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Logics of Ethos and the translations of Unheimlich

Wu Tianzhang and the Post-Martial Law Era in Taiwan

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I

This paper poses questions related to the double-edged translation of the logic of *ethos* in the post-martial law era in Taiwan. I will focus on the visual dimension of the politics of translation, through cultural policies, aesthetic discourses and artistic practices, and will try to respond to the question raised by Rada Iveković in her article “On permanent translation,” that is, the insufficiency of language, the inadequacy of the human being to itself, and every institution's inadequacy to its purpose.[1] I would especially like to focus on the complicated issue of the ethnic partitions and frictions in Taiwan between “wai-sheng-ren” (the mainlanders) and “ben-sheng-ren” (local Taiwanese), the partitions caused by the institutionalized cultural and language policies during the martial law period in Taiwan, the state of emergency, and the effects of it that remained in the post-martial law era. So-called “wai-sheng-ren,” literally the ones from outside of the province, refers to the

two million refugees, retreated with the KMT regime (KMT, meaning Kuomintang, i.e., the Nationalist party) after their defeat in the civil war against the Chinese communists, and their descendents; and "ben-sheng-ren" refers to the descendants of early immigrants, mainly from southern Fujian. I shall take Wu Tianzhang's art works as a thread that links us to the core of the subtle issue of ethnic partitions. Wu Tianzhang's (b. 1956) techniques of the *un-heimlich* translated and transplanted the sense of abject and ethnic border deeply experienced by Taiwanese "ben-sheng-ren" onto the surface of the canvas and revealed the unutterable subjective conditions during the martial law era.

A brief sketch of the historical conditions of Taiwan in the first half of the twentieth century is required here. In recent history, the ownership of Taiwan government has been drastically turned over twice, through military force and high political oppression, first from the hands the Chin government to that of Japan in 1895, and then from Japan to the KMT government in 1945. In 1945, after the termination of the Japanese colonial period (1894-1945), the KMT regime of the Republic of China sent Governor-General Chen Yi to be in charge of Taiwan. The corruption of the Chen Yi government and the chaotic situation caused by the inflation of the rice market soon disappointed and irritated the general public. The 228 Incident in 1947,[2] the civilians' protest against the Monopoly Bureau agents who used excessive force on an old woman peddling untaxed cigarettes, immediately grew into an island-wide armed riot. Crowds of people seized police stations, arms and radio stations, and even killed some "wai-sheng-ren" in the streets. This riot was put down by force by reinforced Nationalist troops from the mainland. Up to eight thousands, and some reports said twenty-eight thousands, of "ben-sheng-rens" were killed in the incident and its aftermath. The "State of Emergency" was declared

and the Martial Law was imposed on Taiwan which lasted for nearly 40 years, from 1948 to 1987.

What is complicated in this historical process is the logic of *ethos* and of *heim* that is constructed through the cultural and language policies. The use of Japanese language was forbidden. Japanese publications, newspapers, magazines, music and movies were banned. Not only the intellectuals who received high education in the Japanese colonial period soon lost their influence in society, but also the majority of the population was denied access to higher social ranks because of the language policy. The subsequent cultural and language policies during the 1950s and 1960s banning the use of Taiwanese dialect in public increased the forced suppression of "ben-sheng-ren."[3] The ethnic partition and social hierarchy were consolidated through these policies. Furthermore, the education and promotion of the Chinese traditional culture were re-enforced. The mainland was taken as the cultural homeland, and the sentiments of nostalgia were expressed by the entire generation of artists, writers and the general public. The second generation of the mainlanders and the post-228 generation of the local Taiwanese shared the same nostalgic sentiments for the homeland.

The stability of this political state was gradually shaken after the Republic of China retreated from the United Nations,[4] the international relations and political recognition cut off, and public disclosure of the KMT government's violation of human rights in the white terror period. Kaohsiung Incident[5] in 1978 brought people's awareness of the political terrorism of the KMT government to the surface. The debates over a "Chinese consciousness" and a "Taiwanese consciousness" during 1983 and 1984 further crystallized the polemic of the confusing issue of Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese consciousness.[6] Thomas B.

Gold has noted that the “quest for a unique Taiwan identity” began early in the mid-1970’s, along with Taiwan's “increased diplomatic isolation and the rise of the *tangwai*, the dissident party”.[7] Gold also pointed out that, in the 1980’s and the 1990’s, “defining Taiwanese identity is still a process at the stage of rediscovering a history comprised of a diverse array of components, but it has become a conscious project”.[8]

Wu Tianzhang was born in 1956 in Keelong, a northern harbor city of Taiwan. He graduated from the Chinese Cultural University as a student of art in 1980, and began his career as an artist from early 1980s.[9] Wu Tianzhang’s art works from mid-1980s to early 1990s presented to us his self-conscious radical protests against the violence done by the KMT regime during the martial law era.[10] In the mid-1990s Wu Tianzhang switched his concern to the problems of home, or *heim*, or the awkwardness attached to the status of Taiwanese-ness.[11] In the 2000s, he began a new series making fun of the moral jargons of “being-together” through a mixture of the pseudo-reincarnation narratives, folkloric circus gestures and the technique of high-tech digital image-making.[12]







In between these drastically different stages, I find the transitional projects in mid-1990s most puzzling but also most revealing. In these series of paintings, we no longer see the anger, accusations, protests and frontal criticisms in the hard lines and edges of the masculine bodies presented in his protest series in the first stage, nor do we see the detached and hilarious laugh about the pretense and futility of "being together" in the latest projects yet. Instead, we see demure but seductive and performative gestures of figures of the past, the marine sailor with the guitar, the school girl and woman dressed in the fashion of the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan, the citations of images taken from the posters of cigarette advertisement of the 1930s in Shanghai, a painting of the market place of the 1950s by local Taiwanese painter Li Shiqiao, and a film poster by Hou Xiaoxian about a story of a small town in the 1960s. The backdrop of the pseudo photo-studio, the stylized rococo studio settings, the famous tourist spot Spring and Autumn Pavilion of Zuoying, near the military camp in Kaohsiung, also tell us about the time of the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan. These complicated citations and montages of images from different time spots all point to the moments of the 1950s and 1960s in which the mainlanders, "wai-sheng'ren," and local Taiwanese, "ben-sheng-ren," meet and the time in which all the problems were originated. These meetings are full of ambiguous flirtations and conspiracies. Women from mainland dressed in Shanghai style, women brought up in the Japanese educational system dressed in discreet school uniforms, feminized marine sailor holding guitar, with his genital organ protruding within his pants, and family

scenes with seductive gestures: all suggest some sort of black humor and dark eroticism behind the serene scene of the familiar place.











These pseudo-studio-photographs were designed and framed up as photographs, decorated with painted frames and artificial flowers, the artificial plastic flowers used for funerals in Taiwan. The juxtaposition of innocence and flirtation, hidden malice behind the happy faces of the family members, eros and death, and the collage of deceased still *life*, all suggest an altered and uncanny milieu of the sight of familiarity, a familiar and cozy home that has changed its face, a tinge of the *unheimlich*.[13] This tone of the *unheimlich* reveals the image-maker's difficult and ambivalent attitudes toward home, or the place to settle with.



The theme of the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, is metonymically represented in the piece *Wounded Landscape*, the first painting in these series, that he did in 1994. Though it is entitled as "wounded" landscape, as the keynote of damage and injury in his previous works, beginning with *The Symptom of the Syndrome of World Injury* in 1986 to the series of "Wounded Funerals" in 1994, but in this painting the center of the canvas is no longer the wounded figures. We see only the façade of a desolate house, as if emerging from the darkness of the background. This piece is a black and white photograph, tinted with spots of green, purple and brownish colors, as in old photos. The center of the up-front stage is an emptied-out space, lit with spot light. This empty space and the gloss of the painted shiny blue frames captured our immediate attention. The act of removing the figures of representation from the center of the frame is symbolic. Wu Tianzhang had shifted his attention away from the external violence and physical violations, and moved toward the violence hidden behind the scene of familiarity. The violence referred to in these paintings of the mid-1990s is the internal violence brought up by the changed relationships established on the basis of home, of *ethos*.

II









To discuss Wu Tianzhang in the context of the post-martial law era in Taiwan, and to examine the visual politics and the logic of ethos employed by his contemporaries, I need to first define the terms I use here in the context of visual culture. By visual politics, I mean the visual rhetoric appropriated in artistic practices and aesthetic discourses so that certain contesting political positions are thereby posited. Such visual rhetoric would encourage the

intervening, challenging and disrupting forces of the repressed against the established order, but would also assign at the same time the distribution, circulation and the duplication of the images of a new order that are desired or anticipated by the contemporary audience. The different sense of order is constituted by and founded on people's different sense of border, of *ethos*, of the *habitus*, that is to say, bound by different axis related to one's own, including one's custom, as in Greek *ēthos*, one's family and kinship, as in Old High German *sippa*, and one's comrade, as in Latin *sodalist*. What gestures are visible and invisible, desirable or repulsive, beautiful or ugly, what gestures are expected to be looked at, are all related to a larger system of *ethos*, in other words, the sense of community, kinship, solidarity and comradeship that are operating in concurrent societies.

To ask such questions is to take visual culture not merely as the study of style or iconography, but as a complex apparatus of signifying practices relating to the shared system of epistemology. Visual culture tells us not only about the cultural models in which the signifying processes are at work, the histories that are connoted in the use of icons, but also the affective driving forces of the time that constitute our sense of community. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall have pointed out that "visual culture always provides a physical and psychical place for individual spectators to inhabit."[14] To inhabit in certain physical and psychical space suggests the notion of a familiar abode, of *habitus*, of home, and a subjective sense of *ethos*.

To study the visual translation of the subjective sense of *ethos* is close to the history of mentalities proposed by Jacques Le Goff. History of ideas, economy, politics or battles cannot provide us sufficient materials to know more about the subjective and affective dimensions of the community. Le Goff suggested that underneath

the coherently or logically organized surfaces of the cultural texts, were involved different strata and fragments of past histories, that he called "archaeopsychology."[15] The ambivalence of meanings attached to the cultural objects, ideas or visual images led us into a complicated vascular network composed by multiple local systems and diverse subject positions. Just as what Irit Rogoff has very nicely stated, besides the contesting histories that constitute the visual images and the cultural models that guide the viewing apparatus, there are also "the subjectivities of identification or desire or abjection from which we view and by which we inform what we view."[16]

The questions awaiting investigation in our study of visual translations of our histories and our communities, regarding the issue of the logic of *ethos*, are such as the following - on what ground, for what purpose and with what rhetoric is the sense of *ethos* of a certain era constructed through visual images? How is this logic of *ethos* instituted through cultural and language policies, and even functions as regulating, governing and policing systems? How does it rationalize and execute the violence of domestic exclusion at all? Finally, how are the logic of *ethos*, the violence of domestic exclusion and the sense of bodily abjection translated through visual images?

III

Wu Tianzhang's art works in the 1980s directly presented a world of violence, or a critique of violence. Beginning with *The Symptom of the Syndrome of World Injury* I-IV (1986), *The Injury of the Red* (1986), *The Injury of Taiwan* (1988), to *About the Dark Green Hurt* (1989), *Homage to the unknown hero--228 Memorial* (1992), Wu Tianzhang dealt with the state of mind of Taiwanese people under

the Martial Law and the cold war conditions. Graduated as a student of modern art, and as a member of the Modern Art Group of Taipei, Wu employed bold experimental techniques as a rebellion against the conventional Chinese landscape brush painting and the modernist abstract painting that were the canon in the 1970s. The recurring images of the eye motif, the downward falling figures of the assassinated, murdered and executed corpses, the repeated sites of the crime scenes, and the tall brick prison wall, all speak about the feelings of damage, secrecy and fear in a highly militarized, policed, watched and guarded environment, and the collective memories of the warring history of the civil war, the traumatic experience of the 228 Incident, and the ethnic hostility caused by it. Furthermore, there is also the fear of being suspected of conspiracy with the red communists. In these paintings, the figures and the gestures are all masculine and sharply edged. The frames are disrupted or protruded by the out-stretching fists, arms or wounded bodies. The anger against the suppressive environment is obvious and direct. In the series regarding the dictatorship, including *the Rule of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Jieshi, Jiang Jingguo* (1990), *Composite Damage I-II* (1993), and *Wounded Funerals I-IV* (1994), the motifs of injured individuals and conformed crowd fill up the space occupied by the gigantic figures of political rulers. The deprivation of the senses and the right to see, to speak, to hear and to smell, is synthesized with objects of abjection on the canvas.



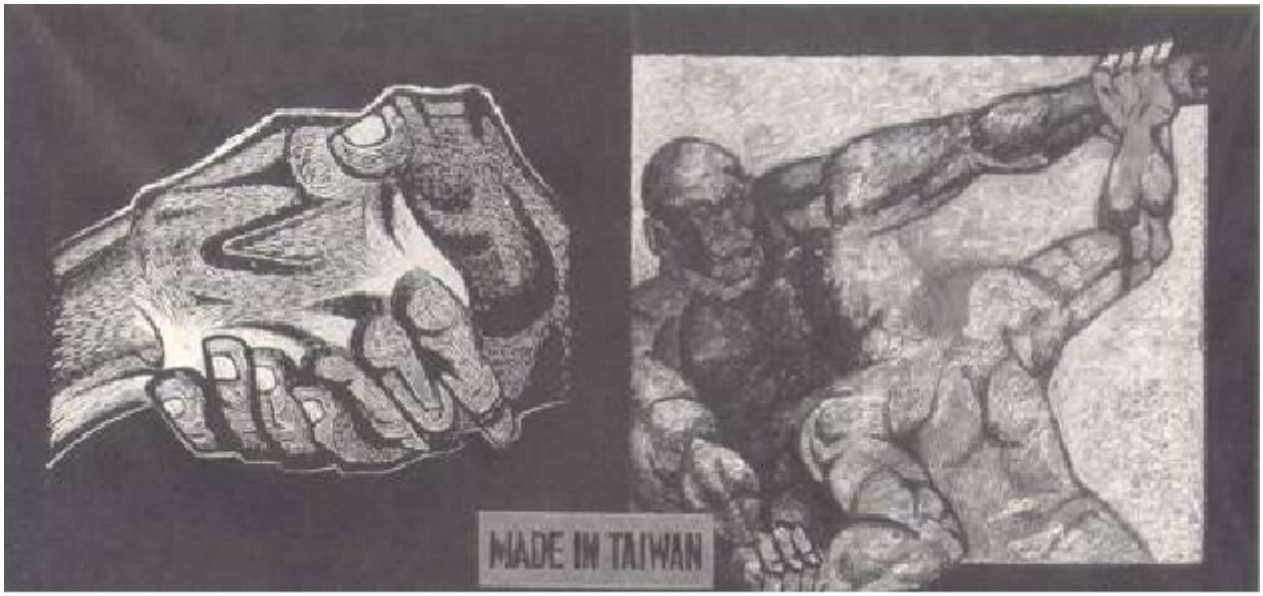




This thrusting force to break loose the tight-jacket and the self-assured position of moral justice in Wu Tianzhang's art works

echoed the momentum of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Taiwan. In the mid-1980s, Taiwan society has already started its restless revolts in different ways, enhanced by both *ben-sheng-ren* and *wai-sheng-ren*, mostly young people of the post-228 generations. Literary, theatrical and artistic circles introduced post-modernist avant-garde movements in order to challenge against the preceding conventions and authorities. Little theatres and avant-garde artists performed political dramatic works in the streets. Heated public forums debated about the reformation and re-election of the national assembly which was composed by a group of 90-years-old members elected in the 1920s. The criticism against the control and censorship of newspapers, publications, performances, public assembly and political parties were on daily newspapers. Students' and laborers' movements went on strikes to voice their protests.

Other artists, Wu Tianzhang's contemporaries, such as Yang Maolin, Hou Junmin, Mei Dingyan and Chen Jieren also shared similar patterns of rebellious motifs. Take Yang Maolin as one quick example. In his series of *Made in Taiwan*, we see enlarged images of steel-hard fists, arms and legs filling up the space of the canvas. The hard lines of the muscles and the contour of the torso are highlighted. There is no softness in the lines and the composition, nor is there any ambiguity. The anger and accusation is clearly stated through the images.[17]



The year 1987 is a symbolic landmark that witnessed not only the closure of the 40 years' martial law era in Taiwan, but also the emerging dynamics in the mutations of power struggles in the political, aesthetic and cultural spheres. The avant-garde movements in the art, literature, dance and theatre of the late 1980s, supported by both *ben-sheng-ren* and *wai-sheng-ren*, shared the same driving force of the time that demanded a new order, a new order that could defy the dictatorship exercised under the regime of the white terror. But this new order quickly acquired a new logic of *ethos* and a new logic of *heim* in the 1990s. The *heim*-rhetoric of a different kind emerged, the *heim* that is supported by the concept of the people, "min-jian"（民間）, and is directed toward a closed system of the *ben-sheng* nativist narrative, nativist in terms of the language and the ethnic origin applicable only to the early settlers. Some major changes in governmental cultural policies in the 1990s indicated this shift of the nativist discursive mode. Basing on the *Statutes on the Establishment of the National Culture and Arts Foundation*, the National Culture and Arts

Foundation was founded in 1996 and the awards for local-oriented art were established. Lee Denghui, former president during 1996 to 2000, encouraged universities to cut down or even abolish the courses related to China. Chen Shuibian, the current president since 2000, stressed that the content of Taiwan Culture should build up its subjectivity on Taiwan geography, Taiwan history and Taiwan life experience, and that the objectives of textbooks should rid off the Chinese consciousness. The main function of the Archive for National Culture, for example, is to collect, preserve, analyze and publish the historical documents of Taiwan culture, and to develop special features of local cultural resources so that the subjectivity of Taiwan culture could be established.[18] The lack of recognition in the international political arena and the stateless condition of Taiwan made it all the more urgent to plead for a more solid construction of subjectivity and identity.

Such emerging politics of *heim* is a reaction against, but also a mirror that echoes and repeats the mainland-oriented politics of *heim* enforced by the KMT government's cultural and language policies. The only difference is that the myth of the *heim*, our "*jiaxiang*" (家鄉) or "*guxiang*" (故鄉), is changed from the "middle-land" (中原) and the "divine kingdom" (神州), which had triggered people's nostalgias and passion, even for the post-228 generations of both *ben-sheng-ren* and *wai-sheng-ren*, to the land of Taiwan, also under the rhetoric of our "*jiaxiang*" (家鄉) and "*xiangtu*" (鄉土).

In the artistic discursive field, a long series of debates on such topic rose up and lasted for nearly two years, from 1991 to 1993.[19] The long debates began with an article written in 1991 by Ni Zaiqin. Quoting earlier writings by Lin Xingyue and another senior art history scholar, Xie Lifa, Ni criticized the modernist movements in

Taiwan art history from the 1950s to the 1980s. Following the arguments brought up by literary scholars such as Yie Shitao, Song Dongyang (aka Chen Fangming) and Peng Ruijin, Ni suggested that "it is only natural and right for people who live in Taiwan to identify with the land they live in, and to know its history," and that "only the art works that identify with Taiwan could be called Taiwan art."[20] Ni Zaiqin listed Li Shiqiao's *Tianyuan Le* (*Harvest Joy*), Li Meishu's *The Temple of Sansha*, Hong Ruilin's *Working in a Mine* as "the real representation of the local life of Taiwan, a rustic and firm spirit that is totally different from the style of the salon."[21] Among the artists during the second modernist wave in the 1980s, only Lu Tianyan, Yang Maolin and Wu Tianzhang were considered by Ni Zaiqin as the ones who embodied local consciousness. Ni Zaiqin's article was followed up by over twenty-five essays debating for or against his nativist positions.[22]

Lin Xingyue, an established artist and art critic, made his statement in an article in 1993 and concluded the debates: "Today, the localization of art is no longer a question whether we want it or not, nor a question whether it is possible or not; the localization of art has already been going on in a great scale. The question now is how to facilitate it and help it move on the grand path."[23] To Lin Xingyue, this localization of Taiwan art is a matter of ethical issue: "If anyone who has not concerned himself with Taiwan with all his heart, he could not become the conscience of the time and could not take up the responsibility of an intellectual."[24] The legitimacy of this ethical righteous position is derived from the people and the local: "the foundation of people' democracy is the autonomy of the people, a civic society that would free itself from the domination of the sacred authority."[25] Lin Xingyue's article settled the debate and set the key tone that revealed the discursive mode of the 1990s.

The 1996 *Taipei Biennial: The Quest for Identity* and the series of *2.28 Commemorative Exhibitions* from 1996 onward are exemplary examples in this nativist wave of identity construction. These series of exhibitions had its educational purposes. Through recreating historical sites and images, these exhibitions intend to foster the communal sense of identical cultural and political positions.[26] The intention to construct an appropriate cultural iconography through the memorialization of the traumatic historic moment is manifest in these exhibitions.[27] The objectives set up by the curators of these exhibitions attracted artists to submit art works of shared sentiments. These exhibitions answered the affective demand of the epoch, along with the participating curators, artists as well as the audiences, a demand that reflects the structure of feelings of the people and shapes the emerging consciousness of community. But, a mode of distinction is also formed. There is a certain side of "them" that were targeted in the exhibition as the one to be accursed or condemned, and a certain side of "us" who demanded apology, compensation, and even claimed the right to punish and correct the wrong. The line between the internal, domestic and the same, against the external, the foreign and the different, were exposed by the intended viewing position structured in the image.

This act of icon-building leads us to the question: what viewing positions are pre-inscribed in these images? Or the question posed by Lacan: "where does the gaze come from?" "The social function, which was already emerging at the religious level, is now becoming clear. Who comes here? Those who form what Retz calls 'les peuples', the audiences. And what do the audiences see in these vast compositions. They see the gaze of those persons who, when the audiences are not there, deliberate in this hall. Behind the picture, it is their gaze that is there."[28] It is the gaze of the

"communal," in the name of the people, appropriated by the establishing power networking that is demanding the audience to view the history from a particular position.

The ethical regime of images discussed by Jacques Rancière could help us further explain this intricate issue of the logic of *ethos* as revealed in the politics of visual images. The visual images, according to Rancière, share the same logic of the parallel historical narratives, the "modes of discourse, forms of life, conceptions of thoughts, figures of the community," as well as the ability to act as "historical agents."[29] The logic of *ethos*, the constituting force that determines the recognizable, the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, Rancière suggested, could be explained by the Kantian theory of the system of *a priori*.[30] We intuitively distinguish whether the images are acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or resentful, holy or defiling, according to the normative forms of knowledge and the unspoken *habitus* we share with the community. In the ethical regime of images, therefore, it is a matter of "knowing in what way images' mode of being affects the *ethos*, the mode of being of individuals and communities."[31] The ground of the *ethos* is not only a "normative principle of inclusion," but also the "principle regulating the external delimitation of a well-founded domain of imitations." Such logic of the *ethos*, consequently, also determines the "partitions between the representable and the unrepresentable."[32] Rancière also suggested that even the disruptive and revolutionary quality of the avant-garde would have already been "assigned to contradictory political paradigms."[33] The political position taken by the avant-garde, therefore, reveals the new ruling political paradigm that is to come, and this is what we have observed in Taiwan in the post-martial law era from the 1980s down to the present time.

IV

Wu Tianzhang's art after mid-1990s, however, presented to us a far more complex subject positions. There are no images of political protests or physical violence anymore. Instead, we see portraits of pseudo-salon photos, with women or feminized man posing in front of the artificial studio landscape. One critic interpreted this change of style as the artist's self-conscious appropriation of traditional Taiwanese local and folkloric elements to build up an alternative Taiwanese subjectivity and that Wu's strategy revealed a self-amending cultural apparatus to heal the wounded feelings of the past.[34] This view of "alternative Taiwanese subjectivity" presented to me a typical communal desire in the public narrative of the 1990s to re-establish local Taiwanese identity and subjectivity. In Wu Tianzhang's series of the mid-1990s, we actually see visual references to Taiwanese past in a more ambivalent manner. Concerning these series, Wu Tianzhang himself said that there are two particular themes he had in mind: first, the death captured by photographs, and second, the typical shallowness of Taiwanese culture. It is true that these paintings imitate salon photos of the style of the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan. It is also true that through the gaudiness of the dress, the shoes, the hairstyle, the hats and the frippery sun glasses, we see what Wu Tianzhang called "*Tai-ke*" (台客). But, there are more subtle twists of meanings to it.

"*Tai-ke*" originally is a pejorative term used by the *wai-shegn-ren* to mock at the shallowness and vulgarity of local Taiwanese people, including the way they talk, the way they dress, their white socks with black shoes, their slippers and their accents.[35] Taiwanese people's sense of inferiority and *wai-sheng-ren*'s prejudice converging at this term "*Tai-ke*." But, in Wu Tianzhang's paintings

of *Tai-ke* and in the performative gestures these figures posed, instead of saying that "I do not want to be the one you would laugh at," or that "I'm presenting to you what you would want me to change into," these paintings seem to be saying that "here I am," "I'm not afraid of being looked at or laughed at," and that "if you want to laugh at me, I will give you more to look at and laugh at."





In the feminized gestures and the mixture of the cheapness, pretentiousness and gaudiness, a certain sarcastic humor and love-hate sentiment are betrayed under Wu Tianzhang's hands. Either the feminized pose of the marine sailor with the erected genital organ, or the discreetly dressed young lady and the high-school girl with their hands covering their breasts, or the fashionable sing girls, taken from the Shanghai posters, wearing glamorous plastic sunglasses and shiny artificial glass jewels, with golden paillette on the frames, all suggest an highly exaggerated performativity coated

with layers of fakeness and kitsch. These kitsch objects are used in daily life in Taiwanese culture. Wu Tianzhang laboriously added thick layers of these kitsch objects on the canvases and shiny paints and funeral flowers on the frames. In addition, the rococo salon settings, the pagoda and the painted sailboat added with fringes of colorful textile, the glass diamonds pasted on the peacock tail, solid gold pendulum, the plastic sun-glasses, all reinforced the repetitive rhythm of fakeness and flamboyance. These armors of objects of fakeness and floridly displayed kitsch are objects of abject, just as the shimmering gloss on the surface of the painted shiny frames, conveyed a sensation of nauseating sickness, and staged a black comedy that tells about the status of Taiwanese-ness.





The series of *Home Sweet Home I-II* (1996) and *the Worldly Life I-II* (1997) carried on the motifs in the two series of *Spring and Autumn Pavilion* (1993) and *Dream of Past Eva* (1997). The ping-pong ball that was stuffed into the mouth and the sunflower that covered the eyes in *Synthesized Damage* re-appears here in *Worldly*

Life and in *Home Sweet Home*. Here, it is the teen-age boy, stuffed with the ping-pong ball in the mouth, trotting along the road innocently and happily, and the mother ready to powder the baby with the puff, echoing the ping-pong ball motif. The political censorship is executed in a civil but unconscious mode, through the hands of family members, in the family scene.

What does it mean for Wu Tianzhang to be addressed as a *Tai-ke*? Why did he work on the series of paintings of the image of the vulgar and tasteless figures, with the thin film of oily gloss on the frames and the artificial cheap objects, the oily film of gloss that he said in the interview would make him shiver? Or, gooseflesh, he said. Born in Kee-long, the northern harbor city with the fishermen as his neighbors, seeing the dead or dying fish in the markets, the market ground and the street corners spilt with filthy water, with oily surface, seems to be his primary impression of his childhood memory. The loud electronic band and strip girls for the funerals, the bar girls associated with navy of the US 7th Fleet, the girls dressed with fake jewelry and shiny dress, are also his childhood memories. Coming to Taipei in his teenage to study, he was mocked at as a *Tai-ke* because he was dressed as one, and he also felt as one. He said in one interview that, at that young age, he felt a keen traumatic experience of the "ethnic discrimination" brought by this phrase. The subtle differentiation between *tai-ke* and the *wai-sheng-ren* is reinforced by the distinction made by the language policy during the 1960s and 1970s.

Instead of charging his protests and anger, Wu Tianzhang allowed himself to perform the feminized position of *Tai-ke*, displayed the altered scenes of familiarity, translated and transplanted his sense of abject onto the surface of the canvas, a technique of the *un-heimlich*, or the technique of epidermization.

V

We are brought back to the question of *ethos*, the familiar custom of the common abode, and the logic of *heim* that serves as the guiding principle of ethical considerations and value judgments. Our ethical, aesthetic as well as political judgments are involved with the logic of *ethos,* our accustomed modes of thinking, hierarchy of meaning-making, networks of personal relations, sense of duty, and the experience of free choice. It is then a question of *Dasein*, as suggested by Jean-Luc Nancy: "*Dasein* would be being-obliged, its *Da* would not be a *there*, but would be its summons by an order. Or the there would only be the *there* of the being summoned-there by the imperative."[36] The unquestioned imperative of this order of *ethos* poses a problem. As Jean-Luc Nancy put it, "if *ethos* means (whatever the etymological debate about it) *Heim*, a home, familiar place: the animal's lair, man's cavern or cave," then what we are faced with is "the opening and the question of an *Unheimlich ethos.*"[37] The law that constitutes the mode of appearance and of *ethos* then is the question to be asked. As Heidegger put it, "we cannot discuss the problem of the finitude of the ethical being if we do not pose the question: What does 'law' [Gesetz] mean here, and how is the lawfulness itself constitutive for *Dasein* and for the personality?"[38]

Such are the questions that inspired the current project. But, in this paper, I have pointed to a different set of questions and a different path of thinking: How is the 'law' physically and emotionally experienced? What are the affective residues of the effect of the law that are translated through visual images? What are the images through which people are propelled to assume or to exclude? How do the images stage and perform the abject positions and ethnic borders experienced by the subject?

The banal objects, accessories, the *un-heimlich* nauseating sensation on the shiny frames and the surface of the cloths, to me, suggest a space of perpetration and complicity which has translated the untranslatable conditions of the past. We could borrow the concept introduced by Jean Baudrillard in his discussion of "The Trompe-L'Oeil" that, on the space of the collaged objects, "the pleasure they procure is thus not the aesthetic one of a familiar reality, it is the acute and negative pleasure found in the abolition of the real [...]. Only isolated objects, abandoned, ghostly in their ex-inscription of all action and all narrative, could retrace the haunting memory of a lost reality, something like a life anterior to the subject and its coming to consciousness."[39] On the canvas created by Wu Tianzhang, I would like to suggest, some sort of *trompe-l'oeil* is going on. The background and the setting are only excuses for the dislocated objects, banal accessories, and disguised masks to appear. Through the assemblage of accessories, and through the sense of tactile, a preexistent life and death is pushed forward, the ghost of the past that haunts the emptiness of the stage. The sickening and nauseating sensation of the *skin* is exteriorized first on the frames, and then transferred on the surface of the cloth of the distorted figures and the compressed smiles of the figures in the 2000s projects. As Rada Ivekovic's keen observation: "It is the state of being in translation oneself. And this is the cost of translation remaining faithful to life and retaining its gesture: it constantly avoids putting itself in a state of grace; that is to say, exception; that is to say, finitude."[40]

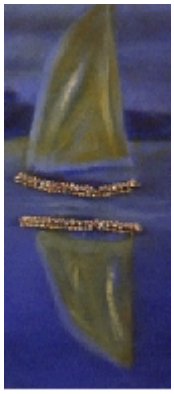


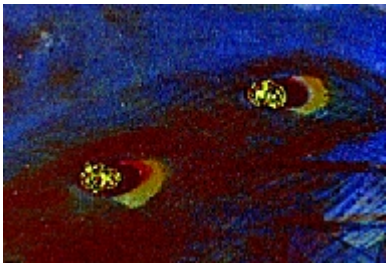


Through Wu Tianzhang's art, the controversy of 'heimlich' ('homely') and 'heimisch' ('native') is played upon, and the secrecy, untrustworthy, disagreeable and unfamiliar elements of the native/home is brought to the surface on the canvas. Different from his contemporary Chen Jieren who staged the historical trauma through the digital images of self-mutilation, Wu Tianzhang staged his sense of the abject through the stylization of the fakeness and kitsch. The sense of inferiority, abjection and puzzlement experienced by the Taiwanese during the martial law era is externalized and staged through the technique of epidermization, or the translation of *un-heimlich,* by Wu Tianzhang via repeatedly working through and laying bare the abject on the canvas.

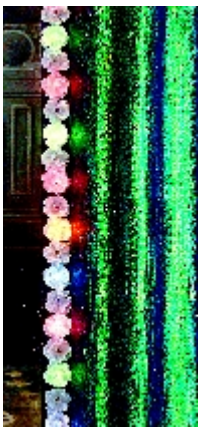
















[1] Rada Iveković, “On Permanent Translation (We are in Translation)”, in *Transeuropéennes 22, 2002, “Translating, Between Cultures / Traduire, entre les cultures”,* pp. 121-145 and *transversal 06 2002*, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0606/ivekovic/en.

[2] The 228 Incident (Chinese: 二二八事件; pinyin: èr èr bā shìjiàn; Pe̍h-ōe-jī: Jī-jī-pat sū-kiāⁿ) or 228 Massacre was an uprising in Taiwan that began on February 28, 1947 and was suppressed by the Kuomintang (KMT) government, resulting in between ten thousand to twenty thousand civilians killed. The number “228” refers to the day of the incident, February 28 (28th day of the 2nd month, 2/28). See: *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/228_Incident.

[3] Please consult: *Taiwan Yearbook 2006*, http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/03History.htm#ROC; *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martial_law#Republic_of_China_.28Taiwan.29

[4] The Republic of China (ROC; Taiwan) was a founding member of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. However, in 1971, the People's Republic of China (PRC) succeeded in taking the seat held previously by the ROC following the passage of UN Resolution 2758. Since then, most UN members have switched their diplomatic allegiance from Taipei to Beijing. In 1979, the United States severed diplomatic ties with the ROC and abrogated the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty. In the absence of formal relations, the Taiwan Relations Act was passed by the US Congress to maintain substantive ties with Taiwan, including the sale of

defensive weaponry to help defend Taiwan. See http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/03History.htm#ROC

[5] In the Kaohsiung Incident of 1979, Kuomintang's military and police broke up the island's first major Human Rights Day celebration (10 December 1979), and subsequently arrested and imprisoned virtually all leading members of Taiwan's budding democratic movement. One of the major issues in the Formosa Magazine, the organizer for the Human Rights Day Celebration, was to disclose the historical tragedy of the February Twenty-Eighth in 1947 (the "228 Incident") , which had been suppressed immediately after the Erection of Martial Law in 1950. The tortures these people suffered during the imprisonment, non-stop interrogations, beatings, punching, cigarettes scorching, were severe. The Kaohsiung Incident galvanized most people's political conscience, some along with the incident, some gradually in the following years. For a brief introduction to the background of these political events and social changes, please consult Yang Bi-chuan's *Taiwan Lishi Cidian* (Dictionary of Taiwan History), or "The 'Kaohsiung Incident' of 1979: A turning point in Taiwan's history. http://www.taiwandc.org/history.htm.

[6] The debates over the "origin" of Taiwanese literature and culture, or the definition of the history of Taiwanese literature, has been carried on since early 1980. The term "Taiwanese literature" was established during the debate on this issue during 1983-1984. Representative views on the "Chinese consciousness" or the "Taiwanese consciousness" in Taiwanese literature and culture include: Yie Shitao's "Continuing the umbilical cord of the mother country--on the rise and fall of the Chinese consciousness and the Taiwanese consciousness in Taiwanese literature over the past forty years", Lin Ruiming's "The Studies of Taiwanese Literature under

the Conflict of National Identity," Ma Sen's "The Chinese Knot and the Taiwanese Knot in Taiwanese Literature," Chen Zhaoying's "On the Localization Movement in Taiwan: A Study on Cultural History," and Chen Fangming's "Taiwanese Literature and Taiwanese Style over the hundred years--An Introduction to the New Taiwanese Literature Movement." A good overview of the above-mentioned debates, please see Zhang, Wenzhi. *The Taiwanese Consciousness in Contemporary Literature*. Taipei: Zili News Press 1993.

[7] Thomas B. Gold, "Civil Society and Taiwan's Quest for Identity." *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*. Ed. by Steven Harrell & Huang Ch-chieh. Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc. 1994, p. 61.

[8] Ibid. , pp. 61-64.

[9] Wu Tianzhang has been invited, besides the exhibitions in Taiwan, to international exhibitions many times. Such as Hara Museum ARC. Tokyo, Japan; “K-18 Mutual Acknowledgement Exhibition,” Kassel, Germany; "Taiwan: Kunst Heute," Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany; “Asia-Pacific Contemporary Photography Exhibition,” Tokyo, Japan; “2nd Asia-Pacific Triennial,” Queensland Art Gallery, Australia; The 47th International Art Exhibition of the Biennale di Venezia; “Touring Exhibition Inside Outside: New Chinese Art.” Asia Society, New York, Asian Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; “1st Asia-Pacific Biennial,” Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; "CLOSE-UP" Contemporary Art From Taiwan Touring Exhibition, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria B.C. Canada; “Cyber Asia-media Art in the Near Future,” Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan.

[10] The works he did during late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, *The Injury of the Red* (1986), *The Symptom of the Syndrome of World Injury* (1986), *The Injury of Taiwan* (1988), and *the Rule of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Jieshi, Jiang Jingguo* (1990).

[11] For example, the *Dream of Past Eva* series from 1995 to 1997, *Home Sweet Home* series (1996) and *the Worldly Life* series (1997).

[12] For example, *Two Treading Together Forever* (2001) and the *Dream of Impermanence* (2002).

[13] Freud had discussed the complex meanings of the German word '*unheimlich*' in his article on the Uncanny. '*Unheimlich*' is obviously the opposite of 'heimlich' ('homely') and 'heimisch' ('native'), the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. But, heimlich also connotes meanings associated with secrecy, disagreeability, frightening, unfamiliarity and untrustworthiness. Sigmund Freud, (1919). The 'Uncanny'. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works, pp. 217-256.

[14] Jessica Evans & Stuart Hall, "What is Visual Culture," *Visual culture: the reader*. eds. Jessica Evans & Stuart Hall.L ondon, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE publication 1999, p. 4.

[15] Jacques Le Goff, "Mentalities: a history of ambiguities." *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*. Eds. Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985, p. 169.

[16] Irit Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture.” *Visual Culture Reader*. Ed. By Nicholas Mirzoeff. London & New York: Routledge 1998, p. 18.

[17] Wu Tianzhang, Yang Maolin and Lu Tianyan were later welcomed and praised in early 1990s by Ni Zaiqin, a nativist art scholar and critic and later the director of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (the NTMFA) from 1997 to 2000, as the ones who really responded to Taiwan political reality in an earnest local manner, as opposed to the other artists who were still practicing western modernist fashions. This article was written in 1991 and started the series of debates on the Taiwanese identity in Taiwanese art. See discussion below.

[18] Cf. Shizhao Yang, “Guangfu hou Taiwan zhongyao wenhuazhengche zh guancha 1945-1994” (Observations of the Major Cultural Policies of Taiwan 1945-1994). *A Hundred Years of Taiwan Culture 1901-2000*. Taipei: National Museum of History, 1999.

[19] The debates among Taiwanese art critics on “the local” and “the Western” occurred during 1991 to 1993. This wave of debates was initiated by Ni Zaiqin’s “Western Art, Made in Taiwan: A Critique on Modern Taiwan Art.” It was followed by a series of debates from all sides, accumulating twenty-five essays. Reviewing the arguments involved in the debate, we see clear repetition of the debate held by the nativist “Xiangtu” movement against the modernist literature in 1970s. Please consult *Taiwan Meishu zhong de Taiwan Yishi* (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: Anthology of the Essays on the Taiwanese Art Debates in early 1990s.) Cf. articles by Ni Zaiqin, Guo Shaozong, Liu Wensan, Lin Xingyue, collected in *Taiwan Meishu zhong de Taiwan Yishi*. Other similar debates arise in different cultural field, the debates among

literary scholars concerning Taiwanese consciousness and Taiwanese subjectivity during 1993-1994 is one other example.

[20] Ni, Zaiqin. "Xifang Meishu, Taiwan Zhizao—Taiwan Xiandai Meishu de Pipan," (Western Art, Made in Taiwan—A Critique on the Modern Art in Taiwan), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art)*. Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, p. 183.

[21] Ni, Zaiqin. "Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi" (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art)*. Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, p. 49.

[22] See for example, Chen, Chuanxing. "Xiandai Kuifa de Tushuo yu Yishixiuci" (The Lack in Modern Pictorial and Ideological Rhetoric), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art)*. Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, pp. 238-254 ; Chen, Ruiwen. "Taiwan Wenhua yu Bentu Wenhua suo yinchu de pianduan sikao" (Fragments of Thoughts related to Taiwan Culture and Local Culture), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art)*. Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, pp. 142-149; Mei, Dingyan. "Taiwan Xiandai Yishu Zhuti de Misi," (The Myth of the Subject in Taiwan Modern Art), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the*

Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art). Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, pp. 273-278.

[23] Lin, Xingyue. "Meishu Bentuhua de Shiyi ji Shenlun" (On the Questions concerning Localization of the Art), in *Taiwan Meishu zhongde Taiwan Yishi: Qian jiuling niandai Taiwan meishu lunzhan xuanji (The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of the Debates in early nineties in Taiwan Art)*. Taipei: Xungshi Books 1994, p. 325.

[24] Ibid., p. 308.

[25] Ibid., p. 310.

[26] According to Lin Mun-lee, the director of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the first exhibition in 1996 focused on memorializing the February 28 Incident and showed "pieces both directly and indirectly related to the incident, including essays and photographs" and thus contained "educational and historical significance" (Lin Mun-lee, "Director's Foreword" 1998, p. 7). Chen Shui-bian also stressed specifically that the exhibition has to "bring the artists' work back around to the actual event, to demand that the artists look closely at the event and enter into the historical circumstances surrounding it" (Chen Shui-bian, "Mayor's Foreword", p. 5). Through the narratives of 30 historical scenes selected and arranged chronologically by Vince Shih, with the hope that the exhibition could "enter and understand history."

[27] For the reactions to these exhibitions, please consult Xie Li-Fa, "On the Role of the 2.28 Incident in Taiwan Art History," 38-43; Huang Bao-ping, "We do not see the Sadness, How do we talk about Sublimation—on TFAM's 2.28 Exhibition" 309-311;

and the special issue on the 2.28 Exhibitions, *Xiandai Meishu* (Modern Art). 70 (1997.2)

[28] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company 1981, p. 113.

[29] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics.* (*Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*) (2000) London & New York: Continuum 2004, pp. 10-11, 30.

[30] Ibid., p. 13.

[31] Ibid., p. 21.

[32] Ibid., pp. 21-22.

[33] Ibid., p. 17.

[34] See for example Xiangjun Chen's article on Wu Tianzhang. Chen, Xiangjun. "Wu Tianzhang: Xiao Hua Pipan Jiaguo de Shish," (Wu Tianzhang: an Epic of Critique on the Nation-Home), *Diancangjin Yishu* No. 124(2003.1), pp. 110-114; Also, see Lee, Weijing. "Wu Tianzhang: the Impact of Programming and Re-doing," *Yishujia (The Artist)* No. No. 344(2003.1), pp. 246-251; Luo, Baozhu. "Lishi Xianshi, Xuni/Wangxiang de Tonggou yu Chaijie" (Historical Reality, Isomorphism and Deconstruction of Simulacrum/Paranoid—On Wu Tianzhang's Artistic Process), *Xiandai Meishu (Modern Art)*, No. 121(2005.8), pp. 36-51; Yang, Minger. "Guanghuan de Beihou—Wu Tianzhang Zhanyan Fushi Xuhua" (Behind the Halo—The Vanity Fair Performed by Wu Tianzhang), *Xiandai Meishu (Modern Art)*, No. 121(2005.8), pp. 24-35; Huang, Haiming. "Senchu Yanli, Yuwang ji Jiyi de Dongkou—Shi Fenxi Wu Tianzhang jiuqi gezhan zhong de

shikong jiegou" (Saturate through the Cave of Glamour, Desire and Memories: on Wu Tianzhang's Exhibition in 1997), *Yishujia (The Artist)* No. 45 : 3 (1997.9), pp, 445-447.

[35] Tai-ke, see http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%8F%B0%E5%AE%A2 ; http://w1.southnews.com.tw/snews/polit/specil/050/050.htm.

[36] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Free Voice of Man," *Retreating the Political*. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy. London & New York: Routledge 1997, p. 51.

[37] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[38] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the problem of metaphysics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1962.

[39] Jean Baudrillard, "The Trompe-L'Oeil." *Calligram : Essays in New Art History from France*. Ed. Norman Bryson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 54.

[40] Rada Iveković, op. cit.