

Changing Landscape— Art Exhibitions for Two Centenaries in Taiwan's History and their Political Connotations

台灣風景畫的政治意涵變遷—
以國家紀念日藝術展之風景畫為例

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Abstract

Art history in Taiwan is going through a turn of its course, as the consequence of the rising awareness of Taiwanese-ness and divergent discourses. Such a turn was particularly reflected in the curatorial direction of art exhibitions for two centenaries in Taiwan's history, one for ROC's 100th National Birthday, one for Taiwan Culture Association's 100th anniversary. In the celebrating art events displaying landscape paintings, themes looking in the exploration of nature, the gazes of colonizers, and surveys of lands were first considered as a part of the national identity. This study first introduces the political climate during the time each of these centenaries was taking place. Then it brings out issues upon territorial claims in history and how these issues had been integrated into the themes of landscape paintings. This study also reviews how plein air painting, promoted as modern art by Japanese colonizers, became a way for Taiwanese artists' pursuit of subjectivity. And after looking into artworks and curatorial statements of several art exhibitions in Taiwan, this thesis further analyzes how the curatorial tasks contextualized the nation's aspiration to decolonize through developing national narrative other than Sino-centric view.

Keywords

Taiwan Culture Association, landscape painting, colonial gaze, decolonization, de-sinicization, de-sino-centralization

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Art Exhibitions for the Two 100th Anniversaries

Taiwanese art history is going through a turn of the course. The turn is represented especially through the exhibitions on national occasions, such as the 100th National Birthday of the Republic of China's (ROC, Taiwan) founding in 2011 and the 100th anniversary of the Taiwan Cultural Association 台灣文化協會 (TCA) in 2021. The exhibition for the former was the *Scenery and Vistas of Taiwan through the Eyes of Artists: A Century of Taiwanese Landscape and Scenic Art* 畫家風景 - 百年風景: 一百年台灣行旅 held at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (NTMFA). The exhibitions for the later were *Worldward: The Transformative Force of Art in Taiwan's New Cultural Movement* 走向世界: 臺灣新文化運動中的美術翻轉力 at the Taipei Fine Art Museum and *Lumière – The Enlightenment and Self-Awakening of Taiwanese Culture* 光 - 台灣文化的啟蒙與自覺 at the Museum of National Taipei University of Education (MoNTUE) in 2021.

TCA was an organization founded by Chiang Wei-shui 蔣渭水 and other Taiwanese intellectuals in 1921, during the Japanese rule. By hosting all kinds of cultural events around Taiwan to spread their ideas of democracy, TCA appealed constantly for equal rights for Taiwanese to participate in politics.

This study reflects on the dates spotlighted for a (re-)orientation of the national narrative. The focus of the study is to discuss in which political and curatorial context the landscape paintings were exhibited, and how the interpretation of the artworks were shifted in response to each of the centenaries. The study drew on the *Discourses of Representation* by Stuart Hall and the *Politics of Exhibitions* by Henrietta Lidchi as the references of the "discursive competition", especially their suggestions for practicing cultural studies within the postcolonial frame.

By referring to Michel Foucault who emphasized that knowledge could be produced only through discursive representation within a dialectic mechanism, Hall suggested to question paintings related to power:

Who commands the center of the picture? Who or what is its subject? Can you tell that knowledge is being produced here? How? What do you notice about relations of power in the picture? How are they represented? How does the form and spatial relationships of the picture represent this? Describe the "gaze" of the people in the image: who is looking at whom? Do you notice anything else about the image which we have missed? (Hall 1997, 54)

To create a dialectic mechanism of art-historical knowledge production, questioning the power-related landscape paintings could include the analysis of their geography, angles, perspectives, vegetation and man-made structures.

Henrietta Lidchi's (1997) thesis showed that exhibition was a mechanism of meaning production which inevitably mirrored the relations of power, especially between the organizers and the creators of the exhibited objects. She indicated that the denotation of a painting would refer to the first level of meaning derived from a descriptive relationship, while a second level of meaning guided one to look at the image to be understood according to the organizers' intention. It therefore made reference to a more changeable and ephemeral structure in responding to the circumstances of social life, history, social practices, and

ideologies (Lidchi 1997, 164). Applying Lidchi's viewpoint, this paper analyzes the political and cultural contexts presented in the aforementioned exhibitions.

Before diving into the turn of cultural interpretation regarding national identity, it is necessary to explain the recent power turnovers in Taiwan. The Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) ruling period from 2000 to 2008 was the first time of the power shift since WWII in Taiwan. The Chinese Nationalism Party (Kuomintang, KMT) came to power again from 2008 to 2016 until its second time defeat in the general election by DPP in 2016. The hitherto three times of alternation of ruling power have tremendously influenced the directions and dynamics of cultural developments in Taiwan.

The cultural turn after political power shifts in Taiwan had been a long journey of changing cultural identity. The Nativist Movement 鄉土運動 in the 1980s was Taiwan society's urge to break through its diplomatic isolation after Taiwan lost its status as the orthodox China and its seat in the United Nations was replaced by the People's Republic of China. And in the 1990s, policies deemed as Taiwanization and equality between all peoples in Taiwan with different origins were launched by KMT's President Lee Teng-hui 李登輝. The goal of Taiwanization was to diminish the influence of western culture as well as the dominance of the Sino-centric ideology (Chang 2004; Chen 2016). The pursuit of Taiwan's subjectivity 台灣主體性 became a pressing issue for many intellectuals (Lu 2018; Shih 2020, 95-122), and art creations among other cultural activities touching on Taiwan's subjectivity were endorsed by official policies or grants (Su 2002).

During its first ruling period, DPP emphasized multiculturalism through localizing cultural development, recognizing cultures of different ethnicities and supporting grassroots cultures. Numerous local historical-cultural centers 地方文史中心 were founded, various databases or archives of historical materials were restored, which considerably facilitated the de-centralization and diversification of art-historiographical methodologies (Wu 2013). The new directions were understood as Taiwanization, at the same time de-Sino-centralization; or, in extreme cases, de-Sinicization (de-Sinification) (Hsiao 2012, 279).

Compared with the DPP's ambition in cultural affairs, KMT provided less sophisticated and foresightful cultural policies. Instead, it emphasized economic growth of cultural industries (Chang 2004). Studies on government fundings for museums among other public cultural institutes and cultural activities showed that, except intensifying Cross-Strait cultural exchanges with China, from 2000 to 2008, during KMT regained the rule, it didn't alter much of DPP's earlier course of cultural policies (Shih 2012; Wei 2017, 79; Chen 2019). Nonetheless, the different ethos of cultural politics of KMT and DPP became more apparent after the third time of power shift. KMT is inclined to promote the economic dimensions of culture and to tie Taiwan with China by asserting Taiwan's cultural origin was rooted in China. Whereas DPP tends to reconstruct the national narrative by emphasizing the past injustice in Taiwan, especially the political oppression over native Taiwanese (Chen 2019, 227). Among many policies, DPP's re-orientation of Taiwan's nationalism is the ongoing project of Reconstruction of Taiwan's Art History 重建台灣藝術史. The Project consists of various initiatives, such as acquiring artworks from dispersed private collections, moving art-historiographical scope from Sino-centric to Taiwan-centric, restoring historical sites, as well as building up and

openly displaying art-historical archives (Executive Yuan 2021). The exhibitions for the 100th anniversary of the TCA in 2021 were a substantial part of the Project.

Staged at the venues in national art institutes, these exhibitions were designated by the authorities to demonstrate Taiwan's cultural achievements as national pride. Naturally, concerns were raised over whether the political purposes of these events would undermine the autonomy of art (Shih 2017). Although curators were aware of the problematic situation in the first place, alternative messages paralleling the expected "national pride" were embedded.

With the aspiration to "Taiwanize" art history, theories of different curatorial practices emerged to rival each other. Discursive competitions came up not without political ambitions, reminiscent of the overlong debates on whether ink art was the National Genre 國畫 from the 1950s to the 1970s. Furthermore, whether ink painting was revolutionary or avant-garde enough to be categorized as contemporary art or not was often discussed with a nationalist undertone. The disputes were mainly about the "orthodox" Chinese-ness conveyed in the genre, which was singled out and utilized for cultural propaganda to legitimize KMT's regime over Taiwan (Lin 2011, 76-82; Wu 2017, 24-26). Due to the nationalist connotation, debates over ink landscape paintings continued up to date. To emphasize the nationalist symbolism of ink art and to exclude it from contemporary art might be the reason of public's ignorance of the great variety ink art has developed in recent decades (Xiong 2001; Wu 2017; Pai 2021).

The debates over landscape paintings in Taiwan could be traced to two types. First, Ink landscape paintings by artists migrating from China to Taiwan after 1949 were largely presented according to their memories of the landscape in Mainland China. Their works were often criticized for being nostalgic and disconnected with reality (Lin 2011). And landscape paintings in association with land ownership, conquering territories, or discoveries and adventures, remained as the focus of colonial studies (Hsieh 2012; Liao 2008; Lo 2002)¹. W. T. J. Mitchell claimed that, starting with the Dutch maritime empire, the idea of landscape was per se conceptualized and was often "alienated" for symbolization through the gaze of land explorers. It explains how Taiwan was first depicted by Dutch colonizers with the then advanced cartographic technology, as well as why landscape genre was closely associated with maps in Taiwan's art historiography. Regarding the development of landscape paintings in western art history, Mitchell indicated that the genre embodies the expansion of culture and civilization into a natural space. Empires move outward opening up not just a spatial scene but an imagery of development and exploitation (Mitchell 2002, 17; Liao 2008).

The opposite side of the coin of colonialism is Taiwan's pursuit of subjectivity. And the exhibitions in question provided examples that the symbolism implanted in the landscape paintings in Taiwan has been changed as the political circumstances and people's awareness change. People identifying themselves as the inheritors of Chinese culture contend that Taiwanese culture is a part of Chinese culture, and people identifying themselves as Taiwanese deny it and insist that Taiwan is an independent entity, politically and culturally

¹ Landscape Painting for Colonial Studies prospered since the 1970s, such as these of Australian art history, James Gleeson's *Colonial Painters, 1788-1880* (1971) and the Exhibition catalog by Barbara Chapman, *The Colonial Eye: A Topographical and Artistic Record of the Life and Landscape of Western Australia, 1798-1914*. (Art Gallery of Western Australia, held in 1979)

(Wang 2014, 40-41; Cabestan 2017, 46-47). The divided identities in Taiwan's society were subtly given away in the art events for the two centenaries wherein landscape paintings were curated. Consequently, the interpretation of exhibited artworks, took place under the rule of political party holding opposite political views, is further complicated.

The following section explores the historical-political contexts of the art exhibitions organized for significant historical events in Taiwan. It compares the curatorial statements about the landscape paintings selected for each of these exhibitions, and analyzes the political connotations composed into the art historiography. The ultimate goal of this study is to investigate whether or not there are observable phenomena indicating the politicization of art exhibitions.

The Changing Sociohistorical Conditions of Cultural Policies

The 228 Incident² and the sequential authoritarianism until 1987³, understood as White Terror, were the causes of the split historical and cultural identities, as well as native Taiwanese people's denial of the legitimacy of KMT's regime. After the end of the authoritarian rule, the urge of truth finding and reparations for historical injustices surfaced. Nonetheless, investigations of the past wrongdoings did not put KMT's regime throughout the Martial Law Period under scrutiny until it lost the presidential election to the opposite DPP party in 2000. Before 2000, few compensations to the 228 and White Terror victims were made⁴. After coming to power in 2000, DPP expanded the scope of reparative policies and redressed the historical oppression through cultural policies (Klötter 2004; Amae and Damm 2011). DPP's emphasis on multiculturalism and its policy of restoring unrecognized languages, native narratives and local histories kicked off more comprehensive nativism 本土化 in cultures (Wang 2014). These cultural policies were arguably interpreted as DPP's attempt to "de-Sinicize" (or de-Sinify) the society and polarize Taiwanization and Sinicization (Chang 2004; Amae and Damm 2011, 7-10; Denton 2021).

The KMT's authoritarian regime in the past is still casting shadow over the society in the wake of Taiwanization. Discourses leaning on postcolonial theories implied that the KMT's oppressive rule over Taiwan was no different to Japanese colonizers (Huang 2003, 309; Ni

2 After gaining control of Taiwan in 1945, the Nationalist government rapidly alienated the local population by excluding it from managing political affairs with various discriminatory measures on the pretext of the excessive "Japanization" of the islanders. Against this problematic background, the beating up of a female contraband cigarette vendor by the police on the evening of 27 February 1947 degenerated the following day into anti-government riots in Taipei that rapidly spread to the whole island. Ad-hoc committees were created to negotiate with the authorities, made up mostly by local elites. Whilst discussions were undergoing through these assemblies, riots that started in Taipei rapidly spread to the whole island. Governor Chen Yi 陳儀 requested reinforcements from Nanjing, which arrived in early March. From that moment on and for a little over a month, these troops gave themselves over to violent acts that resulted in between 18,000 and 28,000 deaths, many of them were Taiwanese elites (Stolojan 2017: 27).

3 The Martial Law 戒嚴法 ruled Taiwan from 1949 to 1987. The period of suppressive control is known as White Terror.

4 Since 1998. (Taiwan Association for Truth and Reconciliation 2015 Vol. 2)

2008, 32; Hsiau 2000 and 2012). On the contrary, believers of KMT's ideology that Taiwan, as the free China, was the legitimate successor of orthodox China, and saw KMT as the liberator of Taiwan from Japan's colonialism. Such divided identities were and still are the core issues of the supporters of KMT and DPP, thus decisive for their respective cultural policies.

When the KMT president took office in 2008, the ruling party changed the national language policy and recompiled textbooks taught in schools (Chan 2020).⁵ Although there were few changes in culture policies, the curatorial directions in several national museums quietly adapted (Vickers 2010; Denton 2021).⁶

Beside the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2012, the most important cultural policy during KMT's government period was the funding of numerous activities on the occasion of ROC's 100th National Birthday 建國百年. Among many events was the ostentatious musical *Dreamers 夢想家* about the founding history of the state. Commissioned by the hitherto highest cultural authority, the Council for Cultural Affairs 文化建設委員會, the musical revealed the authority's appreciation of nationalist patriotic aesthetics (Cheng 2013, 183). Meanwhile, a great variety of other state-funded activities for the 100th National Birthday showed little to do with national narrative. KMT inclined to have an event-oriented cultural policy, but showed less attempt to influence the contents through its funding. Conversely, DPP's cultural policy consistently enhanced nativism and Taiwanization of cultures, through which the Sino-centric perspective of art history was challenged (Chiu 2021).

At the same time, discourse on Taiwan's geopolitics shifted from continent-oriented to marine-oriented (Vickers 2010: 97; Hsiau 2012, 296-297; Chang 2015, 57).⁸ The re-narration dated back as early as the sixteenth century meant to restore Taiwan's maritime history⁹ and its colonized past. The purpose to promote multiple historical views is to repudiate the absolute significance of Chinese culture over Taiwan (Chang et al. 2020; Denton 2021, 22). Beside the newly researched maritime materials supporting the historians' reinterpretation of Taiwan's geopolitics, ideas about the South-ness of Taiwan often appeared in recent art exhibitions. Keywords such as "South-ness", "Global South" or "Austronesia" found in quite a few curatorial statements suggested a reconsideration whether Taiwanese cultures were exclusively originated in China (Lin 2019; Lu 2021). The identification of being in the south of the Pacific Ocean, instead of being marginal to the Chinese mainland or a southern territory of imperial Japan, is an attempt of decolonization rather than a realistic geopolitical awareness of Taiwan's society.

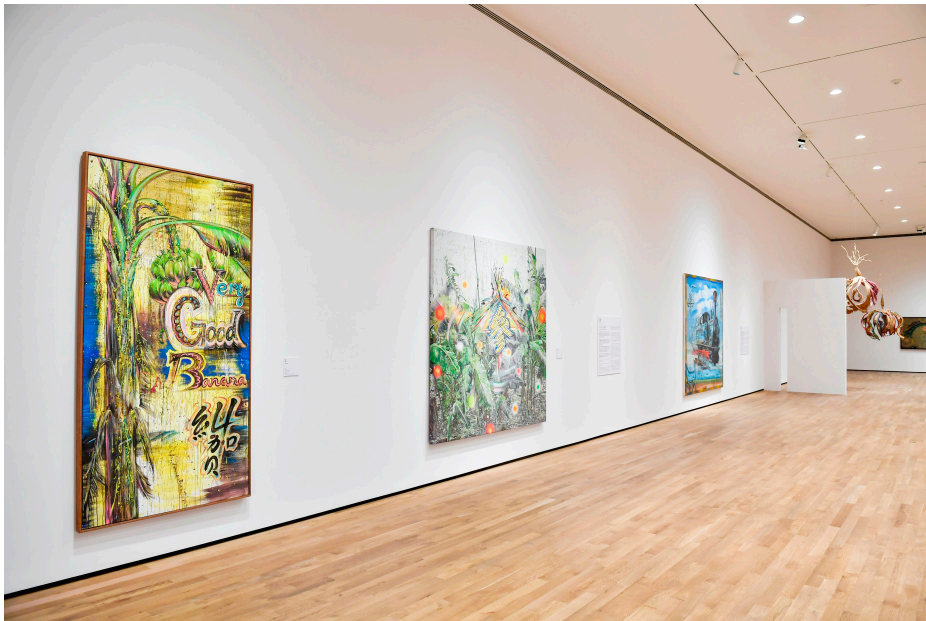
Nonetheless, ambivalent feelings surfaced through the tendencies of Taiwanization, decolonization and de-Sinicization. The exhibition *Everyday Life and Landscapes of the Island – Betel Nuts, Bananas, Sugar Cane and Palms 島嶼生活與地景：檳榔、香蕉、甘蔗、椰子樹* (Figure 1) at the Tainan Art Museum in 2020 scrutinized the "southern identity" with landscape paintings it exhibited. Curator Nobuo Takamori 高森信男 questioned the political

8 The move was partly the response of the official cultural policy on the New Southbound Policy 新南向政策 initiated by the Executive Yuan since 2016. The policy aimed to reduce Taiwan's economic dependence on China and to strengthen connections with the countries south of Taiwan (Meesuwan 2018, 46).

9 Dating back to the Netherlands' occupation of Taiwan from 1624 to 1662.

connotation behind the artworks depicting Taiwan's South-ness. He pointed out that, as early as during the first half of the 20th century, landscapes in Taiwan had been drastically changed by Japanese colonizers through modern technologies of large-scale cultivation, in order to meet the demands of colonial industrialization (Takamori 2020, 16). The curator implied that presenting Taiwan with images of tropical and subtropical plants for being the South or Austronesian was actually a confusion. The exhibition questioned the genuineness of the natural scenes in Taiwan represented by the aforementioned nativism of cultures since the 1980s.

Figure 1. *Everyday Life and Landscapes of the Island – Betel Nuts, Bananas, Sugar Cane and Palms.*
 Photo Source: Nobuo Takamori



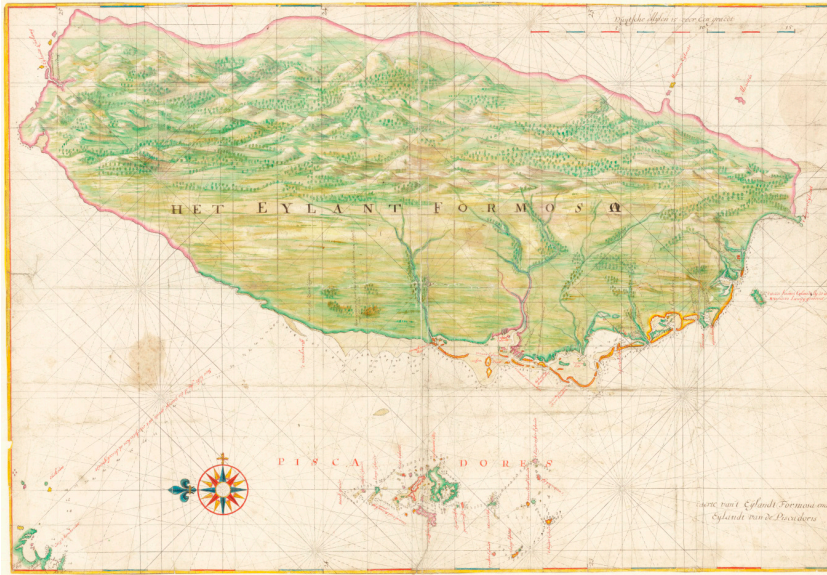
Reconstructing National Narrative by Curating Landscape Representations

Another endeavor of re-writing Taiwan's history was seen in the display of maps in various exhibitions. *Taiwan in Map* at the National Taiwan Museum in 2007 and *Something about Maps -Taiwan History in Map* at the National Museum of Taiwan History in 2017 showed maps of the island since the sixteenth century, intending to highlight the island's links with regions beyond China. And among all the early maps of Taiwan it exhibited, the *Ilha Formosa* held at the National Palace Museum in 2003¹⁰ featured a seventeenth-century Dutch map on its catalog cover. In the map Taiwan was laid horizontally, facing toward the Pacific Ocean with its back to China (Vickers 2010, 99).¹¹ The re-orientation of Taiwan's historical-geopolitical significance has had impacts on the vision of Taiwan's art historiography. In 2011, the same

10 The entire title of the catalogue is *Ilha Formosa: The Emergence of Taiwan on the World Scene in the 17th Century* 福爾摩沙 - 十七世紀的台灣 . 荷蘭與東亞

map was used as the primary image of an art exhibition celebrating the 100th National Birthday, the *Scenery and Vistas of Taiwan through the Eyes of Artists* (hereafter: *Scenery and Vistas*).

Figure 2. *The Island Formosa and the Pescadores*, ca. 1640 by Johannes Vingboons.
Photo Source: Wikipedia



In 2022, the exhibition *A Song of Seas and Power – The Flow of Labor, Goods and Currents* 逐鹿之海 – 物流、人流、海流 held at the NTMFA also used a map of Taiwan as its primary image (Figure 3). The curator Huang Shu-ping 黃舒屏 explicitly addressed issues about replacing Taiwan's mainland-centric views with marine-centric views (Huang 2022). The exhibition contextualized the history of Taiwan through artworks demonstrating historical scenes, including paintings celebrating the conquest of the Chinese empire, sea trade between Taiwan and other continents, or the arrival of migrants at Taiwan. Among them were the eighteenth-century work *Paintings of War Pacifying Taiwan* 平定台灣戰圖 (Figure 4), a series of etching prints depicting Qing Empire's victorious troops putting down uprisings in Taiwan.¹² Coincidentally, the series of prints showing a great resemblance to maps, have been exhibited previously in *Scenery and Vistas*, under the subcategory of Allegories of Political Desire 政治權力寓示.¹³

11 Made by the Dutch cartographer Johannes Vingboons (1640).

12 Lin Shuang-wen Incident 林爽文事件, Taiwan's civil commotion during 1786-1788.

13 Along with Representation of the Beauty of Taiwan and Its Landscapes 山川之美再現, Popular Memories of Local Life 生活景象記憶, Expressions of Cultural and National Identity 本土主體認同 and Reverence for the Land and Environment 土地環境關懷.

Figure 3. Imagery of *A Song of Seas and Power – The Flow of Labor, Goods and Currents*.
Photo Source: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts

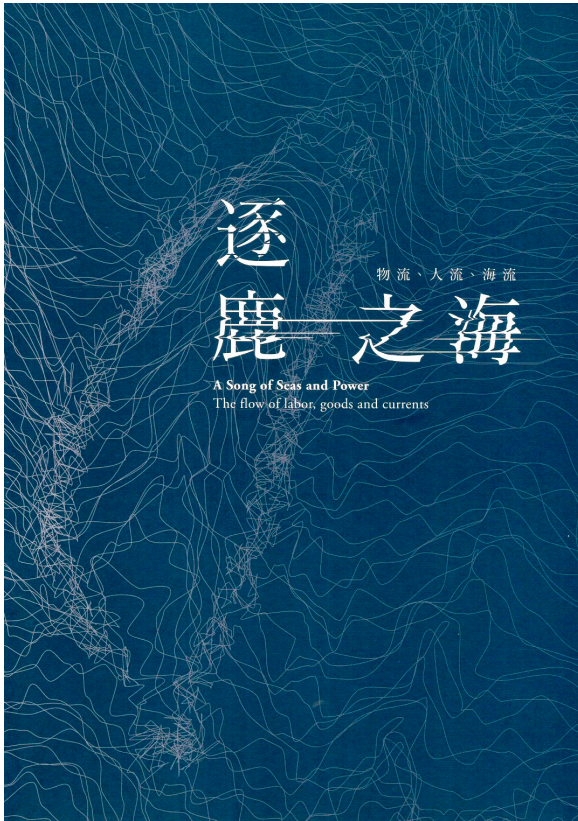


Figure 4. One of the series of *Paintings of War Pacifying Taiwan* by Yao Wen-han et al., 1793.
Photo Source: National Museum of Taiwan History



The curatorial statement of *Scenery and Vistas* reads:

The background maps completed in Taiwan gave meticulous detail to the strategic passes, terrains, rocky mountains, villages, houses, enceinte, woods and of course war scenes, (...) these illustrations convey Qing Dynasty's control over the land as a valuable piece depicting the historical and political landscape of Taiwan at that time (Hsueh 2011, 38).¹⁴

By juxtaposing maps and landscape paintings, curator Hsueh Yen-Ling stressed how landscape paintings served the colonizers' exploitation of newly annexed territories symbolically and realistically:

Tracing back the history, the development of Taiwanese art history is intimately linked to landscape paintings. During the Dutch occupation of Taiwan, they drew a great deal of sea charts, maps, and landscape illustrations of Taiwan for practical uses. These materials allow us to reconstruct the early impressions of Taiwan in the seventeenth century (Hsueh 2011, 31).

Hsueh further discussed the same deeds of Japanese colonizers to envision Taiwan as a desired territory annexed for Japanese imperialism (Yen 2000; Hsueh 2011; Liao 2007). The multiple functions of landscape paintings were embodied through the particular role of the officially appointed Japanese artist Ishikawa Kinichiro (1871-1945):

During the Japanese occupation,¹⁵ Japanese rulers opened up people's eyes to the beauty of this island. Modern or western perspective of landscape was introduced to Taiwan through Japan. Ishikawa Kinichiro's gesture and representation of Taiwan's Landscape had a profound impact on Taiwanese painters.¹⁶ Their landscape paintings of local features were mixed with the views from colonial authority, adding more complexity to the seemingly pure paintings (Hsueh 2011, 31).¹⁷

Ishikawa Kinichiro served the General Staff Office of Imperial Japanese Army as an interpreter, and because of his art specialty, he was dispatched to depict the Barrier Defense Lines 番界 against the aboriginals (Yen 2000; Hsueh 2011, 39). Later he taught painting in pedagogical high schools in Taiwan and often organized plein air painting field trips with his students. Ishikawa Kinichiro eagerly promoted modern western art and advocated official art competitions.¹⁸ According to Hsueh, landscape paintings at that time not only reflected

14 Slightly edited by author.

15 The term "occupation" was frequently debated, since Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895 after the Qing Empire lost the First Sino-Japanese War to Japan. The KMT inclined to describe the period from 1895 to 1945 as Japanese Occupation, while most historians preferred to use Japanese Rule. The debates arose while the KMT government imposed the use of Occupation for all official documents as well as for textbooks (Wu 2014). Footnote by author.

16 The introduce of western art by Japanese artists was generally marked as the inauguration of the modern art in Taiwan. Footnote by author. Also see footnote 17.

17 Slightly edited by author.

18 The initiates of the Japanese and Taiwanese artists became later the Taiten 台展 and Futen, the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition (Taiten) from 1927 to 1936 and the Governor-General's Art Exhibition (Futen) from 1938 to 1943. https://www.moc.gov.tw/en/information_197_119595.html

19 More about the modernity of art, coming from the West and then defined and introduced by Japanese artists to Taiwan can be read in Lo Hsiu-Chih's study on Ishikawa Kinichiro (Lo 2002).

colonizers' gaze at their new territory in the south, but also initiated modern art in Taiwan.¹⁹

Hsueh continued elucidating that in the 1970s and 1980s, rivalry between different genres in representing orthodox Chinese-ness for political legitimacy emerged. Although artists from Mainland China expressed their nostalgia through ink landscape paintings, some of them embraced a new identity after seeing the natural beauty in this island and created their art in new styles:

(...) they were touched by the new landscapes and mountains, and sketched their way into real life in Taiwan. They presented the landscapes as the subject matter of local identity (Hsueh 2011, 49).

The pursuit for Taiwan's subjectivity by painting Taiwan's landscape became a trend during the times of national crises, such as the isolation in the world community after withdrawing from the United Nations, or when the tension between Taiwan and China was heightened. Art society had no choice but to face the fact that the political climate did affect art themes (Hsueh 2011, 51). Landscape paintings could be artists' expression of their political attitude. As the curator's analysis of Lin Hsin-yueh's 林 惺 嶽 realistic artworks of Taiwan's landscapes:

(...) many of his works are realistic, yet their fantastic fineness exudes an epic ambiance. His art profoundly represents the extraordinary beauty of mother nature, as well as his heartfelt depiction of local features. Lin Hsin-yueh's art not only broadened the scope of landscape painting, but also powerfully animated his interpretation of homeland (Hsueh 2011, 52).²⁰

Lin Hsin-yueh (1939~) is also a pioneer art historian who, since the 1980s, makes great efforts to rebuild Taiwan's art history. In response to the nativism movement, Lin's strategy to decolonize Taiwanese art is to replace the gaze of colonizers by representing native Taiwan with contemporary plein air painting.

Thirty years before Scenery and Vistas, several artists responded to Taiwan's political crises by "sketching the way into real life in Taiwan, presenting the landscapes as the subject matter of local identity". The touring exhibition of the panoramic ink painting in 1981, *Formosa Evergreen Scroll 寶島長春圖* (Figure 5-1, 5-2), was initiated to celebrate ROC's 70th National Birthday. The colossal project of 66-meter scroll was commissioned by the National Museum of History (NMH) to "show the world the beauty of Taiwan's landscapes" (NMH 2019). After leaving the United Nations, Taiwan was increasingly isolated and the number of countries maintaining formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the Republic of China (ROC), dropped dramatically (Tsai 2019).²¹ Taiwanese people, no matter with which cultural identity, became gradually aware of the fact that the ROC's territory covers no more than the island and some offshore islets, and the ambition to resume or to unify with China is no longer realistic. Nonetheless, to overcome the national trauma, ten renowned ink art painters traveled and sketched extensively across Taiwan, and completed the scroll collectively (Minister of Culture 2019).

20 Translated by author.

21 The ROC left the UN in 1971, and the diplomatic relation with the U.S. ended in 1979.

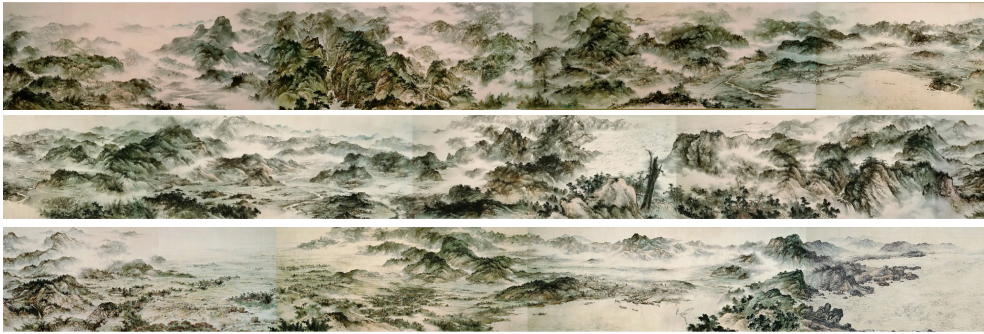
Figure 5-1. *Formosa Evergreen Scroll*

Source: Screenshot from VR Exhibition of Tainan Art Museum



Figure 5-2. *Formosa Evergreen Scroll*, 1981.

Photo Source: National Museum of History



The scroll had been showcased in several countries and then preserved in the museum's storage for the next thirty-six years, until it was exhibited again in 2019 at the Tainan Art Museum (TNAM). From today's perspective, the political messages it meant to carry in the first place, demonstrating Taiwan as the guardian of Chinese culture and portraying Taiwan's economic prosperity with exquisite ink art,²² hadn't been delivered. However, the scroll is, as the researcher of the NMH Tsai Yao-ching 蔡耀慶 stated:

*(...) not just a map or a painting, but also the artists' witness of the entire Taiwan's landscape at that particular time. It marks the turning point of Taiwan's art history, since then the art society no longer adopted the colonizers' gazes, but viewing Taiwan's native soil with their own eyes (Tsai 2019).*²³

For art historians like Hsueh and Tsai, plein air painting not only kicked off the development

22 The Ten Major Construction Project 十大建設 completed in 1979, which included six transportation projects, three industrial projects, and one power-plant construction, were depicted along with the landscapes. The Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, which was completed in 1980, was also portrayed in the painting.

23 Translated by author.

of modern art in Taiwan, as the Japanese pioneer artists promoted, but also opened up the path to the decolonization of Taiwan's art history.

The concept of viewing the landscapes through plein air painting instead of through the colonizers' gazes, was further extended in the exhibitions of the 100th anniversary of the Taiwan Cultural Association (TCA), the *Worldward: The Transformative Force of Art in Taiwan's New Cultural Movement* (hereafter: *Worldward*) and the *Lumière – The Enlightenment and Self-Awakening of Taiwanese Culture* (hereafter: *Lumière*).

One of the curators of *Lumière* Chiang Po-shin 蔣伯欣 credited the exhibited plein air paintings, created by artists of Japanese colonial time, with an "epistemological significance":

The new art movement replaced the old practice of painting by imitating the ideas of "plein air painting," and new visual forms were created for a new epistemology and worldview. Painters began to see local characters by themselves and select meaningful cultural scenes as their themes.

Painters gazed in to the local colors of their native land and customs (...) while selecting specific cultural landscapes as their subject matter. (...) In spite of strict censorship, these artists represented landmarked urban spaces where citizens gathered to discuss public issues. They were to explore whether landscape paintings could demonstrate the resistance of people under colonialism through their portrait of "resistant landscapes".²⁴

Under the interpretation of the curators, paintings depicting places where TCA members held its activities were "resistance landscape":

*Kuo Po-chuan's 郭柏川 composition focused on the court in front of a temple (Tainan Sacrificial Rites Martial Temple 台南武廟, the temple's Sanchaun Gate, and a lane connecting it. It was where the New Taiwanese Cultural Association was located. The dark red shadow in the middle ground is a subjective depiction of light. Perhaps this is why the reporter of *The Taiwan Minpao* 台灣民報 claimed that Kuo's work carried the "symbolism of the art as a combative tool" (Chiang 2022, 142).²⁵ (Figure 6)*

The description seems to be contradictory to the text of the Tainan Art Museum (TNAM), where the painting is collected:

The shadow of the temple divides the picture into two parts and creates a vivid interplay between light and shadows. The woman with a sun umbrella strolling around the plaza, the street vendor with his customers, and a man resting in the shade make up the scene of an afternoon of leisure in Tainan (TNAM No. 4299).²⁶

24 Translation edited by author. The original English translation of the sentences is unclear: The artists constructed visual subjects in the colony through their views of the resistant landscapes informed by the spirit of the public domains of discourse (皆以市民社會的地景為題，探問殖民地地景的可見性)。

25 Translation edited by author, the origin translation "the art of the struggle" seems not to conform with the Chinese text.

26 Translated by author. The original text: (...) 廟埕前偌大的陰影將畫面從中一分為二，大膽的構圖所帶來的光影效果，讓整個畫面更為活絡生動。手持洋傘遮光漫步著的婦人，對應著在陰影處納涼休憩的市井小民和販賣下午點心的小攤販，輕鬆點出臺南悠閒的午後時光。

Figure 6. *Tainan Sacrificial Rites Martial Temple* by Kuo Po-chuan, 1929.
Photo Source: Tainan Art Museum



Prior to Chiang's concept of art as a combative tool, the painting *Zhenren Temple* 真人廟 (Figure 7) by Chen Chih-chi 陳植棋 in 1929 had become an icon of the "resistance landscape". The painting then appeared in all exhibition catalogs of the four national museums' commemoration of TCA's 100th anniversary. After elaborating the painter's life, art career and his role in TCA, art historian Chiu Han-ni 邱函妮 asserted the irreplaceability of this painting to account Taiwanese people's persistent pursuit of subjectivity. Chiu was convinced that the temple, located near the headquarters of the new Taiwan People's Party founded by several former members of TCA, and the painting made shortly after it, was undoubtedly Chen Chih-chi's statement of his support of the party and its goals (Chiu 2017).

The newly established party headquarters was located at today's No. 45 Tianshui Road, right next to No. 49 where the temple was. The time when Chen Chih-chi portrayed Zhenren Temple was close to when the headquarters of Taiwan People's Party was set up. This offers us a key to interpreting this work, including the part that was not depicted in the picture (2021, 29).²⁷

Chiu believed that the painting was an action out of Chen Chih-chi's Taiwanese nationalist consciousness, and the Zhenren Temple under his brushes represented two things. One was people's determination against colonialism, the other was their awareness of subjectivity. Chiu contended her deduction by emphasizing that the painter's intention showed in his choice of an abandoned temple in the district frequented by activists (Chiu 2021, 31).

27 Slightly edited by author.

Chiu's viewpoint of this painting is repeatedly cited. The curator of the *Lumière*, Chiang Po-shin, also echoed:

In the middle ground, he used layered brushstrokes to form various color blocks, reddish brown or dark green. The ancient temple, the verdant shrubs and the slightly disordered scene are simplified by the painter's intense brushstrokes, exuding a vibrant momentum. It seems to announce that the headquarters of Taiwan People's Party is established at the center of Tataocheng (大稻埕), and the fight of Taiwanese people continues (Chiang 2022, 146).²⁸

Figure 7. *Zhenren Temple* by Chen Chih-chi, 1929.
Photo Source: Catalog of Taipei Fine Art Museum



Artworks of past centuries could be interpreted differently by altering context. Intriguingly, Ishikawa Kinichiro's watercolor painting *Overlooking Taipei from the Taiwan Shinto Shrine* 從圓山神社眺望台北 (1930) (Figure 8) was exhibited in the events for both of the centenaries, only it was interpreted in the context of opposite views. In the *Scenery and Vistas* in 2011, the piece was a reminder of the multiple roles of artists as the colonial explorers, adventurers, geographers and promoters of Japanese nationalism. The curator defined the painting as the explicit example of imperialist gaze. It demonstrated a downward view to the surrogate of the highest mundane power, the Government-General House of Taiwan 總督府, from the symbol of the most sacred power, the Shinto shrine located remotely in the Hills (Hsueh 2010; 2011, 40; 2012). The same piece was loaned for the *Worldward* in 2021, however, under the subcategory of the *Japanese Painters / Educators in Taiwan*,²⁹ it was used to indicate

28 Slightly edited by author.

the connection between Japanese art educators and the self-enlightening movements of Taiwanese artists in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 8. *Overlooking Taipei from the Taiwan Shinto Shrine* by Ishikawa Kinichiro, 1930.
Photo Source: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts



It seems to be a paradox to juxtapose the artworks of the colonizers and the colonized, especially for the TCA's 100th anniversary. While some researchers redressed Japan's role for Taiwan from an oppressor to the precursor of modernity, the others criticized such manner "colonial nostalgia" and ideologically confused (Chen 2016; Huang 2003, 312; Lo 2002, 115-117; Vickers 2010, 101). Or in a broader political context, the nostalgia for the Japanese colonial era is politically driven, a counter to KMT's Sino-centric narratives (Denton 2021, 5).

Oppressors or enlighteners, the role of Japanese artists during the colonial period had been interpreted differently. In 1986, the exhibition *Artworks of Ishikawa Kinichiro and His Students* 石川欽一郎師生作品展, held at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), explicitly counted the importance of his foresightfulness as a pioneer educator of modern art in Taiwan (Hsiao 2009, 26). Art historian Yen Chuan-yin's 顏娟英 research also recognized Ishikawa Kinichiro's contribution to Taiwan's modern art education (Yen 1993, 495-499). Additionally, the exhibition *Oil painting in the East Asia: Its Awakening and Development* 東亞油畫的誕生與開展 in 2000, endorsed by the director of TFAM at that time, Lin Mun-lee 林曼麗, solidly affirmed the significance of Japanese artists' efforts for Taiwan's modern art (Lin 2000, 14-15).

Was Ishikawa Kinichiro a colonial exploiter or a mentor? His art career is interpreted contradictorily in art exhibitions and catalogs in Taiwan. For example, his painting portraying the Government-General House 台北總督府 (1920) was sorted out for the subcategory *Reflection of Japanese Colonialism in exhibition Waves Striking – One Hundred Years of Taiwanese Arts* 千濤拍岸—台灣美術一百年 in 2001, to illustrate the curator's critical viewpoint (Hu 2001). Art historian Liao Hsin-tian 廖新田 pointed out the related purposes of conducting

29 Along with *Art Competitions and Taiwanese Artists* 美術競賽與臺灣藝術家, *Modernity and Local Color* 現代性與地方特色, *Images of the Modern Woman* 現代女性形象 and *The Rise of Photography* 寫真術興起.

land surveys and plein air painting during the Japanese rule. He indicated that the artworks of the Japanese educator shall be considered as the materialization of the colonizer's metaphorical language of possession (Andrews 1999, 77; Liao 2007, 45-47; Hsueh 2011).

On the other hand, a tendency in favor of Japanese artists has emerged in recent studies of Taiwan's art history. The re-narration of the Japanese artists' influence and the emphasis of their pedagogic achievements in Taiwan have significantly changed the perception of the art audience. Ishikawa Kinichiro's *Riverside* 河畔, sensationally announced to be rediscovered after vanishing for ninety years, was exhibited in *Yōga: Modern Western Paintings of Japan* 日本近代洋画大展 (hereafter, *Yōga*) (2017), had greatly increased his popularity (Chien 2017; MoNTUE 2017).

The viewpoint that Japanese artists helped Taiwanese artists to develop self-awareness under the Japanese rule was first hinted by the exhibitions *Taiwan Travel Notes* 台灣紀行 and *Formosa in Formation* 台灣製造 製造台灣 organized by Taipei Fine Art Museum (TFAM) in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Both exhibitions selected artworks dated back to the Japanese ruling period. According to the curator Lin Yu-chun's 林育淳 view, landscape paintings from Japanese artists and Chinese artists were both from foreigners who appreciated Taiwan's landscape (Lin 2014, 8).³⁰ She also stated that today, Taiwan's images in art are ascribed primarily to the colonial time, when the Japanese and Taiwanese artists influenced each other. Lin also thought that there was no stereotypical hierarchy between the colonizers and the colonized in the genesis of modern art in Taiwan (TFAM Press 2015-5-22).

These exhibitions in a public art institute and its interpretation of the power relations between the Japanese and Taiwanese artists have nuancedly changed historical perspective. The curatorial statement of the *Yōga* reads:

Through presenting the unique, interconnected contexts of artistic evolution in both Japan and Taiwan, the exhibition provides a vantage point for all to review the development of modern art in Taiwan and an opportunity to continuously expand the regional dialogue about East Asian art history through re-contextualizing and re-examining Taiwan's own historic context (MoNTUE 2017).

In a recent exhibition *South Plus* 大南方 at the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (KMFA) (2021-2022), artist Su Yu-hsien 蘇育賢 and other twelve artists repeated Ishikawa Kinichiro's footsteps during an overnight hike in Mt. Tattaka 塔塔加, where the Japanese artist had traveled and painted one century ago (KMFA 2021). This project attempted to launch an across-time dialog between contemporary Taiwanese artists and the Japanese artist from equal positions.

South Plus also experimented on the concept of South-ness to imply the ideas that modern art germinated in Taiwan not because of its status as a colony but because of the rich imagination its geographic location offered:

How can the unique spiritual landscape of "the South" be depicted? (...) The revisiting of the concept of "the South" is an escape from the fixed framework of geopolitics on the

30 Lin took Gohara Koto 郷原古統, Ishikawa Kinichiro, Wu Cheng-yen and 吳承硯 and Long Sih-liang 龍思良 as examples.

one hand and also a process of self-rediscovery by exploring the diverse facets of "the South" on the other. Can "the South" really become a kind of thinking / attitude, or an action, a method, or a kind of "State of Mind"? (KMFA 2021)

South Plus as a compound project of artworks and numerous historical materials sought to reestablish Taiwan as a space / place³¹ bringing about encounters of native peoples, colonizers, adventurers, traders, explorers, scientists, photographers, anthropologists, artists and historians. As the curatorial discourse on the photographic works it exhibited:

*The South used to be the object gazed at by empires and colonizing powers. (...) During the Japanese colonial rule and its exploitation of resources in Taiwan for WWII, propaganda images of military mobilization in southern Taiwan were created. By looking at these images nowadays, we are intervening how the idea of South-ness was transited to the process of Taiwan's pursuit for modernity and subjectivity (KMFA 2021).*³²

To the curator and artists, the major issues were no longer about decolonization, de-Japanization or de-Sinicization of Taiwan's art historiography. Instead of following what had been construed before, with the abstract and undefinable idea of South-ness, art history could be rewritten through the reinvention of Taiwan's landscape.

Conclusion: Examining Art Historiography in the Art Events for National Centenaries

Setting out from the *Scenery and Vistas* (2011), the *Worldward* (2021) and the *Lumière* (2021) for the 100th anniversaries of two significant years for Taiwan, this study discusses the changing political connotations of art exhibitions of landscape paintings. It scrutinizes how the shifts of ruling power might have influenced the curatorial directions for national events, and how the autonomy of art might be compromised. This study has found that the tendency of reshaping art historiography through curatorial contextualization in art events for significant political dates was unignorable.

Discourse on Taiwan's art historiography was developed under an extreme political circumstance in a very short period after democratization. The authoritarian regime of KMT from 1949 to 1987 had caused polarized political and cultural inclinations in Taiwanese people. The rivalry of the two political parties, KMT and DPP, which ruled Taiwan alternately since 2000, and the opposition in their respective cultural policies, are how each of them fortifies their camps. KMT intends to establish the national narrative for Taiwan as being the orthodox China by reducing the significance of Japan's role for Taiwan's modernization. While the DPP inclines to interpret that Taiwanese have resisted oppression all the time, even during the KMT's regime. The strategy for Taiwan's society to break away from the narrative

31 Drawing on Mitchell's discourse about the difference, a landscape just is a space, or the view of a place. In both the phenomenological and historical materialist traditions of this subject, space and place are the crucial terms, and landscape is taken for granted as an aesthetic framing of the real properties of space and places. Space is a practiced place, and landscape is a conceptualized or symbolized space in context of western cultures (Mitchell 2002: viii-x).

32 Slightly edited by author.

of Taiwan being voicelessly colonized and "enslaved" for nearly a century, is to emphasize that the TCA had shaped Taiwanese's resistance against oppressions and discriminations as early as in the 1920s. This interpretation is enhanced by the viewpoint that Taiwanese artists have fought for equality with their Japanese art educators.

KMT's cultural policies made little effort to challenge the status quo, and DPP's project of Reconstruction of Taiwan's Art History was to rewrite the viewpoints of the past. Although the independence of curatorship was guaranteed, the art exhibitions in the name of TCA's 100th anniversary still revealed DPP's ambition and the curators' enthusiasm to second.

In the wake of reconstruction of Taiwan's art history, art historian Shih Shou-chien 石守謙 (2020) warned the problems of construing art history based on national narratives. Art historiography endorsed by official resources might outreach further, but its autonomy might be eroded.³³ The art exhibitions for the two centenaries were well-perceived, and had successfully summoned people's patriotism to the nation they identified with. However, both of the two centenaries were retold. Taiwan was Japan's colony until ROC's takeover in 1945, and the entire ROC government retreated from Mainland China to Taiwan after its founding party KMT was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949.³⁴ Since ROC did not exist in Taiwan for the first half century, it is odd to have a KMT version of Taiwan's art history for the past one hundred years. Meanwhile, although TCA was founded by dissidents who pursued democracy under colonial government, many Taiwanese artists who identified with TCA were deemed as Japanese nationals. They actively participated in art competitions organized by the Japanese government in order to be recognized as equal to Japanese citizens. The ambivalence remained unspoken in the art exhibitions memorizing TCA.

This study concludes with Chip Colwell's (2022) Palimpsest Theory of Objects for the interpretation of artworks. Palimpsest symbolizes overwriting contested meanings, regarding its usage of wax tablets and on which the authors repeatedly erase and write over the given inscriptions. Consequently, the earlier inscriptions were never fully erased and over time the palimpsest is representing the sum of all the erasures and over-writings (Colwell 2022, 130). Instead of maintaining multiple art histories, as Lu Pei-yi (2018) advocated, this study prefers to describe Taiwan's art history as a palimpsest, on which the political wrestles over the interpretations of artworks remain ambiguously visible. Even if a new interpretation shall prevail, previous versions do not disappear, for how they were related to one another also matters. And above all, no art exhibition, for national commemoration or not, can easily serve the political interpretation of art history.

33 By analyzing the development of Lin Yu-shan's 林玉山 and Chang Dai-chien's 張大千 artistic styles, which didn't coincide with the political development, Shih questioned the appropriateness to interpret the genesis of art history in accordance with the political phases (Shih 2020, 100-101).

34 Mainly the officials and soldiers followed Chiang Kai-Shek's command, it was about two million Mainlanders.

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