

## **Editorial/ The Heterogeneous South**

<https://curatography.org/7-0-en/>

By Hongjohn LIN

The notion of the South has been generating heated discussions and debates in art and curating practices for the past several decades. Positioned passively in relation to the Global North, the South represents the asymmetrical allocation of social, cultural, economic, technological and political capitals, due to the long history of globalization, colonialism and global militarism. The South is an umbrella term used for designating the dire human conditions of the poor who suffer psychological and cognitive cultural symptoms around the world. In the past, postcolonial forms of psychoanalysis, critical theory and political science attempted to account for the plight of the South in terms of its poverty, lack of education, inadequate housing, and impaired subjectivity—namely what Achille Mbembe describes as “necropolitics.” Boaventura de Sousa Santos even goes further in analyzing the cognitive problematics of the South, and makes claims for an epistemicide, via the constructing of inaccurate and indifferent discourses, anything from deliberately distancing the South from mainstream modernity to valorizing the Western-centric political formation. There is no denying that the poor South is always strategically positioned in relation to the rich North, as much as the Brandt Line, established four decades ago, can still mark the divide through the shifting and transient global economy and technological sphere. However, the theory of the South may run the risk of overgeneralization, by depending on the dynamics of the North-South divide, without looking into the intricate interdependency between the South- South geopolitical spheres, involving a long history of complex and particular colonial and regional relations.

It is therefore necessary to recognize the South as a heterogeneous entity without sacrificing the differences and distinctiveness existing among the large variety of countries and continents referenced under the umbrella term. These individual and particular historical and political relations, in terms of their geographical significance, can be intricately contingent. A homogenous South can

only obscure these particular historical relationships, by ignoring the different degrees of co-operation and resistance among the South's many countries and specific regions. A theory of the South cannot be *teoria povera*, which is constructed solely on the basis of the North-South divide, by distancing the North and by imagining an ideally united solidarity of the South. Firstly, in order to more thoroughly emphasize the significance of these layered intricacies, the realities of differences in the cultural, political, economic and demographic make-up of the South's various countries shall be examined and articulated. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the term, "the global South," is unable to address and/or articulate the complexities of the particular localities whereby the interrelations among certain countries and the historical tensions of their respective regions are left unnoticeable, or are deliberately elided.

Manray Hsu curated one of the first exhibitions on the notion of the South in Taiwan, *Ask the South*, installed in the Kaohsiung Museum of the Arts in 2017. Tracing the epistemological and historical construction of the South from the period of post WWII modernization, Hsu defines the classification of the Third and First World under the rising hegemonic globalization of late capitalism, which clearly mirrors the fate of Taiwan as part of the Southernization within the World system, namely the rise of the Four Asian Dragons. Hsu also applies the notion of the South to Taiwan's own geopolitics, displaying the political and economic imbalance between Taiwan's North and Taiwan's South, whereby the voices of the social minority, the subaltern, and the other are silenced and/or ignored. To conclude, Hsu takes the notion of the South into the concept of cosmism, in which nature, technology, and the ways in which humans dwell on the earth, namely human ecology, are understood in terms of the hybridity of objects.

Ayos Purwoaji takes into consideration the subjugated situation of art in Indonesia, in working out the historiography of curating practices and contemporary art. His project points up how some counties in South East Asia emphasize the effects of national formation as one of the key factors in the development of art, which serves for advancing the political ends of nationalism. Tracing back the history of curating in Indonesia, the methods of ethnography, albeit their being a part of the colonial agenda and its cultural property,

nevertheless attend to the complex and hybrid relations of traditionality within the local cultures in detailed descriptions—interpreting practiced as a heterogeneous composition drawn from different tribes and communities—that can be attuned to the materiality of culture, instead of serving merely for promoting a monolithic national narrative. Exhibition making, according to Purwoaji, can be ethnographically written within actual time and place; the ideology of the white cube is transgressed, for eternity and sacredness are no longer displayed.

In *South Fever*, Lu Peiyi takes on the concept of the South though applying the theory of Derrida's deconstruction, targeting the disease of global culture, and decrying the viral fashion of its application, though responding to three exhibitions in Taiwan, all of them bearing the key term, "the South." There is the exotic imagination from the North, regarding the tame South; the cultural specimen, collected for the curiosity of anthropological knowledge; and the projecting of a utopian dream, substituting for the unfulfilled and/or failed political task of the West. Far, far from it. According to Lu, the South is the Hegelian "being-for-itself," and "being-in-itself" as well.

To conclude, through presenting the aforementioned articles, these heterogeneous formations and their pluralistic modes of signification need to be considered in relation to the global and regional concept of the South: The South needs to be understood in terms of its being a heterogeneous formation representing dynamic and pluralistic significations: the South, depending on its various geopolitical situations, demands that its visions and revisions be regarded as the basis for cultural sites practicing their self-defining differences and differentiations. The South can thus find its anchoring point, which is retroactively done from the South-South co-option, not from the dichotomy of the North-South division; these invited articles have therefore demonstrated a way out of the dilemma of *teoria povera*.

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## The South - An art of asking and listening

<https://curatography.org/7-1-en/>

By Manray Hsu

Translated by Chi-Fan Lin

### Foreword

Foreword For a long time, Kaohsiung, along with the whole southern region of Taiwan, the so-called South, is geographically, economically, and politically in a relatively marginalized position in the national hierarchy of power. In a global context, the term South designates the southern countries colonized by the West in the early modern period. It also refers to the unequally developed Third World during the period of post WWII modernization, or the so-called 'Global South' that emerged from the globalization of late capitalism. Thus, the South has become synonymous with the subjugated caste, namely the subaltern, which development programs have silenced and sacrificed, stripping the disenfranchised natives of their voice and social mobility in deference to the power that be.

This exhibition explores issues related to the invisible subject of the South in modernity. The first chapter, "Your Country Doesn't Exist", looks at how modern states while ostensibly promising their mass population of human rights, justice, and autonomy, have in practice relentlessly and structurally subjugated and "southernized" debased groups of individuals. In resistance to the hegemony of power, the oppressed are forced to stand in rejection of their states, using artistic and other strategies of disobedience to create an imagined state beyond the state. This backlash constitutes the theme of the second chapter "Ask the South", which scrutinizes how modernity programs despoil the environment, endanger other species, and reduce the entire earth to the subaltern status of The South.

"Xiao-Yao-Yu 逍遙遊: From Free Range Imagination to the Aesthetics of Scale", the third chapter, proposes a new theory of aesthetics that attempts to explicate

recent artworks related to ruins, environmental disasters, and large-scale human interventions in the planet and beyond. Emanating from the perspective of the South, these artworks exhibit multifaceted scales of time and space that interweave modern technology and natural forces. Though akin to the non-anthropocentric traditional Taoist aesthetics, they differ from the free-range imagination of the Taoists. At the core of the aesthetics of scale is the knowledge of technology that is already embedded in human perception and permeate our way of lives. The Aesthetics embodied in this chapter provide a critique of modern technology and its worldviews.

### First Chapter: Your Country Doesn't Exist

The title derives from an artwork of the same name by Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson. As an installation art exhibited in public spaces, it uses posters, billboards, and streamers to pose questions and provoke viewers' multifarious attitudes toward modern states. Does your ideal state exist? In what ways does an oppressive state rectify its brutal past? How do you evaluate the state you reside as an immigrant or as a native? This searching piece of art ushers in the exhibition from the lowly locus of the South.

The distribution of the Austronesian tribes and peoples covers the entire region of Taiwan to the north, New Zealand to the south, Madagascar to the west, and Easter Island to the east, with a total population of 250,000,000 people. In the last few hundred years, these peoples lived through colonization, decolonization, and marginalization. Idas Losin's "Island Hopping" series aptly demonstrates the location of the Austronesian geography in relation to the map of the world. Chang En-Man, a fellow aborigine of the former artist, is constantly caught in the predicament of a prevalent Han culture vis-a-vis her Paiwan extraction. Being perennially excluded from the here and the now, her work endeavors to capture this elusive third space. In the process of transitional justice, decolonization, and democratization, the involved subjects, land, and people are always central to the controversies. The road to rehabilitation justice oftentimes uncovers further ramifications. Exhibits by Minouk LIM of south Korea, Wang Hong-Kai the sound artist, Yin-Ju Chen the visual artist, and the Asian American James Hong, bring the viewers to the historicity and subjectivity

of modern man from the artists' respective angels. Oliver Ressler's work refocuses on the plight of the Syrian refugees. The project of Lai Yi Chih, which serves as a transition between the first two chapters, points to the vanishing inhabitants and ravaged landscape in a rapacious modern world.

## Second Chapter: Ask the South

The song "Ask the South" by Lin Sheng Xiang and Chung Yung-feng establishes the theme of this chapter. The lyrics depict the devastating impacts of industrialization on rural southern Taiwan: the exodus of youthful labor force to industrial parks and the construction of petrochemical plants, both being common phenomena in the developing world. As a prologue to other large-scale projects, the photographic pictures of Lin Bo-liang capture the heavy tolls on agriculture wrought by industrialization. All these projects entail long-term fieldwork of the activists who document the harm done to the environment and pit themselves against the vested interests of the polluting industries. Edd Jhong and Shu Zhen Tang's *South Wind* investigates the pollution inflicted on Taixi village by the sixth naphtha cracker complex of Formosa Plastics. Images provided by PM2.5 Action Squad show environmentalists and many concerned citizens rally behind the group's appeal for a mask free blue sky. Two pieces by Tai-Jou Lin intend to strike a balance between art and activism and reflect on the violence and resistance sparked by controversial social as well as civil actions. Huang Huan-zhang and Chao Rei-kwang trace the disposal of ashes from incinerators and steel mills, which pollute rivers and render farmland nonarable.

## Third Chapter: "Xiao-Yao-Yu 逍遙遊: From Free Range Imagination to the Aesthetics of Scale"

Yang Shun-fa's "A Submerged Island" draws inspiration from traditional Chinese ink brush landscape painting to present the seascape of flooding in the coastline and low-lying land of Taiwan. With the subtext of water, waves, ripples, clouds, and sky, the works exhibit a scintillating beauty that belies the allegory of deluge. Yao Rei-zhong and his team expose numerous "mosquitoes halls", wasteful white elephant public structures that dotted the landscape of Taiwan. The gargantuan abandoned ruins and concrete monsters are products of

campaign promises made by politicians to garner votes. Chen Po-I, who holds a Ph. D degree in Ocean Engineering, records and processes the scenes of natural and man-made disasters with the dissecting eyes of a forensic medical examiner. Chang Yung-Ta resorts to audio-visual mechanical devices to observe minute changes in physical phenomenon and sound that routinely escape people's awareness in our fleeting and evanescent daily existence. A French-born marine diver currently residing in Taiwan, Yannick Daubu helps the viewers listen to the "thinking coral reef" as the species is facing mass destruction. The art of technological minute observations more than just enhances and enriches our sensuous experiences, it makes us appreciate our fragile environment and dwindling species. The above projects conclude this aesthetic and phantasmal excursion.

#### Postscript

It is necessary to be aware that the critiques on modernity cannot be a monolithic one, as much as these artworks invite the viewers to see, to listen, and to read the multiple referential dimensions of the South without a fixed scale. To me, the contradiction does not lie in the juxtaposition of Taoist aesthetics and the predicament of modernity; the contradiction is in the myth of globalization, national -states, and anthropocentrism themselves. It is a mistake to realize that the "global" does not exist for how it has been put together in a coherent fiction; the South, the new epistemological object, is to seek a solution for the global, badly composed for a discursive shortcut. This is the reason that the new cosmopolitics comes in, combining with aesthetic-technological means in calling the natural and spiritual worlds to revisit us, for the partially stressed globe, the South.



## Uncharted Territory: The Roots of Curatorial Practices in Eastern Indonesia

<https://curatography.org/7-2-en/>

By Ayos Purwoaji

Curatorial practices began to develop in Java, ever since the Dutch colonization took hold of the archipelago. Traces of their development can be found in old museums throughout Java, that still stand even today. Among them is the National Museum in Jakarta, originating from an institution known as *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Batavian Arts and Sciences Association), established on 24 April, 1778. This institution actively collected and studied various archaeological and ethnographic objects owned by collectors and scholars living in Batavia.

This includes collections from Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman (1814-1880), a prominent Indonesian painter, who undertook various cultural journeys out to the far corners of Java, in order to find archaeological objects, excavate fossils, and collect old manuscripts that were owned by inherited families. These collections were donated to the *Bataviaasch Genootschap*, and can still be seen in the National Museum today.

In Surakarta, several Javanese aristocrats and intellectuals who were interested to cultural and literary artefacts, founded the Radya Pustaka Museum in 1890, under the initiative of K.R.A Sosrodiningrat IV. While in Yogyakarta, the *Java-Instituut* initiated the establishment of the Sonobudoyo Museum on November 6, 1935.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of various museums in Java also began to foster curatorial practices in the region. One of the driving factors was the widespread dissemination of new knowledge on the concept of museums and their management, purveyed by the Europeans to the scholars in Java. In 1950, shortly after the revolutionary period of Indonesian independence, the condition of museums was again discussed. President Sukarno, prompted by the deteriorating relationship with the Netherlands due to the West Papua conflict, then encouraged the "Indonesianization" of various cultural institutions.

This turn of events could then be considered as manifesting a momentum for the emergence of museum curators in Java, including Moh. Amir Sutaarga, and Ghozali, who worked at the National Museum, and there were also Koesnadi, and Gani Lubis, in the Fine Arts Gallery of the Directorate of Culture and Education.<sup>2</sup> However, the term, "curator," at that time had not been widely used. Hence, some curators referred to themselves as "*ahli museum*" (museum expert). In a periodical newsletter from the Central Museum, Ghozali first wrote the term curator in an article in 1967.<sup>3</sup>

In regards to the cultural implications of this new nomenclature, along with his peers of the same profession, Amir Sutaarga secured the foundation of museum curatorial practices in Indonesia. Since the late 1940's, he undertook ethnological studies under the guidance of A.N.J.Th. a. Th. van der Hoop, an archaeologist at the

*Bataviaasch Genootschap*. In 1952, Amir was commissioned to work as the museum's publishing editor. At the time of publication of this periodical, he had also written many articles of his views on the museum. Due to his proficiency, he was then sent to study museology in Western Europe, in 1955. After returning from his studies, Amir resumed his position in the National Museum while actively writing books on museology practices and delivering lectures in the Anthropology Department at the University of Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of curatorship for fine arts, various studies conducted by Flores (2008)<sup>5</sup>, Hujatnikajennong (2015)<sup>6</sup> and Supangkat (2018)<sup>7</sup> implicitly show that curatorial practices only occurred in Java—yet they are generalized as “curatorial practices in Indonesia.” This shows that there has never been a thorough investigation of and record on curatorship in the islands, other than Java. Hence, this writing tries to highlight those curatorial practices outside Java that also occurred, especially in Jayapura and Maumere, which I will describe specifically.

Some people are of the view that in Eastern Indonesia, there are no means that can support the emergence of curatorial practices, since all educational institutions for prospective curators have only been found in Java. But the facts differ a lot from that assumption, since it turns out that the curatorial practices in Jayapura and Maumere started not much differently from those of Java.

### **Opening the Doors of the Museum by Singing**

Arnold Clemens Ap was born in Biak on July 1, 1945. He began studying in the Geography Department of Cenderawasih University in Jayapura in 1967. During his studies, he received guidance from Dr. M.T. Walker, professor of anthropology at the same university, in conducting ethnographic research in several communities. It was from this experience that Arnold gained the knowledge of how to record the evidence of cultural materials that prevail in a region. This knowledge was proven useful when he was appointed as an employee at the Loka Budaya Museum, located in the Cenderawasih University campus in Abepura district.

The Loka Budaya Museum is the first anthropology museum in Papua. This museum was established by chance. In 1961, an anthropologist and photographer Michael Rockefeller undertook an ethnographic expedition to the hinterland of Asmat, Papua. However, the boat he was on went under a misadventure, and Michael was lost in the middle of the expedition.<sup>8</sup> Various artefacts, tools, and Asmat statues he gathered were then gifted by the Rockefeller Foundation, and became the first collection of the Loka Budaya Museum, founded in 1973.

Arnold Ap had been working for this museum since it first opened. He initially became a daily employee, but due to his knowledge and skills he was later appointed curator in 1978. During his career as a museum curator, Arnold Ap tried many different approaches in displaying and gathering the collections. However, perhaps, he did his duty as a curator intuitively, because he never received any formal education as a curator.

One example was that a year after being appointed curator at the Loka Budaya Museum, together with his best friend, Sam Kapisa, he formed a music group called Mambesak. The name comes from the Biak language means the bird of paradise and its members were museum employees and students of the Anthropology Department. Every afternoon, the group used to perform music and dance in the vast courtyard in front of the museum. Some of the instruments they used were from the museum collection, and also musical instruments collected from various indigenous communities in Papua. Arnold also changed the image of the museum by calling it *Istana Mambesak* (Mambesak Palace). His various musical activities turned out to be a strategy for attracting locals to visit the museum.<sup>9</sup> For the Jayapura community at that time, the museum was certainly a peculiar place, because the local community did not recognize the concept of museum culture. With music, Arnold brought the concept and significance of the museum closer to the society. After their musical performance, they usually invited the public to enter the museum, and Mambesak members would then explain the various collections to the public.<sup>10</sup> Through this practice, Arnold changed the image of the museum, from being simply a repository of inanimate objects, into a living cultural laboratory.



Arnold Clemens Ap (left, in white) and Sam Kapisa (right, in stripes) in the Loka Budaya Museum, Cenderawasih University. Photo: Constantinopel Ruhukail

Their music group, Mambesak, became increasingly widely known from their broadcast program called *Pelangi Budaya* (Rainbow of Culture), featured on Radio of the Republic of Indonesia (RRI). The broadcast was able to reach various communities of people living in the mountains. The program was dear to the

people, as it highlighted the culture of Papuan people in a unique way, being interspersed with musical games. The larger Papuan community eventually found out about the Loka Budaya Museum through this media event, which then inspired several head chiefs to come visit, and hand over cultural artefacts from their communities, for inclusion in the museum's collections.

Arnold Ap's growing activity was supported by the Loka Budaya Museum and the Mambesak music group, which was then, however, interpreted quite differently by the Indonesian government. For them, the popularity of Arnold Ap was arousing hope for the Papuan people, by encouraging them to fight for their independence, especially after the implementation of the referendum Act of Free Choice (Pepera) in 1969. The political tension strengthened in the 1980s, and the military began to hunt down the sympathizers of the Free Papua Movement (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*, OPM).<sup>11</sup> This included Arnold Ap, who was arrested in 1983 and shot dead by the military in the coastal area of Pasir Enam, east of Jayapura, in the blinding morning of April 26, 1984. Papuan people to this day remembers Arnold Ap not only as a curator, but also as an important cultural icon in their political struggle.

### **Indigenous Rituals in the Courtyard of the Catholic Church**

A different approach was also taken by Piet Petu, SVD. He was the first curator on Flores Island to establish the Bikon Blewut Museum in the suburbs of Maumere. As with other regions along East Nusa Tenggara, the influence of Catholic teachings brought about by Portuguese colonization came to be felt very strongly. This new religion then brought a modernization of knowledge that slowly shifted the traditional knowledge that had been passed on for generations. Piet Petu is a perfect example illustrating such shifts and strains.

Piet Petu was born on February 3, 1919, in Nita, Sikka, with the name Sareng Orinbao. His parents were chiefs and thus highly respected by the people around him, who still adhered to their ancestral religion. When he was ordained to become a young indigenous priest in 1951, he also baptized his parents. This was the face of the gospel transmission on Flores, with missionaries giving Catholic teaching to privileged young people, in the hope that they themselves would teach the Catholic faith to their parents and the next generation.<sup>12</sup>

In 1936, Piet Petu entered the secondary seminary in Mataloko, where, in the middle of his studies, he became acquainted with Pater Theodorus Lambertus Verhoeven, SVD, who later helped him in his studies of anthropology and archaeology. Both disciplines are indeed quite close to the *Ordo Societas Verbi Divini*—abbreviated SVD, which also published various ethnographic studies in the *ANTHROPOS* Journal since 1906. Until 1950, Piet Petu actively participated in miscellaneous scientific expeditions initiated by Verhoeven in various regions of Flores.

The church then sent Piet Petu to continue the study of spirituality in Nemi, Rome,

between 1961-1962. In that timeframe, he took the time to visit a number of museums in Europe, in order to learn about museum management practices. When he was returning to Indonesia, the top leader of the SVD Order asked him to open a museum in Flores. This request was eventually fulfilled in 1983, when he built the Bikon Blewut Museum in the Catholic high school complex, where he taught. He wanted the museum he established to support the traditional teachings that had begun to be twisted (*bikon*) and were becoming rotten (*blewut*), especially after the presence of modernization brought by the Catholic church.<sup>13</sup>

Piet Petu's curatorial approach was strongly influenced by the ethnography he had done, whereby cultural artefacts were exhibited in accordance with the ritualistic context of the local community. For instance, when he wanted to display the sacred inculturation concept of customary marriage, he would make a composition of elephant ivory, which is widely used as a dowry by the Lamaholot tribe, with Moko Alor inherited from Đông Sơn culture. Conversely, when he wanted to narrate the practice of collective governance in traditional societies, he would display elephant tusks side by side, with Mahe Watu, or altars of worship in the Krowe Tribe.<sup>14</sup> This method of presentation could only be done because Piet Petu had a basic knowledge of ethnographic methods, and since he was also from an original tribe and had experienced various traditional rituals since he was a child.



Piet Petu SVD in front of the Bikon Blewut Museum, Maumere. Photo: Arbain Rambey

Another interesting element is that Piet Petu used Bikon Blewut Museum as a space for celebrating various traditional rituals and teachings, while ironically, the museum itself is located in the courtyard of a Catholic church, the institution that

had historically encouraged the elimination of traditional knowledge as part of the modernization agenda they brought from Europe. Perhaps this contradiction may be viewed as a kind of autocriticism for the museology tradition in Europe, that is often stuck between scientism and exoticism, at two opposite cultural extremes. Whereas, in this case, Piet Petu saw that the past had never been truly left behind. Hence, the museum paradoxically displays a pattern of representation as a chronicle—not only in regards to the concept of time for the linearly moving Western societies, but also in a pattern of non-linear representation, in which the past can be compared with the present in the same space.

Along with Piet Petu's passing on November 24, 2001, the Bikon Blewut Museum lost its most visionary thinker. Currently, although it still stands firmly in the courtyard of the Catholic high school, the appreciation towards this museum has decreased considerably. However, recently, the museum has attracted a group of young artists, an art collective known as Komunitas KAHE, who carry out artistic interventions in it by involving the surrounding community.<sup>15</sup> They aim to restore Piet Petu's mission, along with the official inauguration of the Bikon Blewut Museum, so that the museum can pass on the wealth of cultural heritage of Flores, and become a source of knowledge for the younger generation.

### **Those Who Breached the Walls of the Museum**

Through a historical exploration on these two curators from Eastern Indonesia, we can clearly conclude that curatorial practices in Indonesia did not and do not only occur in Java. If positioned along a timeline, the period of the two curators discussed above is also no different from the emergence of the earliest curatorial practices in Java. Thus, it can be said that the biographical tracing on the figures of Arnold Clemens Ap and Piet Petu, SVD will lead us to the preliminary conclusion that the history of curatorship in Indonesia is omnipresent, and is not centralized, as has been claimed in earlier studies, which indicate that the practice only grew in certain cities in Java.

In particular, I also want to acclaim the progressive artistic approach that broke down the museum walls, as Arnold Clemens Ap and Piet Petu, SVD accomplished. They indirectly practiced the promoting of what James Clifford calls a *museum as a contact zone*, wherein the institutional structure and organization of their collections become a set of tools for imagining historical, political, and moral relations, both for the visitors and the community being represented.<sup>16</sup>

For Arnold Clemens Ap and Piet Petu, SVD, the museum is not merely a repository of inanimate objects, but rather a symbolic apparatus used to evoke a collective memory for the community, something that intentionally erased in the official historical records, due to the power of colonial structures. Through their stories, it seems that there should be more initiatives developed, so as to explore the various forms of curatorship in Indonesia, which I believe are still many, and scattered on the other islands of Indonesia.

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# South Fever: The South as a Method in Taiwan Contemporary Curating<sup>1</sup>

<https://curatography.org/7-3-en/>

By LU Pei-Yi

Since 2016, a “South Fever” has come into vogue in Taiwan, one whose popularity has witnessed continued growth. Unlike the trend of “Discovering the South” that began in the 1990s, and the subsequent endeavors to increase the visibility of “the South perspectives”, this “South Fever” serves as a reminder for us to reflect on “the South’s” pressing significance to present-day Taiwanese society. This paper aims to explore the following questions: What does “the South” mean today? What underlies “the making of the South” in various forms of artistic practice and representation? Is it a journey to explore individual or collective identity or is it an empty gesture catering to political correctness? Can “The South” as a method in contemporary curatorial practice unsettle the conventional hierarchies of art and prompt a rethinking of the ways in which art in peripheral regions are represented? Or does it simply reproduce the current hierarchies of the globalized art world? This paper offers an analysis the following exhibitions in order to explore the complex and multifarious representations of “the South”: *South Country, South of Country—Vietnamese & Taiwanese Artists Exchange Project* (2012) and *The South—An Art of Asking and Listening* and *The Hidden South* (2017).



<sup>1</sup> The content of this article was presented at the “Contemporary Curating Rethink: In the Context of Asia and Beyond” conference on 11-13 October 2019. It was subsequently published in the *Journal of Taipei Fine Art Museum*. Please see: Lu, Pei-Yi. “Making South: The ‘South’ as a Method in Taiwan Contemporary Curating.” *Journal of Taipei Fine Art Museum*, vol. 41, 2021, pp. 65-98. (<https://www.tfam.museum/journal/Main.aspx?id=46&ddlLang=zh-tw>) This article is a shortened version.





**Connecting the Nanyang: *South Country, South of Country—Vietnamese & Taiwanese Artists Exchange Project***

*South Country, South of Country—Vietnamese & Taiwanese Artists Exchange Project*, held between December 2, 2012 and February 3, 2013, is an exchange program initiated in 2012 by Vietnamese curator Nguyen Nhu Huy and Taiwanese curator Nobuo Takamori. Two alternative project spaces in the south of the two countries—“Zero Station” in Ho Chi Minh City and “Howl Space” in Tainan—were chosen for the program. As part of the residency exchange project, an artist from each country was sent to the other country every three months to collaborate with a local artist. Since September 2012, the residency program hosted a total of 12 artists from both Taiwan and Vietnam and 6 collaborative contemporary art projects were created.

In this residency and exchange program, the idea of “the South” is both diverse and multi-layered. Firstly, the program seeks to explore the ways in which regional exchanges engender connections within and across sites located in the periphery. In particular, it registers a shift away from the conventional Euro-American framework of art and circuits of exchange. By changing one’s reference point and orientation, “the South” becomes a possible alternative framework, echoing the question proposed by Nobuo Takamori— “Are we able to transform a one-way-street pattern in which other countries are subject to North-American-European centrism and move towards a network pattern that fosters multilateral connectivity?”<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the program addresses “the South within Asia” and questions the relations between Taiwan and Southeast Asia (South Seas) by asking “is Taiwan a part of Southeast Asia?” Cultural similarities (such as strong Chinese influences and affinities) between Taiwan and Vietnam, further, lay the foundation for artistic collaboration. In *Crossing the Line*, for instance, the female Vietnamese visual artist Ngo Thi Thuy Duyen and male Taiwanese architect Lin Hsin-Her have played wife and husband for a month. This collaborative project centering around “Vietnamese spouses in Taiwan” culminated in an intense performance, that gave cathartic expression to their emotions and feelings built up during the residency period. The curator Takamori argued that “they have brought about transformative effects on the circumstances they have been in, turning themselves from (passive) observers to (active) subjects who are emotionally involved. And, eventually, they themselves as subjects with agency are presented in artistic form to be gazed at by an audience (Nobuo Takamori 51). Lastly, “the South” refers to a kind of mentality. Compared with large-scale international exchange exhibitions and performance projects, *South Country, South of Country—Vietnamese & Taiwanese Artists Exchange Project*” is a small exchange experiment among artists and project spaces. By highlighting the ways these shared journeys facilitate mutual understanding, cultural exchanges and creative collaborations, this exchange and residency program represents a distinctive mode of experimental art-making and curating that resonates with the regions history, cultural and identity.

### **The South/Other: *The South—An Art of Asking and Listening***

In contrast to Tainan that was once the capital of Taiwan, Kaohsiung has always been the self-proclaimed “South” of Taiwan. Indeed, Kaohsiung has long been neglected due to the uneven distribution of economic resources between Southern and Northern Taiwan. As the city that has been sacrificed for the sake of the development and modernization of Taipei, the metropolitan capital; Kaohsiung has historically been viewed as the periphery to be provided with limited resources. Significantly, Kaohsiung is not only geographically located in the South, it is also considered “the South” in

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<sup>2</sup> “A tributary system” describes a situation in which the center of the art world (New York, Berlin, London, etc.) occupies a central position like an emperor in an ancient empire receiving tributes from other subordinate kingdoms. The centrality allows the power and capability to know everything and to obtain all exotics. Other peripheral areas rely on the empire’s views and translation to see other worlds. On the contrary, in “a network system”, places are able to foster mutual relations with one another and facilitate exchanges. For more details, please see Takamori, Nobuo. “From Tributary System to Networking: Redefined ‘International Art’ / Connection Processes between Peripheral Regions.” *Demolition Eve – Forum and Sound Performance*. Taipei: TheCube Project Space, 2013, pp. 180-182.

cultural, psychological and political terms. In 2017, curator Manray Hsu was invited by the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (hereafter KMFA) to develop a research-led exhibition titled *The South—An Art of Asking and Listening*. Taking place from June 3 to September 17 in 2017, the exhibition invited 26 international and Taiwanese artists to participate and present work in relation to “the South politics.” Within this context, “the South” appeared as a metaphor for the Other as it confronted the subject that is sacrificed, silenced, and rendered invisible in the project of modernity in Taiwan—the South/Other. Furthermore, the exhibition can be seen as giving expression to KMFA’s self-proclaimed aim to be the Museum of “the South” and its ambitious program of “South Plus: Constructing Historical Pluralism from The KMFA Collection.”

Three subthemes help structure sections within the exhibition. The first section is titled “Your Country Does Not Exist.” In this section, Chang En-Man’s *The Sea is Close to Our Tribe* (2015) utilizes demolished building materials found at the scenes of forced demolitions to create site-specific installation in the exhibition venue. Chang’s work highlights the tension between state laws and urban indigenous people’s right to housing and examines conflicts caused by capitalist developmentalism of modern cities. It sharply questions the actions of a modern state, addresses those who are neglected, and critically interrogates the way ordinary people are “Southernized/Otherized” by the state apparatus. The second section, “Ask for the South,” is named after the eponymous song by singer-songwriters Lin Sheng Hsiang and Chung Yung-feng. The effects of industrialization, such as the decline of rural areas and the subsequent exodus of the younger generation from the countryside, represents the grim reality of modernization and the societal pursuit of economic developments. The documentary photography work by Chung Sheng-hsiung and Hsu Cheng-tang, *South Wind*, investigates pollution caused by the Sixth Naphtha Cracking Complex of Mailiao Refinery and its calamitous effects on local residents and the environment. In the third section, “From *Wandering at Ease* to Macroscale Aesthetics”, ecological catastrophes resulting from large-scale construction projects in a world premised on a developmentalist logic are documented, represented and reflected on by artists. This is allegorically depicted in Yang Shun-Fa’s photographic series *The Submerged Beauty of Formosa Series* (2016). Last but not least, the exhibition poetically concludes with the concept of “listening.” Sound artist Yannick Dauby’s *How Corals Think* speaks to crucial ideas that bring the show together: as a human being in the ecosystem, “listening” to the Other could be a way for us to understand and to know “the South” better.

*The South—An Art of Asking and Listening* critically brings “the South” into sharp relief while foregrounding the effects of its cultural, political and historical negligence. While the exhibition’s binary opposition of “North vs. South” and “centrality vs. periphery” reinforces the critical potential of the idea of the South, it also runs the risk of oversimplifying a complicated reality. “This exhibition involves two expanding dimensions which share a considerable overlap: firstly, the oppressed collectively constitute the abstract, general ‘South’; secondly, the exploited areas—the areas other than metropolitan Taipei— are read as concrete evidence to prove their becoming ‘the South,’ which even morphs into a kind of materialized aesthetics” (Huang 153). In other words, “the oppressed” is positioned as morally and politically “in the right;” and aligned

with “the South.” In my opinion, evoking the idea of “the South” to advance the pursuit of transitional justice not only has possible connotations of political correctness; it also obscures the complex and multilayered politics of “the South” in ways that undermines its potential to challenge the status quo and enact critical and transformative change.

### **Learning from the South: *The Hidden South***

*The Hidden South* is a public art project whose exhibition/performance venues are scattered along the South Link Highway within a 50-km span in four different townships (Daren, Dawu, Jinfeng, Taimali) in Taitung County. Held between May 26 and September 1 in 2018, it featured the work of 20 international and Taiwanese artists and 50 affiliated projects, exhibitions, performances, events, and workshops that were closely connected to the concept of this unconventional public art project. By bringing viewers to the townships along the South Link Highway and local tribes in the area, the project enabled the audience to acquire first-hand experience of site-specific art projects located amongst communities of indigenous tribes. The viewing public and participants were also able to familiarize themselves with the local area by “being physically present” on site.

The curatorial team adopted an approach that emphasized the close connection and proximity to the land and the time spent during the residency with the local tribes. Moreover, they prioritized artists who were “open to listen to what localness has to offer.” The project featured contemporary artists who were not from the local area, such as artist collective “LuxuryLogico.” Known for the precision in their design of artworks, the collective inevitably had to face the challenge of adapting their project to the local environment. LuxuryLogico’s original plan was deemed unfeasible after the team discovered that it could not be realized on site. They then had to redesign the work, *Rebirth*, according to demands of their local environment. Abandoned steel bars and rubbles found after typhoons were repurposed to create a hollow mountain-shape installation, as a response to the excessive mining of limestone in Eastern Taiwan. The work also represents a critical interrogation of the developmentalist view that “faith will move mountains,” noting how such a belief is disastrous to the environment.

In addition, this project also invited local indigenous people who “lead their lives artistically” to participate. There are no words for “art” or “artists” in the Paiwan language. Rather, the focus lies on the subtlety of the everyday and how they lead their daily lives. *Ina’s Garden of Memory*, created by Cudjuy Malijugau who is from a local Paiwan community, presented a garden made with plants native to Taiwan, common food plants in local indigenous culture, and drift wood. The work represents the profound wisdom drawn from indigenous people living harmoniously with nature. “The indigenous daily life is in itself a kind of artistic translation. It is not about the everyday aesthetics but particular ways and guiding principles to lead a life. That is why the concept of ‘art’ does not exist and the word is not part of their lexicon” (Hou). The local indigenous people who “lead their life artistically” could “easily, naturally shake up how ‘art’ itself is imagined and defined when they join the project and interact with its

framework using their own systems of linguistic expressions” (Yan 107).

Unlike large-scale art events that offer dazzling spectacles or art festivals in rural areas that aim to attract a huge crowd to make profit, *The Hidden South* foregrounds the suspension of logic and rational thought by presenting a journey in which the possibilities of understanding are opened up so as to enable a rediscovery of indigenous art(making). More than 50 events based on indigenous tribal cultures and life experience were planned, including artistic creation in residency projects, eco-tours, food-sharing workshops, and bonfire concerts. A feminine, non-mainstream, open model of curating was experimented through small events, in-person interaction, sharing and collaboration. Instead of being referred to as the “curator”, Eva Yi-Hua Lin considers “mediator between the cracks” a more precise description of her role in *The Hidden South*. “The South” in *The Hidden South*, therefore, does not refer to the geographical south. Rather, it is used to denote “a deeper spiritual state to be arrived at when existing knowledge and logical reasoning are forsaken to make space for the physical body to experience intuitive rediscovery of the world, to connect with nature” (Yan 109). In my opinion, *The Hidden South* presents the South as a space of potential and possibility and a deeper spiritual realm, one which is greatly valued; hence the significance accorded to “learning from the South.”

### **“The South” as a method in contemporary curating**

The term, “the South” has been gaining currency and becoming ubiquitous in contemporary cultural production and presentation. It has further shifted from its limited “geographical” connotations to more nuanced meanings encompassing a kind of sensibility, worldview or perspectives, and a method. When we take a closer look at the three aforementioned exhibitions, it is clear that “the South” conveys multiple meanings. It refers to the North-South divide within Taiwan and the regional scope of Southeast Asia (*South Country, South of Country*, 2012); it implicates the way the global South has been sacrificed in the project of modernity (*The South*, 2017); and it serves as an index of the geography and culture of indigenous peoples in Taiwan and Austronesia (*The Hidden South*, 2018). On one hand, “the South” is evoked to mark Taiwan’s multi-layered history of colonialism, its close connected to the ocean and the languages and cultures of Austronesia, and its pivotal location at the crossroads of Northeast and Southeast Asia. On the other hand, “the South” embodies a powerful affective force that evoke the imagining of a shared ethnic identity, one that seeks to accommodate the yearning for Taiwan’s cultural sovereignty. In this sense, “the South” is not simply a subject matter of exhibitions, it also a trope that contributes to a fundamental rethinking of the frameworks, methods and trajectories of contemporary curatorial practice. Exhibitions are curated to “present the South”, “fabricate the South”, “create the South,” and, furthermore, to continuously complicate the plural meanings of “the South” in relation to Taiwan. In other words, through the two aforementioned approaches, curating can be seen as an important contemporary instrument to reimagine and remake the cultural and geographical bearings of the South.

If, however, this “South Fever” is directly linked to governmental policy<sup>3</sup>, then “the South” as a method in curating may yield double-edged results. It can be difficult to make use of political resources and to have unconstrained autonomy in artistic activities at the same time. A lot of consideration is needed to determine whether one is catering too much to political correctness and how distant one should be from public funding schemes. Moreover, since “the South” can also be an instrument to create cohesion within a group of people (a nation, a region, a local area) and consolidate the value of particular identification, it is important to remind oneself of the risk of inciting extreme nationalism or over-romanticizing the local. In this context, the core value of “the South” curating should therefore aim at knowing oneself, knowing “the South” as it is (from one’s own peripheral positioning). A complex and layered understanding of the struggles of everyday life can be a starting point for a recognition that “the South” is not a site for the exotic projections and fantasies of “the North”; nor is it a cultural specimen to be collected or a utopian idea with which “the North” utilizes to invigorate itself. Quite the contrary, “the South” is a mode of being in and for itself, one that emerges from the foundation of reflexive practice “Feng/ Tu”<sup>4</sup>, “Craftsmanship/ Art” and “Sharing/ Common” through visions of plural Souths emerge. In so doing, the South finds itself in its own contexts and specificity, in which different rhythms of lives negotiate with one another for a shared and flourishing future.

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<sup>3</sup> In terms of cultural policy, the Ministry of Culture established “The Emerald Initiative” in 2013, to promote cultural exchanges between Taiwan and Southeast Asia, and in 2016, the Southeast Asia subsidy program “Youth Cultural Gardening Team” was initiated. In the same year, Tsai Ing-wen’s administration enacted the New Southbound Policy, in response to the shifts in global supply chains and the challenges and opportunities of engaging with emerging economies in the South. It is also a response to the drastic demographic change in Taiwan. As a result of this policy, more resources are being allocated to foster cultural exchanges between Taiwan and countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and Oceania.

<sup>4</sup> Feng/ Tu, 風 / 土 is a Mandarin Chinese term used to describe the environmental factors and social custom of a certain place.

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