Kitsch Now!

The journey of exploring kitsch spectacle

Jung-Wei CHANG
ABSTRACT

This thesis takes kitsch as the main research subject and inquires on the aesthetics of kitsch in our everyday life; in addition to retracing the background of myself, I also followed the thread, accumulating and digesting the historical context of kitsch through the gem of wisdom from many scholars' research, and then further reexamined and explored the things which are always fascinating but easily taken for granted all the time—— Taiwanese kitsch. In this thesis, I attempted to describe and document "Taiwan Kitsch" as much as possible, presenting a local aesthetic taste that has its own unique narrative. Furthermore, I even coined a new term “innocent kitsch” to describe this distinct local taste.

In the last half of the second chapter, this thesis also takes a look at other Asian countries, comparing and organizing more Asian concepts that are similar to kitsch, hoping to give readers a glimpse of the particular aesthetics in Asia that also share the kitsch genes. Finally, the chapter was wrapped up with argumentation of the inseparability of humans and kitsch, and the necessity of the existence of kitsch.

In the end, based on the literature references and personal insights, I listed some visual characteristics of the innocent kitsch and applied them to the experimental artworks. For instance, I attempted to check whether amping up or withdrawing some of the visual characteristics of kitsch would affect the nature of kitsch. Besides, with a personal interpretation of the innocent kitsch's inner characteristics, my practical series of artworks are well-documented at the end of this dissertation.

Although kitsch may not be considered pretty, it is unquestionable that kitsch will not be unlaughable.

Keywords: Kitsch, Kitsch and Cultural Industrialization, Modernity, Local Kitsch, Innocent Kitsch, Bad Taste, Kawaii, Kawaii Violence, Too-cool Culture
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my supervisor Max Ryynänen as a kitsch enthusiast for the intellectual insights and encouragement he has given me during my thesis all the time, which let me be able to dive deeper into a kitsch wonderland that I've never thought of before. Thanks to my peers in ViCCA who have offered me good advice and fascinating thoughts in the beginning. I am very grateful for the support and confidence in me from my grandmother, grandfather, father and mother who are so generous and bighearted. Appreciating the lifetime company of ñana, I miss you so much, you would live forever in my memory beautifully. And thanks to the people in Finland for being devoted to creating a very healthy and friendly learning environment for students. Also, thanks to me in the past for working hard, not giving up and finally making the right decision to be a part of Aalto University. Last but not least, thanks to my partner LO for staying with me in the whole journey, you make all challenges much more fun. Thank you all, WHOLEHEARTEDLY.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
CONTENTS

1. PREFACE: BUMPED INTO KITSCH 3
   1.1 Motive 3
   1.2 Get to Know the “So-called” Kitsch under The Historical Narrative 6
      1.2.1 Start from “The lively Arts: Kitsch, Ice Skating, and Other Attempts to Foster the Beautiful” by Max Ryynänen 6
      1.2.1-1 What is kitsch? What does it come from? 6
      1.2.1-2 Kitsch as A Born Rebel? 7
   1.2.2 Five Faces of Modernity 11
   1.3 “The” Kitsch I love - Innocent Kitsch 16

2. KITSCH’S FRATERNAL MULTIPLE BIRTHS SCATTERED AROUND THE EAST ASIAN 30
   2.1 Introduction: Kitsch in the early 21st century 30
   2.2 Anonymous Kitsch in Taiwan - Does there any local kitsch exist? 31
   2.3 Mutation or Native? Kitsch in North-east Asia 38
      -- Kawaii Culture in Japan and 土 [tǔ]酷 [kù] (too-cool) culture in China
      2.3.1 Japan — kawaii culture & kawaii violence 39
      2.3.2 China — Bureaucratic Mao kitsch & Too-cool culture in young generation 45
   2.4 Kitsch? - Why We Need Kitsch? 57
      It’s Survival Mode: the Submissiveness or Disobedience

3 THE CONCEPT AND FORMATION OF THE KITSCH WORK 59
   3.1 Stalking Project in Taiwan - The Spectacle of Taiwanese Kitsch 59
   3.2 The Characteristics collected for My Creation/Bad Art/ Great Trash 87

4 THE RECORD OF THE CONSTRUCTION AND ITERATION PROCESS OF MY WORK 90
   4.1 Work 1 : Inedible Dogs 90
   4.2 Work 2 : A Genuine Statue 97
   4.3 Work in processing: Flat Wreath 104

5 CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION - Kitsch in the Future 110

Bibliography 113
1. PREFACE: BUMPED INTO KITSCH

1.1 Motive

Kitsch perhaps seems low in taste, while it helps you to get “high” VISUALLY – It provides the most unusual psychedelic experiences, yet at the same time, it is so prevailing that it constitutes my most familiar everyday life.

I didn’t know what they belonged to at first.

They’re usually colorful, adorable, lovable, and corky. Marshmallow-like, despite their various forms and tint, they have the same flavor - sweetness seasoned with a tiny bit of salt.

Sometimes, the messages of their appearance are blunt - the suspiciously blunt makes the messages not belong to themselves instead, which, on the contrary, arouses my curiosity of their own stories beforehand (Where they came from? On what kind of reason they were decided to be created? What kind of missions had they been assigned? Who put those words/messages in their mouth?) They are, for me, extremely innocent. With childish aesthetic traits- a naive glance, chubby face, overall round silhouette, they are displayed on the selling shelf like a baby in a pram watching pedestrians. They seem to smile at you when you meet them, and then you figure out they do not especially smile at you. Perhaps just like babies, babies smile at whatever is moving in their underdeveloped eyes or just luckily they are right in the nice baby mode.
Settling so well on the shelves no matter how shabby stores are, they are conducting their jobs with perseverance and loyalty. Sometimes, if the selling environment is too dark and listless, smiles on their faces seem to be made out by pinning two fish hooks on both sides of their cheeks to produce a perfect, big, creepy smile. At this moment, the word “emotional labor” suddenly popped into my mind.

Then, one day, at a certain moment, I was told they were kitsch. (To be more specific, it was an occasion I was demonstrating my sculpture art piece to my friend, and tried so hard to describe what I like.) When the term “Kitsch” came to my world like an unexpected guest, it is like the plot in which a doctor told me that my blood type is B, but I have believed so hard I’m A type since I was born. (Or I was diagnosed with “Macuzcocaca”, while I have no idea what this term means?) (Anyway, how could someone be something that he has never heard before?)

They had thus been named since then. Whereas, nowadays, I am not so sure they are the traditional so-called kitsch or not.

My question is: if I have been living in an environment filled with Kitsch stuff/spirit my whole lifetime, why would I still be able to recognize this kind of unique group out?- Do fish know what water is?

When do I know I’ve been living in the atmosphere? Until I live without air? (This analogy seems not appropriate enough.) Does that mean the reason I could recognize kitsch things is that I’ve been to somewhere that has no/less kitsch? Or no matter where Kitsch appears, it has a sort of inherently invasive/alien sense? Why could kitsch always find its place all over the world?

Is that I like Kitsch itself or just the type I like was put into the bag called kitsch by some sort of social consensus? If the answer was the latter, then what does this specific anonymous concept mean to me all along time? When the tag so-called kitsch was put on it suddenly and violently, what would it reveal itself for me?

”Being is both revealed and obscured.”--Martin Heidegger

Inspired by the Phenomenological\(^1\) Method, I attempted to answer the above questions about kitsch by "describing and presenting" the essence of kitsch, clarifying the relationship between kitsch and me, and also figuring out why kitsch has a magical attraction to me. So, in this thesis, I will first collect Kitsch data from various sources without any preconceptions, and actively search for kitsch in my daily life. In the process of my research, I will first attempt to understand the definition of kitsch, including its context, and its modern

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\(^1\) The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), one of the pioneers of phenomenology, proposed that "consciousness is always a consciousness of something". Another important phenomenological philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), inherited and developed this concept, proposing "Existence precedes essence."
evaluation, then I will examine “the” (anonymous) kitsch I have encountered in my life from my own life experience. Through the above process, I will try to answer the purpose of my research, and explore what is the kitsch that I see. Then the tentative answer to those questions would also become nutrition and inspiration for constructing the new idea and hope to establish a personal view of creative expression. In the end, there would be a part documenting and presenting my personal series of artworks in the end.
1.2 Get to Know the “So-called” Kitsch under The Historical Narrative

1.2.1 Start from “The lively Arts: Kitsch, Ice Skating, and Other Attempts to Foster the Beautiful” by Max Ryynänen

1.2.1.1 What is kitsch? What does it come from?

In the historical part of kitsch, The kitsch scholar Max Ryynänen distinguish three waves of kitsch discussion in his On the Philosophy of Central European Art (2021) Chapter 4 “The lively Arts: Kitsch, Ice Skating, and Other Attempts to Foster the Beautiful”: The first wave appearing shortly before the Second World War saw kitsch an opponent of art and equal it as “pseudo-art”. Most of the debates on kitsch concentrate on everyday culture and only half of them are about “art” in the broadest sense. The most famous user of the concept at that time is Clement Greenberg, he made the concept famous by making it as broad-natured as it could.

The second wave of kitsch theory came after the first cracks in the modern system in the 1960s. According to Umberto Eco who published the first book on popular culture (Apocalittici e integrati), kitsch is still a concept that can be used of all arts and kitsch is included in “bad art”. Once “bad art” match the following condition, it could be seen as kitsch: a) the work analyzed as kitsch is sentimental in a way that does not leave much room for interpretation, and/or b) it plainly goes against the rules of good taste, and/or c) its makers borrows formal particles/pattern so that it looks like art. In the end of the second wave, Matei Călinescu’s discourse on kitsch, “Kitsch” (1989) in Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch and Postmodernism is the main idea historical work now, which indicates that the strong connection between modernity and kitsch, or in other words, kitsch embodies the essence of modernity. And seen as the most typical products of modernity and closely related to economic development, kitsch could be limited only by the market. At this moment, the balance of theories between pseudo-art and everyday knick-knacks start to be close to 50/50. Tomas Kulka’s article “Kitsch” (1989) and his book Kitsch and Art (1994) defines kitsch mostly as bad art, whereas “being bad” is more related to artistic expression or lack of novelty rather than the technical aspect. The overall critiques towards kitsch were slowly turning into the positive side.

The third wave, developing after the 1990s, is the kitsch which I’ve been more familiar with, the theories of kitsch set their foot well in the knick-knack side, becoming more gendered/feminine, pinky, glitterish and more material-specific made (porcelain, or for me, plastic). And not too long, the concept is way more used in the

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knick-knick side than painting. Kept or exaggerated the traits of being sentimental, colourful, kitsch is recognized commonly in a contemporary sphere in 2000s, and could say the fact that Takashi Murakami, Yoshitoshi Nara and Jeff Koons being active at that time has a great deal to do with it. Being way more broadly known as the object form, the concept of kitsch gains more chance to be deconstructed, reconstructed, absorbing new-coming and even creating more space for interpretation.

Nowadays, still in the beginning of the 2000s, kitsch has moved on to the next page under my observation, especially in the fields of fashion, entertainment, theatre, romance, nostalgia, parties and festivals. Not merely how broad the domain of it has been extended or how active it has been, more importantly, part of the kitsch seems to be a symbol of the rebellious spirit, like the colourful street graffiti or the 1987 Madonna's Iconic Jean Paul Gaultier Cone Bra. kitsch is no longer just about the objects that are put out there, but about the person who is able to identify kitsch (even not knowing what it is called) and use it to represent his/ her/their personal qualities.

### 1.2.1-2 Kitsch as A Born Rebel?

In many discourses, kitsch exists as an opponent of art, and therefore, when exploring kitsch, it is often necessary to examine what art is. However, while studying kitsch, I realized that more time has been spent on discussing art and the opposite of art as the meaning of kitsch, which makes me wonder if kitsch is still being discussed as a shadow/dependent of art even now.

Why do we need to talk about art? In Ryynänen's book, he thought that it is meaningless to discuss "what is art". Also, take the interesting question that Ryynänen raises at the beginning of the kitsch chapter: why is ballet classified as an art, but ice skating is a sport? He finds a tiny crack in human categorization and definition.

Ice skating, which originated as an everyday activity on ice, was accidentally created as an aesthetically pleasing form of expression through play, but was not discovered by the upper classes of Central Europe as the first and then was crowned as an art form. It certainly would not have been as natural as ballet to be in the art category.

After reading this passage, I do agree that studying the "aesthetic preferences" of a specific group of people (18th century, Central European, upper class, male) offers a glimpse into the lives of the privileged in the context of time and space. However, it turns out that the intrinsic question "What is art?" which seems the most important
is actually not the most important (but it may be relatively important to someone who has a strong desire to be part of that system).

The definition of art changes over time. Regardless of academic or institutional perceptions of art, in modern times, the use of the term "art" in everyday lives has become mostly a synonym for "incomprehensibility", e.g., a display of beauty that cannot be easily understood or appreciated, an overrated status that cannot be easily recognized, the secret of how to live with grace and elegance without the pressure of everyday trifles... and so on. This use of the term reveals the disconnection between art and the everyday world, and a certain risk that art becomes something that can be dictated by certain people who are often powerful and familiar with the system, whether before or now.

The key factor in ballet being classified as an art, but still considered kitsch in my eyes, is the "ease" that ballet has. It is like a lullaby before bedtime, a gift wreath decorated with blooming flowers, a salute to human power, a rave party without a hint of self-doubt. Such euphoria, indulgence, absence of position, non-offence, non-quarrel, is a happy place amid chaos, this kind of sense of ease can also be a good friend to a dictator.

Perhaps discussing what is the relationship between kitsch and art is as meaningless as discussing what art is—if Kitsch himself could speak, I guess he'd stare at me like a gossip reporter and tell us to stop meddling with his relationship with art.

No principles, what kitsch has is a primitive, survivalist nature. You can say he is "unprincipled" and leans towards the winning side, just as a small non-governmental organization would get close to and support a large political party even with different ideas of most issues just to achieve their main goals. But who is qualified to impose their moral values on such decisions and compromises they made for survival? In contrast to goal-driven, totalitarian states, which eradicate those who stand in the way, kitsch flourishes without causing harm and hatred with their faith in their lives.

I have observed that people who claim to like kitsch can be roughly divided into two categories: those who can identify what kitsch is (and they are basically middle class, educated people) and those who use it a lot in their lives but don't know what kitsch is or have never heard of it.

In the former case, I interviewed a student who was studying for a master of arts in fine arts at the Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan and was an enthusiastic collector of kitsch vintage decorations, she said that her interest and love for these decorations were actually rooted in her childhood memories of the domestic decorations surrounding her.
When I asked her if she was as confused as I was about how to call this visual style, she said that because she had heard the term “kitsch art” early when she was in college (and even felt that the term was somewhat overused in art schools), so she was not really bothered by naming it. Yet at the same time, she admits that the term seems to live only in the academic field of art and that no one has ever heard of it outside of this sphere.

The latter case is about one of my friends who like to dress in a style that has a lot of kitsch visual elements, however, when I interviewed her, she did not have a strong perception that such a style is actually related to kitsch, and she claimed that she and most of her friends with similar dressing preference initially approached this style from social media³. Despite not knowing that there is an aesthetic concept that can be used to describe the styles they love, these twenty-something young people are intuitively choosing to re-wear these seemingly out-of-date items such as the teeny-tiny Baby Tees, low-rise jeans, miniskirts, velour track sets and playful kitsch accessories such as Fruit Stripe Enamel Bracelets (some call this as Y2K style⁴). Perhaps they, through this style, could enjoy a little romantic nostalgia vibe from these items, or consider them as a symbol of rebellion against the mainstream society.

Although it is not possible to arbitrarily conclude what age group likes kitsch, at least in my observation, young people who like kitsch and are under 35 years old are particularly happy to show kitschy clothing on themselves. However, middle-aged and middle-class people over 35 who like kitsch tend to express their interest in kitsch in their conversation or to appreciate kitsch as a kind of modern art. For example, my friend's father is a fifty-something middle-class man who is following the fashion trend. Although he doesn’t wear Y2K style clothes, he could still show his open-minded and little defensive attitude towards kitsch or Y2K style in the conversation, i.e. "I don’t understand, but I respect other people's taste". However, I found that he has a great acceptance of "Urban Art/Street Art/Pop art" and its derivatives, for example, he collects Nara Yoshitomo’s dolls, buys Yayoi Kusama's pumpkin decoration, or wears a T-shirt with Kaws' Companion image printed on it. While there is merely a fine line between the fields of "Urban Art/Street Art/Pop art" and "kitsch art", or even they overlap occasionally.

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³ The most used social media here are Instagram or TikTok.

⁴ In fashion, Y2K is a contemporary trend covering the late '90s and early-to-mid 2000s styles. Y2K fashion has a distinctive style resulting from blending the millennium’s pop culture and tech advancements. There are plenty of nostalgic influences impacting the Y2K fashion trend. The end of the last millennium was defined by women who ruled the pop culture of those times, such as Destiny’s Child, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Elle Woods in Legally Blonde, and Regina George of Mean Girls.
Back to the title of this chapter: Is kitsch a born rebel? I don't think so. He can only be described as an underdog survival strategy. Speaking of rebellion, I think that rebellion often requires more than just what it claims, in fact, its real purpose is buried behind the demands. For example, some women protesting for abortion rights are not just fighting for the option that women can have abortions, but furthermore for the government to understand that women are against the government's power to supervise and control anyone's body. Another example is that there was a period of time some children would deliberately choose the anti-A option because their parents asked them to choose the A option. However, they choose the anti-A option not because they particularly like it, but more to show their "disobedience" attitude. Thus, it can be said that "disobedience" is a symbolic demeanour. A simple footnote to what I see as "rebellion" can be found in one of the slogans shouted by the students in Protests of 1968 in France: "Il est interdit d'interdire (means "it is forbidden to forbid")". Yes, these moving groping and arrogant righteousnesses are what kitsch does not understand at all and decides to ignore. Kitsch is like a prostitute standing in the dark of the street, smoking a cigarette and looking coldly at the values, social culture, and social norms developed by those humans and searching for her target for paying the bill and making ends meet.

Kitsch is a virus, clinging to the beings he thinks can give him life, growing, mutating and strengthening himself in flesh and blood that already exists. Kitsch has been a parasite of art, but definitely not only of art. Kitsch lives in a world where there is no God, no faith, no enthusiasm, no perseverance, no dignity to uphold, to live is the only thing that matters.
1.2.2 Five Faces of Modernity

This is an art critique, a cultural biography of modern aesthetics. The "five faces" of modernity mentioned in the title of the book are: modernity, avant-garde, decadence, postmodernism and kitsch. Therefore, it is also a commonly mentioned book when studying kitsch.

Kitsch is arguably one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics. At first glance, it seems to have a basic consensus - cheap, mass reproduction. But if a real Rembrandt hung in a millionaire's home elevator would undoubtedly make for kitsch. Why's that a classic work of art, a real Rembrandt, expensive and one and only, would be eventually considered to be a total kitsch paradigm? Călinescu takes this example to point out that kitsch has a "law of aesthetic inadequacy" and then especially reminds us that while determining whether an object is kitsch always involves considerations of purpose and context.

Even in the face of such a difficult concept, Călinescu boldly asks several questions about kitsch: What is the relevance of kitsch to modernity? How has modernity influenced the development of kitsch? Is kitsch merely "bad taste"? Does kitsch ruin so-called aesthetics? Why does kitsch enjoy a strange kind of negative prestige even in some of the most sophisticated intellectual circles? What kind of perspectives can we use to observe and analyze kitsch? What attitude should we take towards kitsch today? The book references a wide range of material spanning multiple fields, countries, and eras, and a wide range of views that either Călinescu agrees or disagrees with are all put into this book, giving the reader a more multifaceted approach to kitsch, and with Călinescu's unique insights, the book gradually unravels these questions, which allows readers gradually get the directions for answering by themselves.

As a sociological concept, modernity is always inseparable from the process of modernization - industrialization, urbanization, secularization, civil society, colonialism, nationalism, nation-state, etc. However, the process and result of modernity are not linear and single. It is actually full of contradictions and confrontations. Nevertheless, modernity as a cultural or aesthetic concept seems more often to be in opposition to modernity as a social field. Călinescu concluded here that, kitsch, technologically as well as aesthetically, is one of the most typical products of modernity, but kitsch is in no way a direct consequence of the rise of aesthetic modernity. The appearance and growth of kitsch are the results of the intrusion of other modernity -- capitalist technology and business interest -- in the domain of the arts.

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Kitsch was brought into being by the industrial revolution, at first as one of its marginal products. In time, the world stressed consumption, old temperance, restraint, and saving habits tend to appear as outmoded relics of the past. Consumption has even become almost a duty--a way of helping the economic health of the nation. In addition, due to the instability and discontinuity of modernity, instant enjoyment has become the only "reasonable" thing to strive for. In this condition, "the amusement industry" grew and companies found a profitable market in the needs of popular culture. At the same time, advanced technology made it possible to produce at low cost, so unsurprisingly kitsch became one of the core elements of civilized life, and distraction or fun became the most characteristic products of capitalism.

Reformulating in a cultural context Marx's famous theory: "the mode of production manufactures not only certain commodities but also the need for precisely those commodities." Because the producer created the "need", the people clamour for what they are going to get anyhow. In such a world, uniqueness and rarity are no longer needed and have become anachronistic. In this view, consumers are passive and their participation is limited to the choice of buying or not buying. Kitsch seems to be a tool for the bosses to make a profit and maintain their class rule. In the meantime, although the number of consumers has increased under modernization, opulent and fastidious consumers become more scarce, leading both artisans and artists to produce with great rapidity a large quantity of imperfect "art commodities".

In general, art was created and bought mainly as a sign of social status, and art no longer had to perform its difficult aesthetic function. As consumable art, kitsch gradually became one of the quintessential products of modernity - a "conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure".

The above way of thinking about kitsch combines the two perspectives of "seeing kitsch as a product/style of a certain category of artists/makers/designers." and "seeing kitsch from the vantage point of the consumer who is kitsch-man." (kitsch-man can be understood as kitsch-lover). The former regards kitsch as the contemporary form of the Gothic, Rococo, Baroque. The artists/makers/designers apply definite sets of rules, and communicate varieties of highly predictable messages in stereotyped "aesthetic" packages, treating the consumer as average and passive. This view means that kitsch intends to offer instant satisfaction of the most superficial aesthetic needs of a wide public. In such a hypothesis, not one of kitsch items has been made because the maker enjoyed the making; not one has been bought because kitsch would give anyone any pleasure, but solely because each of these things is accepted as a symbol of a particular social status. The latter regards that consumers are willing to accept the "aesthetic lie" of kitsch, and are accustomed to products that are based on quantity and the instant beauty surrounding. The
kitsch-man can perceive even genuine works of art as kitsch. The author categorizes these two views of thinking as conclusions from the "aesthetic-moral approach".

However, Călinescu criticized both of these arguments which treats kitsch as nothing more than deception -- it is true that kitsch-lovers may seek fame or an enjoyable illusion of prestige, but their pleasure does not stop there. For example, kitsch also fulfills the psychological function of escaping from the banality and meaninglessness of contemporary day-to-day life, and once seen from this viewpoint, kitsch is an exact response to the widespread sense of spiritual vacuum in modern times. Besides, both arguments ignore the fact that there are some artistic elites who deliberately use kitsch as a form of ironic and intellectual amusement, such as Camp, which is often hard (indeed impossible) to distinguish from kitsch. Camp uses its special and unique sensibility to reverse the image of kitsch, bringing kitsch and Camp together into the domain of "high art". As if "bad taste", consciously acknowledged and pursued, actually could outdo itself and become its own clear-cut opposite. Moreover, by making "bad" art become an act that requires much effort, Camp responds to the general criticism of Kitsch as a "mental passivity, spiritual laziness and the sin of sloth." It could be said that Camp receives help from kitsch to satisfy its need to satirize the "art", and kitsch also takes a cue from Camp and learns about its sensibility to become "high".

All these arguments show how complex a concept kitsch is, and show that it cannot be defined from a single vantage point. After all, there is no "beauty" that could be exempt from the two aforementioned criticisms. In this world, even natural beauty can be traded by postcards, and landscapes can also be condemned as beauty or ugliness simply based on whether they resemble the works of any prestigious painter.

Therefore, the author proposes the third way to analyze kitsch -- "kitsch is the specific kitsch elements that appear in the process of mass production and diffusion of art", which is the "historicalsociological approach". In this view, such kitsch elements are clearly non-intentional, that is, they are not planned in advance by the producers but are rather the fatal consequences of modern technology's intervention in the art world. This view is also the historical interpretation of the "amusement industry" mentioned in the beginning, but refutes its ultimate conclusion. Călinescu said: When our world is full of kitsch, it is not that capitalism wants to alienate the masses, nor that capitalism wants to divert the masses from their revolutionary vocation, but simply because kitsch is inevitable, and when we recognize kitsch as the "normal" art of our time, we have to recognize that it is the obligatory starting point of any aesthetic experience, namely, that the simplest and most natural way toward "good taste" is through bad taste.

Călinescu holds an optimistic attitude towards kitsch and views its existence in a more neutral way. At the time it was a liberating light for kitsch, especially, it had
been stigmatized for a long time, and since then the positive discussion of kitsch has increased. Yet the concluding words at the end of the kitsch chapter made me meditate -- “If kitsch followers emphasize "work beautiful", then I must emphasize "work well".” summed up by Călinescu.

Undeniably, this book affirms that kitsch brings people fantastic fun, but in its hidden words, it still assumes that people who only like kitsch and do not want to like "high art" are mental passivity and spiritual laziness. Then this falls into a fallacy because if I were a kitsch-lover and I had tried to get to know "high art" but I eventually did not like it at all, I would be accused of passivity and laziness, because I must not be intelligent and active enough to like "high art", and there is no possibility that I could not like it even though I have already tried my best. When Călinescu issues the moral order: "work well", it means that kitsch must be considered an element of evil in the value of art. But in fact, everything that is too far is as bad as not enough (for example, democracy goes to an extreme and becomes populist, which is also a worthy warning). Then why does no one want to warn that "high art" must "work well"?

Even though there are some points in the book that I would like to discuss more with Călinescu, it has still created a way for kitsch which many want to be cleansed and to survive. For instance, by using the inevitable result of modernization as an argument, kitsch was given a more innocent look. And at the end of the kitsch chapter, it gives a more optimistic future to a world full of kitsch -- "art, even when exploited, misunderstood, and misused, does not lose its value and aesthetic truth."

**Appendix: Adjectives/Describing of kitsch**

As kitsch is the only "bad taste" term that has achieved truly international status, I collected adjectives and descriptive phrases that have been used on kitsch in this book, both positive and negative, and even contradictory (ex. Triteness/Open-ended indeterminacy, Obnoxious/The power to please). Hopefully, I can outline the possible appearance of the complex kitsch by presenting these phrases. Please feel free to experience those words which match the image of kitsch in your mind!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grotesque parallel of &quot;expendable art&quot;</th>
<th>Modern illusion that beauty may be bought and sold.</th>
<th>Affordable, relatively cheap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art as recreation and</td>
<td>Easiness of access</td>
<td>Effortless enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainement</td>
<td>Pre-Digested</td>
<td>Patterned</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art that has a predictable audience, predictable effects, predictable rewards</td>
<td>Both to &quot;save&quot; time (don’t want to have to spend a lot of time to make myself happy.) and to &quot;kill&quot; time (escape from meaningless present)</td>
<td>Easily enjoyed beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient art: It’s easier to satisfy people and easier to make than high art.</td>
<td>Want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously.</td>
<td>Compulsive consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art that is produced for immediate consumption.</td>
<td>The conception of art as play in exchange for financial gain</td>
<td>Commercial availability: can be obtained by anyone willing to buy it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception and self-deception</td>
<td>Imitation, forgery, counterfeit, false</td>
<td>The hypocrisy of luxury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo art</td>
<td>Artistic rubbish</td>
<td>Bad art, bad taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental passivity</td>
<td>Spiritual laziness</td>
<td>The sin of sloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conspicuous consumption &amp; conspicuous leisure</td>
<td>Vulgar showoff</td>
<td>Banality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tritteness</td>
<td>The kind of art that normally and inescapably surrounds us.</td>
<td>Imitations of everything -- from primitive or folk art to the latest avant-garde, any masterpiece is available for &quot;home use&quot; in copies of different sizes and materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>Sketchy</td>
<td>Aesthetic infantillism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle of mediocrity: guarantee that the works will be favorably received.</td>
<td>Repugnant</td>
<td>Distasteful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgusting</td>
<td>Stylistic overdetermination</td>
<td>Infinite capacity for acquiring beautiful junk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pretty, cute</td>
<td>The power to please</td>
<td>Induces relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant beauty</td>
<td>Immediacy of access &amp; immediacy of effect</td>
<td>Vague hallucinatory power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended indeterminacy</td>
<td>Unprejudiced</td>
<td>Blandly tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hominess</td>
<td>Sentimental</td>
<td>Precondition for the all-embracing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager for new experience</td>
<td>Promise of an easy &quot;catharsis.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 “The” Kitsch I love - Innocent Kitsch

“The” kitsch I normally see in my Asian culture circle is clear and blunt, like an object that comes with a guarantee of happiness, for instance, kitsch follows certain “can’t be wrong” norms in this world (no offence / submissive): innocent eyes, weak and flimsy and appearance traits that look easy to be manipulated. For me, the furry ornament could be the representative example for this case, which would be elaborated below.

Compared to the mild kitsch above, another case I took called Tai-lu Chickens Ornament takes the same visual strategy, while the whole circumstance is furthermore lifted up to a different level — the scene starts to go out of control, bombing the viewers’ brains with the super sweet smoothie power. However, generally speaking, I would put both in the same catalogue called Innocent Kitsch.

The showcase for those innocent fellows:

[The first example]

The furry ornament
The information collected about this antique ornament so far: it was a popular local inexpensive handicraft (not quite an imported product) more than 30 years ago (about the 1990s), and was popular among people in their 20s at that time (about 5-60 years old now).

The specialized brush for making furry texture:

The instructions of making knitting ornaments in 1977:
The typical appearance are dogs, parrots, Mandarin ducks and other animals. Dogs are mainly Shih Tzu dog and Pomeranian dog (small toy dogs)

Shih Tzu dog:  Baby Pomeranian dog:

The Champion in toy dog group in Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show Instagram:
The parrots ornament:

Mandarin ducks:

The furry Mandarin ducks ornament:

It was also used as a gift or a wedding present (especially animals with love connotations, such as Mandarin ducks), and was usually presented in a special glass display box.

Nowadays, it is no longer possible to buy the new products and the material package for the production.

This ornament can be said to be my favorite kitsch object. In terms of shape, they usually bring the viewer a visually soft touch, the species are mostly non-aggressive puppies or birds, and their expressions are usually quiet, sluggish, and submissive (or even if they are
aggressive, they are within the tolerable level of harm). The common formula is: pairs of furry dolls as the main focus, the symmetrical and stable configuration from a frontal angle. The typically additional accessories are little bows and plastic flowers, implying the beauty of the natural and how decent it is.

From the interview, I learned that the tools and techniques used to make it were extremely time-consuming: it was made by weaving the overall shape with wool first and then combing it through a super small steel brush that was placed on my fingers. This closely "hair-related" object somehow echoes the theme of my previous sculptures (I try to create some life/emotion for non-living objects via adding hair to them. The reason why I added hair to the sculpture and even braided it - because I think human emotions never seem to be free of hair/fur, whether it's a monkey helping each other scratch their hair, parents braiding children's hair, or human combing the fur of pets. The weird intimacy of the hair makes me wonder: am I irrationally emotionally affected by the hair attached to the object (a primitive human impulse), or am I (sensationally) successfully implied by the behind story that someone put long hours and effort into producing this neat and sophisticated hairstyle?

To be honest, I can say that I fell in love with it instantly at the first sight, and at that moment, I didn't care whether it was art or not. I was probably indulging in the softest, most frivolous of relationships. If art as a profession is a kind of work in which the creator provides ideas having "difference" from others, whereas, I am purely fascinated here by the void where there are no ideas it offers.

[The Second example]

Tai-lu Chickens Ornament (帶路雞 pronounced Tai-lu-chi, means Leading-way Chickens)

The custom of "leading the way" originates from Hakka legend - it is said that many years ago, chickens brought the Hakka ancestors to this land (presumably the southern part of China) and thus the Hakka community came into being. As a token of gratitude, the custom of "Tai-lu Chickens" (which means the chickens which are able to lead the way to a brighter future" was introduced. The specific method is to bring a pair of male and female chickens from the old home when moving to a new residence. This pair of chickens must be kept in the new house for 100 days before they can be slaughtered. Extended to the traditional wedding custom, the bride's parents give the bride and groom a gift when the bride returns to her home for the first time after her marriage.

In the traditional custom, a rooster and a hen are tied to the feet with a 9-foot-long red color, and the rooster and hen are placed in a flower basket for the daughter to take back to her in-laws’ home in the hope of leading the couple to form a happy family.
Early traditions used live roosters and hens, but now plastic, crystal, gold, lucite, sewn or dolls are often used instead of live animals.

In a way, perhaps it could be called regional kitsch, which is strongly related to the land, so to speak, and fairly site-specific, and is a bit like reindeer furs products and elk teddies in Finland.

In particular, I would like to discuss the changes in the customs/decorations of the Tai-lu Chickens Ornament in the modern context and my personal observations on this.

Older and more rustic ornaments of the chicken are very rare and only antiques remain (Can not be purchased in general stores these days.) :

Which is still available, mostly in local grocery stores, and is a gift style that relatively few people will buy (first, the packaging is too simple, too cheap, and may not be decent enough for gift-giving; secondly, the style is relatively outdated aesthetics in today's mainstream society):
The three pictures above can be said to be the prototype version of the traditional custom when it first entered modern industrialized society. Later on, more new styles were developed using different materials, such as synthetic-fabric-made muppets at affordable prices and crystal or gold dolls at higher prices.

Synthetic fabric made Muppets:

Ornaments made of coloured glaze/ crystal:

Ornaments made of gold:
This type of ornament can be said to be one of the popular greetings that my predecessors, the middle-class people (now about 80 years old, that is, the post-war baby boom generation, born around the 1940s), would like to prepare for their children (born in the 1960s). These ornaments are mainly made of plastic and have bright colors (high lightness and saturation level), intricate shapes, and are usually made up of basic elements that symbolize good luck: a rooster and a hen symbolize mutual support between husband and wife, chicks and eggs represent blessings for early pregnancy and childbirth, gold ingots represent great wealth and prosperity, pineapples represent good luck, and sugar cane represents having a sweety relationship with a happy ending. Pork and bamboo are used to symbolize good luck and avoid bad luck (originally, a bamboo pole was hung with pork on the bride's car on her wedding day, but nowadays it is rare because it is said to be afraid of scratching the car. The ornaments also omit the pork and use only bamboo). Other elements that are added are rice (representing a good harvest), flowers of any kind, couplets with auspicious phrases, auspicious combined characters (a large character made by combining 3-4 Chinese characters), and red lanterns (a decoration that is hung during festivals and good events).

Interestingly, lace elements from the West (synthetic lace) are used extensively, and sometimes even simple English words (LOVE) are interspersed.

The deluxe version developed from the original prototype:
The Tai-lu chickens Ornaments with English words for decoration:

The Tai-lu chickens Ornaments with Western-style porcelain dolls:

When I found this Western-style porcelain doll ornament, I felt a new level of incongruity in the picture, like staring at a super huge cream cake, holding a spoon and not knowing where to start scooping it up. Even before the cake was in my mouth, my brain was already tingling with sweetness.

In this small glass box, I may be witnessing the huge event that was involuntarily hosted by East and West hand in hand, or even a glimpse of a peaceful world in the future. So I looked into the background of this item, hoping to learn more about how this world-peace item was made by a traditional wedding gift store. But all I got was the banal product description: the
If I were a newlywed today who had to make an order for this ornament, but was forced to have a Western-style wedding in the ornament, and could not choose my own wedding dress - or even a heterosexual marriage (surrounding by chickens) - a political marriage conspiracy suddenly replaces the initially peaceful atmosphere that a perfect world where there is only harmony between species and the love that accepts diversity unconditionally. Looking at this glass box like a nature observation box, however, even after looking at it for a long time, I do not understand how the ecology works in it, as if I have accidentally fallen into a fantasy world where logic disappears and thinking is useless. This can be said to have surpassed the essence of aesthetic deception and self-deception of kitsch art as originally described by Matei Călinescu, and there is no way to even glimpse the "original" through this work. In this world, all external appearances and details are no longer important, all accessory elements exist as a symbol (a rooster and a hen symbolize mutual support between husband and wife, gold ingots represent great wealth and prosperity, pineapples (a rooster and a hen symbolize mutual support between husband and wife, gold ingots represent great wealth and prosperity, pineapples represent good luck and so on.)The meaning of the symbols is the only thing that matters. The reason why viewing this work causes sorts of confusion is that we try to interpret it as a narrative, but perhaps the best way to comprehend it is to see it as a child's sticker book- where symbols, generally being very worn, are rippled off, repeatedly put on, and arranged like stickers and gradually growing into a painting, a poem, or a set of codes that could decode the creator/maker's personal preferences.

In addition, I find the original prototype of the Tai-lu chicken ornament and its derivatives, as well as its background, particularly interesting. These ornaments were usually given as wedding gifts to children in the 1940s. The gift was full of various techniques of modern industry, such as the technique of making various plastic products (at least 10-20 different techniques were included in one ornament for plastic alone), elements symbolizing a broad international vision (including the so-called Western elements representing the highest civilization of mankind), a great fusion of different materials (porcelain, plastic, glass, etc.), and an efficient mass production model that kept prices always affordable.

The whole ornament is like a small showcase of industrial achievements and a miniature carnival of human technologies. The fact that this ornament was qualified enough to be presented as a gift shows that the 1940s generation considered it to be an object that is decent enough, which also shows their ardent yearning for modernization, their fantasy and the actual distance between them and the reality of industry (it is because of the lack of understanding of modernism and industrial society that leaves the room for imaginary fantasy).
Yet what seems to be such a generous gift is arguably seen as a sweet but burdensome gift by people in the 1960s (that is, my older generation). First of all, I observed what happened to these gifts: they might be placed in the living room of the newlyweds' home during the wedding period as a decoration to show respect to the parents when they received it from them; after the wedding, or 1-2 years after the wedding, they would be packed up and often piled up in the dark corners of the house covered by dust, or they will be thrown away with other clutter at one of the household cleanings. Obviously, The older generation is not keen on this kind of aesthetic.

However, the discarded ornaments did not fade away and began to be re-gazed at or collected in the 1990s generation of subculture. Is this the same phenomenon that often happens in the fashion world - the destiny of a predetermined reincarnation of beauty? Or was it just used as a symbol of a small rivalry between generations? Or is it a manifestation of the attitude of each generation towards human industry (praising or degrading materialism)?

Just a list of Taiwanese "Innocent kitsch" is enough to shake Călinescu's research on kitsch, and here I see another life form of kitsch outside of the European kitsch - a less ambitious, less systematic (or back to the handcrafted approach), and more casual version of kitsch.

Supplementary notes:

It can be said that it is the latest modern version of the Tai-lu chicken ornament, which are in smaller sizes and cut down the general proportion of plastic. Instead, mainly using immortal/eternal flowers (immortal flowers are real flowers, also called preserved flowers, or "flowers that never die". It is said that immortal flowers first appeared in Germany in the 1990s. It is believed that a German scientist invented the technology of immortal flowers, and later became popular in France and other Western European countries, and was highly appreciated by the white-collar and upper class in the West. 2012 to present, "immortal flowers" are very popular in the Japanese market, with a demand of at least 100 million flowers per year.) combined with some globalized iconic cartoon characters toys.
The Tai-lu chicken ornament with eternal flowers, Aladdin (Disney cartoon) characters and Western-style house elements:

So, As a kitsch lover, what sort of lover am I?

Take the case of the cat lantern as an example, I try to record here the process of how I resonated with kitty kitsch:

This is 2020 Taipei Lantern Festival Main Lantern Installation which is called “躲貓貓” (which could be paraphrased as hide-and-seek” and be literally translated as “hiding cats” in regional dialect).

The final presentation of the lantern installation.

When I saw the installation work, I felt like I was witnessing a sort of spectacle, in the meanwhile, it seems that I’ve entered a fantasy. It should be noticed that the fantasy is not just a visual glitter or pink color, but material amazement that has never been seen before, and this amazement is mostly due to the illogical development and bold execution.

I lost track of the artist/designer’s creative thinking trajectory.
After that, because I was so interested, I searched for more information about it on the Internet. As a result, I found its original design drawing.

There is, I think, a critical gap between the design and the actual finished product, so much so that the finished product even has an unexpectedly repulsive and joyful allure. Taking away the visual disproportion, the incompetent of the lighting (partial lighted the cat’s limbs), and the lifeless mechanical eyes forced into motion, I think this work instead provides me with a blank space/void in my mind - a narrative space where memory was lost and waiting to be filled - and I would never know what actually happened during the execution of the work. Therefore, when I imagine the changes and twists in the artist's mind during the production process (he may have started with enthusiasm, but at the end of the process, he realized that things were not going as expected, thus he began to experience feelings of disappointment, helplessness, self-loathing and finally obedience to reality) Then, because of my personal imaginary plot/scenario, a strong sympathy and an irrational affection couldn't help but stroke my heart.

Although kitsch is seen as superficial, overly pretentious and without depth, I still could feel the realness and sense the sympathy for it. (Compared to the "perfect, infallible, seemingly awesome" image that creative culture most startups stress, I feel more intimate with kitsch.) Speaking of the fact that kitsch was usually seen as “superficial” in a certain sense, yet what is the exact sense we are talking about? Intellectually? As an experience with a sense of time and depth? Or in the typical criteria that art should perform its difficult aesthetic function in the art sphere? From my perspective, people who consider kitsch to be simple, easy and superficial could only reflect the fact of his lack of interest in the subject, rather than the fact that there is nothing worthy to think about. However, to be fair, shouldn’t the depth of thought be actively created by the conscious subject himself? Additionally, it is undeniable that kitsch is a great player that it has been sugar-wise and marketing-wise enough to make itself gradually become one of the quintessential products of modernity.
As I wrote above, I believe in the realness it offers and I especially like the absurdity and humour in its visual culture. Because the more absurd and unorthodox, the more playful.
2. KITSCH’S FRATERNAL MULTIPLE BIRTHS SCATTERED AROUND THE EAST ASIAN

2.1 Introduction: Kitsch in the early 21st century

“Rising sales of our kitsch lines already support signs of a growing appeal worldwide” - Flying Tiger

In an article titled "The timeless ubiquity of kitsch and how East influences West," it says, "While “kitsch” is a trend that has reached its peak over here..., in South Korea, Japan and China it isn’t a trend at all — it’s a way of life. In the West, the deeply kitsch might be (finally) having a trendy 15 minutes decades on from the 1950s when it first made an appearance. But in the East it is wholly acceptable at all times to invest in pink, fluffy and/or animal-shaped household and personal items. It has been for decades."

As someone who grew up in Asia, I agree with everything the article says about Asian kitsch items which we have already gotten used to. After all, who wouldn't want to spend our hard-earned money on a toilet seat with a cat’s face on it? I'm even a little surprised that it seems that Europeans are not into this.

When I came to Finland to study for my master’s degree, getting to a brand new environment, I realized not only how much my native environment was overflowing with kitsch, but also pretty easy for me to detect a trend of kitsch merchandise has crept into the plain Scandinavian style landscape - whether it's a small potted plant with a face in a lidl supermarket, or the pink crystal lamp-shaped (Baroque?) candle holders sold in the flying tiger for people to put on the cake.


7 Ibid
This trend of kitsch consumption is spreading all over the world, and the world is investing money in things that are colorful, cute, inexpensive, and silly - things that make you feel good when you own them. Now is the era when almost every family has at least one kitsch object, so I find that today's kitsch around the world is like fraternal multiple births, and different cultures nourish and bring up “kitsch” diverse entities.

Therefore, by discussing the phenomenon of kitsch in my growing environment - Taiwan, to understand how my kitsch viewpoint was formed, and then extend it to Taiwan's neighboring countries, Japan and China, in order to further discuss the respective development of kitsch in East Asia for finding out whether they have a hidden interaction on each other's kitsch ecology.

2.2 Anonymous Kitsch in Taiwan - Does there any local kitsch exist?

In Taiwan, the introduction of kitsch was relatively late, and it is generally accepted that the first time was in 1987, through Milan Kundera's novel L'Insoutenable Légèreté de l'être, which was originally in French, however, the Chinese translation is based on the English translation and finally kitsch was translated as "媚俗mèi sú". Although this translation is not bad, there have been different opinions over the years due to the interference of the original meaning of Chinese characters. So, before Chinese speakers try to understand the concept of kitsch, the first problem they confront is how to translate it.

In the Japanese world, foreign characters are entered phonetically in 片仮名(Katakana). In addition, each foreign pronunciation has its corresponding katakana, so under this strict system of rules, it is easy to achieve consistency in both translations whether into Japanese or restoration back to foreign languages. Many books specialized in comparing Chinese and Japanese cultures have even cited this feature as one of the reasons why Japan can more easily absorb foreign cultures. However, the Chinese do not have a phonetic transcription system similar to Katakana in Japan. Chinese characters are based on the principle of Logogram, but they are inherently generic, polysemous, ambiguous, and uncertain, and they are even sometimes homophonic, which makes it impossible to avoid interpreting and understanding foreign concepts with ideas from one's original language system. Absorbing imported foreign ideas in this way is not very helpful in revealing the true color of the counterpart - I could say that it will make the color even more ambiguous. The above-mentioned phenomena in the Chinese language system, such as homonym, heterograph, and the lack of an absolute translation principle for foreign words, make it

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9 Ibid
more possible to say that there is often confusion in the use of foreign words in Chinese culture.10

One of the most representative and confusing cases of translation in the Chinese world is the translation of kitsch. Briefly explaining its situation here: the earliest translation of "媚俗 mèi sú" is still the mainstream usage in the Chinese world; however, because the word is based on the free translation approach(if we put it back to English, it means "ingratiate oneself with the public"), and it also gradually deviates from the original meaning of Kitsch in the daily use (normally for criticizing the behavior or style as cheesy), some of the Chinese-users began to use phonetic translation instead. For example, the word “刻奇 kè qí" which has less extra interpretation and also retains the original language's emphasis on sound(there’s a saying that the aspirated voiceless consonants pronoun in German gave the audience a sense of contempt), so people are less likely to interpret the word in a literal way and come up with Whimsical interpretations. The number of people using the word "刻奇 kè qí" is gradually increasing, and it may one day be able to compete with "kitsch" for the throne of mainstream usage. In addition, there are other more translations like “畸趣 jī qù” and “忌屎 jī shǐ". Although “刻奇 kè qí","畸趣 jī qù” and "忌屎 jī shǐ" are already phonetic translations, the fact that each Chinese character has its own meaning has more or less affected Chinese speakers' understanding of the original meaning of kitsch (for example, a literal translation of "畸趣 jī qù" word by word could be interpreted as “freaky hobbies", and "忌屎 jī shǐ" as “a taboo against talking about poop”).

In fact, the notion of kitsch, both historically and geographically, as a dynamic center of aesthetic criticism Munich is where kitsch started to spread outward. First exporting to the neighboring European countries, then to the Anglo-Saxon languages area, and then to Japan in the 1970s. In Taiwan, the first contact was in 1988 (and not in an aesthetic but a literary context), but the gap of a century cannot be considered small - many people have never heard of it, or are even merely exposed to the late concept - additionally, the war between the free and phonetic translations has not yet ended. All these factors have prevented the concept from being disseminated quickly and efficiently in the Chinese world.

Taiwan first encountered kitsch not through the aesthetic-critical theories of Walter Benjamin, Gillo Dorfles (1910–2018), or Clement Greenberg, but through the novels of Milan Kundera. The novel is a literary form that happens to be a sort of archetype of kitsch, like a mold that kitsch can be reproduced in large quantities - a cheap, sentimental context in which the spirit of kitsch can be disseminated rapidly. (It must be mentioned that one of the factors that allowed the German word "kitsch" to spread around the world was the series of revolutions in printing technology that began in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century, and the development of such a publishing and printing system also led to the widespread circulation of popular literature/Goethe's horror novels, and also critical

commentary literature them. (The interaction between popular literature and literary criticism, in turn, became a good ecosystem for kitsch to grow, flourish, and even dominate the world. How does the fact that Kitsch was first understood in Taiwan through novels rather than aesthetic criticism or academic articles affect the development of foreign kitsch in the local? I think this has caused the Taiwanese to encounter the problem of not being able to reach a consensus at the very first step of understanding the concept. From Calinescu’s words, kitsch is already one of the most aesthetically complex topics, and even learning about it in the form of a novel (Milan Kundera’s novel!) which is inherently a genre that condones the intersection of reality and imagination, and most authors’ position is often unclear, which can leave the reader in a more precarious state and in a state of constant doubt. With a lot of questions like: how to understand kitsch, whether to take it seriously or to treat it lightly? Which part about kitsch is the author’s own personal interpretation and which is the original meaning? Or is it actually a fictitious concept that came from the author? is what readers confront at all times.

I think it’s as difficult as learning English through Finnish, appreciating a song through mere texts, or learning to love by reading a manual!

In addition, Kundera’s depiction of the kitsch brings in his own interpretation and poetic philosophy of life, so the kitsch in his novels cannot be considered universal kitsch, but can only be described as a "Kundera-style kitsch”. Even though Kundera’s kitsch shares the same characteristics of kitsch in popular culture, such as false emotion, the bad taste which is pretentious and vulgar, the flamboyant gesture that can not reflect the reality, the truth is that it can only be said that the commonalities between them are only the most basic and superficial norms, and that the two types of kitsch have already developed their own routes. (Perhaps the subtle differences between them are just like Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola — it’s hard to elaborate well.)

Therefore, based on this failure to reach a translation and conceptual agreement, the way I write kitsch is mainly from the term of visual culture.

As an ordinary person initially without too much aesthetic history knowledge and from a culturally marginal place(at least not the leading role in world history), I slowly built up this familiar and alien concept by assembling everyday visual elements.

The way that the foreign Kitsch entered Taiwan is so twisted and rugged, is there a local Kitsch that has already existed in Taiwan? If kitsch was an "organism"(no matter from outside or inside), how well does it survive in Taiwan? I grew up surrounded by kitsch scenes and just loved them as innocent. However, influenced by the introduction of modern art and design theories, Taiwan once criticized its own kitsch characteristics and tried to pursue a more simple and neat style in order to (feel like) squeeze into the ranks of the so-called advanced countries. Till these years, the attitude towards the kitsch essence in Taiwan has
gradually changed, and the number of people who love kitsch and can also recognize it has gradually increased. And why is that?

The following is the only article I have collected that talks about the changing status of Kitsch’s tastes in Taiwan.11

"Although bad taste is no longer sharp with the ebb of the postmodern era, for people who are long-time observers of bad taste, it should be interesting to explore some of the bad-taste phenomena that Taiwan society takes for granted- but the negativity side somehow can be sensed by the knowledgeable or scholar. For example, why are there hilarious pharmaceutical commercials on TV that make us laugh? Why do the parents often put the Sanderiana12 bonsai next to the TV? By exploring the crux of these phenomena, we should be able to gain a better understanding of Taiwan's nationhood."

"After all, Taiwan's culture has an extra layer of sadness, and our enjoyment of kitsch13 a little more isolated than that of optimistic advanced countries.14 Although this overcrowded, clogged, dirty, wasteful, and screaming environment is filled with kitsch that is ten times denser than that of advanced countries. The difference in values created by different national conditions(national conditions - a term often used to avoid inferiority complexes when comparing with advanced countries) makes it difficult for the ordinary Taiwanese to see at a glance that kitsch is everywhere."

A screenshot of an old-time pharmaceutical commercial.

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12 “萬年青 waˇn niaˇn qiˇng”, which literally means: it will be green for tens of thousands of years (and, of course, lucky forever)

13 The original text uses a lesser-known translation term “畸趣 jǐ qu” whose literal translation is “freaky hobbies”.

14 I have translated this paragraph literally, which might cause some problems for English readers. So I put my personal interpretation here:Because the people in Taiwan generally have low self-confidence, which makes Taiwanese attempt to keep a safe distance with kitsch rather than the way that optimistic advanced countries could fully enjoy the bad taste.
This article was published in 1999, and the ideas and analyses in it are still not outdated today. However, before discussing these two quotations, I would like to provide a brief history of Taiwan in the last half-century:

Since the 1950s, the United States provided military, economic, and technological assistance to Taiwan for the strategic need to contain the expansion of communism, known as "U.S. aid" (1951-1965). During this period, Taiwan gradually became a famous "world factory", especially in the textile and plastic industries. For example, because of the plastic materials and processing technology Taiwan was equipped with, Taiwan became a famous toy OEM(Original Equipment Manufacturer) country. In its heyday, one out of every two Barbie dolls in the world was made in Taiwan. The diversity and universality of Taiwan's toys have accompanied many people in their childhood. Even Toy Story director John Lasseter once mentioned in public that his youth was accompanied by toys made in Taiwan, no wonder that in Toy Story, one of the main characters Buzz Lightyear is a "made in Taiwan" imported product as well.


Buzz Lightyear is a "made in Taiwan" in the movie scene:

In the toy antique market, almost all of the Barbie dolls between 1950s and 1980s are made in Taiwan.\(^{18}\)

The classic elements of Kitsch: mass-produced, cheap materials, high saturated colour, colourful feathers, furry, mass... etc, all happen to be within Taiwan's technical expertise. It can also be said that by making these products Taiwan became one of the major economies in Asia and managed to establish its own identity. To some extent, Taiwan found a certain dignity, which makes Taiwan seem more qualified to join the international community. Naturally, the kitschy elements and characters have infiltrated into all the crevices of the Taiwanese environment - both in the public and private realms.

Looking back at the first quotation above, the text vividly describes the local reality of kitsch in Taiwan - in fact, kitsch is so ubiquitous that it has fused with the television images into everyday family life, and family's approach to the configuration of lifestyle props continues to be influenced by more unexplainable and mutated old customs, which just embodies what the French poet said:” What is intoxicating about bad taste is the aristocratic pleasure of offensiveness.” But rather to call the pleasure "aristocratic", I think in this context even the

\(^{18}\) Source: [https://www.ebay.com/itm/292363628059](https://www.ebay.com/itm/292363628059)
aristocracy is only the one being taken advantage of - the word "aristocracy" is merely regarded as a stepping stone, a stone for intellectuals to improve their status. As Călinescu said, “…yesterday's successful banality can lose both its appeal and meaning in the eyes of the large audience for which it was devised. This makes for the paradox that older forms of kitsch (as expressions of bad taste) may still be enjoyed, but only by the sophisticated: what was originally meant to be "popular" becomes the amusement of the few. Old kitsch may stimulate the ironical consciousness of the refined or of those who pretend to be refined. “ It is like a stone step building competition in a cultural hierarchy, intellectuals who enjoy Language/mind-games see kitsch as a perfect place to locate their steps and trample the traditional aristocracy underfoot. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the prevalence of kitsch in Taiwan is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored by all scholars who want to learn about Taiwanese culture.

As for the second quote, it mentions the phenomenon that Taiwan still suffers from an inferiority complex caused by an unclear identity, so that it cannot fully enjoy the pleasures of kitsch. Taiwanese continue to yearn for the civilization of developed countries and follow their example, even starting to selectively ignore their own native environment and customs (which are full of kitschy scenery). This reminds me of an experiment I saw on a reality tv show called 100 Humans19: In this experiment, the experimenters wanted to test whether people tend to be closer to people like themselves.

The result of the experiment is that as long as people have a socially recognized “stigma” (i.e., the older age.), they could still be hated and discriminated against by people in a similar category(“Even Blacks are discriminated against Blacks. Women discriminate against women.” said Jody Armour, the professor of Law in USC). I think the author’s description of the inner state of Taiwanese echoes the results of this experiment to some extent. I think it is because kitsch is somehow like a mirror that not only reveals the image of the person who looks into it, but also reflects the subtle distance between it or the person in front of it - when the person recognizes the image in the mirror as beautiful, one cannot help but want to come closer, and vice versa.

Nowadays, the status of kitsch in Taiwan's cultural industry has been further elevated. More and more products and public events are beginning to incorporate "Taiwanese Kitsch" elements, and the public is also becoming more and more appreciative of such bad taste.

The album in “Taiwanese kitsch” style ( The hip-hop music album Taipei DiDi Long is a hip-hop music album created and released by DJ Didilong in 2016, and its cover is designed by artist Godki Dlla20.):

19 100 Humans, episode 4 "Are You Biased?”.
100 Humans is a 2020 streaming television series. Netflix is the distributor. The premise revolves around 100 people who go through different experiments on the theme of behavior.

20 Godki Dlla, a Taiwanese artist, the link of his behance: https://www.behance.net/godkidlla
I realized that my long-time beloved kitsch kind which I call innocent kitsch actually refers to a particular cultural aesthetic that is native to Taiwan and with the strong vibe of grassroots. Although it seems innocent, it is not the fragile and weak kind. Instead, it is lively and energetic like fish just caught from the sea.

2.3 Mutation or Native? Kitsch in North-east Asia - Kawaii Culture in Japan and 土 [tǔ]酷 [kù] (too-cool) culture in China

As an immigrant country Taiwan has been colonized by many countries, what I want to ask here is whether Taiwan’s kitsch is its own indigenous genre or whether it is in fact an affiliate

21 The 2017 Summer World University Games is the highest level of international sports event ever held in Taiwan.
of Japanese kitsch school or popularized from other countries? But no matter what the local kitsch context is in Taiwan, in an era of globalization and with its special location at a geographic junction, kitsch in Taiwan will inevitably be influenced by the surrounding cultures. Therefore, in this chapter, I will expand the scope of my discussion to include concepts and examples that I personally consider to be similar to kitsch in Northeast Asia and East Asia. I aim to depict as much as possible the general kitsch landscape in modern East Asia.

There are several basic key features of modern kitsch (developed after the 1990s) acknowledged worldwide currently: sentimental, colorful, entertaining and offering instant pleasure, mass-producible, cheap/affordable and following a "principle of mediocrity" (for impressing and pleasing the average consumer). Whereas there is no term in East Asia that carries as many meanings and is widely accepted as kitsch. Take the case of Taiwan for example, there is no naming and categorization of this category of artistic concepts or phenomena, and I do not sense the urgency and desire to name this cultural phenomenon, either. I would boldly assume that if the victory of the modern nations lies with the exportation of culture and the successful publicity of the national image, then, to be honest, it does not seem to be a problem for this cultural phenomenon with negative connotations not to be named and defined (whereas it is necessary to create a unified brand and concept when it come to export) because the number 1 taboo in Asian is to Wash your dirty linen in public. Moreover, the modern social order is still based on the scientific rationality built by the Western world in the 18th century with mathematics at its core. To a certain extent, wanting to compete within the framework of this existing game, Asian countries cannot help but follow the footsteps of the West. So it’s understandable that there is always a great distraction for them to focus on their own social phenomena - not to mention the connotations with negative meaning.

However, the bad taste lovers and the kitschman who seek pleasure without effort are all over the world, so I would describe kitsch cultures in Asia as a city-state kingdom that has developed into a culturally flourishing landscape, like a system of kitsch star systems. And what I do is just to perceive the clusters and astronomical landscape with a constellation concept.

2.3.1 Japan — kawaii culture & kawaii violence

I still remember that in 1999, McDonald's in Taiwan launched a campaign that customers who ordered combos could additionally purchase Hello Kitty Stuffed toys, which became a craze at that time. I was also involved in the irrational consumption trend created by the 7-11 convenience store in 2005 that customers gather points on the loyalty card for collecting Hello Kitty magnets (and what is much more annoying is that you could only get the magnet at random). Hello Kitty as the representative
image of Japan's unique kawaii culture— Japanese aesthetic of kawaii has its earliest appearances in the pop culture of 1970s Japan, is usually soft, cute, childlike, girly—has successfully applied its cute seductive power to enchant the surrounding cultural circles. Shortly after, the saccharine trend has swept the world - in 2002, the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain presents an manifesto-exhibition of Takashi Murakami, and Louis Vuitton also launch several more collaborations with Murakami, such as Cherry Blossom in 2004, Cerises in 2005, etc. In 2021, the statistical agency "Statista" announced the top 10 most valuable intellectual property (IP) in the world based on the all-time revenue of IP. The Pokémon brand is the world's most valuable media franchise, and another Japanese franchise places second which is Hello Kitty. The Japanese "kawaii" culture has spread vigorously around the world, leading to huge commercial profits. As Taiwan was colonized by Japan for fifty years (1895-1945), it was certainly covered by the kawaii culture, and the acceptance of Japanese culture was so high that the term kawaii even became part of our daily expressions.

Before discussing the similarities and differences between kawaii and kitsch, I would like to first explore the differences between the origin of the word kawaii and similar foreign terms. In terms of the meaning of kawaii, it may seem similar to the English world's cute or pretty, and to the Chinese world's “可爱 kě ài”. But in fact, compared to those words — "cute" carries a "smart, clever and smart" image and often refer to a child or small animal, "pretty" contains the special "pleasant" vibe, or Chinese “可爱 kě ài” could be translated to "lovable" without controversy- kawaii has its distinctive linguistic context which cannot be easily replaced by other foreign words.

The Japanese word "kawaii" was developed based on the meaning of "blushing, shy, and embarrassed" (かほはゆし), in the semiotic sense, which refers to kawaii’s

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22 In 2021, the statistical agency "Statista" announced the top 10 most valuable intellectual property (IP) in the world based on the all-time revenue of IP.

intrinsic meaning with a special "sense of shame" which is inextricably linked to the roots of Japanese culture.

This is why Japanese cultural scholar四方田 犬彦 (Inuhiko Yomota) pointed out in his book "かわいい"論 that there is no corresponding term to this modern Japanese word in foreign languages, because it is hard to embody the specific ideogram it represents.

Due to Japan's highly effective cultural export to the world through the anime industry, I think people can easily answer a number of memorable kawaii images, such as Pom Pom Purin, Rilakkuma, My Melody, Little twin stars, Hatsune Miku, Sumikko Gurashi, Dorami, etc. And we have all been unintentionally surrounded by kawaii materials, such as Gachapon, figurines, stuffed dolls, stickers, stationery, etc. Even objects that have nothing to do with cuteness are all possible to be “kawaiized”, for example, hello kitty theme airplanes, hello kitty toilets ... and so on. These exquisite kawaii things skillfully take away our attention and money - whether you need it or not, whether you really want it or not, and they also generously provide a sort of escapist nostalgia. At this point, perhaps they could be a kind of Japanese Kitsch in a way.

Like refined sugar, kawaii offers instant pleasure, a feeling of hominess, a replicable and reproducible image, and a dreamy and beautiful fantasy at all times - which overlaps a lot with the nature of kitsch. But unlike their European kitsch cousins, kawaii products often do not appear as individuals; once on the market they are associated with a number of carefully designed business strategies, such as campaigns for making a public image's debut, a series of products that are deliberately produced in limited quantities, and a lot of advertising to promote them, etc. In fact, they can be said to be like idols, regulated by a strict image policy (you won’t see hello kitty pregnant, one of the Little twin stars is actually gay, or Pom Pom Purin starts to worry about your hoarding disorder). In contrast, the European kitsch is manufactured according to the principle of "beauty illusion", but there is no consensus on sales strategy - the owner of a souvenir store selling snowballs can still not greet customers with enthusiasm, and the interior of the store can not be reshaped for the products in the store. Nevertheless, these Japanese stores selling kawaii images have all the details set up - everything in the store is soft and calm, peaceful, the staff should preferably be girls under 30, and the receipts printed with cute cartoon patterns (as if this would make the consumers feel better), etc. Such an elaborate setting is created to appease the consumers, just like a spider's web made by stretched malt candy, and a few bills will definitely be dropped when leaving the web.

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According to my recent personal observation of kawaii, what is more, interesting is the recent emergence of a new form of kawaii, and the formula is “kawaii + violence”, such as the animation Pop Team Epic, Aggretsuko, fictional character Gloomy Bear. The appearance of this form of kawaii characters are usually accompanied by a lot of violence, even blood and gore, and usually, those cute characters are the perpetrators.

At first glance, these two qualities - kawaii and violence - are not related, but recently this kind of characteristic contrast and contradiction of the role is becoming more and more popular. To me, this is one of the examples of kawaii following the inner nature of kitsch that continues to evolve in modern times, and it can even be said to be an upgrade of kitsch (what a kitsch bonus package)!

Sianne Ngai, a professor in literary and cultural theory at Stanford University, brought discussions of cuteness to the humanities from the academic study of cuteness in biology, because she wants to focus her work on the aesthetic experiences that “people use most frequently in their everyday lives.” In her paper The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde, published in Critical Inquiry in 2005, Ngai noted that the formal properties associated with cuteness can call forth specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency. But except for a tender desire to cuddle, the passivity of cute objects could also entice a “consumer’s sadistic desires for mastery and control.” There is even a term "cute aggression" that was published widely in 2013 in the psychology field to indicate a similar phenomenon, while the reason for causing this reaction is still diverse. One says things tend to be cuter when they're passive or injured because the weak can stimulate humans’ nursing nature; another says that once humans see the cute they will instinctively want to protect them. Yet due to situational restrictions (such as could only see them in the photo), they can
not immediately hug them or pat their heads, so they feel frustrated, and then become a kind of aggression.

Seeing Japan’s kawaii culture as exaggerated cuteness, Ngai told Cabinet Magazine. “Cuteness is...a commodity aesthetic, with close ties to the pleasures of domesticity and easy consumption.” In any case, kawaii goods have never been pure or innocent, in fact, they are created to satisfy humans’ endless lust (the lust to care, protect and control). In the state of having kitsch qualities, kawaii finally reaches out to the consumer’s dark desire for violence. Then how to "properly " satisfy the consumer’s desire for violence? The magic formula: "kawaii + violence" genre is an excellent answer to this currently.

Violent entertainment has existed from ancient times to the present, whether the gladiator games in ancient Roman, modern bullfighting or flamboyant performance of professional wrestling, violence brings people a sense of excitement that the heart pumps and the pulse increases, which makes the show with violence become entertainment that both ancient and modern people can hardly quit. Thus, whether the cute character is injured, or cute characters using violence, it is undeniable that it will double the entertainment effect of human’s sensory stimulation.

In addition, cuteness/kawaii is also made exceptional by its ambivalence. 'Unlike the beautiful, which is a judgement,' Ngai explains, 'it's not really clear that calling something cute is praise or criticism.' To Ngai, however, this reflects a world where people are generally less certain about their aesthetic judgements. And this ambivalence around cuteness to Ngai is actually fitting with more contemporary aesthetic categories, because she thought that 'Many of our contemporary aesthetic experiences are mixed feelings; people aren't sure exactly what to feel.' With its ambivalence and flexibility, kawaii added with a little bit violent quality seems to contradict itself would makes it easier for modern consumers to instead project themselves onto and resonate with it, and even see those images as spokespersons for their own emotions - as people are constantly encouraged to have a friendly, mellow, and likeable social appearance, this violent kawaii character can somehow release a bit pressure for their constantly suppressed ids.

Therefore, I believe Japanese kawaii is not only pursuing the greatest commercial interests but also taking on some kind of social obligation to maintain a stable and good social environment for the capitalist society to continue to grow. Pure kawaii is like a refined and polished paragon of the "social identity", educating people on what is a “lovable image" in this society and instilling it into the public’s brains from their childhood. It also provides the average consumer in the social system with a weaker figure to look after, in order to distract them from the rebelliousness of the commercial titans and current reality. Yet, if it was all purely kawaii left, it would lose the connection with consumers due to the lack of authenticity. Especially, in the case
of kawaii with a kitsch nature, losing the sense of closeness to the consumer is very unbearable and detrimental to its future. As a result, kawaii also adds a "limited" negative quality to itself - by sharing the secret dark side of it behind the officially decent appearance - which is a clever response to a certain sense of frustration and powerlessness of modern consumers who thought they cannot do anything about this enormously social system. But there is still another group of people who are good at enjoying and using kawaii, they basically take it as a sort of camouflage, and all their personally naughty and subversive entertainment continues to take place in the shadow under the guise of the kawaii image. In general, compared to the innocent kitsch type in Taiwan, this clever, up-to-date kawaii culture can be said to be an honor student/well-behaved kitsch developing pretty well in the kitsch family tree in today's world - so, allow me to put kawaii into the box labelled with the tag "Good Kitsch".
2.3.2 China — Bureaucratic Mao kitsch & Too-cool culture in young generation

After discussing our neighbors in the north of Taiwan, I would now like to discuss our neighbors in the west, China. China and Taiwan are both Mandarin Speaking Countries, and the word Kitsch was also introduced through the novel "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" by Milan Kundera, because kitsch was first introduced to the Chinese community not with an aesthetic concept but with a "poetic" interpretation, when kitsch is discussed in online forums or columns, it is mostly about "personal kitsch experiences". Personalized "kitsch" stories would be like, for example, during the college entrance examination, cheering for general people or friends who are taking the exam by posting messages on personal social media, as if they can use their mobile phones during the exam. Or the reason why some of the articles regardless of the content that could go viral are basically due to the fact that they end in a patriotic tone, such as "If you don't retweet it, you're not Chinese!". All of these kitsch cases share a common characteristic: kitsch is "collective" and "emotional", which means that the individual has to hide behind the community, to label himself or herself, and to strive for social recognition and collective identity-behind all of these is a deep fear of being abandoned by the world. Although most people are familiar with the concept of kitsch through personal experience, when asked what is the most classic Chinese kitsch culture? All answers coincidentally point to the same place - the Cultural Revolution(1966-1976).

The Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966, called on the masses to "Destroy the Four Olds - Old Ideas, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Customs that had been poisoning the people for thousands of years" and to pursue the "Four News" that they had set out to achieve and it has been sweeping across China since then. (However, the fact is that people care more about purging the old than the new.) And compared to the Four Olds which clearly list the ideas needed to be demolished, the definition of "Four News"- establishing the New Ideas, New Culture, New Habits, and New Customs - is actually very vague. (For instance, the examples of the cultural advances in that period would be the integration of "new" western instruments and ballet into Peking opera, and the derivation of the anti-malarial drug from the herb in Traditional Chinese medicine by the technology of Modern Medical Science.)

Kitsch is not supposed to have anything to do with " new ", it is even " mediocre, corny and not trying to be new", it is the opposite of revolution, so why is the Cultural Revolution now widely said to be the representative image of Chinese Kitsch culture?

I think one of the reason is that the skills of promotion used by the Cultural Revolution are fairly kitsch - it promotes Matanarratives, trying to replace a thousand imaginations of the future in the minds of civilians with a grand narrative (similar to
the Futurism that happened in Europe in the early 20th century). This beautiful story about the future reminds me of the stereotypical, mass-produced, and dreamlike snow globes in cheesy souvenir stores, whether it's the Cultural Revolution or snow globes, all attempting to construct a beautiful fantasy - it can snow even in Hawaii.

The Cultural Revolution used two ways to achieve its goals: the first was to resort to the collective — singing and dancing at the same measured pace, grand processions. The second way was to appeal to emotions — poetry, movies, novels, paintings, and all other artworks that emphasized the great and noble meaning of this revolution, and non-stop harping on the same string with powerful words like People, Motherland, and Land, which became a kind of "the dictatorship of culture".

A cultural revolution that had to spread across a huge territory needed to gain the support and mobilization of the people as much as possible, and the best assist was a powerful and simple slogan, for instance, the Cultural Revolution, which rejected foreign culture and destroyed ancient culture in the name of opposing so-called "feudalism", "capitalism", and "revisionism". However, the Chinese Communist Party thought that the concept of these doctrines was a bit abstruse, so it decided to replace the above doctrines with the word "Olds", and from then on "feudalism, capitalism and revisionism" and "old" were equated. Eventually, "old" was adverse and became a sin. The language and concepts were simplified so much that the original conceptual context was erased instead, so that people failed to know what they were actually opposing or supporting for - just like the over-abridged Seven Commandments painted on one side of the barn in Animal Farms\textsuperscript{24} or the Newspeak\textsuperscript{25} in Oceania.

The Cultural Revolution kitsch can be found in line with the poetic kitsch, which is collective and obliterates the individual, appealing to (false) emotions belonging to the mass rather than the individual. What is even more interesting is that not many people in Chinese society today are engaged in the academic study of kitsch theory, but they are still capable of precisely recognizing the cases of kitsch in their culture. I am amazed by the fact that people can grasp and comprehend the concept of kitsch which is so intangible and abstruse from the subtlety of the routine so well.

\textsuperscript{24}Animal Farm is a satirical allegorical novella by George Orwell, first published in England on 17 August 1945. The book tells the story of a group of farm animals who rebel against their human farmer, hoping to create a society where the animals can be equal, free, and happy. Ultimately, the rebellion is betrayed, and the farm ends up in a state as bad as it was before.

\textsuperscript{25}Newspeak is the fictional language of Oceania, a totalitarian superstate that is the setting of the dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, by George Orwell. Newspeak is a controlled language of simplified grammar and restricted vocabulary designed to limit the individual's ability to think and articulate "subversive" concepts. In "The Principles of Newspeak", the appendix to the novel, Orwell explains that Newspeak follows most of the rules of English grammar, yet is a language characterised by a continually diminishing vocabulary.
With a straightforward and intimate tone, kitsch engaged pretty well in this storm of social movement, and took advantage of its fortes, especially in all conceptual and semantic ambiguities. Kitsch was associated with such a fanatical collective call, and there was even a proper noun "Mao kitsch" invented for describing the personal idolatry of Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, and the phenomena of ubiquitous Mao-related souvenirs in the Chinese tourist spots that some people even called Mao Zedong as “King of Kitsch”26. There is no doubt that the cruelty in the dark of the Cultural Revolution had been confirmed, and people in the forum are often discussing the possibility of escaping from kitsch (however, discussing and criticizing kitsch together are very kitsch actions per se.), which makes me more convinced that kitsch contains a repulsive but at the same time fascinating and powerful allure that not only ferments in the art field but also permeates all the interstices of life.

I was in front of the souvenir store by Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 2017. I didn't know the term Kitsch at all, and I had no concept of Kitsch at all, but I was thrilled by these emotionally intense souvenirs of their founding father at the moment - such saturated colors, consistent expressions, numerous and repetitive, a modern man-made god demeanor, attempting to be close to the potential consumers with their vigorous energy but keep a subtle distance between at the same time (I was thinking of the image of a politician visiting the farmers in the village). And I did have a fun time imagining what kind of person would buy this decorative plate and whether someone would use it for food. I also wondered whether it was my sense of detachment from them that made me be able to appreciate them with humor? Or whether when we apply kitsch to all objects then those objects become a much more delightful kind?

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, but China did not interrupt the development of kitsch. If the Cultural Revolution was the ideological poetic kitsch of Milan Kundera, with the Chinese economic reform and opening-up, middle-class popular culture became the mainstream culture, and China began to introduce an aesthetic, mass-cultural kitsch - mass reproduction, artificial illusion, and indulgence of hedonism. Moreover, the official government has even produced a combination of ideological kitsch and aesthetic kitsch, for example, every year, China Central
Television (CCTV)\textsuperscript{27} produces and broadcasts the “Spring Festival Gala”\textsuperscript{28} on the eve of the Lunar New Year. This is the quite unique aesthetic taste of this cultural market which consists of cultural producers (China Government), mass media and consumers.

In addition to the Kitsch culture formed by official leadership from top to bottom, observing kitsch in a country, it is necessary to see Kitsch among the masses. China has a flourishing manufacturing industry nowadays, and this advantage gives kitsch the exact nourishment to grow.

I lived in Beijing for three months (in the Outer Ring Road, the last stop on the MRT line), and during my walks around the city, I did see a lot of folk kitsch: poodles dyed pink, cream cakes decorated with longevity peaches, due to the poor manufacture quality the animal-shape decoration in a children’s amusement facility looked like they were smoking, fruits were shaped into the Maitreya figure, etc. There are also kitsch scenes accidentally constructed from everyday objects, such as a little girl holding a Chinese flag at Tiananmen Square with her mother preparing to take a picture with a selfie stick, buses and tourists coming behind them, or food

\textsuperscript{27} It is a public television broadcasting, similar to BBC in the UK or Yle in Finland, but CCTV is highly regulated by the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party.

\textsuperscript{28} Production and broadcasting by CCTV since 1978. Since 1986, the Chinese government has banned other TV stations from broadcasting similar programmes on the eve of the Lunar New Year, making the Spring Festival Gala the only TV show that can be broadcast on Lunar New Year’s Eve in China. As a result, watching the Spring Festival Gala has become a collective Lunar New Year event and has even been certified by the Guinness World Records as the world’s most watched television program. (e.g. 1.14 billion viewers in 2021).
elaborately made into the delightfully chubby shape in the tourist area but is placed in a greasy glass display cabinet on top of the random sauce cans serving as cake stands. At the same time, the sweet and delightful food contrasts with the dark store in the back, as if the food display in front is just a beautiful flat on the stage in a theater, the insulator between the beautiful lie and the dark reality was merely a flat piece of glass.
At the same time, there is a huge pressure behind this flat and thin Utopia set that is eager to be released, so that this fragile set is very unstable and constantly trembling slightly. However, most people would like to take a picture in front of such a beautiful set like in front of a beautiful background in a photo studio, why not? — After all, it is much happier to imagine a utopia rather than actually visit it.

But what surprised me the most recently was the discovery of another fairly vital local Kitsch culture that is thriving - Too-cool culture (土[t ū] 酷[kù]ǔ).

The culture of Too-Cool sprouted from the Internet. Photographer Li Zhi-Yuan became famous in 2016 with a humorous but sharp subculture wearing style, he named this style as "tū kù(Too-Cool)", and then this style/culture began to be in the public eye. Li Zhi-Yuan has expressed his opinion on Too-cool: "The essence of Too-cool is based on sincerity... It means embracing, inclusive, opening-mind, and love." Li encourages people to accept everything in life and discover wherever beauty lies, and such Too-cool culture has no limits, no restrictions, no definitions.

Today, this culture is being promoted by young people who are about 20 and 30. The reason why the concept of Too-cool could gradually flourish is that the "tū"(rural vibe) elements, though which is despised and deliberately ignored by most people in China, is still rooted in the society without a doubt. However, the undeniable fact is that "tū" has been an indispensable tune-up for minds in the mass's life. So with the emergence of Too-cool, the younger generation can gradually realize that accepting and acknowledging what is actually around them could be very helpful for them to find out who they really are, which is exactly the core value of Too-cool. The rise of this awareness encourages not only Chinese people to face their own local culture, but also indirectly encourages everyone in the world to take pride in their own culture, rather than blindly pursuing or submitting themselves to a stale definition of beauty.

There are a number of domestic brands in China that adopted the theme of Too-cool as the core of their styles, such as Marrknull and Fabric Porn. Inspired by the "Chinese Dama "30, Marrknull's apply the spirit of Too-cool to its clothes, models, photos, brand image, etc., and its ultimate goal is to promote Too-cool to the world. And it truly made it, Marrknull had participated in several international fashion weeks in London, New York and Paris, and following not surprisingly, been reported

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29 The term 土[tū] 酷[kù] consists of chinese character 土[tǔ] and English word cool. In Chinese context, the first character "tū" in tū kù means "dirt/soil" in noun, and "local" & "tacky/unfashionable/vulgar/dowdy/rustic" image while as an adjective. Due to the influence of this concept, some Mandarin users even take the English term "Local" as the alternate of "unfashionable" and "tū" in daily conversation. The other interesting thing is that they would describe people modern or trendy by using the word "洋气(Yán Qì)", which can be literally translated as a "western style charisma".

by international fashion magazines. The founder of Marrknull says, "Nevertheless, Too-cool actually originated from mass culture, it still was rejected or even degraded by most of the people. Yet, surprisingly, the new generation sees the value of such daily culture." The designer of Fabric Porn, another Too-cool brand, also mentioned a similar concept: "Too-cool is a new interpretation of Chinese culture from the 1970s and 1980s. In this kind of demonstration, the tǔ (rural vibe) evokes today's young people a familiarity with the past, which is the atmosphere that used to surround them in the period of growing up.

(Left) Some screenshots from MARRKNULL official Instagram (@marrknull_official)  
(Right) MARRKNULL at The VFiles Show Spring Summer 2019 (New York)
In all fairness, our generation is one that has grown up with a lot of non-human substances, such as listening to bedtime stories by audiotapes instead of by parents, TV time taking up a large part of leisure time, raising Tamagotchi instead of puppies as a child, etc. Could it be that this is also the reason why people are more likely to have a relationship with material things in an age where they are surrounded by abundant modern materials? In a world surrounded by artificial creations, are people more likely to have a love affair with material things, or to have a romance with them? Perhaps we could say that Too-cool is a kind of Chinese "natural kitsch"? After all, these people born after the 1990s are only showing the things they know and love most sincerely (nature is a bit more strange to them, since nature in life has long been replaced by tropical juice bars or artificial turf). And yet, these are the very objects, the mass production kind, that have been despised by the cultural elite and aesthetic critics of the 19th century. (But, frankly, who else has been able to live a life where everyday objects are handmade since mankind departed from the Agricultural age?

And nowadays, "Too-cool" is not only a style of dressing but also a life attitude.

For example, the famous Too-cool stylist, "Princess Butterfly" (real name Liu Min), wears clothes with Shan shui\textsuperscript{31} or with Chinese characters written with red colour in regular script, presenting the fusion of Too-cool culture and life on her social media platform. Her high popularity and high controversy are not only over her dressing style which is too tū, too cool, or too Too-cool, but also around her outspoken and confident personality, whereas at the same time she is not ashamed to show her own confusion, vulnerability and loss.

She once said, "If I am not unique in this world, then the world doesn't need me at all. This quote is a very realistic description of the common values in China. Because the population is so large, young generations are particularly likely to feel lost and unable to find value and meaning in their lives in a highly competitive environment. The interesting paradox here is that in an environment where human beings are reproduced like mass-produced products, young people are inspired by kitsch’s cheap, mass-copying nature instead, and decide to create their own culture based on it. In this process, the young find their individual, genuine selves to some extent.

\textsuperscript{31} Shan shui (Chinese: 山水; pinyin: shān shuǐ; literal translation: 'mountain-water') refers to a style of traditional Chinese painting that involves or depicts scenery or natural landscapes, using a brush and ink rather than more conventional paints. Mountains, rivers and waterfalls are common subjects of shan shui paintings.
Although it is still unconfirmed whether the Chinese Too-cool is influenced by the "ugly fashion" of Western luxury brands (in fact, the name of tū kù (Too-cool) is a kind of hybrid: tū in Chinese + kù from the English word cool), the rise of Too-cool is a sign that the new generation in China is no longer just a "Grabbism" of fashion, they are no longer blindly admiring "imported aesthetics". The observation stems from Zhao Chenxi, designer and founder of Fabric Porn, that “Chinese people are lacking in their own cultural confidence.” and he also adds that “Excess nationalism is definitely not good, but a country should have pride in its uniqueness.”\textsuperscript{32} Needless to say, their interests have been back to the locals again.

More importantly, China began to think about the role and importance of kitsch within Chinese cultural values. In an interview with Princess Butterfly, she said, "What is the Chinese aesthetic? It's not only the elegant and delicate Chinoiserie, the Chinese aesthetic is the style belonging to the Chinese. The tǔ, gaudy and vulgar is also a kind of Chinese aesthetic. Don't deny it! Yellow Chinese characters on a red background, the sky is blue (like always), and red flowers with green leaves, these are the most Chinese style of China." Such a youthful and sharp talk makes me have an association: Too-cool is like porcelain - an art of clay and fire - using the local clay and burning with the fire of inner rebellion and restlessness.

As the natural kitsch of China, the Too-cool culture has an enormous market of nearly 140 million people, which makes foreign brands also eager to enter the youth market in China. But Too-cool is, after all, extremely "local", so it is a challenge if it can be properly used by foreigners instead of falling to cultural appropriation. For example, the Too-cool advertisements and products launched by Balenciaga during the Qixi Festival in 2020 sparked a controversy over whether or not they deliberately uglified the image of China. The incident ended with a public apology from Balenciaga via Weibo. In this case, I saw an interesting phenomenon. Too-cool is clearly a culture that is based on the spirit of pleasing the average customer. However, there are so many unspoken rules in its use, so that China began to have a monopoly on this native kitsch culture. In general, kitsch only cares about "consumers' money", but Too-cool culture is a type of kitsch that relies so much on a single nation for developing, so that no matter native or foreign producers must additionally demonstrate as much recognition and respect as possible for this culture, people, and country.

Wu Li-li. (2020). *Balenciaga launched a graffiti handbag to celebrate the Qixi Festival, but the tǔ ad triggered the netizens to question that it is insulting china, what do you think?*. Retrieved September, 2021, from Initium Media. Web site: [https://theinitium.com/roundtable/20200814-roundtable-zh-Balenciaga-bag-for-chinese-valentines-day/](https://theinitium.com/roundtable/20200814-roundtable-zh-Balenciaga-bag-for-chinese-valentines-day/)
This chapter aims to present the appearances of the cultures outside the European world that have the common essence with kitsch, and after understanding the uniqueness of diverse kitsch rooted in their respective cultures in China and Japan, I become more convinced that Taiwan's kitsch is also a natural product derived from its own roots, not an imitation of another country. And compared to the look of its fraternal siblings which could be categorized as the grand, flamboyance, systematically organized and carefully planned performative kitsch, Taiwan's kitsch is more immature, more like unpolished, unexcavated rough stones scattered all over the land of Taiwan that have not been discovered — which is why I call Taiwan's kitsch as innocent kitsch.

Of course, I am also curious about the future evolution of each of these different types of kitsch. In particular, the kitsch that knows how to exported systematically, such as Japanese kawaii, which has rich experience in spreading culture as soft power, and Chinese Too-cool culture, which has the world's largest market (In addition, Korea, which was not mentioned in this article, has already invested significant amounts of funds in the entertainment industry.), may have the opportunity to create a bigger wave of kitsch culture all over the world in the future. Based on the ambiguity, flexibility, and inclusiveness their kitsch each has and the uncertain factor of the national power competition in the international community, someday one of them may replace the German term kitsch and become the successor.
2.4 Kitsch? - Why We Need Kitsch? It’s Survival Mode: the Submissiveness or Disobedience

Why do modern people need the comfort of kitsch so much that almost everyone has it, and everyone follows the rule that ‘the more the better'? Is this a reflection of the complexity and magnitude of today's social system that people feel incapable of operating/understanding anymore? And this feeling of gradual alienation/separation from the social system additionally enhances the need for kitsch. However, kitsch is not just a static, unilaterally exploited character, but it does respond to people of this era and even produces qualities that correspond to the reality, also honestly reflecting the contradictory nature of human beings.

It appears to be a kind of human spiritual submission - humans find spiritual and sensual pleasure in the limited options offered by cultural producers and enjoy the present moment. Meanwhile, amid spiritual healing, there is still a secret flow of desperate emotions. This rebelliousness, under the guise of seemingly harmless cultural commodities, produces a more diverse subculture with some conventionally negative traits. Even the feeling of "meaninglessness" can create culture, as modern people feel a deep sense of meaninglessness so they produced a kind of self-deprecating rebellious works, such as a politicized Internet meme Pepe the frog, the Japanese cartoon character Gudetama, and the American animated tragicomedy sitcom BoJack Horseman, which could all be classified into "demotivational culture" type that is thriving on its peak now.

Why do we need kitsch so much? It makes me so happy, why not? This immediate answer may seem simple and straightforward, but in fact, I had also meditated on whether it is too hedonistic, or too "easy"? Then a thought struck me that why do we often question kitsch's existence more than some classical art, such as classical music or architecture? Or to criticize it for not offering the challenges of contemplation? If it is rare for human beings to question the qualities of integrity and kindness, is there a kind of person who emphasizes kindness so much that it makes people feel bad? Could there be a case because we are so eager to pursue the complexity of meaning and instead we lose the option of just being "meaningless"?

While pursuing the so-called ideally good qualities, the "not-so-good qualities" are not necessary to be treated with contempt or evasion, which seems that even this sort of opposition is mere to be taken as another way of self-orientation and identity. Kitsch, as a confused and ambiguous being, is much closer to the human being but has long been denigrated. The truth is that humans are so contradictory and confusing that we need such things as analogues for ourselves - kitsch takes us away from reality, but also brings us closer to reality/self/the world. At the same time, his
existence per se continues to question whether our quest for meaning or attempt to give meaning to the world, is necessary and just.

We don't just need kitsch because it makes us happy, and we don't just have to accept it because the world is already full of kitsch. Neither is it to implicitly encourage people to use kitsch to get to a higher aesthetic experience nor "the fool who realizes his foolishness and becomes wise." I suppose it is simply that kitsch does its job consistently, which is keeping its flexibility and resilience and staying survived. And this very existence offers people a window into comprehending themselves, and a new way of perceiving.

We're just a bunch of people who don't want to be the kind of people who only say that high art is great and no longer want to feel apologetic for our own happiness. Applauding the existence of kitsch.
3 THE CONCEPT AND FORMATION OF THE KITSCH WORK

3.1 Stalking Project in Taiwan - The Spectacle of Taiwanese Kitsch

"Of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping quest for a new way of life is the only thing that remains really exciting. Aesthetic and other disciplines have proved glaringly inadequate in this regard and merit the greatest indifference. We should therefore delineate some provisional terrains of observation, including the observation of certain processes of chance and predictability in the streets." —— Guy Debord (1955)34

In the 1950s, French philosopher Guy Debord proposed a new way of experiencing the world: Dérive -- the idea that people should rapid passage through varied ambiances. This de-conscious roaming attempts to break out of the established routines of life and discover new de-commercialized and de-centered experiences in urban space.

I have been in the habit of taking pictures of chucklesome street scenes that I have encountered, and surprisingly this manner somehow echoes the philosophical concept advocated by Guy Debord. Therefore, in this thesis, I started a small project called "Stalking Project", which will be a journey full of self-muttering and with unknown endpoints, hoping to discover the revealed and obscured kitsch street scenes in the process of wandering.

- Stalking Project -

This was a mansion in my neighborhood that I would walk past in awe of when I was a kid. I still remember when I heard it was a little girl named Tracy in the same after-school club as me living in this mansion, my imagination about her life couldn't help but go wild at that time. change of viewpoint. Even after decades, the house still looked like a foreigner’s/ alien's house which looked like it was cut and violently pasted into the street scene.

First, to the left of the mansion is a 24-hour local supermarket called Hokkaido35 Fresh Supermarket (but it has nothing to do with Hokkaido), with several signs and banners all striking, huge and bright red characters on them, quietly clamoring in the background scene.

The wall decoration sits on the right ganging up with the supermarket against the mansion. On the wall are tiled European pastoral landscapes, and the sky is an ingenious use of the sheet metal often used in roofs of Taiwanese architecture, creating a multi-material collage work inadvertently.

While this wall was also limited by the surrounding architecture, which does not even surround the mansion (in fact, the college/mural was made on the wall of the terrace house next door). The ordinary everyday space is cut by this backdrop which additionally creates a separate 2-dimensional squashed space. (However, the sculpture of an eagle in front of it seems to fly out of this flat space, which makes the boundary between reality and imagination blurred.)

The paint of the exterior walls of the mansion is gradually peeling off due to the hot and humid climate of Taiwan, which betrays the classic imagery of a mild, refreshing climate of the Central European that the collage on wall art attempts to create. The paint was peeling off in a very realistic way, leaving the traces made by the local climate. The asphalt road in front of the villa seems like it was squeezing towards the mansion. And the No Parking sign that was randomly placed on the road and in front of the mansion was brutally ignored by the cars and motorcycles. It was as if an assemblage of tons of foreign elements was trying

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35 Hokkaido officially Hokkaido Circuit Prefecture, is the second largest island of Japan and comprises the largest and northernmost prefecture.
hard to ward off everything outside its walls, but it could never actually stop the flies buzzing around. This mansion is so lonely and has been tinged with a tragic and vain color.

What I admire the most is the two lion sculptures above the gate, which could be seen as an innovation -- the lions' whiskers and eyebrows are stereoscopic like the real big cats! It's like interrogating all past classical art sculptures: why didn't the sculptors make the hair and whiskers on the works stereoscopic? It seems also questioned that since the materials and techniques are now available and mature, why some of the modern classical sculptures continue to follow the norms of the past. I am very impressed by this kind of walk on walk activism.

The other building is a Presbyterian church that I saw in the indigenous area of Miaoli. Again, it seems that many elements of Western architecture can be seen in the facade, but these elements have been "falsified". What appears to be a domed roof is a bell-shaped. The simplified tracery is made of stainless steel. The architecture, which is supposed to be very simple, added some unexplained decorative structures, such as the four miniature towers on the roof of the main building, and the cross symbol was blended into the roof edge on both sides.
The small details of the church and its surroundings create a certain instability in time, space, and the setting of objects, for example, the dilapidated house on the left is hardly associated with the good life promised by religion, the church sign looks like a lightbox of a general convenience store, the arched windows on the side of the church are intruded by a very out-of-tune outdoor unit of air conditioner, and the tiled roofs of the church look like they come from local construction techniques but are inconsistent with the overall yellow and blue color palette.

When confronted with a scene that is overloaded with visual elements and filled with incoherence, and after going through many visual interruptions, my thoughts start to bounce and experience a special thinking rhythm.
The truth is that this church, which looks a bit like Western architecture, has never really existed on the European continent. It reminds me of the second generation of immigrants from all over the world, like a new existence, a bold assumption of the form of lives, containing both foreign and local features. Even if the appearance will never fully blend in with the surroundings, it has the distinctive character that makes it outstanding anyway.

Another case is the pavilion combined with Western and Chinese architecture elements nearby the tourist center beside the beach in Tainan City.

It is also an isolated object in its environment. Its elements make it impossible to identify precisely what kind of cultural product it is. The lion sculpture above it is undoubtedly a Chinese-style stone lion sculpture, but it somehow looks like a lion that got lost (on the roof).

Similar scenes that make people temporarily detached from reality will also happen in the gaps of the city.
There is a print of an Italian alleyway near the road, in the gap between two stores, which seems to create the fantasy that the way is a gateway to a foreign country.

When I took these two photos, I actually just came back from the cremation of one of my favorite family's members (the cat that had been with us for eight years), and I should be in a state of extreme grief, but this view was like an antidote, magic to get me out of this moment. I was unexpectedly in the mood to take these two pictures, which shows that such kitsch is somehow helpful to humans.

In addition to the illusion that takes place in the gaps of the city, as a cover-up strategy, the city's massive transformer boxes are painted as a landscape with blue sky and white clouds. It seems to be a failed strategy to conceal the truth, which only makes me more curious about the shadowy facts of the city's construction. These pastoral paintings in urban areas, which seem to come from the hands of naive artists, have also become sightseeing spots in the virtual world. (as the PokéStops in a mobile game Pokémon Go36)

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36 Pokémon Go is a 2016 augmented reality (AR) mobile game developed and published by Niantic in collaboration with Nintendo and The Pokémon Company for iOS and Android devices. It uses mobile devices with GPS to locate, capture, train, and battle virtual creatures, called Pokémon, which appear as if they are in the player's real-world location. Players must physically travel to explore the game's map and visit PokéStops to get some equipment or set the 'Lure Modules' for attracting wild Pokémon.
It seems to be simple and unadorned, innocent, passionate and approachable in style, like some kind of "naïve art", yet it makes people question whether this is the subject the painter sincerely desires to work on, or is it just a tacit theme for the work under the instruction of "beautifying the environment"? Do people really want the blue sky and white clouds to appear repeatedly in their daily lives in this way? Do the city planners/painters want the public to see them or or not?

On a hot summer day of over 30°C, looking out of the window of the car with AC, there is a signboard of shaved ice abandoned on the roadside. The polar bear on the sign was pulled away from its native place and placed in an alternative flat space, and then abandoned again on the hot roadside, keeping its innocent, smiling face in such an incoherent scene. This is also a scene that allows people to get out of reality temporarily.

Speaking of pet crematoriums, I also recalled that there were Joss papers for pets for sale. The absurdity of this is that no one can guarantee that the animal spirits will receive the money after Joss's papers are burned. In addition, dogs or cats didn't use money anymore while they were alive, so why
did we still have to burn those papers to them? But at the time, my family was too upset, so we still bought some. And I think my mom did get some comfort from that.

Since the category of religion is mentioned, it is also necessary to mention the religious products and their unique aesthetics that have been created as a result of the diverse rituals.

When it comes to religion, it is important to talk about the relationship between the general Taiwanese and the gods of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In my opinion, the public treats the gods as the doctors at the street corners of every community, the ones they turn to for help when they encounter either big or small trouble that cannot be explained by modern science. The barrier between the people and the gods is quite small, so they can go to the temple to make a special pray (do remember to bring a gift to the gods, especially once the wish is granted). People can also take the Buddha as an auspicious ornament in their homes. In a nutshell, the gods are just like a neighbor/friend with superpowers.

This is a statue of Maitreya\textsuperscript{37} in Budai\textsuperscript{38} form surrounded by miscellaneous items on a shelf behind the counter of a noodle store. The sunglasses were put on the statue, which seems that Budai was enjoying the beach summer.

\textsuperscript{37} Maitreya or Metteyya is regarded as a future Buddha of this world in Buddhist eschatology.

\textsuperscript{38} Budai is a semi-historical Chinese monk who is often identified with and venerated as Maitreya Buddha in Chan Buddhism.
Taiwanese temple Culture is often considered tacky by the general public, and the most representative ones are Ke-Tse opera(歌仔戲, gē zǎi xì) and Glove puppetry(布袋戲, bù dài xì).

Briefly, in the Taiwanese tradition, whenever there are major celebrations, such as the birthday of the gods and the anniversary of the opening of the temple, or important religious events such as the pilgrimage of the gods, performance will be performed in the temple as respect. And In general, most of the performances entertaining gods are mainly Ke-Tse opera or Glove puppetry.

Usually, the colors of the stage are highly saturated and vibrant, each color is very strong. The stage is quite narrow, only large enough for 5-6 actors to stand at the same time, but the flats (and usually just two pieces) are ambitiously built to create a way more depth of the stage and thicken the background of the story and plot. I assume this type of setting is inspired by the graphic in the Ming Didactic Woodblock-Printed Book — The objects and buildings on the painting are usually not limited by perspective, so you can see what is happening at different angles at the same time on the same painting (Take the picture as an example, the roof is mainly drawn from a downward angle, but at the same time you can see the drums and bells under the roof on the second floor, and this is because the angle of view has changed to upward at this part. And sometimes, the picture would contain multiple events at different times in one frame, which is a little similar to a time-lapse photo), which makes it a fantasy world free from the rule of spacetime.

Moreover, there could be multi-track distinct narratives simultaneously at the same scene - each window-like scene surrounded by beams and columns which serves as dividers in the set, like multiple frames on the pages of manga books, and each with something happening - multiple times and spaces are developed simultaneously on just one flat and displayed side by side. And the living people just strangely live in such a huge, bizarre paper house.

These days, there are even flats with "exotic" style architecture. (Yet, it still has strong Eastern style elements.)

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39 Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/sunshine_chuang/45660435901
In the past, the temple was not only the center of local religion but also the center of local entertainment, but nowadays, due to the increase of entertainment options, fewer and fewer people are willing to sit in front of the temple to enjoy such traditional shows. Thus, the performers are usually in front of an empty auditorium, performing for the gods who seldom give feedback with miracles.

Especially the stage without an audience gave me an even stronger feeling of dissociation. What was originally a fundraising event organized by the whole village to thank the god and earth, and to bond at the same time, was now a merely colorful shell without flesh containing a puppeteer who probably doubted himself at all times (unfortunately, because the backstage was not fully covered, the performer's private space also became part of the stage to be watched), manipulating the tiny dolls in his hands and weaving another myth.

40 Source: https://unews.nccu.edu.tw/unews/%E6%88%B2%E5%8F%B0%E5%86%B7%E6%9A%96%E8%AA%B0%E4%BA%BA%E7%9F%A5%E3%80%80%E5%A4%B1%E5%8E%BB%E8%A7%80%E7%9C%BE%E5%BE%8C%E7%9A%84%E9%85%AC%E7%A5%9E%E6%88%B2/
Here, I think the separate stories are being played out both inside and outside of the stage, and they are not intertwined at all.

Another popular type of performance entertaining gods is fairly dynamic, called Electric Flower Car.

Sometimes the car carries a statue of Buddharupa, and sometimes there are women dressed in sexy clothes singing and pole dancing (all in the name of entertaining the gods, and no matter if the god is a woman or a man). It's like a carnival that takes place on the road from time to time. And I would say it always appears in a bossy way— not only is it visually dazzling, and with loud background music and hot young girls singing and dancing, as well as the fireworks being set off while the parade is going on, attempting to take away all the senses of the audience.

The electric flower car is usually a modified truck originally carrying goods, only the goods change from fruits or parcels to sexy ladies or Buddharupa. The visual elements of the decorations are mainly in bright colors and have a shiny, glossy surface texture, and all the patterns fill every gap, following the philosophy that "more is better". At the same time, under this kind of template, there is still some flexibility for personal creativity, for example, there are areas on the side of the car where the owner can paint what they want, so it is often possible to see owners' individual viewpoints and personal desires.

All the elements on the car beckon the audience, and the performers on the car also become part of the car, which is literally a "touring stage", summoning the lonely minds on the road to cheer for the one and only show each time.

The electric flower car carrying the Buddharupa.

Source: https://photo.xuite.net/n790809/16660574*1
The electric flower car carrying the dancers. 42

The same question, do the gods really enjoy watching hot ladies?

Although these religious entertainments have gradually faded, they definitely recorded past popular preferences and entertainment aesthetics faithfully.

Other religious artifacts are listed here:

Paper houses used to burn as offerings to deceased relatives and friends:
using light materials (paper), using flat surfaces to represent space (still somewhere between 2 and 3 dimensions), the massive repetition of the same pattern in visual design, and the complex and even disparate-style composition of each element at a closer look, but somehow still establishing a unique aesthetic as a unit.

42 (Left)Source: https://yang0902.pixnet.net/blog/post/27225989
(Right)Source:https://www.mobile01.com/topicdetail.php?f=193&t=3523933
Paper modern goods used to burn as offerings to deceased relatives and friends:
Laptops "similar" to macs, high-priced bags "similar" to the Louis Vuitton, the gift bag of communication electronic equipment, shrunk heavy motorcycles, massage chairs and cigarette sets (including cigarettes, ashtrays, lighters and electronic cigarettes. Seriously, do I still need a lighter to get a fire in heaven?)

It seems to imply that even spirits still follow the rules of the human world and have universally recognized hobbies like fancy cars, luxury watches, electronic devices, and other typical human pleasures prevalent in modern capitalist society. Practically, because there is still the issue of intellectual property rights in the world of the living, all these options can only be pirated anyway.

Imagining the spirit riding the motorcycle, perhaps people can somehow begin to imagine what heaven would be like.
My father found out from a fortune teller that his "destined" tutelary deity was at a temple nearly 4 hours away from home. While driving me to the airport, I accompanied him to this temple to greet the god. What was not expected was that it seemed like I accidentally trespassed on a religious theme park.

The car had just entered the temple's large parking area, and then I saw the two Egyptian statues surrounded by cars. Except for the incomprehensible logic of configuration, the installation between the statues also did not fit with the symmetrical composition. One of the statues even had the ribs sculpted out, as if the genes of Buddhism had been transplanted. Because I didn't understand why they were in the parking area, I chose to bring in some characters for them, such as the concierge in front of the Five Star Hotel (because the poses are similar), the guardian of the car, and the valet parker...etc. I guessed the mind of whoever made this arrangement.

The most obvious thing in this area is the 120-meter high statue of Lord Guan (built-in 1967), whose huge back can be seen from the parking area far away. This statue is the main
building of the temple, and the windows drift on its uneven back like they move with the tide and up towards the sky non-stop.

The statue of Lord Guan stroking his beard looks awe-inspiring, but the gesture is like a thumbs-up photo pose in old-school style, as if telling the believers that everything will be fine, like a god who dares to guarantee happiness on faith. My question here: What kind of happiness does it guarantee? The happiness that is guaranteed in this temple is like a fixed formula as if you are once blessed by the gods so that you will be happy, regardless of what you are about to do. It’s all so simple, like magic.
If the large statue of the god who is charged for justice and wealth\textsuperscript{13} is too scary and daunting, the wall at the entrance with a cartoony Lord Guan (who is actually riding a jumpy horse like Rody\textsuperscript{44}) appears to be close to all age groups, like declaring that this is a paradise for everyone.

And there are indeed many "religious amusement facilities" inside -- Coin-operated Kau chim\textsuperscript{45} machines. After you have your questions in mind, and religiously throw NT$10 coin\textsuperscript{46} into the machine (the above instructions are posted on the front of the machine and especially noted that it is "Incredibly efficacious"), the machine will then activate with music. The robot fairy inside the box will turn back and slide into the small temple, and come back with the fortune poem served with both hands. Once the fortune poem is thrown into the slot, the music comes to an abrupt end.

The combination of modern machines and religion. A machine that is an agent for the gods, but with a gambling nature -- You trade a cheap price for the gods' guarantee of your recent luck, and if you are not satisfied with the answer the gods give you, you can always ask for more chances. Here is an interesting question to me: Can machines represent god? How do we distinguish the will of machines from gods'? Whether it is the prediction of destiny given by probability, or probability is the so-called god? In other words, is the modern god just mathematics?

\textsuperscript{13} Even the gangs have the custom of believing in Lord Guan.

\textsuperscript{44} RODY jumpy horse designed and produced in 1984 by the Italian professional physical toy manufacturing company LEDRAPLASTIC SPA is a load 200 kg of inflatable toy horse. In 1997, the Japanese company JAMMY signed a global exclusive agency agreement with the original Italian manufacturer and then successively designed a series of RODY's graphic images and developed merchandising, so that RODY's brand awareness increased quickly.

\textsuperscript{45} Also known as lottery poetry or fortune sticks is a fortune telling practice. Person asking the question requests answers from a sacred oracle lot. The practice is often performed in a Taoist or Buddhist temple. Usually the content is written in the form of poetry, so it is also called the fortune poem.

\textsuperscript{46} Of course, this refers to the New Taiwan Dollar, which translates to about 0.3 Euros.
Here is another invention under the same logic: Lucky bracelet gashapon.

Likewise, the exact steps are marked on the top of the machine. Step 1, insert the first NT$50\(^{47}\) coin, and then turn the knob half a turn; Step 2, insert the second NT$50 coin in your hand, and finish the remaining half-turn of the knob. I don’t know if this is a kind of limitation of the mechanism of machine perse, or if this is a deliberate attempt to create a sense of ritual.

There is also a huge lantern created for the mid-autumn festival.

The lantern is about 5 to 6 meters high, the design is very much following the trend, which is a hybrid of Iron Man and Guan Gong. I feel it is particularly whimsical, after all, the only common thing between Lord Guan and Iron Man is the color, the appearances of both are majorly red.

\(^{47}\) NT$50 converted to Euro about €1.53.
Such a creation, indeed its style, ideas, production fail to achieve a visually harmonious state at all: its body features are undoubtedly Iron Man's armor, and above the neck still remains the head of Lord Guan, which even adopt the iconic posture stroking the beard and keep the Guandao which is the signature weapon of Lord Guan. It is said that this design is hoped to combine modern technology and God's divine power to dispel the covid epidemic and guard the health of all people. (The whole body will light up at night, especially the chest and palm lights will be particularly bright, simulating laser-shooting).

There is also an artificial style "peach blossom pond": the bottom of the pond is painted blue to make the water look bluish, a huge pink crystal is placed in the middle, and finally, it is decorated with an emoji-like, easy hearts with an arrow symbol to express the pond associated with love. The side instructor said: with the peach flower branch dipped the water in the pond, following a particular order to spraying water from the head, left shoulder, to the right shoulder, you can bring good luck and good yuan fen home. This is also one of the popular spots where even many young couples would come together to pray for their relationship.

In addition to these novel religious amusement facilities, the sacrificial offerings placed in front of the shrine also have a unique believers' aesthetic.

The real pigs and real sheep that used to be used for sacrifices were replaced by dolls, but the body parts of these dolls were replaced with edible noodles (which the worshippers could take home to eat after the worship). The colors used for the sacrifices are mainly red, a symbol of luck, and the main composition of this kind of aesthetics is usually about the large quantity, symmetrical and stable configuration.

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48 As known as "fateful coincidence / destiny / natural affinity among people," is a concept describing good and bad chances and potential relationships.
Beyond that, the details of religious textiles are also very gorgeous, just a small patch containing a variety of handcraft techniques: intensive embroidery, padding thickness to make surface bulging, embellished with plastic beads, etc. The bold use of color and the complete display of the characteristics of various cotton threads are extremely magnificent. I am fascinated.

The headdress and costumes of the statue of gods are also very detailed, but since I didn’t take any pictures in the temple, I will put the pictures I took at the Buddhist shop for reference. Usually, if people have a statue of the god at home, they can buy some costumes, headdresses, and accessories for the statue at stores. It is, so to speak, a sort of gods’ version of the dress-up game.
The last daily category of stalking comes to the food category, which I tentatively call **kitsch food**.

The first thing that I think can be classified as kitsch food is **bubble tea**\(^{49}\). Bubble tea is an everyday drink in Taiwan. The most classic image is the light brown color of milk tea with dark brown pearls, which has spread to the world and become a trend in the wave of globalization.

![Image of bubble tea](image)

In Taiwan, bubble tea is a cheap daily drink (but it is expensive for students, some do not eat lunch and take bubble tea to replace a meal instead). Because of the fun and special mouthfeel of drinking and eating at the same time, it has become one of the most popular and representative foods in Taiwan.

Bubble tea can be considered a modern food created to make the eating experience more enjoyable, based on ordinary tea beverages, adding other "non-essential" elements (tapioca ball), which is a new drink created with a "playful" mentality (becoming somewhat like a beverage + dessert category). Each of the two tea shops claimed to be the inventor of

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\(^{49}\) It is also called Tapioca (ball) tea, Boba/Poba milk tea. It is a tea-based drink that originated in Taiwan in the early 1980s, and it most commonly consists of milk tea accompanied by chewy tapioca balls.
bubble tea\textsuperscript{50}, but regardless of who was the first creator, the stories from both sides said that they made it out "incidentally" and were an experimental product out of curiosity and playfulness.

So it can be said that this is a new evolution of human's everyday food for food entertainment, which follows the philosophy of "more is good". Nowadays, besides trying to make changes in the basic ingredients to be recognizable in the market, tea shops continuously try to put various stuff into the milk tea, and all those manners make the whole bubble tea family look more diverse and manifold.

Combining different sized tapioca balls, the tea shop invented a new beverage with the creative and catchy name "leopard-spot bubble tea" to attract customers' attention.

In the development of the human visual appetite, bubble tea also spares no pain. The tapioca balls have been developed in a variety of colors (dyed with plants), shapes (made into a cube), and flavors. Some of the milk for tea will also be mixed with other ingredients, focusing on the overall color palette, treating this everyday drink as a new creation, a canvas of infinite possibilities.

\textsuperscript{50} Two tea shops in Taiwan claimed to be the inventors of bubble tea and took the case to court to fight for a product patent. In 2019, the court determined that bubble tea is a new type of beverage that can be prepared by any store, and therefore is not a patented product that can be owned by anyone.
The colorful tapioca balls are made by a tea shop in Hong Kong.

A Taiwanese tea shop makes tapioca balls like the Poké Ball (but the taste is not very different from the general tapioca balls).

The gold leaf rose bubble tea in the tourist attraction of Taipei. It emphasizes the use of a whole sheet of gold leaf and claims it would offer a "luxurious taste".
This has caused a phenomenon that images not only serve for sights but also taste sensation.

At first, my desire to buy a product was indeed evoked by the wild speculation of the taste from those visuals; however, not long after, seeing the new products that keep coming out, I became only fascinated by the inventive ideas but lack the thirst for buying or consuming them at all. This food as a pleasant diversion surprisingly bores its customers so rapidly.

However, generally speaking, when the masses see new products (with provocative drink names, e.g. Mermaid's Tears, Taste of Betrayal, etc, even the name of the drink is an imaginative creation or an exciting riddle to be solved), most people are always willing to invest NT$50-80 to try them as an adventure for the tastebuds and entertainment for eating.

Even if it doesn't taste as good as images, its tasteful appearance is beautiful enough to be posted and delude others. (I often see that the posts with such photos have lots of comments asking if it's tasty or worth buying, and most of the answers are no.) Finally, I can't help but ask, is this a food made for taste or food made for the image?

Compared to the decorative knick-knack sold in flying tiger, this is a category of kitsch that Taiwanese are particularly keen on investing in -- buying out of curiosity and trying out fresh modern products with only a small cost. Furthermore, since the purchase is food, it does not cause a hoarding problem, and even if it does not taste as good as expected, I can still reuse the food for deliberately tantalizing the taste buds of the innocent people by the images. This product can be fully utilized from its essence to its appearance, satisfying not only the human appetite, inquisitive nature but also the desire to show off/share (and the merchant also benefits from more curious customers called by images).

In Japan, bubble tea has become popular since 2018 but compared to Taiwan, bubble tea is defined as a "stylish drink" in Japan, and the price is much higher than in Taiwan.

The Japanese even apply Boba to other different cuisines.

The ramen store "二代目 博多だるま" in Odaiba, Tokyo, adds Boba to the Tsukemen (English: "dipping ramen"), along with soft-boiled eggs.
Someone cooked rice with bubble tea.

Boba Ramen

Boba with stewed meat

Boba pizza

Boba Mapo tofu
I even found slime made in the form of bubble tea on the Internet.

Other foods that I think could be also categorized as kitsch food include traditional Taiwanese cream cakes, sundaes, sugar painting, fish cakes for hot pots, sacrificial foods, traditional foods for weddings, vegetable carvings, and some decorations next to the food, such as plastic flowers and grass, which I think are also important elements in making it kitsch food.

The traditional Taiwanese cream cake.
Sugar painting.

Traditional fish cakes are sold in the traditional market.

I like the quality of their poor, crooked outlook. What a specificity of mass production - Even though they are made in large quantities, each one looks different.

The very kitschy pastry in the tourist area in China I saw before, which imitated the shape of a peach, using a single color for dyeing, and huge amounts were being piled randomly together.
In response to the needs of customers who do not want to kill and would like to easily preserve the products, the sausage, chicken, and fish originally used for rituals are replaced with products made from bread in animal form.

The traditional wedding banquet in Taiwan.

When I was a kid, if I was invited to a wedding banquet, what I wanted most was the fake flower decorations on the plate.
I've always thought the fake grass next to the sushi was fascinating. Anyway, there is no logic about the fact that marine life has been captured and dismembered into Sashimi, and placed on top of rice, and finally was surrounded by fake grass.

The symmetrically placed round mochi may not be too kitschy by itself, but with the colourful decorative paper on the side and the blue sky with white clouds and green dragon plate underneath, the overall kitschiness is greatly enhanced. (Imagery: super mochi floating in the sky with a dragon flying alongside)

From the examples above, we can see that even though the visual taste of kitsch is sweet, yet this sweet aesthetic can be applied to different dishes in general. What these foods have in common is a strong sense of "artificiality" - extracting and refining elements from natural ingredients, and making them into a type of food product that could barely see its original looks (which is what modern people eat every day). Even in such a primitive act, humans gradually lose the opportunity to directly face or get acquainted with nature and the land.

However, some youngsters in Taiwan are not just critical of this. I think we all see in it the absurdity of human beings and the futility of life. Although we had had the desire to be the
heroes of saving the world, now we have more the feeling of being tripped up by the sweet cream. Over time, we embraced this native sweetener and tried to build towers of whipped cream around our feet, hoping to get closer to the world we dreamed of.

The young people of Taiwan have added the local kitsch sweetness to their cake creations.

Regardless of the moral issues, these foods are fun even if they don't necessarily taste good or look good.

3.2 The Characteristics collected for My Creation/Bad Art/ Great Trash

To sum up, I list some characteristics of Taiwanese kitsch (innocent kitsch) within my stalking project below:

Visually:

- A strong sense of "artificiality" (usually is light materials, such as plastics)
- Shapes limited by modern manufacturing techniques (shapes created by human intervention in nature)
- Visually fussy and overwhelming
- Emotionally supersaturated and straightforward in expression
- The over-exaggerated proportion of the shape
- Flimsy/lack thickness
- Collage-like/jerry-built
● Strong and conspicuous characteristics of appearances (unique shape or striking solid colors)

● Detached from the environment/context (not fitting into the surrounding environment, creating a sense of detachment from reality)

● Repetitive elements that appear in abundance

● Prefer symmetrical, stable compositions

● Inadequate completion

● no meticulous attention on quality at all (Make-do-with attitude)

● Play with numerous symbols

● Good at using different dimensions of space (lots of planar/flat spatial elements are included)

● Blurred boundaries between private and performance spaces (e.g., the key part of mansions are the exposed architectural parts outside the walls which allow passersby to peek at; the actors' performance space is usually between two flats in Ke-Tse opera or Glove puppetry, just go to the side of the stage and you can see the whole stage structure, even the actors' temporary rest area at the roadside; In the Electric Flower Car performance, the audience can see the inside of the electronic float all the time, which is a messy temporary leisure space, and also a strong sense of the presence of truck drivers who usually seems not engaged in the show)

● Salty-sweet (with the aforementioned brushed dog ornament, which I think is not only extremely sweet but also a tinged of salt. And the possible source of the salty flavor is a sense of nostalgia, a sense of abandonment, and being out of touch with the times. I always feel sentimental, emotional, and happy-sad about this. Whether this saltiness adds the finishing touches on it or is just a disaster, I think this is just a matter of opinion, just like the British Marmite sauce's slogan: "Love it or hate it.

The personalities of the innocent kitsch makers:

● Intent to create a beautiful illusion

● The whimsical move

● Follow the "addition logic" in aesthetic decision

● An active trier and practitioner
• Straightforward and simple
• Domineering, wanting to invade and occupy all the audience's senses
• Happy to pursue fun and entertainment
• Limited newness: that is, although the creators are flexible in their approach, they seldom question the premise and the essence (for example, do gods love hot girls? Creators are so tolerant of long-standing customs and rarely criticize them)
• Hedonism / a strong sense of futility - the colored bobas need great effort to make, but it can be said that these bobas are made only to create novelty, instant pleasure, or even just to be images

**Characteristics of the innocent kitsch items:**

• Accidentally assembled
• No self-awareness
• Drifting along / following the trend
• Resigned
• Illusory
• Enjoying the hardships / bittersweet

These characteristics of innocent kitsch that I have summarized above make me particularly resonant with it, not only because I think people can easily see themselves in it, reflect on it, and get to know themselves further. Moreover, I think I may be able to find in it the courage which I had lost to create and the strength to overcome the creative bottleneck. I would also include these personal reflections in the practical part of this study.
4 THE RECORD OF THE CONSTRUCTION AND ITERATION PROCESS OF MY WORK

4.1 Work 1: Inedible Dogs

With the summary above, I would like to first experiment with some of the qualities of innocent kitsch’s appearance: strong artificiality/man-made look, repetitiveness, detachment from the environment/context, ambiguously emotional expression of objects, and salty-sweet/happy sad fantasy style.

Inspired by the furry dog ornament mentioned in the previous paragraph, I combined the elements of buttercream, trying to make an "emotionally unrecognizable" buttercream Shih Tzu toy dog.

In order to respond to the characteristics of "mass production" and "infinite reproduction", the making technique I chose this time is casting -- The first step is model-making, which means making the prototype of the sculpture. Once the negative mold was made from it, the casting material could be repeatedly poured into the mold and made a large number of copies.

Shih Tzu dog, the image as a reference.

The draft of the sculpture.
Because the clay is too hard to achieve the effect of buttercream piping, I first used clay to make the base of the sculpture, then put the plaster paste into the piping bag as if it were buttercream, and squeezed it onto the base one by one.

The cake on the right side of the picture is the squeezing test.
At first, I thought it wouldn’t be too difficult to do, but I didn’t expect that plaster paste is a material that will solidify in a short time. I spent about 15 minutes making a 250ml bag of plaster paste, but considering the smooth effect of squeezing, the best time to squeeze it on the base is only about 1.5 minutes. So in the process of making the appearance, it is often in a tight rhythm. (After that, come with the cleaning part, which needs about 15 mins to clean all the unused plaster out of the bags, buckets, and tools, and start over all the steps again. To be fair, it is a sort of physical exertion work, while I felt this physical labor was quite exhilarating and soothing.)

It took me about 5-6 hours to squeeze the plaster paste onto this L20*W10*H15cm sculpture and most of the time was spent on making a moderate plaster paste, and if there was some non-smooth piping that caused some unevenness, I also had to remove or polish it within a short time, which is quite time-consuming.

After finishing the dog model with the plaster, I applied silicon evenly on the surface and waited until the silicon became hard, then made another plaster shell for the silicon mold as a support structure.
First casting test -- using plaster.

Second casting test -- using cement.

Third casting test -- using acrylic resin.
In this production, a great amount of time and labor out of expectation was input. I thought this case could help kitsch to defend itself against the typical accusations of "sin of laziness" by kitsch's critics. However, the idea of the sculpture's appearance is very straightforward and easily understood (buttercream + dog), which may not be exempt from the criticism of "mental passivity, spiritual laziness", but it does issue a series of whimsical questions, for example, how to imitate the effect of buttercream, how different feelings were brought up by the different materials, and what is the psychological state of the creator after witnessing a great amount of reproduction? Putting in my labor and experimenting with different materials and techniques, I did have a lot of fun with this kind of playing-around working mode.

However, the difficult part of creating is the dialogue with myself in the process of work. I often question the meaning of what I am doing at that moment (does it help the world at all?), and even become more self-doubting because of the common criticism, "mental passivity and spiritual laziness", of kitsch that I have heard before.
Nevertheless, this making process was precious to me, for it forced me to look straight into my heart and be honest, ignoring the possible criticism and the fear of possibly being considered as "superficial". Instead, I could simply add together the qualities that interested me the most by the simplest formula: a dog! buttercream! buttercream dog!

Such kind of thinking could be judged as superficial, but in fact, I have gone through continuous self-interrogation in the process, for instance, what would this not-yet-existent buttercream dog look like once it came true? Would people think this is a lack of depth? Does my work have any positive meaning to the world? One of the most common situations is that I often interrogate myself: "What the hell am I doing? " when I was trimming the hair of a sculpture or cracking the plaster shell.

The continuous questioning with the work in hand often gives me an alternative sense of absurdity as monologue comedy alike, and which perhaps is the key that made it meet the requirement of the so-called "non-superficial" artwork. Anyway, I think the most important thing is that following Kitsch’s typical form of thinking has given me some kind of salvation and emancipation while encountering my struggle with “being creative”.

I am a divergent thinker, so thoughts often look like stars scattered across the astronomical landscape, although they often appear to be in the same frame, in fact, I often have trouble concentrating and connecting them. Moreover, I tend to be an "over-prepared" person. As ideas accumulate and grow in complexity, I will postpone my practice and gradually become mentally overwhelmed.

In this time-intensive practicing schedule, the brief time for thinking allowed me to follow my intuition and focus on one thing first instead. It is the first time that the execution has slightly preceded my thoughts. Because the practice proceeded along with the contemplation, it can be said that this is an experience that I had to face my true desires. In the past, the longer I thought about it, the more factors I would take into consideration, and sometimes the focus would be blurred and I would accidentally sacrifice what I wanted to do most. The experience this time is the case that when time, materials, and physical strength are highly limited, what actually do I want to do? This strong, urgent question is exactly unavoidable.

And as I mentioned before, I often wonder: does making this product help the world? Not only has no contribution to our ecological environment, I even felt insecure, guilty, and defeated that my works/products that are not accompanied by a "need for the product" manufactured by me as the maker, which seems my fault for not creating an enticement that can lead to consumption.

Surprisingly, I felt affection for the work that has no commercial evaluation, carefully crafted package designs, and marketing strategies, and through the relationship between it and me, I was able to liberate myself to some extent. Especially since my previous study and
profession was "design", today's making mode is different from most of my previous design experiences. I used to be very dissatisfied with most of my works and wished to bury them all. On the contrary, in the situation of sculpting the buttercream dog, I can be assured that I enjoy it a lot and this innocent kitsch sculpture is not used as a tool by the big bosses to gain profit or maintain the status of the ruling class; moreover, the consumers/viewers are not passive either, their participation is not just a choice to buy or not to buy, but they can choose, choose to love it or hate it.

Unlike being a designer, who often has to take into account the needs of the client, this time I was able to face my own desires and complete my own fantasy, and, here, imperfection is allowed to exist.

With the ambiguous expression on their faces, each piece seems the same to each other, but if you observe those buttercream dogs closely, you can have your interpretation of them and even see the subtle differences of each replica. And once you discover these distinct (imperfect) qualities, it seems that a new connection has been born between you and it, and the one will be given meaning, even divinity by you at the very moment. Although mass reproduction could cause depreciation on the market, the "genuine" would no longer matter either, which means we all regain the freedom of choice at some point and the right to redefine. Additionally, imperfection is something crucial and necessary here, for imperfection is the first step in building relationships, and the irrational affection towards imperfection is what we need especially within the mathematics-dominated world, so I can proudly applaud imperfection here.

The existence of this work per se is problematic towards the properties of materials (what would a hard, permanent buttercream be like?), meaning (is it necessary to give meaning to everything?), and it is also a provoking question to the immutability and the human obligation.
I tried to make a low-fidelity image of the dog.

4.2 Work 2 : A Genuine Statue

The second project is an extension of the buttercream dog work, attempting to get closer to the essence of kitsch by removing the elements of specific kitsch visual stereotypes one by one, to experiment after that whether such work could be still considered kitsch.

The subject of this sculpture is still a toy dog, and I also use the same method -- casting. Yet the size (about L45cm*W10cm*H30cm) was enlarged, and unlike the first series, which has complicated details, this time it adopted a simple form style.

The basic structure is first made of wood, then covered with iron mesh, filled with some support materials, and finally covered with clay that will be used to make the outer shape.

The final silhouette was quite simple and intentionally deformed into a squeezed shape, making it look like a squashed cartoon character, somewhat reflecting that kitsch culture.
usually adopts rapid and repeated specific symbols which become cliché and worn due to overuse.

The toy dog stands on a squeezed, leaning Greek pillar is a brief greeting to the subject of “god-making” and “purity” -- not so much as biting sarcasm, but perhaps just a situation experiment that a dog trying to see if standing in such a sacred place would make itself more stately and divine or not.

In addition to the squeezed shape of the sculpture, I was particularly concerned with the details of its eyes and eyelashes. And I also gave it an unfathomable facial expression.
I used plaster to make a disposable one-time mold this time. I waited for the outer plaster layer to become solidified and then remove the clay inside.

The next step was the casting. The material I selected was concrete, a very heavy, hard material. (The dog will weigh about 55kg once it is made into a concrete statue.) I wanted to know if a very "light" subject, once dealt with by a very "heavy" material, would diminish the essence of kitsch or not.
Helping the dog take a bath. I like that it looks like there are some tears in its eyes.
So I used a very "serious, heavy, timeless, classic" concrete material to challenge kitsch's quality (which is also Kitsch's original sin) of "lightness" -- lightweight, handy, frivolous, and easy-breezy. Nevertheless, the result shows that the self-deprecation and humor inherited by kitsch still secretly leak out through this sculpture.

An especially interesting comment made by one of my classmates was that she felt that the work seemed to be an ancient relic that had been excavated and that it came from an ancient dog lover who made a statue of his dog just out of pure love and pride. Perhaps it can be said that this sculpture has broken the so-called “shallowness” of the time of kitsch, which indirectly proves that even if the visual lightness is deliberately eliminated, the nature of the object as kitsch is not diminished.

If humor has not been the main character on the stage of the history of art, then I was wondering if the comical meme being prevalent in the present would be defined by future generations as one of the arts representing our generation?
The huge toy dog and its puppy fellows were set as a fetishism shrine.

4.3 Work in processing: Flat Wreath

Talking about “kitsch”, except for the visual sweetness, I also think about one of the traits of kitsch that fascinates me a lot, which is its ambiguity, that I associate with the concept called liminality in the anthropology field.

According to Wikipedia: “In anthropology, liminality (from the Latin word līmen, meaning "a threshold") is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of a rite of passage, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete. During a rite's liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which completing the rite establishes.”

From my personal interpretation, liminality is a place/condition where non-beings and beings are extremely unstable, unclear, and also mobile. And there are some objects which give me the same feeling, one of them are wreaths.
The Taiwanese traditional wreath could be used for both funeral and marriage occasions. The traditional wreath is special for the funeral. The Taiwanese traditional wreath with LED panels is special for the funeral.

Wreaths always give me an out-of-the-way sensation: they usually look so elated and lively, but people use them as decoration for funerals. (Some of them are even reusable and could appear in both grieved and joyful places.) And although they are made of natural elements (flower or plastic flower), they look unnatural and quirky no matter where they appear. The
flowers in the ring are bent, cut, arranged, and manipulated into something aiming at pleasing or comforting humans, which means we take dead flowers as the sacrifice for visual jollity.

Between life and death, celebration and condolences, nature and artifact, with no starting and ending point, wreaths became my inspiration for my next works.

I plan to use clay to build the overall shape of the flower ring and cut it into small pieces like Mosaic tiles. A plane surface, small pieces, and mobility while reassembling respectively symbolize superficiality, unclarity, lack of context and consistency and flexibility that are the communal characteristics kitsch and liminality both have.

After firing all the components, I would apply a kind of processing technique called “Flocking” in the final step, which would make my work have a furry texture. The reason for doing this is that I've always been fascinated by hairy objects. I assume once objects grow hair/fur, which is easier for humans to like. So I am going to take it as an approach to add some intimacy and lovability to my work.

The examples of the texture by flocking technique.

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51 Flocking is the process of depositing many small fiber particles (called flock) onto a surface. It can also refer to the texture produced by the process, or to any material used primarily for its flocked surface. Flocking of an article can be performed for the purpose of increasing its value in terms of the tactile sensation, aesthetics, color and appearance.
The draft of my work.

Use waste clay to make my own material.

Making the giant sheet from clay by machine manually.
Assembling the parts together.
Making plaster mold for producing tiles.

Now, before being fired in the oven, in order to let the clay dry without cracks, I am patiently waiting for the clay which was covered by the fabric and plastic sheet to slowly dry itself for a few days. So far, witnessing my work has been born gradually and being capable of being fully involved in every step of the making, I feel so exhilarated and content. Can’t wait to continue my journey leading to my kitsch fantasy.
5 CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION - Kitsch in the Future

My exploration of kitsch has been through the journey whose focus was cyclically narrowed down, then expanded and reconcentrated.

From a newborn's gaze of not knowing what this is at first, I concentrated on a particular aesthetic that is all the place in my original life and intuitively asked: What is this? Why is it classified in this way?

I then inadvertently fell down the rabbit hole of a sphere of art studies where questions continue to grow. This hole was much deeper, wider, and more encompassing than I had imagined, like an underground pipeline system. And those questions led me to the literature of modern scholar Max Ryynänen, Matei Călinescu who wrote the five faces of modernity. With my observations, I discovered what I believe to be a brand new category of kitsch that has been unrecognized and unnamed for a long time in Taiwan-- which I called “innocent kitsch”.

Innocent kitsch is innocent because it is voiceless -- whether it is muted, naturally incapable of speaking, or forcibly filled with the voice from someone else -- it has no say in anything, and its meaning is always given by the people around it. And those meanings are only outside itself. Although its forms are diverse, colorful, and sometimes messy, I think it has an inherent quality of the "white cube" -- a kind of "universal space" with maximum abstraction. It may seem neutral, but in fact, it is more like a "glass cube" that truly reflects and even amplifies and reproduces "infinitely imaging" of human desires, which makes viewers inescapable to face. Though most kitsch scholars agree that kitsch does not provide the audience with space for a different interpretation, I found more space for my imagination to roar instead.

In addition to exploring Taiwan's own "Innocent kitsch" culture, for a better understanding of the concept of kitsch in Asian cultural circles, I also studied the kawaii and kawaii violence culture of Japan and Chinese bureaucratic kitsch, and the too-cool culture of the younger generation. Finally, a small conclusion was drawn that Taiwan's anonymous kitsch is a unique cultural landscape that originates from the locals.

In the process of this broad exploration, it was discovered that, despite not having a name of its own, or appearing to be a concept from abroad, kitsch can be said to be a visual, psychological concept that coexists with all modern human beings - as long as human beings exist, they cannot avoid having a part of kitsch in their lives or their hearts.
According to this modern phenomenon, I believe that Kitsch's activity has moved from the third wave mentioned by Ryynänen to the fourth stage.

In this stage, most human beings are using aesthetics based on the principle of mediocrity, and skillfully using the logic from the manufacturing industry to create their own appearance (e.g., Beauty Industry), image (e.g., Image Consultant), thoughts (e.g., the best-seller in the bookstore) and even their whole lives; moreover, in a world gradually controlled by virtual data, modern people's psychological dependence on substances is gradually increasing, and substances things are no longer treated as mere substances, but rather as some kind of containers for emotions. Gradually, the home has become a repository of emotions. It can be said that from the inside to the outside, humans have already become a new human-nonhuman hybrid.

As a new human-kitsch hybrid, I think kitsch provides a conduit for people to get to know themselves better. It's always a bit scary to look at oneself soberly, so that's why I felt that all human beings require to associate with the outer kitsch less and more through their lives, which could help them confront themselves with more nerve and humor, become much more identity-wise, and also could let them discover the unique affinity between the individual and the individual.

After the broad lens above, I returned to my familiar path and kicked off my stalking project. The Dérive proposed by French philosopher Guy Debord allowed my mind to move flexibly within the great spectacle of kitsch, whether it was the actual neighborhood walks or the drifting wanderings of images online, I realized more about the reasons why kitsch fascinated me: Whether it is its overly straightforward character, its absurdity sense of humor, its ability to heal people out of the moment, or its power to create an emotional impact like a liminal space, I felt connected to it and couldn't stay out of it.

Based on this personal mini-project, I sorted out the qualities I found of the innocent kitsch and based on these qualities, I began my experimental works with different visual elements extracted from kitsch. In addition to experimenting with those visual elements, I also decoded my own interpretation of it, and gradually re-coded these abstract qualities into my works. In this process of experimentation, introspection, and reconstruction of thoughts, my conception of innocent kitsch went from the overall social level to the personal level, and inadvertently, through the works I generated, I gave back to society from my personal perspective. I unwittingly joined the cycle of social construction physically and mentally.

Through this process of practical research, I have become more convinced of the strong and firm connection between kitsch and me. And due to the reclusive question consciousness I constantly associate with it, I became calmer and at ease to indulge myself in this fantastic world. In the future, I would be willing to share the joy and reintroduce this art genre that has been long denigrated but is still charming, sincere, naughty, and so close to the nature of human beings to the world.
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