



Ear to Asia podcast

Title: Taiwan through the eyes of mainland Chinese writers and filmmakers

Description: Despite China's official stance that reunification with Taiwan is non-negotiable, the perspectives of mainland Chinese writers, filmmakers, and television producers who have lived on the island are often far more nuanced. How have these artists reconciled their ties to the mainland with their experiences in Taiwan? What distinguishes the works of those who fled the mainland at the end of the Chinese Civil War from those who arrived in Taiwan decades later? Historian and translator Dr. Craig Smith, and literary and film critic Dr. Phyllis Huang, analyse cultural products that were forged in the crucible of political and ideological division. With host Peter Clarke. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

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Voiceover:

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Peter Clarke: Hello, I'm Peter Clark. This is *Ear to Asia*.

Craig Smith: I think that nostalgia seems to be the most important part of this literature, and it was a nostalgia for a homeland, right? For a lot of these people, life on Taiwan was going to be temporary. They were going to return to China. But starting in the 1980s, we have a completely different kind of literature, and we slowly start to get into people having a more complicated view of their lives on Taiwan.

Phyllis Huang: Zhang Yiwei coined this term "Taiwan Dream". It refers to the post 1980s Chinese generation who overly idealized Taiwan as a modern and more civilized version of China, but she described her culture shock after she moved to Taiwan, her feeling of isolation, and her adjustment of her own position as an alien.

Peter Clarke: In this episode, longing and disillusionment: Taiwan through the eyes of mainland Chinese writers and filmmakers.

Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialist at the University of Melbourne.

As most everyone knows, the official view from China has been and continues to be that reunification with Taiwan is non-negotiable. Yet pronouncements from Beijing aside, how is Taiwan viewed and represented by writers, filmmakers and television producers from the mainland and in particular, those who have spent part of their lives on the island? In 1949, 1.5 million mainland Chinese fled to Taiwan with Chiang Kai shek after the nationalist government's defeat to Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party forces, radically changing Taiwanese society and culture in the early post-Civil War years. A very different wave of mainlanders made their way to the island after Taiwan's ruling Kuomintang, or KMT party, ended martial law in 1987 and allowed free movement between the island jurisdiction and mainland China. These were often people seeking higher education and other opportunities away from the gaze of the CCP, in what became known as the Taiwan Dream. In this episode of *Ear to Asia*, we look at how representations of

Taiwan in literary, film and video works produced by members of those two mainland generations reflect their expectations and experiences there. Do they take, as might be expected, a more nuanced view of the island and its politics and culture than their mainland counterparts, without any Taiwan experiences. How did they reconcile their affiliation with the mainland, with their life experiences in Taiwan, and what they observed there, and what themes and perspectives emerged in the writings of those emigrants in the early decades after the Chinese Civil War? And how did they compare to those who came decades later? Joining me to discuss this are historian and translation expert and regular contributor to *Ear to Asia*, Dr Craig Smith from the University of Melbourne and literary and film critic Dr Phyllis Huang from Monash University. Welcome to *Ear to Asia*, Phyllis, and welcome back, Craig.

Craig Smith: Thanks, Peter. Happy to be here.

Phyllis Huang: Hi. Thank you. Peter.

Peter Clarke: Let's start our conversation with a bit of time machine, shall we? We're going to be discussing culture and politics and even economics, perhaps in Taiwan. Craig and Phyllis are starting with you, Craig. Take us back in time, though, to just before 1949, and that pretty large migration of about 1.5 million people moving on to the Taiwanese island. What was it like before they arrived? Give us a sense of that.

Craig Smith: Well, of course, in the first part of the 20th century, Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule. And before the Japanese colonial period, life wasn't easy for the settlers. You know, Han Chinese were coming over from the mainland, and it was a tough place to live. There was lots of disease. It was inhospitable climate, lots of natural disasters. And things were getting better in the late Qing dynasty already. You know, they'd already started to build trains. We already had a lot of government support in the west of Taiwan, so we had this modernization starting to happen, and then that accelerated through the Japanese colonial period. So by the time we get to the 1940s, although all the nasty aspects of colonialism were also there, including things like strict language policies and ethnic policies, at the same time, you had a very modernized society, but you had a modernized society that was increasingly "Japanesed". Starting from 1937, people were only speaking Japanese officially in publications and things, and people had Japanese names. So in some ways it was very, very different from what was happening in mainland China. And so it was a big surprise for people, I think, coming from China.

Peter Clarke: So what was the basic language in Taiwan? You mentioned Japanese and the restrictions on the use of the local languages. What were those languages?

Craig Smith: Until the end of World War two, Japanese was the official language, but in fact, most people, at home, spoke Hokkien, which some people often call Taiwanese. It was a Taiwanese form of Hokkien, and Hakka was also very, very common language throughout Taiwan, and there were indigenous languages that were common, especially in the mountainous areas and the east coast, and these languages are all still popular languages for people at home today. Although of course, with the arrival of the nationalists, the Kuomintang in 1945, the people went from having a strict policy for using Japanese to a strict policy for using Mandarin. So it must have been incredibly difficult for the average person to have to learn what to many people was a completely new language to use in business and in education. It was difficult for people.

Peter Clarke: It's worth mentioning in passing that in Taiwan, the character system, which is an extraordinary system, but a very big burden for people to learn from a very young age. Taiwan kept the pre simplified version of those characters.

Craig Smith: Yeah that's right. But of course in the 1940s, mainland China was also still using what we often call traditional or full form characters. So the simplification of the written language happened in mainland China in the decades after the war, and even up until the 1970s and 80s, people were often fairly familiar with the full form characters. But by now you have very few people who are educated in that character system. I would say that if you're used to the standard full form characters that Taiwan uses, it's not too

difficult to read the simplified version. It takes effort. I mean, you have to learn a little bit, but it's not too difficult. It's much more difficult to go the other way. Going from China to Taiwan.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis, you're in Taiwan, joining our conversation. And your special area, of course, is literature, narratives and forms of media, etc.. What's your sense of that period that Craig just described before 1949, before the big migration? What's your sense of it?

Phyllis Huang: Okay, what I want to add is that at that time, Taiwan had a population of around 6 million. And just like you said, there were around 1.5 million civil war migrants moved to Taiwan with the KMT. So it was quite a big proportion, especially the KMT claim, that it was the legitimate government of both mainland China and Taiwan and forcefully promote Chinese nationalism in Taiwan. It was indeed quite difficult for Taiwanese at that time. I want to add that at that time, about 73% of Taiwanese people got Japanese education. That means that about 70% of Taiwanese people actually speak very good Japanese, and they read Japanese and 70% of Taiwanese population are Hokkien people and they speak Hokkien or we say Taiwanese. So it's quite a lot of proportion. So when they need to learn Mandarin and including the written form and the speaking form, that's quite difficult for the writers at that time. So after KMT moved to Taiwan, there was a long period of time that almost no Taiwanese writer could write anything in Mandarin.

Peter Clarke: So we're talking about quite a significant clash, aren't we? And you alluded, Phyllis, to the Japanese education system. Just take us a bit more deeply into that. What was the character of that education system as it might impinge upon the next phase of the Taiwanese history?

Phyllis Huang: Okay, so during the Japanese colonial period, Japanese government really wanted to make Taiwan a model colonial island of Japan. So they tried to transform Taiwanese into Japanese. They promote Japanese education and teach Taiwanese [the] Japanese language. So I would say that that part of education was quite successful. When I was young, my grandparents, my parents, they still spoke in Japanese even after KMT came to Taiwan. So for them it was really significant transformation of their life.

Peter Clarke: Craig, we talk about the the migration, but take us into a bit more detail on that. What happened to Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang military after the Communist Party or the CCP won that civil war in 1949? That that was a moment in history. But describe the reality of that for human beings moving to Taiwan. What happened?

Craig Smith: Okay. Well, I think it's important that we look at the context kind of between 1945 and 1949. Remember, in 1945, you have a kind of Japanised population in many ways on Taiwan, and then you have these Chinese soldiers coming over in 1945 to actually start administering, taking control of Taiwan. So even before the big waves come over later in the 1940s, you already have government taking control, a new police force, right? And this new police force, this new government really struggles to have a common language with the population they're governing. So you can imagine there were a lot of problems right from the beginning. At the same time, they're fighting a really difficult civil war back on the mainland. So they start taking a lot of the resources from Taiwan shipping them to the mainland to the front for the war. This all makes a lot of sense. However, for the people living in Taiwan, you know, the standard of living was getting worse and worse and worse. And then in 1947, you have a really big uprising called the 228 movement. And things got really bad. A lot of people, a lot of Taiwanese people were taking control over various parts of the island. And then things got worse when Chiang Kai-shek ordered the troops from the mainland to attack, and thousands of people in Taiwan were killed. There was a massacre. And that's a really pivotal moment in Taiwan in 1947. This is February 28th, 1947. So we often call the 228 incident. After that in March, very quickly we turn to a state of martial law, and that martial law continues on for the next 40 years. So now you have a situation where 1.5 million people from the mainland are moving to Taiwan, and you have very clear differences, especially linguistically. You could argue ethnically, definitely politically through the population. And this new 1.5 million people who have complete control over the political system.

Peter Clarke: Was it just the soldiers or did they bring dependents, etc.? What was the make up of that migration, Craig?

Craig Smith: Craig a lot of them were soldiers, but there were a lot of dependents. I mean, 1.5 million people. There were all sorts of people moving over. Uh, it's quite famous that the National Palace Museum was brought over. Uh, the gold from the reserves were brought over. A lot of the scientists and their families came over. So Academia Sinica, which is now Taiwan's foremost research institute, came over from mainland China at that time. A lot of the universities, entire universities moved over, I say the entire universities, but obviously they broke up. Some people were able to make the move and some people were not. So we're talking about an incredible variety of people on all levels of society, suddenly arrived in Taiwan in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Peter Clarke: And Phyllis, all these people arriving, as Craig just pointed out, soldiers and some dependents. Where did they all live? That's a very big influx. What was it like in terms of developing accommodation infrastructures?

Phyllis Huang: So for militaries, they and their families, many of them live in a so-called military dependents villages. What we say in Chinese, "juancun", these villages are communities that the KMT built since 1950s in order to accommodate these people. Actually, about one fifth of these military members and their family had that experience of living in them. And before 1990s, when the Taiwanese government started to demolish most of the military dependents village because of urban redesign, there were about 880 such kind of villages. Some of them are very big, just like the real village, you can imagine, they have schools, community centers, they have their own park or recreation center, something like that. But some of them were very small, just like several houses. The KMT took over a lot of Japanese military dormitories and official dormitories and turned them into military dependents villages. But these kind of villages were turned into a very special cultural landscape of Taiwan, especially for mainlanders.

Peter Clarke: Can you identify fillers? What assumptions were at work in the minds of these immigrants? This wave of migrants heading to Taiwan and about their departure, about the permanence of their move to Taiwan.

Phyllis Huang: So when they moved to Taiwan, they thought that they were about to go back in several years. Actually, there was a say in something like they were prepare their retake of China in one year, and they will start the action in three years, and within five years they would retake China and they will go back to China. So initially they didn't think that they would stay in Taiwan like forever until today. They just thought that they would go back to China very quickly. As you can see, if you visit military dependents village at that time, you will find that the building was like very shabby because they thought it's temporary.

Peter Clarke: Let's take our first snapshot of what literary works started to emerge from those mainland emigres. Can you give us a sense of that? What sort of literature started to emerge, both fictional and non-fictional, from those early emigres?

Phyllis Huang: So in the 1950s and 1960s, there emerges two types of literature. The first type is nostalgic writing, and the second type is called anti-communist writing. The second type was actually encouraged and promoted by the KMT for propaganda, and the first type was more about writers, the earlier mainlanders writers, nostalgia for their hometown, so most of them were focused on mainlanders childhood memory in China, such as, uh, Lin Hai-yin's memories of Beijing. This one was very popular in both China and Taiwan, and such as 1970s. Yu Kwang-chung's very famous on homesickness, Xiangchou. So they express a kind of strong homesickness and their longing for China and for anti-communist writing. Just like I said, it was primarily encouraged by KMT for propaganda purposes. The KMT government may subsidize the writers to write this kind of anti-communist writing, so that it turned very formulaic.

Peter Clarke: And this literature was distributed only in Taiwan. It didn't make its way to the mainland in any form.

Phyllis Huang: No, it's only in Taiwan, and it lasts only about 10 to 15 years because of its lack of interest by the Taiwanese readers as well as the mainland readers. Yeah. So I would say that this type of literature was not that successful.

Peter Clarke: Did any movies emerge at this time, any local Taiwanese films in the same vein as the literature?

Phyllis Huang: Yeah. In 1970s there were quite a lot of what we call patriotic films. At that time, the KMT government had strict censorship for films, so that what kind of films could be released was totally controlled by the government.

Peter Clarke: Craig, how do you see the character of some of those early writings? The villages obviously figured to some degree in the fiction in particular, but how do you view the character of that literature now as you look back.

Craig Smith: I think that nostalgia seems to be the most important part of this literature, and it was a nostalgia for a homeland, right? So it really indicated that for a lot of these people, life on Taiwan was going to be temporary. They were going to go back, they were going to return to China. And this rift was certainly only going to last for a short while. I think at that point, nobody expected that things would go on as they have now for what, 70 some years. But starting in the 1980s, we have a completely different kind of literature, and we slowly start to get into people having a more complicated view of their lives on Taiwan.

Peter Clarke: Of course, Craig, children are born, generations happen, the next wave of children happen and growing up within Taiwan. And let's underscore the fact that Kuomintang and the CCP, etc. are both fairly authoritarian in slightly different ways. So that's shaping people's thinking as well. But we're moving towards that period in the late 80s when things did shift. So how is that next wave, the next generation, starting to shape and reshape the sense of identity, of course, in Taiwan, but also infiltrating literature, the movies, radio, I guess to some degree. And of course, later on television?

Craig Smith: Well, look, there were very different voices from the 70s and through the 80s and through the 90s, and increasingly, especially in the 80s and 90s, you have more of a Taiwan voice, you have more of a Taiwan identity. But the idea of these mainland identity did continue. So the first time I studied Taiwan literature was actually at Tsinghua University in Beijing, which is kind of interesting. And we studied the works of Chen Yingzhen, who was, uh, this writer in Taiwan, really wonderful writer who wrote anti-imperialist and basically anti-American literatures, short fiction, mostly really amazing writer. But another Taiwanese writer that I would say Taiwanese mainland writer actually, who really kind of did very well in mainland China early on was Pai Hsien-yung. I'd like to hear what Phyllis has to say, um, Pai Hsien-yung, because he ends up becoming kind of a leading figure in queer literature as well in the Chinese language. And although his early works were well, all of his works were really about Taiwan, very, very well respected in mainland China.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis, please give us more detail about that, because that's intriguing, isn't it, that he was distributed and consumed on the mainland?

Phyllis Huang: Yeah, yeah. Pai Hsien-yung is a very special mainland Taiwanese writer. And I would call him the 1.5 generation of mainlander, because when he moved to Taiwan, he was, as far as I remember, he was 14 years old. He at the same time experienced the flight from China to Taiwan. But on the other hand, he indeed experienced the transformation of Taiwanese society differently from what his parents generation experienced. So when he started to write, he introduced a lot of new ideas like modernism he used from the Western culture because he studied foreign languages and he did a lot of experimental literature in Taiwan. So he's a very advanced writer in Taiwan. But very interesting thing is that after he immigrated to

America and he started to write a very famous literature called *Taipei People* Taipei, and this literature became the canon of Taiwanese literature, right now very popular in both mainland China and Taiwan, I guess, because in this book, the Taipei people are not actually Taipei people. In this book, this Taipei people refer to mainlanders who move to Taipei. But when they live in Taiwan, they feel nostalgic for China. They feel like their most beautiful, glorious time of their life was in China. So Pai Hsien-yung's book, they characterize the struggle of mainlanders and many Chinese diasporas in different parts of the world during the Chinese Civil War.

Peter Clarke: Craig, take us a bit more deeply into that. I'm intrigued listening to Phyllis there, how did this writer pull off the trick, the literary trick, I guess, of being respected both in Taiwan and in mainland China. What was the content and the stylistics that produced that respect in both places?

Craig Smith: Well, he was just a fantastic writer that so obviously one part of it, but also it's a historical context. So in the 1980s, both sides are starting to kind of relax a little bit. You start seeing a lot more interaction. Things are changing, right? He was cutting edge as well in many ways. Although, you know, we might look back at his literature now and think he was kind of a modernist, maybe no surprise in the early 1980s. But he also, I mean, his most famous long novel, *Niezi* or *Crystal Boys*, was really queer literature, and he was writing about gay men at a time when the West wasn't really doing that in mainstream literature. And I think he still stands out today because of that, that, you know, it's quite obvious that Taiwan, in many respects, was and still is much more liberal and progressive than Western countries on things like this. And, you know, Pai Hsien-yung was just an amazing character who was incredible at his art, but also cutting edge and what was going on in society. And he was in the right place at the right time. And I guess you could say he came from the right family, you know, his father was an important general and he was obviously very privileged as well. So all of these factors come together, I think, with Pai Hsien-yung.

Peter Clarke: Craig, we're heading into the late 80s and getting into the next phase, but leading up to say, 1987, which does seem like a pivotal kind of year for Taiwan. Were there harbingers of that within literature? We're talking about one writer. But other writers, television, radio, films. Were there harbingers starting to emerge of that shift into a new phase?

Craig Smith: We were already starting to see in the 1980s a turn towards a kind of Taiwan consciousness we often call "bentu", or nativist understanding of the local people, and in some ways Pai Hsien-yung was part of that with *Taipei People*. I mean, definitely we start to see this turn towards Taiwan rather than a turn towards reunification. I think in some ways the politics were doing different things. So in 1987, when things relax and you start seeing people actually able to cross that border, especially from Taiwan, not so much from China, but people from Taiwan were suddenly able to go back to China and experience China and go and find their families. And this nostalgia all of a sudden is quite different when you suddenly are able to go there. But of course, what people found was quite different from what they remembered. Because by the time you get to late 1980s Taiwan, Taiwan's a pretty developed country. You know, they had a lot more money than the average person in mainland China. That disparity was very, very apparent in the late 1980s.

Peter Clarke: You're listening to *Ear to Asia* from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute's online publication on Asia and its societies, politics and cultures. It's called the Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. You'll find articles by some of our regular *Ear to Asia* guests and by many others. Plus, you can catch recent episodes of *Ear to Asia* at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which again you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. I'm Peter Clark and I'm joined by Chinese language, literature and film scholar Doctor Phyllis Huang and translation expert Doctor Craig Smith. Phyllis, let's move our focus now beyond the late 80s into the 90s. In the 2000, what was the shift of gears from KMT all about? What was their attitude to travel earlier and what changed that?

Phyllis Huang: I'll start from 1987, when the KMT lifted the martial law. The KMT soldiers were eventually allowed to go back to visit the mainland to visit their families. Just like what Craig says, most of them found

their trip very disappointing because the China they remembered no longer existed. Their parents already died. Their relatives asked them for money. I would like to interpret the period of time as a very important transitional period for mainlanders to develop a type of Taiwanese identity suddenly, because when they visit there and witness the difference, they suddenly realize that they were no longer the Chinese [who] belonged to the PRC China. They stay a Chinese in Taiwan. So that's the difference. And after 1987, a lot of Taiwanese tourists also were allowed to visit China. And they also saw the difference. And in 1990s, we had a great number of Taiwanese professionals and entrepreneurs move their factories to China. They brought their families to China. Right now, we still have a lot of Taiwanese businessmen and professionals in China. And in 1993, Taiwanese government started to allow Chinese spouses to move to Taiwan. And later on, like after 2000, Chinese people started to visit Taiwan and even to stay in Taiwan for a long period of time.

Peter Clarke: It seems to me there was an upwelling of more cultural output as well. Artifacts, TV shows, radio, etc.. Phyllis, is that right? And some stars emerged as well from Taiwan?

Phyllis Huang: Yes. So from the very early ones, like the singer Teresa Teng, she's very popular, extremely popular in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. And somehow she was very popular in China as well. At that time there was a very popular saying in China saying that listen to Old Deng during the day and listen to Little Deng during the night. They say “Báitiān tīng lǎo Dèng, wǎnshàng tīng xiǎo Dèng (白天听老邓, 晚上听小邓)”. So lǎo Dèng, the old Deng means Deng Xiaoping, and little Deng means Deng Lijun. (Teresa Teng). So you can see that even during the very strict censorship during the Deng Xiaoping period, a lot of Chinese people are attracted to Dan Legion songs, which were actually banned in mainland China. That's the earliest we can say that the cultural communications between China and Taiwan. And in 1980s, after Taiwan and China started to have um, people interaction, they also had like culture interactions more often. And a lot of Taiwanese writers work were introduced to mainland China, just like what we discussed Pai Hsien-Yung and, uh, more recent one, like Lung Ying-tai, uh, Chu Tien-hsin. A lot of primarily mainland writer works, uh, were very popular in mainland China, I guess, uh, primarily because in their works there is a sense of connection between China and Taiwan. No matter is some kind of secondary nostalgia they inherited from their parents, they feel a kind of connection with China, or they doubt themselves whether they belong to China or Taiwan. China is an important theme in their work. I guess that's the reason why these works are very popular in China, and I can provide a very recent TV program which was *Kangxi Lai Le – Kangxi Coming*. It's a Taiwanese, uh, variety talk show broadcast from 2004 to 2016. It was very popular in Taiwan, and I taught in um, Asian Institute, a class with most of the students from mainland China. Almost all of them had the experience of watching this TV program. They use the illegal website to watch the TV program. The show was so popular that after it stopped in Taiwan, the two hosts of this show were invited to China to start another show in mainland China.

Peter Clarke: Craig, I'm just thinking, listening to Phyllis, that the overarching concept. Of course, as we look at Taiwan today, the political dimension of it all, one China. But. As you look back at that period that Phyllis just described, are you also seeing that distinct shift in the content, in the style and the output, the cultural output in Taiwan? How do you see that shift now evolving.

Craig Smith: From the 1990s on? You're getting a lot of cultural output from Taiwan to be more and more focused on Taiwan. I'm really interested in historical fiction and, uh, films, television shows on history. And what's really interesting is starting, I guess, in the 1990s, but definitely more so in the 21st century, a lot of Taiwan film and television about history is increasingly about Taiwan, which is a big difference. And a lot of it is about the Japanese colonial period. Some of it is kind of rose-colored glasses, like *Cape Number 7* maybe, or *Kano*, but some of it shows the bad things out of the colonial period too. Like there's a really popular film called *Seediq Bale – Warriors of the Rainbow*, about massacres of the Japanese military and then the indigenous peoples in 1930. Really, uh, a brutal but beautiful film. And it really just shows that you have this turn towards remembering history as or if you say our history, the people's history is no longer this history from China. It's a history from Taiwan. So in some ways the historical memory has a really dramatic shift, I would say.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis, I've just watched the film *Apart Together*, which was released in 2010. I really enjoyed this film, but it's set in Shanghai in the late 80s when things opened up, as you just described a moment ago. A KMT veteran comes back to Shanghai. Take us through the plot. Just a very brief synopsis of the plot. It's an allegorical film and a fascinating one. Just take us through the general contours of that film.

Phyllis Huang: Yes. So it recounts the story of a KMT veteran who visited China, planning to take his long separated wife to Taiwan. But when he returned to China, he found that his wife already had a new family, and the husband of his wife was actually a PLA soldier. And the soldier was described as a very responsible, kind hearted and good man at the name of that PLA soldier was called Lu Shanmin. Shanmin means literally means good man. So, uh, he was so kind that he promises to divorce his wife, to let her go, to follow the KMT veteran back to Taiwan. But he had a stroke immediately after he finally expressed his deep love for her. At the end, the wife decided to stay with the PLA soldier because she found the true love, the meaning of love from him. So, just like you say, by drawing a highly allegorical contrast between the loyal and responsible Chinese soldier, in contrast to the passionate and yet selfish KMT soldier, I think the director present his view of the cross-strait relationship, showing that Taiwan is not so much a member of this Chinese family as he depicted in this film, kind of invader, or an outsider of this family. So I think in this film you can see that it's a clear picture saying that the relationship between China and Taiwan is not so much what the PRC government promoted or try to tell to the Chinese people, at least.

Peter Clarke: At least the idea of unity is made very problematic within this film. Interesting too, in terms of language, which we were discussing earlier, the film was almost entirely in Shanghainese.

Phyllis Huang: Yeah, Shanghainese language is a very special part of this film because Shanghai itself occupies a very special position in mainland China. Shanghai is the biggest city of China, and if you know about China, you'll see that Shanghainese people had like superior status than people from other parts of China. So the Shanghainese language, I think the director tried to use this language to represent that. This is a kind of Chinese people's opinion about cross-strait relationship. It does not belong to the central government, because the language the central government use is the official language of mainland China is Mandarin instead of Shanghainese. But Shanghainese is a very strong kind of position of what Chinese people think.

Peter Clarke: I must say, food and eating figures quite heavily in this film, almost all the way through. They're eating a lot and food and crabs and going to the market or threads its way right through the film, which I found, uh, very endearing in its way. And there's a scene where they have the reunion sitting down to a feast, and the local village chief welcomes the Taiwanese outsider to the meal and to the family and put forward that concept of we're all one blood.

Phyllis Huang: Yeah. So this is what I observed, that the director intentionally to put this character, the official character, into this film when they have their family feast and say something that's not appropriate in this occasion, I guess that the director want to use this film to demonstrate ordinary people's Cross-Strait reunion may be full of pain and conflicts, not that smooth and carefree. It's what Beijing government propagated.

Peter Clarke: Craig, mainlanders started going to Taiwan in that later period into the 2000 to study in higher education, to do tertiary studies. Explain how that worked, what drew them across to Taiwan, what were the permission frameworks for that, and what was the mechanism underlying mainlanders going to Taiwan for higher education?

Craig Smith: Well, at the time, I mean, um, there's a few things going on. Taiwanese universities are great. And of course, things are taught in the Chinese language. That makes things very easy for people coming over from China, but, um, it was a positive time. The governments were willing to collaborate on things. And so starting in 2010, the doors started to open. At first, I think students were only allowed to come over for a year. They weren't allowed to do a degree, but very quickly they were allowed to do degrees. You had students at all levels, post-docs and things, and it was quite wonderful experience for many people. I think

for many of the Chinese, I think it was a good experience. Not for all of them. There was um, was quite difficult. I was a graduate student, actually, still in 2010, in Chiayi, and not many of the mainland students went down to Chiayi, but a few did and it wasn't easy. There was some conflict. I was studying Taiwan literature, so you can imagine there weren't that many mainland students coming over to study Taiwan literature, but they did study other things and we did get to interact with them. And for me, it wasn't a big surprise. But for my Taiwanese classmates, many of them had literally never met anybody from the mainland. But at the same time, you have this increased tourism. So loads of tourists coming over, and in hindsight, maybe things opened up too fast. There were so many people coming over, it was a bit of a shock. But for many people coming from the mainland at that time, it was a positive experience and I'm still friends with some of them today.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis, I've been reading some of the papers you wrote about the author Zhang Yiwei, where he came to Taiwan as a university student from Shanghai in 2010. How did her sense of identity and belonging evolve over her quite long period in Taiwan? About six years, yes?

Phyllis Huang: Zhang Yiwei is a very special writer because when she was in China, she had been already a very famous young writer, and she decided to move to Taiwan as an exchange student at first, and then she continued to do her PhD in Chengchi University in Taiwan. That's the reason why she spent so long a period of time in Taiwan. And during her stay in Taiwan, she wrote at least three works, especially on the topic of Taiwan. And she talked about Taiwan Dream. Actually, a lot of, uh, PRC students in Taiwan talk about the similar concept, but Zhang Yiwei especially coined this kind of, uh, term to this. It refers to the post 1980s Chinese generation who overly idealized Taiwan as a modern and more civilized version of China. But she thinks such an impression is based only on Taiwan's movies, TV dramas and literature, just like what we said. And she argued that Taiwan, in this dream, is a kind of an imagined utopia which reflects the Chinese younger generation's dissatisfaction with PRC society. So in her work, she described her culture shock after she moved to Taiwan, her feeling of isolation and displacement in Taiwan, and her adjustment of her own position as an alien in one of her works.

She even used the terms alien – waixiangren or yixiangren 13 times to express her feeling in Taiwan. So not only her other Chinese writers also express such kind of, uh, similar feeling. As an outsider of Taiwan, I would like to read several lines of quotes from another writer, Taibo II, in her essay *Taiwan Wo zai Taiwan, wo zheng qing chun* (我在台湾, 我正青春) – *In Taiwan. I'm young*, she said. I'm already used to be called a Chinese, Zhongguo ren (中国人) by my Taiwanese classmates. I no longer argue with them. I am still upset, but I no longer have the motivation and position to ask them cynically, "Aren't you Chinese?" because they indeed don't think they are. Now I'm at most reply please call me mainlander instead of Zhongguo ren. So quite contrary to what Craig said, perhaps that's because of different people's feeling. What Zhang Yiwei and Cai Boyi feel about Taiwan is that the longer they stay in Taiwan, they feel they are alienated by Taiwanese, both culturally and politically. And based on some of the sociologists research such, uh, experience, make them upset, and even arouse a kind of stronger Chinese nationalism or even resentment toward Taiwan.

Peter Clarke: So, Craig, this turn from Chineseness, which is very elusive to me as an observer on the sidelines. Does that mean something very different to different people on the mainland and in Taiwan, including those people that have moved back and forth? Phyllis was just alluding to it a moment ago, in a way. What does that term "Chineseness" actually signify?

Craig Smith: Well, of course, the word "Chineseness" is an English word, so it's quite problematic. Uh, there's not a good Chinese equivalent for the word "Chineseness", which, um, but.

Peter Clarke: The concept is there?

Craig Smith: Well, the concept is there. Yeah, but remember, in Chinese there are many different kinds of word for "China" and for "Chinese". So I think that's quite important. All right. For instance, you know, in

English we might say, uh, “Center for Chinese Studies at University”, then the Chinese translation for “Center for Chinese Studies” could be done in a few different ways that either emphasize the political China or cultural China words that are more inclusive of Taiwan and other Sinophone or Chinese-speaking communities. Or words that are much more related to the People's Republic of China. It feels like I'm trying to sidestep your question, but, um, I think these linguistic things are really interesting and really a big part of it that, you know, you could say in English, “I am Chinese”, and it could mean a lot of different things when you translate it into Chinese.

Peter Clarke: Back to you, Phyllis, on the same question.

Phyllis Huang: Yeah, I agree with Craig. I have problems translating “Chineseness” into Chinese. Yeah, that's interesting, but I guess if we don't extend this concept too far to like Chinese diasporas or sinophone, uh, communities overseas, all over the world, we focus on Taiwan-China relationship. I would say that the concept of “Chineseness” is a kind of, um, either political or ethnic belonging or longing to China. Perhaps we can use XI Jinping's wording. Two sides of Taiwan Strait belong to the same family. As an example, whether you feel that you belong to it or not, the Chinese government try to define it as you belong to one family. You show the same responsibility to revive the glory of the Chinese nation. But this kind of Chineseness, this sense of Chineseness is not accepted by contemporary Taiwanese culture, even for most of the Taiwanese people. They feel a kind of hostility toward this kind of idea of Chineseness in Taiwan.

Peter Clarke: Craig, as we come towards the end of our conversation, let's just very quickly the three of us discuss censorship, and I'm still intrigued and unclear how Taiwanese cultural output is received and shaped and inhibited on the mainland. We know that that film we discussed very briefly earlier *Apart Together*, did very poorly on the mainland in terms of the film market. It was an arthouse film, it won a Golden Bear for screenplay at the Berlin Film Festival. But that's just one film. I'm just wondering about censorship on the part of the PRC authorities and what that shaping back and forth across the strait in terms of cultural interflow is like today.

Craig Smith: There is a lot of censorship in China today. Um, that doesn't mean you can't find things. I would say most urban Chinese use what we might call illegal websites to download or, well, to stream. You can access quite a lot a surprising amount of Taiwanese television film, music through these ways. However, if Taiwanese artists and producers want to make money in China, that's a totally different thing. And getting a film into China is not too easy. Music. On the other hand, music, a lot of popular musicians are still very popular. Taiwanese musicians are popular in China, although recently the popular band Wu Yue Tian, uh, Mayday in English, hugely popular band around the world, I suppose. They just had a few sold out shows in Melbourne. They've encountered some, uh, legal issues where they've been accused of doing some bad things. Uh, we don't know, you know, what, the politics are involved in this. But when it comes down to making money and legally releasing your work, it can be quite difficult. So that's mainstream is pretty heavily controlled; there's a lot of censorship. That said, um, if you're, you know, work at a university or something or you have access to, uh, VPN, then you can get all sorts of things. So there's still a lot of Taiwanese content getting through. But to break into the mainstream, that's pretty tough these days, the censorship can be pretty strong. And you'll see when “Taiwan” is mentioned, you always have to pair it with the word “China”. You don't just say “Taiwan”, you can't just say, “She comes from Taiwan” anymore. She comes from Taiwan, China” . Um, which means every time “Taiwan” is mentioned officially in the media, it's paired with “China”.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis, your view on that environment? The censorship environment?

Phyllis Huang: Yeah. So I am currently doing the project about China's cultural narratives about Taiwan, and I found a number of literary works or films about Taiwan produced in China. I guess the most relaxed period was during Ma Ying-jeou the president in Taiwan from 2008 to 2016. Since Ma Ying-jeou is known for being more flexible about Beijing's One China policy and his encouragement of cross-strait exchange, so Beijing was also seen as more relaxed with the Taiwan issue, as well as the publication or release of all of this cultural products. But after 2016, we have Tsai Ing-wen of DPP as the president. China start to be more

stricter about censorship. One example is that in 2019, one of the very popular Chinese actress Qin Hailu, she directed a film called *Fu Xiangxin*, in English is *The Return*. The film even won the Shanghai International Film Festival Award for Best Actor, I think in the same year, the director claimed that that their film will be released in June, I believe, but, uh, the film release was permanently suspended, so I still cannot see the film until today.

Peter Clarke: Let's finish our conversation today right up to the moment. As we know, the DPP party has been in government since 2016, and the PRC government has become increasingly bellicose about bringing what they consider a recalcitrant population in Taiwan back into the fold. We've seen even the military exercises off the island and across the strait. How has that posturing, including military posturing by Beijing, affected how mainlanders view Taiwan? And Phyllis, how has that become expressed more clearly if it has in recent popular culture and literature?

Phyllis Huang: I believe there is not that easy to have a new wave of Taiwan dream in the contemporary China because of the stricter censorship, also because of the different cultural values. Just like Craig says in Taiwan, in the contemporary media, they focus more about the Japanese colonial period and the contemporary local culture. So this part of Taiwanese culture do not attract the Chinese or PRC – we can say PRC general public. And also Xi Jinping's New patriotic education policy is very successful, I have to say. So based on my observation, the younger generation Chinese, they may think that Taiwan is a better place in terms of culture, in terms of cultural quality. We can say “sùzhì (素质)” people's sùzhì – people's quality, but Taiwan already lost its charm in terms of economic performance or we say, modernity.

Peter Clarke: Craig, your view on that and just how free the imaginations are of the artists in Taiwan? Is there a form of self-censorship operating at some level, or is it a much more free and easy approach to output in terms of literature, film, television, radio, etc..

Craig Smith: In terms of freedom and imagination in Taiwan? Do we have self-censorship in Taiwan? I think that, you know, still today when I go to Taiwan, I think it's one of the freest places in the world in terms of censorship. And I think that people still have all sorts of wonderful ideas and wonderful imagination. It's still a wonderful place for art and literature, and I hope it remains so for a long time. Phyllis, what do you think? Is there a lot of self-censorship now in Taiwan compared to the way things used to be?

Phyllis Huang: Uh, no, I don't think Taiwan has such kind of self-censorship, at least as far as I know. But if right now in Taiwan, you write a book or you make a film related to China, it may not sell that good that is decided by the market instead of what we call censorship.

Peter Clarke: Phyllis Craig, thoroughly enjoyable conversation. Thank you so much for being with us on air to Asia today.

Phyllis Huang: Thank you.

Craig Smith: Thanks a lot, Peter. It's great to be here.

Peter Clarke: Our guests were Dr Craig Smith from the University of Melbourne and Dr Phyllis Huang from Monash University. Here to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website. Be sure to keep up with every episode of *Ear to Asia* by following us on the Apple Podcast app, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Please rate and review us; it helps new listeners find the show and put in a good word for us in your socials. This episode was recorded on the 21st of December 2023. Producers were Kelvin Param and Eric van Bommel of profactual.com. *Ear to Asia* is licensed under Creative Commons. Copyright 2024. The University of Melbourne. I'm Peter Clarke, thanks for your company.