

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 Xi-aowen'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) - $\sim 10^{100}$ 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 ($\sim 2\text{-}3$ 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: 0.000000000545% 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