

Contemporary Asian
Photography
亞洲當代攝影展
Part III

CRISIS
OF
NOW

Wei-Li YEH

葉偉立

LIU Ho-Jang

劉和讓

Ting-Ting CHENG

鄭亭亭

ARTISTS

Wei-Li YEH, (Taiwan, 1971–)

Born in Taipei, Taiwan and emigrated to the United States with his family at the age of eleven. As a teenager in Tampa, Florida, Yeh was fascinated by heavy metal music and aspired to be a rock-and-roll photographer. He consequently studied photography at the University of South Florida (BFA 1994) and later received a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Photography from the Rhode Island School of Design (1997). Graduate workshops at Brown University's experimental Literary Arts Program and a three-month visit to Taiwan in 1996 (his first since emigrating), fueled his thesis work on themes of displacement, assimilation, cultural identity and racial politics. Relocating to New York City, YEH presented his seminal photography work, *Guest: On the Subject of Home*, at his "Septemberly" Brooklyn studio in December 2001, shortly after 9/11. Since returning to live permanently in Taiwan in 2002, YEH has been active as an artist, curator and instigator. YEH's work is shown and collected internationally, and his photographic and text-based projects continue to explore the dynamics of the individual within collective practices, centering on both the personal and the socio-political relationships between the self and the city in which he resides.

LIU Ho-Jang, (Taiwan, 1972–)

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1972. He graduated from the Creative Institute of Queen's College of the City University of New York in 2002. The work is mainly based on photography and composite media equipment. Now he works and lives between Taipei and Tainan and represents the mt.black cultural industry and teaches at the Tainan University of Fine Arts Plastic Arts Institute as a full-time teacher. LIU's works are confusing in the multiple difficulties of photographic identity in the contemporary social situation. In the static photography process, the production methods of contemporary images are rubbed, and the modern sense of time is disintegrated into his life. In 2011, his works were summarized and published in the name of "Aster Magazine". Under the perspective of LIU, photography and creation are not only related to the image itself or technical operation. The artistic practice often reflects the social and political significance of the object; the development of an object, place, and community is in the overlap of labor and total time factors, the uniqueness and difference are revealed. By moving the visible and invisible relationship, he puts a new imagination on the social function of the art and the perceptual medium, and will be connected with people. The intangible value of the exchange is replaced by the continuous motivation of art.

Ting-Ting CHENG, (Taiwan, 1985–)

Born in Taipei, Taiwan. She moved to London in 2008, and graduated from MA Photographic Studies at University of Westminster and MFA Fine Art at Goldsmiths College in 2009 and 2012. In her practice, CHENG applies images, videos, sound, texts and objects to form installations or interventions, exploring the concepts of foreignness, nationhood and immigration by examining languages, history and mass media. CHENG had solo shows at Taipei Fine Art Museum, Galerie Grand Siècle (Taiwan), Identity Gallery (Hong Kong), Gallery Nomart (Japan), Addaya Art Centre, Luis Adelantado (Spain), Rowan Art and Iniva (London). Other exhibitions she participated in include Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture (Shenzhen), III Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Contemporary Art Festival Sesc_Videobrasil (São Paulo) and group exhibitions at Kuandu Museum (Taipei), National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art (Taichung), National Art Museum of China (Beijing) ... etc. After being shortlisted for Taipei Art Award in 2011, CHENG was selected by Perspective Magazine in Hong Kong as the Top 40 artists in Asia the year after. In 2015, CHENG was awarded Asian Exchange Prize by Asian Creative Award in Japan. Her works are in the collection of Taipei Fine Art Museum, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art, Fundació per amor a l'art and Fundación Entrecanales.

CRISIS OF NOW Contemporary Asian Photography Part III

Text by
Chun-chi
WANG

Crisis of Now: Contemporary Asian Photography is an exhibition series examining the contemporary culture and art practices from Asian artists' perspectives. The exhibitions focus on specific aspects of history and life experiences, and also attempt to construct or discover relationships between historical contexts from diverse perspectives. Specifically, observations are made from different geographical locations simultaneously, or from the same location at different times. The personal experiences and collective consciousness are linked through multiple historical trajectories mapped by the vicissitudinal political and social forces.

In Part III of the Crisis of Now series presents photographic works by three contemporary Taiwanese artists, Wei-Li YEH, LIU Ho-Jang and CHENG Ting-Ting, revealing their idiosyncratic personal trajectories and closely connected forms of memory. What, in previous crises, is proved helpful for us? What do we learn from the artists regarding future experiences of destabilization and vulnerability? How do we seek the support we need?

Wei-Li YEH's photographic series *Three Places for Marguerite Duras* (2003–2006) consists of seven photographs. His photographic works focus on the personal, social and political relationship between himself and the city where he lives, and explores other individuals via collective practice and diverse photographic and text works based on his attention to himself and that city. After 20 years in the U.S, YEH's return to Taipei triggered his fixation on the "identity" issue resulted from culture and region. This inspired YEH in his research on the practice of recording and extensive investigation of the relationship between "guest" and "home". In this series made over four consecutive years, he focused on a quest for beauty in desolation and destruction. In addition, he pays homage to one of his favorite writers, referring to her stories of departure, loss, and rootless existence. The pictures demonstrate a full spectrum of his artistic practice and philosophy of image-making.

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LIU Ho-Jang's photographic series *B5-Project* (2012–2017) in the form of installations consists of furniture in combination with old patchwork wood plates from Southeast Asia which LIU found around Taiwan. In the installation project, LIU continued to use the series of images

in combination with local objects or events, proposing the meaning of rebirth in the images as a kind of communication tool, and extending the local supply of exchanged materials under globalization. In the work, wood materials are recombined and collaged; LIU also rubbed them for new surfaces to emerge. “Feldman Lumber” is actually a manufacturer of new materials, reflecting comparisons between raw and treated materials at different times in a capitalist system. “The End of Newtown Creek” and “Waste Management” were respectively shown in *mt. black* and *B5* projects. In corresponding to the space and objects at the venues, LIU didn’t display specific texts represented as explanations. Rather, by a vague medium at the sites through lightboxes similar to advertisements (the dissolved author; a sorrowful space), LIU implied the “virtual border of substance” that involves one’s own labor and a local capitalist system, which consisted in alienating and re-constructing a medium. From the making of lightboxes to the *B5* project in *mt. black*, LIU carried out different stages of art production practice. From relations of a general subjective order to multiple designations of identity as well as collaboration with different artists, LIU tried to make ideal connections with material systems of production. If, regarding labor relations in parallel to the local, art can be a possible extension and continuation of life, how can we avoid the capital?

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CHENG Ting-Ting’s photographic series *Robert Storey (Lonely Planet Taiwan)* (2013), extended the artist’s interest in perspectives towards foreign cultures, and the ways they were represented by mass media. This is the artist’s first project with his own country, Taiwan, as the subject, in an attempt to explore how Taiwan is viewed and filtered by the context, and to question the concepts of tourism, exoticism and speculation in a broader genre. This series contains five editions of *Lonely Planet Taiwan* published by Robert Storey between 1987 and 2001; the same passages in each edition were selected for comparison, and the altered key words in respective passages were marked. After researching several Taiwan guidebooks in English, CHENG adopted the said five editions written by Robert Storey in the project, and compared the nuances through time to explore the transformation of the society, identity and politics of Taiwan, and the oscillating relationship between the West and the East, exploring her own identity through the perspective of the other. Who is Robert

Storey? The vinyl texts on the wall were extracted from the *Lonely Planet* books, not only signaling the “authenticity” behind the provided “knowledge” about East/foreign cultures, but also questioning Storey’s role in representing Asianess. As an outcome of the guidebooks, in the video, Cheng collected clips from Youtube showing foreign tourists having snake dishes in a famous tourist spot, Snake Alley in Taipei, along with her voice-over reading the texts introducing Snake Alley in the guidebooks from 1981 to 2011 chronologically.

This publication includes a series of texts: “Fragments of Time: Wei-Li YEH’s Three Places, for Marguerite Duras (2003 to 2006)” by Julia Gwendolyn Schneider, “The Genealogy of Defect: LIU Ho-Jang’s B-5 Project” by Chen-Han YANG, and “An Alternative Narrative of Taiwan: Ting-Ting Cheng’s *Lonely Planet Taiwan*” by SHEN Bo-Wie.

*(Contemporary Asian Photography is an exhibition series. Part I of the series consists of works by YAO Jui-Chung, YANG Che-Yi and Yunyi LIU at Malzfabrik Schöneberg, Berlin, Germany in 2018; Part II of the series consists of works by I-Hsuen CHEN, HOU Lulu Shur-Tzy and TING Chaong-Wen at UNO St. Claude Gallery (University of New Orleans, School of the Art), New Orleans, L.A., the U.S. in 2019.)

Wei-Li YEH

- [01] Exhibition view, Espronceda Institute of Art & Culture, 2020
- [02] Three Places for Marguerite Duras, #2 of 7, 2003
- [03] Three Places for Marguerite Duras, #4 of 7, 2004
- [04] Three Places for Marguerite Duras, #5 of 7, 2004
- [05] Three Places for Marguerite Duras, #6 of 7, 2004

LIU Ho-Jang

- [06] Exhibition view, Espronceda Institute of Art & Culture, 2020
- [07] Brown Sugar, 2013
- [08] The Shape of the Rainy, 2016
- [09] Practice a Falling Drop, 2013
- [10] Listen to Sound of Splinter, 2013
- [11] The Table Saw, 2015
- [12] One Half, 2014
- [13] Chan Shih-Tai’s Work (1), 2014

Ting-Ting CHEN

- [14] Flattery, 2013
- [15] Guanxi, 2013
- [16] Mountain I, 2013
- [17] Exhibition view, Espronceda Institute of Art & Culture, 2020



Fragments
of Time:
Wei-Li
YEH's
*Three
Places,
for Marguerite
Duras*
(2003 to
2006)

Text by
Julia
Gwendolyn
Schneider

A heap of rubble dropped in a room makes it inaccessible and emanates the feeling of a world fallen to pieces. Natural light comes in from the left through a huge hole in the wall. Next to the debris, on the right, a mostly empty bookshelf holds just one row of books. Such is the scene in *Three Places, for Marguerite Duras, #5 of 7* (2005) a photograph taken by Wei-Li YEH that is part of a series of seven large-format photographs taken between 2003 and 2006. Over the period of four years Wei-Li YEH studied the interior space of an abandoned house in Taipei next to his own residence. Not merely an observer the artist reshaped and further deconstructed the appearance of the room and added a series of small interventions. At different moments in time we get to see the site through the lens of his camera always from a similar angle.

To make a work that pays homage to Marguerite Duras—a reference, which is clearly stated in the series' title—was an idea that originated when YEH began to clean the deserted house. At first, he had thought he might use it as a temporal studio space, and there was no plan to incorporate it into an artwork yet. But cleaning the house reminded YEH of a short passage in Duras' novel *The Atlantic Man* (1982). With only 30 pages the book is more like a short story, and its experimental literary form—situated between prose and poetry—comes closest to a long love letter. An interior monologue directly addresses a lost lover and the reader at the same time. After her lover has left for good the narrator returns to the house on her own and starts cleaning it excessively. Full of despair the writer speaks of cleaning everything up before her own funeral, at the same time the action tries to erase the painful traces from the past.

Throughout Duras' story the lover is always present in his absence, while the narrator struggles to accept the pain of loss. Out of the inability of language to fully grasp the absence, the text envisions making a film and incorporates script directions. In fact, the book is the voice-over of a movie by the same title, which was conceived previous to the novel in 1981. Translating the failure to grasp what is missing into a visual form, the cinematic composition is almost entirely deprived of its images. Most of the time the screen turns black, and the film consists mainly of a spoken version of its written equivalent. In either medium the reference to the camera is a narrative device to address

the lost lover. “You will pass once again in front of the camera. This time you will look at it. Look at the camera. The camera will now capture your reappearance.”⁰¹ These instructions read like an attempt to direct something that is uncontrollable. Personal longing is imposed onto the image and thereby the lover. The commands show the wish to travel through time, to modify the past from the vantage point of the future. They stem from a yearning to transgress the course of time and redirect one’s memory.

That Duras’ text is predominately about absence and the inability to control the flow of recollections are aspects, which resonate strongly with YEH’s own image creation. Abandoned and damaged the house in YEH’s series has the status of a ruin. The ruined building is a remnant, a portal into the past of a potentially lost property, while its status of decay is an unignorable reminder of the passage of time. As a ruin it can be a signifier of memory and despair over the past, and of hope for the future. In a way, by intermingling past, present and future, Duras’ text uses an aesthetic similar to that of a ruin. The “three places” referred to in the title of YEH’s series come into play here as well: Obviously there is only one place that the

photographs are based on, and what YEH calls “three places” is an actual reference to time. It is about place as time and acknowledges how a ruin can be viewed as always dynamic and in process. Seen from this perspective the term “three places” is linked with circular time that hovers between different temporalities.

YEH’s images are part of a series made subsequently over time and hold some sense of chronology, but this representation gets distorted in the process and might even be read as a critique on a linear perception of time and the attached notion of progress. The aforementioned image with the rubble, for instance, is number five in the series. It shows a massive deterioration of a space that was cleaned previously and had started to look like it was ready for a new beginning. We had seen the progress: In the first photograph the room is messy with different objects lying and standing around, and some panels from the ceiling are coming down. In the second image the dirty floor is covered by the ceiling panels and the ceiling’s wooden structure is laid bare. The next photograph shows a shiny floor with blue and red mosaic-tiles, and a ghost-like appearance of a small child in image number four adds further to the notion of something new to begin.



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[03]

This slow process out of a state of decay shown in the images taken between 2003 and 2004 is coming to an abrupt halt with image number five, here an enormous pile of debris creates a feeling of shock over the sudden destruction. In number six however a man tranquilly sleeps on the rubble by a fire. With an opened book lying next to him and a cup of liquor in front of him, he evokes a poetic vision of temporarily settling in the provisional. This notion is once more turned around in the last image of the series, where the room is emptied out and we can see a giant hole yawning where there was once a window.

The row of books on the shelf, which started to appear from the third image onwards, is gone in the last image, as if a circle was closed and a new state of abandonment has been reached. The books are the artist's personal collection of Duras' oeuvre, English translations of an author whom YEH had started reading as a high school student in the US—where he had moved with his family from Taiwan at the age of 11. To insert these books as a personal marker into the found space makes sense in manifold ways. They show not only YEH's homage to a writer he admires, but also hint at another subtext of the work. Duras' life, like his own, was shaped by the experience of

migration. She was born in French Indochina (Vietnam), returned to France when she was a child for a short period of time and went back to Indochina, before the family moved to France for good when she was 17. YEH himself stayed in the United States for 20 years, without ever going back to Taiwan during that time. When he finally did go back in 2002, at the age of 31, his ability to speak Chinese was poor and he felt a strong sense of displacement, almost like he was migrating once again. It was during these early years back in Taiwan and accidental encounters with urban ruins that led to the creation of *Three Places, for Marguerite Duras*. So much more than a chronology, the series shows the transience of life, its extreme fleetingness. YEH's images open up to a sense of ambiguity, of openness and indeterminacy—a transitional space of in-betweenness. It is a space that embraces liminality, which anthropologists consider vital for any transition between two disjunctive phases in human experience.



[04]



[05]



The
Genealogy
of Defect:
LIU
Ho-Jang's
B-5
Project

Text by
Chen-Han
YANG

[07]

My works incessantly expose the radicality of materials as defect, as well as the rationality of the hairline finish as the surface. Yet the details of photographs involve deployment of defects of space to a great extent, where the real flaws of images are exposed, and the noises are avoided, without ever having to cover to feel reluctant.
—LIU Ho-Jang

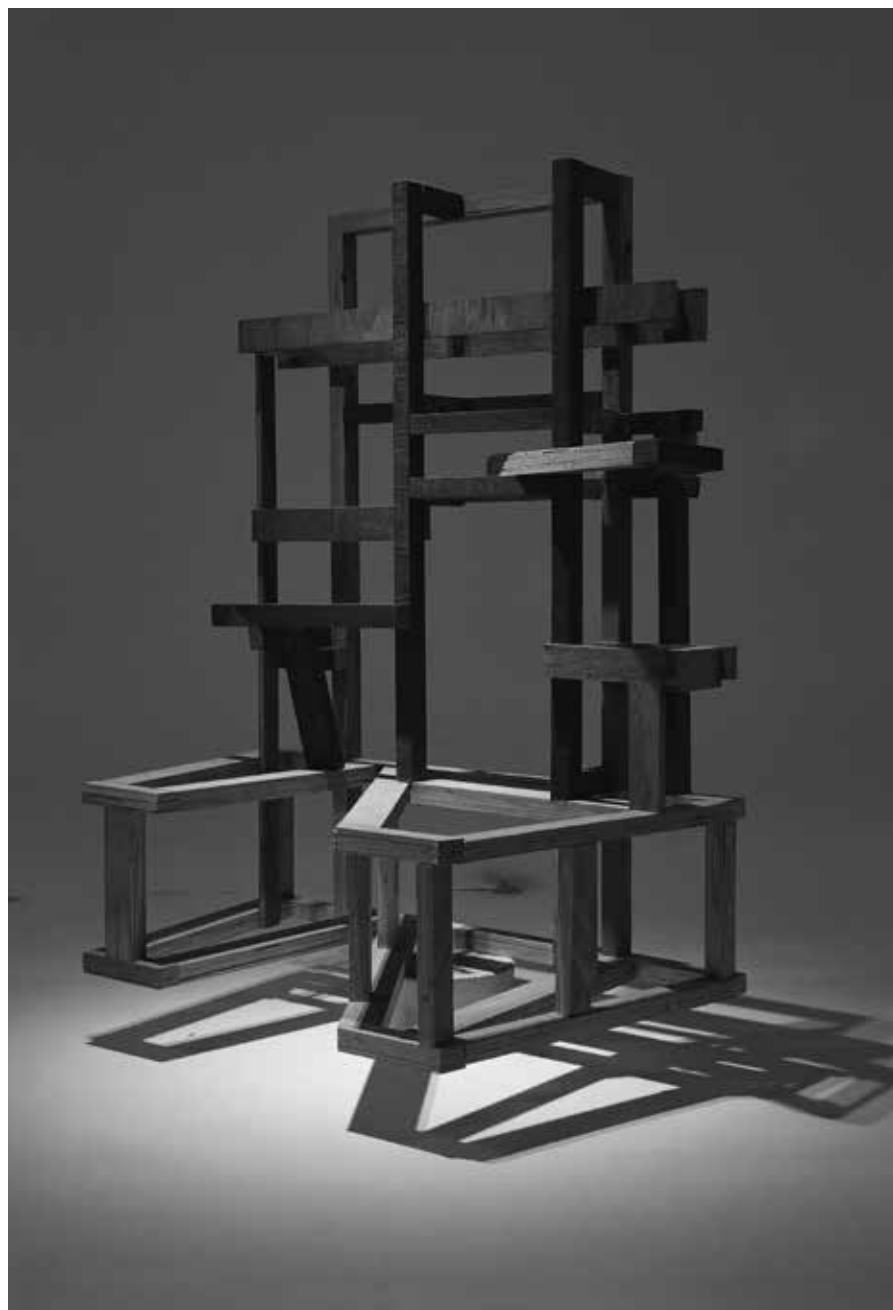
I remember meeting Ho-Jang for the first time in 2007. Owing to the invitation of Chun-Chi regarding an exhibition she curated, I visited the mt. black, the studio of Ho-Jang. The smell of the wood flours, dusts and iron rust pervaded the air in his studio. The light in the studio was slightly blocked, which was characteristic of the buildings in the Xizhi District in Taipei. The air was both differentiated and differentiated, in Deleuze's sense. Particular lightness and smoothness radiated from the surfaces of the materials. There was a smell you are not going to have in the studios and from the bodies of metal workers, carpenters, and other plastic artists. I know what that smell is. When I met Ho-Jang in Taiwan last month, he was working on his new project, *The Pavilion of Seven Villages*. The work is situated between the self-possessed positivity and idle negativity of intersecting with other living substances. It is a work that brings us back to ourselves. Compared with my impression of Ho-Jang more than a decade ago, he now seemed more relaxed and attentive. It is a focus without focus, or an attention-less attention. It is like a 3D rotation-modeled and turn-aside state which allows for interaction in relaxation, and serves as a condition for creative possibility. An index. What is it? It does not seem to be a focus or an amplification from a point, but the composedness of a line. It is both personally centripetal and eccentric. What is it? Do points and lines necessarily compose and form surfaces? Are lines necessarily substantial and concrete? What is it (in the crisis of now)?

Defect and the Love of Material

They have existence *beyond* each other, *beyond their limit*; the limit, as the non-being of each, is the other of both. It is in accordance with this difference of the something from its limit that the line appears as line outside its limit, the point; the *plane* as plane outside the line; the *solid* as solid only outside its limiting plane.
—G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*⁰¹

01—G. W. F. Hegel,
Science of Logic
(Cambridge:
Cambridge
University Press,
2010), p. 99.





[8][9]

02—Henri Bergson,
*L'Idée de lieu chez
 Aristotle* (Paris : Alcan,
 1889), p. 12.

G. W. F. Hegel has mentioned that the line is represented as line outside the point, the plane is represented as plane outside the line, and the solid is represented as solid outside the plane. Is here a transition from movement, and the negation of the solid, to the analogy of the solid? How can we understand the remains and the fabrication of Ho-Jang? I know there is a kind of in-betweenness, an in-betweenness produced in the process, in the impression I have of Ho-Jang's works. It belongs to a pre-ontological plan, which is also a smooth, inoperative ontology. It is a distance from, and a non-appearance of being. In this smooth and inoperative ontology, we can discover a double consciousness formed by the smooth Being and the being of surface. It is a warm interface consciousness. It is this interface consciousness between transitivity and intransitivity that triggers Ho-Jang's thinking, feeling, and fabricating.

[...] the place is neither the body, nor any quality of the body it encloses, in this sense I said, the place is even not the empty interval which seem to remain after the suppression of the body.

—Henri Bergson, *The Concept of Place of Aristotle*⁰²

While elaborating the concept of “place” (*lieu*) of Aristotle, Henri Bergson mentioned that place originates with the birth of interval. The thing-in-motion is contained in space, and the space is contained in place. What else can be the container, if the space itself is contained? There is a stiffness in Ho-Jang's works, which belongs neither to the positive description of objects, nor to the affective enunciation of the negativity of things. It is the scratches that belong neither totally to the friction between the consciousness of the craftsman and the social consciousness, nor to the stiffness possessed by Ho-Jang. It is a stiffness which is neither obtained from somebody, nor entirely belongs to himself. Ho-Jang aims at further concretizing the scratches, and unifying the scratches with the materials. Ho-Jang gives body to the scratched and headless materials. “Like a *Shaobing*”, Ho-Jang always said. Ho-Jang manifests the scratch-materials which allow the works to rest and breathe, and also turns the materials into volumes. It is a love of material: a love that “incessantly expose the radicality of materials as defect, as well as the rationality of the hairline finish as the surface”, as Ho-Jang mentioned. Meanwhile, it is a crisis of the now: a state that makes the inedibility appear, as well as the fungus and viruses in between the edible and the inedible. It is a state of defection, or a genealogy of flaw, defect, and deterioration of touch. Light. In Ho-Jang's works, the atomized light softens the engineering drawing lines. As such, all the straight and clear-cut drawing lines intentionally left in his works are connected to the final engineering lines that curve and surround the edges of Ho-Jang's studio and works, and finally dissolve into the scene. In other words, it is a state of defection and deterioration that present themselves like the waterdrops.



[10][11]

The unity of the future associated milieu, within which the causal relations will be deployed that will enable the functioning of the new technical object, is *represented*, it is *played* or acted out as much as a role can be played in the absence of the true character, by way of the schemes of the creative imagination. The dynamism of thought is the same as that of technical objects; mental schemas react upon each other during invention in the same way the diverse dynamisms of the technical object will react upon each other in their material functioning.

—Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*⁰³

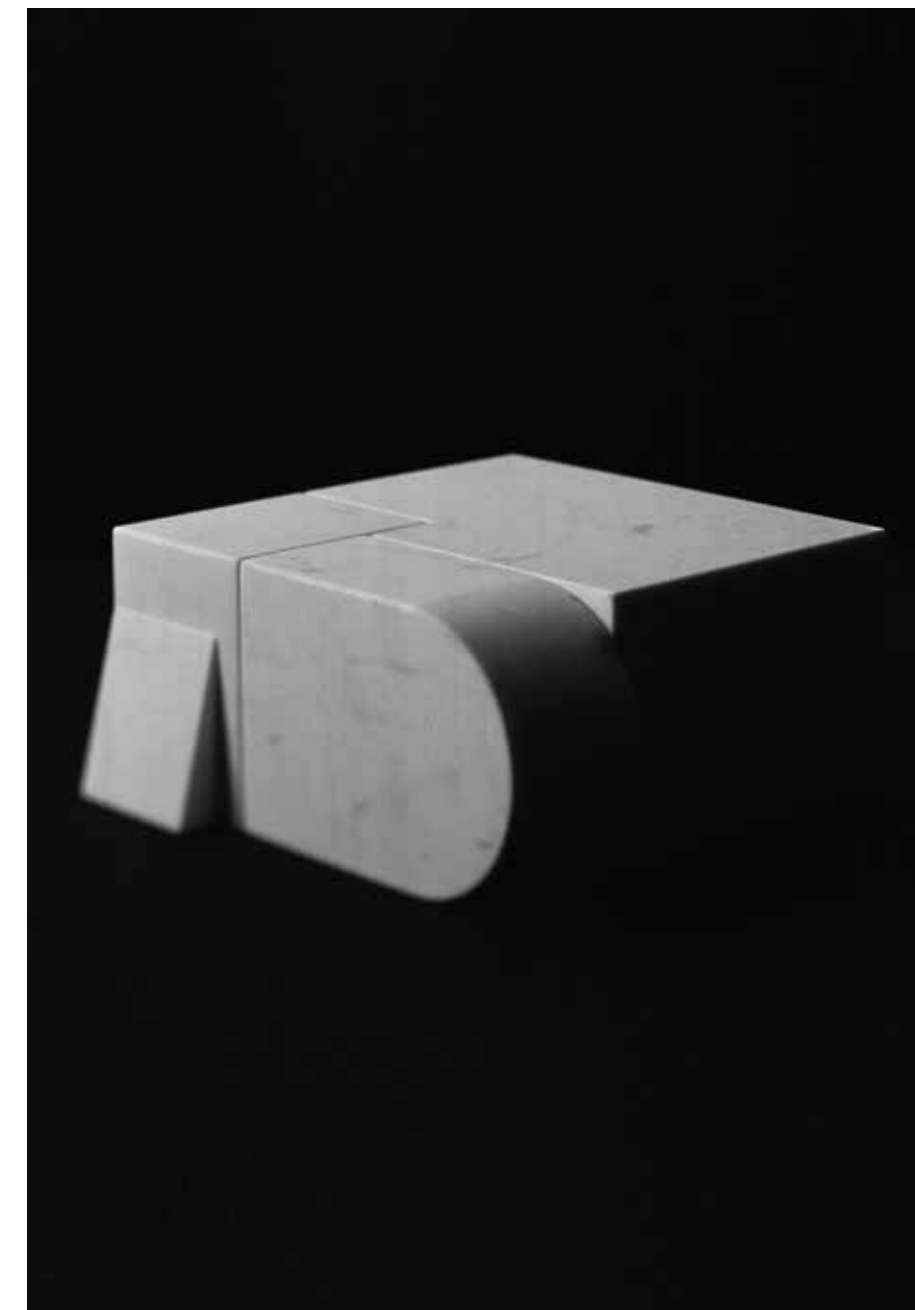
Good can be radical; evil can never be radical, it can only be extreme, for it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension yet—and this is its horror—it can spread like a fungus over the surface of the earth and lay waste the entire world. Evil comes from a failure to think.

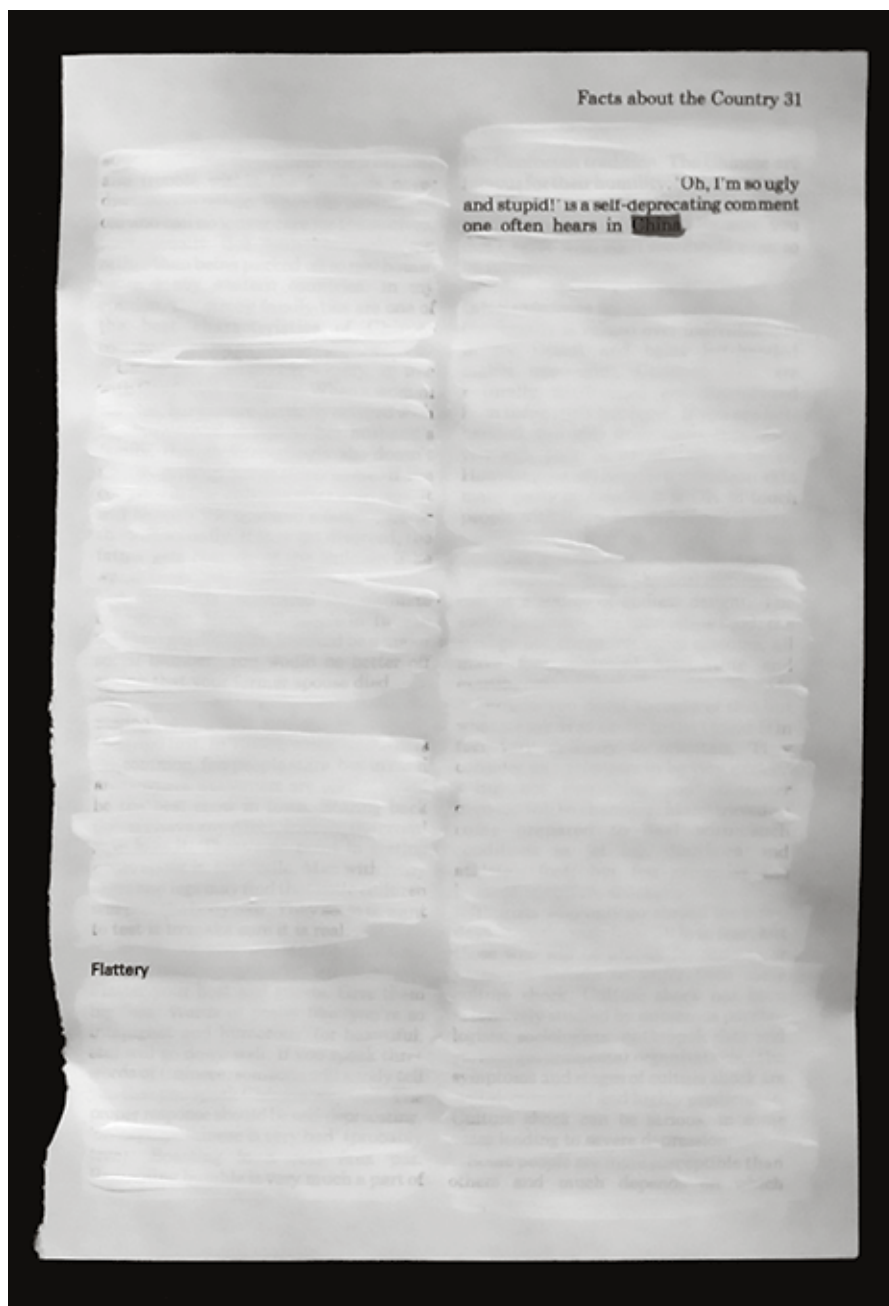
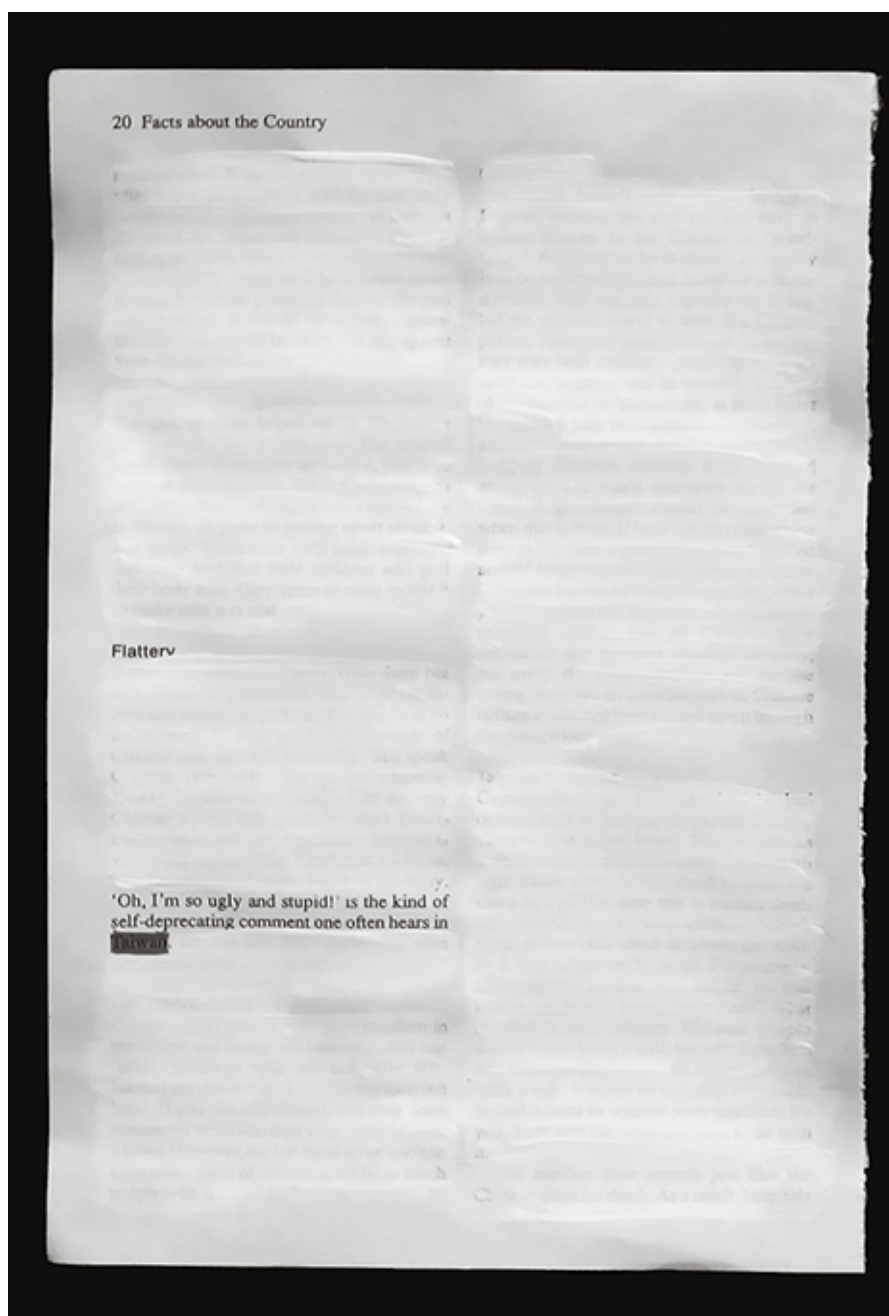
—Hannah Arendt⁰⁴

Ho-Jang's works also represent the depth of the scratch itself, as well as the thoughtful act of material and volume. Every photo he makes is a window for glancing at the material, or a piece cut from the material. In these images, the quality of material always emerges between the opaque and the clear. Image is not matter, but belongs to matter. The hazes on Ho-Jang's photographic images are the fuzzy scratches on the surface of material that one cannot perceive clearly. We know that it is the material-in-milieu, or the milieu which is formed by the material, the associated milieu. For Gilbert Simondon, the associated milieu is the massive milieu which makes the carefree space appear in the place. The associated milieu protects, orients, and empowers us to resist the savageness of the world, that is, the "savage being" (*l'être sauvage*) mentioned by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Last, it is also an amplification of the concrete, which is the methodology of creation, from where a pragmatism manifests itself. In this sense, to polish is to open and to vitalize the wounds (the scratches). The polishness gives us the force of a depth without depth, which is also a revelation without depth. Ho-Jang's works are sweet. What does those mutations and transformations mean after tasting a sweet flavor? Ho-Jang always said "just" in relation to his works. According to Hannah Arendt, evil is only extreme and without depth, while the goodness is radical and deep. Evil is the fungus that can "lay waste the entire world". The shallow and ignorance are evil. If the gesture of evil is also the "just", what Ho-Jang redeems by his works is our long-lost profoundness, depth, goodness and beauty. (Thus, from the crisis of now,) I know what that smell is.

03—Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), p. 60.

04—Marie Luise Knott (ed.), *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 209.





An Alternative Narrative of Taiwan: Ting-Ting CHENG's *Lonely Planet Taiwan*

Text by
Bowie
SHEN

Narrated Taiwan

How is Taiwan, the small island in Asia, represented by English media in the West? As we know, many of us learn about any country through the media of our languages. I wonder, how do the travel magazines, tour guides and other English media portray the country? How exactly are Taiwan's images constructed?

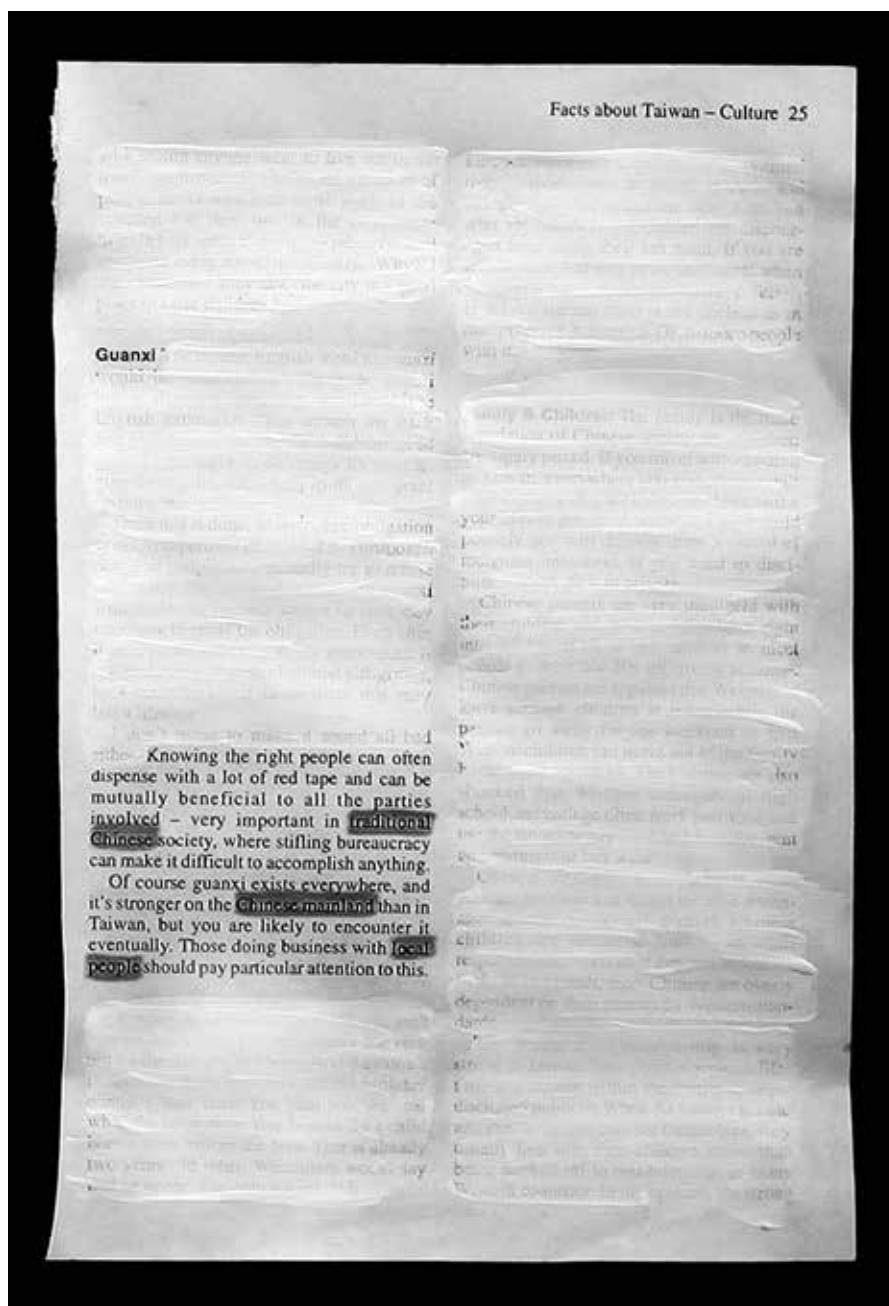
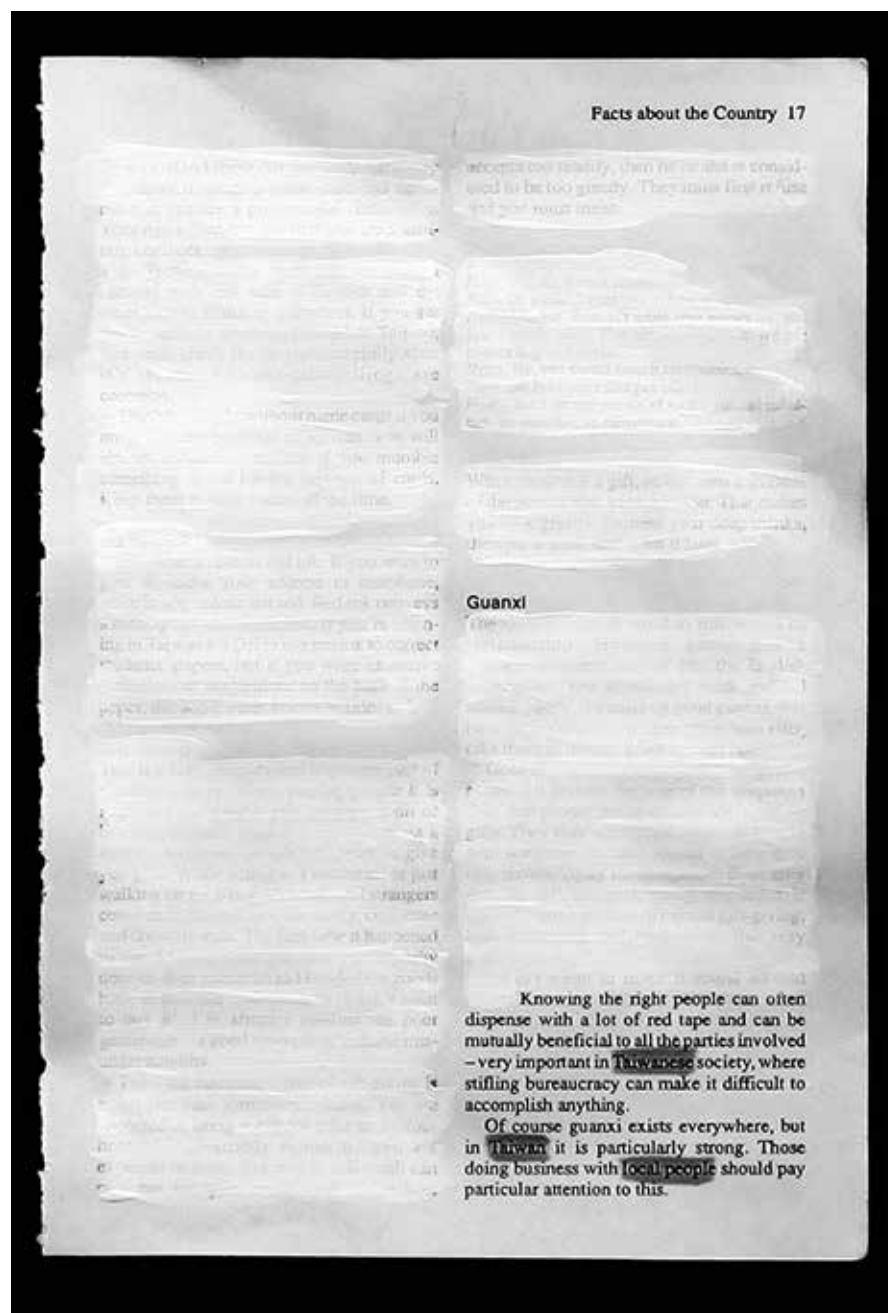
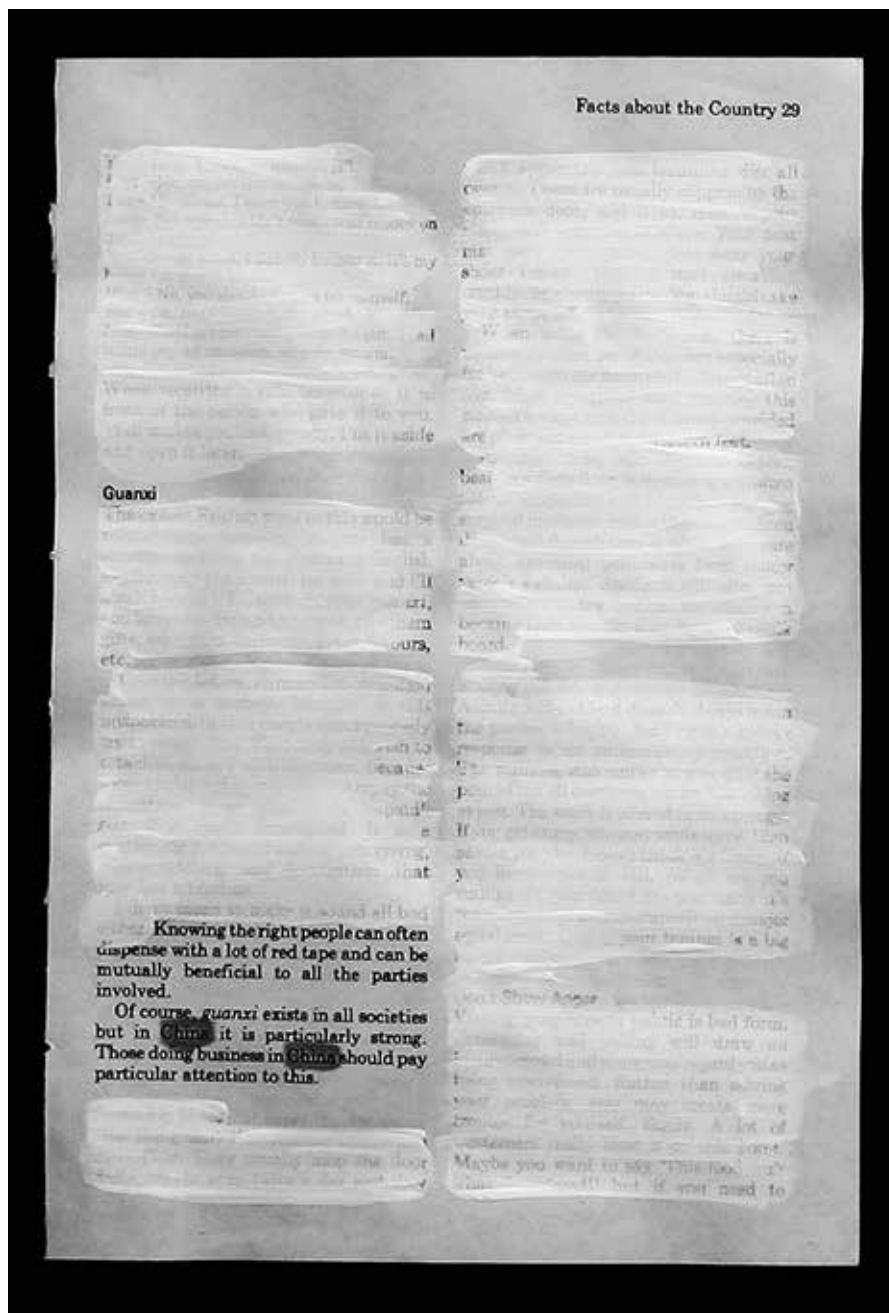
Through her work *Robert Storey (Lonely Planet Taiwan)* (2013), artist Ting-Ting CHENG, who's skillful in applying texts and images in her works to explore different cultural relations and stereotypes, examines how the images of Taiwan are shaped by the Western media. There are two parts in the project, one is the textual descriptions, and the other one is the image representation.

Stepping into the exhibition space, one would encounter rows and rows of documents describing Taiwan. You might notice that there are traces of alterations on the pages. Some words were highlighted with reinterpretations made by a certain reader/author. All of those indicate a certain level of "bias" among these seemingly objective documents. If we take a closer look at the content, we would realise that the texts interpreting Taiwan are not fixed, but constantly changing over time.

In fact, these documents were collected from the travel guide book, *Lonely Planet*, published between 1987 and 2001, before being re-interpreted by CHENG. The content comes from the five editions written by American writer Robert Storey. CHENG explored the changes in Taiwan's culture, politics, and international positions by comparing the differences and corrections of each edition. For example, the earlier version of the book used "China" to describe the island, which was later changed to "Taiwan". In another case, the word "the Orient" was "corrected" to "Asia", before being amended to "Taiwan". The adaptations of the words show the awareness of political correctness, while the stereotypes remain unchanged.

Pictured Taiwan

In addition to the documents, you can also find landscapes of Taiwanese mountains in the exhibition.



They are composed of images from different sources. Compared to the landscapes of Western "civilization", these exoticized landscapes of mountains portray nature through seas of clouds which can be easily found in many Chinese Shan shui paintings.

These images were from various travel guide books of Taiwan collected by CHENG when she studied in the UK. She noticed that sceneries of mountains are the most common type of images used to describe the country. Through stitching together the mountains, CHENG intended to reconstruct an image of Taiwan in the eyes of Westerners.

Through CHENG's intervention, we have a chance to ponder on how the images of Taiwan were shaped by the Western world. These seemingly neutral documents, images, and travel books present the "knowledge" of Taiwan through the intermediary of media production, without showing the invisible power dynamics and ideologies. For example, Robert Storey is an American writer, who's an authority figure in terms of the knowledge of Taiwan. But why represent Taiwan through an American perspective instead of inviting Taiwanese writers to introduce themselves in English?

The Limitation of Representing Taiwan

It seems to me that many Taiwanese might want to distinguish Taiwan from how the West imagines it to be. They might want to prove how Taiwan "really" is, and to represent the "true" Taiwan as they claimed. However, this is not what CHENG's doing. Instead of using photographs and texts to represent the island, to show the "real" Taiwan in the eyes of Taiwanese, CHENG chose to disclose the communication mechanism of how the impressions of Taiwan were constructed and operated.

If CHENG followed the traditional methods of representing Taiwan, she could easily have fallen into the trap of the established Western mechanism, incorporating her images and texts into the existing framework. The modus operandi of the artist is definitely not to reject "the fake Taiwan

shaped by the West”, or to pursue “the authentic Taiwan in the eyes of Taiwanese”, but to integrate CHENG’s viewpoints into the Western knowledge framework, and to deconstruct “the operational process of knowledge making”.

Therefore, these seemingly Western, civilized, rational and objective forms we see are in fact infiltrated with CHENG’s subjective interpretations and perspectives. (Just like how Robert Storey did with his writings.) In other words, she is not fixating the images of Taiwan, but fluidifying the concept of Taiwan, transforming it into a dialectical process through her infiltration of the documents.

Why is it easy to fall into the trap of the West if we pursue an “authentic” description or image of Taiwan? Because if we do so, we might be struggling with “self-orientalization”, othering and transforming the self into cultural symbols which fit in the superficial exotic imagination. In contrast, CHENG’s strategy of “working with” the Western knowledge penetrated the cultural surface, entering the power structure of knowledge production. Therefore, even though her works are about stereotypes, they are not “correcting” the stereotypes, but criticizing the invisible authority and its subjectivity.

Most importantly, who can “represent” Taiwan? A westerner? An Asian? Or a Taiwanese? There are always differences behind any representation. Media applies a set of ideologies that filters out the unwanted information and selects the message they want to convey to the readers. Representation through any medium would be distorted, and can never be equated with reality. Therefore, the question at hand is not to differentiate the “real” or “imagined” Taiwan, it is that no one’s (either Westerners’ or Taiwanese’s) imagination can represent the whole group. In fact, the “real” Taiwan is a mixed bag of divergence and incompatible qualities.

Re-problematized Taiwan

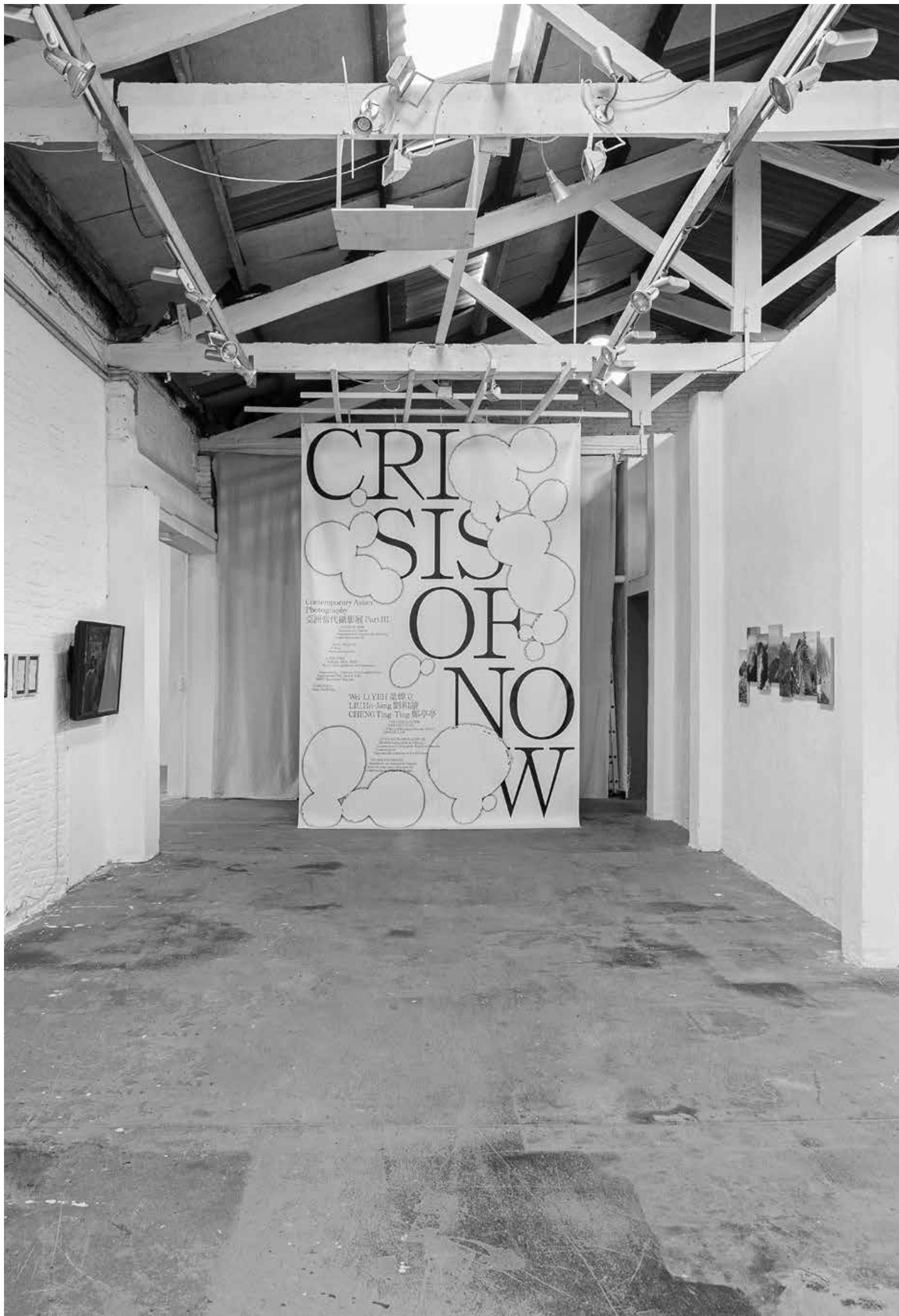
Compared to the artworks that portray visual spectacles, CHENG’s method is relatively calm and restrained without losing critical emotions. She

does not provide visual stimulation, but uses the works as an index for the audience to browse through the invisible issues of power, structure and representation.

She did not provide an answer to what Taiwan is, but to re-problematize it, deconstructing Western archives in a dynamic and dialectical way, giving these archives new perspectives and ways to reconstruct the island. At first glance, *Robert Storey (Lonely Planet Taiwan)* might seem to be the narrative of Taiwan from Storey’s perspective, but in fact, it was reoccupied by CHENG who transformed it into an “alternative narrative of Taiwan”.

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AUTHORS
Chun-Chi WANG

is a Berlin-based curator and publication editor. She engaged in collaborative art production and research. She is trained as an artist at New York University Tisch School of the Arts. In 2012, she was Assistant Curator for Taipei Biennial, Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction. Her projects were presented in Berlin, Paris, New York, Taipei, Seoul and South America in various collaborations from 2010 until now. A collective and intergenerational investigation of feminism in the context of contemporary art practice that included a symposium, exhibition; and lecture. She is the founder of IDOLONSTUDIO(Union of European Asian Artists), a non-profit, interdisciplinary organization that provides innovative artists working in the media, literary, and performing arts with exhibition and performance opportunities to create and present new work.

Dr. Chen-Han YANG

is an art critic and independent scholar based in Taipei. He got his Ph.D. degree in Cultural Studies, Institute of Social Research and Cultural Studies, National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. He has been the post-doctoral researcher of the Digital Humanities Project Office, National Chengchi University, the adjunct assistant professor of the Graduate Institute of Transdisciplinary Art, National Kaohsiung Normal University, and the assistant researcher in the Art Archive Center in Taiwan, Tainan National University of the Arts. His research areas include contemporary art and social studies, philosophy of technology, digital sociology and critical framework studies. His critical focus is on the question of how does contemporary art respond to the challenges posed by its time, society and world. He is now working on the research and publication project "Phenomenology of Digital World" and writing a scholarly monograph on the relationship between being, digital technology, and contemporary art.

SHEN Bo-Yi

is an art critic and image researcher, he is mainly focused on Taiwan's contemporary art and photography culture in an attempt to explore the relationship of tension between contemporary art and photography. His critical essays have been published in ARTCO magazine, ACT (Art Critique of Taiwan), internet media The Reporter and also maintains a personal opinion blog entitled Implication. He is responsible for the documentation and review of various photography lectures at Lightbox, included in an organized Photo Book Exhibition "Photobook as a Performance" (2017) and the exhibition "Feel the Warmth of the Island" (2018).

Julia Gwendolyn Schneider

is a Berlin-born art critic. She studied American Studies, Cultural Sciences, and Aesthetics at Humbolt University, Berlin, and Cultural Studies at Middlesex University, London. She has contributed to books on contemporary art and artists' monographs, and her essays, interviews and reviews have appeared in Camera Austria International, springerin, Berliner Gazette, die tageszeitung, Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art, and LEAP, among others. Since 2006 the Asia-Pacific region has been a focus in her writing, including essays on numerous topics such as alternative art spaces, the survival of The Artists' Village in Singapore, video art and media activism in Indonesia, the documentary IPHONECHINA, the Shanghai and Gwangju Biennale, or artistic strategies in the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Another focus in recent years has been on art that sheds light on the social and political implications of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

