# Project: Reading Self, Reading Others, Dublin, 2009- 2010

Curated and organized by Jay Koh and Thomas O'Connor

In collaboration with ICCSA - Irish Chinese Culture and Sports Association, supported by the Artist in Community scheme from the Arts Council managed by CREATE - IRELAND, Sun Emerald Chinese newspaper, Dublin City Council Chinese New Year Festival and International Forum for InterMedia Art

*Reading the Self, Reading the Others* is a cross community art project inviting Chinese and Irish participants to construct visual images of themselves to be seen and read by others. It aims to open up constructive dialogue between the two communities on cross-cultural readings: what, why and how we read ourselves and others. The project's activities are accessible and inclusive and will be marked by two significant events, the first being a photography exhibition showcasing perspectives from the Chinese Community and the second, an exhibition incorporating views and responses from commissioned Irish artists, who may also work in collaboration with Chinese participants.

In the first photography exhibition, which took place in Feb 2010 as part of Dublin City Council's Chinese New Year festival, members of the Chinese community in Dublin shared images recorded from their everyday lives, chosen for the stories that they tell - of their daily routines, work, leisure and play, family and friends, concerns, and connections with Dublin. Chinese residents were encouraged to use the medium of photography to construct images to be read by others, as mirrors to look at their 'selves', ways and conditions of life in residence within the Irish context, and also to visualise the Irish as objects of their gaze through a series of workshop articles exploring the use of photographic images and their interpretation, which were published in the "Sun Emerald" newspaper, and a series of interaction-workshops in Chinese restaurants.

RSRO hopes that the images and art works will open up discussions and challenge pre-defined notions of Chinese and Irish communities in Ireland today; and leading possibly to the revealing of embedded tensions, which will contribute towards the reduction/overcoming of prejudices and stereotypes.

### Background: From Ni Hao – Dia Duit to RSRO

RSRO built on the engagements and networks created from the Ni Hao–Dia Duit ('Hello–Hello' in Chinese and Irish) project, a cross cultural project initiated in 2007 on a public art commission from CityArts with support from the Irish Youth Foundation and Dublin City Inner Partnership. It aimed to identify some key sustainable ways of establishing interactive channels between the migrant and local communities around Parnell Street<sup>1</sup>. As individuals the Chinese wish to remain invisible, not to attract attention, so they can go about doing their studies or business without hindrance. These traits are strategies to survive in a densely populated competitive society and developed under an authoritative, scrutinizing system. But as a group, the Chinese desire to congregate within the comfort of the familiar (food, aesthetic, language and proximity), resulting in the creation of Chinatowns in whichever part of the world they migrate to. Little did they realize that such inclinations and actions create certain fronts<sup>2</sup> that communicate nonverbally the message of isolation and ghettorisation. Some Irish see these visual markers as signs of unfriendliness, especially so when augmented by the fact that the Chinese lack the knowledge to communicate in local slang and to refer to local events (sports, politics) or lack participation in Irish drinking culture. Through a process of research and allowing positive intersubjective meanings to developed, identified persons from the Chinese community collaborate with Jay Koh to form the Irish Chinese Culture and Sports Association.





<sup>1</sup> Parnell Street, Dublin used to be a neglected area connected to drug trade in the 90s. Migrants begin to move in attracted to the low cost infra structure and since the mid 2005 evolved into a vibrant and unofficial Chinatown of Dublin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Fronts, a sociological term coined by Goffman, Erving reprint 1990. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Books (Chapter 1: Performances) to denote the everyday performance put forth by individual and group to create meanings for the others



Barbeque event bringing together Chinese and Irish communities held as part of *Ni Hao-Dia Duit*, DIT Summerhill, 2007



A series of published articles in 2 different Chinese newspapers to introduce Jay Koh's works and intention to the readers. It announced the project NH-DD's objective to create bridges across the communities.





Calling for participation to a workshop on Irish Culture in Chester Beatty Library, Aug.2007



Social, Education Information and Arts event in IMMA's artist studios, July 2008

#### Reports on RSRO in Chinese newspapers in Dublin

Through a series of published articles<sup>3</sup>, which acted as informal workshops, on topics such as the construction and reading of meanings through and in photographs, and interactions in karaoke rooms in Chinese restaurants, the Chinese were given motivation to take part in the photo exhibition.



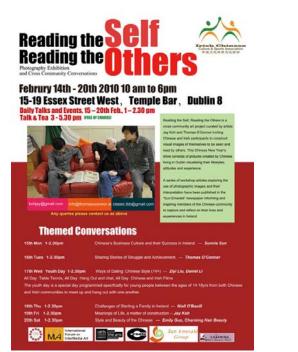
Informal workshop-essays on photography conducted through Chinese print media: 1<sup>st</sup> published article



Workshop and interactive activities in Chinese Restaurants

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Sun Emerald, the largest Irish Chinese weekly newspaper, articles can be viewed under this link http://ifima.net/IFIMA/personal/Reading%20Self,%20Reading%20Others.htm

RSRO Exhibition that took place as part of Dublin City Council's annual Chinese New Year Festival



Exhibition poster in English and Chinese





Opening

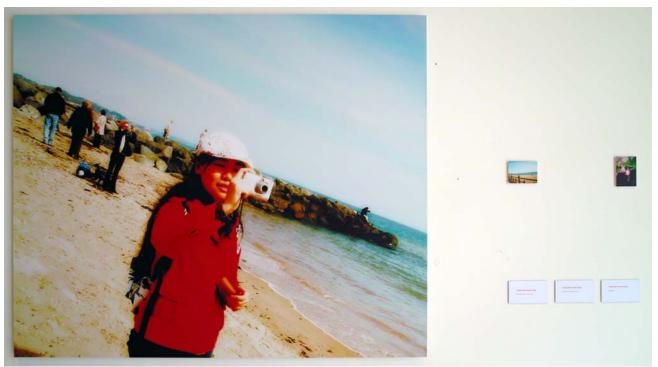


Exhibit on history of the project



Other submissions

# Winning Photographs in Selected Participants Section



1<sup>st</sup> prize winner, See Young Fung



2<sup>nd</sup> prize winner, Ziyi Liu



3<sup>rd</sup> prize winner, KaKa aka Huang Ye

## Other Photos in the Selected Section



















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## Other Submitted Photos in the Open Section













### Other events during the exhibition

Over the course of the exhibition a special area adjacent to the exhibition space was set up where visitors can relax and engage in informal art activities such as photography, paper folding, as well as conversations. All materials, equipment and guidance provided free of charge with complimentary refreshments everyday between 1pm and 5pm. Also there will be themed lunch time conversations facilitated by special guests from both the Irish and Chinese communities.





#### Themed Conversations

15th Mon, 1-2.30pm How to do business with the Chinese by facilitated by Sunnie Sun
16th Tues, 1-2.30pm Sharing Stories of Struggle and Achievement facilitated by Thomas O'Connor
17th Wed Youth Day
1-2.30pm Dating Mannerisms/ Etiquette of the Chinese facilitated by Ziyi Liu and Daniel Zhong

All Day Table Tennis, Hang Out, Chat, Screening of Chinese and Irish Films

The youth day is a special day programmed specifically for young people between the ages of 14-18yrs from both Chinese and Irish communities to meet up and interact with one another.

18th Thu, 1-2.30pm How to start a family in Ireland facilitated by Niall O'Baoill
19th Fri, 1-2.30pm Meaning of Life, a matter of construction facilitated by Jay Koh
20th Sat, 1-2.30pm Health and Beauty Practices of the Chinese facilitated by Emily Guo

### Prize giving by Sarah Tuck

