

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
 - Spurs imposition of central authority, 1683
 - 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"
 - February 28, 1947 incident
 - 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 Jinguo, 1910-1988)
- Martial law lifted, 1988
- Development of multi-party democracy
 - 2000 election of Chen Shui-bian
 - First non-Nationalist president
 - Native-born Taiwanese
 - Nationalist Party reclaims power in 2008

Political and Social Liberalization

- Emergence of the local (Taiwanese) element in politics and society
 - Independence movement
- Relations between Taiwan and the mainland China
 - Neither government formally recognizes other
 - Both assert "one China"
 - Both claim goal of reunification
 - 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
- *Taipei People*, 1971 ("Winter Nights," 1970)
 - 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
 - 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)
 - Military family background
 - Taiwan-born boom generation
 - Prize-winning stories, novels, screenplays
 - *Notes of a Desperate Man*, 1994
 - "Fin de Siècle Splendor," 1990
 - "Cinematic" techniques
 - Personal experience in modern world as metaphor for Taiwan?