule, suppression of political and social dissidence
  • Tension between “Taiwanese” and “mainlanders”
    o February 28, 1947 incident
    o Promotion of Mandarin, suppression of local culture
Taiwan’s Economic Miracle
  • American and Japanese investment
  • Education and industrial development
  • By 1980s one of “four little dragons” of Asian economy
Political and Social Liberalization
  • Death of Chiang Kai-shek, 1975
  • Succeeded in presidency by son Chiang Ching-kuo (Jiang Jingguo, 1910–1988)
  • Martial law lifted, 1988
  • Development of multi-party democracy
    o 2000 election of Chen Shui-bian
      ▪ First non-Nationalist president
      ▪ Native-born Taiwanese
    o Nationalist Party reclaims power in 2008
Political and Social Liberalization
  • Emergence of the local (Taiwanese) element in politics and society
    o Independence movement
  • Relations between Taiwan and the mainland China
    o Neither government formally recognizes other
    o Both assert “one China”
    o Both claim goal of reunification
    o Mainland reserves option of military action
Politics and Culture in Taiwan

“Multi-cultural” Taiwan

- Ties to Chinese tradition
- Displacement from the heartland
- Local Taiwanese culture and the Japanese influence
- Openness to the West and the world at large

Chinese Literature on Taiwan

- Early classical literary activity (17th c. on)
- “New Literature” of the 1920s
  - Influences of May Fourth and Japanese literature
  - Reflections of colonial society
  - Writers in both Chinese and Japanese

Literature under the Nationalist Regime

- 1950s: Mainland-educated anti-Communist writers
- 1960s: The Taiwan Modernists
  - From mainland families
  - Less fixated on anti-Communism
  - Cut off from May 4th tradition
  - Inspired by modern American and European literature

Bai Xianyong (b. 1937)

- Son of Republican-era general
- Family relocates to Taiwan in 1949
- Education in Taiwan and the United States
- Taught at UC Santa Barbara
- Leading figure among Taiwan Modernists
  - Style: influence of modern Western fiction
  - Subject: lives of displaced mainland elite

1970s: The Taiwan Nativists

- Subject: rural life and native Taiwanese
- Language and style: simple, direct, elements of local dialect
• Authors: Taiwan natives
  o Huang Chunming (b. 1939)
    • “The Drowning of an Old Cat” (1967)
  • Literary reflection of challenges to Nationalist rule and mainland culture

1980s-1990s: Beyond the Taiwan–Mainland Polarity
• Zhu Tianwen (b. 1956)
  o Military family background
  o Taiwan-born boom generation
  o Prize-winning stories, novels, screenplays
    ▪ Notes of a Desperate Man, 1994
    ▪ “Fin de Siècle Splendor,” 1990
  o “Cinematic” techniques
  o Personal experience in modern world as metaphor for Taiwan?