Introduction

> There was so much pain in that memory; so many paradoxes; entanglement of pain upon pain; contradiction of paradox upon paradox. How can I find a coherent thread? Where should I begin?
>
> It took me years to understand where this different-from-others feeling of loneliness came from. It came from *liuli* (diasporic displacement).
>
> Long Yingtai, *Dajiang dahai yijiusiju* [Big river big sea 1949]

The Rivers and the Seas of 1949

The year 2009 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). "Sixty years" (一甲子) holds a special meaning in traditional Chinese cosmology. It signifies the completion of a full cycle and the dawn of a new era. For the PRC officials, the eagerness to throw a grand party for the occasion was also inspired by their tremendous success in hosting the Beijing Summer Olympics one year earlier. In what could perhaps be described as China's finest moment in recent memory, hundreds of millions of its citizens basked in the splendor of state-sponsored extravaganzas, enjoyed spectacular performances put on by the world's best athletes, and reflected on how far their country had come. The PRC's glorious national saga began in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Chairman Mao Zedong defeated the Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*, KMT) headed by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The triumph of the CCP brought national unity as it put an end to the KMT-dominated but still largely divided Republic of China (ROC). According to the official CCP line, the Chinese Communist victory liberated the nation's oppressed masses. It washed off a century of shame and humiliation suffered at the hands of foreign imperialists and their Chinese lackeys: the warlords, the capitalists, the landlords, and of course, the Nationalists. In the midst of all the unbridled patriotism and triumphalism generated by the huge military parade and the official celebrations, the PRC's traumatic origins remained deeply buried; the

horrors of the Maoist era and the massacre at Tiananmen Square felt like nothing more than a distant memory.

As the PRC celebrated its sixtieth birthday with pride and confidence, a book titled *Big River Big Sea 1949* (大江大海 一九四九) published in the same year was creating a different kind of buzz among Chinese-speaking communities outside of China. Written by Taiwan-born female writer Long Yingtai (龍應台, 1952–), *Big River* provides a counter-narrative to the ideologically and teleologically driven CCP (and also KMT) history. The book is based on a large number of personal recollections from the common folks who fought on the losing side of the Chinese civil war and those who, for a variety of different reasons, ended up in Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek's expelled Nationalist regime (the ROC). *Big River* portrays 1949 not as a revolution for nationalism, social justice, and mass liberation, but as a maelstrom of appalling fratricide, massive social dislocation, and heartbreaking family separations. The book became an instant best seller in Taiwan and Hong Kong.[1] It also stirred up considerable discussions among Chinese readers living in other parts of the world. The PRC authorities promptly banned the book, but an electronic copy was easily accessible for China's netizens who knew how to circumvent the Great Firewall.

Long Yingtai was born in a "military families' village" (*juancun* 眷村) in southern Taiwan. *Juancun* were residential enclaves established by the exiled KMT to house its displaced military officers and their families.[2] There have been different translations of *juancun*: "military dependents' village," "veterans' village," "military compound," and so on. I prefer "military families' village." The reason is to underscore the point that these communities mean home/family for the people who grew up in them. Long's parents were among the roughly one million Nationalist personnel, soldiers, and war refugees who were displaced from China to Taiwan when Chiang Kai-shek's government collapsed on the mainland. In Taiwan, the exiles of the Chinese civil war and their descendants – like Long – are called "mainlanders" (*waishengren* 外省人). On October 1, 1949, when Chairman Mao stood on top of Tiananmen and proclaimed the founding of a new socialist republic for the people, many of them were actually leaving the country. This was, in fact, one of the largest and least understood instances of out-migration in twentieth-century China. This human exodus scattered in Vietnam, Burma, and other countries in

[1] Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Book Reviews: Lung Yingtai, *Da jiang da hai – 1949* (Big River, Big Sea – Untold Stories of 1949) and Chi Pang-yuan, *Ju liu he* (The River of Big Torrents)," *China Perspectives* 2010/1 (2010): 114.

[2] Roughly 900 of these villages were erected all over Taiwan. Most have now been demolished for new public housing projects.

Southeast Asia. A small number of the top Nationalist elites were allowed to enter the United States.[3] An overwhelming majority landed in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Today, the mainland exodus to Taiwan and the unsettled dust of the Chinese civil war continue to have important implications for Sino-American diplomacy and regional politics in East Asia. However, even with a cornucopia of literature on the "Taiwan problem" and "cross-strait relations" (Taiwan–China relations), the human migration story that started it all remains relatively obscure. There has been little research and few publications on both the exodus itself and on *waishengren*, aside from a small number of studies looking into the ethnic politics in contemporary Taiwan and some fictional works by mainlander writers that have been translated into English.[4] Among historical scholarship, nothing was written until the early 2010s with Joshua Fan's *China's Homeless Generation* (2011) and Mahlon Meyer's *Remembering China from Taiwan* (2012).[5] Like Long's best-selling book, both Fan's and Meyer's monographs are based on oral history.

Big River attracted considerable attention internationally due to Long's status as a famous writer/public intellectual in the Chinese-speaking world and a well-orchestrated global book tour arranged by her publisher.[6] Yet, *Big River* is only one example among a surfeit of oral history books and personal memoirs produced by *waishengren* during the past three decades, since Taiwan became a democracy. This conspicuous memory boom has focused on the traumatic and diasporic recollections associated with the great exodus in 1949. In this mnemonic community,

[3] Notable examples included Chiang Kai-shek's brothers-in-law T. V. Soong (宋子文, 1894–1971) and H. H. Kung (孔祥熙, 1881–1967). Thousands of Chinese students were stranded in the United States after 1949. For more on the latter issue, see Madeline Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), chapter 5.

[4] Kuang-chün Li (chapter 5) and Stéphane Corcuff (chapter 8) in *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, ed. Stéphane Corcuff (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 102–122, 163–195; Scott Simon, "Taiwan's Mainlanders: A Diasporic Identity in Construction," *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 22:1 (2006): 87–106. For translated works, see Pai Hsien-yung, *Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream: Tales of Taipei Characters*, trans. the author and Patia Yasin, ed. George Kao (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982); Chi Pang-yuan and David Der-wei Wang eds., *The Last of the Whampoa Breed: Stories of the Chinese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[5] Joshua Fan, *China's Homeless Generation: Voices from the Veterans of the Chinese Civil War, 1940s–1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Mahlon Meyer, *Remembering China from Taiwan: Divided Families and Bittersweet Reunions after the Chinese Civil War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

[6] In recognition of her status and contribution, the President of Taiwan Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九, 1950–) made Long the island state's first Minister of Culture in 2012. She held the position until the end of 2014.

the elderly and still surviving first-generation migrants acted as the storytellers. Their Taiwan-born children and grandchildren, such as Long Yingtai, served as the curators and proponents of their parents' and grandparents' memories. Notable publications in the same year – publications that employed the same river/sea trope as a metaphor for *waishengren*'s agony and melancholy of living in displacement – included Chi Pang-yuan's (齊邦媛, 1924–) *The River of Big Torrents* (巨流河) and Zhang Dianwan's (張典婉, 1959–) *Pacific 1949* (太平輪一九四九).[7]

In addition to the oral history books and memoirs, there have also been novels, films, TV dramas, and stage plays spotlighting two particular groups of *waishengren*: the disenfranchised Nationalist army retirees, or "old soldiers" (*laobing* 老兵), and the residents of the aforementioned *juancun*. Fan found a trove of published personal stories readily available in Taiwan during the 2000s, when he was conducting research there on the "old soldiers," whom he fittingly referred to as "China's Homeless Generation."[8] Similarly, Meyer observed that the former civil war refugees in their twilight years were "eager to talk, eager to imagine and re-image his or her identity in the context of the present."[9]

Despite being aware of the mnemonic nature and identity politics of these individual narratives, Meyer, as well as Fan, treats oral history mainly as history – as a way to recover and retell grassroots experiences that had been suppressed by the authoritarian Nationalist regime in Taiwan before democratization. My book is different. It treats oral history both as history and as the social production of memory or "social memory" – what a group of people, a society, or a nation concentrates on recalling or commemorating at a certain point in time in order to satisfy a particular need or serve a specific purpose. Every mainlander family in Taiwan is said to have a heartrending "refugee story" (逃難故事). Even so, it took nearly half a century before people started to take these stories out of their private homes/conversations, and began to articulate, exchange, and promote them in public. Why? There had been a Nationalist taboo on discussing defeat, and that surely accounts for the many decades of silence, but is that the only reason? What were the mainland refugees thinking and reminiscing about before the late 1980s and early 1990s? What do these personal accounts – told decades after the initial event – tell us about the history of the mainlanders and their

[7] Chi Pang-yuan, *Juliuhe* [The river of big torrents] (Taipei: Tianxia yuanjian, 2009); Zhang Dianwan, *Taipinglun yijiusijiu: Hangxiang Taiwan de gushi* [Pacific 1949: Stories of the journey to Taiwan] (Taipei: Shangzhou, 2009). An English version of Chi's book was published by Columbia University Press in 2018.
[8] Fan, *China's Homeless Generation*, xv. [9] Meyer, *Remembering China*, 11.

forced migration to Taiwan? What do they not tell us? What does narrating the suffering and dislocation of their forebears mean for the Taiwan-born children and grandchildren of the former civil war exiles at the present time?

The historical trajectory I delineate in the chapters of this book – based primarily on documentary research and with oral history as supplementary evidence – provides answers to these complex and interwoven questions. The painful memories of the great exodus were, in fact, relatively unimportant for *waishengren* before they were impacted by two overwhelming and shattering experiences in the wake of Taiwan's political liberalization. Such shocks were produced by their belated return to a China that they could hardly recognize and Taiwan's stormy post-authoritarian politics. I describe these difficult and unsettling episodes in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 respectively, as "the social trauma of the homecoming in China" and "the social trauma of the homecoming in Taiwan." Furthermore, my research uncovers the salience of two earlier social memory productions, or "mnemonic regimes," among the mainlanders in Taiwan before the late 1980s. From the beginning of their exile to the late 1950s, their previous refugee experiences during the Japanese invasion of China held special meaning for the newly displaced mainland refugees in Taiwan. From the early 1960s until about midway through the 1980s, the historical and cultural knowledge associated with their native places in China became significant as the basis for rebuilding communities. I use the term "mnemonic regime" to signify the rise and fall of three historically and culturally conditioned memory booms in three separate periods of mainlander history in this book. The two earlier mainlander mnemonic regimes, like the current one revolving around the great exodus, were a direct response to substantive social trauma. Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3 shed light on these important historical developments that *waishengren*'s contemporary memories have elided.

This elided past informs my interpretation of the reason and meaning behind the resurgence of "the rivers and the seas of 1949," more than four decades after the initial traumatic cataclysm. My main argument consists of two related points. First, *waishengren*'s social production of memory centering on the great exodus since Taiwan's democratization has turned the event into a shared cultural trauma for the still ongoing but only partially successful process of mainlander identity formation. I borrow the term "cultural trauma," or more precisely, "the cultural construction of collective trauma," from sociologist Jeffrey Alexander to underscore the discursive and instrumentalist aspects, as well as to highlight the political nature of this

meaning-making enterprise.[10] *Waishengren*'s mnemonic "cultural trauma" is different from the four separate and substantive "social traumas" that they had lived through at four different points in their history. These overwhelming and shocking instances of social dislocation and disorientation included: the mass expulsion from China (1948–1955), the moment when the hope for return began to fade (late 1950s – early 1960s), the heartbreaking homecoming in China (late 1980s – early 1990s), and the equally disheartening reality of the homecoming in Taiwan that immediately followed.

The idea of making a categorical distinction between "social trauma" and "cultural trauma" is derived from the empirical research presented in the book. My take on social trauma resonates with the views expressed by Neil Smelser and Piotr Sztompka, two coauthors of Jeffrey Alexander's anthology on cultural trauma. Smelser opines, "It is possible to describe social dislocations and catastrophes as social traumas if they massively disrupt organized social life."[11] Similarly, Sztompka proposes the notion of "traumatogenic social change" to depict the widespread maladjustment felt by the citizens of Poland and other Eastern European states following the collapse of the socialist system.[12]

The second point of my main argument is that despite the strong diasporic sentiment of displacement and rootlessness articulated by *waishengren*'s great exodus memories, which has prompted several scholars to consider them as a type of "diaspora" or "Chinese diaspora," the aim of their contemporary mnemonic regime is to do the exact opposite of being a diaspora – and that is to construct a locally based identity as "mainlander Taiwanese."[13] The unfolding diachronic narrative in the ensuing chapters will support my claim. Initially, the main protagonists of the book are the Chinese civil war exiles/migrants, or first-generation mainlanders. Second- and third-generation mainlanders, that is, the Taiwan-born children and grandchildren of the mainland exiles, will appear in the latter part of the book. They bear witness to their parents' and grandparents' repressed wounds of 1949 not only to mitigate their own traumatic sense of exclusion and stigmatization in democratized Taiwan, but also more importantly – to assert themselves as deserving members of the island state's new imagined community. Since early post–World War II

[10] Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 2; Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), chapter 1.
[11] Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*, 37. [12] Ibid., 158.
[13] Zhao Yanning (Antonia Chao) and Scott Simon have been the two main proponents of considering *waishengren* as a "diaspora." I will discuss their arguments in the last section of this chapter.

Taiwan, the label "*waishengren*" had been used to describe mainland Chinese who arrived with the KMT. However, a self-conscious and collective *Waishengren* identity did not begin to emerge and crystalize among the descendants of the great exodus until the early 1990s.

Contrary to popular belief, most who fled China for Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek's defeated regime were not Nationalist military/bureaucratic elites or influential business tycoons. Most of the one million civil war exiles reaching the island's shores in the late 1940s and early 1950s were ordinary folks: common soldiers, petty civil servants, and dispossessed war refugees from different walks of life. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 will reveal that many were not even loyal supporters of the Generalissimo. The unfinished war between the KMT and the CCP had fundamentally altered the lives of these expellees and the families they had left behind on the mainland, whom they would not see again for another four decades, if at all.

The story told in the following pages thus stands in contrast to the mainstream historiography of the Chinese civil war, which largely concentrates on analyzing the causes of the Nationalist downfall and the Chinese Communist victory. Instead of ruminating on this politically/ideologically driven and over-researched question, this monograph draws attention to a long-neglected aspect of the war: how ordinary people and communities were affected by the final battle for China between the KMT and the CCP. In particular, it delves into what this vicious fratricide has caused for the one million mainland Chinese who were forcibly displaced to Taiwan, as well as for their Taiwan-born descendants and the semi-Japanized native Taiwanese who were compelled to receive them.

The mainlander story I bring to light in this book not only offers a new vantage point to rethink the historiography of the Chinese civil war, it also provides a stimulating case study for the research and writing of historical trauma in relation to memory and diaspora. The psychoanalytic notion of trauma as "unclaimed experience" or unprocessed/inaccessible memory – made famous by Cathy Caruth's writings in the 1990s – has been challenged and complicated by the sociological notion of trauma, such as the abovementioned "cultural trauma" theory proposed by Jeffrey Alexander and his colleagues.[14] While my theorization of social and cultural traumas is more in line with the sociological perspective of trauma rather than the psychoanalytic perspective, the empirical research introduced in the subsequent chapters shows that both perspectives need

[14] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*.

to be reconsidered. *Waishengren*'s traumatic and diasporic history is worthy of scholarly attention, especially for those who do not work on Taiwan or China, because it illustrates three interconnected theoretical points concerning trauma, memory, and diaspora.

The first of these points is the need to move beyond what I would characterize as the "single event" model that is symptomatic to both the psychoanalytic approach and the sociological approach to trauma. For the first approach, trauma, mainly individual but sometimes collective (social), is induced by one shocking external event. For the second, a single traumatic occurrence in the past, real or sometimes fabricated, becomes the focal point of collective memory and identity. *Waishengren*'s ruptured and anachronistic history – with multiple instances of social traumatization and recurring efforts at mitigation via shared recollections – illuminates the limitations of these two major schools of thought in trauma theory. Both schools have arisen from the complex debates within the Euro-American academy on issues regarding psychoanalysis, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Holocaust representations, collective memory, modernity, nationalism, and so on. My contention here echoes postcolonial literary scholars Michael Rothberg's and Stef Craps's critique of the Freudian "event-based model" in trauma studies, which constitutes part of the scholarship's Eurocentric bias.[15]

The second theoretical point is the function of social memory in assuaging traumatic experiences – how reflecting collectively on a particular kind of past has helped a displaced population like *waishengren* find solace, bearings, and a sense of belonging at different times in their history. This view of memory as salutary and therapeutic is different from the psychoanalytic approach that has a strong tendency to problematize the "access" to traumatic memory. It is also different from the sociological approach that has an equally strong tendency to problematize the "excess" of traumatic memory. Both of these tendencies result from the fixation on one major shocking incident that becomes the focal point of either memory restoration (psychoanalytic approach) or reproduction (sociological approach).

To be fair, the psychoanalytic position does consider recalling and coming to terms with the initial traumatogenic event (claiming the Caruthian "unclaimed experience") central to the healing process. Still, *waishengren*'s history exhibits three aspects that are counterintuitive to the established psychoanalytic thinking. First, as traumatized and expelled

[15] Michael Rothberg, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response," *Studies in the Novel* 40:1&2 (2008): 224–234; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, paperback ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

people, most of the mainlanders did remember and they did not necessarily need others to help them remember. Second, the mainlanders concentrated on recalling different things at different times to ease their perturbation and shock; what they chose to remember was historically conditioned and culturally specific. Third, the two types of social memory that they found particularly comforting and meaningful initially at two different points in their history did not focus on the initial traumatic incident, and hence the inadequacy of the "single event" model in explaining the mainlander experience.

Scholars who take the sociological approach to study collective memory like Jeffrey Alexander are concerned about the "excess" of traumatic memories in our time.[16] They are wary of the "affect" generated by ethnic/religious/social groups or nation-states evoking their past suffering for toxic identity politics, chauvinistic nationalism, or other menacing purposes. Therefore, the primary mode of operation is to expose the constructiveness, the selectivity, and the instrumentality of these joint recollections of pain. While I do not fundamentally disagree with this mode, and in fact see it as an important scholarly undertaking to put the present-day narratives of a cultural trauma, such as *waishengren*'s great exodus memories, in historical perspective, I would nonetheless argue that the therapeutic function of shared memories should not be taken lightly or even denied just because they are "socially constructed."

The human agency of individuals or groups that employ a variety of their past experiences in specific historical and cultural contexts to alleviate their despondency, grief, and shock should be recognized and analyzed. To say only people who have trouble remembering are "traumatized subjects" worthy of the attention of trauma studies (the psychoanalytic position), or to say people conjuring up some long-forgotten historical events only to serve a sinister purpose (the sociological position), is to limit our imagination of the complicated relationship between trauma and memory. By doing so, we delegitimize the human agency and respect for cultural diversity that can contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation.

My third and final theoretical proposition is that *waishengren*'s forced exodus, with reference to both trauma and memory, can help start a fresh and productive conversation on theorizing diaspora in the field of Chinese migration studies. In the past few decades, the debate on what constitutes a diaspora became a pointless academic exercise. The main reason is the liberal application of the word to stand for all forms of dispersion and

[16] See Alexander's take on the Holocaust memory in Israel in Alexander, *Trauma*, chapter 3.

displacement globally, which, according to French sociologist Stéphane Dufoix, has made the concept "theoretically lifeless."[17] Similar to the larger global debate, theorizing Chinese diaspora has also run into an intellectual cul-de-sac. Other than the proliferated and unreflective usage, there is a problem that is specific to the Chinese context. For many scholars of the "Chinese overseas," using the term "Chinese diaspora" to describe their research subjects suggests a primordial linkage between China/the Chinese state and the dissimilar peoples of Chinese descent living outside of the country, thereby encouraging an essentialist/homogenous notion of Chineseness. Oddly, this version of diaspora goes up against an anti-essentialist/anti-nation state version of Chinese diaspora influenced by the theories of globalization and transnationalism, which puts emphasis on the diversity and hybridity of Chineseness. This thorny definitional issue is one main reason why I have refrained from identifying the Chinese civil war exiles and their Taiwan-born descendants as a type of "diaspora" or "Chinese diaspora," despite attempts by others to do so.

That said, *waishengren*'s lived experiences and memories are without doubt "diasporic" when the term is employed as an adjective to describe the condition of displacement created by forced migration. While dismantling the essentialist notion of Chineseness is still a crucial intellectual project, I argue that diaspora does not have to be dismantled together with it. Drawing insights from the writings of Edward Said, Cathy Caruth, and in particular, James Clifford, my research connects trauma and memory to diasporic displacement. It demonstrates that *waishengren*'s diasporic history reorients the theoretical discussion of diaspora in three important ways.[18] The first is the need to apply the term in a more attentive and circumspect manner to exiles, refugees, and other more extreme forms of involuntary relocation and social dislocation. The second is the need to investigate the temporal displacement of uprooted communities beyond the more frequently explored spatial dispersion. This point is epitomized by my rephrasing of Clifford's famous description of a diasporic condition – "of living here [*and now but*] remembering/desiring another place [*in another time*]."[19] The main conceptual focus is not only between "roots and routes," but also between

[17] Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 107.
[18] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (Winchester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1994), 137–149; James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
[19] Clifford, *Routes*, 255.