

Unwriting Academic

Exploring Multimodal Writing in Social Research

5 February 2026, 9H-17H

**Research Center for Humanities
and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taipei**



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**French Center for Research on Contemporary China (CEFC Taipei)/ Research
Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC)**

Room 2B, Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taipei

Rationale

Across the social sciences, scholars are increasingly engaging with creative and multimodal forms of knowledge production. At this workshop, participants will discuss their work with comics, video-making, film programming, artists' residencies, literary ethnography, podcasts, and other inventive approaches to research and writing. These practices open possibilities that exceed the boundaries of traditional academic prose—not only methodologically, but also epistemologically—by offering new ways of apprehending and conveying social experiences. The aim of this workshop is to explore how such alternative forms of writing and representation can meaningfully coexist with, and even enhance, conventional scholarly outputs. Rather than treating creative modalities as add-ons or outreach tools, we seek to understand how they can transform the very processes through which we analyze, interpret, and communicate research. What do these forms allow us to know, sense, or reveal that standard academic texts cannot? How might multimodal experimentation reshape our analytical practices, ethical commitments, and engagements with wider publics? By bringing together scholars who are already experimenting with these practices, the workshop invites a collective reflection on the methodological and epistemological contributions of creative research. Our goal is to imagine how a richer plurality of writing modes can deepen our understanding of the social world and broaden the ways we participate in scholarly conversation.

Program

9h15-9h30	Welcome Coffee
9h30-9h45	Opening Remarks by Corrado Neri, Jérémy Jammes & Beatrice Zani
9h45-10h15	Involving Researchers in Cultural Programs: Case Studies from the French office in Taipei – Morgan Fraisse-László
10h15-10h45	Straying from the “Proper” Path: A Sociologist Wearing Too Many Hats- Yin C. Chuang
10h45-11h15	Thinking through Images: Video Essays as Research Practice – Corrado Neri
11h15-11h30	Coffee Break
11h30-12h	Can Film Curation Change Film History? – Wafa Ghermani
12h-12h30	Writing Literary Ethnography: Stories of Overland Chinese Migrants of Burma – Chang Wen-chin
12h30-13h	Drawing and Recording Research: Innovative Approaches to Southeast Asian Studies – Alex Desmules and Jérémy Jammes
13h-14h	Lunch Break
14h-14h30	When a Bra Speaks in Ink: Turning Ethnographic Fieldnotes into Graphic Frames – Beatrice Zani
14h-14h30	Artistic and creative approaches to scholarly projects – James Lee
14h30-14h45	Break
14h45-16h45	Comic Making Workshop by Valentine Boucq and Emilie ‘Emy’ Garcia

Abstracts and Bios

Involving Researchers in Cultural Programs: Case Studies from the French Office in Taipei

Morgan Fraisse-László, French Office in Taipei (BFT)

This talk will explore ways to make research accessible to a wider audience by renewing formats of interaction between researchers and the public, particularly within large-scale cultural events. Drawing on the example of “The Night of Ideas” in Taiwan, this intervention will focus on the “Tribunal for Future Generations” (TGF), developed by the French Office in Taipei since 2023 in cooperation with French media Usbek & Rica. Awarded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Innovation Fund in 2023, the format was renewed in 2024 and 2025, and will reach its fourth edition in Taiwan in 2026. By positioning researchers not as lecturers but as witnesses contributing to a collective debate, the TGF encourages more embodied, cross-disciplinary and interactive forms of participation, helping to reach younger audiences and renew public speaking formats. The talk will also mention “Villa Formose–New Stories”, a program offering research and exploration residencies to Artists and Researchers, designed to experiment with new narratives and formats beyond traditional artistic residencies frameworks. Finally, it will briefly introduce an upcoming new project, “The Nightmarket of Ideas,” conceived as a series of 20-minute talks delivered by Experts and Researchers, aimed at multiplying points of entry into research, breaking down disciplinary boundaries and creating accessible spaces for exchange in the context

of a popular cultural event. A first edition is scheduled to happen this May in Kaohsiung during the “2026 Kaohsiung French Festival.”

Morgan Fraisse-László is Cultural Attaché at the French Office in Taipei. He holds a Master’s degree in Cultural Projects and Institutions Management and works at the intersection of Artistic creation, Cultural policy and Diplomacy, with a focus on audiences, public debate and contemporary forms of mediation. He develops international cultural cooperation programs, some of which explore new formats for connecting research, artists and the public within large-scale cultural events.

Straying from the "Proper" Path: A Sociologist Wearing Too Many Hats

Yin C. Chuang, Taiwan Normal University

In this article, I want to share my journey of wearing many hats—as a Taiwanese-speaking mom, a sociologist, a professor of Taiwanese Literature, and a creative writer and musician. I’ll talk about how I’ve channeled my passion for sociological research into real-world action across different media platforms. This includes: **Firstly**, publishing Taiwan’s first “Taiwanese Civic Picture Book and Micro-Animation Series.” (台灣第一部「台語兒童公民繪本為動畫系列」) I use Taiwan’s unique local animals to help children understand complex topics like democratization, national identity, and land justice. **Secondly**, hosting the PTS Taigi show *Echoes in the Lost Pages* (毋但是思念). We use modern aesthetics and storytelling to take a fresh look at Taiwan’s White Terror history, transitional justice, and our democratic journey. **Thirdly**, hosting the FTV show *MIT Daily* (台製日常). In these 30-minute weekly episodes, I translate deep sociological and cultural theories into everyday language for the general public. **Fourthly**, my work as a soprano and arranger for the *Afire* A Cappella ensemble. I’ve had the joy of rearranging classic Taiwanese songs into A Cappella versions and performing them regularly. Throughout these creative projects and “alternative” academic paths, I see myself as a sociological and cultural guide for Taiwan. My hope is to spark a collective “sociological imagination” with the public, helping us all to know ourselves better, understand others deeply, and build a stronger sense of civic awareness together.

Dr. **Yin C. Chuang** (莊佳穎) is the head and an associate professor at the Department of Taiwan Culture, Languages and Literature at Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan, and has a PhD in Sociology from Lancaster University, UK. She has served as President of East Asian Popular Culture Association since 2011. At National Taiwan Normal University, she also holds the position of Deputy Director of the International Taiwan Studies Centre. Her research interests include Nationalism and National Identities, Democratization, Everyday Practices and Popular Culture. She is a soprano, creative lead, and resident arranger for the *Afire* A Cappella ensemble. Her background includes releasing a solo album *A Place Called Home* (我住的地方), producing music, serving as an editorial writer for *Taiwan News*, acting as a UK special correspondent for CTS, and producing/hosting for TNT Radio. She believes that critical dialogue should not be confined to university classrooms. This conviction led her to host the FTV program *MIT Daily* (台製日常), where she translates sociological and cultural research into everyday language for a public audience in a concise, 30-minute weekly format. From 2021 to 2023, she published Taiwan’s first “Taiwanese Civic Picture Book and Micro-Animation Series.” (台灣第一部「台語兒童公民繪本為動畫系列」) Through hosting programs like *Echoes in the Lost Pages* (毋但是思念) on PTS

Taigi (公共電視台語台), she also strives to contribute to conversations on transitional justice and personal emotional expression.

Can Film Curation Change Film History?

Wafa Ghermani, National Central University (Taiwan)

Taiwanese cinema is internationally known largely through the work of three filmmakers—Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-liang, or four if Ang Lee is included—who began their careers in the 1980s and 1990s during what is widely referred to as the Taiwan New Wave or Taiwan New Cinema. Since then, new generations of filmmakers have emerged; however, their recognition remains limited and often overshadowed by that of their predecessors. At the same time, scholarly research on Taiwanese cinema has been stimulated by ongoing digitization and restoration initiatives. Nevertheless, the traditional gatekeepers of film canons—cinémathèques, film distributors, publishers, and film educators—continue to focus predominantly on the Taiwan New Cinema period. More recently, encouraged by proactive cultural policies, some film curators, including myself, have sought to propose alternative approaches to Taiwanese cinema. These curatorial efforts aim to redefine the island’s film history and to shift attention away from the centrality of Taiwan New Cinema. This presentation will examine several such initiatives, ranging from the academically grounded Taiyupian touring programs to more recent attempts by festivals and cinémathèques to offer new perspectives on Taiwanese film history.

Wafa Ghermani is an assistant professor at the National Central University (Taiwan) and used to work at La Cinémathèque française in France. She also works as an independent film curator for European festivals. She is the author of *Le Cinéma taiwanais, fictions d'une nation* (2024) and the co-editor with Chris Berry, Ming-Yeh Rawnsley and Corrado Neri of *Taiwanese-Language Film, Rediscovered and Reconsidered* (2024).

Thinking Through Images: Video Essays as Research Practice

Corrado Neri, CEFC Taipei

This paper reflects on the video essay as an alternative scholarly output and on the epistemological consequences of adopting audiovisual forms of research within the humanities. Rather than approaching the video essay merely as a tool for dissemination or pedagogy, the presentation considers it as a mode of thinking in its own right—one that challenges established hierarchies between analysis and illustration, argument and example, writing and viewing. The discussion is structured around two contrasting case studies. The first examines a video essay that traces the cinematic imagination of “entering the network”: the visualization of connection, immersion, artificial intelligence, and virtual worlds across different historical moments. By assembling and juxtaposing heterogeneous filmic representations of the act of “jacking in,” this example foregrounds how cinema has long served as a speculative laboratory for conceptualizing abstraction and digital subjectivity. The video essay format, through montage and temporal manipulation, enables a form of comparative analysis that unfolds audiovisually rather than

discursively. The second case study adopts a markedly different perspective, focusing on an author-centered video essay devoted to the work of Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai Ming-liang. Drawing on experiences of conference presentation and peer-review processes involving audiovisual scholarship, this example raises questions about evaluation, legitimacy, and authorship when research is conducted *through* images and sounds. Here, the video essay becomes a site where critical interpretation, curatorial choice, and scholarly argument converge. By placing these two cases in dialogue—one thematic and historiographical, the other authorial and process-oriented—the paper examines how video essays reconfigure research practices, scholarly authority, and modes of validation. It argues that audiovisual scholarship not only diversifies academic outputs, but also transforms how research objects are constructed, encountered, and critically understood.

Corrado Neri Corrado Neri is a Full Professor at Jean Moulin University Lyon 3 and Director of CEFC Taipei (Centre d'Études Français sur la Chine Contemporaine / French Centre for Research on Contemporary China). He has been researching and writing in Italian, French, and English on Sinophone visual culture—with a particular focus on Taiwanese cinema, past and present—since the publication of his first book on Tsai Ming-liang in 2004. His recent publications include *Taiwanese-Language Cinema: Rediscovered and Reconsidered* (with Chris Berry, Wafa Ghermani, and Ming-yeh Rawnsley, Edinburgh University Press, 2024), and the edited Special Feature “Taiwanese Cinephilia” in *China Perspectives*, no. 142 (2025). His monograph on contemporary Taiwanese horror cinema is forthcoming with Anthem Press (2026).

Writing Literary Ethnography: Stories of Overland Chinese Migrants of Burma

Chang Wen-chin, Academia Sinica

In 1986, Clifford and Marcus published their celebrated edited volume, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. The book points out the shortcomings of conventional ethnographies characterized by the writer's mono voice and authorial invisibility. In a similar vein, several important anthropological works have discussed the significance of polyphony and of individuality (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1993; Chodorow 1999; Hollan 2001; Yan 2003). These “experimental” writings challenge traditional interests in using collective structures for the presentation of a coherent society and stress that individuals bearing different facets of selfhood in relation to multiple positions present an alternative focus. Anthropologists who have adopted a narrative approach especially have attempted to work from this orientation (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1993; Behar 1993; Crapanzano 1980; Frank 2000; Hecht 2006; Krause 2009; Shostak 1981; Stoller 1999; Waterson 2007b). In my own research on the migrant Yunnanese of Burma (or Myanmar), including those who are residing in Burma and the ones who have moved from Burma to another country, especially Thailand and Taiwan since 1994, I have listened to numerous of their life stories as well as traced their migration routes as far as possible. In the process, I have learned to see how the divergent threads of lived experiences have impacted their subjectivities, embracing facets of determination, ambivalence, repression and alienation. In my two published ethnographies (2014 and 2025), by adopting a narrative approach and using first-person narration as much as possible, I have tried to preserve the “thickness” of the stories. Specifically, informants' personal accounts (in different narrative genres—letters, essays, poems, records of

family genealogy, and autobiographies) compose the main body of the ethnography. Unlike a large number of anthropological works whose subjects are faceless and voiceless, I have delineated individual narrators by illustrating not only their lived experiences, but also what they expressed of their thinking, feeling, intimacies, courage, ambition and despair. While revealing their personal pasts, their narrations also constitute something of a shared historical background across vast upland geographies of Southeast Asia.

Chang Wen-chin is a Research Fellow at the Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica. Dr. Chang's general academic interests include migration, borderland studies, ethnic politics and the economic history of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. Her own research on the mobility and livelihoods of the migrant Yunnanese of Burma is related to these issues, grounded in an inter-disciplinary approach that draws on anthropology, history and area studies. She is author of the monographs *Beyond Borders: Stories of Yunnanese Chinese* (Cornell University Press, 2014) and of *Echoes from the Sino-Burmese Borderlands. Untold Stories of Overland Chinese Migrants During the Cold War* (Harvard University Press, 2025).

Drawing and Recording Research: Innovative Approaches to Southeast Asian Studies

Alex Desmules and Jérémy Jammes, IRASEC

This talk examines alternative forms of scientific writing and communication in the social sciences, with a particular focus on graphic novels and podcasts as emerging tools for knowledge dissemination. Drawing on a curated selection of scientific graphic novels, the first part of the presentation analyzes how visual storytelling can translate complex research into accessible narratives. The second part turns to another increasingly influential format: the research podcast. It explores the institutional launch of a podcast as a tool for scientific outreach, addressing key issues such as audience building, changing listening habits, and evolving modes of access to scientific knowledge in the digital age. More broadly, the talk considers how podcasts, like graphic novels, can serve as bridges between academic research and wider publics, contributing to a reconfiguration of contemporary practices of knowledge production and transmission. It also reflects on the conditions under which these works can be scientifically recognized and valued within academic frameworks.

Alex Desmules is a recent graduate of the Master's program in Asian Affairs at Sciences Po Lyon. His academic work focused on Taiwan's authoritarian period, on which he wrote two dissertations. After gaining professional experience at Radio Taiwan International, he is now developing a research podcast for IRASEC aimed at increasing the visibility of Southeast Asian studies and reaching broader audiences.

Jérémy Jammes has been Director of the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC, MEAE-CNRS) since September 2025. Formerly Full Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Sciences Po Lyon, he has held several academic leadership positions in Southeast Asia, including in Brunei and Bangkok. His research focuses on religion and geopolitics in Southeast Asia.

When a Bra Speaks in Ink: Turning Ethnographic Fieldnotes into Graphic Frames

Beatrice Zani, CNRS

In this contribution, we reflect on the methodological and epistemological implications of transforming a multi-sited ethnography—originally conducted for a PhD dissertation—into a comic. At the centre of our collaboration stands an unexpected narrator: a fluorescent orange bra whose “social life” (Appadurai, 1986) shaped the doctoral fieldwork across factories in southern China, rural villages, intimate domestic spaces in Taiwan, and transnational digital marketplaces. By giving voice to this object rather than relying on a conventional sociological narrator, we collectively experimented with redistributing authority, reconfiguring reflexivity, and unsettling the relationship between empirical material and its graphic representation. Producing the comic required an extended dialogic process in which the playwright and cartoonist actively re-entered the terrain of the original dissertation research. Through questions about gestures on assembly lines, the textures of rural kitchens, the affective atmospheres of WeChat entrepreneurship, or the sensory and emotional contours of marital migration, our collaboration generated new data. Writing, drawing, and revisiting the dissertation material became a form of inquiry in itself—less a translation of an existing ethnography than a “research from research,” where visual, narrative, and aesthetic choices transformed the raw material and produced new analytical layers. This collective engagement also forced us to confront the place of emotions and positionality. The withdrawal of an explicit researcher-narrator and the presence of an object as storyteller made visible how affect, moral dilemmas, and embodied experiences permeate both doctoral fieldwork and its graphic re-embodiment. Ultimately, our comic demonstrates how alternative writing modes can open new heuristic spaces for the social sciences, allowing us to render complex mobilities, vulnerabilities, and aspirations through co-produced, visually grounded storytelling.

Beatrice Zani is a sociologist and researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Her research interests include economic sociology, migration, globalization, globalized labor, and migrant entrepreneurship. Drawing on the case study of transnational labor in the Asian fishing and shipping sectors (China, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia), her ongoing research explores the link between labor and commodity mobilities, global work and supply chains, informality and digitality in the transformation of capitalism and globalization. She’s the PI of the French National Research Agency (ANR)-funded project FORSEA : Migrations and Forced Labor in the Maritime Economies of Globalized Asia (2026-2029).

Valentine Boucq has been a comic book scriptwriter since 2017. Trained as a journalist, her work focuses on documentary comics, with a strong interest in social and historical struggles. She has scripted several issues of *Les rues de Lyon* [Lyons’ streets], published by the authors’ association L’Épicerie Séquentielle. Her first graphic novel, *Corps en Grève* [Bodies on strike], illustrated by Amandine Puntous, was published in 2020 by Steinkis.

Émilie “Emy” Garcia is a comic book author and illustrator trained at the Émile-Cohl School. Based between Saint-Chef and Lyons (France), she has published works such as *Les Premiers Matins du Monde* [The First Mornings of the world] and several issues of *Les Rues de Lyon* [Lyons’ streets]. She also creates commissioned projects for cultural institutions, designs book covers,

and leads workshops with diverse audiences. Since 2019, she has taught illustration at the École de Condé.

Artistic and creative approaches to scholarly projects

James Lee, Academia Sinica

This presentation examines ways in which artwork and creative writing can provide alternative media for communicating academic projects. It begins with the author's involvement in the development of the recently published graphic novel "NATO 2099," coordinated by the NATO Defense College under the concept of strategic foresight and incorporating storylines submitted by writers from across the Alliance. It also discusses the author's initial concepts for using Chinese painting to communicate "Farm for Change," an interdisciplinary "idea lab" on environmental protection and sustainability based at the Institute of European and American Studies at Academia Sinica.

James Lee is an Assistant Research Professor at Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica (Taipei). He is also an Associate Fellow at the Research Division, NATO Defense College (Rome), and an Affiliated Researcher at University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (La Jolla, California and Washington, D.C.).