Getting to Know Taiwan: Borrowed Gaze, Direct Involvement and Everyday Life

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The indigenization process initiated in Taiwan in the 1980s aimed at replacing China with Taiwan as center of the national imaginary by defining a local culture. This included re-writing national history according to the principle of "Taiwanese subjectivity," which consisted in casting off the island's former peripheralization by adopting a local perspective (Lynch, 2004: 516). In a study of the Community Construction Movement launched in the 1990s to involve neighborhoods in preserving local culture, history and heritage architecture, Hsin-yi Lu (2002) discusses cultural-historical 'guided walks' and 'in-depth trips' for domestic tourists as a solution to Taiwan's troubled identity caused by a fragmented history, not entirely its own given outside claims to the island. Such tours reveal 'truths' about various localities, formulated as coherent narratives that integrate diverse sites and heritages and make them Taiwanese by incorporating them into 'our land.' In Lu's case studies, 'our land' is featured either as a coherence-providing factor for the narrative of national history, or as spaces of global modernity that surround or have displaced historical sites.

This chapter will focus on several epistemological and representational strategies related to Taiwan and its history, and highlight the kinds of gazes and audiences that they involve. It will start with a discussion of tourist souvenirs purchased between 2014 and 2017. First, I turn towards a series of postcards by Xiaocao Studio which reproduce old maps of Taiwan and are intended as collectibles for a local public. The series' images illustrate the strategy of re-appropriating history discussed by Lu. They borrow external gazes upon Taiwan (epistemological approaches to the island from outside, or which reflect an insider's view serving colonial rule) and divert them for a local purpose, integrating representations of domination into a series that shifts the emphasis towards 'our land.' The Chinese-language contemporary texts on the reverse claim subjectivity for Taiwan by transferring the perspective from a macro (state) to a micro (individual) level and by upholding an epistemological model based on personal experience. This model is furthered by other souvenirs targeting foreign audiences, which shape a tourist gaze that goes beyond the visual and foregrounds experience, performance, social practices and sensorial engagement. 'Our land' becomes the center of attention in its contemporary, mundane, everyday aspect. Its role of integrating various chapters in Taiwan's past is retained, but is accompanied by a shorter, individual- and community-based view of history.

In Taiwan, the self-reflexive imperative to formulate a local identity has resulted in high openness towards foreign concepts and strategies in academia (Lynch, 2004), institutions related to tourism, and those related to heritage preservation and community building (Lu, 2002: 23-25; Taylor, 2005: 164). This chapter's final section relates such definitions of Taiwan to global trends and foreign tourists' expectations. It reaches beyond the tourism industry and shows that these definitions are also deeply grounded in significant local discourses of identity, culture and history, and prominent in other kinds of popular texts combining linguistic and visual elements: materials designed for community building projects, graphic novels and picture books issued between 2013 and 2017. As they not only target local audiences but are also promoted to foreign audiences, I will appraise their persuasive potential, their scope as de-colonizing strategies, and problematic aspects inherent in them.

My study is informed by discourse analysis, which assumes that social knowledge, reality and identities are discursive products. Discourses are manifested in texts of various kinds (written, spoken, visual materials or material artifacts), interconnected into coherent patterns (discourse formations, Foucault, 1972). They also overlap or compete, are produced and maintained within a larger economic, social and political context, and are influenced by dynamics of power, ideology and knowledge (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 19-20). As discourse analysis combines the study of texts with fieldwork and ethnography (Wodak, 2001: 69), my argument will be complemented with in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in 2017 with souvenir designers, authors and publishers, and representatives of government institutions.

Xiaocao Map Postcards – The Paradox of Taiwanese Subjectivity

Maps do not mirror geographical reality but constitute discursive representations of the world embodying ideologies and power relations (Harley, 2001: 35-37). Cartography's close link with state and social elites (55, 57) is visible in the earliest, Western maps reproduced in this series, authored by representatives of state institutions: Jacques Bellin (1703-1772), member of the Royal Naval Academy of France and the Royal Society of London, and Rigobert Bonne (1727-1795), Bellin's successor as French Royal Cartographer. Another postcard features Taiwan's map appended to Commodore Matthew Perry's report to the US state secretary, written in 1856 upon his return from expeditions to Japan. My sample also includes a 1945 map published by the Army Information Branch in the *Newsmap for the Armed Forces*, a weekly broadsheet issued by the US government for its troops during the Second World War.

Most maps testify of scant and partial knowledge of Taiwan, obtained from outside the island. Bellin's map and a 19th century English-language map (a newspaper or magazine edition)

only give Taiwan's rough contour. Perry's maps resulted from more thorough explorations and charting of the coastline for navigational purposes, a tradition initiated in the 18th century: the points of elevation on Taiwan's eastern coast and the inland mountains are marked as visible from the sea. Moreover, some maps or fragments are based on second-hand data: Taiwan's western coast on Perry's map is probably reproduced from other sources; a 1779 map in Italian is a copy of Bonne's work, which in turn may draw upon information collected by the Jesuits.

These Western maps feature Taiwan as part of international power games; it is usually marginalized within a larger regional context or appended to China. The 18th century French and Italian maps roughly sketch China's southeastern coast and Taiwan, with more detailed representations of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and the Philippines. The name used for the region ("East Indies") reflects a Western history of naval exploration motivated by trade and colonial interests. An English-language map from the Opium War period (1856) presents Southeast China with the treaty ports central to Anglo-Chinese military disputes, crown colony Hong Kong in the south, and in the lower right corner, Taiwan – then target of British and American expeditions searching for shipwreck survivors and geological surveys. Perry's map focuses on Taiwan: his report to the US state secretary mentioned coal deposits near Keelung, emphasized Taiwan's importance for American trade in the Far East and advised its occupation (Manthorpe, 2005: 130-131). The 1945 American map was informed by military operations and strategy in the context of General MacArthur's occupation of Japan after World War II. A large topographic view of Taiwan in shaded relief is accompanied by a smaller map of the surrounding area and a text summarizing Taiwan's colonial history and strategic importance for Japan.

While Western maps reflect knowledge obtained from outside the island or other sources and a lack of interest in Taiwan for its own sake, Japanese maps reflect an "epistemological rupture" (Yao, 2006: 43). Shortly after acquiring its first colony, Japan initiated an exhaustive project of land surveying and the collection of statistical data (1897-1905). Two maps from 1895 and one from 1920 reflect this rapid increase in knowledge. The former depict Taiwan as it was known to its Chinese settlers. One of them is probably reprinted from a Qing source; it still maintains the boundary between Han settlements and Taiwanese aborigines established in 1722. The eastern region, inscribed as "savage territory," is but scantily mapped. The other is more detailed, although mountain ranges are marked only approximately. By contrast, the 1920 map is a paragon of scientific cartographic knowledge obtained on-site by the Japanese – it shows Taiwan's topography as thoroughly known, informs on administrative divisions, climate, agriculture, and provides close-ups of northern Taiwan, Jilong Harbor, and Tainan's vicinity.

The curiosity the Japanese felt about Taiwan and their great dedication to understanding its territory and people were instrumental to a project of colonial control and domination (Yao, 2006: 38-39). This ideological framework is salient on the October 1895 map, which links Taiwan to the colonial center and highlights Japan's further imperial aspirations. An appended smaller map uses the same pink color for Taiwan and Japan; it marks navigation tracks from Japan to China's southeastern coast and to Korea via Taiwan. Even more telling in this respect is a map from the 1940s depicting Taiwan and the islands controlled by Japan under the South Pacific Mandate as attractive, exotic tourist destinations. Colonial rule is emphasized by the red-colored Sōtokufu (Colonial Administration Building) that singles out Taipei, and ships and planes bearing Japan's flag at nearby ports and airports. The attractions visible all over Taiwan overlap with resources exploited by the colonizer: gold, camphor, hinoki wood, sugar, rattan, rice, etc. The Japanese wear uniforms and operate modern equipment (locomotives, planes, steamships) or sightsee on the island. Unlike the benevolently superior colonizers, the natives are characterized by a 'denial of coevalness' (Teng, 2004: 61-62): aborigines or Han Chinese are represented in traditional or working attire, aboard junks and small fishing boats, as tourist attractions or producers of goods supplied to Japan.

It would seem, therefore, that this postcard series emphasizes Taiwan's lack of subjectivity and performs auto-ethnography – whereby the colonized subjects' collaboration with their conqueror is evidenced by appropriating the latter's idioms for self-description (Pratt, 1992:7). But while the postcards do not make a critical attempt at decolonizing knowledge (1992: 2), they do make significant locally-centered statements. While maps themselves are ideology-laden persuasive texts, postcards also perform curatorial acts by adding cultural meaning to represented views through a process of selection and framing (Hornstein, 2011: 13, 50). The Xiaocao series re-contextualizes historical maps by selecting them according to its own ideological framework for a contemporary audience.

First, the series distances itself from China (the 'other' of Taiwanese nationalism) by not reproducing archival Qing maps despite their availability (Teng, 2004; Keating, 2011) and only including several post-World War II maps. None of these positions Taiwan as part of China, although under martial law most maps depicted China's geography with Taiwan as a province (Chang, 2015: 72-73, 77). The titles of two maps from 1948 and the 1950s-1960s refer exclusively to the island without mentioning its province status: "Tourist Map of Taiwan" and "A Tourist Guide to Taiwan." Thus while apparently embracing a lack of subjectivity and a 'pro-colonial' attitude, Xiaocao postcards can also be read as expressing a local identity through resistance against a China-centered national imaginary, a strategy noted by many scholars of Taiwanese historiography, heritage preservation (Taylor, 2005: 166-167; Amae, 2011: 52-56) and cinema (Sang, 2012).

Secondly, although individual Xiaocao postcards depict Taiwan as part of regional strategies devised by political centers external to it, when perceived as a series they integrate all these historical events into a Taiwanese national narrative, and interpellate a local identity by reiterating the island's shape. The larger geographical context changes according to diverse configurations of power and strategic interests, but Taiwan's map remains central to these representations. Taiwan may be seen through foreign eyes, but the whole series embodies a local perspective and highlights a contemporary national territory.

Xiaocao and Other Souvenirs - Personal Involvement, Social Practices and Everyday Life

The contemporary, locally-oriented ideological framework of the Xiaocao postcards comprises yet another aspect. On their reverse side, Chinese-language texts that supplement the images embrace a constructivist approach to history-writing as an endless process determined by power relations ("the old and the new overbalancing and overturning each other in their endless journey"). They propose leaving the past behind and beginning anew ("The old captain says we should discard the compass and turn the map over to its blank side"; "find the tropics anew, having drifted off course throughout history"). This new kind of history is to be written from a different standpoint. The geopolitical, macro- and (colonial) state-level perspective featured by the maps is replaced by a democratic, individual approach in the texts. The reader is directly addressed ("you like…", "you say...") and integrated into a national community ("we"); an affective ("the beautiful island, our cradle, a mother's gentle embrace") and markedly sensorial bond ("[your] two feet kissing the ground") is established between people and the "mother island." The reader is constructed as an agent entrusted with the task of establishing an appropriate position for Taiwan through round-the-island travel. This journey involves obtaining first-hand knowledge ("firmly believe in first-hand information, rely on your own solid steps") and recording personal memories ("always meticulously taking notes"; "upon arrival at an unknown place, you always write and send a postcard; this is, you claim, the only accurate record of your satellite coordinates").

Despite these statements' categorical tone, the Xiaocao series does not elaborate on this individual cognitive endeavor. However, many other tourist souvenirs employ first-hand, bodily experience as a strategy for representing Taiwan, engaging with it and re-creating it abroad. Studies of postcards and souvenirs usually highlight their visual aspect. According to Susan Stewart, they reduce the physical dimensions of represented objects, thus bringing them into a form of privatized intimacy that favors the visual at the expense of other senses (1993: 137-138). Verena Winiwarter refers to postcards as "a visual instruction manual for the consumption of sights" (2008: 195). This perspective recalls John Urry's theory of the tourist gaze, which is criticized for exclusively

emphasizing the sense of vision (MacCannell, 2011: 188-190). Urry and Larsen respond to this accusation by discussing the ‘performance turn’ in tourism and the ‘sensescapes’ involved in traveling: soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes and “geographies of touch” (2011: 196).

The souvenirs analyzed here make viewers aware of these manifold possibilities of exploring Taiwan. Local snacks and other foodstuffs are a widespread theme. They evoke memories of actual food consumption and encourage such experiences involving the senses of smell and taste. They also induce a sense of interacting with actual objects through representational techniques which emphasize materiality and engage the sense of touch. Purses by a Tainan brand realistically imitate fish varieties, including a natural-sized head of a milkfish, with a striking view of raw flesh around the severed spine; the luster of fish scales is accurately imitated through the material employed (oilcloth). Comparable techniques are also exploited by postcards, an eminently two-dimensional medium. Items by a Taipei-based designer (Pigeon PostCards) feature photographs of single objects, cut along their contours: wooden clogs, a box of firecrackers, and a breakfast snack. Similarly, a set of cards by another producer (Miin Design) depicts sponge cakes in a variety of shapes: turtle, rabbit, shrimp, toy pistol, etc.

These texts encourage an ‘anthropological gaze’ (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 20): they mobilize viewers to discover cultural meanings underlying represented sights and objects. John Storey argues that “culture is not […] something we ‘have’; rather, it is something we ‘do’”; the materiality of things is entangled with their meanings resulting from social practice (2017: 18). Although they seldom depict people, these souvenirs feature objects present in particular kinds of social interaction, to which they emphatically draw the viewer’s attention. The set of sponge cake cards includes a brown envelope, with instructions to place the ‘cakes’ inside before sending. This evokes the social settings related to the sale of such cakes, handed to customers in brown paper bags at street stalls. The expression “cards for sharing” (分享卡) placed on their packaging refers to a practice inherent in Taiwanese home or restaurant meal gatherings. A pair of two-sided refrigerator magnets by the same company imitates wooden moon blocks used for divination in temples across Taiwan. Single objects such as these or the Tatung rice cooker (prized for durability and versatility, ubiquitous in restaurants and homes) popular with many souvenir designers, invite the purchaser to discover their cultural connotations and the social practices to which they pertain.

Souvenirs imply a ‘loss of origin’ - they substitute a narrative of the object and its maker with the unique, reportable (as opposed to repeatable) experience of its possessor (Stewart, 1993: 135-136). By contrast, these souvenirs highlight the object itself (Taiwan) and repeatable experiences related to it. The purchaser is not only engaged in intellectual games of discovering Taiwan-centered narratives involving social contexts and cultural meanings, but also in bodily

performances aimed at exploring Taiwan or (re)constructing it for a foreign audience. EyeDesign's wooden works include Taiwan's puzzle map, a didactic game teaching geography through practice. The sponge cake cards position the sender and receiver as manufacturer and consumer. The moon block magnets can be used for home divination (as recommended on the packaging), and two other Miin Design postcards require the receiver to restore the three-dimensionality of initially folded elements, an activity also required for these objects' real-life counterparts: a Pingxi paper lantern, usually inscribed with wishes and sent into the sky for the Lantern Festival, or a red pineapple hung in front of newly-established stores, restaurants, etc. with wishes of abundant revenues. The typicality of these objects and practices are confirmed by their use in actual performances of national identity – young Taiwanese studying abroad use them to introduce their culture or sell them at national stalls during university fairs (interview with Ben, Miin's designer).

Apart from cultural connotations and social practices, the souvenirs also draw attention to stories of everyday objects and sights, thus constructing a national narrative that integrates various historical chapters (as discussed by Lu, 2002). One of them is the Japanese colonial rule responsible for building Taiwan's railway network, a salient motif in a postcard series with cats nearby railway tracks and station plates in Pingxi (Renren Publishing Co. Ltd.), and many other souvenirs depicting railway equipment, bridges and stations. The 1960s and 1970s 'economic miracle' is illustrated by the Tatung rice cooker and fan, featured by a 'do-it-yourself' postcard to be cut, folded and assembled by the receiver (Monkey Design). This is also a history of cultural hybridity, combining incoming and local traditions – Japanese (the wooden clogs, Pigeon PostCards); Chinese (the Pigeon breakfast snack - sesame pancakes with fried bread, Pigeon PostCards); Hakka (an oil paper umbrella, same series), or Christianity (the 1956 Neihu Hu-Guang Church in Taipei, Monkey Design).

Alongside the above approach to national history, the analyzed souvenirs also induce a sense of small-scale history, related to everyday material culture, people's lives, activities and close living surroundings. Many postcards depict cluttered personal possessions embodying individual histories: rattan and plastic chairs, flower pots, metal bowls and other objects placed in doorways, drying laundry and odd objects stored on balconies (Renren Publishing, 6636 Advertising & Creativity, Chez Nemo). The present configuration of vernacular architecture (another prominent theme) reflects histories of small communities: low-rise living quarters with rooftop extensions, water reservoirs and pigeon cages (6636 Advertising & Creativity); urban street views with tangled electric cables, haphazard shop signs and busy traffic (Miin Design, Renren Publishing), or temples squeezed between apartment blocks (Chez Nemo). The worn appearance of certain elements testifies of changes caused by human use and climate: cracked doors and walls, with peeling plaster

exposing bricks underneath or dark mildew spreading from below (Rainbowarts, Renren Publishing).

Therefore, what these souvenirs highlight is neither state-level, political history or the remote past, nor the modernity that has come to replace or surround its vestiges. Instead, they emphasize 'our land' as it is now, with its small-scale, social history and ordinary material culture, which they de-naturalize and re-position as extraordinary spectacles for the tourist gaze. At present, Hakka umbrellas and Japanese-style wooden clogs are tourist commodities, and 1970s and 1980s Tatung desk fans are vintage collector items. However, rice cookers are still home fixtures, and together with other objects and landscapes recurrent across the national territory, and, with practical knowledge, everyday social interaction, habits and routines, they contribute to a sense of national identity "enmeshed in the embodied, material ways in which we live" (Edensor, 2002: vii). Although many such sights and behavioral patterns are state-regulated through rules pertaining to traffic, architecture, desired conduct, etc. (2002: 20), the everyday is also open-ended, fluid and disruptive of rigid conventions (Edensor, 2001: 62). Judy Attfield describes the commonplace, material culture of everyday life as the 'wild things' escaping both the politics and orderliness of design and the ephemerality of fashion. She discusses the home as a space that offers the possibility of individual agency and control, and elaborates on both the unruliness of cluttered personal possessions and the idiosyncratic orderliness paradoxically inscribed in clutter, as a means for establishing individual identity and history (2000: 149-172).

Taiwanese souvenirs rarely offer inside glimpses of homes (with a few exceptions: the Tatung rice cooker, a chopstick basket, a dustpan, a ladle for noodles – Miin Design), and their themes are not idiosyncratic, but typical. However, they focus on the familiar surroundings of everyday life that begin right outside the home threshold, and highlight a varied array of humble, menial objects such as plastic bags and eating bowls, blue-and-white slippers, traffic signs, scooters and small blue freight cars, which make up a national imagery based on ugliness and disarray. During my interview, Ariel (6636 Advertising & Creativity) compared government-led heritage preservation projects with the living quarters he depicts, and highlighted this idea of disorder defying rules and planning but interlocked with community development: "Memory as I understand it is weak, their [the state's] memory is antique, old, old architecture. My memory is of a rather social kind. [Such places] are natural! They're not artificial, not manufactured; they're not that intentional, not as anyone wishes them to be. The government says, 'Wow, that thing has four hundred years of history, we've got to protect it.' What I draw is of the common people, it's not lofty, not that classic, you see it in ordinary life […where] they have corrugated iron extensions on top that are against the law, they're illegal." Thus, the analyzed souvenirs encourage viewers to step

out of well-organized enclavic tourist spaces, into heterogeneous spaces where tourist facilities coexist with ordinary activities, official institutions and private housing (Edensor, 2001: 63-64), or into the total 'wilderness' of local everyday life.

The Broader View - The Discussed Themes as Discourse Formations

The souvenirs analyzed above are produced by private companies, outside state-led or subsidized projects. The motifs they depict are largely absent from large-scale state initiatives in public diplomacy and nation branding. The reasons for this absence include: cross-strait tensions potentially inducing reluctance to endorse too localized images of Taiwan, and a penchant for established visual conventions in official projects, described as conservatism by the interviewed souvenir designers. Promotional materials for international audiences – *Taiwan Panorama* or *Taiwan Review*, two magazines currently issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), or other materials distributed abroad through Taipei Representative Offices – convey prominent themes of each cabinet's core policies. Humble everyday sights are not deemed worthy of being popularized as national representations; an interviewed official reported supervising editors' reluctance to include such images in MoFA periodicals. Apart from food, familiar elements of everyday life are only marginal in the visual materials commissioned by the Tourism Bureau under its 'Taiwan, the Heart of Asia' branding campaign (Zemanek, 2017)[1].

Though marginalized by official public diplomacy, the imaging strategies I focus on are typical of smaller state-endorsed projects aimed at branding specific places (not the entire nation) for a local audience – materials designed for community construction activities drawing attention to the built environment (historical sites and vernacular architecture), community or individual histories. Apart from tourist souvenirs, Ariel also designed a notebook illustrated with local sights (streets, parks, apartment buildings) for a 2011 event promoting Minsheng Community, co-organized by Taipei city government's Department of Cultural Affairs. Postcards commissioned by the Yunlin County Government for a 2014 exhibition advocating preservation of the Japanese-built old market near Shuntian Temple in Tuku Township juxtapose contemporary photographs of disused market buildings earmarked for demolition, and Japanese-era photographs of town streets, with contemporary drawings of the same places featuring ordinary spaces of living and commerce. The images are accompanied by texts upholding knowledge through individual experience, re-appropriating colonial and community history. They highlight the importance of the two historical

1 Examples of such materials are available on the MoFA and Tourism Bureau websites (http://www.mofa.gov.tw/en/Content_List.aspx?n=A4FF6E419748B427 and http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/) (accessed 27 September 2017).

sites (market and temple) for the populace, and encourage the viewer (constructed as a younger town inhabitant) to become acquainted with local history by visiting old stores.

A book sponsored by the Ministry of Culture (Wang et al., 2016) under a project of educational tourism introduces Yancheng, a district in Kaohsiung disadvantaged by the city's commercial development and recently revitalized with the establishment of Pier-2 Art Center. Through essays and illustrations, the book highlights small-scale trade conducted in spaces whose haphazard extension with readily available materials followed people's living and working needs instead of aesthetic standards or state-of-the-art architectural planning. Close-up photographs of people (mostly elderly) showing their hands, tools and other work-related objects emphasize place-bound histories. Spaces are cluttered and ugly, and most products sold or manufactured there (cosmetics, false eyelashes, steamed buns, plastic buttons, groceries) are cheap and ordinary, albeit handmade and reflecting lifelong dedication. Apart from being visually appealing, the book encourages sensorial perception. Its unusually thick plain cardboard covers, printed with a strikingly contrasting, colored relief map of Yancheng, expose the book spine and its protruding string bindings.

Similar themes are recurrent in other texts unrelated to tourism or community-building, and attempt to capture a national or local specificity. Some of their authors have received state support under a general policy encouraging the creative and cultural industries. Sean Chuang's graphic memoir *Diary of the 80s in Taiwan* (2013) was included in 'Books from Taiwan,' a 2015 Ministry of Culture initiative promoting local literature to foreign publishers. It chronicles the coming of age of an urban, middle-class generation, and of Taiwan itself during the late martial law era. Detailed pictures of the protagonist's physical and social surroundings resonate with Edensor's account of everyday nationalism. Spaces and objects related to living, working, commerce, education, leisure and the practices and routines performed within are not specific strictly to the 1980s and the depicted locations (mostly Taipei and Taizhong), but are still recurrent all over urban Taiwan. Some work as signifiers for major historical periods, thus integrating them into a coherent national narrative. Baseball stands for the Japanese colonial era and Taiwan's strife for international recognition during the 1970s; scenes from Taipei's Ximending embody the 'economic miracle,' and foreign influences (break dancing, Japanese toys) are domesticated through social practices assigning them locally relevant cultural values.

A picture book in Chinese and English promoted by the Ministry of Culture at the 2017 Bologna Children's Books Fair (Soupy, 2015) expresses reflections on Taiwaneseness inspired by the author's experience of living abroad. It juxtaposes Taiwan and Edinburgh, highlighting cultural differences based on observations and interviews conducted by the author as self-made

ethnographer. It raises a mundane topic (relaxation), in its equally mundane, social forms: shopping, cooking and other everyday activities, with illustrations of related objects – foodstuffs and kitchen utensils, other home fixtures, goods at yard sales, etc. Advertised as "100% handmade" on the cover, the book resembles a personal diary organized according to individual preferences instead of typographic conventions: handwritten, with disorderly sketches and texts crowded into each other and hand-drawn arrows indicating their sequence, collages and 'taped-on' photographs. Insertions with further explanations and maps to be unfolded offer a reading experience that goes beyond the visual.

Chen Ruiqiu's picture book (2016) subsidized by the Ministry of Culture foregrounds an omnipresent, ordinary architectural form adapted to local climate: narrow, several-storied houses built upon rain-shelter passages, supported by columns delineating each unit's width. The last page summarizes its history since the Qing and Japanese eras, but the book's main concern is everyday social life in these familiar surroundings: snack stalls and unregulated commerce, people talking, parking scooters, drinking or sleeping. It exposes the disorder inherent in such sights: each house is painted a different color, and each window stands out by odd objects placed outside: security bars in various patterns, laundry, flower pots, gardening tools, air conditioners, etc. Such images illustrate de Certeau's argument on human practices of living that transform 'place' into 'space' (1984), and urban sociology's emphasis on the relationship between society and space: settlement spaces are products of human thought and action, and are therefore meaningful. Apart from government policies, real estate industries and global capitalism, they are also affected by human behavior and interaction that transform spatial arrangements in ways not predicted by initial developers or planners (Hutchison, 2000: x-xi).

Foreign Gazes, Global Trends, Local Discourses and Final Comments

The epistemological model assuming individual, performative, sensorial involvement with Taiwan and representations thereof grounded in everyday life may reflect existing patterns of viewing Taiwan from a foreign perspective. Ben (Miin Design) indicated foreign guidebooks and travel magazines as sources of inspiration for particular themes: 'betelnut beauties' and scooters, highlighted as 'Taiwanese' in Western sources, or Tatung rice cookers and rotating colorful columns in front of beauty parlors, popular with Japanese tourists. His products' success with the latter group has attracted visits from Japanese journalists that reinforced this two-directional cultural exchange. He and Ariel signaled foreign tourists' general interest in images of Taiwanese ordinary life, which in turn may reflect global trends. Such is the postmodern preoccupation with the body, sensation and materiality, and the replacement of narrative with performativity as principle for legitimating

knowledge (Lash, 1990: 78-100). Another is the use of ordinary sights, objects and commodities in public displays of national identity (the British Millennium Dome, Edensor, 2002: 175-189), and recent tourist interest in other people's 'real life' and work, illustrated by Urry and Larsen (2011: 139) with examples of heritage-making in Northern Britain.

The issues discussed in this study echo not only foreign gazes or a global zeitgeist, but also significant local discourses. James Udden (2009: 13-14, 18) comments on radical changes in grand national narratives imposed by subsequent regimes ruling Taiwan, which caused collective disbelief in the ontology, stability and continuity of a national community and reluctance to commit to clear-cut solutions in this respect. Any fixed categories are superseded by daily experience with its elusive, slippery, ever-changing character. Udden's argument concerns Hou Hsiao-hsien's biography and cinematic works. It emphasizes the centrality of personal experience in the formation of a local identity overriding Hou's ancestry and the second-hand Chinese identity discursively constructed by family stories. Instead of sharing his grandmother's longing for mainland China and his sister's interest in pursuing the China- and Mandarin-centered official education, the hero of Hou's autobiographical *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* (1985) prefers to transgress the boundaries of school and family and integrate into a local Taiwanese community. This film also emphasizes the sensorial dimension of experiencing Taiwan. It begins with ordinary outdoor sounds on a hot summer day against a blank screen. Similar sounds, usually excluded from film soundtracks and easily overlooked in actual life, recur throughout the entire movie. The senses, affect and materiality are also prominent in *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor* (Lovin, 2015; Wang, 2007), the 1990 short story by Hou's scriptwriter Zhu Tianwen, another key proponent of the "Taiwanese Experience in the cultural realm" (Udden, 2009: 18). A socially engaged concern with 'our native soil' and 'our time' can be tracked even further back, to the mid-1970s debates on Nativist literature (Ibid.: 26; Hsiau 2000: 85-86).

The stress on individual, sensorial experience in Hou's New Cinema films and contemporary texts can thus be read within a tradition of distrust or resistance towards discourse. Yomi Braester shows that not only hegemonic sources of discourse are problematic, but also dominated ones. His study of 1980s literary works concerning repressed memories of the White Terror (2007) foregrounds the unreliability and insufficiency of linguistic accounts in conveying personal experiences of suffering and violence. Ssu-fang Liu Jessie (2017) comments on present-day attempts to transcend a visual semiotic mode in recent films on around-the-island journeys that highlight sensuous modalities of conceptualizing Taiwan's geography and history. An irretrievable historical past is replaced with personal, affective narratives, and bodily involvement replaces earlier visually-oriented paradigms: the colonial strategy of incorporating Taiwan into Japanese

aesthetic conventions, and martial law era visual fantasies that encoded Taiwan according to a China-centered ideological framework, or only allowed for imaginary transgression of economic and political conditions that prevented actual experiences of the island. This sensorial, performative epistemological model can therefore be seen as a de-colonizing strategy reaching further than that of acknowledging and integrating instances of past domination, proposed by the Xiaocao postcards and discussed by Lu (2002).

In my sample, the emphasis on social interaction and short-term, small-scale community or individual history makes it possible to circumvent Taiwan's problematic lack of subjectivity in the macro-level historical narrative associated with state power, and constitutes an empowering strategy for grassroots, individual agents. The idea of unruliness and disorder inherent in the represented small, ordinary, familiar spaces echoes Taiwan's vibrant civil society and social activism that have contributed to the island's democratization. This link is directly expressed by writer Cai Zhu'er in an essay[2] on Taipei's iron sheet extensions on top of apartment buildings (an undignified, but lasting kind of landscape despite the city's ongoing modernization), and the continuous, chaotic clamor of rain falling upon such rooftops or street food peddlers' shouts advertising humble but diverse products. She associates these elements with a national spirit - the multiplicity of voices fighting for power over discourse, an indomitable force shaping and maintaining democracy since the 1980s.

Given the distance between the representational strategies discussed in this paper and images of Taiwan promoted internationally through official channels, especially during Ma Ying-jeou's presidency with its emphasis on Taiwan's Chinese heritage[3], it would appear that the former express grassroots resistance against an official, government-led discourse. Nevertheless, some of these non-official texts have enjoyed state support even before the 2016 elections. They are still being produced after the change in ruling parties, which brought about a turn towards local culture and grassroots actors (Tsai, 2015). Therefore, it seems more appropriate to perceive these strategies as reflecting uneasiness with discourse (as discussed above) or a general skepticism with party politics, government actions and agencies, noted by researchers of social activism (Hughes, 2014: 130-131).

By positively valuing ugliness and vulgarity, my research material challenges elite standards of good taste. During my interview, Ben elaborated on *su* 俗, a quality which can be ascribed to objects that are low-end, but are valuable and embody national specificity due to their being part of

2 The Song of Corrugated Iron [*Langban zhi ge*]: https://reader.udn.com/act/fifthgrade/index.html (accessed 22 October 2017).

3 For more details on official public diplomacy, see Rawnsley, 2014; for a comparison between official and grassroots images of Taiwan, see Zemanek, 2017.

everyday routine practices, and their wide availability in financial, temporal and spatial terms (cheap and always on sale at any store). In a newspaper article, Ariel referred to the living quarters depicted in his souvenirs as “very ugly; some people would even say outrageously ugly” (Guo, 2015); their value, however, consists in affective bonds with such sights resulting from their familiarity. In this respect, these artists’ definitions of Taiwan overlap with the *taike* 台客 discourse. During the martial law era, this term was a derogatory label for people whose behavior contradicted standards of high culture and civilized conduct imposed by the KMT government: swearing, betel-chewing, a preference for flip-flops, tattoos and ostentatious accessories, and the usage of Hoklo, officially condemned before the 1980s. This stereotype also expressed an ethnic and geographic divide: it connoted the native Taiwanese (本省人) and the provincial southern Taiwan rather than the trend-setting, cosmopolitan, Mandarin-dominated Taipei. During the 1990s, the lowly, ‘anti-elite’ (反菁英) ‘*taike* culture’ acquired positive connotations as defining a Taiwanese national specificity within an emerging, popular discourse of local consciousness (Xian, 2005; *China Times*, 2013).

However, even incorporated into this nationalist discourse, the *taike* stereotype still applies to people and their usage of commodities as signs of resistance against the hegemony of an elite culture, thus seemingly conforming to Dick Hebdige’s concept of subculture as a specific style (1979). It still strongly connotes the native Taiwanese, as illustrated by two recent films - Wei Te-Sheng’s *Cape No. 7* (2008) and Niu Chengze’s *Monga* (2010). The texts analyzed in this study, on the other hand, shift the focus toward objects, sights and kinds of social interaction associated with specific situations. Instead of a subculture, they point to a vernacular culture, defined by Margaret Lantis as everyday, commonplace and specific to a certain locality: “the culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations” (1960: 202-203). These definitions of Taiwan do not refer to smaller regions (north or south), but are based on elements present everywhere, especially in an urban environment. Thus they bridge the geographic and ethnic rifts inherent in the *taike* stereotype to a greater extent than Hou Hsiao-hsien’s films. Instead of transgressing ethnic boundaries as did Axiao in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*, they avoid ethnic markers and underscore the binding factors of an already existing national community: a shared material culture and living spaces.

Udden (2009: 23-24) and Chang (2006) comment on the crucial role of culture in Taiwan, both locally and in narratives targeting an international community: as an anti-Communist weapon under martial law, as a local response to diplomatic defeats and means for claiming international visibility since the 1970s and 80s, a field for articulating locally-centered identity, and a bone of

contention in party politics. Next (2009: 24-28), Udden inquires into the exact meaning of 'culture' during these decades. Under martial law and to varying degrees afterwards, the KMT understood it as high, classical Chinese culture. Hitherto marginalized Taiwanese culture found its first outlets in elite forms: literature (the Nativists) or the internationally successful but intellectually challenging, art house New Cinema. In recent years, forms of popular entertainment have increasingly contributed to the nationalist project (Wei Te-sheng and Niu Chengze's works, among many others). The Taiwan-related images and strategies discussed in my study emerge in 'higher' forms (Cai Zhu'er's essay), but also constitute a coherent message consistently conveyed by a wide variety of popular texts. Although it arguably has less impact than official public diplomacy, its grassroots producers have created increasingly far-reaching channels and networks for both international and local distribution (Zemanek, 2018).

Nevertheless, there seems to be little confidence in whether such definitions of Taiwaneseness grounded in the present day, humble objects, ordinary sights and small-scale social interactions are worthy of the label 'culture', especially when issues of international visibility are involved. They have been mostly downplayed or disregarded in official nation branding initiatives, and do not enjoy unanimous support among the general public. A recent cover of the Japanese *Brutus* magazine[4] featuring a Tainan traditional market street scene triggered an internet controversy for raising ugliness and disorder to the status of national symbols[5], although many voices also praised it for representing the 'real' Taiwan. The interviewed artists are not self-assured about their role in promoting 'Taiwanese culture' either. Their choices of themes are not justified by firm belief in their status as local culture, but by a lack of alternatives caused by exceeding (historically-constituted) cultural hybridity, incessant present-day disputes over what defines Taiwan, cultural elements that are not objectively present, but ideology-laden discursive constructs (Ben), or contemporary global flows which make it impossible to discern what is really 'ours' (Ariel). Ariel's statement is particularly telling for this attitude: "Your job [i.e. research into Taiwaneseness] is amazing; I'm full of admiration for you. Because Taiwan does not have its own trends, and has undergone many outside influences, especially Western and Japanese, so it's hard for Taiwan to own its own culture […] So all the time I'm embarrassed to say that Taiwan has nothing for you to dig out."

Instead of culture, my interviewees seem to favor the more comfortable concept of memory. They perceive their work as recording memories – either from a definite period (the 1980s for

4 *Brutus* is a men's lifestyle bimonthly and Issue no. 851 (July 13, 2017) advertises "101 Things to Do in Taiwan".

5 It must be emphasized that negative reactions were also triggered by the post-colonial hierarchies this photograph was seen to imply. See https://www.facebook.com/uccu.space/posts/655075691368956 (accessed 12 September 2017).

comic artist Sean Chuang), or sights and objects which have surrounded them since childhood, notwithstanding their primary cultural provenance (Ariel and Ben). They represent Taiwan through such images as they induce a sense of stability by their apparent permanence in time and ubiquity across space. Although such definitions grounded in the 'here and now' present Taiwaneseness as an already existing entity instead of an ever-elusive "object in suspension" (Harrison, 2009: 58), they also reflect a phenomenon captured by Yomi Braester in his study on the 'poetics of demolition' in Taiwanese cinema: progressive disappearance of the spaces they are based on. As indicated earlier, the Japanese-era market in Tuku depicted on postcards was facing demolition. So are the low-rise apartment blocks with illegal extensions, to be replaced by modern residential compounds under urban renewal projects. Ariel's attitude towards the vanishing of memory-loaded cityscapes accompanied by a process of reconstruction recalls the 'nostalgia for forgetting' discussed by Braester (2003: 53). Despite active participation in protests directed at Taipei mayor's Ke Wenzhe's campaign against illegal rooftop extensions (2015), Ariel also authored a series of newspaper ads for construction companies seeking to replace old buildings with new, safer ones while compensating home owners (2011, 2012), a process which he perceives as essentially legitimate and inevitable. All these facts raise doubts about the viability of the form of conceptualizing Taiwan explored in my study, and offer pessimistic prospects as to the likelihood that the task of defining a local specificity remain a perpetual 'mission impossible.'

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