

Border Praxis: Negotiating and Performing "Hong Kong-ese-ness" and "Taiwanese-ness" in contemporary, political 'Chinese' art practices.

ABSTRACT

This paper draws from an AHRC-funded research project on the topic of Chinese borders in contemporary art practices, entitled Culture, Capital and Communication: Visualizing Borders in the 21st Century. The research is contextualized in the article in relation to the concept of "Chinese-ness" in 'Contemporary Art Discourse and Practice', as addressed in the corresponding conference at the University of Lisbon - <http://chineseness.fba.ul.pt>. The physical and political borders that demarcate the straits of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are signifiers of the identity struggles that they contain. Art practices which address issues of Hong Kong-ese-ness and Taiwanese-ness in relation to the limitations of Chinese borders for defining their sovereign political and socio-historical identities, can, therefore, be considered as *border art*. Often, such explorations of identity are counterposed with the presence of China and Chinese-ness as a cultural, economic and political hegemonic force, and ideological barrier. Artists who examine Chinese borders within their work tend to interrogate, represent and, often, contest or counter, the perceived political and cultural restrictions imposed by the mainland. This article considers socially engaged artistic practices – including art spaces and events - encountered during the research laboratories, summative conference and site visits, which work on micro levels to both interrogate and counter the influence of mainland China through instigating social undercurrents. I suggest that the combination of politicized theorizing and physically demonstrative or precarious art activities create a form of artistic praxis that works to expose and, in turn, traverse the limitations of border presence or absence across the Chinese straits.

KEY WORDS

border

Hong Kong

Taiwan

China

identity

localism

nativism

praxis

socially engaged art

ecology

collaboration

protest

INTRODUCTION

‘Critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.’ (Mouffe 2007: 4)

Insert Image 1: Photograph: author's own, Taipei, 2014.

The politics of crossing borders between mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao is intrinsic to the borders' existence. Visual and designed practices which consider and contest the presence – or lack thereof - of such borders and the spaces that they delineate, then, are also political - whether they challenge geopolitical place, incorporate a kind of indigenous Identity Politics, an emancipatory politics concerning rights to complete suffrage or a discourse around the differences between modes of socioeconomic production and control between the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the special administrative region of Hong Kong. These border issues are broad issues, all of which can be contextualised in relation to globalised debates around migration/diaspora, urbanisation, neoliberalisation and even the Cold War - or its remnants. Borders are interesting because of how their perceived binary or divisional ontology creates literal limits in relation to territories of governance, sovereignty and physical place and because of what this symbolises to the communities that they contain, in terms of identity and negotiations of space. Balibar highlighted the dual and paradoxical nature of borders suggesting, in 2002, that they ‘are being both multiplied and reduced [...] becoming the object of protest and contestation as well as of an unremitting reinforcement.’ (p. 92). Ven der Velde describes the border's capacity to be a ‘selective filter’ (Van der Velde 2008: 115). Like a filter, consisting of both apertures and barriers, borders can allow movement and can create stativity. Sometimes their presence is unwanted and contested and at other times it is desired, depending on the relationship of the regions either side of the border and whether it has been interpreted in terms of a narrative of us/them or one/other.

Chinese borders border on multiple, international physical and ideological sites. To abstract China from the rest of the world as a means for visual research exploration is tricky, though necessary for the sake of a research project which itself – like any other - has parameters. China is optimally placed as a cultural, critical and economic surface on which to reflect such observations and projections, with significant, specific border events taking place within its regions in the latter decades of the 20thC onwards. Included in these are:

Deng Xiaoping's Gǎigé kāifàng 改革開放 in the People's Republic of China (PRC) beginning in 1978, the end of the martial law period in the Republic of China (ROC) (Taiwan) in 1987, the handing back of Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997 and China's membership admission of the World Trade Organisation in 2001. Taiwan's precarious, unofficially recognised national sovereignty, and Hong Kong and Macau's positions as Special Administrative Regions - which are not limited to the one party governmental system of the PRC but whose political systems are monitored by it - are longstanding border issues that have more recently gained visibility through protest movements. These include the 100,000 strong (Kaiman 2014) Occupy Central or Umbrella movement in Hong Kong; its arguable 'spillover effect' to Macao (according to Robert Chung 2014) where around 100 protesters took to the streets of Macao in support of Occupy HK at the end of 2014, and the Sunflower Revolution in Taiwan - a response to the imposition last year of the Cross-strait service trade agreement by the PRC, which enables mainland China to use military force on Taiwan.

The AHRC funded international research network called *Culture, Capital and Communication: Visualising Chinese Borders in the 21st Century* (CCC:VCB) - <https://visualisingchineseborders.wordpress.com>, of which the author is the Principal Investigator, is a cross-institutional project about the politics of borders in Greater China and the ways in which they have been visualised and materialised by contemporary Chinese artists and designers¹. The categories of ‘art’ and ‘design’, which were described within the research project’s aims, are perhaps as problematic, or at least as negotiable, as the terms addressed above, especially where ‘political art’ is concerned. This raised questions of how to approach politicised visual culture and of where to draw the line in terms of what can be used and discussed. For example, can ‘art’ include designed ‘protest objects’ used in rallies, or forms of agitprop; do these formats stray too far from the ‘contemporary art’ sphere, or are they valid for examination if the protest itself can be seen to constitute a form of performance? What has emerged and reemerged within the artistic examples – or data – through the research into Chinese border art, is the notion (and relevance) of socially engaged art. Such practice may include ‘protest objects’ and product-based art and design within its creative process but these are not its main impetus. This paper draws from the Visualising Chinese Borders research project’s findings in relation to an examination of what contemporary socially engaged art is and what it does for the politics of border issues in Hong Kong and Taiwan. I suggest that artistic practices across China, Hong Kong and Taiwan which engage with border issues are most often forms of socially engaged or participatory art and that such practices themselves work to represent and (en)act upon the precarity of geopolitical Chinese borders through a form of cultural praxis.

The term praxis is used to refer to the practice of re-enacting in order to learn from or engage with an issue or theory, bringing together learning by doing and learning by thinking. Friere’s examination of praxis as pedagogy suggests that it is a combination of ‘the reflection and action which truly transform reality’, creating ‘the source of knowledge and creation.’ (Friere 1970: 81-82). Arguably, where artists practice in a way that is physically and antagonistically active, or moreover activist, they learn through a form of demonstrative acting and being, enabling them to ‘perform’ as well as to reflect upon relevant issues. In the case of socially engaged artists who address issues of Chinese borders, the active or performative (and participatory) aspect of their work – which often contains an element of precariousness - can be viewed as constituting a form of deferred border praxis. The praxis as in the active engagement with the issue of borders draws the artist closer to what it means to cross or to contest a border, without the artist or participants actually having to cross a geopolitical border within the artwork. The artists are ratifying the relevance of risk via this form of social engagement.

This paper is the result of research laboratories; site visits to arts spaces and a conference, which occurred as a result of the Visualising Chinese Borders research network project. Like other ‘border work’, the project considers borders or border crossings, both as temporal and spatial or topographical experiences and as delineations of ideology or opinion. This was part of the research network’s intention – to traverse multidisciplinary, international and cross-institutional borders. Yet, these international and infrastructural borders have at times created unexpected but notable barriers and boundaries in themselves connecting to freedom of speech or physical travel, working, in turn, to substantiate the primary concerns of the project; for example, concerns were raised about mentions of

¹ The intention of this discussion, however, is not to describe the AHRC funded research network in terms of all its aims, objectives, practical circumstances and outputs. This would instead have a place in an impact report, whereas, within this article it would detract from the ‘contents’ of what the network has addressed so far. Nevertheless, the process of organising and partaking in the research network has been educational in itself and constitutive and representative of some of the same issues that it seeks to address.

Tiannamen Square and of Taiwan being referred to as a nation, by the project's co-investigators at a conference in Shanghai where some of the research was disseminated. The process of researching within and across a (borderless) network has been a collaborative venture, and in reflecting upon this, a parallel can also be drawn with the kinds of socially engaged artistic practices that the network has been observing. Without making the procedures of the research network the attention of this paper, it is worth acknowledging that the interfacing of multi-disciplinary practitioners across multiple institutions in various locations - in the UK, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Taiwan – within the context of the network, has worked to introduce, dislodge or reorient perspectives around elements of cross-straits 'Chinese' identity, whilst highlighting the benefits of collaborative working. The purpose of this paper is to consider some of the instances of socially engaged arts that have been encountered within the research, and to contextualise them in relation to the project's consideration of border issues - which has been concerned with the differences in artistic practices within mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The arts practitioners encountered have, arguably, at times, 'actively' addressed the physical and socio-political and historical differences between these regions, highlighting their corresponding identity formations or concerns.

PROTESTING PRACTICES, ENDORSING RISK, VIA THE SOCIAL, THE PUBLIC AND THE COLLABORATIVE; TRANSLATING SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART ACROSS INTRA AND INTER NATIONAL STRAITS

Collaboration is a key feature of a kind of arts practice that has in the last two decades been described as socially engaged art. Its (20th century) origins are usually located within a rhizomatic amalgam of John Cage's and Allan Kaprow's 'happenings' of the 1950s/60s, Black Mountain College, Fluxus (and earlier and later forms of Dada) and Joseph Beuys' 'social sculptures' of the 1970s, all of which merge art with life, blurring boundaries of our notions of creative forces, life forces and the everyday. Art that is socially engaged – or defined as such – is that which is concerned with: process and 'affects' (Thompson 2012) rather than product. It alludes to context over content, politics over aesthetics, conversations rather than conclusions and the equalisation of artist and viewer/participant/public within its creative formation. It is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms 'art activism', the less 'activist' Relational Aesthetics – coined by Bourriaud (1998) - and 'participatory art', depending on the theorist or practitioner who is doing the labelling. Notoriously, socially engaged art has been aligned to two camps that arose as a consequence of a written, public dialogue between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester. Loosely, Bishop (2006) has suggested that the artworks of socially engaged art need to be present or aesthetically apparent, whereas Kester (2004) views art as a catalyst for social or political change. Within this process of change, or what Ranciere might consider more critically as 'dissensus' (Ranciere 2009), Kester positions the participants – as members of the public - at its core, whereas Bishop maintains that there is still a distinction between the artist and their participant-collaborators, both artistically and ethically. The often debated nuances between Bishop's and Kester's interpretations of socially engaged art are perhaps not of the same significance to similar contemporary arts practices in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, although Kester (2011) has tended more towards contextualising socially engaged art in relation to global neoliberal modes of working, whilst describing new social art practices as encompassing 'cosmopolitan diversity' (2011: 135).

However, considering the term 'Socially Engaged Art' in relation to the art historical trajectories of Taiwan, China and Hong Kong is, in different ways, not entirely comparable to European and American twentieth century cultural models of Modernism, which, after the

1950s, reacted to Formalist (if from a Greenbergian perspective) forms of art, opening up what constitutes the 'expanded field' of dematerialised art and sculpture (Krauss 1979). The processes of modernisation and industrialisation to which Modernism – as a heterogeneous artistic movement and narrative – responded, occurred in different periods within China, Hong Kong and Taiwan and including some influences of the Japanese during their occupation or colonisation of these areas in the twentieth century. Japanese interests in Western culture, which has its roots in the *Rangaku* 'Dutch or Western learning' of the 17th to 19th centuries, arguably contributed to its earlier modernisation processes as compared to other parts of East Asia, whilst, at the same time, the cultural impact of Western learning upon the Japanese was to some extent enforced upon areas of occupied China, colonised Taiwan, Hong Kong (and Korea). In an increasingly globalising world throughout the 20th century, this was not the only contact that these regions had with Modernist art from Europe, with the obvious instance of Hong Kong, which was under British colonial rule (when not under Japanese rule, 1941-5). However, the Cultural Revolution (1949-1976) prevented Mainland China from exploring Modernism, though Gladston suggests that a move towards more experimental forms of art, such as 'collage-montage' (Gladston 2015: 35) did move beyond Europe and the USA per se, in part as a response to former imperialist presences and, later, in relation to the worldwide 1968 protests and the associated Marxist (and, perhaps, Identity Political) critical frameworks. These collage-montage techniques of the early avant-garde were endorsed by some Educators in China who had travelled to or studied in the Europe and who advocated either Post-Renaissance forms of Realism or early (e.g. French) avant garde forms of Modernism.

The Juelanshe/Storm Society was, according to Gladston, the first avant-garde *Qianwei* institution to be established in China, in 1931 (2015: 36). What it is important to recognise when discussing socially engaged art in relation to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, is that their relation to Modernism and Modernization – as a vernacular driving force for its development – are complex and historically nuanced. However, with the lifting of Martial Law in Taiwan in 1987 and the opening up of mainland China – *gaige kaifang* (改革开放) – from 1978, artists were to some extent freer to experiment in ways which were politically/socially engaged. However, Taiwan's art scene, just after martial law had been lifted was extremely limited, whilst China's has continued to be at least partially monitored by the PRC.

In Pei-yi Lu's editorial of the special edition of *Yishu* (2010), which examines a number of 'off-site' artworks in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1990s, she endeavours to summarise what she refers to as 'off-site' and synchronically 'socially engaged' artworks between the regions, through her consideration of the authors' case studies:

'off-site art in Taiwan aims to bring art back into everyday life, off-site art in Hong Kong is more like a battleground among dominant forces, and in mainland China, off-site art is a way of gaining artistic freedom under political control. / In the situations of these regions I have observed three interesting parallel phenomena: the insufficiency of art museums, the separation between art and life, and the intervention of politics.' (2010: 11)

The compatibility of art and life is a key theme of late Modernist participatory art, in particular with regards to Allan Kaprow's *happenings*, alongside his interest in art as life and life as art (1993). More recently, as outlined above, Bishop indicated the 'social turn' in art of the 21st century. Despite the differences in China's, Hong Kong's and Taiwan's modernising

historical trajectories in comparison to the West's - where these discursive frameworks tended to be rooted, some of the same concepts abound. In both cases, there is a concern with the availability of artistic practice to 'everyday' citizens as well as to everyday social practices (de Certeau 1984) per se. Art should intervene with life in a way that is meaningful but also potentially life-changing and, thus, political. Dictionary definitions of politics stipulate the relevance of activities involved with the governance of an area and the activity and intention to gain power or responsibilities. Similarly, relations of power (to borrow from Foucault) are outlined in political theory survey books, such as Eagle and Johnston's, though they emphasise that politics can be communal rather than always governmental or institutional (Eagle and Johnston 2008: 20-21). In addressing whether grassroots, small-scale communal art practices actively disrupt macro, state political decisions, it is worth considering the overlap and relationship between the two; both can be considered categorically as a form of politics and one may draw impetus or reaction from the existence of the other. Sometimes large changes to state (operating in relation to the private sphere) policies take a long time to change and sometimes smaller changes on a community level have more impact though to fewer citizens. Kaufman suggests, 'Social justice work in the present moment is more dominated by a micro-politics of subtle transformation than it is by a macro-politics of large-scale confrontation.' (ibid. 296) She references the 1968 protests as a form of large-scale confrontation. In terms of political art practices, the artworks and art spaces encountered on the research project indicate that both large-scale confrontations - of macro state policies such as the Sunflower and Umbrella movements - and smaller, communal micro (usually ecological) interventions are at play, in relation to border antagonisms across the Chinese straits. The artist can subtly contest the border between micro and macro politics via their praxis in a way which may be considered as 'art' rather than as state aggravation.

One of the issues which socially engaged art in all regions of the Chinese straits brings to the discussion, is not just the potential for (publics and artists) to contest the effects of neoliberal capitalism - as is the case with many Western-based instances of socially engaged art - but also to face the totalitarian Chinese 'Communism' of the mainland and its relationship to the perceived 'mainlandization' of Hong Kong and Taiwan. The pro-democracy Umbrella Movement, which adjoined the Occupy Hong Kong movement in autumn 2014 in Hong Kong's central districts, was distinct from other Occupy instances in that it simultaneously contested Capitalist and Communist political systems, although in China the two are indeed linked and David Harvey refers to the mainland's climate as Neoliberalism 'with Chinese characteristics' (2005: 120). Because mainland China does not openly have a clear distinction between its public and private spheres, however, critics such as Wang Hui and Chen Yangu (1998) and more recently Zheng Zhuangzhou and Zheng Bo (2009; 2012) have questioned - in relation to the Stars 'outdoor art exhibition' in 1979 to the more recent "Difference • Gender: The First Chinese Art Exhibit on Gender Diversity" - whether art in mainland China can be truly publically engaged. There are also translational difficulties in using, for example, Habermas's Eurocentric-Modernist notion of the bourgeois 'public sphere' or the more recent, European discourses around discursive public space, such as those reconfigurations of Habermas by scholars such as Kluge and Negt (1993) on the proletarian public sphere and Mouffe (2007) on agonistic spaces. The bourgeois proletarian dichotomy referred to in Habermas's and Kluge & Negt's work does not easily correlate to China's 20th century Socialist to 21st century Neoliberal-totalitarian historical, cultural and economic trajectory. The public cultural sphere continues to be monitored and censored by the state, whilst the private sphere in the economic sense, since China's reforms, is neither so easily palpable nor indistinguishable from the state. Though Liu and McCormick (2011: 101) suggest that changes in market-led media reform mean that 'while the party-state maintains

its restrictive management, the commercialized public sphere nonetheless allows citizens more choices than they used to have,' which does 'at least marginally improve the prospects for democratic change'. A public sphere in which contestation of the state consensus is liable to be censored is at least (counter)public until this point, and the struggle for the public is all the more significant because of such measures by the government. Zheng Bo suggests that the term public sphere can be used in a 'dialectical' way, where, perhaps, elements of public theory might be self-consciously evaluated and revised in relation to China, whose post Qing dynasty 'social movements' have worked to create a form of publically engaged communication (2012 7). Bo likens Publicness *gong gong xing* (公共性) in art to the striving 'for free expression, in public, as individual citizens and collectives, to define and address issues of common concern,' whilst the struggle to attain this is 'the pursuit of publicness,' which 'has been one of the critical forces motivating the development of Chinese contemporary art.' (ibid 5)

TRAVERSING PRACTICES OF "CHINESENESS"

An additional problem is with the public category of 'Chinese contemporary art', both within the global sphere and across the different national or cultural areas of Greater China. Usage of the term 'Chinese art' has the potential to instigate a counter-public response from artists and citizens in Hong Kong and Taiwan (and Macao and Tibet which are not the focus of this particular project) – a response which is also, perhaps paradoxically, counter-hegemonic. The limitations to public discourse which artists encounter in mainland China have affected artists in Hong Kong. An example of this, which has been given by Hong Kong based curators Ying Kwok and Phoebe Wong (of Community Museum Project), is the censorship of - Li's party political 3D sculptures 'The Reality of Pixel' by Hong Kong's University and Museum Art Gallery (see Ejinsight online and the write-up of the 2nd research lab: Marsden 2015). Li's 3D printed sculptures depicted Chinese and Taiwanese political candidates – Fernando Chu, Leung Chun-ying, Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-jeou by using pixel technology, which was programmed to correspond to the number of votes that each leader received when they were elected. The sculptures of the four leaders appear more pixelated or rough in appearance, the lower the number of votes attained. Li claimed that the mainland authorities requested that the Hong Kong museum removed the sculptures because their timing was improper (ejinsight online), although the museum have not verified this. Such alleged censorship, which has since been heightened by further events, such as the disappearance of Hong Kong based *Mighty Currents* publishers (Sala 2016) suggests that mainland China disregards the presence of the political and cultural border with Hong Kong. Phoebe Wong volunteered further examples of 'mainlandization', such as the Beijing-fuelled proposal for Moral and National Education MNE reforms, which was seen by Hong Kong residents as an attempt to 'brainwash' children with Chinese propaganda and against which there were protests in 2012 (see, for example: <https://www.rt.com/news/hong-kong-education-protest-161/>).

Researchers from Hong Kong and Taiwan throughout the project referenced identity issues in conjunction with the mainland. Taiwanese artist Yin Hua Chu described how in Taiwanese high School, they were always taught that the capital was Beijing, not Taipei. Scholar and curator Sophie McIntyre and co-investigator of the project Ming Turner discussed photographer and performance artist - Yao Jui-Chung and his 'Recover Mainland China' action series. The post martial law artist, who, in this satirical series, superimposed photographs of his body, floating over key PRC monuments, claims that he knows more about China's history than his own, whilst at the same time feeling emotionally detached from the mainland or 'motherland'. McIntyre referenced his more socially or publically

engaged photographic project - Territory Takeover - where he dropped his pants and urinated on different territories in Taiwan, using a kind of oppositional stance 'to invoke the marking of historical sites corresponding to different phases of settlement by Holland, the Ch'ing dynasty, Japan and the Republic of China.' (Tung 2003: 116) Taiwanese arts scholar Tung, who references McIntyre, goes on to suggest that 'In performing repetitively these animalistic behaviours, Yao raised the question of what it means to be Taiwanese' (ibid.), or, indeed Chinese. McIntyre and other Taiwanese researchers on the project concurred that in the 1990s post Martial law era, there was a tendency for 'contemporary' artists to explore and to foreground their Taiwaneseeness (本省人 *běn shěng rén*) (Taiwanese or 'local' Chinese) as opposed to waishengren (外省人 *wài shěng rén*) (mainland Chinese) sometimes by using indigenous or 'Nativist' iconography and media (such as ink painting) or everyday 'folk' practices – which also occurred in the 1970s as a 'Nativism movement' in the arts, under Martial Law. However, the 1990s movement of Taiwaneseeness – also referred to as 'Local' or 'Localism' 'fever' and, perhaps, indicative of a broader governmental movement towards 'Taiwanisation' (Lu 2010: 82) tended to focus more on local sites which were used creatively in order to both draw from and impact Taiwanese environments, enabling dialogical practices with publics. Tung references The Rice Storage Artists' Community residency scheme as a prime example of local fever. The artists worked with the community and its surrounding agriculture in the village of Chu-Tein in 1999, utilizing a rice storage space for the summative exhibition, titled 'Land Debate' (2012: 167). She describes how agriculture and the working of the land is significant to Taiwan's long established Hakka community.

The 1970s and 1990s decades were not the first to see 'Nativist' art in twentieth century Taiwan, as the Japanese colonial government promoted such art in the first half of the twentieth century so that they could showcase the cultures of Taiwan – as an area which they now governed (1898-1945). After the colonial period and the instatement of Martial Law artists explored Western Modernist styles until there was a Nativist backlash in the arts in the 1970s and 1980s, the latter of which saw the birth of the 101 Modern Art Group. The 'localisation' – or 'Localism Fever' art of the 1990s was less restricted because of the lifting of Martial Law. In this sense, it was less a form of internal dissent or rupture against the Taiwanese state but outward facing, towards the mainland. The art of localised protestation arguably transposed its focus from the restrictions of working within (the single-party-Kuomintang Martial era, or, prior to that, the Japanese imperial) boundaries to the limitations of working without borders that *are*, in fact, desired (that the UN recognises the national, sovereign border with China). Taiwanese art of the 1990s has sometimes utilised folk traditions for the conceptualisation of Taiwanese indigenous identities. Because part of this artistic practice concerns intangible cultural heritage, including learning from and with indigenous communities, then it could be described as a participatory and collaborative as well as a public art process. According to Tung, the desire to make public art from beyond the gallery space was at its zenith in the 1990s in Taiwan. She argues that this move should 'be interpreted in part as a political act that sought to challenge the institutional censorship that was still prevalent at that time by claiming autonomy for the artist' (Tung 2012: 160), whilst challenging 'discourses that had developed around art prior to the lifting of martial law' in Taiwan. Publically engaged art within a local context also facilitated a 'contrast to monolithic Chinese ideology and...the canons of western modernism,' thus empowering Taiwanese artists from beyond the border.

A key example of contemporary Taiwanese art practice that demonstrates a performance based, socially engaged or public participatory element is Huang Po-Chih's work, including *Production Line – Made in China & Made in Taiwan*, 2014. The difference

now – in contrast to the localisation art projects of the 1990s - appears to be that such artworks are more self-categorically or self-consciously ‘socially engaged’. Huang’s recent, travelling art piece 500 Lemon Trees, which involved the planting and growing of lemon trees on barren land and the subsequent serving up of lemon flavoured cocktails to gallery visitors (at Manchester’s Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art and the Whitworth Art Gallery), appears to pay homage to Joseph Beuys seminal 7000 Oaks of 1982. Huang, and other contemporary Taiwanese artists, such as Wu Mali - who both contributed to the summer exhibition and conference ‘Micro-Micro Revolution’ at the aforementioned galleries in Manchester 2015 – combine ecological, agricultural issues with a kind of community arts activism (which sometimes includes indigenous communities, such with as the Amis people in Taiwan) (see figures 8 & 9). Whilst Huang, Wu (and Pak) apply the term Socially Engaged Art, it can be argued that previous forms of Nativist art were socially (and politically) engaged, though the intention was about a different kind of identity politic that was less about border crossings with the mainland and more concerned with emancipating Taiwan’s identity in the immediate post Martial Law era. In both cases, however, the Taiwanese terrain is used as a site for social interactions.

The focus on land can be seen in the sustainability work of Tse Pak Chai of Community Museum Project, Hong Kong, when he collaborated with local farming communities, with photographer John Choy and various artists and film-makers (Elijandry et al 2013) around ‘the disputed land of the North Eastern New Territories’ of Hong Kong, by Mo Shi Po village. Their work involved taking photographs/documenting, farming the land, building ‘native huts,’ drawing and making films of the contested space. In this territory - that is next to the border with the mainland area of Guangdong, governmental Development Bureau plans for new towns to be built to house central Hong Kong residents - who cannot afford accommodation in the overcrowded city, will disrupt settled communities (see Urban Diary online; <http://www.urbandiarist.com/en/diaristsnote/008>; Tsoi 2012), as well as a High Speed railway, linking Hong Kong to Beijing, via Guangzhou. Some Hong Kong residents and activists alike, such as the Hong Kong Independence Movement, view migration from the mainland as a cause for the overcrowding of living and work spaces in Hong Kong, which has even pushed up the prices of housing in the New Territories area, which has typically been viewed as a less desirable place to live for Hong Kong city workers. The New Territories can be viewed as a signifier of the geopolitical border issues between Hong Kong and the mainland, symbolising not just the place where border crossings physically take place – or where they were previously prohibited in the closed frontier region – but also the historical, ideological and social differences between the PRC and Hong Kong. Additionally, the rural area of the New Territories is crossed by migrants who are seeking the metropolitan and liberal centre of Hong Kong and so it represents the passage of rural to urban migration, which has taken place on a larger scale in the mainland (especially since the Hukou system in China has been reformed). The work of Chai and other artists around this border region helps to raise awareness of the problems faced by both rural Hong Kong border communities and by city citizens in relation to the mainland. On a micro scale, the work actively creates a culture around the area as it stands at present, connecting the tangible to the increasingly intangible elements of Hong Kong heritage. The initiative is comparable to the work of The Rice Storage Artists’ Community mentioned above; in both cases, such cultural practices enable fluidity between the roles of artist practitioner, worker, local and audience, giving a voice to local residents whilst endeavoring to generate a form of environmental sustainability (and, hence, control) from within an urbanizing nation or greater area.

Image 2: Treasure Hill Artist Village. Photograph: author's own, 2015.

SITE-SPECIFICITY IN HONG KONG-ESE AND TAIWANESE ART PRACTICE

Project Investigator Pei-yi Lu has written about how Taiwanese 'localised' art of the 1990s began to engage with off-site art projects which included an ecological focus, taking art s and displays beyond the museum and into local communities, which 'come back to the land' (Lu 2010: 14) of Taiwan. Such ecological or communally run, 'off-site' spaces whose sites operate away from metropolitan museums and galleries - as beyond, rather than as satellites to - major city locations, were experienced during the Visualising Chinese Borders autumn 2015 research trips to Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Taiwan, the research network group visited various alternative arts spaces but most significantly 'off-site' were Treasure Hill Artists Village, on the outskirts of Taipei and By wood Artist Village, an ex Japanese colonial sugar factory, in a rural area outside Kaohsiung, Southern Taiwan. Yu Fang Shang – Director of Bywood Artist village, presented the history and projects of the village to the research network, describing the community 'Formosa Wall Painting' project and the communal working conditions on the site, for example how the artists built their own huts collaboratively in which to work as artists in residence. When we visited Bywood on the research trip we were shown the living area, which consisted of solar powered and DIY forms of energy for cooking and lighting. The artists lived and acted together as a sustainable cultural community, relying on natural, local resources and in some instances exploring nativist forms of Taiwanese identity through their painting styles and the display of banners stating 'Reclaim ancestral spirits.' Hence, the artists' community intersects off-site, collaborative and Nativist elements of so-called Socially Engaged art practice.

Insert Image 3: Artists' communal residence (exterior) at Bywood Artist Village, Taiwan. Photographs author's own (2014).

Insert Image 4: Artists' communal residence at Bywood Artist Village. Photographs author's own (2014).

Insert Image 5: Artists' communal residence at Bywood Artist Village. Photographs author's own (2014).

With less physical space available in Hong Kong, the notion of 'off-site' or out of sight (e.g. from commercial or government interests) is less feasible. In fact, space has been wilfully occupied, as is evident with the protest sites of the Umbrella Movement and Occupy Central. There are also examples of gallery spaces within Hong Kong that operate as independent to national or private galleries and as collaborative, not for profit, and socially engaged - for example, Hong Kong's Wooferten arts space co-operative, Floating Projects art co-operative, and C & G art 'apartment.' When speaking to one of the organisers at Wooferten, in early September 2015, she described how they had recently instigated a street performance in memory of the violent riot on Pitt Street, which happened after the Tiananmen Square massacre. They were also planning an exhibition of collected 'protest objects' of the Umbrella Movement, which culminated in the exhibition and archive: 'Hereafter: Objects

from the Umbrella Movement 展覽’ at Wooferten and Foo Tak building in late September and early October 2015. Samson Wong and Wen Yau formed the Umbrella Movement Visual Archives & Research Collective, where they archive, photograph and continue to research the significance of the Umbrella/Occupy movement and its connected protest objects / artworks (Art Radar: <http://artradarjournal.com/2014/10/24/the-umbrella-archives-hong-kong-artist-collective-fights-to-preserve-protest-art/>). The Hong Kong art activist-performer and academic Kacey Wong (see www.kaceywong.com) has also collected and displayed Umbrella Movement objects and instigated an Umbrella Movement logo design competition (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kacey-wongs-protest-art-goes-on-view-in-hong-kong-in-the-wake-of-the-umbrella-movement-273789>). He referenced the movement in his substantial exhibition and book 'Art of Protest: Resisting Against Absurdity,' at AJC Gallery. Here, the (limited) public space of the protest is re-enacted within the more contained and less visible interior place of the gallery. Arguably, the protest objects are, then, better placed to be viewed as legitimised cultural artefacts, rather than as constituents of illegal demonstration. That is not to say that such archived artefacts will not be censored under the current Chinese government and Hong Kong administration, instigating further sites of protest.

Insert Image 6: Tent in Umbrella Square of the Visual Archive and Research Collective, Ohconfucius (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons, November 2014.

Off-site interventions, arguably, instigate power gains ‘on a microscopic scale’ (2010: 95) through the opening up of artistic and public dialogues, as Carol Yinghua Lu describes in relation to Liu Ding’s politically engaged ‘Conversations’ project (ibid.) of the late noughties. Yet is the instigation of conversations, and in the latter case, conversations between artists, enough to socially and politically engage publics? Professor Paul Gladston questioned on the project the extent to which art that is described as socially engaged enables a true emancipatory impact. Prior to his comment, I had noted Giddens’ distinction between ‘emancipatory’ and ‘life’ politics. Artist and protester Jen Wu - who did a residency with the Taipei Contemporary Arts Centre - presented her work around the Sunflower Movement splinter group protests, which had occupied inner-city areas of Taipei without a licence in spring 2014, as part of the wider Sunflower protests in Taiwan. Wu discussed elements of artistic practice by political activists she had encountered, such as the Untouchables Liberation Zone organisation who protested on behalf of more disadvantaged sections of society, hence ‘untouchables’ or *Jiamin*. As untouchables, they had been able to both deterritorialise and reterritorialise an urban territory in the Deleuzian and Guattarian (1972-80) sense of reclaiming something which had been spatially restrictive and imposed by (e.g. as by coloniser or by commercial, capitalist) structures or ‘stratified systems’ (ibid.), of which the lower stratas (*Jiamin*, perhaps, in this case) felt alienated. Further, anthropologically, the artists, performers and squatters who occupied this zone – until the police came and moved them – adopted a new creative – if temporary and micro – cultural place within Taiwan, where art, political thought and activism coincided ‘reterritorially’. As in Hong Kong, since the British handover (1997), anti-PRC protest movements amongst students, scholars and other pro-democratic citizens have been commonplace in Taiwan since martial law under the Kuomintang (KMT) government was lifted in 1987 by president Chiang Ching-kuo.

According to curator and researcher Sophie McIntyre, Taiwan’s sunflower movement preceded Hong Kong’s umbrella movement, with both protest movements campaigning against the mainland’s interference with their political, cultural and economic - spheres,

particularly in relation to rights to complete suffrage and in respect of - in Taiwan's case - the lack of governmental transparency and consistency in negotiating the Cross Straits Services Trade Agreement. Whilst the police shut down many Sunflower movement protests, including the ones described by Wu, it is difficult to measure what effect their public pronouncement of Taiwanese (political) identity had upon surrounding members of the public. The Taipei city centre protests (which the author incidentally encountered when walking through a central shopping area to get to the train station in April 2014 - see photograph) were not necessarily reported on fairly by the centre-right Chinese Nationalist Party - Kuomintang-biased, Taiwanese media. Harrison (2014) gives the Taiwanese mainstream media as a reason for the Sunflower Movement's alternative focus on social media, which was used to spread the word and raise awareness. Similarly, social media was at least initially key in the instigation, dissemination and maintenance of the worldwide (#)Occupy movement. It was also utilised or, rather, mass mobilised by the Hong Kong based group (of which the aforementioned Samson Wong is a part) 'Stand By You: 'Add Oil' Machine' for the Umbrella Movement,' who projected thousands of international tweets of support onto the publicly post-it-noted 'Lennon Wall' of Hong Kong's Central Government Complex building, creating what Garrett refers to as 'visual resistance' through 'image events' (2014 116). However, seeking information about politics and art via social media tends not to appeal to older generations who relied on print and TV media prior to the 'digital revolution'. In the case of Add Oil Machine, the digitally social was made physically public - and in a key place.

Insert Image 7: Lennon Wall with projected messages from “Add Oil Machine,”
 Ohconfucius (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)],
 via Wikimedia Commons, November 2014.

Vigneron (2013) discusses the problem of 'outside' art impact in relation to the formal (or perhaps reactionary) pedagogic and mass media knowledge constructs that prevail in Hong Kong and Westernised cultures. Further, he describes how artistic practice operates within its own systems of meaning, or 'aesthetic regimes,' which are not always translatable by members of the public. The active ripples, 'dissensus,' public, social and infrastructural impact or disruption which is potentially caused by socially engaged art is arguably negligible or limited, though it may depend on how accessible and public-facing (both physically and semantically) the art practice is. Also, as considered above in relation to Kaufman, impact may be micro, affecting fewer citizens but with greater intensity, or, the ripples may take a long time to make waves that are capable of transforming state policy.

The practices of artists and art spaces - both urban and rural - in Hong Kong and Taiwan - that have been encountered on the Visualising Chinese Borders project have been assimilated and discussed within the network's framework because of their perceived focus on issues of border crossings between the Chinese straits. For artists to contest these borders it makes sense that they have firstly felt that the borders' presence, or, in this case – absence, in their lives is discordant or a threat. The identity and everyday practices of what constitutes the place positioned on one side of the border is compromised by what lies beyond it. Identities are often constructed in terms of what they are not - rather than what they are, the construction of the other in relation to the one, the subject. This was encapsulated by Gilroy in a discussion of post-colonial and racialized identity: 'Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' [...] that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate - identical - to the subject processes which are invested in them.' (Hall 1996:6) Arguably, Hong Kong and Taiwanese

identities can be read as 'the other' to the 'Chinese subject' as a monolithic cultural, economic and political hegemonic force and this is a position that needs to be surpassed, for the benefit of all communities located within a heterogeneous China and Taiwan. Discussions of "Chineseness" within cultural and other contexts are problematic if they are inclusive of the places and the citizens of Hong Kong and Taiwan without naming them as such, without delineating their territories and corresponding identities. That is why artists from these regions, encountered on this project, have used the terms and corresponding concepts of "Hong-Kong(ese)-ness" and "Taiwanese-ness." Artists try to find ways to react to the presence of "Chineseness" by performing their identities and social practices and by creating localised identities *through* practices - by way of praxis. This cultural praxis designates the palpable territories from beyond the borders.

Insert Images 8 & 9: Photographs of *Micro Micro Revolution* exhibition, Centre for Contemporary Chinese Art, Manchester, 2015, author's own.

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