

BLACKLIST

# This Art Basel video was banned in China

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📷 Tony Leung Chiu-wai showed his support for the Umbrella Movement. (Ho Tzu Nyen)

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BASEL, SWITZERLAND

An experimental video installation banned in China is being shown at this week's prestigious [Art Basel](#) fair in Switzerland. But Ho Tzu Nyen, the Singaporean artist behind the work, hopes it will eventually find its way to Chinese soil.



📷 A well-known face. (Ho Tzu Nyen)

*The Nameless* features Tony Leung Chiu-wai, one of Hong Kong's most acclaimed actors, and tells the story of Lai Teck, an intriguing figure in Southeast Asian history. Lai Teck served as the Malayan Communist Party's secretary general from 1939 to 1947. Behind the scenes, he was a Sino-Vietnamese triple agent serving the French, British, and then the Japanese, pulling strings in the region's political development.

Ho says the 2014 Shanghai Biennale originally commissioned the video work. "We thought it might get censored because [the work is] talking about a leader of the communist party who is essentially a traitor," he says. "We were not sure how the Chinese would take it."

As it turns out, the authorities blocked it for another reason: Tony Leung. The actor's involvement in Hong Kong's pro-democracy Umbrella Movement in 2014 earned him a place on a government blacklist. Though he wasn't at the forefront of the protests, like singers Anthony Wong Yiu-ming and [Denise Ho](#), he did show his support.

Ho initially wanted to tell the story of Lai Teck through a feature film. "His biography is an embodiment of political and ideological forces that were played out in Singapore, Malaysia, and Southeast Asia at that moment and time," says the 40-year-old multidisciplinary artist, who was born in Singapore and educated in Australia.



📷 The right roles. (Ho Tzu Nyen)

But information on Lai Teck was dubious, he says, as it came mostly from secondary sources, informants, and double agents whose job was “to fabricate narratives.” So instead of a feature film, Ho created a video installation using sample footage of films Leung had been in, from *City of Sadness* in 1989 to *The Grandmaster* in 2013. Most of them were Hong Kong films.

Leung was the perfect choice because of his unique acting style and the roles he’s played, says Ho. “He had many roles as a double agent, such as *Infernal Affairs* and *Lust, Caution*.”



📷 Ho Tzu Nyen. (Amos Wong)

Ho mixed and edited the film snippets to create a new narrative about Lai Teck. The video is accompanied by two tracks of voiceovers, in Vietnamese and Mandarin.

“I wanted to not just pay homage to the Hong Kong cinema I grew up with. It was also about Hong Kong cinema’s fixation of a double identity,” Ho says.

At Art Basel the video is being presented by the [Singapore gallery STPI](#). It was also shown at the Berlin International Film Festival last year, as well as in Tokyo and Osaka. It’s currently being shown in Queensland, Australia and at Germany’s [Festival Theaterformen](#).