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PUBLICATION NOTES



80s TAIPEI X 90s HONG KONG
(台北80 X 香港90)

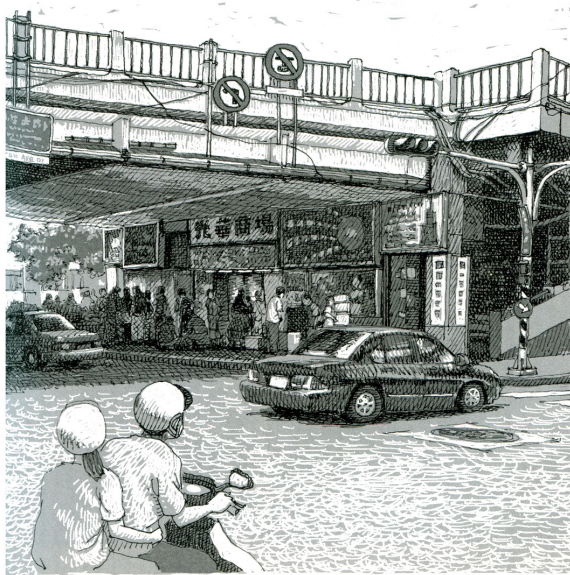
BY 61CHI, SEAN CHUANG (小莊), AMIN LEE (李勉之) ET.AL.

167 PAGES

DALA PUBLISHING

PAPERBACK: TAIWAN

光華商場
Guang Hua Plaza



Above and right: Illustrations from Sean Chuang's story in *80s Taipei x 90s Hong Kong*, a graphic novel with stories by illustrators from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

PHOTOS: DALA PUBLISHING AND SEAN CHUANG



Local comics look at Taiwan

Two anthologies published by Dala offer different perspectives on Taiwan, showing that homegrown comics are breaking with manga conventions

BY ADINA ZEMANEK
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

In Taiwan's comic book industry, local talent tends to be overlooked or not taken seriously. Japanese manga dominates, and comic books are commonly associated with teenage entertainment.

Much like Taiwan's "New Wave" cinema, which introduced elements of realism to the screen, success at international events such as the Angoulême International Comics Festival and the Frankfurt Book Fair, doesn't necessarily mean popularity at home. When asked, many Taiwanese are surprised that local comic book talent exists.

It does. Alongside established, successful artists such as Wei Zhong-cheng (韋宗成) and AKRU, who draw in a manga style for younger readers, another niche market has recently been on the rise: the graphic novel, a genre targeted at both young and older audiences. The authors of these richly produced works distance themselves from Japanese models by cultivating a personal style, while sharing a preoccupation with defining Taiwan.

Instead of looking towards Japan, these artists look towards the west for inspiration and marketing opportunities. Lin Li-ching's (林莉菁) graphic memoir *My Youth, My Formosa* (我的青春，我的FORMOSA), published first in France and later in Taiwan, echoes Marjane Satrapi's famous *Persepolis* with its story of growing

up in a lesser-known geographic location and adverse political circumstances.

FOSTERING HOMEGROWN TALENT

But it is not only single authors like Lin who forge global paths for themselves. Taiwanese publishers also foster homegrown talent. One of them is Dala Publishing (大辣出版). Its "Dala Comic" series includes Chinese-language translations of European *bandes dessinées* (drawn strips) and works that place Taiwan under the spotlight.

Dala's star author is Sean Chuang (小莊), who in one book recounts his experience as a video ad director in *Film Maker's Notes* (廣告人筆記), a collection of anecdotes on work, leisure and watching other countries through the gaze of a Taiwanese tourist.

Chuang's most recent success is *80s Diary in Taiwan* (80年代事件簿), winner of two Golden Comic prizes in 2014, a two-volume graphic memoir full of nostalgia-tinted, wonderfully detailed pictures of urban everyday life in the 1980s, yet still found today.

Another lover of local urban landscapes is artist 61Chi, whose melancholy *Room* (房間) tells bittersweet stories of open and closed doors, solitude and friendship and moving in and out of rented apartments.

Aho Huang (黃健和), Dala's chief editor and comic aficionado, is personally

committed to defining Taiwan for local audiences and promoting it to Western markets. *80s Diary in Taiwan* was translated into French and German, and included in "Books from Taiwan," a project sponsored by the Ministry of Culture.

COLLABORATIONS

Huang also has a knack for bringing together Taiwanese and foreign graphic artists for bilingual projects, such as *80s Taipei x 90s Hong Kong* (2014) and *Island to Island: A Graphic Exchange Between Taiwan & New Zealand* (2015).

The short works included in these anthologies — narrative and non-narrative, autobiographical and imaginary — contain references to the artists' home countries or other regions featured in the book. Each artist contributes either one (in *80s Taipei x 90s Hong Kong*) or several pieces (*Island to Island*), with each designed as a graphic gift for another artist.

While Hong Kong and Taiwan are given equal prominence, artists in *Island to Island* tip the scales in favor of Taiwan. Thus it is interesting to follow not only how local authors define Taiwan, but also how Taiwan is seen by foreign eyes.

Many works convey a sense of interconnectedness between Taiwan and its close neighbors or the larger world. In *80s Taipei x 90s Hong Kong*, Hong Kong artist Li Chi-tak (李志達) shows how mass-

mediated cultural texts shape a person's world view, and how Taiwan participates in these transnational cultural flows.

Infatuated with a girl who frequents his favorite video shop, Li's protagonist borrows her favorite movies; he aims at getting close to her, inadvertently becoming fascinated with world cinema. Li thus engages the reader in a delightful game of counting just how many scenes from American, Japanese or Taiwanese movies are depicted or alluded to in the story.

The book also contains two stances on the recently prominent Taiwan and Hong Kong connection built upon shared anxiety about China. Lee Amin (李勉之), a Hong Konger living in Taipei, juxtaposes the two cities in a humorous comparison that blends colonial heritage and contemporary politics, popular culture, linguistic discrepancies and mutual stereotypes.

Justin Wong (黃健達), a political cartoonist at Hong Kong's *Ming Pao* daily, has a more somber take on Taiwan and Hong Kong. His story, set in present-day Hong Kong, features a young newspaper columnist with writer's block, disillusioned with local politicians and estranged from his home town, where he refuses to settle down. He decides to set out for Taiwan instead, searching for a better tomorrow.

In *Island to Island*, Taiwanese artists depict their country through photographs and everyday life. Ahn Zhe (安哲) uses

processed, daguerreotype-looking, black-and-white photos of present-day Taipei. The humbleness, even ugliness, of the scenes depicted (a bicycle loaded with haphazardly piled packages, rooftops with water reservoirs, barbers and road workers), are easily recognizable by anyone familiar with the city. Combined with the formal imperfection of grainy print reproductions, the images construct a sense of place that may be flawed, but is a home.

In his gift for Rae Joyce, Chuang employs family photographs as a pretext for recalling his childhood in Taichung.

These anthologies are also notable as portfolios of individual styles to be browsed separately or together for tracking constancy, versatility and favorite tropes. The black and white drawings of veteran illustrator A-Tui (阿推) resemble older-generation comics by authors such as Niu Ke (牛哥) or Au Yao-hsing (敖幼祥).

Chuang stays faithful to his detailed nostalgia-inducing style and the memoir form. 61Chi works in inkwash and watercolor and is captivated by the idea of glancing at reality. Ahn is a versatile artist who exploits both drawing and photography, fascinated with graininess and the photograph format.

This kaleidoscope of visual styles proves that homegrown artists have developed personal voices to convey complex and diverse messages about Taiwan.



A page from 61Chi's story, above left, and Sean Chuang's, right, found in *Island to Island: A Graphic Exchange Between Taiwan & New Zealand*, a collection of stories by illustrators from Taiwan and New Zealand.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DALA PUBLISHING, 61CHI AND SEAN CHUANG



PUBLICATION NOTES



ISLAND TO ISLAND: A GRAPHIC EXCHANGE BETWEEN
TAIWAN & NEW ZEALAND
(島嶼禮物: 台灣紐西蘭圖像小說創作合集)

BY SEAN CHUANG (小莊), 61CHI, ANH ZHE (安哲) ET.AL.

199 PAGES

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