

Temporal Scales and Historical Events

Scale I: Individual (Seconds to Hours)

Phenomenological time – subjective experience, immediate sensory reality

Events: – A conversation across the strait via video call – Reading a news headline about military exercises – Making decision to emigrate or stay – Moment of missile launch – Death in combat

Scale II: Biographical (Years to Decades)

Lifetime time – personal memory, career arcs, family history

Events: – 1949–2025 (76 years): Separation of Taiwan and mainland – Lin Xiaowen's lifetime (1997–2025, 28 years): Entire adult life post-democratization – Chen Wei's lifetime (1983–2025, 42 years): Witnessed China's rise – Sarah Huang's lifetime (1990–2025, 35 years): Diaspora born after migration – Professor Liu's lifetime (1935–2025, 90 years): Lived through Japanese occupation, Chinese Civil War, Communist rule, Reform and Opening

Scale III: Generational (50–100 Years)

Historical memory time – living memory, cultural transmission, political legitimacy claims

Key 75-Year Marker (1949–2024): – “75 years of separation” as rhetorical anchor – Approximately 3 generations – Within living memory of oldest survivors – Beyond direct memory for majority of population

Events: – 1895–1945 (50 years): Japanese occupation of Taiwan – 1912–1949 (37 years): Republic of China on mainland – 1949–present (76 years): PRC on mainland, ROC on Taiwan – 1987–present (38 years): Taiwan's democratic era – 1988–2025 (37 years): Cross-strait exchanges and economic integration

Scale IV: Civilizational (Centuries to Millennia)

Historical record time – documented history, dynasty cycles, cultural evolution

Events: – 1644–1912 (268 years): Qing Dynasty – Manchu rule over Han majority – 1683–1895 (212 years): Taiwan under Qing administration – 221 BCE – present (~2,245 years): Concept of unified “Chinese” empire – 1500

BCE – present (~3,500 years): Chinese written language continuity – Historical pattern: Conquest → Sinicization → Integration (Mongol Yuan, Manchu Qing examples)

Observer Note: At this scale, 75 years is 0.03% of recorded Chinese civilizational history. Current configurations appear temporary.

Scale V: Geological/Cosmic (Millions to Billions of Years)

Deep time – planetary processes, species evolution, cosmic events

Events: – 4 million years ago: Taiwan island formation via tectonic collision (Philippine Sea Plate and Eurasian Plate) – 300,000 years ago: Homo sapiens emergence in Africa – 10,000 years ago: End of last ice age; Taiwan Strait flooded, creating geographic separation – 5,000–8,000 years ago: Earliest human settlement in Taiwan region – 4.5 billion years ago: Earth formation – 13.8 billion years ago: Universe origin (Big Bang) – $\sim 10^{10}$ years from now: Heat death of universe (projected)

Observer Note: At this scale, all human history is contained within last 0.002% of Earth's existence. The entire human species is a transient chemical arrangement.

Temporal Compression Exercise

Event: Taiwan Strait Military Conflict (hypothetical 2025)

Individual Scale (Combat Duration: 72 hours) – Each death is an entire subjective universe extinguished – Every decision point feels like eternity – Time dilation from adrenaline and fear

Biographical Scale (Impact: Lifetime trauma, ~50 years) – Survivors carry psychological scars until death – Refugees build new lives across decades – Political careers made or destroyed

Generational Scale (Legacy: 50–100 years) – New historical grievance layer added – National mythologies reconstructed – Veterans pass trauma to children (2–3 generations)

Civilizational Scale (Historical Event: +1 entry in 3,500-year record) – Joins catalog: Warring States, Three Kingdoms, Taiping Rebellion, Civil War – In 500 years: Reduced to paragraph in history textbook – Pattern recognition: Periodic unification–fragmentation cycles

Geological/Cosmic Scale (Impact: Zero) – Earth continues orbiting sun – Tectonic plates continue moving (~2–3 cm/year) – No detectable perturbation in planetary or cosmic processes – Island of Taiwan remains geologically active regardless of political control – All physical evidence of human

conflict eroded within 10 million years – Ultimate fate: Sun expands into red giant (~5 billion years), vaporizes Earth

The Arbitrary 75

Why does “75 years” carry political weight?

1. **Biological:** Within maximum human lifespan (~120 years); few living witnesses remain
2. **Cognitive:** Beyond personal memory for most; becomes “historical” rather than “current”
3. **Political:** Can be framed as either “ancient connection” or “long independence” depending on narrative need
4. **Arbitrary:** In geological time, difference between 75 years and 75 seconds is negligible

Observer Calculation: – 75 years = 2.37×10^9 seconds – Age of universe = 4.35×10^{17} seconds – Ratio: 0.00000000545% of universal time – Comparable to: 0.17 seconds in an 80-year human lifetime

Key Historical Analogues

The Qing Case Study (Conquest → Integration)

- 1644: Manchu conquest (foreign invasion)
- 1644–1680: Violent resistance, Han resentment
- 1680–1750: Gradual cultural integration, queue enforcement
- 1750–1850: Peak integration, “Chinese” identity includes Manchus
- 1912: Revolution framed as anti-Manchu, but Qing territories claimed by ROC
- Outcome: Conquerors absorbed by conquered culture within 3–4 generations

The Japanese Taiwan Case Study (Modernization ≠ Identity Shift)

- 1895–1945: 50 years of Japanese colonial rule
- Modernization: Infrastructure, education, industrialization
- Assimilation attempts: Language policy, name changes, emperor worship
- Result: Did not create “Japanese” identity; created distinct “Taiwanese” identity through resistance and adaptation
- 1945–1949: Brief period of ROC rule before 1949 influx
- Outcome: Shorter than Qing-Taiwan period (212 years), yet separation persists

Timeline for Novel Reference

1935: Professor Liu born (Japanese colonial period) **1945:** End of Japanese rule; Taiwan returned to ROC control **1947:** 228 Incident – violent suppression of Taiwanese uprising **1949:** Chinese Civil War ends; ROC retreats to Taiwan; PRC established **1950–1953:** Korean War; US protects Taiwan **1971:** PRC replaces ROC at UN **1979:** US switches recognition from ROC to PRC **1987:** Martial law lifted in Taiwan; democratization begins **1996:** First democratic presidential election in Taiwan **2000:** First peaceful power transfer (KMT to DPP) **2005–2015:** Peak cross-strait economic integration **2016:** DPP returns to power; cross-strait relations cool **2020–2025:** Increasing tensions; military exercises; sanctions

2025 (Novel Present): Crisis point – hypothetical conflict scenario