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Diasporic Drifts: A Visualization of Diverse Chineseness

VENNES CHENG SAUWAI

> Her name is Yip—meaning “leaf” in Chinese.
> There is a Chinese saying that goes: “Falling leaves return to their roots.” My mother is called “Yip.” Where does she think her roots are?[1]
>
> –Law Yuk Mui, *From Whence the Waves Came* (2018–21)

From Whence the Waves Came (2018–21) is an ongoing series of works by Law Yuk Mui (羅玉梅, b. 1986), a Hong Kong artist whose practice concerns geopolitical tension, personal history, and traces of time in physical space. The series is a sentimental and historical weaving of multiple personal histories: Law’s parents; Tom, a Vietnamese boy; and Ma Si-Cong (馬思聰), a violinist from Haifeng, China. Law’s parents fled Shanwei in Guangdong province to Hong Kong in a self-constructed sailboat in 1979; Tom is a boy whom Law met a few years ago in Saigon. In the late 1980s, he was a Vietnamese refugee in Hong Kong and was later repatriated after having spent many years in Hong Kong’s Whitehead Detention Centre. Ma Si-Cong is a violinist from Haifeng who fled to Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution and eventually emigrated to the United States. For Law’s mother, the concepts of roots and home are distinctly different ideas; home to her is Hong Kong, where she settled in the late 1970s; however, her roots are still connected to a small fishing village in Shanwei, China. The series proposes notions of national, ethnic, and cultural identity in which home and roots are unsettled propositions—propositions that underpin the thesis of this essay.

Most modern and contemporary research on the Chinese diaspora tends to accentuate the concept of homecoming and sees physical reunion or emotional reconciliation as essential to “being Chinese.” The saying “being Chinese” encompasses a certain hegemonic yoke, whether in terms of geography, culture, or ethnicity. *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (2008) by the renowned sinologist Philip A. Kuhn, for example, asserts that Chinese emigration in modern times was for the purposes of livelihood, concluding that most of the migrants were sojourners and hoped to return home eventually. However, the reasons for the existence of the Chinese diaspora are not so easily summarized. Beyond economic opportunities and ideological confrontations within the parameters of the Cold War, geopolitical tensions in Southeast Asia have contributed to the complexity of the Chinese diaspora in the region. This complexity also pushes back against faulty assumptions about a collective and unified idea of

Chinese identity. The modern and contemporary histories of Southeast Asia are also histories of Chinese displacement, which were not merely a result of Cold War ideological confrontations, but, rather, were ignited by conflicts in the region such as war and civil war, colonization, and waves of re-occurring anti-Chinese sentiment, ignited by the anti-Communist purges in Indonesia and Malaysia during the Cold War. Thus, the waves of Chinese migration in the region are not mere transnational movements of leaving the homeland for economic opportunities; they indicate various confrontations that render nationalistic readings of identity, homeland, and roots in the context of Chinese diaspora invalid.

The departures, escapes, and displacements of Chinese migrants were often by sea and were dispersed throughout the region. These drifts, on one hand, represent the actual flow of traffic that constituted the migration; on the other hand, they are metaphorical, suggesting fluidity, mobility, and unsettledness. Considering the sea as a historical and artistic metaphor, this essay proposes pluralist readings of the ethnic and cultural identity of Chinese through an examination of the artworks of Hong Kong and Taiwan artists Law Yuk Mui (羅玉梅), Kurt Tong (唐景鋒), Lin Yichi (林羿綺), and Tsao Liang-pin (曹良賓). These artists from Taiwan and Hong Kong belong to a group of Chinese artists that rejects the nostalgic notion of China as a cultural motherland, source of value, or nationalistic sentimentality.

The Fierce and Wobbling Sea

The displacement of Chinese people throughout Southeast Asia by sea indicates firstly the archipelagic features of the countries in the South China Sea and the East China Sea—all of which are either island countries or have extensive coasts. The proximity to the seaways suggests fluid traffic, exchange, movement, and swapping, evading any encroachment of hegemonic coherence. Throughout the histories of Chinese diasporas, the migrating populace was predominantly southern Chinese, alongside other ethnic minorities migrating for their own reasons or coerced into leaving their homes. Their coastal and archipelagic peripherality suggests an identity beyond Chinese identity,[2] which proposes territorial and cultural hegemony as an illusory reality in the discussion of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia. In the historical context of Hong Kong and Taiwan, the sea is often a politically contested area, transient and unsettled. The sea reveals the histories of Hong Kong first as a refuge for those fleeing China, then as a city where citizens seek asylum abroad—wrestling their forced inclusion into a Chinese identity. The strait between China and Taiwan has been contested since the Kuomintang government escaped to Taiwan in 1949; with the history of Japanese colonization, the sea is both a threat and reflective metaphor for the archipelagic country in terms of Taiwanese identity as politically and culturally defined by the oceanic boundary.

Law Yuk Mui (b. 1982, Hong Kong) engages the themes of waves and sailing as a symbolic means to interweave the histories of Hong Kong as a refugee city and to reflect the city’s current paradoxical situation in *From Whence the Waves Came*. This series of artworks includes photography, video, and a kinetic installation—work that collectively channels an ambiguous agenda to examine the fluidity of one’s identity through historical and memorial investigation. The series also addresses the history of various influxes of refugees from China and Vietnam to Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s. From the Sino-Japanese War to the post-Cultural Revolution period, Hong Kong was a migration destination that saw waves of immigrants due to regional instabilities and disputes. Law’s parents fled a little fishing village in Shanwei, a city situated on the coast of southern China, to Hong Kong on a sailboat in 1979, a year before the colonial government announced the end of the Touch Base Policy—an immigration policy of the colonial British government of Hong Kong from 1974 to 1980 that allowed illegal immigrants from China to stay in Hong Kong if they reached urban areas and found a home with their relatives or other forms of accommodation.

The Vietnamese refugees coincidently fled their country to Hong Kong to escape the civil war that had been raging since the 1970s. The life story of Tom, as told in Law’s work, focuses on the refugee camp in Hong Kong and Tom’s misconceptions about Hong Kong.

Law amalgamates memories from her mother with those of Tom, interweaving news footage and other historical images into *YIP* and *TOM*. The precise and linear sequences of the two historical incidents are dispersed throughout the various works. The waves act as the essential symbol linking the histories of Chinese and Vietnamese diasporas in Hong Kong and suggest the subjective interpretation of roots, home, and

A shrine in Beitou, Taiwan, 1930s. Historical photograph. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Yang Wei and Tsao Liang Pin.

identity. The video work *Her Name is Yip* (2018) tells the story of her parents' flight. Her mother was seasick throughout the rough three-day journey from a small fishing village in Shanwei. This voyage echoes the more recent disputes and instabilities in Shanwei such as the Siege of Wukan an anti-corruption protest that happened in Wukan (near Shanwei in 2011). This and the story of Yip's flight are juxtaposed with music by Ma Si-Cong (a violinist from Haifeng county) in the video work *Her Name is Yip.* The Wukan protest was in some ways a rebellion against systematic corruption; whilst Ma's musical work *Nostalgia* (1937) was praised and deployed as a propaganda tune by the Chinese authorities to stir up a sense of nationalistic melancholy and nostalgia among Chinese communities in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Although Ma's music had nationalistic associations, Ma was paradoxically forced to flee to Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution and eventually emigrated to the United States. The paradox reveals the flimsy rhetoric behind the monolithic nature of nationalistic sentiments. The idea of being at home and the sense of belonging are associated with feelings of contentment and being comfortable in a dwelling. The individual experiences of leaving home in *Her name is Yip* are entangled with the notions of waves and instability and the idea that one's roots, in this sense, are not always as the same as one's home. One may leave their roots in order to establish a stable home elsewhere; thus, a yearning for home is equivalent to the search for roots particularly in the case of a forced political exodus.

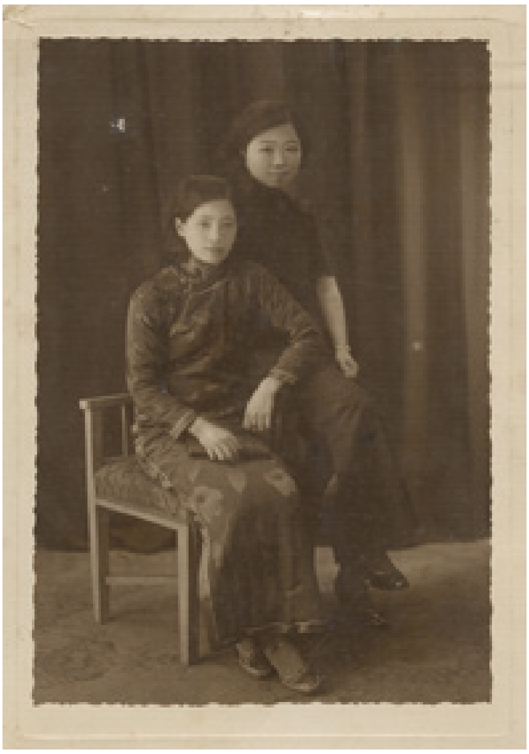
The rough sea and the wobbly journey of Law's mother resonate with Tom's reminiscences of the misty seascapes and the wave-shaped two-dollar

Imaginarium, exhibition view, 2018. Photograph: Zhang Guo-yao. Courtesy of Tsao Liang-pin.

coins of Hong Kong. Tom, having arrived in Hong Kong by boat as a refugee from Vietnam in the late 1980s, was later repatriated after having spent many years in Hong Kong's Whitehead Detention Centre, located at the waterfront of Wu Kai Sha in Hong Kong. In the video *His name is Tom* (2018), he recollects the blue sky and seascape that he was able to glimpse behind the barbed wire of the camp; his visits to the outside world and school-days are included in the work; the experiences render a subjective perspective of Hong Kong wherein he was able to maintain a sense of contentment in a foreign land. Tom still longs to return to Hong Kong to see once again the blue sky and seascape. The sea reflects the complexity of Tom's identity—a Vietnamese refugee who was not recognized as such by the Hong Kong government—and the sense of belonging; the tough life in the confined refugee camp and the diasporic trauma—all of which are poetically transformed into a sense of contentment by the footage of a misty seascape and blue sky.

The complexity of Tom's feeling about being at and longing for a contented non-home reveals the political entanglement in Southeast Asia and the sea as a contested zone wherein the notions of homeland and one's identity are positioned in tensional fluidity. Law further draws out this paradox through sailing imagery in *Marinas* (2021)—a work within the series *From Whence the Waves Came*—a kinetic sculpture with a mini-replica of a self-constructed sailboat that her father made in order to flee from China. The mini-replica is made from the wooden shaft of a hammer, which belonged to her late father. The replica sailboat is guided by a magnetic compass and moves in a vague southward direction. Hong Kong is to the south of Shanwei. The looping circle of the boat on the kinetic sculpture suggests that the home and roots are relative and shifting notions; notions that inevitably coexist in the discourse of diaspora.

Therefore, the notions of returning to roots are revealed as empty rhetoric. James Clifford, an anthropological historian, asserts that diaspora in the contemporary context signifies residing in foreign countries while maintaining communication with one's community—returning home is only a minor element. Thus, the notion of diaspora is, in fact, a kind of dialectics between homecoming and dwelling in displacement.[3] In the history of human displacement, diaspora is not a mere transnational movement; rather, it is a signifier of unique localness and special ways of establishing and maintaining a community. In this sense, the idea of a homeland becomes an ambiguous notion of "returning home," not returning home (or not



Kurt Tong, Dongyu and her friend, historical photograph from the series *Dear Franklin*, 2018–. Courtesy of Kurt Tong.

being able to do so). This “not returning” is not a negligence of one’s origin; rather, it supposes multiple existences of ethnic groups.

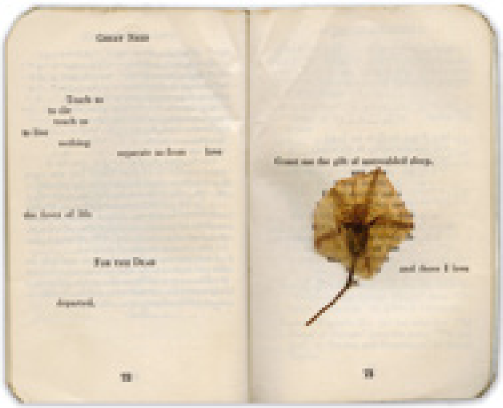
From Sea to Void

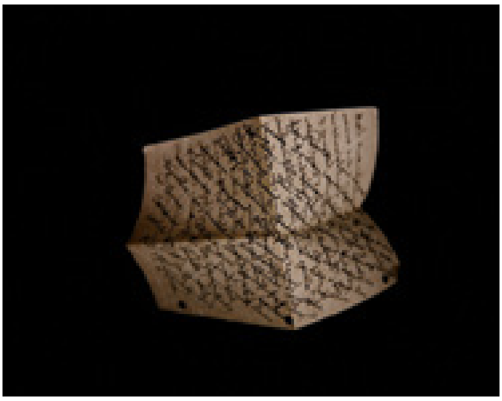
The abyss of sea/water in Kurt Tong’s *Dear Franklin* (2018–) signifies how political and cultural identities are statuses in constant transformation; the work also connects problematic notions of identity to the spiritual realm where the parameters of the mortal world and their ability to define individuals are invalidated. *Dear Franklin* is an archival, artistic, and photographic oeuvre by Tong (b. 1977), an artist who was born in Hong Kong and grew up in the UK. The series explores the tragic story of a pair of lovers—Franklin Lung and Dongyu—who were forced apart and fled Shanghai when the communist party was coming into power in China during the 1940s. Tong was given an old wooden trunk that was sealed with a Taoist seal after the death of a friend’s neighbour. Inside the trunk were a number of hand-written letters, old photographs, and numerous books from the 1920s, all belonging to a man called Franklin Lung. Tong discovered the clues about Franklin after months of research; Franklin was born into a poor family in Hong Kong just after the fall of Imperial China in 1912. He later managed to attend the best university in Shanghai and he became a member of high society, who had trading links with several of the colonial occupiers. He also fell in love and got engaged to Dongyu, the daughter of a high-ranking Kuomintang general.

Tragically, Dongyu was on board the SS Kiangya[4] in 1948; the passenger steamship filled with refugees trying to escape the communist army that sank after being hit by an explosive near the mouth of Shanghai’s Huangpu River. Franklin was heartbroken but decided to go ahead marrying Dongyu in a ghost marriage ceremony. He fled to Hong Kong after the ceremony, and after failing to settle in the USA he ultimately committed suicide by jumping into Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbour, during Typhoon Wanda in 1962. The project combines geopolitical, historical, and personal entanglements and instabilities—the forced migrations of Chinese due to the civil war in China and the anti-Chinese sentiment in the USA—addressing the histories of Chinese diasporas after the Second War.

The tragedy of Franklin and Dongyu and their transnational displacements—be they the relocations of Franklin from Hong Kong to Shanghai, Dongyu’s escape from the communist party or Franklin’s eventual return to Hong Kong—reveal the instabilities of being Chinese and the unsettledness of dwelling in two Chinese cities which supposedly provided a sense of roots for the tragic couple. These instabilities are symbolized and visualized through the motif of the sea. Tong includes images of the sea taken by him and other archival materials such as letters and photos of Franklin and Dongyu, as well as vintage publications documenting the details of the Sino-Japanese War. In *Dear Franklin*, the sea thus becomes an emblem of the wobbling and diasporic life of Franklin. He was born in Hong Kong and gained his social status in Shanghai, yet the diverse-cultural surroundings in both colonial Hong Kong and the Shanghai international settlement failed to provide him with a contented existence. Instead of holding onto his ethnic origins—China—Franklin’s diverse upbringing led him to leave Shanghai for the United States. The photographs of the sea are taken in Hong Kong, Europe, and San Francisco by the artist himself. They are all ports of transition, with outward travel opportunities, and connections to the other places on earth—symbolizing Franklin’s act of flight, from both identity and settlement.

Top: Kurt Tong, *Grant Me the Gift of Untroubled Sleep*, from the series *Dear Franklin*, 2021. Courtesy of Kurt Tong.
Bottom: Kurt Tong, *Marriage Proposal*, from the series *Dear Franklin,* 2020. Courtesy of Kurt Tong.





The tragic story of Franklin and Dongyu ends with their exit to a spiritual world, a boundless dimension that renders sociopolitical parameters—nationality, ethnicity, and culture—irrelevant. Tong juxtaposes this with his photographs of vintage cheongsams from various sources—the kinds of garments that may have been worn by Dongyu and her contemporaries. The cheongsams in Tong's oeuvre are floating in the air like spirits; devoid of any human form to define their origins, genetic features, and cultural affinities, thus subverting conventional ideas of defined identities. From the images of the sea to the void of the spiritual world, *Dear Franklin* mediates the histories of human displacement wherein a nation-state-bound sentimentality is peripheral. The project suggests the bonding of a community that cannot be confined to a shared geographical location and the notion of returning home; nation-state-bound connotations do not offer reconciliation for the diasporic community. Dongyu's escape from the communist party by leaving her birthplace and Franklin's studies in Shanghai and a brief stay in the US suggest diverse features of diaspora; in the end, they both entered into a spiritual void where geographical orientation, cultural identity, and genetics became irrelevant.

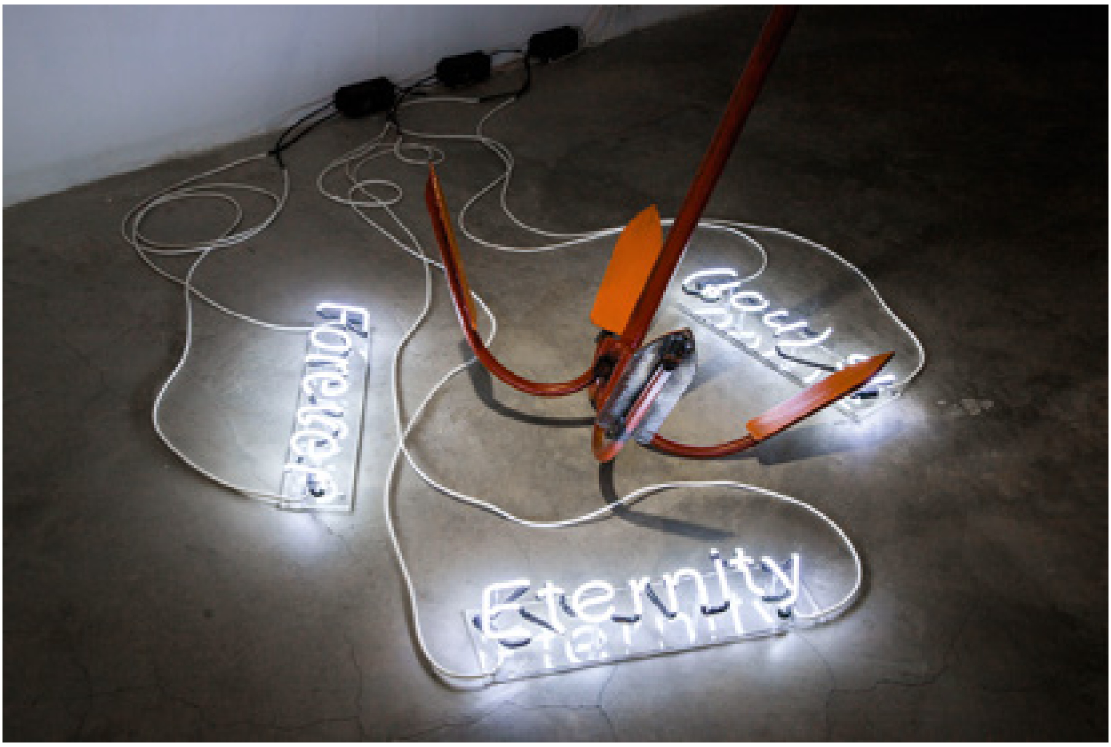
The Secluded Yet "Opened" Island

Contemporary diaspora as Clifford states cannot be, "reduced to epiphenomena of the nation state."[5] Rather, it is more about systematic border crossings and interconnections between multi-locale diasporic cultures[6]. While the works of Hong Kong artists in this essay reflect the invalidity of the centripetal aspiration to a hegemonic nation and its totalizing representational culture, the cases of Taiwan illustrate the interconnection of multi-locale diaspora cultures as archipelagic bodies as Clifford argues. The diasporic movement is often a politically charged form of mobility that signals geopolitical tension. With its history of Japanese colonization and the relocation of the Kuomintang to Taiwan in 1949 after their defeat Taiwanese identity is rendered into a genetically Chinese *huaren* (華人) identity, connected to multiple locales, thus unsettling the rhetoric of a Chinese-centric hegemony embodied in the concept of *zhongguoren* (中國人), which refers to the collective those dwelling in China *zhongguo* (中國).

Lin Yichi (b. 1986), a Taiwanese artist, also reflects this diverse and conflicted sense of belongingness with a series of interwoven family histories, which are combined with field research. Lin was brought up by her grandmother in a military dependents' village—a special type of residential community built in Taiwan in the late 1940s and the 1950s. The original purpose of these communities was to serve as provisional housing for soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of the Republic of China Armed Forces, along with their dependents from mainland China after the Government of the Republic of China (ROC) and the Kuomintang (KMT) retreated to Taiwan in 1949.[7] Her grandmother is from Kinmen, a group of islands that lie between Xiamen, China, and Taiwan, and a strategic location along the Taiwan Strait. Lin discovered letters in her grandmother's drawer from her grandmother's brother living in Indonesia. The discovery engendered familial connections across multiple locales and also revealed the complexity of defining oneself as Taiwanese or Chinese in the diasporic context of the archipelago. Lin's *Trans-drifting Nanyang* series employs these familial histories, to foreground diasporic experiences in the context of Cold War East Asia. In her video, she presents herself as a messenger who travels to the southeast Asia region (*Nanyang*) in search of her own history beginning with the address on the letter which was sent from Indonesia. The video tells a story of Lim's drifting grand-uncle to Bangka, Indonesia from Kinmen, Taiwan in 1948 and also her grandmother's drift from Kinmen to Taiwan in the 1950s. The prelude to this journey is a scene of her grandmother saying a prayer in Minnan (a language spoken in southern Fujian, China). She prays for good offerings for the Ho offspring (Lin's grandmother's family name is Ho), both those living locally and abroad. Lin narrates the stories of three generations in four different languages—Indonesian, Minnan, Mandarin, and English. The switching of languages reveals the fleeing identity of Kinmen-born Taiwanese who hold connections throughout Southeast Asia, as language is often one of the primary indicators of sense of belonging. The linguistic fluidity resonates with the status of Kinmen as a contested point between Taiwan and China. (The islands are governed by Taiwan and lie roughly 10 kilometers east of Xiamen in Fujian, and the PRC has continuously claimed Kinmen as part of Fujian Province.)

Lin has a certain sensitivity to language or more precisely accent in her exploration of homeland. Although both are regarded as Minnan—i.e. as the same language—the Kinmen-accented Minnan sounds different from its Taiwanese-accented counterpart. Lin, who was brought up by her grandmother, feels connected to the Kinmen accent even though her Taiwanese friends sometimes do not understand the linguistic quirks of her Kinmen Minnan. Her younger relatives in Indonesia speak Kinmen-accented Minnan but do not understand Chinese, neither the written form nor spoken Mandarin. The gaps between languages signify the three generations of a family which have both acquired and identified with various cultures. Among her relatives, the longing for the homeland—Taiwan—is strong amongst the older generation while the younger generation only sees the archipelago north of Indonesia, namely Taiwan, as a mythical motherland. To them, home is Indonesia.

This sense of fleeing and unsettled identities is further amplified by a new work in the series: *Transoceanic Practice* (2021). *Transoceanic Practice* is a sound installation that includes sculptural installation, photography, and sound works; the set of two photographs feature the Hou-Po Port at Kinmen and the Pangkal Balam Port at Bangka, Indonesia; the images of the two ports are separated by a poem written by Lin and translated into both English and Indonesian. The poem says: *Standing on this side / I silently drew in*



Lin Yichi, *Transoceanic Practice*, 2021, sound installation, neon light, anchor, dimensions variable. Photograph: Aaron Lu. Courtesy of Lin Yichi.

Lin Yichi, *Transoceanic Practice*, 2021, laser print and sound installation, dimensions variable. Photograph: Aaron Lu. Courtesy of Lin Yichi.

my heart / a home on the other side. The poem and its translation and the separated coasts of the two islands reveal that diasporic identity cannot be reduced to ethnic heredity; a reproduction of an anchor with a neon sign which reads “eternity is not forever” reinforces the fluid connotations of cultural identity. The archipelagic flips between Taiwan and Indonesia, the subjective perspectives, and the linguistic shifts in the work suggest individual experiences as the constant mediator of culture and identity.

Lin’s work also attests to the heavy coastal defense of Taiwan during the martial law period which was more a performance than functional military strategy aimed at protecting the island from the infiltration of Communists who might float across the strait. Thus, the people of Taiwan have been indoctrinated to the dangers of going close to the sea and became an ocean-phobic community, by turning their backs from the ocean.[8] The political crises and the enemies—of Taiwan often “came” from the ocean, such as the Japanese colonization and tension with PRC across the strait; thus the ocean was seen as a place charged with danger; in short, it was better to stay land-bound. However, Lin’s diverse family background reveals that the land-bound seclusion ceased neither their transnational communications nor reflections on identity. This imposed seclusion which was a mere physical barrier and a pretext for a regime to exercise control over its populace. It could not proscribe the shaping of the sentimentality and attachment to certain values, a certain culture and ways of thinking, which precisely foreground belongingness.

Furthering this investigation into Taiwanese identity, Tsao Liang-pin’s *Becoming/Taiwanese* (2018) is a photographic series that investigates the historical tension inherent within the consciousness of a Taiwan idenity; the series reveals a sacred gesture, bowing to Chinese martyrs’ shrines, a demonstrative act of national loyalty disguised as chauvinistic rhetoric. The shaping of one’s sense or consciousness of belonging is a dialectic of rendering wherein subjectivities, such as a person’s experience and memory, are imperative and contributing factors to the consciousness of identity.

Becoming/Taiwanese explores the tensions between national history and individual values through the documentation and reenactment of civic activities happening at Chinese martyrs’ shrines (忠烈祠) and former Japanese Shinto shrines in Taiwan; these places pay homage to government officials, particularly soldiers, policemen, military and defense officials who were killed in active duty. Since the Kuomintang’s relocation to Taiwan in 1949, ceremonies have taken place at the martyrs’ shrines paying tribute to heroic ancestors and reminding us of the origins of the Chinese nation. They have also acted as places to re-consolidate the historical connections to Taiwan as a place whose people are “descendants of Yan and Huang,” that is related to the Yanhuang ethnic group which claimed to be descendants of the emperors Yandi and Huangdi.[9] In the making of his series of work, Tsao visited and conducted research at the shrines, which are located all over Taiwan. According to his observations, the shrines have become places that oscillate between the sacred and secular and the national and individual. While the shrines are still seen as nationalistic and respectful symbols to some people, who bow in the direction of the

DILARANG BERENANG
DI AREA PANTAI INI

shrine when passing by, at the same time these sacred places also act as selfie-backdrops for the younger generations. Thus, the nationalistic and sacred character of the shrines which broadcast hegemonic symbols are being questioned in contemporary Taiwan. Furthermore, chauvinist practices, namely bowing, as a means of paying respect and performing an act of fealty towards a hegemonic Chinese origin have become no more than a mechanical action that conveys nothing but empty rhetoric.

Tsao contests the solemn attribution of nationalistic loyalty and suggests a pluralist reading through absurd conceptualism in *As Ritual,* part of the series *Becoming/Taiwanese*. In *As Ritual,* historical photographs of people visiting the martyrs' shrine in the 1930s during Japanese colonization and in the 1960s and 1970s during of time of the Kuomintang government—are juxtaposed with Tsao's photographic reenactment of the solemn bowing to the martyrs' shrines.

However, the photographic reenactment of the tribute is, in fact, an absurd rendering. In the series, there is always a back shot of a man who is seemingly wearing a Chinese tunic suit (or zhongshan suit) bowing deeply toward the shrines, the bow is so deep that the man becomes visually headless. The re-experience of the bowing of a headless figure critiques the settled, comfortable and unified loyalty to national identity, which has become a national ritual.

After deconstructing the settled nationalistic sentimentality in *As Ritual*, Tsao attempts to imagine the connotations of being Taiwanese in the second part of the series *Imaginarium* (2018). In *Imaginarium*, the martyrs' shrines transform into a dimension of non-conformity by featuring ordinary people carrying out quotidian activities—taking selfies, cosplaying, having fancy wedding ceremonies, and having their portraits taken—at the supposedly sacred site. The holy connotations of the shrine are made absurd by the quotidian activities performed there; here, Tsao transforms the martyrs' shrines into imaginative sites wherein fluid individual identities are allowed. The title *Imaginarium* is inspired by the concept of imagined community coined by Benedict Anderson.[10]

Nation is not a natural entity to Anderson; rather, it is a socially constructed community wherein people believe that they belong to the same community even if they have never met, and have nothing in common. The juxtaposition of these images of civilians and the activities of civil society taking place at the martyrs' shine combined with historical photography release the consciousness of the Taiwanese from the shackles of a mythical wholistic identity and open up possibilities for individual imagination.

Conclusion

There are numerous paradoxes which arise when discussing notions of Chineseness; be it the deep-rooted notion of Chinese as offspring of the dragon—a hegemonic myth that accentuates both geographical and ethnic sameness—or of the notion of the diasporic Chinese, which is often overgeneralized by the establishment of Chinatowns in many foreign countries.

The artworks from Hong Kong and Taiwan that are discussed in this essay explore both the displacement of Chinese migrants who choose not

to return home as well as those that contest the idea of a totalizing Chinese identity. Hong Kong was regarded as a refugee city, or more precisely as a contact zone[11] since the beginning of the twentieth century, which positioned the former British colony as a zone of transit for Chinese displacement. The particularity of Hong Kong has shaped the ideas of home, roots, identity, and fluidity as expressed through the motif of the sea in the works of Law Yuk Mui and Kurt Tong. The image of the sea also channels the melancholic paradox of contemporary Hong Kong where people are fleeing elsewhere due to the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020. On the other side of the Strait, Taiwan encountered equally complicated histories of colonization before its democratization in the 1990s; including the movement of people during Japanese colonization and the white terror—a 36-year period of martial law[12]. The works of Lin Yichi speak of family histories of diaspora which signal multiple ideas of what it means to be Taiwanese, while Tsao Liang-pin's photography series is a critique of the monolithic idea of Chinese identity. His ethnographical approach in the series reveals the multiple possibilities of emerging Taiwanese consciousnesses. The artistic renderings of the discussed artists resonate with Clifford's idea of the futility in maintaining and searching for absolute sameness in the diasporic community.[13] The dispersed and diverse existence, be it cartographic, cultural or linguistic, is the unavoidable condition of contemporary diasporas.

Opposite page: Lin Yichi and Law Yuk Mui, *From Whence the Waves Came Marinas* 2021, kinetic sound sculpture, 40 × 40 × 110 cm. Phototraph: Billy H. C. Kwok. Courtesy of Vennes Cheng SauWai.

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1 From Law's official website, http://www.lawyukmui.com/portfolio/from-whence-the-waves-came/.

2 Shen Yuanfang and Penny Edwards, *Beyond China: Migrating identities* (Canberra: Centre for the Study of the Chinese Southern Diaspora, Australian National University, 2002).

3 James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, 9, no. 3 (1994), 302–38.

4 The SS Kiangya or Jiangya was a Chinese passenger steamship that was destroyed in an explosion near the mouth of the Huangpu River 50 miles (80 km) north of Shanghai on December 3 or 4, 1948. The cause of the wreck was thought to be a Japanese mine. The ship was filled with refugees fleeing the communists and was bound for Ningbo. Only 700 of the estimated 3,000 passengers were saved.

5 Clifford, "Diasporas," 302.

6 Clifford, "Diasporas," 302–38.

7 These "military dependents' villages" ended up becoming permanent settlements, forming distinct cultures as enclaves of mainlanders in Taiwanese cities.

8 Rex How, *Ruo Guo Taiwan De Si Zhou Shi Hai Yang*, [Taiwan unbound]《如果台灣的四周是海洋》, (Taipei: Wanglu yu shu chuban, 2015).

9 "Descendants of Yan and Huang" (*yan huang zisun* 炎黃子孫) is a phrase that refers to the hegemonic origin of the Chinese people. This ethnic identity is based on a common ancestry. Yandi (炎帝) and Huangdi (黃帝) are considered the mythic common ancestors of the Huaxia (華夏), who are ancestral to the Han people.

10 An imagined community is an idea developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983). For Anderson, people who perceive themselves as members of a group socially construct "nations."

11 Li Cho-Kiu, "Asia's Refugee City: Hong Kong in the Cold War," in *The Cultural Cold War and the Global South: Sites of Contest and Communitas* (London: Routledge, 2021), 238–51.

12 In Taiwan, the White Terror was the suppression of political dissidents following the February 28 incident, but the phrase broadly refers to the period from 1947 to 1987, when the Kuomintang government imprisoned Taiwan's intellectual and social elite out of fear that they might resist KMT rule or sympathize with the communists.

13 Clifford, "Diasporas," 302–38.