

# BFA Senior Thesis Conversations featuring Howsem Huang

Questions by Daniela Segovia

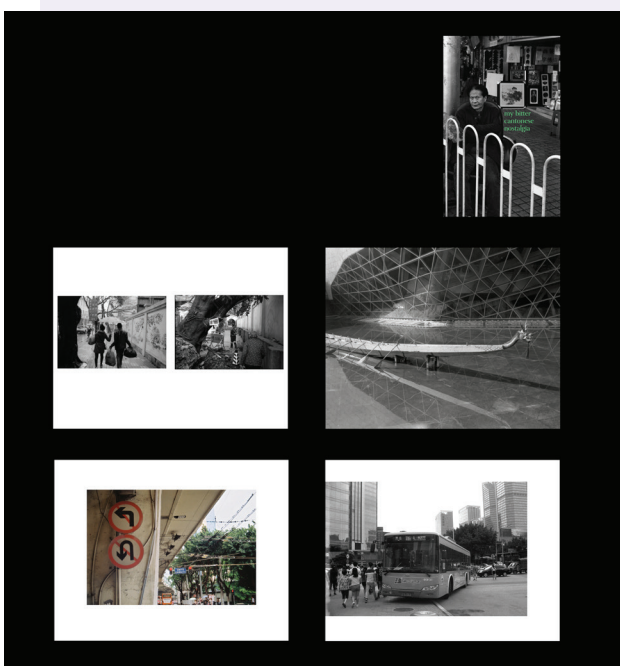


**Howsem Huang** is an undergraduate student pursuing BFA degrees in both Graphic Design and Photography at California College of the Arts. Having lived in the States since 2016, Howsem Huang's background of growing up in Southern China has influenced his photographic work which explores the political, cultural interconnection and contradiction, between East Asia and Western values.

See more of his work on Instagram [@howsem](https://www.instagram.com/howsem) or visit his websites [howsem.net](http://howsem.net) and [howsem.photo](http://howsem.photo).

## How has your project evolved?

Since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak last year, I've been reviewing my photographic works in the past and enhancing my photo editing skill. Instead of finishing photography assignments in the lighting studio, which was the way I thought would dominate my photography career, I learn so much about sequencing my photographs, and turn them into photo books. As a dual-major student who also studies graphic design, I've found photo books are a medium that connects my skills in these two fields, moreover, connects my concepts with physicality through design and photography.



*my bitter cantonese nostalgia* (Book Spreads), 2020.



*Untitled*, 2018.

## What is your major influence at the moment?

I'm studying East-Asian photography, which I didn't get many chances to learn in the US. Studying Japanese post-war photography which has shown us a provocative photographic language, I've been trying to use a similar disturbing language in my photographs to address the outrageous reality. In other words, the reality is also a major influence on my works. The BLM movement happened worldwide last year, the Hong Kong 2019 protests, and many social injustices in China keep reminding me of the role of creating which is to reveal the outrages and challenge the power.

Although I have some rough thoughts about this question (as I previously answered the first question), I often find it difficult to answer. As an Asian student studying in the US, what I've learned in art school is usually Euro-centric. Besides, what my works usually investigate is about Asia or China, thus replying to it with one or two art movements or artists is incomplete and problematic. However, through my researches and study, I've encountered lots of inspiring Chinese artists and scholars. I luckily had a chance to interview Amy Suo Wu, who is a China-born artist and educator based in the Netherlands, and inspired by her practice to convey messages and knowledge about Chinese Feminism and marginalized cultures through steganography. In addition, I took a class titled Asian Modernism instructed by professor Mia Liu at CCA, in which I realized—how our histories are written, who wrote them, what is being addressed—these are important questions to raise.



*Make. Act. Resist.* (Website Design), 2020.

I'm working on my next photography project about the national identities of Chinese people, aiming at revealing the complexity buried in the propaganda used by the Chinese government to fulfill their political needs. China is a huge country both economically and territorially, so when we identify ourselves as Chinese, the idea of national identity becomes vague. In the US, many Chinese immigrant groups originate in different Chinese cultures, where people speak Toisaness, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Mandarin, not to mention people who live in China and Chinese indigenous groups. Further, political power plays an essential part in cultures either. Taiwan people are facing the oppression of their identity, especially overseas, therefore, it adds more complexity to the topic I'm exploring. What's next for me is to research more on the Chinese identity disorientation issue. Of course, I hope more people can see my works and ponder about the ideas addressed in my photography.



**Top to Bottom:** *Big Head Buddha*, 2019;  
*intertwined (Book Covers)*, 2021.