Melissa Chan's on Her Dystopian Graphic Novel

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Welcome to *Horns of a Dilemma*, the podcast of the *Texas National Security Review*. I'm Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Director of the Asia Policy Program at the University of Texas at Austin, and Editor in Chief of the *Texas National Security Review*. I'm here today with our Executive Director Dr. Ryan Vest. We are very pleased to have joining us on today's podcast Melissa Chan, author of the new book *You Must Take Part in Revolution*. Melissa is an Emmy nominated Hong Kong and Taiwanese American journalist who's based between Los Angeles and Berlin.

She was previously posted in China, until she became the first journalist, in more than a decade, to be expelled from China in 2012. Much of her reporting examines human rights, the rise of authoritarianism, and the defense of democracies. She has written for The New York Times–where she was nominated for a Loeb Award–The Atlantic, The Washington Post, The Guardian, and many more. As a broadcast correspondent, she's reported for VICE News Tonight and Al Jazeera. She joins us today to talk about her debut novel, which was created with global activist artist Badiucao.

Melissa, welcome to the podcast.

Melissa Chan: Thank you so much for having me.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, it's great to be here and I'm really delighted to have you visiting UT, and to be able to talk with you about your book today. The book is a novel, and so, we'll get to some questions about that in a minute.

But you are a journalist with really deep experience in Asia and around the world, reporting on issues of democracy, authoritarianism, and its global impact. So I wanted you to, just maybe, tell our audience a little bit about your career, and your background as a journalist covering Asia. And what has changed in China, and in Asia, in the time that you've been reporting on it?

Melissa Chan: Yeah. It's very interesting, because my area of study in college was South America, and particularly Cuba. It was not China, and Asia was not on the radar. But I do speak the two languages, the major languages of Chinese:

Cantonese and Mandarin. And so when I left college, I ended up spending a lot of time reporting in Asia, rather than South America.

Unfortunately, for most of American media, there's less of an interest in South America. Perhaps that's a little different these days under this Administration. But certainly, 20 years ago, the focus was very much–the future is the Indo-Pacific. And so I found myself there, reporting on China, was based in Beijing for five or six years, filed some 400 stories. Ended up doing a lot on human rights, because I was primarily interested in human stories. And then you end up just seeing how terribly, frankly, this government treats its own people, and the levels of corruption. But other opportunities came up.

Being based in Beijing, including unusually to North Korea, so I managed to report from there in 2010, to see the political succession transition from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong-Un. And then in later years, after I left Asia, had the chance to report from Moscow. And I had said that I started out with an interest in Cuba, so I kind of joke that I ended up reporting from a lot of closed societies, which then developed into, you know, greater interest in the global rise of authoritarianism, and the sort of defense of democracies.

And, you know, my early interest in South America ended up being quite useful as I saw China making inroads in South America. And that is actually one of the stories I worked on for the New York Times in Ecuador–looking at the Chinese sort of surveillance technology that they were selling to markets that, frankly, I mean, let's be honest, the United States and Western Europe also, have quite a number of companies doing surveillance technology work and manufacturing. But the Chinese were very smart about targeting the cheaper markets, you know, in Africa, in South America. So, yeah, that's kind of the gamut of what I've done.

And now I'm based in Berlin, with a little bit of time in the United States.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, we're really lucky to get you here in Texas, so thanks for coming by.

Melissa Chan: Thank you. And I realize I didn't answer the second question, which is how much has changed in China and Asia? And I would say that, the primary, the big event that kind of was the focus, and the orbit, when I first got to Asia, was China's Beijing Olympics of 2008. So this was considered a coming out party. We heard that term a lot. And it was a freer time to report in China. Now it's much more difficult to report the level of surveillance and following, frankly, foreign correspondence as they move around the country is

just much higher. So it's tougher to get those stories. It's tougher to convince people to talk.

And also the geopolitical environment, of course, has changed. Taiwan was always there, and there were various issues that popped up in the early 2000s. But now it is much more of a concern whether there is going to be some kind of imminent aggressive action from Beijing.

So we are in a scarier place than we were 20 years ago, 15 years ago, when I was kicked out.

Ryan Vest: By profession, you're a journalist, and you have this really incredible portfolio of journalistic work. What made you pivot to writing a novel, and a graphic novel, at that?

Melissa Chan: I think, first of all, I think a lot of excellent people I know have already written amazing nonfiction works on Asia or China. And as a journalist you do feel the pressure to say, well, I need to write a book. I need to publish a book. But I was just looking at the literature out there already and didn't see a clear place where I could contribute something new to the scholarship.

And so the other thing was that the media landscape has changed in the last 20 years. And I was getting frustrated, whether it was doing broadcast reporting, or text reporting, that in many ways you're sort of writing to people who already agree with you about sort of the dangers of geopolitics, the dangers of rising authoritarianism, China being a point of concern.

And you hit this mid-career point, where I certainly felt like the need to reach new audiences. So this is an attempt to reach new audiences. I happened to have just finished a piece in The Atlantic about Chinese creatives moving to Europe, particularly to Berlin, in the same way that a lot of creative people were in Paris in the 1920s and 30s, and also in Berlin in the 1930s, because it was this space–this very free space. And I was seeing a lot of Chinese, I mean, the most famous Chinese artists were in Berlin at the time–Ai Weiwei, Liu Xia, the wife of Liu Xiaobo, who was the Nobel Peace laureate.

And Liu Xia was, and is a poet. But there were much younger Chinese who were coming over, and it was a reflection of the closing political space under Xi Jinping–that creative Chinese artists, filmmakers, writers, didn't see a future for them in China. And so they were ending up in Berlin.

And one of the people I interviewed was Badiucao, who is my co-author, and the artist for *You Must Take Part In Revolution*. He was, at the time, mostly known as a political cartoonist. He was spending a year working out of Ai Weiwei's studio. And I just remember doing this interview with him, and then the piece came out, I think about a year later, COVID happened. Everyone was in lockdown. I happened to be in California at the time, and I would find myself sort of stuck in my childhood home, and staring at the bookshelves of books I used to read, seeing the graphic novels. Some of them, you know, are amazing books, of course, like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, about the Holocaust.

That was my introduction to understanding the Holocaust–was through the format of a graphic novel, which is basically a long, I mean, just in case people don't know, it's a comic book, but a long comic book, like, you know, 150 pages or more, which is why it's called a graphic novel. And then I was looking at Badiucao, posting his political cartoons online on social media.

This was the height of maximal Twitter, before it became X. And I just remember messaging him and saying–where are you going with this? Like, I've interviewed you–where are you going with your art? You're just going to do political cartoons for free, post it, and say creative commons everyone can use for the rest of your life? And that started a conversation that ended up becoming this graphic novel that we spent five years working on. It's 264 pages. It is a full on thing. Had I known all the things I know about the publishing industry on the fiction side, I don't think I would've pursued this. But the goal also, at the time was, during lockdown you'll recall, that slowed down the Hong Kong protest movement of 2019 into 2020.

People were afraid of COVID, and they were locking down in Hong Kong as well. And so that movement was fizzling, and it had been so inspiring, as I'm sure both of you felt. And we wanted to honor that. And some of my background is that I was born in Hong Kong, and so this was a story very close to my heart.

And the reason why I'm in the United States is because, you know, in the early 80s after, you know, it was clear that Hong Kong was going to be handed over back to the People's Republic of China in 1997, my dad had fled a communist China. He was going to flee again.

And so all these themes of freedom and democracy just came together in the comic book form, and we decided to do this in a fictional space, because my co-author is an activist, I'm a journalist, and I could already see us clashing, if

we were going to try to do a nonfiction work, like maybe you know, about what happened with Hong Kong protests, or something.

So we started playing in a more open space. But, you know, the thing with the work of fiction is, it's not focused on the facts, but it has fundamental truths. And so, I think we really focused on that concept, as we worked on our book.

Ryan Vest: Can I follow up with a quick question?

Melissa Chan: Yeah.

Ryan Vest: You mentioned that this book goes to a different audience than your normal journalistic audience. Who is the target audience for the book?

Melissa Chan: It's a little bit, it's something for everyone. So I do think that I would love people who care about China, and national security, and foreign affairs, and the Indo-Pacific. The people that I know, journalists, friends, to read it, and they have, and they've enjoyed it, and so that's great.

And for those that we've met who are from Hong Kong. And also the plot takes place in Taiwan significantly. We had our first massive book talk in Taipei actually, right before the official publication date. And it was a packed house, because a lot of people in Taiwan are worried about what might happen to their country.

And so, to Asian Americans, and Asians, it means one thing. It is also interesting because I know some, you know, this book also, was taken to Comic-Con, to comics conventions, where people did not know a lot about the Indo-Pacific, or about Hong Kong, and it was completely new to them.

They just wanted a good graphic novel story. And then, you know, the hope is that they learn something about a region they didn't know that much about. You'll notice that, especially in the beginning, there's some footnotes to clarify, like real world events. A lot of people don't know that before COVID there was SARS, and that is something, it came from China too, so there's clearly a problem structurally with how they deal with a disease, and pandemics. And so that was written in, so that people understand things like that.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Let me ask you about this partnership with your co-author, because like you, my main familiarity was with his political cartoons.

But I wanted to ask you how you thought about the book. To me, and I don't know graphic novels all that well, but the book has a very particular visual feel to it. There's a lot of black and white, and then there's a lot of use of red and yellow in particular places to, I think, communicate certain things.

But can you tell us about how you thought about the visual scheme for the book? Are there particular images that you started with, and kind of how you got that visual part of the storytelling, and why you shaped it the way you did, or the feel of it the way you did?

Melissa Chan: Yeah. I mean, a lot of that I left up to my co-author who's the artist. It was a very collaborative process. It's not like I wrote the plot and he just drew the art. He needed the buy-in for the characters, the world building. So it was very back and forth. But of course I let him lead the way on the aesthetics.

You'll notice it looks a lot like a Chinese watercolor. There's a little bit of that, and Badiucao has talked to me about it, because he feels that the Chinese Communist Party likes to position themselves as the stewards of Chinese culture, when they were the ones who destroyed so much of it, during the Cultural Revolution.

And he wanted to sort of lean into traditional Chinese watercolor art and style to sort of take that back, and reclaim it from the CCP–that was one way of looking at it. The other thing is, I was heavily influenced by Frank Miller, you know, the work of *Sin City*–if you've watched that film, it has a similar palette of grays, black, white, and then spots of color that are related to fire–orange, yellow, and red.

And so it was interesting to have the two of us work together, because Badiucao grew up in China. I grew up in the United States, so our pop culture references were very different. And I would sometimes tell him something and he wouldn't quite understand. There's even, I don't know if either of you guys remember this, there was a cartoon in the 80s called *The Secret of NIMH*.

That movie freaked me out as a kid, and I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. And so, you know, some of that was brought in, and on his side, he also brought in a little bit of manga, which I was less, you know, I didn't grow up being a big fan of manga–Badiucao was. So there's a scene, I don't want to ruin it too much, but there's a big bomb that goes off, and it has all the vibes of sort of manga, and Japanese art. So I think it's a combination of us talking about the aesthetics and our own like upbringings, and what has impacted us.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: So let me ask about, you mentioned this idea of reclaiming certain things from history. The title of the book, *You Must Take Part in Revolution,* is actually a quote from Mao.

Melissa Chan: Yeah.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: And it's a period where he's worried that the Chinese Communist revolution will die because the young people have no practical experience actually carrying forward revolution.

And so I'm just really curious how you decided to make that the title of this book.

Melissa Chan: Yeah. I mean, titles of books, as we realized, it's really hard. I mean, I'm sure you know too–I mean, both of you–it's just trying to come up with a catchy thing. And so, I was really struggling and part of, I decided to look at Mao's writings, because I wanted to be subversive.

I said, this is probably going to be a book that's going to be banned in China, or it just won't make it, and wouldn't it be funny if it was just a line from Mao–that they're like banning a book that is a quote from Mao Zedong. So it was me trying to be a little bit playful, and subversive.

I don't think at the time, because we spent five–we started working on this five years ago. And a lot of people have told us, as we've gone on book tours–wow, how did you predict so much of what's happening today? And I don't think we fully understood what a call to arms, in some ways, to resistance, it can be interpreted as for people today, but we certainly felt that. So I guess it was serendipitous, in that sense, in terms of the title resonating with a lot of people around the world.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Let me just maybe give a little bit of context, because I'm assuming not everybody watching, or listening, will have read the book.

Although we hope many people do, as a result of the event.

Melissa Chan: Yeah! We haven't really talked about the plot, or even what it's about I realize!

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Assuming the novel's highly dystopian, right? And it starts in kind of a presentist, around 2022 moment, around protests in Hong

Kong, and three friends who make these decisions about their involvement in protest activity in Hong Kong.

But then you go into this highly dystopian future that goes out, I think, to 2035. And I actually love dystopian fiction. I think it's really an interesting way to reflect on politics. My kids and I just read *The Giver,* and I was thinking about the weird ways that it plays, actually, with ideas from Plato and *The Republic*.

Melissa Chan: Yeah.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: But I don't think you have to read Plato necessarily, or to understand, or find value in the story that *The Giver* is telling. It can stand alone as a novel that helps us think about the world, and about questions about how society should be organized, and who pays for certain choices.

How did you decide the timeframe, and the sort of dystopian future? Because you could write a graphic novel that isn't a dystopian, futuristic, grim scenario. And so I'm kind of curious about how you chose to put these characters in that future setup?

Melissa Chan: Yeah. I mean, one interesting thing is–Is it dystopia? Or how much of what is in the book is already happening in the present day?–is something that I think we realized. And we just decided to use the word dystopia in part, I mean, I joke that it's the publisher, and the marketing of the book. And the basic plot, as you mentioned, is about three characters in Hong Kong, but they end up fighting in a future, where the United States is a fascist country at war with techno-authoritarian China, and they fight over Taiwan, right?

So it touches on all these things. And I think for one, a lot of my reporting went into this book, in ways that I don't think people fully realize. So I, at The New York Times, did a project with them, looking at the future of warfare, particularly with drones. And the whole focus was mostly at the UN, in terms of these killer drones, killer robots, I'm sure you know about, which is sort of keeping the human in the loop, out of the loop, right?

And that whole discourse. And so drone swarms–I had the opportunity to look at some of that, and observe some of that, by visiting one of the places they were experimenting with that–in the California desert. It was just sitting in my head, and that makes it into the plot. So is that really dystopian–when it's already happening–and we've seen how it's been employed by the Ukrainians,

and the Russians on that front, in ways that are just stunning–in terms of the iterations that's happened with drone technology and warfare over the last couple of years.

And then there's also the surveillance element, which is something that I endured as a journalist in China, being followed. But also, my last trip to Xinjiang, which was I think in 2011–we were surveilled–and I could see all the cameras that had been set up since the Urumqi riots the year before, which is getting in the weeds, for people who don't know. But you can Google it.

So the idea of camera technology, facial recognition, all of this is already out there today. So I'm not–it is dystopian–but I'm not entirely sure. It's in the future, it's here, and maybe the message is: dystopia is here. We look at AI and nothing–I don't believe anything I see on social media, in terms of images and video.

So there's that aspect of it. The other thing is, that the timeline in which this is happening, it was sort of an artistic decision. I personally preferred something super cyberpunk, and super in the future. Badiucao creatively said he felt more comfortable drawing in a more New York, near future space.

So, you know, super sci-fi is not for everybody, right? And so we kind of then, a lot of this is negotiation, because you're working with another person. But what ended up happening is, we were constantly running up against [the] reality that, you know, well–this is a future war between the United States and China.

Taiwan is there–and I remember when Nancy Pelosi's plane was headed towards Taiwan, everyone was freaking out, and following it on FlightAware. And I was talking to Badiucao–we're kind of near the end of our book in terms of the plot process, and we say–Oh my God, like, this book will come out, it'll be dated. You know, so there's that thing hanging over the book the entire time, that I find really interesting.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, I'm glad certain parts of it are not yet dated.

Melissa Chan: I hope it never happens. You know, I hope a lot of things that happen in there never happen. But there are elements that just– it's not dystopian.

We're living in it, right?

Ryan Vest: There are some really interesting elements actually I found in there. In the book, you come up with a scenario where China and the US back away from nuclear war by dividing Taiwan into multiple zones, which to me felt a lot like Berlin during the Cold War. What was the purpose of setting up this kind of situation in there?

What are you hoping that the readers pull away from that?

Melissa Chan: Yeah, I think a lot of it has to do, again, as you point out, with my lived experience. I mean, I live in Berlin, so I live right near where the former Wall was. So every day I cross this imaginary line, going into former East Berlin, and out into West Berlin.

And that lives with me, you know, every day. The other thing is my reporting career in Asia, where I had the opportunity to go to the DMZ, and I covered things developing in the Korean Peninsula. I covered the Six-Party Talks, trying to get North Korea to denuclearize. And so these are two places I've reported on, where they're divided.

And at one point I did end up working on a piece sort of comparing–like living in Germany, you realize that Germany today is still struggling with the results of unification. That East Germany has fallen so far behind economically, it is permanently depressed, and combining a wealthy West Germany, with an impoverished East Germany, was a very difficult endeavor.

And I wanted to look at lessons learned from that, and whether a United Korea could ever happen. I don't think it can, because where North and South Korea are today is 20X the difference, in terms of income inequality, and health, and all these other issues. And it was hard enough, as is, that Germany is today living with the political consequences, the rise of the far right in primarily Eastern parts of the country, as a result of people feeling like they kind of got the short end of the stick.

And so all these things of a divided country I think were living in me, that went into the book. Now, in terms of what message I want people to take out of it, I don't think there are any hard lessons. It was just something that I was familiar with, and I can imagine happening. Actually, you are probably the experts on looking at, like, the geography of Taiwan Island, and the topography, and whether a line would actually make sense. There's a big mountain range that cuts through across the whole island, north to south, right. So in my head I was like–oh, I guess it could happen. And so that was just a plot device, and I do think that, you know, so many of the things that we're going to have to reckon

with, are the unresolved problems of these boundaries that were created decades ago.

And I feel like we're at a point, geopolitically, where some of those things are going to have to be addressed, right? You go to Seoul, and it's weird how close the DMZ is. And Korea is so wealthy, and K-pop is dominant, and everything–*K-pop Demon Hunters* is fantastic, right? But like, they're going to have to reckon with that.

And it's going to be terrible when they have to reckon with that. So that was living in my head.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, let me ask a little bit about the human element of the story, because the book centers on this sort of transition, from the peaceful protest movement that we have seen in Hong Kong.

But there's a moment in the book, as you move into the future, where it develops into an actual underground resistance, and that extends then to Taiwan. And so there's a debate early in the novel among these three characters, who are the same age as, you know, young people, students, Andy, Olivia, and Maggie–I think are their names.

And they have a debate about what their role in any resistance, or protests should be, and are they comfortable with violence? And the characters don't all come to the same conclusion. They play really different roles in the unfolding decades. So I'm curious, you know, what did you want people to think about as they watched these characters debate, and then watch the consequences of these choices play out, over the course of their lives?

Melissa Chan: I mean, it's the age old theme of violent versus nonviolent resistance. And we set out with the intention of not giving people the answers. What I would say in my own experience interviewing dissidents is that there is a toll to resistance and activism that takes place for everybody, and I do wonder about the nonviolent movements that we saw in the 20th century that were successful.

And I've seen some of the protests more recently. And I almost feel as if 21st century authoritarians have learned from the lessons of 20th century authoritarians. I mean we just saw what happened in Iran, and we don't know the number of people dead, but it looks like several factors of the carnage that took place at Tiananmen Square.

And that seems to be the lesson–to really strike down hard against protestors. And so, this is something that I toy with. It's certainly a very dangerous idea. I'm well aware of that, but perhaps there are limits to nonviolent resistance, in an era where the autocrats have learned their lessons, and the tools for control have been much more advanced.

And so that's something that, for me personally, I play with. But I know Badiucao thinks about it differently. And again, the nice thing about a work of fiction is, we're not telling people anything specifically. It just raises a lot of questions. And it becomes a point of a way for people to start conversations.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: It is really an interesting thing that fiction can do for us, is to kind of open that space to think about, and maybe talk about things in ways that are a little bit different than we have to talk about–what's right in front of us, in the present. I wanted to ask actually about this idea, that maybe there's been some learning, because one of the things that struck me in reading the book is that, you know, the Chinese party state has really cracked down in Hong Kong, over the course of the last decade in particular.

So I remember going to the Tiananmen Vigil, on June 4th, in the park in Hong Kong. And that vigil is no longer allowed, right? And so, the sort of national security law that has really repressed a lot of the civil liberties that Hong Kongers previously had.

You know, part of that is based on this narrative that there is this sort of foreign back subversion and resistance, and then that's a justification for this fairly draconian crackdown that's occurred. How did that shape how you sort of wrote the book, the plot, the feeling, the language that you used in the book–to have had this experience as you were writing?

Of watching the Chinese authorities sort of frame the crackdown in that way?

Melissa Chan: Yeah. It was actually really dangerous territory for us to sort of explore, because part of our concern was that one of the characters from Hong Kong does choose violence as a path. The reality of the Hong Kong protests is that it was mostly, and largely nonviolent, and actually very organized. It was leaderless. It was very unique and interesting, in terms of how people decided to resist. It was very smart. And many people in the city were involved, a big 20% of the entire population. And that usually, by the way, you know, political scientists would say, would be enough to topple the government, but it did not in this case.

So we were, I was nervous about having a character that was going to do that, and we were concerned about how people from Hong Kong might misconstrue that, or feel like we were sort of suggesting that the movement had been violent.

When, you know, a car blows up–no car blew up in the real world events. And so this was purely, frankly, a thing we had to do, because it was fiction. We wanted this book to be entertaining. It is not meant to feel like a chore to read. More than anything, people need to be able to read through it, and enjoy it as a work of fiction, before they start taking away lessons from it. Otherwise you can't get the Comic-Con people interested, right?

So there was a lot of learning from both of us, who had never worked, in terms of working, in creative writing. And this is, I know, this is probably not the answer that you expected, but there's a whole world, where [it] had nothing to do with my experience as a journalist, his experience as an activists, our knowledge of the Indo-Pacific, our knowledge of China–and was completely about a scene, and moving through that scene, and having the scene end, and then wanting to, making sure that the person wants to read what happens next, and then what happens next in a standard like, sort of Hollywood cinematic style, or book form way, of just getting people engrossed.

So that was basically–that's the answer– it is world building, character building, and a plot device.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, it is fiction, that makes some sense. That's why I wanted to ask.

Melissa Chan: Yeah, and going back to the nonviolent versus violent, we had an editor–he was fantastic.

He is African American, so his sort of knowledge of resistance was very different. And he was drawing a lot of things from the civil rights era, and gave us homework, you know–to watch certain films, to read certain books that were important. To him that was very different. It's not anything related to China, but, I think it was useful because you understand that resistance against all governments of varying, you know, even democracies, right?

There are similarities in how you want to do things, and similar struggles anytime you sort of challenge power, and want accountability.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: That's fascinating.

Ryan Vest: I can imagine, you know, because it's such a divisive topic that you get a lot of different responses. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about the response to the book, and how it's landed so far.

Melissa Chan: It's landed shockingly well, and I think part of what made it work is precisely because we had a lot of these conversations. I don't know if you guys know, but in the publishing world, there's this apparent–I learned about this as we were researching–there's a huge debate about whether, for example, a white author can write an African American or black character, right?

And there's a whole discussion about representation and what is allowed, and what is not. And so I was aware of these conversations and trying to be mindful of it. This is why the main, one of the main characters is Asian American. I'm Asian American. One of the characters is from the People's Republic of China, in the same way Badiucao was.

So some of this was to be mindful of the literary conversation, the conversation in the literary world. That was actually helpful because I think literature should definitely offend, and you don't want to tiptoe in a way that would just make everybody happy. That's not the point. But you want to be aware of the conversations that people, who have done many more novels than you have, are having. And I think that was helpful in terms of thinking about representation.

So it is a graphic novel. We've put in Easter eggs, by the way. So, if you're from Hong Kong, there'll be things that you'll recognize, and Badiucao did not know. I had to explain to him. I was like–I had to show him pictures–and I said, there's a weather cartoon in Hong Kong, where if you've grown up in Hong Kong, it's almost a rite of passage. Like the news happens and then at the end, the weather guy comes on. It's a little cartoon character. Everyone knows this cartoon character. You know, I think cultures and countries have these weird little things.

And so I said, let's put this weather guy, you know, on one of the television sets, in one of the panels. And that is just a way to sort of tell people in Hong Kong, look, you know–this book is for you. So we have little things like that–also even for the fact that both me and Badiucao have spent time in Germany.

Badiucao is heavily influenced by the German artists from the 30s, the communist socialist, frankly, Käthe Kollwitz, who did a lot of art representing the working class. And so there are a couple panels in there that are absolute callbacks to her art–that if you're German and you see it, you'll recognize that.

And so we did a lot of things where we put hidden messages to various different pairs of eyes that we wanted to read, and it was just to tell them that–you're seen and this book is for you.

Ryan Vest: That's awesome. I love that.

Melissa Chan: There's a couple of Easter eggs for Ukrainians as well, just because it's something that I think had, I mean, I live in Berlin, and there's a lot of Ukrainian refugees in the city. And, of course, Badiucao and I both see eye to eye in terms of what, you know, this conflict is, and we feel really strongly about it. And so we, even though neither of us are Ukrainian, and don't have that many Ukrainian friends, it was important for us to, sort of, also put a little bit of that in there.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: That's really interesting. I am now going to go back and reread each page.

Melissa Chan: Yeah, it's visually, I mean, I thought at some point I want to reveal all the Easter eggs–look how genius we were! But it's in there. It's in there and it's fun. And so I'll give you one for Ukraine.

One of the fighters that are in the final chapter–Will–has the Insignia of Ukraine, which is a subtle way of saying that foreign legionaries, foreign fighters have joined this fight in Taiwan, in the same way that we've had a few people from Taiwan and Hong Kong fight in Ukraine–most recently two Hong Kongers who died. So it was just a little bit of a thing.

It's a quick read. You'll finish it in an afternoon because there's lots of pictures. That's my joke. Bad joke. And you know, it's a different way of conveying themes that I think we all care about.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Well, Melissa, we really want to thank you for joining us today. This has been such a fantastic, interesting conversation. Thank you.

Melissa Chan: Thank you very much to both of you.

Sheena Chestnut Greitens: Thanks for joining us on *Horns of a Dilemma*. This is Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Editor in Chief of the *Texas National Security Review* here with our Executive Editor, Dr. Ryan Vest.

We have been discussing today having a conversation with Melissa Chan, author of the new book, *You Must Take Part In Revolution*, and you can find this podcast at our website, *TNSR*.org. If you enjoyed this episode, please be sure to subscribe and leave a review wherever you get your podcast. You can find all of our work articles, podcasts, and other products at *TNSR*.org.

Today's episode was produced by *TNSR* Digital and Technical Manager Jordan Morning, and made possible by the University of Texas System. This is Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Ryan Vest. Thanks for listening.