Elaine Wong was born in Taiwan and lived in Hong Kong and Vancouver, BC, before moving to San Antonio. She is interested in exploring an interlingual poetics through creative work and research, focusing on the visuality and regenerative creativity of written signs. She is currently working on an English-Chinese interlingual poetry manuscript. Elaine teaches first-year writing at Trinity University.
WRITING ZHONGSHAN SOUTH ROAD, TAPEI

Low and thick as the rainclouds above,
cicadas’ songs overflow the banyan trees and
gloss the poems engraved on the sidewalk—

遺忘語言的鳥呀
也遺忘了啼鳴

The characters are too old for ants,
too young for mosses, too dark for the nightingale.
They take a spin on the sculpture outside the library,
flexing lines and dots that become a new order
of questions—

Brushing in cursive,
royal palm trees on the medians study for answers.
Across the street, the quiet steps of doves
write all over the square—

The road’s intersection

is at the gate of freedom, cicadas translate,
each stroke a note, forming and transforming.
Traffic pauses its impatience, unscrolls the archways.
Note: The first two lines in Chinese come from the beginning of a poem by Taiwanese poet Wu Yongfu (1913-2008), who grew up during the Japanese colonial rule of Taiwan (photo on left). The literal meaning of the lines is: “The bird that forgets language / also forgets singing.” The Chinese line in the middle records the signs on a facet of the bronze sculpture “Wisdom” (2006), which, created by Lai Tsun-tsun and installed in front of Taiwan’s National Central Library, features Chinese character components that do not necessarily have meanings (middle photo). The last two Chinese lines present a moment of Chinese character transformation: when superimposed, the characters 中 and 山 become 由. Literally, 由自中山 (yóu zì zhōng shān) means “由 comes from 中 and 山,” with 自 meaning “from,” while 中山 is the Chinese name of Zhongshan South Road and 自由, “freedom,” is the name of the square off the road, a popular gathering place for various social and political events as well as a major tourist attraction (photo on right). I walked on this section of the road almost everyday when I was researching on Taiwan visual poetry at the National Central Library from May to August 2014.