

Review: *The Process of Becoming a River Crab* (Yulia Hua, 2022)

By Mark Jiang

Any work that references contemporary culture, in particular the fast-moving, rapidly morphing culture of the internet, is bound to be a product of its time. The meaning of the title is, of course, immediately obvious to those of us working either wholly or partially within the digital Sinosphere, yet to an outsider it seems quaint, almost philosophical.

Of course, the fact that this novel is set in Taiwan brings an ominous undertone to the use of mainland internet slang. The contents of the novel – the gradual introduction of Chinese aspects to a Taiwan under military occupation – is mirrored through its unique use of typography, gradually substituting traditional Chinese characters with simplified over its 20 chapters until the final chapter is composed entirely in simplified Chinese. The author (Yulia Hua) is careful to treat the issue with the sincerity it deserves, carefully detailing every aspect of the transformation with an anthropologist's care to detail – There is an inexorable, stately pace to the assimilation, carried out through innocuous declarations by the provincial government, and accompanied by changes in everything from the way people talk to the food that they eat. Taipei at the end of the novel is barely recognisable to the Taipei at the start: a city more aflush with light and sound, but a city subdued nonetheless.

Of course, no discussion about the book can be complete without describing its

河蟹化

華宇蓮
The Process
of becoming a
River Crab
Yulia Hua

extensive references, from the speculative Hong Kong movie *Ten Years* to a series of obscure resistance texts published in WWII-era Japan known as *Showa Zatsuwa*. It seems set to join these banned works, as the Chinese government agitates for its removal from overseas bookstores and “heavily discourages” any translations of “texts that reflect doom-mongering and Western propaganda.” Thus, even this review becomes an act of resistance, soon to be eliminated as we, too, join the process of becoming a River Crab.

Written 20th December, 2022

又搞政治