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Long Vacation In BK

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(Chung-Hui Chao)

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts Integrated Media Arts Hunter College
The City University of New York

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Thesis Sponsor:

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- **DEDICATION**

Before everything I want to thank my family, for all the things they have been through for me, and my friends for the bitter sweet times we have spent together. I would especially like to express my appreciation to: my brother Joseph Chao for supporting my stay in USA, and Professor Reiko Tahara for being a godmother and for enabling my transformation, as well as: Professor Chi Lung-Zin; Tony Wu; Yung Hao Liu; and my production crew (cameraman, producer, inspirers, translator, musicians and activist friends).

- I. **ABSTRACT**

Long Vacation In BK is a 26-minute diary. It is an ode to Taiwan and Asia written while I live in Brooklyn. The film opens with the news of a controversial and renowned Chinese photographer Ren Hang's suicide, which drives me into my memories of my past life in Asia. During 2007-2017, I, myself, a female, me and *my avatars*,^[1] were traveling and searching, escaping from my family. Traveling the bittersweet road in search of understanding, this is my political journey and my history of growing up. The film toasts to selfishness, to the nature of melancholy and depression as my autobiography from first person perspective. Music is a main theme, an important element of the piece. Even without knowing the background history, the film can be viewed as an expressionistic musical-visual artwork. It uses my personal story to reflect the era that Taiwanese youth experienced. Through my transforming and my migrating, with my shifting viewpoints, and the discrimination I received and released, I re-created things from a different angle, like the twisted world I inhabit — fake oriental, Asian fever, yellow fever, fusion cuisine and mixtures of all kinds.

^[1] **My avatars** represent my other thoughts in different times than now, myself in different times with different personalities. This is not a delusion, it is a way to write and to describe.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

▪ KEYWORDS

Family history, devastating protests, frustrated politics, suicidal friends, contemporary love story, musician tour, migrating, dreams, time, era, roaming, murmuring, childhood memories, mixed Tape, super 8, 3gp, 35mm still, DV, HD, 4K, iPhone, digital cameras, animation, analog, tech, documentary, experimental, Internet, stream of consciousness, electronic, dance, post punk, hip hop, underground, nostalgia, Taipei, Beijing, Far East Asia, USA, Brooklyn, Ren Hang,^[2] Ai Wei Wei,^[3] Zuoxiao Zuzou,^[4] Indie Taiwan,^[5] exile, paradise, metropolitan, tribe, road, flights, parade, movements, generation, war, stranger, foreigner, traveler, outsider, avatars, psychic ills, disease, sarcasm, democracy, socialist, communist, anthropology, psychoanalysis, postcolonial, religion, activism, ritual, left wing sucker, poem, notes, repetition, rhythm, spirits, beats, tempo, rhetoric, narration, dialogs, scenes, space, flashbacks, jump cuts.

^[2] **Ren Hang** (1987-2017) is a Chinese photographer and poet, known mostly for nude photographic portraits of his friends. His work is significant for its representation of Chinese sexuality within a heavily censored society. For these erotic undertones, he was arrested by PRC (People's Republic of China / Communist China) authorities several times. Ren suffered from depression. He posted an article titled "My depression" on his blog, recording the fear, anxiety and internal conflicts he experienced. He took his own life by jumping from the 28th floor of a building in Beijing.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren_Hang_\(photographer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren_Hang_(photographer)))

^[3] **Ai Wei Wei** (born 1957 in Beijing) is a world-famous Chinese contemporary artist and activist. Ai's father was the Chinese poet Ai Qing, who had a close relationship with Mao Zedong during the 1940s. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_Weiwei)

^[4] **Zuoxiao Zuzhou** (born 1970) is a Chinese musician and artist, a notable music producer. He has produced and arranged Ai Wei Wei's first rock album *The Divine Comedy*. The soundtracks from the album are featured prominently in Ai Wei Wei's documentary films. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zuoxiao_Zuzhou)

^[5] **Indie Taiwan a.k.a IndieDaaDee** (born in the 1980s) is a Taiwanese underground Internet celebrity and the founder of "Beastie Rock". Known as a public figure in Taiwanese independence movements as the founder of the "Intestine Flower" during the Sunflower Movement. (<https://www.facebook.com/IndieDaaDee/>)

▪ BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The motive for making this film came from my parents' separation when I was in the first grade. Gradually, as I grew up, I started to notice that their separation was not only about their failed relationship; there was another layer involving the political issue of the "Pro China" or "Pro Taiwan" identity conflict.

My maternal family had immigrated to Taiwan from China before Japan took over Taiwan in 1895. My maternal grandfather and his mother could speak Japanese, and his father died several days after he was injured in a protest against Japan in Taipei. On the other hand, my paternal family was in China at the end of WWII. During Chinese civil war that continued after the withdrawal of Japan from China, as the communist expanded its territory into my paternal grandfather's town, his parents were both marked in the "Five Black Categories."^[6] His father was executed by Communist China at the age of forty-seven, and his mother was starved to death by the Communists around that time. My grandfather joined the military of the nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek carrying the ideal of building the other "New China." He followed Chiang's army and his political party Kuomintang (KMT), as they were defeated on the mainland and fled to Taiwan in 1949. He served in the KMT army until he retired as a Major General in the 1990s. KMT declared themselves as China's legitimate government until now even though they are in exile. KMT imposed Taiwan Martial Law for 38 years, and reformed the land, language, and political system in Taiwan to their advantages.

After my parents got divorced, I remember often hearing my mother calling my paternal grandfather a "vested interest holder," a type of bourgeoisie. This phrase disturbed me as a child, and brought me a lot of confusion. During the ten years after I graduated from college, with the changes of Taiwanese society and the political situation, I started to participate in many protests, hoping to

learn about Taiwan's history to better understand the complex social factors that influenced my parents' relationship.

Many family members from my father's side (KMT side) have already emigrated to the United States or Canada. Most of them never really owned any property in Taiwan; with the recent fall of KMT in Taiwan, now, they have fewer reasons to go "back" to Taiwan. Maybe for them, the meaning of the word "return" and the link with Taiwan have been shifted with time and political changes. There is no place to "return" to and they have already become the real "foreigners"; only my grandfather will stay in Taiwan until the end. Although I became aware of my family's existence as an embodiment of Taiwan and China's relationship, my perspective of Taiwan was a restricted one. Taiwan is an isolated land – an island – that has been colonized by different nations and authorities. To talk about Taiwan, I would have to look at it from another place, from a distance. In order to develop thoughts about Taiwan by "standing in the Western world looking back at Asia", the U.S. itself, and its position in the world, had to be part of my research. However, when I flew to the other side of the Pacific Ocean, I faced another layer of identity conflict.

Long Vacation In BK is my journey searching for myself as a mix of Taiwanese and Chinese cultural identities, but my political mind switches and turns through the status quo. Standing at my ideal Western world's central spot – Brooklyn, New York – I am confronting the evolving history of the Far East Ghost Island^[7] by inserting my past dreams and memories into it.

^[6] **Five Black Categories** : "Landlords, Rich farmers (peasants), Counter-revolutionaries, Bad-influencers ["bad elements"] and Rightists." Mao Zedong categorized groups of people, such as members of the Communist Party of China, poor farmers and low-class workers, as Five Red Categories. This new Red/Black class distinction was used to create a status society, determined by birth. People in the Five Black Categories were separated out for struggle sessions, humiliation, re-education, beating, and persecution. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Black_Categories)

^[7] **Ghost Island**: In recent years Taiwanese have adopted the term *guǐdǎo* (literally "Ghost Island") as a self-deprecatory reference to the lack of opportunity, economic stagnation, government corruption and waste, and all the sorrow that seems

to manifest itself here in Taiwan. This word is related to the “Black ditch” (Taiwan Strait or Formosa Strait), when people tried to come across the strait from China, the fast tide and waves was so dangerous that often capsized and drown the people. (<https://synapticism.com/meta/ghost-island/>)

▪ INFLUENCES

My first memory of an encounter with art might be books of Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s paintings in my mother’s lab. I was there a lot by myself with books of painters that my mother had bought—Edgar Degas, Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, Amedeo Modigliani, Dadaism, Beastie, all kinds of painters. I was also exposed to Japanese cartoons such as *Doraemon*, Hayao Miyazaki’s films, and *EVA*; USA media like Disney and Hollywood; Hong Kong movies; literature; and contemporary arts. And, I am influenced by some of the classic avant-garde film directors including Wong Kar-Wai, Takeshi Kitano, and Jean Luc Godard. Some of my friends called me *Taipei Maya Deren* for fun when I made films with Bolex and super 8. I am friends with Chris Marker, Jonas Mekas and Terayama Shuj in my mind. I have intimate dialogues with those celebrities when I read about their lives—usually we just sit down together and chat, like normal friends.

The most important influence is Rock n’ Roll, which I first became aware of in my middle school days. I listened to all kinds of musicians from radio, CDs, cassettes, and TV—classical, dance, terrible trendy pop, punk, post punk, post rock, electronics, hip hop and rap. I was in love with Ian Curtis and Kurt Cobain; my imaginary boyfriends were Charles Baudelaire, Michael Cera, and they are Japanese, Aboriginals, or foreigners—whoever that would not be considered legitimate in my family. I was obsessed with underground fame, wishing in my heart that I would be someone like Courtney Love, Yoko Ono and the women who got hit by a junkie lover in Nan Goldin’s photography.

As I planned this film, I intended to be like the artists who influenced my mind, who took away my time and manipulated my thoughts. I was trying to reproduce my own story to get closer to them by becoming one of them myself. When thinking of myself as an artist, as a filmmaker, I was trying to remember, understand, fix my own problems, and write my own autobiography, like Naomi Kawase did with her early film work. I thought, before doing a real thing, I had to have full understanding of my own self; if I couldn't see through my own life, I wouldn't be able to tell a story about others, or make one up.

I grew up receiving huge amount of American culture from the other side of the world. The deformation of another culture coming with limited information and no actual cultural understanding re-created things from different perspectives, like fake oriental, Asian fever, yellow fever, fusion cuisine and other nonsensical mixture. Through my transformation and migration, my viewpoints shifted. I discriminated against and was discriminated against. In the process, I became and got into an odd being, like NYC or TPE, a deformed or recreated abbreviation, which I have incorporated into my film.

I-Novel^[8] is another influence on my creative process. As I ponder the nature of melancholy, depression from my family and personal life, the position I occupy in the society, being a powerless person, and my contemporary Asian hipster tramp life, I had great emotional connections with authors like Osamu Dazai and Yukio Mishima. I would like to use my personal story to reflect a circle or group, Taiwanese youth, the generation of my time.

^[8] **I-Novel** (私小説 Shishōsetsu) is a literary genre in Japanese literature used to describe a type of confessional literature where the events in the story correspond to events in the author's life. Many authors believed the form reflected greater individuality and a less constrained method of writing. From its beginnings, the "I-Novel" was a genre that also was meant to expose the dark side of society or the dark side of the author's life. There are several general rules for the creation of an I-Novel: The first and most important was that it was often written from the first person perspective, and this is where the "I" of I-Novel comes from. I-novels attempt to portray a realistic view of the world. As autobiographical works, they involve real

experiences to be completely portrayed with language. Additionally, compared to formal writing styles influenced by Chinese literature, it uses more casual language. The first "I-Novels" are believed to be *Hakai* (Broken Commandment), written in 1906 by Shimazaki Toson, and *Futon* (Quilt) written by Tayama Katai in 1907. Major writers include Osamu Dazai and others. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Novel)

- **FORM**

Taking the concept of a "Mix Tape" from music, I have used mixed media including Super 8mm and 35mm film, 3gp, smartphone, digital cameras, 4k, and more. The material of documentation varies through time, and an image that suits the audio, be it my voiceover, other performer's voice, or music, is carefully chosen to convey the mood of that specific moment. The first person perspective narration, the voice of the storyteller, links them throughout the film. Chapters are designed using different kinds of forms, such as mockumentary, fictional plots, dreams, notes, rap, or sarcastic cartoons. I divide scenes by different soundtrack and different materials of the video, however the storyline happens chronologically, letting the layers build up with time. I insert text or bilingual subtitles, using words like NYC or TPE, deformed or recreated abbreviations. These initials and signs give another layer of science fiction and imagination.

Choosing an experimental form rather than a linear, fictional, or complete piece, is a reflection of the uncertain political status of Taiwan and my mind, which is constantly shifting, choppy, and intermittent. I constructed the fragmented chapters across multiple places, as the word "Frustrated Art"^[9] coined by Lin Hong-john around 2007 in Taiwan described the absence of political art—it was as if I was looking at an artist Tsui Kuang-Yu puking everywhere in his spontaneous work.^[10]

^[9] **Frustrated Art** After 2000, works making direct social or political criticism were on the decline. Young artists often took their own inner feelings and everyday experience as the starting point of their work. In mid-2007, Lin Hong-john pointed out the absence of political art by coining the term "the art of frustration", while Huang Chien-hung described the tendency of artists to withdraw into themselves with the term "micro-sensible". These two discourses broadly summarize the directions

of Taiwanese contemporary art between 2000 and 2007. “The art of frustration” attempts to link the younger generation’s penchant for “kuso, the otaku culture and the quest for self-expression without addressing an audience” to symptoms of “deliberately avoiding politics”, “resignation” and “frustration about the present”, questioning the young artists’ apathy and alienation from society and politics. - Towards “Art/Society”: Study on Socially engaged Art Practices by Lu Pei-Yi.

(http://www.ncafroc.org.tw/Upload/Study%20on%20Socially%20engaged%20Art%20Practices_LU%20Pei-Yi.pdf)

^[10] Tsui Kuang-Yu In *Eighteen Cooper Guardians in Shao-Lin Temple and penetration: Spontaneous*, he was puking everywhere. He states: “In this work, the idea of penetration is interpreted in a relatively different version. Vomiting is the substitute of penetration, and ‘shortcut’ indicate myself.” (<https://youtu.be/SV9NgET-pac>)

III. CHAPTER RESEARCH ANALYSIS

▪ SUMMARY

I am in exile – the Resisting Paradise^[11] in Brooklyn. The death of a distant Chinese friend Ren Hang made me think about my close Chinese friends, and the fact that we are actually political enemies. The gap between us is subtle and delicate. Day by day I become someone else, as if I’m going further and further away from my Far East Friends.^[12] I am sitting here without a formal identity, not able legally to work for years due to my visa status, facing my fear of disease and mental illness. While I have nothing and roam here for such a long time, the endless protest by Taiwanese indigenous people continues. They get no reply from President Tsai’s government and are cheated repeatedly. The Communist China took my paternal family’s land and made them refugees. But they came to Taiwan and robbed from the “real” Taiwanese. I shouldn’t exist – my family was supposed to have perished in the Chinese Civil War 70 years ago.

^[11] **Resisting paradise** Renowned documentarian and filmmaker Barbara Hammer has crafted an eloquent and richly layered examination of the artist’s and individual’s role in times of conflict. Resisting Paradise focuses on Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard’s artistic work in the south of France during World War II, while also examining the word of Matisse’s family and others in the French Resistance Movement. (<http://barbarahammer.com/films/resisting-paradise/>)

^[12] **Far East Friends** The Far East is an alternate geographical term in English, that usually refers to East Asia (including Northeast Asia), the Russian Far East (part of North Asia), and Southeast Asia. South Asia is sometimes also included for economic and cultural reasons. In Japanese: 極東, in Traditional Chinese: 遠東. This word for me is very oriental and exotic. With love of Togawa Jun’s album “Kyokutou Ian Shouka”(Far East comfort songs), the word “Far East” often reminds me of

Japan and “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” the slogan of Japan during WWII. Using the word “Far East” to me is an act of resistance to China-centered way of thinking.

- **CHAPTER BREAKDOWN**

2017 Brooklyn - Death of Ren Hang

2007 China trip – Flashback China trip

2008 - 2013 - TPE suicidal friends, family, childhood memories, activities and flashback

2013-2017 Brooklyn - Brooklyn until Now

- **CHAPTERS**

- [Intro – Background Info]**

This chapter was made at the last moment after everything was done, in response to all the people who complained that my film is not clear, is difficult to understand, or impossible to read. Initials and abbreviations are used as signs, which gives the chapter another layer like a voice of a mysterious authority. The bold fonts and flashing lights, as well as the colorful transparent VCR background, are like Jean-Luc Godard’s films. It is as if the author/character speaks to the audience about something that isn’t really related, like silent film’s intertitles for an audience to read information, or like a comic book’s chapter description. It is for fun and to create a sense of sarcasm from the film’s beginning, pointing out that this is an intellectual film, but that the audience should not expect to understand it fully. It starts with an underground band’s song, which indicates it’s not styled like a Hollywood film nor National Geographic documentary.

[Chapter 1 – Ren Hang’s Death]

Born in a prison, with bundles on our backs and our thoughts, we could not reach the end of a single if the possibility of finishing does not incited us to begin the following day...The shackles and the unbreathable air of this world take off us everything, except the freedom for killing us...

-Emil Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*

The film starts with the famous Chinese contemporary photographer Ren Hang’s suicide in February 2017. Ren Hang’s story functions as the prelude of this piece.

Ren Hang jumped off the building in Beijing and died. Kun Liang is my friend who is one of Ren Hang’s models. I got to know her when I first went to Beijing by myself ten years ago through a common friend who belonged to a Columbia University’s Taiwanese film group. After we met, Kun studied film at Goldsmith in the U.K., then she studied anthropology in Germany; she’s always in Europe. We almost had a fight because of political issues. When I mentioned Tibet, she didn’t want to talk about it, saying it was “annoying;” she never said anything political or showed any obvious political views.

I was shocked when Ren Hang died; in 2015, Ren Hang had an exhibition in New York where Kun introduced me to him and his group of friends. But around that time the Sun Flowers Movement^[13] was happening, so I couldn’t help feeling uncomfortable when I met a group of unfamiliar Chinese people. I couldn’t have deep conversations or relax with them, but I remember Ren Hang’s empty pale face. He was friends with a lot of artists I knew, and we were supposed to be friends, but because of the Sunflower Movement, it was difficult not to be aware of his Chinese nationality.

Ren Hang's death brought the politics, identity, and mental issues to the forefront of our relationship. We are in different political worlds. I am a foreigner in Brooklyn, and Ren Hang lived in Communist Beijing where he suffered severe depression and is now resting in peace. Somehow this kind of distance is hard to break through, but in a way attractive because of its mystery veil.

[13] **The Sunflower Movement** is associated with a protest movement driven by a coalition of students and civic groups that came to a head on March 18 and April 10, 2014, in the Legislative Yuan and, later, also the Executive Yuan of Taiwan. The activists protested the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) by the ruling party Kuomintang (KMT) at the legislature without clause-by-clause review. The Sunflower protesters perceived the trade pact with the People's Republic of China (China; PRC) would hurt Taiwan's economy and leave it vulnerable to political pressure from Beijing, while advocates of the treaty argued that increased Chinese investment would provide a necessary boost to Taiwan's economy, that the still-unspecified details of the treaty's implementation could be worked out favorably for Taiwan, and that to "pull out" of the treaty by not ratifying it would damage Taiwan's international credibility. The movement marked the first time that the Taiwanese legislature has been occupied by citizens.

[Chapter 2 – Sugar Jar - Our Life Is Sweeter Than Honey]

The arrival of revolution is for me to be ashamed

- Show Oligarch 秀场寡头, *Night is a high tall wall that God thrown out*^[14]

It is 2007, and I have arrived in Beijing with my curiosity of Communist China and its underground music. However, whatever I saw all collapsed. "It was completely different from what I've read in the textbook!!!" At that time, influenced by the *Magic Stone Records*, I was addicted to Chinese Rock n' Roller's like Dou Wei, Zhang Chu and He Yong. Beijing was a place with its own cultural charm. I had heard about the "798 Art District" and the contemporary arts in China. I packed my suitcase looking forward to visiting there.

At the 798 Art District, I found a Beijing underground record label called *Sugar Jar*. I became friends with Sugar Jar's owner Yang Li Cai and its only staff, Liu Kai. They showed me a lot of underground documentaries, such as *Beijing Drifters* depicting artists living under poverty, or another film shot in HIV villages in Henan province. All those banned materials were beautiful and fascinating.

I heard about artists like Ai Wei Wei and Zuoxiao Zuzhou from Sugar Jar. Liu Kai showed me a photo: "Look, this is the new emerging photographer Ai Wei Wei; he took a pic of his wife showing her underpants in front of the Tiananmen Square, so this photo became *Zuoxiao Zuzhou at Dianmen's* album cover." Hearing about this story was definitely fascinating and a big influence on me. I went to Tiananmen Square, and used my super 8 cameras to take my version of showing underpants in front of Mao.

I was planning to go Beijing Film Academy because of my love for Beijing underground culture. However, when I actually went there and witnessed the reality of life in China, I also realized that just like how Ai Wei Wei is this kind of prestigious artist, he actually has a strong background and relationship with the communist party; Ai Wei Wei's father Ai Qing was a famous communist poet and his work was published by Mao.

So that is why Ai Wei Wei can protest and be an "activist". Instead, Sugar Jar was torn down, and the owner went to Europe, and then back to China afterwards. He now doesn't have a bank account, keeping his life almost like an anonymous, retired, or disappeared person who doesn't really exist anymore. Since I was a child, I thought I was Chinese, but I felt lost when I went there and witnessed the actual China, which was too different from what I learned about it from school or the media. Everything in China seemed dangerous, besides the little crimes in daily life. It would not have worked for me as a normal person.

^[14] **Show Oligarch** is a Beijing underground band, they often sing about politics, gave their voice to mine refugees, self-immolation Tibetan. "The arrival of revolution is for me to be ashamed" is a line from their 2007 album: *Night is a high tall wall that God thrown out*

[Chapter 3 – TPE Suicide Friends]

Mine has been a life of much shame. I can't even guess myself what it must be to live the life of a human being.

- Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human* ^[15]

Throughout my teenage years most of my best friends or people I cared about were suicidal. In 2009, two of my friends attempted to kill themselves. My best friend A had a mental breakdown and held a knife while telling me she was going to kill herself in front of me. A has a similar family structure as mine; her family is one side Taiwanese and the other side from Mainland China after WWII. Her parents were separated also; one of her grandfathers was in the highest position in the KMT military, just two steps under the president. At the time she was rich, much more wayward and seemed more talented than myself. I followed and listened to her all the time, mentally copying some of her acts. Gradually, I was acting or thinking like her in many ways.

We seemed to all come from nice bourgeois families, but all of this was in our own minds because of the different reality of political instability. We did not have the ability to reproduce our family's bourgeois conditions because this pattern of life was destroyed. The mental disease of my friend reflected my uncertain mind. When my friend started to attack

and threaten friends with her life through her language and actions, I had nowhere to go to or escape to; our concerts and our protests could not save us.

^[15] **Osamu Dazai** (1909 – 1948) was a Japanese author who is considered one of the foremost fiction writers of 20th-century Japan. A number of his most popular works, such as *The Setting Sun* (Shayō) and *No Longer Human* (Ningen Shikkaku), are considered modern-day classics in Japan. With a semi-autobiographical style and transparency into his personal life, Dazai's stories have intrigued the minds of many readers. His books also bring about awareness to a number of important topics such as human nature, mental illness, social relationships, and postwar Japan. The novel "No Longer Human", the literal translation of the title, discussed by Donald Keene in his preface to the English translation, is "Disqualified from Being Human". This novel, despite being serialized as a work of fiction in 1948, is narrated in the first person and contains several elements which betray an autobiographical basis, such as suicide—a recurring theme in the author's life. Many also believe the book to have been his will, as he took his own life shortly after the last part of the book was published, on June 13, 1948. One modern analyst has proposed Dazai was suffering from complex post-traumatic stress disorder when he wrote the book.

[Chapter 4 – Childhood's Nightmares]

My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind.

- Jamaica Kincaid, *Autobiography of My Mother* ^[16]

My memories, my avatar's memories, and childhood nightmares influence this chapter. I saw ghosts as a child and often had nightmares of being chased by animals, or getting my throat slit and bleeding. In those dreams, I was often near water, and there were sharks or fish with sharp teeth. I would float with the tide and sink to the crack of the Mariana Trench. I was often in all kinds of buildings, with hospitals and schools as the most common locations. Some black mist often came along on the ground floor and wanted to drag my conscious away. The only fortunate thing was my ability to fly. In those dreams, more than one Taoist priest appeared and confirmed with me or my

avatar that my past life was someone related to He Xian Gu^[17] or Jiutian Xuannü^[18], who both had an ability to fly. But I wasn't always good at controlling my own flying because I would get caught or fly too far. When I learned about my family history and great grandfather's destiny, I started thinking that my dreams might be something that remained in my blood, possibly the biological reflections of a past life memory, of escaping from the war.

I also had dreams with opposite kind of feelings - like myself decomposing in a sane, scientific way. Those dreams to me represented my mother's images as a rational scientist. But, they are mostly also nightmares. In one dream, my avatar could feel the decomposing, splits of cells, the ache of vanishing, until myself, the body, turned into particles and mist, then in the end, scattered in the air. The dreams were always clear, as if they really happened in reality.

^[16] **Jamaica Kincaid** (born 1949) is an Antiguan-American novelist, essayist, gardener, and gardening writer. She was born in St. John's, Antigua. Her writing explores such themes as colonialism and colonial legacy, postcolonialism and neo-colonialism, gender and sexuality, renaming, mother-daughter relationships, British and American imperialism, colonial education, writing, racism, class, power, and adolescence.

^[17] **He Xian-Gu** birth name He Qiong, is a Chinese mythological figure and one of the Eight Immortals in the Taoist pantheon. While she is often seen as the only female among the Eight Immortals, the sex of Lan Caihe, another of the Eight Immortals, is somewhat ambiguous. Her special ability is fly.

^[18] **Jiutian Xuannü** In Chinese mythology, Jiutian Xuannü is the goddess of war, sexuality, and longevity. She has a bird head and human body. This book researches on how Japanese Literati were afraid of being persecuted by the people, and gradually shifted their opinions to support the right wings' agenda during WWII.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiutian_Xuannü)

[Chapter 5 – Tunghai University Dorm]

I lived in a college campus dorm in Tunghai University with my mother for fifteen years. It was a very sealed environment. My mother is a professor in Theoretical Chemistry, and she is a scientist who has lived in this closed campus for all her life. I wrote a diary poem about Tunghai University,

describing it as a cultural desert. There was just me, my family, and the discipline that imprisoned my childhood. I felt like the trapped princess in a fairy tale in a contemporary children's storybook. My mother used to tell me: "I am divorced, we are abnormal. Look at our neighbors - they are families that have a father, and they look down on us. We have to be quiet."

[Chapter 6 – Family Photos]

Family photos featured in this chapter are what my paternal grandfather gave to me. I viewed them as family treasure; they were old and fragile. And by making this piece, I am able to remember them forever, to recontextualize them from a different perspective. The method of using single frame images and repeating them with a speed that creates persistence of vision makes the images float. The family photos are of my grandparents, my grandfather in military, and aunts training with guns, my parent's college graduation, family trips, and other old photos. Over the family photos, we're hearing the conversation between myself as a child and my aunt. It is a cassette tape that my parents had sent to my aunt who was taking care of me in Taipei while they were pursuing their PhDs in Pittsburg.

[Chapter 7 – Indie Taiwan and Sunflower Movement]

Tenkō - is a term which was coined in Japan in 1920, and which came into general use in the 1930s. It is not a translation of a European word, but expressed a concept born and developed in the political milieu of the phenomenon as one could find. ...One method of approach to cultural and intellectual history is to examine a deviation in order to reveal the essential characteristics of a national culture. What took place in Japan from 1931 to

1945 should not merely be dismissed as the product of a whim or thoughtlessness. With careful study, the period reveals much of both positive and negative value. What is true of a personal history is also true of a nation's history; we grow only by examining our errors, and this requires not only that we learn not to repeat them, but also that we grasp the element of truth and value contained in them.

- Shunsuke Tsurumi, *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan, 1931-1945*^[19]

One of my older relatives, who immigrated to the West, was calling my friend *Indie Taiwan* a bastard on the Internet. That was when Indie Taiwan started “Intestine Flower^[20]” to let protesters and young people complain and speak to the government outside of the Legislature Yuan after the Sun Flower movement. Unfortunately, my relative didn't know that Indie Taiwan (a.k.a. Indie DaaDee) was my friend. For my family members, who were part of the KMT party for their entire lives, it was not easy to understand what the revolution was about and what was happening in the news.

“The bastards my relatives were talking about are all my friends; I wish I was in the Legislative Yuan protesting with them. The party they were supporting is not the same party anymore. Today's KMT is friends with PRC! How can someone take the retirement pension from the Taiwanese government and be friends with PRC? Isn't that called treason? Isn't that what they left home to fight for? Isn't it clear now that the majority of society despises KMT, and my family? If so, then whom am I betraying?”

^[19] **Japanese spiritual history of the war 1931-1945** This book researches on how Japanese Literati were afraid of being persecuted by the people, and gradually shifted their opinions to support the right wings' agenda during WWII. Shunsuke Tsurumi (1922-2015) was a prominent philosopher, historian, and peace activist in Japan.

^[20] **Intestine Flower** Programmed by Internet fame Indie Taiwan, an extension of Sun Flower movement. Once gathered thousands of people cursing in front of the Legislative Yuan through live streaming.

[Chapter 8 – The Endless protests in front of the Presidential Office Building]

This lifetime is doomed to be hopeless.

- Gu Meng-Ren, *United Daily News (Taiwan)* ^[21]

In 2008, two years after I graduated from college, I got a job working with professor Kuang Chung-Shiang's in Civil Media / Peopo team as a journalist, pursuing all kinds of stories that didn't appear in the mainstream media. The most impactful news to me at the time was the *Sanying Tribe* ^[22]. I occasionally couldn't stop my tears when filming, or my hands from shaking when I was editing. In 2008, many tribes made a union parade to the Presidential Office building; they got no reply. I was listening to *Pa Nai's* ^[23] singing, running around with the tribe. I felt as if I had more emotional connection with the tribe than with my family, that the tribe was like my real home—a close-knit group with a supportive safety network. One day I was still shedding tears when I came home, after viewing an emotional scene in which the tribe's housing was torn down. I insisted that we must help the aboriginals to take back their land. My grandfather poured me a bucket of cold water, and yelled: "Leave it! That is useless. They are supposed to be like that."

I realized that the people whom I was protesting against were just standing in front of me, that they are my family, that the person I was protesting about was sitting right in my living room. It is them, their values have been suppressing the aboriginal for decades. My emotion was useless. I was hanging around in Taipei, unable to fix things, unable to help myself or other people. It took me a while to actually leave Taipei, but I did. In the meantime, today, 2017, ten years later, Pa Nai is still protesting, standing in front of the Presidential Office Building. This time it is worse, because they were cheated by *President Tsai*, ^[24] and lost even more traditional territories. But here I am, sitting in Brooklyn, using my

grandfather's state pension. I haven't had a job for years. And now, KMT lost and my grandfather's pension got cut off. He can't send me money any more. Why didn't it happen sooner? I hope all the land goes back to aboriginals in the end. I should not be alive, I was supposed to have died in my past life.

^[21] **Gu Meng-Ren** A journalist of the United Daily News in Taiwan. In 2010, he wrote an article about how the gentrification by the consortia and corporations made people lost their lands.

(<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/yotu/uUdBiYttD3U/INmQxcVIQYIJ>)

^[22] **Sanying Tribe** An aboriginal squatter settlement of Amis people in New Taipei City, formed in the 1980s following an explosion of Haishan Yikeng Coalmine in 1984. It is located under the Sanying Bridge by the Dahan River, in Sanxia District. Around 140 households existed when the community thrived, but they have been a target of repeated forced demolitions by the government for the past 10 years. Numerous groups including social workers, scholars and independent media have come together to help Sanying Aboriginal Community to fight against the government's forced demolition and relocation, as well as to support their claim to their ancestral land.

^[23] **Pa Nai Kusuis** (born 1969) is a Taiwanese singer-songwriter, guitarist and social activist. Her parents are of the Puyuma and Amis tribes of southeastern Taiwan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panai_Kusui)

^[24] **President Tsai** broke promise after she received the majority of Aboriginals' vote to get elected. The Transitional Justice was not processed, instead, Tsai let the government amend the law to take over more private land from the aboriginal tribes.

[Chapter 9 – Leaving TPE]

Re-departure: The pain and the frustration of having to live a difference that has no name and too many names already. Marginally: who names? Whose fringes? An elsewhere that does not merely lie outside the center but radically striates it. Identity: the singular naming of a person, a nation, a race, has undergone a reversal of values. Effacing it used to be the only means of survival for the colonized and the exiled; naming it today often means declaring solidarity among the hyphenated people of the Diaspora.

- Trinh T Minh-ha, *When The Moon Waxes Red*

Taipei -there was nothing for me to do there. Every friend I had was insane, either they committed suicide, or were always gone. Once a boyfriend pointed at my nose and said: "Those KMT

pigs!" But I was the one protesting against KMT on the street. There was no tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow. We gave concerts, drank at the Shida Park^[25], worked for money, and played music. Where can I go? Mom said musicians are dirty, so I became a groupie for ten years... I tried China, then Japan, but failed. Thus, I thought I could go somewhere further, leaving me, the betrayer, as far away as I could, and join my cousin's group as KMT expats in the West.

^[25] **Shida Park** The Shida Night Market is a night market in Da'an District, Taipei, Taiwan. It is located near National Taiwan Normal University. Shida night market was formerly a very popular night market given its unique shops, restaurants and fashionable clothing stores. However, as the area Shida night market occupied was close to Taiwan Normal University, it has always been a place that many intellectuals called home. As a result, the neighborhood is decidedly more cultured than your typical neighborhood in Taipei. The Taipei CBGB "Underworld" was right across Shida Park, it is a spot that musicians and young people gather. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shida_Night_Market)

[Chapter 10 – The Japanese Rock n' Roller got Gentrified in Brooklyn]

Gentrification has ruined clubbing^[26]

- Goldie, *inews* (UK)

The life of a Rock n' Roller-foreigner seems exciting and romantic on the screen, but in reality it is not as good as it originally seemed. In tribute to Terayama Shuji's *To die in the country's* last scene's speech in the field, my Japanese friend *Ken Minami* who's on his O1 visa as a musician, stands at a Bushwick rooftop with neighbors hanging around, and yells out his 'doesn't have Money tragedy.' Working endless night jobs at the minimum wage, the only way to feel great is to sing and break through on the stage – the only time he feels free.

^[26] (<https://inews.co.uk/culture/music/goldie-gentrification-ruined-clubbing/>)

[Chapter 11 – Do you have HIV?]

Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place

- Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

The fear of disease also influenced me. In middle school, I wrote “AIDS” on my backpack, and my mom slapped my face. Years later, I tried to understand why I did that; the only answer might be my living condition then with my single mother. She was not able to handle this kind of subject or help with my social education. Instead, I had to experience discrimination and feel the abuse from other people’s words. After college my boyfriend, in a negative tone, asked me if I ever got tested for HIV. My close friend once told me she was with a person who had HIV. I didn’t understand what it meant, and I couldn’t figure out what was right. Then my boyfriend in the US, explained that he attempted to commit suicide in high school because there was a rumor that he had HIV. Every time entering this kind of conversation, I was afraid. This chapter is related to this fear and echoes my concerns with the mental health issue, but when talking about this fear, I felt the need to be funny. The insert card “contemporary love story” was the humorous touch, though this disease is fatal, exists and fuels our fear. Presenting it as a trend in this way might reflect a common experience that people share.

[Chapter 12 – Tour List by a Shitty Person]

I've been high for the past 40 years

- Neil Young

Tour list by a shitty person:

1. Email Deland about banner put aside money for him
2. SELL things: Cymbals, wedding ring
3. Make march for Miami
4. Find buried treasure, go to beach
5. Male prostitution
6. Crack dealer
7. Bounty hunting
8. Buy more Weed
9. Wake up at 7am
10. All I need is 50,000 dollars

- A Brooklyn Musician

This is a to do list from my Brooklyn musician friend when he was preparing to go on tour. This hilarious tour list represents something I strive to comprehend with this film, the life I have never experienced, like a road movie. This is very wild, USA, Rock n' Roll list. This is a lighter chapter, which signals a transition from a Taiwanese to a USA lifestyle. When everything is falling apart, the road will lead to another, better place. But the promises of the road might not always come true; the road sometimes leads to bigger troubles.

^[27] (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/sep/20/neil-young-drugs-alcohol-memoir>)

[Chapter 13 – Endless Protest]

From Taipei to New York City, as we continued to support *Underworld*^[27], the Taipei CBGB, protest against President Ma, *and* support Lee Ming-Che,^[28] we are overseas doing activities for the Sunflower Movement. There, an American passerby asked me: “What’s this about? Sunflower? Is it a big festival in Taipei?” Right, how do I explain what you are seeing, which might seem like an exciting carnival. But in fact we are fighting against the communist, a war without blood on the surface.

^[28] **Underworld** (1996-2013) At Shida Park, Taipei’s CBGB, shutdown by Taipei city government 2013, there were thousands of people joined the last week party around the non-stop

^[29] **Lee Ming-Che** (born 1975) is a Taiwanese pro-democracy activist, detained by Chinese authority in late March 2017. After Lee entered the dominant of China from Macao, he lost ability to directly contact with his families. Lee is a former worker for the Democratic Progressive Party and NGO employee, and the incident has led to friction between security institutions in Taiwan and China. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Ming-che)

[Chapter 14 – Ching Chang Chong]

OS: Because something is being shown, a certain kind of reality is being constructed, but we don’t see any kind of evolution. What I have against these films, and what I reproach Africanists for, is that you are looking at us like insects.

JR: For me, it is evidence of the spontaneous way that the Africans featured in the film, once out of their milieu, purged themselves of the European, industrial, urban environment, by giving themselves over to a representation of it. But problems with circulation come up. One day I showed the film at an anthropology conference in Philadelphia. A lady came up to me after and said “Can I have a copy?” I asked her why. She told me she was from the south of the United States and...she wanted to show...the

film in order to illustrate how...blacks were indeed...savages! I refused. But see, I'm giving you good evidence for your argument.

- A dialog between Ousmane Sembène and Jean Rouch, "You look at us like insects"

This chapter explores my Brooklyn days. After I left Taipei I arrived at a new place. The New York view is messy and unclear, very much influenced by surface observations. I was often stopped by African Americans whistling at me on the street. In daily life, I was often discriminated against by "Whites". This section is a reenactment of what I have encountered on the street in NYC. People I know here are from all kinds of places. This differs from Taipei's bourgeois stratosphere. The dynamic energy and chaos of the situation is unmanageable. All I could project is to reenact the facts in a sarcastic way—The *Oh! Mikey*^[30] cartoon, which is awkward and funny, to me, processes the darkness in daily life into jokes.

^[30] ***Oh! Mikey The Fuccons***, known in Japan as *Oh! Mikey* (オー！マイキー Ō! Maikī), is a series of Japanese comedy sketches created by Yoshimasa Ishibashi featuring a family of Americans ("The Fuccons") living in metropolitan Japan. The series is notable in that all of the characters are played by mannequins with perpetually frozen facial expressions, like the mannequins in the French photographer Bernard Faucon's pictures. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fuccons)

[Chapter 15 – Hanging in Brooklyn]

My grandparents are Chinese, my father was born in Taiwan but was of Chinese descent with stronger ties with China. My brother and cousins are mostly Americans because of the migration. When I was little I thought I was Chinese, but when I grew up I realized that it was not the identity for me anymore. As the third generation of post-WWII immigrant Chinese, I became Taiwanese; everyone

who is born in this Ghost Island is becoming Taiwanese. People who think they are Chinese are traitors to the Island now. I traveled around East Asia, and then moved to the Western world. During the process, I think I've become another person. Maybe I have changed. I'm not sure. If I stayed home it might have been better, but where was that home really? Talking about my Far East Friends makes me afraid because I am so different from them, yet I am also one of them.

Winter 2017, after the cruel summer, a while after Ren Hang's death, I am still here in Brooklyn. I have not been back to Taipei for over three years. Things happening in Taipei started to feel far away enough for me to notice that I can't follow up as much as I did before. Taiwan has become a faraway land to me. I feel myself starting to develop the "Western perspective" when I look at Far East Asia. Time makes everything change, and time heals everything back to the beginning. Ren Hang's death, Taipei's politics and friends, are like a dream, like a past life.

IV. THESIS PRODUCTION PROCESS

In the lineage of my experimental films, which mostly has included just a few words or only images, this piece is the most comprehensible; it has description and narration of facts. It is the closest I could get to having an audience actually understand my work verbally. The most difficult part was to compromise with audience's need for context with my need as a creator to follow my vision for the piece. The production process took ten years, not only in compiling the material of the film, but also the process and development of my understanding of history, life, foreign language, production techniques, aesthetic, insights, financial situations, and other details impacting my experience and perspective.

Because of my anti-social personality, I realized during the early years of my college education that I couldn't handle being a mainstream fiction film director. So I began making experimental films. Gradually because of my journalist job in Taipei, I started to produce film news, and as I also worked in several documentary productions, my work began to include more "real material". The process of adapting to the USA and English was another major transition that was difficult to achieve. There was time I intended to make a traditional documentary, a news documentary or a fiction film, but all failed because of my inability to tell a complete story using methods that did not come naturally to me. Regarding the creation of this film's form, my "mixed tape" approach has its roots in my underground artistic practice.

- **PRODUCTION SCHEDULE**

2007-2017 June

Collecting materials, field research, interviews, developing script.

2017 June-2017 September

Grants writing, post production, final script

2017 October-2017 November

Final Post-Production & Mastering: Re-shoot, final cut, color correction, sound mixing, subtitles, grant writing, film festival plan.

2018 Spring ~

Screening

V. AUDIENCE AND EXHIBITION

The film fits in the experimental genre, or can be seen as a documentary piece. Its artistic approach is suitable for museum exhibitions. It can be screened as a whole film, or separated to parts, or made into an installation piece by looping chapters.

List of exhibitions for possible fit /direction:

Taiwan International Documentary Festival, Kuala Lumpur Experimental Film and Video Festival, The Montreal World Film Fest, Japan Media Arts Fest, Ann Arbor Film Fest, Doclisboa - International Film Festival, IndieLisboa International Independent Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam: IFFR, Visions du Réel: Nyon International Film Festival, Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, Busan International Film Fest, Golden Harvest Awards for Outstanding Short Films, SXSW Film Fest, Hot Docs Film Fest, Tribeca Film Fest, Doc NYC, etc.....

Film Festivals that are already showing interests in screening this film:

Urban Nomad Film Fest, Uno Port Art Films, Golden Harvest Awards & Short Film Festival.

Outside of mainstream film festivals, since the nature of this film is punk, it will fit well in all kinds of music festivals or collaborative multi-media environments, such as music venue or galleries. It could also be exhibited in museums' experimental/political documentary film programs or installations.

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