

Opinion: Here's a Taiwan chill pill for your Pelosi-induced anxiety

Saturday 6 August 2022, by [WEI Clarissa](#) (Date first published: 3 August 2022).

(CNN)As news of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's [arrival](#) in Taiwan has lit up the headlines, I've been hit by a virtual tidal wave of messages from well-meaning acquaintances in the West who are genuinely worried for my safety.

Meanwhile, the biggest drama in my Taiwanese family's group chat currently is how I missed my car's annual smog check appointment and how a cockroach infestation has sprung up in my Taipei bedroom while I've been away on vacation. Clarissa Wei Sometimes I find myself toggling between two alternate realities — one submerged in existential dread in the face of potential armed conflict, and the other with mild trepidation about my cockroach situation as life goes on as normal. That is, until I realize that the political rhetoric is almost exclusively from the outside, and that [most people in Taiwan remain unfazed](#). Taiwanese politicians had also largely been mum about Pelosi's visit.

There's a jolting disconnect between how the outside world perceives Taiwan (as a potential flashpoint for world war), and how we in Taiwan see Taiwan (our dear home where we live). And part of that disconnect is because the international conversation about Taiwan is filtered through a geopolitical lens and almost always in the context of China.

But what's most frustrating about the reaction to Pelosi's visit is not the [prophetic declaration](#) of imminent doom, but the expectation of fear and the surprise that follows when people realize that we aren't all panicking in Taiwan — as if the calm we exude in light of unprecedented threats is a symptom of our ignorance of the facts before us. Threats from China are nothing new. They have been a part of my life, my parents' lives and their parents' lives for as long as almost anyone in my family can remember. In fact, Taiwan has been under threat by the People's Republic of China for nearly 70 years. The three [Taiwan Strait crises](#) are proof of that. My parents grew up in the shadow of these tensions and, in their late 20s, decided they had enough of living on the brink of war. So, they immigrated to suburban Los Angeles where I was born and raised. In my late 20s, I did the exact opposite of what they did and permanently relocated to Taiwan as a newlywed to start a life with my husband.

I find the nationalized healthcare, sleek public transportation system and the low rents in Taipei a steep upgrade from life in California. Even my parents — who are now edging toward retirement — spend the majority of their time in Taiwan because they find it a much safer and comforting place to be.

Our chilled-out attitude in Taiwan can be misconstrued as complacency, but we are not oblivious to the threats before us. China has [threatened](#) "resolute responses and strong countermeasures to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity." On Tuesday, Taiwan's presidential office reported [a cyberattack on its website](#).

But as a fellow Taiwanese friend put it, the Chinese threat is like a cancer in remission that

continuously threatens to come back. We've been infected with it for decades and are acutely aware that it very well might kill us this time around. However, these are long-standing issues the Taiwanese people have been raising for years — more often than not to deaf ears.

Taiwan has begged [for accession](#) to the World Health Organization, which it has been denied repeatedly amid Chinese pressure. Despite being a self-ruled island, Taiwan is constantly being listed as a province of China on the [websites of international hotel chains and airlines](#). And, over the years, Taiwan has been [stripped of diplomatic allies](#) one by one as political leaders are swayed by Chinese investment. If anything, I resent the seemingly performative panic that is expected of the people of Taiwan as we try our best to live our normal lives. Because if the world truly cares about the well-being of Taiwan, then give us a seat at the table.

[Video: Here's why Beijing sees Pelosi as a hostile figure 02:41]

Pelosi's visit is a very welcome gesture of solidarity, but the hyperbolic alarms sounding off as a result of her visit only play to China's advantage and supports the illusion that Taiwan is not a democratic country with its own laws and borders. Many are criticizing Pelosi's [visit as upsetting](#) the delicate balance of geopolitics, but lawmakers [have every right to visit](#) the island and have done so many times in the past, despite Chinese ire. Taiwan is not provoking anyone, and, [according to a recent government-commissioned poll](#), most people in Taiwan — including the current leadership — support maintaining some form of the [status quo](#) for the time being, which means “no unification, no independence and no use of force.” It is a gray area wherein Taiwanese sovereignty is continuously questioned, even as Taiwan has proven itself to be a tenuous source of stability.

Taiwan [has never](#) in its history been ruled by the People's Republic of China, and amplifying China's insistence on unification and its tantrums sets a terrible precedent. The Chinese government alone is responsible for the heightened tensions, and the subdued calm of the people of Taiwan compared with the violent rhetoric pushed by the Chinese state is a metaphor for that.

Our lives in Taiwan do not revolve around cross-strait relations. We do not see ourselves as “[an austere rock in a typhoon-laden sea](#)” or “[the most dangerous place on Earth](#).” If anything, we are more focused on slowly [opening up](#) and loosening Covid-19 restrictions after two years of strict pandemic measures.

I do not think about China on a regular basis and have to continuously remind myself that any anxiety I feel from the consequences of Pelosi's visit is externally influenced. I've been asking my Taiwanese friends for reassurance of this, and they too have told me that no one in their circles is talking about the Pelosi visit. “I'm sure China and their trolls are going to be pissed about that,” my friend joked.

When Pelosi's plane set out for Taiwan earlier today, I got an influx of news from my family. A family friend helped me get that smog check done and an oil change for good measure. Cockroach traps have also now been set down in my apartment. Personally, I'm especially thrilled about the cockroach traps.

Opinion by Clarissa Wei

P.S.

- CNN. Updated 0040 GMT (0840 HKT) August 3, 2022:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/02/opinions/taiwan-not-panicking-nancy-pelosi-wei/index.html>

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Her writing has been published in The New York Times, The New Yorker, The Los Angeles Times, VICE, National Geographic, Smithsonian Magazine, Monocle, Eater, Bon Appetit, Nikkei Asian Review, CNN, NPR, among others. She has field-produced videos for VICE News Tonight, Vox, and SBS Dateline. She is also the host and producer of **[Climate Cuisine](#)**, a podcast part of the Whetstone Radio Collective that explores how sustainable crops are used in similar climate zones around the world.

Previously, Clarissa was a senior reporter at Goldthread, a video-centric imprint of the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong, where she made over 100 [videos](#) on the foods and cultures of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the span of two years. Her award-winning videos have been [syndicated on Discovery Asia-Pacific](#) and were nominated for [a Webby in 2021](#). In 2015, her VICE [piece](#) on working conditions in a rum factory led to an [industry-wide boycott](#) of the company, which sparked [major systematic changes](#) to the sugarcane industry in Nicaragua.

Clarissa has visited and filed stories from 23 provinces in China and once worked a short stint as [a volcano hiking guide](#) in Central America. Born and raised in Los Angeles, she now lives in Taipei with her husband, where they are tending to a subtropical food forest called [Arcadia](#).