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Everything Will Fall into Ruins
Yao Jui-Chung

(Editor’s Note: We invites the Taiwanese artist Yao Jui-Chung to present his serial photography on ruins for EASTS. We believe that Mr. Yao’s work on ruins could serve as an important starting point to reflect on East Asian industrializations and civilizations. Our cover designer Awai made a collage out of four photos from Mr. Yao’s serial work for the cover image. Below is Mr. Yao’s own elaboration on ruins as well as the original photographic work. Please visit his website for the complete work of his photography on ruins: http://www.yaojuichung.com/)

There can be no civilization without ruins, just as there can’t be a heaven if there is no hell. There will always be light and darkness, good and evil, love and hatred in this world. I often roam the edges of the city, hunting for memories, but the city is changing surreptitiously—a result of various unpredictable forces—heading straight at us with an attitude never seen before. The elusive force hidden in a dark corner watching reality is forever creeping forward, and yet its existence is unmeasurable.

In the process of photographing ruins, I have experienced a number of realizations. I have had to admit that we are not simply destined to be born and die but rather we are dying all the time. All things have a life cycle, and an expiration date has been set for every one. After the decay and destruction of their physical being, they reappear in another form, preserving the aura of their original being as a relic. Seen against the contrasting backdrop of our happy existence, the wasteland is in certain ways more “real” than the real world and more “perfect” than perfection. The concept of “remains” is a relative one and somewhat at odds with real life.

I always turn back to look at the ruins, impressing on my mind these deserted scenes. There seems to be an unfillable black hole in my heart, and I am speechless when facing the ruins. I’m not sure whether I travel around to see the ruins, or to be seen by the ruins. If the image is a mirror, I’m probably trying to escape from the “self” in the mirror. Instead, I enter the illusion in the mirror to lose myself. Sometimes it may seem perverse or obsessive, but more often it is a kind of inexplicable search. By searching for ruins, I get a look at the half-withered and lonely soul deep inside me and I enter into a dialogue that might allow me to cure myself. But after seeing so many forgotten corners of the world, I’ve become even more speechless and uncomprehending . . .
The sky is studded with stars. While some new stars are expanding, some white dwarfs have already been destroyed. In the boundless universe, all kinds of “ruins” abound. Although our brief existence is accompanied by decay, the silent ruins may be a symbol of nature’s constant cycle of birth and death. Too much commemoration and reconstruction will distort the lesson hidden within. If we can understand this, ruins are no longer just ruins but an essential experience in life.

With this realization, maybe we should think of life and death, or any kind of architecture that is bound to perish over time, as “dreams and illusions,” and all material existence as “dewdrops and lightning,” as the Diamond Sutra says. A star, a grain of sand, a temple, or a ruin—everything is just an idea and a thought that reflects a secret landscape deep in people’s hearts.
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