

DISSERTATION

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Negotiating Traditions

Taiwanese Art Since the 1980s

Referees

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In memory of my mother

Abstract

Traditions, especially those that are non-Western, tend to be popularly perceived as very ancient. This is frequently not the case as shown, for instance, by Eric Hobsbawn and others in their studies demonstrating that traditions are "often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented." Employing this perspective as a starting point, it is my special interest to investigate how contemporary Taiwanese art came to develop an "active," creative relationship with tradition, provoked by the analysis of, the resistance against, or the programmatic re-presentation of that tradition. After Martial Law was lifted in 1987, the Taiwanese society witnessed an unprecedented era of rapid and continuous change. As a result, cultural resources and different traditions from the past, rooted in various timelines and localities, have concurrently surfaced and presented themselves as multiple opportunities for visual artists. The objective of this thesis is to examine how traditions are developed, constructed, incorporated, juxtaposed, forged, and processed; in short: how they are negotiated by the artists, and what kind of messages and ideas are expressed by them, by which means and for which reasons. After providing a historical survey of Taiwan's artistic development, the study focuses on six major artworks by six contemporary Taiwanese artists including Huang Chin-ho, Yang Mao-lin, Lien Te-cheng, Wu Mali, Huang Chih-yang, and Hou Chun-ming. The primary issues subsequently examined are the artist's visual languages, their artistic styles and development, and the iconographical sources from which they draw. Furthermore, contemporary writings and the artists' statements are extensively consulted, evaluated, analyzed, and critically read in order to uncover the full meaning or hidden messages contained within the artworks. The study concludes that the project of Taiwan's contemporary tradition-making is ambitious and heterogeneous, encompassing cultures as diverse and hybrid as Western contemporary philosophical discourse, various artistic traditions, local popular and religious customs, the Chinese tradition, especially in its marginal and occult varieties, and, not least, the cultural impact of Japanese colonial rule.

Zusammenfassung

Traditionen, vor allem solche der nichtwestlichen Welt, werden häufig als sehr alt angesehen. Daß das häufig nicht der Fall ist, zeigt beispielsweise eine bekannte Studie von Eric Hobsbawm und anderen, die nachweist, daß Traditionen „oft relativ jungen Ursprungs und manchmal erfunden sind“. Ausgegangen aus dieser Perspektive, ist es von besonderem Interesse zu untersuchen, wie die taiwanesischen Gegenwartskunst begann, ein „aktives“, kreatives Verhältnis zur Tradition zu entwickeln, hervorgerufen durch die Analyse dieser Tradition, den Widerstand gegen sie oder den Wunsch nach ihrer programmatischen Re-Präsentation. Nach der Aufhebung des Kriegsrechts im Jahre 1987 erlebte die taiwanesischen Gesellschaft eine beispiellose Epoche raschen und anhaltenden Wandels. In dessen Folge kamen gleichzeitig sehr verschiedene kulturelle Ressourcen und Traditionen aus der Vergangenheit mit Wurzeln in unterschiedlichen Zeitebenen und historischen Kontinuitäten ans Tageslicht und boten vielfältige Möglichkeiten der Nutzung durch die bildende Kunst. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, zu untersuchen, wie diese Traditionen entwickelt, konstruiert, inkorporiert, einander gegenübergestellt, gefälscht und verarbeitet wurden, kurz: wie Künstler mit ihnen umgehen, welche Botschaften und Ideen mit ihnen ausgedrückt werden, und mit welchen Mitteln und aus welchen Gründen dies geschieht. Im Anschluß an einen historischen Überblick über die Entwicklung der taiwanesischen Kunst konzentriert sich die Studie auf sechs Hauptwerke von sechs Künstlern (Huang Chin-ho, Yang Mao-lin, Lien Te-cheng, Wu Mali, Huang Chih-yang, and Hou Chun-ming). Zu den Aspekten, die dabei untersucht werden, gehören nicht nur deren Stil und künstlerische Entwicklung, sondern auch die ikonographischen Quellen, aus denen sie schöpfen. Sowohl Publikationen und Kommentare aus der Entstehungszeit der jeweiligen Werke als auch die Aussagen der Künstler selbst werden herangezogen, bewertet, analysiert und vor dem Hintergrund des sozialen und politischen Wandels in Taiwan seit den achtziger Jahren kritisch gelesen. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluß, daß das Projekt zeitgenössischer Traditionsschöpfung, ambitioniert und heterogen wie es ist, so disparate und hybride Kulturen in sich einschließt wie den westlichen philosophischen Diskurs der Gegenwart, unterschiedliche künstlerische Traditionen, lokale Volkskultur und religiöses Brauchtum, die chinesische Tradition, speziell in ihren marginalen und verborgenen Varianten, und nicht zuletzt den kulturellen Einfluß der japanischen Kolonialherrschaft.

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The following institutions, galleries and individuals have generously provided me with materials or granted me the permission to reproduce their artworks: the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the Koxinga Museum in Tainan, Lin & Kan Galley, Lungmen Gallery, Hanart Gallery Taipei, and the National Museum of Natural History. Warmly I acknowledge their kind assistance. George Gittoes, the Australian artist and photographer, permitted me to reproduce two images he made during his first visit to Taiwan in 1993. I also very much appreciate his support.

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Conventions

For Chinese personal names, geographical names, and terms, I have used the pinyin romanization, with two exceptions:

1 The names of the six artists discussed here in detail are given in the romanization used by themselves and by which they are known internationally. Their pinyin transcriptions may be gleaned from the right column of the following conversion table:

Hou Chun-ming	-	Hou Junming
Huang Chih-yang	-	Huang Zhiyang
Huang Chin-ho	-	Huang Jinhe
Lien Te-cheng	-	Lian Decheng
Wu Mali	-	Wu Mali
Yang Mao-lin	-	Yang Maolin

2 Geographical names which are more well-known internationally in a form other than their pinyin romanization are given in that form, such as Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Peking.

Translations from the Chinese, if not otherwise stated, are mine.

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0. Introduction

0.1 What is Tradition?

Traditions, especially non-Western ones, tend to be popularly perceived of (by outsiders, but often by those born into them as well) as very ancient. That this is frequently not the case has been shown, for instance, by Eric Hobsbawm and others in a well-known study demonstrating that traditions are "often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented," among them those "emerging in a [not] easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps."¹ The revision of common notions of the term "tradition," exemplified here in the field of history, is apparent in other areas as well. "In socio-cultural anthropology," Eugenia Shanklin writes in her article "Two meanings and uses of tradition," "there have been two major views of tradition: the first is the passive idea of tradition borrowed from the theoretical literature of social sciences; the second is the active, indigenous use of tradition recorded in the ethnographic literature."²

The "passive" concept of tradition is essentially rooted in 19th century thought: "Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Tönnies were heirs to the dichotomous thinking that began with the Greeks and reached full flower in the nineteenth century. Tradition/modernity accompanied other dichotomies in the 19th and early 20th century theories, including nature/nurture, primitive/civilized, mechanical/ organic, and mind/body distinctions. ... Marx shared the nineteenth century conviction that tradition would lose its hold once the modernization process was complete. ... Durkheim, in 1893, emphasized the contrast between tradition and rationality even more strongly than most other theorists, by designating traditionalism as part of non-rational, mechanical solidarity. He predicted the decline of tradition as a force in human history as rationalism grew in modern, urban settings."³

Shanklin proceeds to demonstrate how the concept of tradition as passive, inimical to change, and to be eradicated by modernity and rationality dominated social anthropology well into the

1 Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." In *The Invention of Tradition*. Hobsbawm, Eric & Ranger, Terence, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p1.

2 Shanklin, Eugenia. 1981. "Two Meanings and Uses of Tradition." In *Journal of Anthropological Research*. 37. p71.

3 Shanklin. 1981. p72. According to the sociologist Anthony Giddens, "the Enlightenment philosophers largely saw tradition as dogma and a barrier to knowledge. The aim of modernity or Enlightenment was to overcome the dogma of tradition. So, it is arguable that modernity and tradition have been at odds since the Enlightenment and are still locked in this battle. The result of this was that tradition was often understood as superstition, as irrational prejudice rather than having a rational place within society." Giddens, Anthony. 1999. "Tradition." In *The Director's Lectures: Runaway World: The Reith Lectures Revisited*. 24.11. Quoted from the lecture as published in the internet <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/lectures.htm>.

20th century. Ethnographical field research, however, has entirely disproved such notions. Referring to the arguments of a 1960s exponent of the "passive" view of tradition, Robert Redfield, she points out: "As a storage device, tradition serves not merely to store antique behavior; it also serves to align past and present and to set new precedents for behavior. Instead of being an irrational, emotional response, ethnographers have found traditions employed to promote rational innovation. In addition to promoting internal solidarity, tradition is used as a divisive tool to further individual and group ambitions. Instead of disappearing in urban environments, traditions have been reformulated to serve as a basis for claims to political and economic power and privilege."⁴

From a somewhat different angle, the American cultural anthropologist, Edward Shils writes in his book *Tradition* of 1981, that there are at least "two pasts. One is the sequence of occurred events, of actions which were performed and of the actions which they called forth, moving through a complex sequence of actions until the present is reached. ... There is another past. This is the perceived past. This is a much more plastic thing, more capable of being retrospectively reformed by human beings living in the present."⁵ Both kinds of tradition as they appear in contemporary Taiwanese art - one "handed down" in the literal sense and the other constructed by a projection of present needs and sensibilities into the past, or, by another definition, "passive" and "active" tradition - will be the subject of this study.

The complexity of the question of traditions in Taiwanese art is exemplified, for instance, by a 1993 resolution of the Taipei City Council prohibiting the municipal museum for modern art, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, from purchasing ink painting in the following fiscal year. The museum was instead to "acquire oil paintings by senior artists,"⁶ meaning by those Japanese-trained Taiwanese oil painters who worked in the Western, post-impressionist manner introduced by Japan in the 20s and 30s. Behind this decision lies an ideology which rejects ink painting as "Chinese" and thus not conforming to the Taiwanese tradition, proclaiming instead oil painting to be more representative of the true, indigenous Taiwanese art. The resolution was made in a period characterized by tremendous changes affecting the political, social, and cultural spheres, and is perfectly consistent with a school of thought which became current at the time. From a Western perspective, however, it must be rather astonishing to see a medium deeply rooted in the history of European art from the van Eyck brothers onward regarded as an integral part of the Taiwanese tradition; a medium which, moreover, was introduced to, if not imposed on Taiwan by a former colonial power which was itself non-Western – Japan – and which in turn had established itself as a by-product of the Japanese experience of modernization only a few decades before.

The island being a laboratory of the encounters and clashes of different cultures, the Taiwanese experience of "tradition" is thus a quite unusual one. Tradition, normally regarded as a static set

4 Shanklin. 1981. p77. According to the cultural anthropologist Robert H. Winthrop, "since the 1960s the anthropological understanding of tradition has changed considerably. An earlier view of tradition as inflexible and irrational could not be reconciled either with newer ethnological data concerning culture change or with world events. ... More recent culture theory recognizes tradition to be relatively fluid, capable of being invoked to justify or guide innovation, while conferring a sense of continuity with the past." See Winthrop, Robert H. 1991. "Tradition." In *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Greenwood Press. p302.

5 Shils, Edward. 1981. *Tradition*. London & Boston: Faber and Faber. p195.

6 Huang Baoping. 1994. "Beishimei jinzhazhou bu shi gai de: goucang jingfei buzu biantong biancheng xianzhi qunian peichu shuimo jinnian sheding guoji" [The Limitations Imposed on the Taipei Fine Arts Museum are a Fact: Solving the Problem of Lacking Funds by the Exclusion of Ink Painting Last Year and the Restriction on Nationality of the Artist This Year]. In *Minshengbao*, 10, November.

of standards, norms, customs, codes of behavior, or inseparably linked to the building and defining of a community or ethnic entity, has become the object of conscious choice; it is in the process of being made, forged, and negotiated. The artistic and cultural resources available for Taiwan's contemporary tradition-making in fact range from Western contemporary philosophical discourse, artistic traditions and local popular and religious cultures, to the Chinese tradition, including its marginal and occult varieties, and, not least, to the Japanese heritage, as well as present-day Japanese popular culture. Facing these various resources and traditions, how does a contemporary Taiwanese artist choose, discriminate, and decide on which course to take and from which resources to draw, and how to position him- or herself in order to sustain his/her work?

In this study I wish to show how modern Taiwanese art came to develop an "active," creative relationship with tradition, provoked by analysis of, resistance against, or programmatic re-presentation of that tradition. It will take a closer look at contemporary Taiwanese visual art, on the one hand its elementary conceptual structure and basic frameworks, but also the hybrid and diverse cultural resources upon which contemporary works are based and construed, or with which they struggle and try to cope. Interestingly enough, all these cultural resources and different traditions, rooted in various timelines and localities, have concurrently surfaced and presented themselves as multiple opportunities for visual artists. The question of how they are developed, constructed, incorporated, juxtaposed, forged, and processed; in short: how they are negotiated by the artists, and what kind of messages and ideas are expressed by them, by which means and for which reasons, will be my main points of interest in what follows.

0.2 Taiwanese Art: History, Traditions, and the Present

"As a small defensible island, centrally located in East Asia and agriculturally self-sufficient,"⁷ Taiwan has long been a place of confrontation for different cultures and powers. The Australian political scientist, Garry Klintworth has vividly described Taiwan as "a natural refuge for pirates, landless peasants and those who had lost their mandate to rule on the mainland." Located "on a strategic highway for great powers on the march," Taiwan was "destined to become a colony, a stopping place, a trading base and a military outpost for the Spanish, the Dutch, the English, the Japanese and the American."⁸ Under such circumstances, Taiwan's history was and is globally shaped, a fact which is also responsible for the threefold status it has acquired more recently: as a modernized country in the Far East with new economic prosperity, as a new member of the Third Wave, i.e. the international trend of democratization, as Huntington has put it, and, thirdly, as a post-colonial country, sharing the struggles of de-colonization.

There were two indispensable conditions for Taiwan's current development. One was the support of the US, ironically brought about only when the Korean War erupted in 1950 and motivated by America's renewed ideological, political, and military interest in this section of the Pacific theater. Both during the Korean and, later, the Vietnam War, Taiwan served as America's military outpost and spearhead against communism. Had not the postwar world been divided into two opposing camps, it is doubtful whether the massive influx of economic, financial and

7 Klintworth, Garry. 1995. *New Taiwan, New China: Taiwan's Changing Role in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Melbourne: Longman. p11.

8 Klintworth, Garry. 1995. p10 & 12.

technological support from the USA, at least until Nixon's visit to China in 1972, would ever have taken place. Another significant incident was the lifting of martial law in 1987, an internal factor (as opposed to the aforementioned external ones) which put an end to the former authoritarian regime and proved to be the catalyst for the realization of a democratic and pluralistic society in Taiwan. Initiating profound changes affecting almost every aspect of social life, the challenge of forming a civil society presented itself with sudden clarity and urgency, while the question of a power sharing between the two main ethnic groups, the local Taiwanese and the mainlanders, became a source for constant debate, political disputes, and a marked disintegration of society. Externally, the ever-growing military ambitions and capability of the PRC added an even more severe threat to Taiwan's future.

The democratization process launched in Taiwan after 1987 was successful, yet, paradoxically, had the result that Chinese culture as represented by the Nationalists, now regarded as an instrument of cultural hegemony and imperialism, fell into disgrace and became discredited. A movement of de-sinization dominated the previous decade, one characterized by the quest for an indigenous Taiwanese identity. Interestingly, this was a period when Western cultural influences, whether the postmodernist discourse or recent artistic pluralism, were being massively introduced, and rapidly gained ground without meeting any strong resistance, unlike the situation prior to the 1980s. However, it needs to be mentioned that, contrary to all other post-colonial societies, it is not Western culture which is the target of Taiwan's project of cultural de-colonization. Both the Japanese rule in Taiwan (1895-1945) and the more recent rule of Chinese orthodoxy represented by the Nationalist, or KMT regime, are of non-Western origin. Thus, Taiwan's post-colonial experience differs from that of most other countries, a fact which provides a space for the interplay of Western and Taiwanese culture, and allows Western culture to be active within the process of de-colonization and globalization in Taiwan.

Historically determined by predominantly external circumstances, Taiwan's cultural agenda, in consequence, turned out to be highly complex, and mainly characterized by fragmentation, discontinuity, and displacement. This is vividly demonstrated in the example of artistic styles. Oil painting, for instance, was officially established in 1927 with the inauguration of the *Taiwan Art Exhibition* launched by the Japanese authorities. Imposed on Taiwan by the colonial power, this artistic genre and the works created in its vein inevitably reflected the official taste as well as the state of adaptation of oil painting in Japan. Primarily post-impressionist or expressionist in style, oil painting in Taiwan was later cut off from its "supplier," the former rulers of the island, by the time the island reverted to China in 1945. Unable to develop, there still exists in Taiwan a – commercially very successful – school of oil painting which adheres to the style of these senior painters.

Ink painting as it subsequently reached Taiwan in the postwar era was just one item of the entire package of "Chinese culture," ranging from language, perception, values, norms of behavior, to history, which was brought to Taiwan by the Nationalists. Soon proclaimed the "national style," ink painting briefly served as major force in the process of de-colonization and the expurgation of the Japanese heritage. However, oil painting had reached China in the prewar era as well, and had likewise become a part of China's own artistic agenda. Among the artists who migrated to Taiwan were also a number of oil painters. Thus, two different sets of oil painting traditions were present at the same time right after the war, both, too, to subsequently be institutionalized and further supported by the annual Provincial Art Exhibition, as well as by the National Art Exhibition, initiated in Nanking, China, in 1929.

The only artistic form to reach Taiwan without the intervention of the governing power was the postwar visual culture of the West. Still a novelty, it was welcomed and adopted by the younger

generation, which was dissatisfied with the conservative development of oil or ink painting. This input of Western visual art was and is, however, dislocated, subject to individual selection, and far from possessing a sense of continuity. While American Abstract Expressionism and the European Informel found their way into Taiwan in the 50s, followed by photo-realism in the 70s, it was not until the 1980s, when young artists returned from abroad in great numbers, that Western visual art made itself felt more clearly and in a broader range of styles. Significantly, in their process of absorbing Western art, the Taiwanese, so to speak, entirely skipped the prewar foundations of Western modernism, such as the ready-made, Cubism, Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, and with them, due to their early date, the most productive and creative period of modern Western art. As to be expected, the development of global art in Taiwan must be seen under the perspective of its very specific historical experience. At the same time it is also clear that the "tradition" of Western contemporary art as adopted and applied by Taiwanese contemporary artists did not remain equivalent in content and meaning to what it had been in its original place of origin, but underwent significant transformations.

A major factor in the extraordinary creativity of contemporary Taiwanese art is a newly established infrastructure. With public museums, cultural centers, and cultural administrations, all testifying to the considerable influx of national funds into visual art which began in the late 1970s, an artistic environment favorable to long-term development has been created. By means of three different sets of artistic tools, traditions, and forms, namely oil painting, ink painting, and contemporary "international" modes of expression, Taiwanese artists are, above all, interested in creating works which are involved with contemporary society. As members of a society which only recently freed itself from confinement and restrictions, the artists do not lack themes, topics, and issues to deal with. Among them, apart from politics and social criticism, contemporary folk religion and popular culture are major new territories which artists have discovered for themselves in the pluralistic society.

0.3 Objective, Scope, and Structure of this Study

Very little has been published on Taiwanese modern art in the West, at least as far as more comprehensive studies are concerned. Generally speaking, Taiwanese art seems to be regarded as a sideshow of the picture presenting itself on the Chinese mainland, occupying at best a single chapter in works on 20th century Chinese art, and it is difficult to find scholars who recognize the fundamental differences between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese art and culture. "Art historians outside of Taiwan have not, with few exceptions, paid enough attention to art produced in Taiwan," writes Jason C. Kuo in his recent study *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan*, whereas "for Western scholars, mainland China has long been a fascinating and even seductive realm, full of the myth of otherness."⁹ Moreover, "China's open-door policy and limited liberalization in the late 70s and most of the 80s further stimulated both lay and scholarly interest in her art production and led to a number of important publications and exhibitions. By comparison, so little has been published on art in Taiwan in the West that the island is in danger of being perceived as an economic 'miracle' without culture."¹⁰

As a consequence of increased Western interest in the mainland, contemporary artists from

9 Kuo, Jason C. 2000. *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan*. Seattle: University Washington Press. p2.

10 See Kuo, Jason C. 2000. p2.

China, exiles as well as those who remained at home, have practically swept the Western art world since 1989, frequently participating in many of the world's renowned biennials from Venice to Johannesburg, a trend which was followed by major museums mounting shows of contemporary Chinese art. Taiwanese art, on the other hand, long remained in a marginal position internationally, and it was not until 1995, when the Taipei Fine Art Museum organized a touring exhibition in Australia of thirty younger Taiwanese artists, and shortly afterwards sent five artists to the Venice Biennial as Taiwan's first official participation in this venue, that Taiwan more decidedly made itself known in the global art scene.

Interestingly enough, it was the catalogue to the Australian exhibition, written by Australian and Taiwanese scholars and jointly edited by Nicholas Jose and myself, which was the first book-length study and documentation of contemporary Taiwanese art in a Western language. It was also the first comprehensive book which treated Taiwanese art and culture as "China's other," as one contributor put it,¹¹ i.e. as an entity distinctively different from its counterpart on the other side of the Taiwan Straits.

Here, as in many recent studies on the subject in Taiwan itself, much emphasis is placed upon the topic of Taiwanese cultural identity. This is certainly justified, as it is this very subject which lies at the heart of the question what Taiwan is and what is to become of it. Nevertheless, although this study will deal with the question of identity when it is explicitly addressed by individual artists, that question will not be the main topic of discussion, as it is inevitably linked to ideology and its study is therefore primarily a subject of cultural or social studies. By contrast, this is a study in art history, and indebted to the disciplines of traditional art historical training. So, while one's cultural identity is inevitably involved with the choice of a set of collective memories, often determined and shaped retroactively, and also with the ideological choice of which part of the whole range of traditions one tends to recognize and, as the word says, identify with, I consider my task to be to step back and investigate on just what these different notions of Taiwanese identity are actually based, and what historical and intellectual sources they draw on. Thus, an elementary basis of primary material is constructed upon which a further identification of cultural identities may be attempted, if so desired.

When investigating the attitude taken toward tradition(s) by contemporary artists, three approaches become apparent: One is the active attempt to "make" or "invent" tradition – a tradition intended to create a distinctive cultural identity for Taiwan. Another approach, detached and intellectual, investigates tradition from a cross-cultural position in-between the Taiwanese, Chinese, and Western cultures. A third position casts a sharply critical eye over the dark and repressive side of the Chinese heritage while, at the same time, appropriating certain artistic devices stemming from that very tradition.

There is no lack of visual resources in contemporary Taiwanese art. However, taking into consideration the overall structure and of the aims of this thesis, I decided to chose as the centerpieces of discussion in this study just six works by six contemporary Taiwanese artists, all executed between 1992 and 1995. The choice was made on the basis of my working experience as a museum curator in Taiwan between 1991 and 1996. However limited this choice may be as a sample of the massive creativity and productivity of recent visual art, its advantages lie in the clear positions presented and expressed by the six works.

Following two historical chapters tracing the development of postwar Taiwanese art, with special emphasis on the building of an artistic infrastructure, the six artists selected will be

11 Barmé, Geremie. 1995. "Taiwan: China's Other." In *Art Taiwan*. Jose, Nicholas & Yang Wen-I, eds. Sydney: G+B Arts International. pp66-69.

grouped under the three categories described above. The first group, representing a conscious "invention" of tradition, includes the painters Huang Chin-ho and Yang Mao-lin, whose works reflect the political quest for Taiwanese independence. The second group, consisting of Lien Te-cheng and Wu Mali, asserts a position in-between cultures and traditions. Embracing the tradition of contemporary Western and global discourse, they are forerunners of cross-culturality, yet at the same time create works which are closely related to the local context. As to the third group, which is concerned with the "Chinese" tradition, there is no doubt that the mainland Chinese heritage as it was transplanted to Taiwan after 1945 has been and is still the dominant culture in shaping the face of Taiwan and the mindset of the younger generation. However, here I have consciously omitted traditional ink painting, often considered the epitome of that heritage, from my discussion, for reasons of its clear cultural references and origin, even though there is no lack of interesting approaches to and transformations of the medium, inspired, among others, by Western abstraction and the spirit of the avant-garde. Instead, I have chosen two younger artists, Hou Chun-ming and Huang Chih-yang, whose works, which make use of traditional modes of expression but are completely modern and independent in their conception, constitute a stark, subversive reaction against the "black shadow of tradition," and convey a sense of the complexity of their attitude toward the Chinese heritage.

0.4 Methodology and Sources

As I said before, this is an attempt at an investigation along the traditional lines of the discipline of art history – but only to a certain extent. As Norman Bryson writes, "art history expends considerable effort on the discovery of sources," to the degree that "a good art historian develops a truly hawk-like instinct for the cues which point backwards from a given work to its predecessors."¹² While indeed more often than not being obliged to investigate the pictorial, and sometimes literary, sources of certain artistic motifs and concepts, the standard rules of source studies, i.e. the procedure of determining points of origin in style, in technique, or in certain pictorial images, will not be followed in the present examination to their very last consequence, or as objectives in themselves. This is not to be a study in the tradition of "work-immanent" interpretation, nor will it exclusively focus on the works themselves without consulting the biographies, artistic development, or writings of their "authors," as the recent New Art History would tend to operate. Taiwanese contemporary art is indissolubly entangled with the rapid social and political changes taking place on the island. To isolate a work from its context and environment would inevitably cause the discussion to go astray, and in unintended directions. Furthermore, since my emphasis lies on the cultural sources drawn on by the artists, an analysis of the purely technical or pictorial origins of a given work would require greater concentration on drawing specific lines of reference, an effort which would go beyond the scope of this thesis - if not, indeed, to prove entirely impossible given the amount of visual information available under the present conditions of mass communication. Nevertheless, my major instrument of investigation is, by and large, iconography, as developed and postulated by Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, and others; with the consequence that I chose as the point of reference for my analysis, and as providing basic information, a detailed description of each work. I then take different

12 Bryson, Norman. 1984. "Tradition and its Discontents." In *Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p1.

sources of the materials into account, with the emphasis on those provided by the creators themselves – artist's statements, the artist's own writings, and my own interviews with them. Moreover, I have been fortunate to be able to cooperate with each of the six artists in one or more exhibitions, an experience which has enabled me to gain further insight into the artists' personalities, artistic development, and activities.

As mentioned before, only a few specialists on Chinese art publishing in Western languages have occasionally paid attention to modern or contemporary Taiwanese art, for example, Michael Sullivan, Li Chu-tsing, and Joan Stanley-Baker. Major books which I have consulted are Michael Sullivan's *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, and *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* by Jason C. Kuo.¹³ The latter is the secondary source closest to my topic, although contemporary art in the 90s finds little mention there. Also, the Australian John Clark, who specializes on modern Japanese art, writes on modern and contemporary Taiwanese art as well from time to time. His recent compendium on Asian art, a comparative study, offers a broader view on the subject of the modernization of visual art in different countries.¹⁴ Apart from these studies, two recent Western art magazines, *Asian Art News* (monthly, 1992 -) published in Hong Kong, and *Art and Asia Pacific* (quarterly, 1995 -) do cover Taiwanese exhibitions or individual artists, although rarely, and primarily in the form of reviews. The magazine *Art in America* also occasionally offers reviews or articles on contemporary art. In German, just about the only secondary source available is the exhibition catalog *Taiwan: Kunst Heute*, which accompanied an exhibition organized by the TFAM and the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen.¹⁵

As to Taiwanese sources, exhibition reviews were the earliest material available on Taiwanese art, and have continued to be a major source of information ever since the inauguration of the Taiwan Art Exhibition in 1927. The daily newspaper *Taiwan nichinichi shinbun* regularly covered the annual art exhibitions (1927 - 1943). These official exhibitions (called *Taiten* and, later, *Futen*) also published catalogues of their own, containing illustrations of prize-winnings works and the entries selected. Xie Lifa's *Riju shidai Taiwan meishu yundongshi* (History of Taiwanese Art Movements under the Japanese Rule), published in 1978, marked the inception of studies on the prewar period. Apart from Xie, several local art historians and other scholars, such

13 Sullivan, Michael. 1996. *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp178-190. Kuo, Jason C. 2000.

14 Clark, John. 1998. *Modern Asian Art*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. It also needs to be mentioned here that since 1993 the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia has run the *Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, which can be seen as a developing project aiming at integrating Asian artists as well as art communities. Besides the publication of exhibition catalogs, several conferences have been held and papers published. Taiwanese artists, even if only a few, have been invited since 1996. Recent major contemporary Asian exhibitions include *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, curated by Apinan Poshyananda and organized by the Asia Society, New York, in 1996, and *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, curated by Gao Minglu, in 1998, also organized by the Asia Society. While the former show invited 27 artists from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, *Inside Out* concentrated on Chinese artists, including 62 artists from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as overseas Chinese. In addition, a few Taiwanese artists were invited to take part in the successful show *Cities on the Move*, a touring exhibition launched in 1996 in Vienna and curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru.

15 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1996. *Taiwan: Kunst Heute*. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Also written in German is the article reviewing postwar Taiwanese art, Schmidt, Armin. 1998. "Kunstszenen Taiwan. Neue Strömungen und Tendenzen." In *Brücken und Brüche: Chinesische Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*. Toyka-Fuong, Ursula, ed. Orientierung (Sonderheft). pp134-149. See also my article on women artists in Taiwan, "Innenräume, Außenräume: Frauenkunst in Taiwan" in the exhibition catalog *Die Hälfte des Himmels: Chinesische Künstlerinnen der Gegenwart*. Werner, Chris, Qiu Ping, & Pitzen, Marianne, eds. Bonn: Frauen Museum Bonn. pp184-197.

as Wang Xiuxiong, Lin Boting, and Yan Juanying, have dedicated their work to this period.¹⁶ In 1991, the Taiwanese *Artist* magazine launched the publication project *Compendium of Taiwanese Art*. Twenty-one monographs on senior artists emerging before 1945 have been published up till now, each with a major introductory article and extensive color reproductions of the artist's oeuvre.

As to the postwar period, artistic life prior to the seventies was mainly documented by exhibition reviews published in newspapers or certain literary magazines. Subsequently, the founding of two art magazines, *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly* (1970-1996, hereafter *Xiongshi meishu*,) and *Artist Magazine*, (also appearing monthly since 1974, hereafter *Yishujia*) has made it possible, through their detailed documentation of Taiwanese artistic activities, to re-construct the lively artistic environment in Taiwan up till the present day. I have consulted these magazines extensively, in particular as regards artistic production since the 80s. In 1987, Lin Xingyue published his *Taiwan meishu fengyun sishinian* (Forty Years of Taiwanese Art), concentrating on postwar visual art in Taiwan. Xiao Qiongrui's extensive study on the two modernist groups, Eastern Art Group and Fifth Moon Art Group, completed in 1992, offers an insight into the establishment of the two associations, their exhibitions, debates, and reception by the public.¹⁷ Moreover, in his anthology *Dangdai Taiwan huihua wenxuan 1945-1990* (Essays on Contemporary Painting in Taiwan, 1945 –1990), Jason C. Kuo collected a number of major articles written before 1990. As far as the 90s are concerned, exhibition reviews still make up the bulk of writings on art, while more profound articles by critics and writers such as Lu Rongzhi Victoria, Gao Qianhui, Huang Haiming, Shi Ruiren, Wang Fudong, Ni Zaiqin, and Wang Jiayi are new forces of art criticism. Also not to be forgotten are the publications of the public museums, including magazines, catalogues, and editions of symposiums, lectures, and essays on contemporary art.

Apart from the publications mentioned above, further major sources for my study have been two exhibition catalogs, both published in 1995: *Art Taiwan*, edited by Nicholas Jose and myself and already mentioned above, and the likewise entitled *Art Taiwan*, edited by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the catalogue of Taiwan's first official participation in the Venice Biennial, for whose organization I was responsible. The catalogs contain statements by the artists as well as reproductions of the works discussed. Finally, in order to gain an overview of art since the 80s, I have extensively made use of the chronological reviews published by both Taiwanese art magazines,¹⁸ and also consulted a number of internet sources which provide useful bibliographical information.¹⁹

16 Wang Xiuxiong. 1995. *Taiwan meishu fazhan shilun* [On the Historical Development of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: National Museum of History. Yan Juanyin. 1993. "The Art Movement in the 1930s in Taiwan." In *Modernity in Asian Art*. Clark, John, ed. Sydney: Wild Peony Press. pp45-59.

17 Xiao Qiongrui. 1991. *Wuyue yu Dongfang: Zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou Taiwan de fazhan, 1945-1970* [The Fifth Moon and Eastern Art Groups: The Development of the Chinese Artistic Modernization Movement in Postwar Taiwan, 1945-1970]. Taipei: Dongda Chubanshe.

18 *Xiongshi Meishu* regularly published a critical review on art and artistic activities on an annual basis. This included an annual report on cultural policy published in every January issue between 1979 and 1991. *Yishujia* published a collection of reviews on the occasion of its 20th anniversary. See Ni Zaiqin. 1995. *Yishujia - Taiwan meishu: xishuo congrou ershinian* [Artist Magazine - Taiwan Art: Looking Back on Twenty Years of History]. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe.

19 There are four major web sites containing bibliographical resources on contemporary art: 1) *Bibliography of Contemporary Chinese Art* compiled by Britta Erickson, whose General Bibliography chapter contains a section on Taiwanese art; there are also bibliographies of individual artists. <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/art/china> 2) *Yishu ziliaoku* [Fine Arts Resources] compiled by The Taiwanese Dimension Art Education Foundation, which lists books, articles, and catalogs on contemporary art published since 1970. <http://www.deoa.org.tw/artsearch> 3) *Meishu jianji mulu* [Index of Fine Arts Newspaper Clippings], compiled by The Taiwan Museum of Art; this

As demonstrated above, the study of Taiwanese contemporary art, as opposed to the much more advanced research on Taiwan's economic and political development, is still at its very beginning, and is characterized more by documentation, description, and surveys than by in-depth research. This thesis is to be seen as an attempt to clarify the foundations on which contemporary artists in Taiwan work and create, and to investigate certain major approaches current in the artistic scene since the 1980s. However, due to necessary limitations on the scope and content of my study, this was only possible on the basis of a rigid selection of materials. Further and more comprehensive research on the subject is therefore urgently required.

bibliography includes reviews and reports published exclusively in the newspaper since 1980. <http://www.tmoa.gov.tw/research.htm>. 4) *Zhongwen qikan pianmu suoyin yingxiang xitong* [Image and article index of Chinese periodicals], compiled by the National Central Library, Taiwan includes all articles published in Taiwanese periodicals since 1996 or in some cases earlier. Many articles have been digitalized and can be obtained through the library's service center. <http://www2.ncl.edu.tw>.

1. The Historical Background

Chinese ink painting and religious art, traditionally considered as "high" and "low" art, were originally the major forms of artistic expression practiced in Taiwan. During the Japanese colonial period (1895 - 1945), oil painting, which had widely gained ground in Japan, was transplanted to Taiwan. This genre was rooted in Japan's own experience of artistic modernization after the Meiji Restoration. Following the Second World War and with the arrival of the KMT, Taiwan faced a series of new challenges, and the cultural tradition of the so-called "motherland" was re-installed, with a revival, in particular, of Chinese ink painting.

Two major artistic efforts, both undertaken with great enthusiasm, took place during the postwar period. The Modernist Movement at the end of fifties and the beginning of the sixties tried to position itself between the Chinese and the American cultures. Later, in the mid-seventies, the Nativist movement attempted an awakening towards a Taiwanese identity. Neither, however, left an immediate impact until later decades. Although these two movements are introduced in the following sections, emphasis will also be laid on the role of the ruling KMT in Taiwan and its cultural policy. Interestingly enough, the ruling party, in spite of its ideological fixation, had no specific concept as regards cultural management until 1975, when the death of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek largely determined the future course of post-war Taiwanese art.

1.1 The Early Period Before 1895

Taiwan, an island originally populated by Malayo-Polynesian tribes, was *terra incognita* for the West until 1583, when it was discovered by the Portuguese and hailed as *Ilha Formosa*, "beautiful isle." Soon, the island's strategic, political, and economic value came to be recognized by Western powers. This resulted in the establishment of two colonial strongholds, a Dutch one in 1624 on the south-west coast, and a Spanish one in the north of Taiwan. The latter was then seized by the Dutch in 1642, which left them masters of Taiwan until 1662. At about the same time the first Chinese, primarily stemming from the coastal regions of Fujian and Guangdong provinces, began to immigrate into Taiwan. The pivotal event which drew Taiwan into the Chinese orbit was, however, the campaign of Zheng Chenggong, better known in the West as Koxinga, the hero of resistance against the Manchus, who had recently conquered China. Planning to make Taiwan his military base for an eventual recapture of the Chinese Mainland, he attacked the Dutch and drove them out of the island, which continued to be governed by his

descendants until 1683, when it was finally taken by Manchu forces.¹

This rapid transition of foreign rulers in the 17th century was witnessed by the aborigines who had inhabited Taiwan over a period of several millennia. Consisting of ten tribes and dispersed across the whole island, they made their living by fishing, hunting, and agriculture. Archaeological finds show that simple pottery and other artifacts were widely produced. Over one hundred sites from the pre-historical period have been excavated.

Under Chinese rule between 1683 and 1895 the wave of immigrants from southern China continued to grow. In the mid-19th century, the Western powers showed a renewed interest in the economic potential of the island. The forced opening of several Taiwanese harbors to foreign trade in the wake of the Second Opium War (1858), greatly contributed to the island's economic growth. After an unsuccessful attempt by the French to invade Taiwan during the Franco-Chinese War (1884/85), the status of the island was elevated to that of a province. Subsequently, efforts were made by the newly appointed Governor to modernize the island's infrastructure. Unfortunately, only a decade later, following the Sino-Japanese war of 1894/95, Taiwan was ceded to Japan.

As far as culture and the arts are concerned, it was primarily the immigrant Chinese, "members of the upper class, including large landowners and the gentry [, who] were the first to take an interest in cultural and artistic activities."² The members of the wealthy Taiwanese gentry often invited Mainland literati or artists to Taiwan for literary meetings, or as family tutors for their children. The art works created during that period show no stylistic difference to Mainland Chinese art, so that they were in fact, as one art writer commented, "an extension of central Chinese painting."³ Favorite subject matters were "Flowers and Birds" and "The Four Gentlemen" (Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, and Chrysanthemum). Landscape painting, the major and most esteemed genre of Chinese painting, was relatively rare.⁴ As Li Xianwen, the publisher of *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly* (hereafter *Xiongshi meishu*), has remarked, Taiwan, at that early stage, "was still an only recently civilized territory. The social structure was rather basic, and not ready to reach a refined cultural level. It was also hard to obtain painting materials, and no artistic training was offered to the talented. Consequently, painting developed towards the lighter and

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- 1 Among the numerous studies on Taiwan's past and present, in particular on its history, economics and politics, but also on its culture, I have primarily consulted the following: Murray A, ed.1999. *Taiwan: A New History*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe. Huang Chun-chieh, ed. 1998. *Postwar Taiwan in Historical Perspective*. Bethesda, Maryland: University Press of Maryland. Rubenstein, Murray A., ed. 1994. *The Other Taiwan: 1945 to the Present*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe. Klintworth, Garry. 1995. *New Taiwan, New China: Taiwan's Changing Role in the Asia-Pacific Region*. Melbourne: Longman. Copper, John F. 1990. *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* Boulder: Westview Press. Harrell, Stevan & Wang Chun-chieh, eds. 1994. *Cultural Change in Post-war Taiwan*. Boulder: Westview Press. Kuo, Jason C. 2000. *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan*. Seattle: University Washington Press.
 - 2 Wang Xiuxiong. 1995. "A Brief History of Art in Taiwan to 1945." In *Art Taiwan*, Jose, Nicholas and Yang Wen-I, eds. Sydney: G+B Arts International. p30.
 - 3 The art historian Lin Boting wrote: "Before the Japanese occupation, Taiwanese painting was still simple. It was an extension of the Central Chinese painting. Literati painting was the leading style, and closely related to painting in Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang provinces." Lin Boting. 1991. "Taiwan dongyanghua de xingqi yu Tai-Fu zhan" [The Rise of Japanese Style Painting in Taiwan and the *Taiten* and *Futen*]. In *Dangdai Taiwan huihua wenxuan 1945 -1990* [Essays on Contemporary Taiwanese Art 1945-1990]. Kuo, Jason C., ed. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu. pp57-58. Michael Sullivan. 1996. "Art in Taiwan." In *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p178.
 - 4 Lin Boting. 1984. "Zhongyuan huihua yu Taiwan de guanxi" [The Relationship Between Central Chinese Painting and Taiwan]. In *Ming-Qing shidai Taiwan shuhua* [Taiwanese Calligraphy and Painting of the Ming and Qing Dynasties]. Taipei: Xingzhengyuan Wenjianhui. p430.

simpler styles of literati painting."⁵

While early ink painting and calligraphy have been the subject of several recent exhibitions,⁶ until recently, religious painting, sculpture, relief and handicrafts created throughout the Qing period have hardly ever been studied.⁷ The same holds for religious folk art. Its historical significance and artistic quality have only been documented by a few publications. One interesting example is the "Hell Scrolls," which deal with ten judgements in the underworld and are most popular in the Temples of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha (*Dizangwang*).⁸ More significant still are the colored narrative depictions of the Door Gods to be found widely on the wooden pillars and gates of Taiwanese temples.⁹ The style of this religious art dates back to the 17th century. Beginning with masters invited from southern China, some of whom stayed on in Taiwan, this style was continued during the Japanese period, to be later rediscovered and transformed in the works of several contemporary artists.

1.2 The Japanese Colonial Period (1895 - 1945)

The Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan has been described as "beneficial and progressive on the one hand, yet discriminatory on the other." John F. Copper, thus summing up the Japanese policy, further pointed out that it was "efficient and in many ways enlightened but did not lay the groundwork for self-rule, much less democracy."¹⁰ In terms of cultural history, however, the fifty years of Japanese rule in Taiwan were fruitful and is generally known as the founding period of modern Taiwanese art. It was primarily a time of connecting Taiwan with the Western civilization via Japan's own Western experience. Oil and watercolor painting, unknown before on the island, were introduced and enthusiastically practiced by local Taiwanese artists. It was also the beginning of institutionalized annual art exhibitions.

The beginning of Taiwanese art was rooted in colonial education. As Izawa Shûzô, the Chief of

5 Li Xianwen. 1990. "Yige benyong xiangqian de meishu maidong: Taiwan meishu sanbainian zhan choubel yuanqi" [The Flowing Arteries of Fine Art: In Preparation of the Exhibition *Three Hundred Years of Taiwanese Art*]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 227, January. p84.

6 The exhibition *Three Hundred Years of Taiwanese Art*, held at the Taiwan Museum of Art in 1990, included works of a total of over two hundred artists, among them twenty artists from the earlier Qing period. See 1990. *Taiwan meishu sanbainian zhan* [Three Hundred Years of Taiwanese Art]. Taichung: Taiwan Museum of Art. See also 1984. *Ming-Qing shidai Taiwan shuhua* [Taiwanese Calligraphy and Painting of the Ming and Qing Dynasties], an exhibition held by the Council of Cultural Affairs, which included works of calligraphy from the Qing Dynasties. Taipei: Xingzhengyuan Wenjianhui.

7 According to an official statistic survey conducted by the Japanese authorities between 1915 and 1918, there were 3312 Taoist temples, 20 Buddhist temples and 156 Western churches in Taiwan. The results of this survey were published by the Japanese Government-General in 1918 under the title *Taiwan no shûkyô chôsa hôkoku* [Report of the Survey on Taiwanese Religion]. See Cai Xianghui. 1989. *Taiwan de cisi yu zongjiao* [Worship and Religions in Taiwan]. Taipei: Taiyuan Chubanshe. p68.

8 Neal Donnelly, an American diplomat posted in Taiwan during the eighties, collected and published two full examples of Hell Scrolls. The earlier one dates back to the mid-19th century and the second one probably to the mid-20th century. After a painstaking restoration of both scrolls, they were donated to the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC. See Donnelly, Neal. 1990. *A Journey Through Chinese Hell: Hell Scrolls of Taiwan*. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe.

9 Li Qianlang. 1993. *Taiwan chuantong jianzhu caihui zhi diaocha yanjiou* [Research on the Coloration of Traditional Taiwanese Architecture]. Taipei: Xingzhengyuan Wenjianhui. According to this historian of Taiwanese architecture, it was probably not until 1862 -1874 that works of religious art were created by local Taiwanese, instead of by commissioned artists from the Mainland. p30.

10 Copper, John F. 1990. p29.

the Japanese Government-General's Education Bureau, stated, "to obtain allegiance to Japan from the hearts of the islanders of Taiwan [is] a goal which cannot be achieved by military force, but must be achieved through educational methods."¹¹ Beginning in 1896, an education program was developed, and in 1902, drawing and handicraft courses were added to the Junior School of Education (later called Normal School) curriculum. Among the Japanese artists who taught in Taiwan and shaped the artistic development there, Ishikawa Kin'ichirô (1871-1945) and Shiozuki Tôhō (1886-1954) represented Western painting (*yôga*), while Gohin Kotô (1892-1962) and Kinoshita Seigai (1887-1988) worked in the Japanese style (*nihonga*). Among them, the most interesting case was that of Ishikawa Kin'ichirô, an English translator employed by the Government-General who was also an amateur watercolorist. Emerging as the leading figure in the island's art scene, Ishikawa virtually instructed a whole generation of young Taiwanese in Western-style painting techniques and also actively promoted art exhibitions.¹²

The founding of the *Taiten* (Taiwanese Art Exhibition) in 1927 marks a watershed in Taiwanese art history.¹³ Modeled after the Japanese *Bunten* (short for *Monbushô bijutsu tenrankai*, the Ministry of Education Exhibition of 1907 to 1918), which in turn emulated the French Salon, the *Taiten*, organized by the Taiwanese Education Association, became the major arena for young Taiwanese artists to exhibit their works in public. Held annually between 1927 and 1938, it was followed – after a one-year-interval due to the outbreak of World War II – by the *Futen* (Taiwanese Government-General's Art Exhibition), which lasted until 1943. Selected by a jury which included the four artists mentioned above, the works admitted to both *Taiten* and *Futen*, amounting to over one hundred exhibits in each show, were subsumed under just two categories, of paintings in "Western" and "Japanese" styles. Only two major prizes were awarded each time, apart from a considerable number of honorable mentions.¹⁴

11 Izawa made this comment in a speech delivered at the Association for National Education, December 1895 in Tôkyô. See Yang Mengzhe. 1999. *Rizhi shidai Taiwan meishu jiaoyu 1895 - 1927* [Taiwanese Art Education during the Japanese Period 1895 - 1927]. Taipei: Qianwei chubanshe. pp26-33 and note 28. Izawa belonged to the pro-Western reform camp; he had studied education in the United States between 1892 and 1894, and translated, among other works, Darwin's *Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*.

12 Ishikawa Kin'ichirô spent altogether eighteen years in Taiwan, from 1907 to 1916 and from 1923 to 1932. His close relationship with the Japanese art scene and his personal connections there were of great help to him in his work of promoting Western-style art in Taiwan. He held several solo shows, organized exhibitions, introduced Taiwanese art to the Japanese public through his writings, and also invited Japanese artists to Taiwan. Furthermore, Ishikawa founded the *Taiwan Yôga Kenkyûkai* [Taiwanese Association for the Study of Western Painting] in 1912, where he taught and gave lessons to local students interested in art, in addition to their regular art courses. See Yang, Mengzhe. 1999. pp111-128. Also see Xie Lifa. 1978. *Riju shiqi Taiwan meishu yundongshi* [History of Taiwanese Artistic Movements during the Japanese Colonial Period]. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe. pp68-73. Lin Xingyue. 1987. *Taiwan meishu fengyun sishinian* [Forty Years of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Zili wanbao. pp22-27. Yan Juanying. 1993. "The Art Movement in the 1930's in Taiwan." In *Modernity in Asian Art*, Clark, John, ed. Sydney: Wild Peony Press. pp45-59. Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, ed. 1992. *Kin'ichirô Ishikawa*. Shizuoka: Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art.

13 Even earlier, however, the sculptor Huang Tushui (1895 - 1930) was the first to study in Japan and distinguish himself at the official Imperial Art Exhibition in Tokyo in 1919, submitting his sculptural work *Aboriginal Boy* (Fantong, 番童). Due to this success, Huang subsequently received several commissions from wealthy Taiwanese. Upon these occasions, and contrary to Michael Sullivan's assumption that he stayed in Japan "without ever returning to Taiwan," he went back in 1922 and 1924 for longer periods of work. See Sullivan, Michael, 1996. p178. Special Issue on Huang Tushui. 1979. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 98, April, pp4-84.

14 In the first *Taiten* show of 1927, there were, for instance, a total of 475 entries in the Western-style section, from which 88 works were chosen for display. In the Japanese-style section there were 217 entries and 33 pieces selected. For more analysis see Wang Xiuxiong. 1995. "Riju shidai Taiwan guanzhan de fazhan yu fengge tanshi" [The Development and Style of the Official Art Exhibitions in Taiwan during the Japanese Occupation]. In *Taiwan Meishu fazhan shilun* [On the Historical Development of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: National Museum of

Major representatives of Taiwanese oil painting in this period are Chen Chengpo (1895 - 1947), Cheng Zhiqi (1905 - 1931), and Liao Jichun (1902 - 76). All had attended the Tōkyō Art School in the twenties and shared the impressionist or post-impressionist styles which dominated contemporary academic painting in Japan at the time. More complex was the so-called "Japanese-style painting" (*nihonga*). Derived partly from Chinese ink painting, partly from the Japanese polychrome painting tradition (*yamato-e*) and also, since the Meiji era (1868-1912), influenced by Western art, its most unifying feature was the use of water-soluble pigments, especially gouache, as opposed to the Western oil painting technique. Stressing a detailed realism and delicate in its application of colors, this style promoted by the *Taiten* and *Futen* came to replace and incorporate the Chinese literati painting, although not without protest and resistance during the phase of its introduction in Taiwan.¹⁵ Major artists working in this style were Lin Yushan (1907 -) and the woman painter Chen Chin (1907 - 1998). Typical works in the Japanese style featured, for example, "a still life on a table before the window, a rural and suburban landscape, a female nude, or an exotic scene in a foreign country."¹⁶

In spite of their ideological limitations, the said art exhibitions played a pivotal role in the establishment and steady development of both Japanese- and Western-style painting in Taiwan. They further offered, according to the art historian Wang Xiuxiong, "the opportunity for competition, study and learning among painters island-wide. The exhibitions elevated the social status of painters and raised the value of art in society."¹⁷ Nevertheless, Wang also critically points out the conservatism of the first generation of Taiwanese artists.¹⁸ Furthermore, Xie Lifa, the author of a "History of Taiwanese Artistic Movements," writes that while "the artists were dashing forward, vigorously and enthusiastically, ... and waving the flag of the 'national movement,' what they marched on was the one-way road of the official exhibitions under the Japanese colonial policy."¹⁹

1.3 The Postwar Period

During the postwar period, continuing up to 1977, the KMT government focused its efforts

History. p75. (a reprint of a conference paper delivered at the conference *Art Trends in the ROC*, Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1992.)

15 In 1927, out of protest against the jury's selections, a *refusé* exhibition was held, organized by local Taiwanese artists. It was not repeated in the following years, for the jurors subsequently "made minor changes and awarded major prizes to works of Taiwanese artists." (Xie Lifa. 1978. pp98-99.) On discussion of the development of Japanese style painting, see also Kuo, Jason, C. 1998. "Nihoga/Tōyōga/Chiao-Ts'ai-hua in Taiwan 1895-1983." In Huang Chun-chieh, ed. 1998. pp210-256. (collected in Kuo, Jason C. 2000. pp32-83.)

16 Xie Lifa. 1978. p20.

17 Wang Xiuxiong. 1995. p79. (see note 14.)

18 After investigating the styles of seven first-generation Taiwanese oil painters, Wang Xiuxiong concludes that, stylistically, little change can be found in their works. Yet during the post-war decades, a period under martial law, the influence of these painters and their control over artistic activities grew immensely. This is why the terms "conservative" and "authoritarian" are used by him to describe their styles and their artistic influence. Wang Xiuxiong. 1990. "Taiwan diydai xihuajia de baoshou yu xuanweizhuyi" [The Influence of Conservative and Authoritarian Practices of the First Generation of Oil Painters in Postwar Taiwan]. In *Zhongguo xiandai meishu: jianlun Ri-Han xiandai meishu* [China: Modernity and Art and A Discussion of Modern Art in Japan and Korea]. Conference paper. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. pp137-176. Michael Sullivan also wrote that "after World War II this group of conservatives, modernists in their days, had a repressive influence on the younger generation of the Western-style painters." Sullivan, Michael. 1996. p179.

19 Xie Lifa. 1978. p22.

primarily on boosting economic and military strength rather than on cultural affairs. The so-called "Taiwanese Economic Miracle," hailed by many, was undoubtedly a formidable achievement, but was accomplished at the expense of other national tasks. The course of this development was pre-conditioned by two historical factors: one was Chiang Kai-shek's determination to "recover China" from the hands of the Communists; the other was the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, which turned Taiwan into a major U.S. outpost in the Pacific and resulted in immense military, financial and economic support for Chiang's regime.

Under such circumstances, the Nationalist government made few attempts to enhance the cultural environment. Instead, its major efforts concentrated on Taiwan's de-colonization and the regaining of China, while at the same time ensuring the peoples' anti-communist stance by initiating political campaigns. The period of transition was, however, marked by a tragic incident. In February 28, 1947, a conflict broke out between the local Taiwanese and the Mainland military, which ended with thousands massacred by Nationalist forces. Known as the "2-28 Incident," the event ushered in an era of harsh repression which was not acknowledged by the KMT until the 1990's. The fifties also saw a large-scale purge during which many alleged "communists" were liquidated. The KMT government continued in its high-handed measures to restrict political freedom and to exercise repression against political dissidents well into the eighties.

1.3.1 The KMT's Role and Its Cultural Policy

The arrival of Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist government meant a full-scale import of Chinese culture and tradition into Taiwan. Mandarin became the official language. The Nationalist government's most effective measures aiming at the implantation of Chinese culture and the consolidation of a "Chinese" identity were, however, taken within the educational system. Characterized by a continuation of orthodox Chinese learning and a strong emphasis on Confucian morality, the curriculum from elementary school through to university was, furthermore, accompanied by an examination system that ultimately assured the citizen's ideological formation and, as the American scholar of political science, Stevan Harrell has remarked, "the Chinese ethnological society was revived."²⁰

The major operating principle of the Nationalist government's cultural affairs policy was simply to take over and transform the institutions left by the Japanese, to fill the majority of the vacant posts with "reliable" Mainlanders, and to ensure basic funding. The Japanese model of incorporating art education into teachers' colleges remained in place. In 1947, four of these colleges re-opened, and in 1949, one of them, the Taipei Provincial Normal School, was re-organized, with its "painting and handicraft section" transformed into a department of fine arts. Later, in the fifties and sixties, in addition to the establishment, in 1955, of an independent art academy (discussed below), art departments were added to the curricula of several universities. Curiously enough, the National School of Politics, founded in 1951, also had a Fine Arts section.²¹

20 Winckler, Edwin A. 1994. "Cultural Policy on Postwar Taiwan." In Harrell, Stevan & Wang, Chun-chieh, eds. p31. Contrary to many local intellectuals, the author holds the view that "the intervention of the Nationalist party-state in Taiwan's postwar cultural development has been extensive and effective. ...[and] is another sort of 'miracle'". P22.

21 See Xiao Qiongrui. 1991. *Wuyue yu Dongfang: Zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou Taiwan de*

Despite their number, the art curriculum conducted at such institutions was, however, far from encouraging. Among the compulsory subjects, 43% were entirely unrelated to the arts. Moreover, no division was made between oil and ink painting. As far as the teaching staff was concerned, the Taipei Provincial Normal School may again serve as an example: among its 13 teachers in 1952, only two originated from the local, that is, Taiwanese, art community.²² The *Futen* was also successfully transformed and re-launched in 1946 under the name of "Taiwan Art Exhibition." First organized by local Taiwanese artists, by the early fifties it had been taken over by the new-comers from China. As was to be expected in view of the prevailing anti-Japanese sentiment, Japanese-style painting fell into disfavor and was excluded from the annual exhibition. It wasn't until 1982 that the related painting technique, re-labeled "gouache painting," was rehabilitated and again accepted into the annual art exhibition.²³

In the cultural sector in general, the government's efforts were generally less energetic. In a paper presented in 1985, the anthropologist and member of the Academia Sinica, Li Yiyuan, argued that only as late as 1967 had the Nationalist government assumed a "conscious" and "organized" cultural policy. According to Li, its beginning was marked by the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement proclaimed that year. Comprising two main objectives and fifteen fields of activities, the movement "on the one hand emphasized the restoration of ancient ethics and morals, on the other hand it sought to turn this restoration into an instrument in the fight against the Communist regime." Consequently, concludes Professor Li, "in principle, its content was of more political than cultural significance" and its aim more "moral ... than aesthetic and intellectual."²⁴

During the entire period of Chiang Kai-shek's rule in Taiwan, from 1949 to his death in 1975, Taiwan's cultural policy was marked by his personal determination to return to and "deliver" China.²⁵ A large percentage of the government's annual budget went into military armament.

fazhan, 1945-1970 [The Fifth Moon and Eastern Art Groups: The Development of the Chinese Artistic Modernization Movement in Postwar Taiwan, 1945-1970]. Taipei: Dongda Chubanshe. pp42-53.

- 22 In his extensive studies on the two art groups, the art historian Xiao Qiongrui, interestingly enough, takes a "Chinese" perspective. He points out, correctly, that the Chinese modernist movement of the interwar decades, which mainly originated from and took place within art institutions in China during the prewar decades, could not be continued in Taiwan, for an independent art school in Taiwan was not founded until 1962. Xiao Qiongrui. pp42-53.
- 23 See Huang Dongfu. 1991. "Cong shengzhan kan guangfu yihou Taiwan jiaocaihua zhi fazhan" [The Development of Gouache Painting under the Perspective of the Provincial Art Exhibitions After 1945]. In *Dangdai Taiwan huihua wenxuan 1945-1990* [Essays on Taiwanese Contemporary Art, 1945-1990]. Kuo, Jason C., ed. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu. pp95-117. See also Kuo, Jason, C. 2000. pp32-83.
- 24 Li Yiyuan. 1989. "Wenhua jianshe gongzuo de ruogan jiantao" [Examining Cultural Construction Work]. In *Taiwan diqu shehui bianqian yu wenhua fazhan* [Social Change and Cultural Development in the Taiwan Area]. Zhongguo Luntan Bianji Beiyuanhui, ed. Taipei: Lianjing Chuban, (1. Edition, 1985). p308. See also Shi Zhihui. 1995. *Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong zhi yanjiu (1966-1991)* [Studies of the Chinese Culture Renaissance Movement (1966-1991)]. Unpublished M. A. thesis. Taipei: National Taiwan Normal University. Huang Cailang. 1992. *Wenhua zhengce yingxiang xia de yishu zanzhu: Taiwan yijiu wuling niandai wenhua zhengce, yishu zanzhu, yu huatan de hudong* [Art Sponsorship under the Influence of Cultural policy: Interactivities between the Cultural Policy, Art Sponsorship and the Artistic Community in the 1950s]. Unpublished M. A. thesis. Taipei: Chinese Culture University.
- 25 In the New Year's speech of 1950, two months after Chiang arrived in Taiwan, Chiang declared the "recovery of China" the country's major goal. In his 1952's New Years' address, he further mentioned four re-construction movements in economic, cultural and political spheres to be launched. As regards the "Cultural Reconstruction Movement," Chiang remarked: "Our slogan is 'understanding etiquette, valuing righteousness, washing away the country's shame, and restoring its territory [*mingli, shangyi, xuechi, fuguo*, 明禮 尚義 雪恥 復國]." Chiang Kai-shek. 1950 & 1952. "Yuandan gao quanguo junmin tongbaoshu, 1950 & 1952" [New Years' Speech Addressing the Country's Soldiers and People, 1950 & 1952]. In *Xian Zongtong Jiang gong sixiang yanlunji* [Collection of Thoughts and Words of Chiang Kai-shek]. Qin Xiaoyi, ed. Taipei: Zhongyang Wenwu. 1984. 32,

The Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement mentioned above was launched, above all, as a reaction against the Cultural Revolution raging on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. The only fundamental presidential declaration on cultural policy, however, had been made in 1953, when Chiang Kai-shek issued his *Two Amendments to the Principle of the People's Livelihood Concerning Education and Recreation*. Although it should primarily be seen in the context of his anti-communist crusade, the text also condemned current trends toward commercialization, as seen in the following passage: "The Communists ... have paid great attention to literature and the theater. By means of literature and the theater, they indoctrinate the thoughts and feelings of class struggle into the hearts of the people. That's why the common citizen is afflicted either by the yellow [i.e. pornography] or by the red evil."²⁶

In these two chapters, consisting of amendments to Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People*, a wide range of other subjects are mentioned as well. More offering a cultural statement than outlining a policy, Chiang conceives of literary works as being "purely true and beautiful" and "praising the National culture." As to the fine arts, he states: "As has been said in antiquity, the highest state to be attained is the merging of morality and intelligence into one single entity, and the merging of body and mind into harmony. In the present times, however, personal self-cultivation can hardly be the final aim. We have to promote aesthetics among all citizens. Only in this way will we have fulfilled our natural educational duty."²⁷

While the importance of promoting the arts is emphasized, promises are made as well. Firstly, "every county and city should have a public museum. The general citizen should be encouraged to hold exhibitions."²⁸ Furthermore, "after the recovery of the Mainland and the reconstruction of the country, we must create a healthy and happy environment for all citizens, and cultivate healthy and happy feelings in them by thinking of and planning for the fine arts at every step."²⁹ The "promises" made by Chiang Kai-shek were never realized during his lifetime, or rather, they were certainly never meant to be realized until the "recovery of the Mainland." In any case, shortly after the publication of these writings, several institutions were established. The National Art School, the country's first independent art academy, was founded in 1955 along with the National Museum of History. One year later, in 1956, the National Exhibition Hall was built. Then, in 1965, the Palace Museum, its contents moved to Taiwan by Chiang Kai-shek, was re-opened with great celebration. With its more than half a million objects from the former Imperial Collection, this world-class treasury was regarded not just as a repository of historical and artistic objects, but as a kind of sacred regalia whose possession ensured their holder's legitimacy as the preserver of the Chinese tradition. The cultural centers promised by Chiang Kai-shek were established, but only after his death, by Chiang Ching-kuo, his son and successor as president of the ROC.

Nevertheless, although no concrete cultural policy was issued before 1977, the *Two Amendments*

pp248 & 33, p2. Quoted from <http://chungcheng.org.tw/thought/class07/0024/0001.htm> & <http://chungcheng.org.tw/thought/class07/0026/0001.htm>.

26 Chiang Kai-shek. 1953. "Minsheng zhuyi yule liangpian bushu" [Two Amendments to the Principle of the People's Livelihood Concerning Education and Recreation]. In *Sanmin zhuyi*. Sun Yat-sen. Repr. 1978 Taipei: Zhengzhung Shuju. pp59-60. (Quoted from <http://chungcheng.org.tw/thought/class05/0002/index.htm>)

27 Chiang Kai-shek. 1953. p63.

28 Chiang Kai-shek. 1953. p63.

29 Chiang Kai-shek. 1953. p63. In the concluding chapter of the *Two Amendments to the Principle of the People's Livelihood Concerning Education and Recreation*, Chiang wrote: "Scientific education, cultural promotion, recreation facilities, hygiene and medicine shall be realized when financial, economic and political strength of the country and the regions have been achieved." Chiang Kai-shek. 1953. p70.

to the *Principle of the People's Livelihood Concerning Education and Recreation* of 1953 (and to a lesser degree the statement proclaiming the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement of 1966) were of no little impact on the local intelligentsia. In 1954, the Chinese Arts and Literature Association (CALA), with its more than a thousand members the most powerful cultural association in the postwar era, called for a nationwide Cultural Cleansing Movement, in order to purge the country of the "yellow and red evil" referred to by Chiang Kai-shek. Within one month, the association had collected the signatures of more than two million private citizens and of three hundred different associations, as well as those of ten large publishing houses and ninety magazines. This initiative by the CALA and the subsequent outpouring of self-censorship, as the literary historian, Zheng Mingli, has correctly pointed out, "proved to form an excellent basis in society for the authorities' measures to censor the press and suppress the freedom of speech."³⁰

1.3.2 The Modernist Movement

Artistic creation during the first decade of the post-war period was characterized by an atmosphere of repression. In the area of governmental responsibilities, the adoption of the Japanese educational system was followed by a re-organization and a staffing of the related institutions mostly with Mainlanders, as mentioned above. The annual Taiwan Art Exhibitions, also shaped after the Japanese model, left much space to decide their proceedings, form and regulations to the artistic community itself. A major shift occurred in regard to the controlling body, which passed from the hands of the former local Taiwanese artists to the Mainland Chinese. The 2-28 incident in 1947 mentioned earlier was decisive and marked a watershed in this respect. The leading artistic figure of the Japanese period, Chen Chengpo, fell victim to the tragic event. The sparks of a new social criticism, briefly to be seen between 1945 and 1947, were immediately extinguished.³¹ Several Mainland activists who had come to Taiwan after 1945 and promoted engaged art, primarily in the graphic medium, were also affected, but succeeded in fleeing back to China. One exception was Huang Rongcan, a woodcut artist and writer, who disappeared after having been arrested. "The last gleam of hope of connecting the woodcut tradition of the thirties with Taiwan was broken."³²

30 Zheng Mingli. 1994. "Dangdai Taiwan wenyi zhengce de fazhan yingxiang yu jiantao" [Influences and Development of Taiwanese Cultural Policy]. In *Dangdai Taiwan zhengzhi wenxue lun* [Politics and Contemporary Taiwanese Literature]. Zheng Mingli, ed. Taipei: Shibao Chubanshe. p33.

31 It is true that a few oil paintings created before 1947 did show unusual socialist tendencies, such as, for instance, Li Shiqiao's *On the Market* (Shichangkou, 市場口) and *Happy Farmers* (Nongjiale, 農家樂), or Li Meishu's *In the Dusk* (Huanghun, 黃昏). Research on this period began only recently. Authors and articles to deal with this subject include: Xiao Qiongrui. 1991. pp73-79. Yang, Wen-I. 1993. "Chunman" [On Springtime]. In *Funiu zhi mei: Li Meishu shishi shizhounian jinian zhan* [Commemorative Exhibition of Li Meishu: The Female Portraits Series]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. pp52-53. Ni Zaiqin. 1994. "Zai zhengzhi xuanwo zhong de Taiwan meishu" [Taiwanese Art in the Vortex of Politics]. In *Zhanhou Taiwan meishu yu huanjing de hudong* [Interaction between Art and Environment in Postwar Taiwan]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Reprinted in Ni Zaiqin. 1995. *Taiwan meishu de renwen guancha* [Observations on Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Xiongshi meishu. pp188-225. In the past few years, the conceptual artist, Mei Dingyan has concentrated on this period in his writings. Apart from his groundbreaking studies on Huang Rongcan, he also wrote about Li Shiqiao. See Mei Dingyan. 2000. "Zhanhou chuqi Taiwan 'xin xieshi zhuyi' meishu zhi yunyu ji liuchan: yi Li Shiqiao huafeng weili" [The Pregnancy and Death of 'New Realism' in Early Postwar Taiwan: The Example of Li Shiqiao]. In *Xiandai meishu*, 88, February, pp42-56.

32 Mei Dingyan. 1996. "Huang Rongcan de yiyun: Taiwan meishu yundong de jinqu" [The Mystery of Huang Rongcan: A Prohibited Area of Taiwanese Art]. In *Xiandai meishu*, 67, August. pp40-63; 68, October, pp38-53;

"The intellectuals who came to Taiwan with the KMT were weakened liberals," remarks the literature professor Lü Huizheng, who further points out that "the mainstream leftist intellectuals raised in the culture of the 20's and 30's all remained in China."³³ Only Li Zhongsheng (1912-1984), a Mainlander who came to Taiwan in 1949, was able to act in a more progressive, if apolitical, manner by introducing for the first time modern Western art which transgressed the limits of impressionism and post-impressionism. Having studied in Japan during the thirties, where he became involved with Japanese avant-garde groups, in his many writings Li extended the local artistic horizon toward surrealism, collage and abstract art. More importantly still, Li drew young artists to the private studios he opened between 1951 and 1956 in Taipei. His anti-academic teaching method, which stressed the finding of one's own creative potential rather than copying plaster models, was a revolutionary concept in a generally conservative environment. Backed by Li's artistic training, several young artists emerged into the art scene and founded the Eastern Art Group (Dongfang huahui, 東方畫會) in 1957. Another important artistic circle, the Fifth Moon Art Group (Wuyue huahui, 五月畫會) which consisted mainly of graduates from the art department of National Normal University, was established in the same year.³⁴ Both art groups held annual exhibitions supported by lectures, public discussions, and reviews, which paved the way for the first Taiwanese modernist movement in the postwar period.

The rise of this movement was also encouraged by external factors. In 1955, the US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty took effect. Shortly before the founding of both groups, for the first time, works by a Taiwanese artist were selected for the international Biennial of Sao Paulo, and awarded an honorable mention. This international recognition repeated itself in 1959 and 1961, decisively bolstering the modernist faction.³⁵ As the art historian Lin Xingyue has pointed out, the major contribution of the movement led by the two art groups lies in the fact that they "broke up the established frames of academic education and of the institutionalized form of the salon art exhibitions, and brought about a shift from the era of officially controlled exhibitions toward an era of competition between privately organized groups."³⁶ Dissatisfied both with the conservative Taiwanese tradition of oil painting as well as with the Chinese ink painting tradition, the young artists turned to the latest international trends of abstraction. Hitherto unseen in Taiwan, and easily recognizable as the epitome of everything new and progressive, abstract art became the style many young artists rallied to in order to establish themselves against the traditionalists.

69, December, pp62-76. The author, who is also an artist (see the previous note), created an installation work which included the reproduction of a woodcut of Huang depicting the 2-28 incident. It was shown at the 2-28 commemorative exhibition held at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1996.

33 Lü Huizheng. 1992. *Zhanhou Taiwan wenxue jingyan* [The Experience of Taiwanese Postwar Literature]. Taipei: Xindi Wenxue. p9.

34 The art historian Xiao Qiongrui has discussed the two art groups in his study of 1991, which is extensively furnished with source materials. See also note 21 & 22. Other Western literature on the groups are Sullivan, Michael. 1996. pp181-185. Kuo, Jason C. 2000. pp138-171. Li Chu-tsing. 1986. "The Fifth Moon Group of Taiwan." In *The Register of the Spencer Museum of Art*. The University of Kansas, 6, 3, pp43-54.

35 Lü Qingfu. 1993. "Xiandaizhuyi de shiyanqi" [The Experimental Period of Modernism]. In *Taiwan meishu xinfengmao 1945-1993* [Taiwan Art, 1945-1993], exhibition catalog. Translated by David Tonman. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p51.

36 Lin Xingyue. 1995. "Bainian lai Taiwan meishu de sici geming" [Four Revolutions in the Taiwanese Art of the Last Hundred Years]. In *Bainianlai de Taiwan* [Taiwan in the Last Hundred Years]. Conference paper. Taipei: Qianwei Chubanshe. p258. See also Jason C. Kuo's account of the transition from traditional ink painting to modernist painting. Kuo, Jason C. 2000. "From National/Chinese Painting to Modern Painting." pp84-101. See also Xiao Qiongrui. 1991.

Yet in spite of this adoption of a Western artistic language, the movement was far from being just a simple copy of abstract art in the West. On the contrary, with the support of poet, writers, and critics, a conceptual framework which attempted to assimilate abstraction into autochthonous traditions was in the making. This was facilitated by the fact that due to the use of the writing brush as its main tool, Chinese art – whether in the decorative field, in painting, or in calligraphy – always had a strong tendency toward the linear, which bears an obvious similarity to abstraction. Trying to establish a common ground for Chinese and abstract art, it was particularly the poet and literary scholar, Yu Guangzhong, who further argued that at the core of abstraction lay nothing but the attempt to "use the simplest material to express all facets of the Tao."³⁷ This Tao, according to Yu, is "the 'Tao' of Laozi, the *taiji* of the *Yijing*, the 'ultimate way' of Buddhism, the 'number' theory of Pythagoras, the 'ideas' of Plato, and the '*natura naturans*' of Spencer."³⁸

While theoretical efforts of this kind were being made to incorporate Western abstraction into the Chinese tradition, in the field of artistic practice, too, members of both the Eastern and the Fifth Moon groups strove toward a blending of this latest approach in art with traditional Chinese art. Liu Guosong (1932 -), Zhuang Zhe (1935 -) and Xiao Qin (1935 -), three young artists who each belonged to one of the two groups, explored the possibilities of features of the tradition, such as linearity and calligraphy, the use of the pictorial void, and the atmospheric or naturalistic approaches witnessed in Chinese landscape or Zen paintings. The result were works which shunned the geometric, expressionist, or automatic manner in favor of the lyrical, poetic, and tranquil, a style labeled by the scholars Li Chu-tsing and Lü Qingfu as being either "Chinese modernist painting" or "a new tradition of landscape painting."³⁹

The major artistic effort, and achievement, of this movement, namely, the contextualization of international abstract art by means of the Chinese tradition, was also its main defect and weakness. Local critics remarked that this movement, which followed the slogan "to be modern is to do abstraction," in fact completely neglected and denied the Taiwanese reality. While one critic even denounced these artists as being "by no means different from the oil painters of the Japanese colonial period, ... [because] the authoritative status of Japan [has simply been replaced

37 Yu Guangzhong. 1964. "Cong lingshizhuyi chufa" [Starting From Clairvoyance]. In *Wenxing zazhi*, June, 48-52, reprinted in Kuo, Jason C, ed. 1991. pp187-8. Between 1962 and 1964, Yu wrote three major essays on the annual exhibitions of the Fifth Moon Art Group. Decidedly advocating their artistic endeavors, Yu further wrote: "As the Western contemporary abstract painters have been under the influence of the Eastern abstract spirit, Chinese avant-garde artists have good reasons to engage in abstract art and should even surpass the former." (Quoted from Xiao. 1991. p260. See also pp259-264.)

38 Yu Guangzhong. 1964. p188.

39 Lü Qingfu. 1993. p55. *The New Tradition of Chinese Landscape Painting* was the title of an exhibition centering on artworks of the Fifth Moon Art Group organized by Li Chu-tsing, which was touring the U.S. between 1966 and 1968 (see Xiao Qiongrui. 1991. p270 & note 125; Li Chu-tsing. 1986. pp43-54.) Xiao Qiongrui also pointed out that around 1960-63 the style of the group underwent a shift from "purely studying 'Western painting' to the awareness of the 'Eastern spirit'." (Xiao Qiongrui. 1991. p261.) Both Liu Guosong and Zhuang Zhe abandoned oil and canvas in favor of the ink medium. Furthermore, as early as 1962, the poet and literary scholar, Yu Guangzhong had warned the young artists that "it is good to go back to the East; but not on the cost of forgetting modernism." (loc. cit.) This seems to refute John Clark's opinion that the main goal of the artists was to "understand modernism." Clark further writes that "these artists themselves relied for their information about modern art on foreign art magazines and occasional visits by overseas Chinese artists and scholars," and that "it was only in the late 1960s that they really understood modernism when they themselves visited the USA." (Clark, John, 1993. "Taipei Modernism in the 1980s." In *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*. Turner, Caroline, ed. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. p148.) In fact, these artists sought to continue the long tradition of Chinese art. Western modernism was seen more or less as a mere source of inspiration.

by that of] postwar New York and Paris,"⁴⁰ their escapism was in fact less directed toward the West than to ancient Chinese painting.

The gradual loss of vitality of the modernist movement in the mid-sixties arose less from critical opposition of this kind, than from a lack of actual institutional and commercial support. Many members of both the Fifth Moon Art Group and the Eastern Art Group subsequently went abroad in order to pursue their individual artistic goals. Nevertheless, until the appearance of the next major movement in the field of visual arts, variously known as Localism or Nativism, which emerged around the mid-seventies, the artistic scene was by no means inactive. Between 1965 and 1970, two groups of younger artists were active in the field of experimental art. Orientating themselves according to the latest international trends such as Pop art, Conceptual art, Neo-Dada, Minimal art and New Realism, their artistic endeavors extended the horizon of the local art community far beyond abstraction. Moreover, similar to the efforts undertaken by the Modernist Movement, these young artists tried to blend the latest Western art trends with Chinese traditional ideas, this time with Zen and Buddhism.⁴¹ Their experiments, however, were short-lived and had little further impact.

1.3.3 Localism and the Taiwanese Consciousness

Meanwhile, a number of other artists began to reflect on the indigenous culture, a direction which soon became of a more fundamental significance and provided an entirely new source of inspiration. This movement, later known as Localism or Nativism, flourished during the late sixties and all of the seventies. The earliest advocate of Localism was Xi Dejin (1923 - 1981), a Mainlander by origin, who, after finishing his artistic education, stayed in the US and Europe from 1962 to 1966. Xi's lifelong dedication to Taiwanese folk art, architecture, and handicrafts, reflected primarily in his writings and documentary work, was unprecedented at a time "when the art world was still largely blinded by 'modernism' and 'internationalism.'"⁴²

40 Lin Xingyue. 1995. p259.

41 In the words of the art historian Lü Qingfu, after the Modernist movement, "an anti-painting wave finally swept Taiwan in the late 60's." Two artistic groups emerged at the time. One consisted of members who mainly came from experimental theater, photography, or graphic arts, such as Huang Huacheng, Chang Zhaotang, and Huang Yongsong. Blending Dada, performance, and conceptual art, they attempted to subvert common notions of "high art," proclaiming that life and art were of equal importance. In their legendary exhibitions between 1966 and 1968, amongst other activities they spread out reproductions of world-famous paintings in doorways or suspended wet underwear dangerously low from the ceiling, testing not only the audience's willingness to make physical contact with the exhibits but consequently also its tolerance in matters of art. The second group, which lasted well into the seventies, called itself *Huawai huahui*, (畫外畫會) which literally means "a painting group outside of painting," with the artist Su Xintian as its central figure. Although discovering the latest international trends, such as Pop art, Neo-Dada, and Conceptual art, they are essentially aiming at conveying a Zen spirit in their works. Professor Lü has commented that "in retrospect, their programmatic ideas had more to offer than their paintings." See Lü Qingfu. 1993. pp58-59. Also see Lai Yingying. 1996. *Liuling niandai Taiwan fuhe yishu yanjiu* [Studies on Taiwanese Mixed Media Art of the Sixties]. Taipei: Guotai Chubanshe. Gao Minglu. 1999. "Conceptual Art with Anticonceptual Attitude: Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong." In *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s -1980s*. Camnitzer, Luis, Farver, Jane, & Weiss, Rachel, eds. New York: The Queens Museum of Art. pp128-130.

42 Jiang Xun. 1993. "Huigui bentu: qiling niandai Taiwan meishu dashi" [Taiwanese Art in the 1970's]. In *Taiwan meishu xinfengmao 1945-1993* [Taiwan Art, 1945-1993]. p63. Translated by David Toman. Between March 1973 and July 1974, Xi Dejin published articles on Taiwanese folk art on a monthly basis, further including religious images, shadow plays, puppet shows, wood block prints, paper cutting, brick reliefs, window design, rice dough dolls, various utensils, and textile design. These articles have been collected and published in Xi

Xi Dejin's Taiwanese orientation was soon to become an island-wide movement. Most prolific in literature, this movement established itself in the visual arts through the discovery and promotion of primitive artists. Its popularity can only be explained by the general *zeitgeist*. During the seventies, Taiwan faced a series of harsh political and diplomatic setbacks. Coinciding with a shift of US foreign policy toward China, the People's Republic was admitted to the United Nations in 1971, replacing the ROC in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Subsequently, Taiwan lost its diplomatic ties with most of the nations with which it had previously maintained formal relations. In 1978, the US formally established diplomatic relations with the PRC, while breaking its official ties with the ROC. In 1971, the return of the Diaoyu islands to Japan rather than to the ROC by the United States caused angry protests and demonstrations. The failures of the KMT on the international stage resulted in Taiwan's political isolation, but it also induced Taiwanese intellectuals to newly question their political and cultural location. The nativist movement, which emerged during this period, was evidently a reflection of these fundamental changes. Consequently, not only did the political opposition - later to play an important role in Taiwanese politics - benefit from this awakening of Taiwanese consciousness, it also planted the seeds for the later fervent search for cultural identity.

Three artists primarily discovered by the Localists were Wuli Yuge (1901 - 1991), Hong Tong (1920 - 1987), and Zhu Ming (1936 -). Typical descriptions of Wuli's works included adjectives such as those used by the editor of the newspaper *Zhongguo shibao*: "simple, ingenuous, naive, sentimental, and free of immaturity."⁴³ Hong Tong, a more influential, even legendary, figure possessed a unique style of idiosyncratic and compressed images. Fantastic, hybrid creatures, half bird-half quadruped, or tiny human figures, as well as numerous peculiar, unidentified beings suffuse his colorful pictorial surfaces. "He was endowed with the rich imagination of traditional Taiwanese folklore, and his colors and forms opened the door to Taiwanese folk arts,"⁴⁴ as one art critic commented later. While the two primitive artists mentioned above denied having received any formal artistic training, the third artist, Zhu Ming, was trained within the folk art milieu of Sanyi, a small town in mid-Taiwan. Representing more a non-academic background than primitivism, Zhu Ming's first wood sculptures were realistic renderings of country people and their activities.⁴⁵ However, it was his later work, the *Taiji* series, where different movements of the ancient martial art were captured, which earned him his present fame.

Highly nostalgic and self-indulgent, the artistic style of Localism was best expressed by an unusual blending with photo-realism which is above all to be seen in the works of Zhuo Yourui (1950 -) and Xie Xiaode (1940 -).⁴⁶ In the mid-seventies, Zhuo, a young Fine Arts graduate,

Dejin. 1974. *Taiwan minjian yishu* [Taiwan Folk Art]. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu.

43 Gao Xinjiang. 1972. "Guiyu ying'er" [Return to Childhood]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 12, February, p17. Gao was the editor of the cultural section of the newspaper *Zhongguo shibao* and until he wrote this article had not previously been involved in the fine arts. He was the discoverer of Hong Tong, wrote the first report on his work, and followed this up with extensive coverage of the artist. His article "Hong Tong de shijie" [The World of Hong Tong] was published in *Zhongguo shibao* on June 5, 1972. See also Lin Xingyue. 1987. pp192-209.

44 Jiang Xun. 1993. p65.

45 See Xi Song. 1976. "Yanxiang: Zhu Ming muke zuopin" [Symposium: Zhu Ming's Wood Sculptures]. In *Xiongshi Meishu*, 59, January, pp74-77.

46 Zhuo Yourui later went to New York and has remained faithful to her photo-realistic style until the present day. Her Banana series executed around the mid-seventies was progressive on account of the novelty of its style, as well as its feminist touch, both in contrast to local conservative voices. Stemming from an artistic family, Xie Xiaode returned to Taiwan in 1973. As a teacher in different art departments, Xie was able to exercise considerable influence on the younger generation. For Zhuo Yourui see Yang, Wen-i. 1996. "A Banana is not a

created a series of large-scale images of bananas, based on photographs taken in her hometown in southern Taiwan. Xie, who had spent one year abroad, concentrated on family portraits rendered with a penetrating sensitivity and empathy.

Ultimately, however, it was more in the field of general perception than that of art that the Localist movement proved to be pivotal for the shaping and development of a new awareness. Crucial issues raised included, for instance, the questions of location and of self-definition. In opposition to the imaginary or illusionary places dwelt in by the earlier modernists, a feeling for one's physical surroundings gained ground. Furthermore, the indoctrinated sense of Chineseness began for the first time to be questioned. Yet, until this lost its final credibility when martial law was lifted in 1987, a genuine Taiwanese consciousness and the grand project of searching for cultural identity, later itself to become an ideology, still lay in waiting.

Banana: The New Women Artists of Taiwan." In *Asian Women Artists*, Dysart, Dinah and Fink, Hanna, eds. Sydney: Craftsman House. pp42-51. For Xie Xiaode see Chen Jiazong. 1976. "Xie Xiaode zhan jinzuozhan" [New Works of Xie Xiaode]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 63, May, pp142-145.

2. The Rise of Contemporary Art Since the 1980s

This chapter aims to provide a general survey of Taiwanese contemporary art, its emergence as a new creative force, the role of the government, and the struggle of artists to come to terms with the rapid changes in society. Historically, the years from 1977 to 1981 were a period of cultural policy-making, a time when the government first laid down plans and programs for cultural management and the building of an artistic infrastructure. In the succeeding years this infrastructure took shape most obviously in the form of the three major public museums which were inaugurated in northern, central, and southern Taiwan between 1982 and 1994, a period which could be dubbed the "era of museums." Divided into three main sections, this chapter will first look at the building of an artistic infrastructure: the government's involvement with the visual arts, its cultural policy, the origins of its concepts, and the scope and limitations of these policies. The role of the private sector, which both in the form of commercial enterprises and non-profit organizations proved as indispensable for the shaping of contemporary art as the public one, will also be briefly dealt with.

The lifting of martial law in 1987 symbolized the end of authoritarian government in Taiwan and the birth of a liberal and pluralist society. How this significant historical event affected artistic creation and how artists reacted to the fundamental change will be examined in the second section of this chapter. While prior to 1987 artistic expression was primarily concentrated on the individual, the sufferings of mind, soul, and body, it is astonishing to see the tremendous acceleration of developments subsequently, and the speed with which internationalism and the wide range of subject matters it entailed took hold and spread to reach its fullest scope during this period of transition. With the establishment of these vast possibilities of expression, the foundation was laid for the developments of the nineties, covered by the third section of this chapter, which were generally characterized by pluralism, critical approaches, and the search for a national identity. The chapter is concluded by the year 1995, when Taiwanese art was for the first time officially shown at the Venice Biennial, an event which marked Taiwan's full participation in the international, global artistic community.

2.1 Building the Infrastructure

2.1.1 The Role of the Government and the *Cultural Construction Plan*

An artistic infrastructure in the proper sense hardly existed before the eighties. Taiwan's government, preoccupied with national defense, the modernization of the country's infrastructure and economic development, paid little attention to cultural affairs. This began to change in the

second half of the seventies. A groundbreaking step in cultural policy was made under Chiang Ching-kuo's leadership in 1977, a move which was motivated by a number of external as well as internal circumstances. Taiwan's take-off in the mid- and late seventies, better known as the economic miracle, laid the material foundation for cultural development. Taiwan's setbacks in foreign relations (the retreat from the UN in 1971, the severing of diplomatic relations by Japan and the USA in 1972 and 1979), as already mentioned above, fundamentally shattered the KMT's dream of a "recovery of Mainland China" and thus the party's very *raison d'être*. With the return to the "motherland" practically out of reach and the KMT's leadership visibly aging, the necessity for a new policy became obvious. The death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975, furthermore, cleared the road to change. Now Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son and successor, initiated a new course which gave the country a different orientation, a realistic policy aiming at and focusing on the development of Taiwan itself.

In 1977, in a report on national policy, Chiang Ching-kuo, then prime minister, announced that "in order to further the strength of the nation, to reinforce social and economic development, and to enhance the citizens' living standards, the government is going to follow up the *Ten Constructions Plan* with a *Twelve Constructions Plan*."¹ Within the latter, "cultural construction" ranked last, as number twelve. Scheduled to span nine years, the *Cultural Construction Plan* was the government's first concrete policy on cultural affairs. Its declared main objective was "to construct a cultural center at every county and city, including a library, a museum, and a concert hall."²

Not surprisingly, Chiang Ching-kuo's *Cultural Construction Plan* echoes his father's as yet unrealized ideas, formulated as early as 1953 in his *Two Amendments to the Principle of the People's Livelihood Concerning Education and Recreation*, already mentioned above, which explicitly announces the establishment of a museum and a concert hall in every county and city. Originally planned for the period after the "recovery of China," the implementation of this cultural program started by his successor in fact also accorded with the political process of Taiwanization within the KMT itself.³ By the time of Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988, major steps toward Taiwan's liberalization had been made: the permission for ordinary citizens to travel abroad, in 1979, and, in 1987, to visit Mainland China, as well as, in 1986, tolerance toward the establishment of an opposition party. Most importantly, martial law was lifted in 1987, a fact which subsequently changed the entire face of Taiwan.⁴

1 Quoted from Li Yiyuan. 1988. "Taiwan guangfu yilai wenhua fazhan de jingyan yu ping gu" [The Experience and Evaluation of Postwar Cultural Development in Taiwan]. In *Wenhua tuxiang* [Cultural Images]. Taipei: Yungchen Wenhua. p20.

2 As the twelfth project, the Cultural Construction section aimed at building a total of "over sixty cultural facilities in the Taiwan area ... with a budget of 21.4 billion New Taiwan Dollars, ... to be finished by Dec. 1986." *Zhonghua Minguo bashisnian gonggong jianshe baogaoshu* [Report on Public Construction on the ROC, 1995]. Public Construction Commission, Executive Yuan, ed. Taipei: Xingzhengyuan. <http://www.poc.gov.tw/pcbook84/8-1-5.htm>. See also Li Yiyuan. 1988. pp20-21.

3 The idea of building "a national museum and museums in all major cities" was the resolution passed by the The First National Education Conference held in 1929 in Nanking. Another resolution made during the conference, namely to organize a nation-wide exhibition, was realized in the following year and has been continued in Taiwan to the present day (parallel to the Provincial Art Exhibition, a continuation of the *Futen* and *Taiten*.) See Zhang Junjie. 1986. "Woguo meishu jiaoyu zhengce fazhan zhi tantao yu zhangwang" [The Perspective of and an Enquiry into the Development of National Art Education Policy]. In *Jiaoyu ziliao jikan*, 11, June, p33.

4 See Rubenstein, Murray A. 1999. "Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy: The Eras of Chiang Ching-kuo and Li Teng-hui, 1971-1994." In *Taiwan: A New History*. Rubenstein, Murray A, ed. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe. pp436-480. See also Gold, Thomas B. 1986. *State and Society in the Taiwan Miracle*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe. Copper, John F. 1990. *Taiwan Nation State or Province?* Boulder: Westview Press. *Zhongguo shibao*,

However, the National Cultural Construction Plan went significantly beyond the announcement of the intention to build cultural facilities. In 1979, a detailed and extended program was drawn up by the Ministry of Education under the name of *Promotion of Culture and of Educational and Recreational Activities*, and was approved by Chiang's cabinet, the Executive Yuan. It now encompassed a total of twelve articles, which also included paragraphs on cultural policies and activities. Among them, there were measures to protect traditional arts and crafts, to identify and protect cultural relics, to organize an annual arts and literature festival, to establish a National Cultural Award, and to promote music and Chinese opera. Also included were programs to develop human resources and train professionals in cultural affairs. For the first time, the government was taking the nation's cultural activities and development into account, administratively as well as in terms of management.⁵

The *Promotion of Culture and of Educational and Recreational Activities* was also groundbreaking for the construction of a cultural infrastructure in Taiwan. Between 1981 and 1985, twenty cultural centers mushroomed island-wide. An estimated amount of up to 9.5 million US dollars was spent on the construction of each center, with each occupying an average floor space of 28,000 square meters. Aimed at the promotion and preservation of the local culture, these cultural centers were also designed to offer exhibition and performance spaces for local cultural activities⁶.

One of the most fundamental measures undertaken was the establishment of a national cultural administration. This began to operate in 1981 under the name of Council for Cultural Planning and Development (CCPD, in 1995 renamed Council of Cultural Affairs, CCA). As the first and central cultural institution, "the highest organization for cultural construction and management, the CCA functions as an institution for policy-making, coordinating, planning, and examining, but without executive power."⁷ Consisting of three sections, the CCA also includes a visual arts subsection, which organizes art exhibitions in collaboration with local cultural institutions.⁸

ed. 1995. *Taiwan: Zhanhou wushinian: tudi renming suiyue* [Taiwan: Fifty Years after the War: Land, People, and Times]. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua.

5 This program was fundamental, and signaled the KMT's belated concern for local Taiwanese culture. The measures for the protection and restoration of the cultural heritage and cultural relics, for instance, were resolutions passed at The Fourth National Education Conference held in Taipei in 1962. See Zhang Junjie. 1986. p33. The twelve articles promulgated in 1979 were later reformulated into ten articles in 1982, and to fourteen in 1987. A comparative chart of these three different versions is given in Li Yiyuan's article (1988. p21).

6 See Li Yiyuan. 1989. "Wenhua jianshe gongzuo de ruogan jiantao" [Examining the Cultural Construction Work]. In *Taiwan diqu shehui bianqian yu wenhua fazhan* [Social Change and Cultural Development in Taiwan]. Zhongguo Luntan ed. Taipei: Lianjing Chuban. (1. Edition 1985) pp317-319. See also Yang Junting. 1995. *Wenhua zhongxin yu jiangou shequ wenhua hudong guanxi zhi yanjiu - yi GaoXiongshi, Zhanghuaxian, Taibeixian wei li* [Studies on the Interrelationship between the Culture Centers and the Local Communities - The Examples of Kaohsiung City, Changhua County, and Taipei County]. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Graduate School of Mass Communication, Chinese Culture University. Council of Cultural Affairs, ed. 1990. *Taiwan diqu wenhua zhongxin jianjie* [Introduction to the Culture Centers of the Taiwan Area]. Taipei: Council of Cultural Affairs.

7 Li Yiyuan. 1989. p310.

8 Over the twenty years since its foundation, the CCA has dedicated itself to the promotion and popularization of culture island-wide, sponsoring a variety of cultural activities on the national level organized by the public sector, and initiating annual cultural festivals as well. Unable to have itself transformed into a ministry, the CCA remains primarily a funding body, without executive and operating powers. In the visual arts, the CCA in its inceptive period actively organized a number of interesting exhibitions, such as the *Niandai meizhan* [Art of Our Age] (1982), *Ming-Qing shidai Taiwan shuhua* [Taiwanese Painting and Calligraphy of the Ming and Qing Dynasties] (1984), and the International Print Biennial (since 1983). In the 90s, the CCA commissioned the

Based on the same program, measures were also taken to improve art education. In 1982, the National Academy of Arts, whose curriculum included the visual arts, dance, theatre, and music, was founded in the suburbs of Taipei. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and a young teaching staff, the NAA became the most innovative institution in its field. Special artistic training programs for talented children at the elementary and junior high school level were initiated. Similar efforts were made at the university level. New departments were founded, such as the Fine Arts Department of Tunghai University in 1983 and the Applied Arts Department of Fu Jen Catholic University in 1984. At the post-graduate level, the Department of Art Studies at the National Normal University was able to establish a Graduate School in 1982, and in 1989 the National Taiwan University expanded its Chinese Art History Section into an independent Institute of Art History. Further institutions and departments were also to be founded in the nineties.⁹

2.1.2 Public Museums and their Operations

As cultural construction work at the national and local levels proceeded, Taiwan saw the birth of its first modern art museums. The first city to build a large museum of modern art was Taiwan's metropolis, Taipei. Initiated in 1977 with the announcement of the last of the *Twelve National Construction Plans* (outlining "cultural construction"), its objective, among others, was "to let foreigners know the modern art of Taiwan"¹⁰ - as stated by Taipei's mayor Lin Yanggang (the first native Taiwanese appointed to this position by Chiang). After six years of construction, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum was inaugurated on December 25, 1983. In 1982, the building of a second art museum in Taiwan was announced by the same Lin Yanggang, now Governor of Taiwan. Its location was to be the third largest city in Taiwan and the seat of the provincial government, Taichung. The Taiwan Art Museum was eventually inaugurated in 1988. Finally, in 1994 a third modern art museum opened its doors in the southern port of Kaohsiung, the second largest city in Taiwan, after five years of construction.¹¹

publication, among others, of the Public Art series, the Environment and Art series, and the Early Taiwanese Painters series. It further laid down the Regulations for the Installation of Public Art, in 1998, and, in the same year, revised the Practices of Sponsoring and Awarding Prizes to Culture and the Arts. Maintaining two outposts in Paris and New York, each with a small gallery, the CCA has also provided exhibition opportunities for local artists to be shown abroad. Currently, the CCA is conducting an extensive program of revitalizing vacant or deserted spaces island-wide for cultural re-use. See 1991. *Xingzhengyuan Wenjianhui chengli shinian dashiji* [Ten Years of the Council of Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan]. Taipei: CCA. 1998. *Wenhua baipishu* [White Paper on Culture]. Taipei: CCA. Since 1992, the CCA has published annually *Wenhua tongji* [Cultural Statistics]. See also information provided in its website: <http://www.cca.gov.tw>.

- 9 See Zhang Junjie. 1986. pp34-44. See also Guoli Taiwan yishu jiaoyuguan (National Taiwan Art Education Institute) ed. 1988. *Zhonghua Minguo yishu jiaoyu gailan* [An Outline of Art Education in the ROC]. Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Yishu Jiaoyuguan and Chen Muzi. 1998. *Taiwan yishu jiaoyu fazhanshi* [The History of Art Education in Taiwan]. Taipei: Huanyu Chuban. Zhang Dewen. 1997. *Huihua yishu yu daxue meishu jiaoyu* [The Art of Painting and Art Education in the Universities]. Taipei: Sanyutang.
- 10 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1988. *Taipei Shili Meishuguan wuzhounian jianjie* [The Fifth Anniversary of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p3.
- 11 The Taipei Fine Arts Museum has a total exhibition space of ca. 10,000 square meters, the Taiwan Museum of Art ca. 15,000 square meters, and the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts ca. 12,000 square meters. Until recently, the Taiwan Museum of Art administratively belonged to the Taiwan Provincial Government, (now to the CCA) the other two are municipal museums. All three are furnished with modern facilities such as a library, an auditorium, a bookshop, classrooms for art education, etc. Their organizational structure is similar as well, all consisting of the following main sections: Acquisition, Education, Exhibition, Research, General Affairs,

In spite of its willingness to promote the local culture, the government failed, however, to match its efforts with a thorough planning in regard to cultural management and the required resources of manpower. When the first cultural center was inaugurated in 1983, the problem of insufficient professional staffing soon surfaced, as reflected in a contemporary headline describing the culture centers as "possessing a splendid architecture ... [but] crying out for lack of manpower."¹² The three public museums faced (and still face) a similar problem. As governmental institutions, the museums were at first to be staffed only with civil servants, whose qualification therefore consisted of having passed a general state examination, rather than of being professionals in a specific field. Moreover, the museums' administrative operating procedures were (and still are) subordinated to bureaucratic regulations, so that in case of a possible acquisition, for instance, the lowest price rather than the quality of a work has been the decisive factor. Although more rational regulations were introduced later and the recruitment of professionals with university degrees was permitted, the situation now is still far from being ideal.

Nevertheless, despite the drawbacks of the system under which they operated, the founding of the public art museums was a major step towards establishing an artistic infrastructure. Thanks to the modern facilities of these public museums, the people in Taiwan are now provided with information about and the experience of visual arts, to a degree unknown before. Furthermore, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum took a leading role in promoting contemporary art. By 1987, the museum had already launched such innovative shows as *Avant-garde, Installation and Space* (1985) and *Behavior and Space* (1987).¹³ More significantly, in 1984, one year after its inauguration, the TFAM organized the exhibition *Contemporary Trends in Chinese* [i.e. Taiwanese] *Arts, 1984*. Chaired by a jury of five members, it awarded its two major prizes to the young artists, Zhuang Pu (1947-) and Chen Xingwan (1951- 2004), both born after the war. The two works selected were not figurative but two-dimensional abstractions,¹⁴ a fact which

Accounting, and, not least, an "Anti-Corruption Department." See Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1993. *Taipei Shili Meishuguan shizhounian zhuanji* [The Tenth Anniversary of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum]. Taipei: TFAM. Taiwan Museum of Art, ed. 1995. *Taiwan Shengli Meishuguan kaiguan qizhounian jinian zhuanji* [The Seventh Anniversary of Taiwan Museum of Art]. Taichung: Taiwan Museum of Art. Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, ed. 1995. *Gaomeiguan ernian* [1st Anniversary of the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts]. Kaohsiung: Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.

- 12 Quoted from Editorial essay. 1984. "Yijiu basannian meishu zongping" [A Critical Review of Fine Art in 1983]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 155, January, p41. The American scholar Edwin A. Wickler has noted that the Taiwanese culture centers were "all hardware (fancy building) and no software (worthwhile programs)." Winckler, Edwin A. 1994. "Cultural Policy on Postwar Taiwan". In *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan*. Harrell, Stevan & Huang Chun-chieh, eds. Boulder: Westview Press. p34.
- 13 Since its opening, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum has accumulated an extensive list of publications, among them, starting from December 1984, *Xiandai meishu* [Modern Art], its museum journal, at first appearing quarterly then bi-monthly, where detailed information on its various activities is provided. An entire list of its publications, activities, exhibitions, symposiums, and lectures until 1993 is to be found in its 1993 issue to celebrate its tenth anniversary. See Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1993. In the same year, an illustrated volume listing its entire acquisitions from 1983 to 1993 was published. See Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1993. *Taipei Shili Meishuguan diancang tulu zonglan, 1983-1993* [The Taipei Fine Arts Museum Collections 1983-1993]. Taipei: TFAM.
- 14 Zhuang Pu studied at La Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid and returned to Taiwan in 1982, while Chen Xingwan, a woman artist, was locally trained and later studied with Li Zhongsheng, the mentor of the modernist movement and especially the Eastern Art Group. Work 8411 (Zuopin 8411, 作品 8411), Chen's price-winning entry, was characterized by a spirit of experiment, due to the use of different techniques, such as collage, pencil drawing, acrylic poured on the canvas, and the overall effect of a controlled composition. Zhuang Pu's *The Trembling Lines* (Zhandong de xian, 顫動的線) consisted of wooden boards

inaugurated a new trend among the local art community. In the wake of the exhibition's success the museum further organized a series of annual art shows, (also in the competition mode) in various genres, such as sculpture, painting and ink painting.¹⁵ These exhibitions became a forum for young emerging artists and a considerable stimulus for the creation of new, innovative works.¹⁶

The model of the competitive exhibition was in fact not a new one: as we have seen, it had been already in use during the Japanese period in the form of the *Teiten* and *Futen*, and of the National Art Exhibition held in Republican Mainland China; these were followed in the post-war era by the annual provincial art exhibitions and the National Art Exhibition. The merit of this system is definitely its openness, objectivity and equal opportunity for all participants. However, its operating procedures, including the selection process and the choice of the committee or jury members, have at times been questionable. A major drawback was (and is) the fact that artists selected into the exhibition are usually not further promoted by the museum or supported by the market, so that the artists' success often remains ephemeral.

2.1.3 The Private Sector and Alternative Spaces

The private sector was quick to take advantage both of economic growth and the founding of public museums. In particular, commercial galleries emerged in rapid succession. In Taipei, as the statistics show, galleries multiplied from around a mere 20 at first, to 68 in 1989, and no less than 195 in 1992.¹⁷ In the view of He Zhengguang, the publisher of *Yishujia* (Artist magazine),

wrapped in canvas and bound together, upon which regular monotonous short lines were applied. See Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1984. *Zhonghua Minguo xiandai huihua xin zhanwang 1984* [Contemporary Trends in Chinese Art, 1984]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. pp24-25. See John Clark. 1995 "Touch, Texture and Concept: Three Women Artists from Taiwan. In *Art Taiwan*. Jose, Nicholas & Yang Wen-I, eds. Sydney: G+B Arts International. pp82-85. Cai Hongming.1983. "Xinling yu caizhi de xiegou: Tsong Pu zuopin de caizhi yunyong " [A Rendezvous between Spirit and Matter: The use of Materials in the artworks of Tsong Pu]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 148, June, pp162-3.

- 15 In 1992, these exhibitions based on different genres were cancelled and replaced by the Taipei Biennial, which was at first locally oriented, but after 1996 adopted the mode of inviting guest curators and international artists. See Shi Ruiren. 1993. "Cong ermu dao xinling de yishu yindu: Taipei Shili Meishuguan shuangnian jingsaizhan zhi huigu yu qianzhan" [From Eyes and Ears to the Spirit: Retrospective and Perspectives of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum's Biennial Competition Exhibition]. In *Taipei xiandai meishu shinian* [Ten Years of Modern Art in Taipei]. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. Taipei: TFAM. pp37-56.
- 16 Major public exhibitions before the 80s were the *Provincial Art Exhibition* (annually) and the *National Art Exhibition* (irregularly). Rooted respectively in the prewar *Futen* (from 1927) and in its predecessor of the same name on the mainland (from 1929), both developed selecting procedures which became so rigid that in 1978, in the case of the *Provincial Art Exhibition*, "the middle-aged artists withdrew their participation." Being a new museum, on the other hand, was able to operate and organize its exhibitions independently. Quoted from Lai Chuanjian. 1978. "Bukan huishou hua Shengzhan" [Reviewing the Provincial Art Exhibition with Sadness]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, special issue on the *Provincial Art Exhibition*, 83, January, p101. See also in the same issue: Lin Qiulan. 1978. "Taizhan, Fuzhan, Shengzhan: lao huajia tan jinxi" [Taiten, Futen, and the Provincial Art Exhibition: Senior Painters Talk about Past and Present]. pp82-89 and "Xie Xiaode tan Shengzhan" [Xie Xiaode Talking about the Provincial Art Exhibition]. pp103-105. As regards the *National Art Exhibition*, see the special issue on the *National Art Exhibition*. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 111, May, pp88-100.
- 17 He Zhengguang. 1993. "Shinianlai Taipei meishu dongxiang yu meishuguan daoxiang" [The Direction of Museums and the Development of Art in Taipei in the last Decade]. In *Taipei xiandai meishu shinian*. p99. See also Xu Zigui. 1996. "Hualang yu Taiwan xiandai yishu de fazhan" [Galleries and the Development of Modern Taiwanese Art]. In *1945-1995 Taiwan xiandai meishu shengtai* [A Retrospective on Taiwan Modern Art Environment from 1945 to 1995]. Taipei: TFAM. pp97-114.

this swift emergence was "due to the establishment of cultural institutions like the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the Taiwan Museum of Art." He further remarked that "although in command of only limited funds (about ten or twenty million New Taiwan Dollars), they still have a symbolic and significant meaning. ... From the collection of works of the older generation to the works of young painters, the acquisition activities of the museums have kindled an interest in works of art among the general public."¹⁸

The gallerist Li Songfeng vividly describes the recent boom, remarking that in the decade from 1983 to 1993, the number of galleries in Taiwan multiplied by twenty, and their turnover increased from 100 million to 4 billion New Taiwan Dollars, which means there was a growth in art sales of forty times within only ten years.¹⁹ Under such favorable circumstances, the eventual arrival of the international auction houses in Taiwan (Sotheby's in 1992 and Christie's in 1994) was no surprise. With two auctions held annually, both firms gained considerable profits, primarily from the sale of works by members of the older generation of Taiwanese painters.²⁰

Seen superficially, the artistic infrastructure would seem to have improved in this period to such a degree that the artists should have enjoyed an environment unknown to previous generations. For several reasons, however, things did not in fact look quite as optimistic as this for younger artists. Even up till today, the public museums, bound by the principle of "equal treatment," have purchased works of a single artist only at great intervals and at a price much lower than the market price. Among the newly opened galleries, only a few concentrate on contemporary art. Moreover, ever since the ban on contacts with Mainland China was lifted in 1987, art from China, oil paintings, ink paintings, and, of course, antiques, are highly in favor with potent Taiwanese collectors. All this leaves only a small portion of the cake for contemporary artists. The few galleries which deserve to be mentioned as champions of new art are Lungmen Gallery, Hanart (Taipei) Gallery, Lin & Ken Gallery, Elegance Gallery, all in Taipei, and Pierre Gallery in Taichung; all of them, however, preferring painters to artists working in other techniques. The latter, whether creating installations, works in mixed media, or conceptual works, usually have to earn their living by other means, primarily by teaching in art schools.

With regard to the non-profit sector, the Dimension Endowment of Art, established in 1990 with funds from a private enterprise, deserves special mention. Apart from organizing curatorial and solo shows of an innovative character, the DEOA also has at its disposal a considerable budget for acquisitions, which has enabled it to build a fine collection of contemporary art over the past decade. Another part of its program is the promotion of art education and art criticism. In 1995, the foundation initiated the "DEOA Art Criticism Award," thus increasing public attention to art criticism and the role of the art critic. Finally, the DEOA is often entrusted with assignments by the public sector, organizing exhibitions, conducting research projects, or publishing books on art.²¹

18 He Zhengguang. 1993. p99.

19 See Liu Tainai. 1996. "Yazhou yishu shichang 'wei'ji sifu" [The Asian Art Market: Chance/Crises Everywhere]. In *Huaren yishu shichang* [The Chinese Art Market]. Taipei: Huangguan Congshu. p17. Li Songfeng, one of the most successful gallerists in Taiwan, even spoke about a "miracle" within the history of Taiwanese galleries during that decade.

20 In the three years between 1992 to 1994, Sotheby's auctioned off 70 % of its items offered in Taiwan. In summer of 1995 alone, 61% was sold with a total value of 34,000,000 NT Dollars (equal to 1,260,000 US Dollars). There are also Taiwanese auction houses such as Yijing, Chuanjia, and Biaogan. The first auction in Taiwan was launched in 1981 by the Tai Ji Gallery. See Liu Tainai. 1996. pp61-66.

21 In collaboration with Taipei County Culture Center, DEOA organized the ambitious exhibition *River: New Asian Art - A dialogue in Taipei* in 1997, which included eighteen artists from four countries and was exhibited in five different exhibition spaces. See Taipei County Culture Center, ed. 1997. *Heliu: xin yazhou yishu - Taipei*

In 1988 and 1989, two alternative spaces were founded solely on the basis of the participating artists' own initiative: Space II and IT Park.²² The intention of the artists running the two spaces, mostly returnees from study abroad, was to create a forum to meet, discuss, and, most importantly, to exhibit their works in public. Both located in Taipei, the two art spaces had clear artistic programs which focused on new and avant-garde art. Augmenting the limited exhibition opportunities provided by the public museums, they welcomed younger artists returning from abroad, thus helping to form a more energetic art scene in Taiwan. After Space II closed down in 1994, IT Park remained the only alternative space of its kind.²³ Being open as well as innovative, the space has become "an underground museum" that offers more progressive art than any public institution.²⁴

2.2 Around the Lifting of Martial Law

2.2.1 The Forging of Internationalism

With the economy booming and the elementary foundations of an artistic infrastructure laid out, at the beginning of the 1980s Taiwanese contemporary art entered a new era. In particular, the influx of current trends from the international art scene accelerated and became one of the major characteristics of the period.²⁵ Since the 70s, the latest news on international art had been regularly provided by two art magazines, the *Xiongshi meishu* (1971-1996) and *Yishujia* (also appearing monthly since 1975), which have continued to be the major sources in the field.²⁶ Significantly, at the end of the 70s, there was a considerable re-flux of artists of the modernist

duihua [River: New Asian Art - A dialog in Taipei]. Taipei County: Taipei County Culture Center. Huang Qianfang. 2000. "Jianzheng Taiwan dangdai yishu tuiyan: Dimen Yishu Jiaoyu Jijinhui jingying shinian chengji busu" [Witnessing the Change of the Contemporary Taiwan Art: Ten Years of DEOA]. In *Diancang yishu*, 88, January, pp158-161. However, as the author learned, DEOA has unfortunately limited its activities since 2003 due to financial difficulties.

- 22 See Huang Lijuan, ed. 1991. "Cong dangdai yishu dao tidai kongjian: zhanwang Taiwan xiandai yishu de fazhan" [From Contemporary Art to Alternative space: The Development of Taiwanese Modern Art and its Perspective]. In *Yishujia*, 199, December, pp300-309. SOCA, Studio of Contemporary Art, founded in 1986 by Lai Chunchun, a woman artist, and her friends, was another artist-run space open for new art. See "Meishuquan: Lai Chunchun zhuchi xiandai yishu gongzuoshi" [Art News: Lai Chunchun Opening the Studio of Contemporary Art]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 188, October, p38.
- 23 See Lien Te-cheng. 1994. "Yige tidai kongjian zhi si" [The Death of an Alternative Space]. In *Yishujia*, 233, October, pp241-242. See also Xu Zigui. 1996. pp97-114.
- 24 See Jiang Shuling. 2000. "Shiyan yishu, qie zhan qie da: Yitong Gongyuan yinjie xia yige shinian" [Experimental Art: Welcoming the Next Ten Years of IT Park]. In *Yishujia*, 297, February, pp212-215. Findlay, Ian. 1997. "Coming to Terms with Change" In *Asian Art News*, 7,1, Jan/Feb, pp54-5.
- 25 After individual travel abroad was permitted in 1979, direct contacts with Western art became much easier. As Guo Shaozong, an artist-writer, remarked: "Artists now can travel to America and Europe without being subject to the procedures for studying abroad. A tremendous amount of art information [now] flows in like a tide... Even on the streets of Taipei, people can purchase the latest international art magazines." Another channel, a private and more selective source of information, are slides of specific artworks sent back by artists studying abroad. See Guo Shaozong. 1990. "Baling niandai Taiwan meishu xianxiang de hengpo zongque" [Examining the Taiwanese Art in the 80s]. In *Dangdai huihua wenxuan 1945-1990*. Guo Jason, C., ed. rep. of *Xiandai meishu*, 28, February, p304. See also Su Xintian. 1983. "Zhuanxing zhong de xiandai yishu yundong" [The Modern Art Movement in Transition]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 151, September, pp152-153.
- 26 Both magazines cover a wide range of fields, from ancient art, primitive art, arts and crafts, calligraphy, cartoons, design, art markets, to contemporary art, locally and internationally. In particular, they offer an extensive overview of the diverse activities in the visual arts on the island since 1970.

movement who had left Taiwan in the 60s.²⁷ Later, at the beginning of the 80s, some of those who had left either China or Taiwan as early as the 40s made trips to Taiwan as well. Among them, Zao Wou Ki (1921 -) visited Taiwan between 1981 and 1983, and Lin Shouyu (1933 -) returned to Taiwan in 1981. As one of the most successful Chinese artists abroad, the Paris-based Zao Wou Ki and his lyrical abstraction were overwhelmingly received by the general public, while Lin Shouyu, a minimalist of Taiwanese extraction who had left for England shortly after the 2-28 incident, proved to be even more influential for the local artists.²⁸

Another important influx of international art came via artists of the younger generation who returned to Taiwan after staying abroad for typically three to five years. These young artists proved to be the main source of energy for bringing about a change in the artistic climate.²⁹ This wave of returning young artists grew significantly in the 80s and became a major force in forming an active artistic environment. Between 1984 and June 1987, artists returning from New York, Paris, Tokyo, Madrid, or Düsseldorf brought back styles such as (in the words of a local art critic) "neo-expressionism and conceptual art from the USA, minimalism and installation art from Japan, neo-Fauvism from France, COBRA expressionism from Belgium, performing art of social orientation from Germany, the search for textuality and materiality from Spain, the Memphis design concept from Italy."³⁰ Most of them obtained positions at the newly-established art academies and art departments. However, unlike their predecessors, they were active and strongly engaged in the local art scene. As the author quoted above also commented, the styles they brought back were "pieces of gems which [were going to have] an unpredictable impact on the Taiwanese art community."³¹

Thus, by the mid-80s, various forms of international art were finally present in Taiwan. Due to the respective choice of host country, school, and teacher, the "carriers" of international art trends hardly shared a common style. Yet the aura of novelty and internationalism surrounding

27 Liu Guosong and Xiao Qin, the protagonists of the Fifth Month Art Group and the Eastern Art Group, respectively, visited Taiwan in 1978. In the following years, other members of the two groups followed. As a climax, a joint exhibition of the two art groups was held at the Provincial Museum, Taipei, in June, 1981, as their 25th anniversary exhibition. See Editorial essay. 1982. "1981 meishu zongping" [A Critical Review of Fine Art in 1981]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 131, January, p123.

28 Zao Wou Ki went to Paris from China directly after the war and received international recognition in the sixties. Lin Shouyu Richard left Taiwan shortly after the war to live in England. After participating in the Documenta III, 1964, and twice at the Carnegie International Show, he became an artist of the Marlborough Gallery, London. Zao first visited Taiwan in August, 1981, and received tremendous public attention. In 1983, a major retrospective of his works was held at the National Museum of History, Taipei. Ever since Zao has regularly visited Taiwan and had his works presented by galleries. After Lin's return in 1981, only two solo shows were held in 1982 and 1995. His pursuit of "pure white painting" continues to be highly admired and praised by the local artistic circle. See Editorial essay. 1982. "Zao Wou Ki xuanfang" [The Vortex of Zao Wou Ki]. In "1981 meishu zongping" [A Critical Review of Fine Arts in 1981]. In: *Xiongshi meishu*, 131, January, p123. See Wang Xiuxiong. 1982. "Baise de meili yu zhenhan: Lin Shouyu yishu zhimei" [The Seductive and Shocking Power of the Color White: The Beauty of Lin Shouyu's Art]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 141, November, pp152-154.

29 The return of artists from abroad has always exerted a major impact on the art community. In the seventies, Xie Xiaode (who had stayed in Paris and New York for only one year) and Xu Kuncheng, both of them painters in the photo-realist style, returned from Paris in 1973 and 1976. Chen Shiming, returning from Spain in 1976, worked in the abstract manner. Xie Xiaode has taught at the Art Department of National Normal University ever since his return (see also chapter 1.3.3, note 46); Xu Kuncheng was an art professor at Chinese Culture University till 1995. Finally, Chen Shiming taught at National Art School, and later at the National Art Academy. Su Xintian & Chu Ge. 1980. "Ping Xu Kuncheng 'Beiyabian de yuzhou'" [Reviewing 'The Smashed Universe' by Xu Kuncheng]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 116, October, pp57-59. Liao Xuefang. 1980. "Chen Shiming tantao ziranjie de zhixu" [In Search for the Order of the Nature]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 109, March, pp97-99.

30 See Guo Shaozong. 1990. p305.

31 See Guo Shaozong. 1990. p305.

them gave them, at the initial stage, an advantage in terms of public attention over artists who were active only on the local scene. Interestingly enough, however, some of those local artists also made their connections with international art, notably the 101 Art Group (discussed below). In 1982 and 1983, three major articles written by expatriate artists or art historians reported on the latest international trend of the time, namely, the revival of easel painting. One article in particular, dealing with the Documenta VII curated by Rudi Fuchs, who was noted for his support of German Neo-Expressionism and the Italian Transavantgarde, had a considerable impact in Taiwan.³²

Apart from information provided through written sources, immediate visual experience was available following the inauguration of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, which was also open toward internationalism. It has to be kept in mind that previously there were only very few venues available for showing international art in Taiwan. The earliest major shows of Western art were mounted in the 70s, such as the *Exhibition of Famous Eastern and Western Painters* (1975) organized by the National Museum of History, and *Twentieth Century Spanish Paintings* (1978), a private initiative.³³ So it was only with the inauguration of the public museums after 1983 that the experience of directly viewing international art could be made with any regularity. The list of exhibitions in the TFAM shown before 1987, for instance, reflects the museum's wide programmatic range: among them were shows on German kinetic art, American fabric art, Dada, graphic works by Picasso, Christo's conceptual works, Video Art, the Bauhaus, Charles Moore, and COBRA, to mention only a few.

The arrival of internationalism, as already seen, took place through different channels and various modes of reception. Among the many forms of artistic expression, post-minimalism and

32 This extensive report, written by Chen Chuanxing, a semiologist studying in Paris, was published in 1983 in seven installments. "Di qijie wenjian dazhan: Cong qianwei dao chaoqianwei" [From Avant-garde to Transavantgarde: Documenta VII]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 143, January, pp44-80; 147, May, pp93-102; 148, June, pp101-109; 149, July, 81-88; 150, August, pp63-73; 151, September, pp85-92; 152, October, pp59-63. It not only documented the latest international trend of figurative painting, but furnished an in-depth commentary and analysis. The section on painting was extensively studied by young local artists, especially by three members of the 101 Art Group. The other two important articles were Chen Yingde. 1983. "Bashi niandai de xinziyou xingxiang huihua" [New Figurative Painting in the 80s]. In *Yishujia*, 92, January, pp76-91 and Li Yu. 1983. "Women qidai yijiu: Ouzhou xinhuifua de chuxian" [Long Expected: The Emergence of European New Painting]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 149, July, pp76-77. John Clark's assumption that the 101 Art Group could have acquired knowledge of these trends "possibly through the Japanese art magazine *Bijutsu Techo*" is therefore unfounded. (Clark, John. 1993. "Taipei Modernism in the 1980s." In *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*. Turner, Caroline, ed. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. p154.) As we have seen, Guo Shaozong remarked as early as the beginning of the 80s that "even on the streets of Taipei, people can purchase the latest international art magazines." (see note 25) Japanese art magazines, by contrast, were hardly important sources of information.

33 The first international show launched in Taiwan was *Masterpieces of Western Art* (1950), organized by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the French Ministry of Culture. However, the exhibits in the show were only reproductions. The *Exhibition of Famous Eastern and Western Painters* (1975) included over one hundred original works by 23 European artists, from Corot, Millet, Courbet, Picasso, Matisse, and Miro, to Dali, as well as three masters of ink painting: Chang Daqian, Pu Xinyu and Huang Junbi. More than eighty late works of Picasso were one of the main attractions of the exhibition. (Interestingly, in the 1950 exhibition, Picasso's communist background had prevented his works from being shown in Taiwan.) See Ni Zaiqin. 1995. *Yishujia - Taiwan meishu: xishuo cong tou ershinian* [Artist Magazine - Taiwan Art: Looking Back on Twenty Years of History]. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe. pp13-15. The third major international show, *Twentieth-Century Spanish Paintings* (1978), the first one to be organized and funded by the private sector, was thematically more focused, comprising 125 paintings by 87 artists. Stylistically, it ranged from cubism, surrealism, Dada, and abstraction to arte povera and photo-realism, which "came as a shock to local art circles still confined in Impressionist or Fauvist styles." See Ni Zaiqin. 1995. pp45-46.

abstraction clearly commanded the central heights of the terrain. The reflux of protagonists of the Modern Movement consisted mainly of abstract artists. Zao Wou Ki and Lin Shouyu, too, concentrated on either abstract art or minimalism; they were, so to speak, working on different fronts of abstraction. The Taipei museum's first major competitive exhibition *Contemporary Trends in Chinese Painting*, mentioned previously, awarded its major prizes to abstract works as well.³⁴ Among the jury, we detect the presence of Li Zhongsheng, the mentor of the Eastern Art Group, founded in 1957. In the eyes of the local art community, a connection was established between the latest trends in abstraction and the earlier modernist movement. Unfortunately, Li Zhongsheng died only two months later. However, within less than one month after his death a group of young abstract artists held an exhibition whose title *Alien Space* was apparently based on a concept originating from Li's artistic ideas.³⁵ Moreover, major artists such as Zhuang Pu, Lai Chunchun (1953 -), and Zhang Yongcun (1957 -) became active promoters of international art in Taiwan. The two art groups devoted to these trends already discussed above were founded after this development, among them the notable alternative space IT Park in 1988. Until then, the artists mentioned had frequently participated in innovative shows held by the museums, among them *Avant-garde, Installation, and Space* (1985), and *Behavior and Space* (1987).

2.2.2 The Trappings of Self-Censorship

By 1987 the Taiwanese art scene had transformed itself into an active artistic environment characterized by an increasing influx of international art and the inauguration of public museums. However, beneath this newly built structure, the general mode of artistic creation was in fact less progressive and critical than the efforts made, for instance, in the fields of new Taiwanese cinema, literature, theater, or dance. A short look at the regulations for participating works set by the 11th National Art Exhibition in 1986 reveals the official perception of the visual arts and the authorities' expectations. "The subject matter of the exhibits," they stated, "should be in accordance with national policy and promote traditional culture and the spirit of our age."³⁶

A similar impression is provided by a paper published in 1991 by the art historian Xiao Qiongrui. In an extensive statistical survey which attempted to determine the effect of the lifting of martial

34 See note 13.

35 Li Zhongsheng died on the 21, July, 1984; the exhibition ran from August 17 through 26. In the panel discussion held earlier, neither Li Zhongsheng's ideas nor a connection of the show to himself were mentioned. However, in October of the same year, another panel discussion was held by the *Xiongshi meishu* magazine and hosted by its Publisher Li Xianwen, in which one art critic expressed the opinion that the title of the exhibition was adopted from "a talk of Li Zhongsheng given about ten years ago." Zhang Jialong, ed. 1984. "Cong Li Zhongsheng dao Yidu kungjian zhan: tan Zhongguo xiandai huihua de tuozhan" [From Li Zhongsheng to the Exhibition Alien Space: Panel Discussion on the Development of Chinese Modern Paintings]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 164, October, p64. Among the eight exhibiting artists only two, Chen Xingwan and Cheng Yanping, have been closely associated with Li Zhongsheng. More interestingly, another leading figure, Lin Shouyu, the newly returned and highly regarded geo-abstract artist, was present at the group show, too. See also Qiu Lili, ed. 1984. "Yidu Kongjian: Kongjian de zhuti, secai de bianzhou zuotan" [Alien Space: Panel Discussion on Space as Subject Matter and Color Transformation]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 162, August, pp141-143.

36 See 1986. "Zhonghua Minguo de shiyijie quanguo meishu zhanlanhui shishi yaodian" [Guidelines of the 11th National Art Exhibition, ROC]. In *Zhonghua Minguo de shiyijie quanguo meishu zhanlanhui* [The 11th National Art Exhibition, ROC]. Guoli Taiwan Yishu Jiaoyuguan (National Taiwan Arts Education Institute), ed. Taipei: Guoli Taiwan Yishu Jiaoyuguan. In this context it is interesting to look at the concept of the first art exhibition of the TFAM in 1984, "to sort out the current isolated and rather confused modern art and to provide a clear and succinct picture." See TFAM, ed. *Contemporary Trends in Chinese Art*, 1984. p3.

law on artistic activities, the author examined art exhibitions held between July 1983 and June 1991 reported on by the two main art magazines, *Xiongshi meishu* and *Yishujia*. While the total number of art shows doubled in the period after the lifting of martial law, the author found them to be less influenced by the political changes than by "the mechanisms of economic factors."³⁷ Xiao then concluded that "as a whole, the lifting of martial law did not, as far as the choice of subject matter is concerned, result in changes of a considerable degree."³⁸

Also at the same time, the art publicist Chen Chuanxing commented on the impact of the lifting of martial law on the art community, as reflected at the psychological level. He remarked that seen against the background of the rapid social and political changes "artistic creativity was extremely conservative and dispirited... and its 'marginality' became even more evident." In his critical comments published in the wake of the decisive events, he further observed that "this marginal area was filled with a feeling of wariness and suspicion. All kinds of social and political changes were like the distant thunder from a remote city. Its rumbling sound and lightening both attracted and frightened them. While fearing to be struck down by a flash of lightning, they were at the same time longing for the drought to be ended by gushes of rain brought about by the thunderstorm."³⁹

The ambivalence described above was nothing but the result of the long period of repression under the authoritarian regime of the KMT. It has to be remembered that up till then the only period when Taiwan had seen some form of social criticism had been abruptly terminated by the crackdown following the 2-28 incident of 1947. No art works created since then had ever ventured beyond the social and political framework set by the KMT. In the 1970s, the Nativist movement drew the attention to the Taiwanese reality as artistic subject matter, yet no critical voices concerning social and political issues were articulated. Remnants of this repressed mentality are to be found in several incidents which took place at public institutions in the 80s.

In one instance, a red-colored, abstract outdoor sculpture commissioned by the museum for its inauguration, created by Li Zaiqian (1928 -), a minimalist artist, and appropriately entitled *Endless Minimalism* (Dixian de wuxian, 低限的無限), had been suddenly repainted in silver without informing the artist. The move had been triggered by a patriotic war veteran who wrote a letter to the Presidential Office indicating that the elements of the piece, if seen from a specific angle, formed the five-pointed communist star. In 1986, after one year's negotiation, the sculpture was finally restored to its original color. The magazine *Xiongshi meishu* rightly commented: "The authorities ... did not order to the museum to retract Li Zaijian's *Endless Minimalism* or to change the color of the work. They only demanded the matter to be 'handled appropriately.' The over-reaction [of the museum] can be regarded as an exemplification of the fact that people still live under the shadow of the 'horror of the red'."⁴⁰

Another incident which took place in 1986 also exposed the limits of free artistic creation, the prevailing censorship and the existence of another tabooed area besides communism. This was

37 Xiao Qiongrui. 1992. "Jieyan qianhou Taiwan diqu meishu chuanguo zhuti de bianqian: cong Xiongshi yu Yishujia liang zazhi de huazhan baodao suozuo de fenxi" [The Transformation of the Subject Matters in Taiwanese Region Before and After the Lifting of the Martial Law: An Analysis Based on the Exhibition Reports in Xiongshi meishu and Yishujia Magazines]. Symposium paper. In *Zhonghua Minguo meishu sichao yantaohui* [Artistic Trends in the ROC]. Taipei: TFAM. p149.

38 Xiao Qiongrui. 1992.p182.

39 Chen Chuanxing. 1988. "Baqinian Taiwan meishu xianxiang de gansi yu pingyi" [Thoughts and Comments on Artistic Phenomena in Taiwan in 1987]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 203, January, p36.

40 See Editorial essay. 1987. "1986 meishu huodong de xingsi" [Contemplating and Self-examining of the Activities of Fine Arts, 1986]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 191, January, p25.

the performance *Non-rope* (Feixian, 非線) by Li Mingsheng (1952 -), a photographer who had turned to performance art in 1983. Over a span of three days, the artist planned to pull a rope from his studio to the Taipei museum, thereby "symbolizing the relationship between a baby and his mother."⁴¹ After the announcement of his plan and on the day he was to begin with the performance, February 26, Li Mingsheng was confined to his home by the police for half a day, so that the work could not proceed. Two facts had attracted the attention of the police: the date chosen for the last day of the performance was to be February 28, the anniversary of the 2-28 incident, and, secondly, its title: *Non-rope (feixian)* is homophonic in Chinese with the term for "connections with communists."

Not surprisingly, however, all this was a misunderstanding. According to the artist, the performance was not at all political. Inspired as he was by the wrapping works of Christo, what he intended was an outdoor piece, an "environmental sculpture," and his choice of the date was due to matters of publicity: that year, the 28th of February fell on a Sunday, when the highest number of visitors was to be expected at the museum in front of which the last part of the performance was scheduled to take place. As to the term "non-rope," he explained that, literally, the word "non" means "unusual" or a negation, and that "non-rope" simply means "a different kind of rope."⁴²

Involuntarily, as it seems, Li Mingsheng's work had touched upon the two most sensitive political topics: the 2-28 incident and communism. While in his case the work provoked a police action, only a few years later, in 1992, the 2-28 incident was finally officially acknowledged. An independent museum dedicated to its documentation was inaugurated, and a park in the center of Taipei was renamed after it. From 1996 to 1999, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum held annual commemorative exhibitions. The artist remarked on the 1986 incident: "I had never thought I would be subject to investigation and police supervision. I was trembling the whole day. Afterwards, while creating new works, I was often afraid that the same thing could happen again."⁴³

In addition to the ban on everything that could even be remotely associated with communism and the 2-28 incident, there was also censorship on nudity and on allusions to funeral rites. One such incident took place at the exhibition gallery of the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in 1982. Seven works showing nudes, all paintings or sculptures by artists of the older generation, were banned for violating the "sacredness and dignity" of the place.⁴⁴ This case is interesting insofar as behind the exhibition there was no private or commercial organizer, but instead the newly-established Council for Cultural Planning and Development, the highest national agency for cultural affairs. Another institution which intervened with an exhibition on their own premises was, quite surprisingly, the American Cultural Center (ACC) in Taipei. When the

41 Wu Mali. 1988. "Li Mingsheng: 1952 nian sheng, Meinongren" [Li Mingsheng, Born 1952 in Meinong]. In *Yishujia*, 152, January, p232. Altogether five policemen arrived at Li's home at six o'clock in the morning and stayed until three o'clock in the afternoon, so that Li could not leave his home. "They tried to persuade me either to change the title or the date. I stubbornly refused because the announcement had been published in the newspapers." p232.

42 Wu Mali. 1988. p232.

43 Wu Mali. 1988. p232. The artist was one of the first performing artists in Taiwan. Over fifteen performances were conducted between 1983 and 1992. Li was also the first Taiwanese artist to be invited to participate in the Aperto, Venice Biennial, in 1993. See also Wang Fudong. 1993. "Zailai yige bu ye meiguanxi: Li Mingsheng de zhanyan yishu" [It Doesn't Matter to Break Another Wind: Li Mingsheng's Performing Art]. In *Taiwan xinchengdai meishu xunli* [An Overview of the New Generation of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huangguan Wenxue. pp168-174.

44 See Editorial news. 1983. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 144, February, p20.

young artist Chen Jieren (1960 -) mounted an installation there in 1984, turning the space into an area "resembling a funeral hall," the ACC terminated the show, on the grounds that it was "too religious and implied death."⁴⁵ The exhibition lasted only one day.

2.2.3 The Suffering Mind and Body

It is evident that before 1987 the cases of "repression" mentioned above were far from targeting protest art or works which actually consciously challenged the power of the authorities. There were, however, exceptions to the generally non-rebellious stance of the art world: Two artistic directions represented by a handful of artists, more or less marginalized at the time, vividly expressed their state of mind and their political views during this last moment of confinement. One was the disclosure of the repressed existence of human beings, the other one was a kind of implicit political protest launched under disguise.

The young artist just mentioned, Chen Jieren, created several compelling works before 1987. In his solo show of 1984, he disclosed the neglected problems of young drug addicts, of helpless handicapped children, and of children skipping school. Social problems such as corruption, prostitution, and rape were also addressed. On one canvas, a historical treaty was written.⁴⁶ In another performance piece of 1983, he and a friend created a symbolic work on the actual confinement of their living conditions. One day they appeared on a bustling street of Taipei, uniformly dressed in long pants and white T-shirts, walking in line one after the other with their hands on the shoulder of the one in front of them, like blind men, for they wore bags over their heads. Then this disciplined group suddenly dissolved, as each of them began to move, to jump, to yell, to kneel, or to mourn, releasing their inner energy into individual acting. All this resulted in highly disharmonious and disordered movements, as suggested by the title of the work, *Losing Function No 3* (Jineng sangshi no 3, 機能喪失 3). Chen Jieren's performances often reached the verge of physical and mental exhaustion. During one three-month performance, he publicly slaughtered a pigeon, whose blood gushed onto his face. Chen finally suffered a breakdown. "While the lifting of martial law liberated the society," he later said, "I, on the contrary, completely burned out."⁴⁷

Sharing the same sensibility but working in a different genre, that of easel painting, Yang

45 The ACC was the only space offered to young artists to exhibit prior to the opening of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Chen Jieren later said, "I was furious about the Americans, who thought that contemporary art can only be done by the Americans, but not by us." See Li Weijing. 1999. "Lian shi wo yisheng de ditu: Chen Jieren" [The Face is the Map of My Life: Chen Jieren]. In *Yishujia*, 293, October, p452.

46 See Xiao Shuoju. 1984. "Meiyou kaishi ye meiyou jieshu: Chen Jieren Kaobai erwu zhan" [Neither Beginning Nor End: Chen Jieren's Exhibition Confession of 25]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 164, October, pp 162-163. Chen was a member of the Xi Rang art group as well. With the group name Xi Rang, a term taken from the earliest Chinese account of mythological geography, the Shanhaijing, and connoting "the everlasting soil," its members rendered the marginal existence of the mutilated bodies of human beings. The group mainly consisted of four young art school graduates and held two interesting shows in April 1986 and October 1988. Among them, Chen Jieren became one of the first performance artists in 1983, Lin Ju then turned from performance to painting, Wang Junjie, a third artist, went to Berlin, Germany, afterwards and worked on video installations. In 1996, the art group re-emerged, and it held another group show in 1999. See Xi Rang. 1986. *Xi Rang*. Exhibition Pamphlet (unpublished). 1999. *Living Clay 5*. Exhibition catalog. Taipei: Lin & Ken Gallery.

47 Chen did not start to work again until 1995. His latest laser print photographs entitled *Revolt of Soul and Body* (Hunpo baoluan, 魂魄暴亂), pictures of historical massacres with his own image replacing both victims and murderers, made him the most coveted Taiwanese artist in several international biennials. See Li Weijing. 1999, p452.

Mao-lin (1953 -) and Wu Tianzhang (1956 -), two members of the 101 Art Group, also took a critical approach toward the current state of affairs.⁴⁸ Juxtaposing various disconnected figures, Wu Tianzhang concentrated on the condition of the human body, depicting it as apparently victimized or tortured. Forming shocking scenes, Wu's figures, struggling, falling down or in need of urgent help, are unrecognizable as individuals. His series *A Symptom of the 'Syndromes of the World Injury' I* (Shanghai shijie zhenghouqun I, 傷害世界症候群) testifies to a horrible world full of powerless, injured, and wounded human beings, a world associated with death. Also dealing with struggle and conflict, Yang Mao-lin's works of the time were more explicit, insofar as they depicted mythological figures and narratives, but they did so decisively from the loser's perspective. Political implications are obvious, as they were created at a time when continuous conflicts between the KMT and the opposition force took place. (See a detailed discussion on Yang Mao-lin in chapter 3.1).

In short, these two artists of the 101 Art Group both expressed their views on current issues of society by means of implication and juxtaposition. As mentioned earlier, the group received decisive impulses and ideas from the international New Painting movement. After absorbing information on this latest trend around 1983 and 1984, both artists bid farewell to their earlier style and, as Wu Tianzhang remarked, "left the critique of the alienated human character behind," as expressed in their former "composite style mixing hard edge and photo realism." Yang Mao-lin acknowledged at the time that the possibility of a "regional language," the "re-reading of history" and "the appropriation of styles" are three major points of inspiration received from the Italian Transavantgarde.⁴⁹ He, too, like Wu Tianzhang, favored a "cold and clean style" before coming in contact with recent international movements. Years later, in 1992, the members of the 101 Art Group again acknowledged the conceptual and technical inspiration gained especially from international trends, described as an "important revelation" that helped to "establish self-confidence."⁵⁰

48 The 101 Art Group (1982-1991) had three major members: Lu Yizhong, Yang Mao-lin, and Wu Tianzhang, all of whom were oil painters and graduates of the Fine Art Dept., Chinese Culture University. Holding a total of seven group exhibitions, it positioned itself firmly among Taiwan's progressive art groups. Most interesting was their stylistical change around 1984, moving from a photo-realistic style depicting the alienated urban scenery to metaphorical or mythological renderings inspired by the latest international New Painting styles (for more information see my discussion on Yang Mao-lin in chapter 3.1). See also Panel discussion. 1983. "Chuandi zhong de zeren: 101 xiandai yishuqun zuotan" [Responsibility in Transmission: A Panel Discussion on the 101 Art Group]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 147, May, pp103-105. Su Xintian. 1983. pp152-153. Lu Yizhong. 1991. "101 de shinian" [Ten Years of the 101 Art Group]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 243, May, pp194-195. Lin Xingyue. 1997. "Xingchao, shichang, zhengzhi" [New Wave, Market, and Politics]. In *Duyue jintao hailang de Taiwan meishu* [To Tide over a Chopping Environment of Art in Taiwan]. rep. *Yishujia* (June, 1990). Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe. pp134-150.

49 In 1992, when the Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva visited Taiwan, *Xiongshi meishu* magazine dedicated an extensive special issue to the Transavantgarde for the occasion. Yang Mao-lin was interviewed and acknowledged the inspiration received from the Transavantgarde theory. See Lin Yuxiang. 1992. "Taiwan meishu chuanguozhe he chaoxianwei de guanxi" [The Relation between Transavantgarde and the Taiwanese artists]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 258, August, p60. Wu Tianzhang was interviewed, too. He said: "What was worthy of adaptation within the nomadic character of the Transavantgarde and served as a good connecting point for the 101 Art Group at the time were an aesthetic emphasis focusing on symbols, metaphors, and irony." (Lin Yuxiang. 1992. p64.) However, apart from the Italian Transavantgarde, other recent international painting styles were also important. In 1985, the 101 Art Group itself published an article introducing these latest trends, including Italian Transavantgarde, German Neo-expressionism, American New Painting and French New Figurative. See Yang Mao-lin & Lu Yizhong. 1985. "Shidai de sichao: sichao zhongde shidai" [The Trend of the Time: the Time in Trends]. In *Yishujia*, 122, June, pp196-201.

50 See Lin Yuxiang. 1992. p60.

A number of individual works created before 1988 remain to be mentioned here. One is *The Silent Body*, an interesting video installation by Lu Mingde (1950 -) and Guo Yifan (1951 -), graduates from the Department of Fine Arts, National Tsukuba University, Japan. Combining music, video images, and slide projections, the work showed dislocated and fragmented human bodies responding to "the change of social consciousness and to the concept of the environment."⁵¹ In a dark space, the bodies mysteriously appeared in multiple folds, providing the audience with a strong intrinsic sense of the fragmentation of human existence into disjoint parts. Another piece is the feminist work *Lips* (Chun, 唇), by Chen Xingwan.⁵² The female sexual organ is rendered here in two parts: four plastic works in the form of shells on stands indicate the labia, one immensely huge wall piece the vagina. This explicit and direct work dealing with female sexuality can be regarded as one of the first examples of feminist art prior to the beginning of the Taiwanese feminist movement launched in 1990. In the same exhibition where *Lips* was first shown, *Media, Installation and Environment*, there was another interesting piece, created by Wu Mali (1957 -), a woman artist who had only recently returned from study at the *Kunstakademie* in Duesseldorf. In this remake of her *Time and Space*, (Shijian kongjian, 時間空間) first shown in 1985 in her solo show at the Shen Yu Gallery, Taipei, she aptly blended modes of expression current in the West with social issues of local importance. Made up of a huge amount of crumpled newspapers filling the exhibition space from ground to ceiling, her installation work *Time and Space* was a fine piece of social criticism, perhaps triggered by the control of the media by the KMT Government (See a detailed discussion of the artist in chapter 4.2).

2.3 After the Lifting of Martial Law

2.3.1 The Advent of Political and Social Criticism

Around 1989, artistic creativity had finally broken its silence and was ready to make powerfully radical works. With a steady growth of artists coming back from abroad, far-reaching political reforms in the making, and a society in the midst of feverish change, artists started to respond and react energetically. In Autumn of 1988, IT Park was established, consisting of six members, most of them returnees from Europe or Japan. The other group, Space II, founded in August 1989, consisted of a total of twenty-three artists, who, significantly, had mainly returned from the USA.⁵³ Yet "the first artist to break political taboos after the lifting of martial law"⁵⁴ was the figurative painter Wu Tianzhang mentioned above, a native Taiwanese and member of the 101 Art Group.

In April 1989, Wu Tianzhang exhibited portraits of the late president Chiang Ching-kuo which attracted an extraordinary degree of public attention. In a series of five portraits, Wu depicted the

51 See 1987. *Jixing yishu zhan: Shiyan yishu - xingwei yu kongjian zhan* [Improvisational Art Show: Experimental Art – Action and Space]. Exhibition catalog. Taipei: TFAM. pp. 62-63. See also Yang Min. 1988. "Meiti yu zhuangzhi: Lu Mingde, Kuo Yifen zhuangdezhan" [Media and Installation: Exhibition of Lu Mingde and Kuo Yifan]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 203, January, p158. Wang Zhexiong. 1990. "Yixieshi meiti, meitishi yixie: ping Lu Mingde fuhe meiti yishu" [Everything is Media, Media is Everything: Review on the Mixed Media Art of Lu Mingde]. In *Yanhuang yishu*, 10, June, pp21-23.

52 For a reproduction of the work see Guo Shaozong. 1990. p314.

53 See notes 22-24.

54 Ni Zaiqin. 1995. p156.

former head of state in five different periods according to five major stages of his life. Most strikingly, these portraits, entitled *The Rule of Chiang Ching-kuo* (Guanyu Chiang Ching-kuo de shidai, 關於蔣經國的時代) and measuring 220 x 220 cm each, were no patriotic renderings of its subject but a rather unsympathetic political analysis. Based on Chiang's biography, they are intrinsic physiognomic depictions of the leader which represent him, particularly in those stages when Chiang was head of the National Security Bureau and the Defense Ministry, as a most frightening, ruthless, and unscrupulous personality. This act of de-mythologizing a national leader inevitably questioned the orthodox representation of the "great leader" and forced the audience "to take a closer look at and to re-evaluate who Chiang Ching-kuo really was."⁵⁵

In his earlier works around 1985, as mentioned above, Wu Tianzhang had depicted victimized and wounded human beings, making use of pictorial formulas stemming from recent trends in Western painting. The portraits he now created, concentrating on a figure of contemporary history who had died only a year before, testified to the latest shift in the political climate. Although the series was closer to a documentation than to a deliberate distortion of Chiang's image, we are reminded of a "re-reading of history", presumably inspired by German Neo-Expressionism which had been appropriated by the 101 Art Group. For in the following year, Wu expanded his series *The Rule of Chiang Ching-kuo* into a whole body of works entitled *Historical Icons* (Shixue tuxiang, 史學圖像) which included images of Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, representing, together with Chiang Ching-kuo, "the four rulers who determined the fate of the Chinese during this century."⁵⁶

Around the decisive year 1987, Yang Mao-lin, Wu Tianzhang's friend and co-member of the 101 Art Group, created his series *Behavior of Game Playing: Fighting Section* (Youxi xingwei: douzheng pian, 遊戲行爲: 鬥爭篇). Inspired by scandalous scenes of physical conflict in the Legislative Yuan (parliament), Yang Mao-lin depicted fighting figures in close-up, concentrating on the powerful movement of grotesquely enlarged clenched fists. Although inspired by actual events, the artist chose a way of representation which de-individualized the protagonists and rendered them in a cartoon-like style. "Political painting," Yang remarked, "is very difficult to do. ... If it is to be critical, it must be full of emotions. If it is to be harsh, it must be sincere and kind. ... Otherwise it will turn out to be propaganda painting or illustration."⁵⁷

While Yang Mao-lin was cautious about political paintings, the genre soon became widespread in other artistic media. Shortly after the creation of the Chiang Ching-kuo portraits, an exhibition took place which was exclusively dedicated to a single political event, the so-called 5-20 incident. This demonstration of farmers protesting against the government's consent to fruit and vegetable imports from the USA on the 20th of May, 1988 turned into a severe clash between farmers and the police, with more than a hundred people injured and many demonstrators arrested.⁵⁸ The improper handling of the case on the side of the government inspired further protests by university professors and students.

One year later, in 1989, a commemorative show initiated by a DPP member of parliament was held, in which five visual artists participated on their own initiative. Among them was the above-mentioned artist Wu Mali, whose contribution, consisting of a wall piece and a floor piece,

55 Ni Zaiqin. 1995. p156. See also Yao Jiang. 1990. "Zai lishi langchao zhong fangun: Wu Tianzhang shixue tuxiang de sige shidai" [Riding the Tide of History: Four Eras of Wu Tianzhang's Historical Icons]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 235, September, pp159-161. See also note 48.

56 Interview with the artist on 30, April, 1994, while preparing *Art Taiwan*, a touring exhibition in Australia.

57 Lin Xingyue. 1997. p144.

58 See *Zhongguo shibao*. 1995. p409.

combined photographs of earlier bloody conflicts to form a tank, while a small mound of broken brick pieces in front of it symbolized the scene "after the violence." Although the reaction of the press was hardly enthusiastic,⁵⁹ for Wu Mali personally, as well as later for other artists, this involvement in political activities marked a turning point in their development. In the following year, she and three other artists who had participated in the commemorative exhibition formed a group called Taiwan Document Room (TDR), which voiced even stronger political criticism. Between 1990 and 1991, the creation of works expressing political criticism in Taiwan reached a first peak. Prominent among them were two group shows of TDR, the first of which, dedicated, with irony, to the inauguration of the re-elected President Lee Teng-hui on 20th May 1990, explicitly lampooned political authorities past and present and ridiculed slogans or national symbols. The audience was, for instance, confronted with a gradually decaying cake in form of the national flag, with small mechanical toy animals dancing amid the characters "Movement of patriotism," with the constitution and the law code turned into toilet utensils, thus "finally" ready to be used, or with the portraits of three presidents (Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, and Lee Teng-hui), including the incumbent, to be worshipped in a dark room. In their second exhibition held in January 1991, the emphasis shifted from political to a number of social issues. Thirteen artists now participated in the show, criticizing topics like money worship, human greed and desires, the disastrous state of the environment, and, last but not least, the tendency to commercialize art.⁶⁰

Artistic creation in response to urgent social or political events had by now become a new direction for many artists. Centering around a core of three artists, Wu Mali, Lien Te-cheng (1953 -), and Hou Chun-ming (1963 -), TDR clearly reflected the eagerness of the artists to participate in the social and political debate. However, this artistic engagement also involved the adoption of new art forms, such as objects, collage, ready-mades, and installations. The spirit of the group was described by its members as "the wish to cultivate and to shape an art which is relating to or belonging to Taiwan and whose form is not unrealistic and weak but lively and real... [as well as] to make more people, both creative artists and the audience, become aware of the existence of this kind of art form."⁶¹

In 1991, Space II held one of their most interesting shows. As the first experimental exhibition initiated by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, *Apartment* included works of all its fourteen members. Without being subordinated to any given concept, the artists were given separate spaces of equal size in which each was to create an "apartment" of his or her own. In accordance with the basic concepts on which the group had been founded, the results reflected each artist's individuality. Closely associated with existing social circumstances, these works encompassed (in the respective artists' highly subjective interpretation) spaces as diverse as a Zen meditation room, a kitchen, a private home, a dormitory, a shop, a prostitute's room, a place of worship, a study, and a gallery. Receiving much public attention, this show demonstrated well what was possible in an atmosphere of pluralist and social approaches.⁶²

59 Li Yulin. 1990. "520 yishu shijian" [5-20 Art Practice]. In *Lianhe wanbao*. 21, May.

60 Chen Meimao. 1990. "Daolan Dibaren Jiang Zongtong jiuzhi wenyi meizhan: Cong tizhi de fanpan dao xingzhi de fanpan" [A Guide Through the Exhibition in Commemoration of the Inauguration of President Chiang on his Eighth Term: From Institutional to Formalistic Rebellion]. In *Zili zaobao*, 04, June. Cao Yunyi. 1991. "Guaili luanshen zhan bianchi Taiwan renwen shengtai" [Exhibition with Bizarre Goats Whipping the Taiwanese Living Environment]. In *Lianhebao*. 12, Jan.

61 Gao Yi. 1990. "Ganzaidian li kuhan ziyou: Taiwan Dang'anshi de yishu chuangzuoqun" [A Cry for Freedom at the Ganzaidian: The Artists of Taiwan Documentary Room]. In *Minjin zhoukan*, 171, p37.

62 See Huang Haiming. 1991. "Tan qianwei yu shiyan zhan: Gongyu 1991" [Discussing the Avant-garde and

2.3.2 In Search for a Taiwanese Identity

By the beginning of the 1990s the rise of a "Taiwanese consciousness," as first witnessed in the Nativist movement in the mid-70s, had intensified considerably and become a major political issue. A decisive factor was the authoritarian regime of the KMT, now considered a foreign rule, which subsequently initiated a shift in the perception of national identity from the Chinese to an indigenous Taiwanese culture. In the domain of visual art, this shift is reflected in at least three different areas: changes in the titles of exhibitions, the debate on Taiwanese consciousness, and, no less important, artistic creations focusing on the issue of cultural identity.

Long proclaimed "the last bastion of Chinese culture" or "the seat of the only legitimate Chinese government" by the KMT, Taiwan first came to see a change in terminology around the mid-80s, when the term "China" was increasingly replaced by "Republic of China." Inconspicuous as this may seem, it already indicated a shift towards a new Taiwanese awareness. To name just a few examples from the area of visual arts: In 1984, the first competition exhibition held by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum was still entitled *Contemporary Trends in Chinese Art*. Two years later, in 1986, the title of the same exhibition had been changed to *Contemporary Art Trends in the Republic of China*. In 1990, the Taipei museum, in the second installment of an exhibition series whose forerunner had been named *China - Paris: A Retrospective of the Artists in France*, also abandoned the term "China" and entitled the show *Taipei - New York: The Encounter of Modern Art*. The time was finally ready to admit the term "Taiwan" (or, a little less sensitive, "Taipei") instead of "Republic of China" or even "China" into both private and official contexts.⁶³

This unprecedented shift of national identity certainly left a strong imprint on the works of many visual artists. However, the new orientation was expressed in a complex form, which emphasized critique rather than nationalist affirmation. The Taiwan Documentary Room mentioned previously, for instance, demonstratively announced their Taiwanese awareness by the intention to begin to collect "files on cultural, political and historical phenomena of the Taiwanese society," or to "sort out, examine, and document current events in Taiwanese society," by means of "a more rebellious artistic form."⁶⁴ In the case of the 101 Art Group, we witness quite an interesting transformation. Their pursuit of artistic languages led them to international new painting, but also to ancient images and mythological subjects from the Chinese tradition. The works of Wu Tianzhang, the first artist to "break the political taboo," reflect a characteristically mixed attitude toward China. In particular, his series *Historical Icons* mentioned above, which depict the four most influential dictators of twentieth-century Chinese history, was characterized by the artist himself as possessing "uniquely Chinese cultural features," while one critic wrote in 1992: "I would rather say that the *Historical Icons* originated from 'uniquely Taiwanese cultural features,' because Wu Tianzhang did not live in the times he depicted, nor does he live on the other side of the Taiwan Straits."⁶⁵

The idea of stressing one's "place of birth," the judgement on whether a work reflects the locality of Taiwan according to its subject matter, as expressed by the art critic quoted above, was soon to become the focus of a fierce debate among local art critics and artists. Launched by *Xiongshi meishu* in April 1991, the debate, which lasted for twenty-two months, was inflamed by the

Experimental Exhibition: Apartment 1991]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 244, June, p196.

63 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1993. pp163-179.

64 Gao Yi. 1990. p36.

65 Wang Fudong. 1993. p40.

article "Western Art Made in Taiwan" written by the artist and art critic Ni Zaiqin.⁶⁶ At the core of Ni's controversial article was the definition of the nature of Taiwanese art as a pure recipient, directly or indirectly, of Western art over the entire course of its history. Dismissed as a derivative art, Taiwanese art, according to Ni, was consequently unable to establish an autonomous development of itself. Out of a strong desire for cultural autonomy, the writer strongly criticized works in the internationalist styles as well as traditional ink paintings. Favoring instead the localist style, he demanded to reflect "the reality of Taiwanese life" and "to deeply contemplate one's own cultural sources of origin."⁶⁷

Involving twenty-five articles by eighteen artists or art critics, the debate itself well reflected the rise of a Taiwanese local consciousness in the visual arts at the beginning of the 90s.⁶⁸ However, the localist position presented by Ni faced fierce criticism, mostly by those who had studied abroad. In particular, the nature of the new debate has been pointed out to be nothing new, but "a 'tragic' prologue to a new episode of the century-old dispute of localism versus internationalism,"⁶⁹ as one artist remarked. Another author focused on the psychology of the recent localist movement, mentioning that it was "a mixed reaction to the double repression from 'Western consciousness' and 'central Chinese consciousness',"⁷⁰ or even an "anti-modernist attitude."⁷¹ Facing various attacks, Ni Zaiqin, the instigator and initial protagonist of the debate, eventually revised his concept of localism, stating that "the reason why we replaced the term 'localism' with 'Taiwanese consciousness' was that the latter embodies more substantial meaning, namely, autonomy and tolerance."⁷²

It is hard to tell how far the debate over Taiwanese consciousness affected local artistic creations, for this was a general current witnessed in literature, dance, and cinema anyway. In fact, few works of art are likely to be directly related to this cultural debate. Among individual approaches which marked their location on the cultural map, *Silk Road: Brocade China* (Sichou zhi lu: jinxiu huaxia, 思愁之路: 錦繡華夏) by Mei Dingyan (1954 -) was an exceptionally provocative piece, particularly in regard to the dispute over Taiwanese localism. Concerned with the geographical and historical scope of Central China, the artist chose a prominent "achievement of Chinese civilization, the cultivation of silk and its influence. Like a natural scientist, Mei

66 Ni Zaiqin. 1991. "Xifang meishu, Taiwan zhizao" [Western Art Made in Taiwan]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 242, April, pp114-133.

67 Ni Zaiqin. 1991. p86.

68 All twenty-five articles were collected in Ye Yujing, ed. 1994. *Taiwan meishu zhong de Taiwan yishi: qian jiu ling niandai 'Taiwan meishu' lunzhan xuanji* [Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwanese Art: Debates on 'Taiwanese Art' in the Early 90s]. Taipei: Xiongshi Meishu Chubanshe. In her introductory text the editor concluded that in this debate, in spite of its being "divergent in viewpoints and positions, there were, ... however, several central issues ... including Taiwanese art vs. Western art, localism vs. internationalism, subjectivity vs exclusivity." The two opposing camps "were ultimately rooted in their different perceptions of Western modernism. While the localists considered the obsession of many Taiwanese with modernism as only grasping it with its tail [i.e as superficial], the Western party considered modernism as the source of rational progress." p21.

69 Shi Bingxi. 1991. "Fenluo chitang jingdong mantian xingdou" [Shit Falling into a Pond Shaking the Reflections of the Stars]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 245, July, p122.

70 Mei Dingyan. 1991. "Taiwan xiandai yishu benti yishi de tantao" [Discussing the Consciousness of Localism in Modern Taiwanese Art]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 249, November, p111.

71 Chen Chuanxing. 1992. "'Xiandai' guifa de tushuo yu yishi xiouci: yijiu baling niandai Taiwan shi 'qian' hou xiandai meishu zhuangkuang" [Explaining the Picture of An Incomplete 'Modernity' and its Consciousness of Rethoric: Taiwan Art in its 'Pre-' and Post- modern condition in the 1980s]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 259, September, p22.

72 Ni Zaiqin. 1991. "Taiwan meishu zhong de Taiwan yishi" [Taiwanese Consciousness in the Taiwanese Art]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 249, November, p154.

arranges a variety of two- and three dimensional items, such as samples of natural objects, photographs and silk products, and re-examines both the metamorphoses of silkworms themselves and their exploration from the time of the mythical Yellow Emperor to the modern age. Using examples from the fields of medicine, acupuncture, commercial life, and geography,"⁷³ the work demonstratively enters into a dialectical dialog with the roots of Chinese culture. Another artist, Gu Shiyong (1960 -), addresses the problem of the transplantation of Chinese culture from the Mainland to Taiwan by the first Chinese settlers in the 17th century in *Home Land, Foreign Land* (Yuanxiang yixiang, 原鄉異鄉). In front of an enlarged photograph of waves rolling onto Taiwan's Western shore, which was "affixed at the juncture between wall and floor, Ku arranged thirty-two gilded Buddha hands (implying the thirty-two attributes of the Buddha) on the photographed seashore, all in the gestures of blessing, but each ending in a sharp cone of fiery red, in order to achieve the effect of invaders from the sea landing on the Taiwan coast."⁷⁴ Both works were finished in 1993, shortly after the debate.

2.3.3 Feminism, Pluralism, and the Emergence of the Curator

The nineties were characterized by the emergence of voices which had been marginalized before. This is certainly the case with feminism and the discussion of the question of women's equality in art. Another voice rose out of a geographical imbalance: for the first time artists in southern Taiwan claimed their fair share in the making of contemporary Taiwanese art.

The feminist movement in Taiwan started at the beginning of the 70s, yet in the visual arts it was not until the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s that feminism came into the focus of public attention. In collaboration with the Woman's Awakening Association and Eslite Art Space, two engaged female artists and art critics, Yan Minghui and Lu Rongzhi Victoria, organized a week of activities including daily lectures, a panel discussion and an exhibition solely dedicated to women artists. While mainly concentrating on the local women artists, past and present, the lectures also informed about developments in feminism in the West. Camille Claudel and Frida Kahlo, two female artists originally much in the shadow of their male partners, were given special attention. The work of the American feminist artist, Alice Neel, and her unique perspective in depicting the human body were given extensive coverage in the light of gender studies in the field of art.⁷⁵

73 Yang Wen-I. 1995. "Transition and Re-creation in Contemporary Taiwan Art." In *Art Taiwan*. Jose, Nicholas & Yang Wen-I, eds. Sydney: G+B Arts International. p19. See also Hu Yongfen. 1995. "Zhengtuo shenfen yu rentong de suming: Mei Dingyan chuanguo licheng" [Breaking the Boundary of Identity: The Development of Mei Dingyan's Art]. In *Diancang yishu*, 39, December, pp164-167.

74 Yang Wen-I. 1995. p19. See also Huang Haiming. 1999. "'Wanquan biantai' yu 'lianjie shengchan': tan Gu Shiyong Xin Taiwanren zhuangzhi yishu gezhan" [From 'Total Perversion' to 'Conveyor-Belt Production': Gu Shiyong's Installation work New Taiwanese.]. In *Yishujia*, 290, July, pp328-332.

75 *Xiongshi meishu*, ed. 1990. "Art News: Nuxing yishuzhou yanjiang xilie" [The Lectures Series of the Women's Art Week]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 232, June, p71. See also Yang Wen-I. 1996. "A Banana is not a Banana: The New Woman Artists of Taiwan." In *Asian Women Artists*. Dysart, Dinah & Fink, Hannah, eds. Roseville East: Craftsman House. pp42-51. Yang Wen-I. 1998. "Inner Space, Outer Space: Women Art in Taiwan." In *Die Hälfte des Himmels*. Werner, Chris, Qiu Ping & Pitzen, Marianne, eds. Bonn: Frauen Museum. pp190-193. See also Lin Peichun. 1997. "Taiwan Dangdai nuxing yishu de huigu yu zhanwang: Cong zhudi zhijiage lai Tai gezhan tanqi" [A Review of and Outlook on Contemporary Women's Art in Taiwan: on the Occasion of Judy Chicago's Exhibition in Taiwan]. In *Yishujia*, 271, December, pp352-356. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1998. *Yixiang yu meixue: Taiwan nüxing yishu zhan* [Mind and Spirit: Women's Art in Taiwan]. Taipei: TFAM.

Yan Minghui (1956 -), a graduate of the New York State University at Albany, was the protagonist of this latest feminist wave. Not only was she a radical advocate of feminist ideas and equal rights for both genders, and emphasized the self-confidence of female artists, she also created powerful feminist works which shocked the Taipei audience. Yan's realistic yet at the same time symbolic oil paintings combined, divided by grids, parts of the female body with still lives of fruit, such as apples, pears, and plums. In a post-modernist manner of juxtaposition, the female body parts, especially sexual characteristics like the breasts, became fruit-like, fetishized objects. One of her most aggressive works, *This is Art* (Zhe zhi yishu, 這是藝術) includes a realistic depiction of a banana and a penis bound together with a purple ribbon. While in art history, the female body has constantly been appropriated as an object of male voyeuristic imagination, Yan tried to "use [those male artist's] method in order to expose their intention."⁷⁶ The art critic, Lu Rongzhi Victoria remarked that while "Yan clarified her own thinking about feminism, she also helped other women artists to re-evaluate their own condition, to uncover the myth of male preeminence. She has tried to open up a wide road for the development of woman artists in Taiwan's art scene."⁷⁷

As mentioned earlier, Chen Xingwan, an abstract woman artist, was the first to explicitly show female sexual organs such as the vagina in public, in a 1988 installation work. However, it was not until 1990 and through Yan Minghui that the feminist movement in art became an issue that received a wide echo. Still, just like Chen Xingwan, Yan Minghui later ceased to create strong works in the feminist spirit. Despite this fact, the idea of the feminist approach in art has since become firmly established in Taiwan. Further group shows have been held; research, study and teaching on women's art in Taiwan has taken off on an ever increasing scale.

A group of southern neo-abstract artists has annually held exhibitions since 1986 under the name "New Southern Taiwan Style Exhibition." Comprising a total of nine artists from the Kaohsiung and Tainan areas, this group has included Huang Hongde (1956 -), Yan Dingsheng (1960 -) and Lin Hongwen (1961 -). Inspired either by Zen art or by automatic painting, they have created abstract paintings which "explicitly challenged [a form of] cultural consciousness which assumed the primacy of the northern Taiwanese style."⁷⁸ The attempt of the Southerners to reach an equal status with metropolitan Taipei was successful. Several efforts to establish an appropriate artistic infrastructure in the south testify to their spirit of competition. In 1989, a private museum, the Yan Huang Art Museum, was inaugurated in Kaohsiung, concurrently with the launching of the magazine *Yan Huang* (Art of China), which, among other topics, at times puts emphasis on contemporary art. In 1990 the Up Gallery, run by local artists and dedicated exclusively to new art, was opened. More importantly, the New Phase Art Space, which opened in 1992 in Tainan, has offered innovative exhibitions, lectures and activities.⁷⁹ With the inauguration of the Kaohsiung Art Museum in 1994 and of the Tainan Art Academy in 1997, the art scene in the South can be expected to become as lively as that of Taipei in the near future.⁸⁰

At the beginning of the 90s, Taiwanese art was characterized by a rapid development in different sectors. In 1992/93, the arrival of international auction houses stimulated local art galleries to launch their own auctions. Also, several art galleries were ready to promote young progressive

76 Yan Minghui. 1990. *Yan Minghui 1988-1990 zuopinji* [Yan Minghui: Works 1988-1990]. Exhibition Catalog. Taipei: Huihuang Shidai. n.p.

77 Lu Rongzhi Victoria. 1990. "Lizi chengshou shi" [When the Plums are Ripening]. In Yan Minghui. 1990. n.p.

78 Xiao Qiongrui. 1995. "Art in Southern Taiwan." In *Art Taiwan*. Jose, Nicholas, & Yang Wen-I, eds. p90.

79 See Xu Zigui. 1995. pp104-113.

80 Li Junxian. 1996. *Taiwan meishu de nanfang guandian* [A Southern Viewpoint on Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: TFAM.

art by organizing attractive shows, such as the Hanart Gallery's *Recycled Scene* in 1990, the Xiongshi Gallery's *Social Observations: Taiwan New Art Trends* in 1992, and the Pierre Gallery's (Taichung) *The Rising of the New Generation: The Attack of the Third Wave*. While a few commercial galleries began to promote various trends of contemporary art, the public museums, on the other hand, paid special tribute to the masters of the past and to historical developments. Three major retrospectives were held: *Three Hundred Years of Taiwanese Art*, organized by the Provincial Taiwan Art Museum and *Xiongshi meishu* Magazine, and *The Retrospective Exhibition of Early Western Art in Taiwan* organized by the Taipei Museum, both of which took place in 1990. Again, in 1993, the Taipei museum launched another major show dedicated to postwar art and entitled *Taiwan Art (1945 - 1993)*.⁸¹ The only cultural center which made a major effort in the field of the new art was the Taipei County Culture Center. With its radically avant-garde program featuring young artists it managed to bring in a fresh wind of change. In 1992, an outdoor project was organized by a team of two curators in order to realize the exhibition *Danshui River*, an outdoor environmental project. In the following year, at its annual competition exhibition, the above-mentioned Lien Te-cheng was invited as sole curator, in charge of selecting works both in the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional category. Also at the beginning of the 90s, the model of the guest curator emerged.⁸² In 1992, the art critic Huang Haiming, who earlier had cooperated with private galleries, was officially invited by the Taipei museum to organize *Dis/Continuity: Religion, Shamanism and Nature*, an exhibition of a total of thirteen contemporary artists. Later, this model of the guest curator became more and more accepted: in 1993, for instance, the Taipei Hanart Gallery launched the *New Art & New Tribes: Taiwan Art in the Nineties* show with Lu Rongzhi Victoria as guest curator responsible for the exhibition concept. Intending to "reflect the realities of Taiwan ... [and] the new climate of Taiwan in the nineties,"⁸³ the show gathered a total of thirty artists with both local and foreign art education, and divided the participants into six "tribes": the social critics, the chroniclers, the activists, the conceptualists, the urbanites, and the shamans. As these categorizations conveyed a sense of different directions pursued by individual artists and the subjects they were concerned with, the curator succeeded in encompassing the state and the broad spectrum of artistic creation current at the time. Another ambitious show, *Toward Apex*, put on by the G. Zen 50 Gallery, Kaohsiung, in 1993, and likewise organized by a guest curator, invited fifty-five artists with various stylistic features and approaches.⁸⁴

81 This exhibition was reviewed by the American Journalist Eleanor Heartney. See 1994. "Mixed Messages from Taipei." In *Art in America*, February, pp43-47.

82 At the beginning of the 90s the public museums did not actively support the system of curatorship. The responsibility of the concept and the selection of entries was sometimes unclear, so that controversies occurred. However, in the late 90s, the situation changed, as witnessed in the symposiums on the role of the curator held in Taiwan. See Taiwan Museum of Art. 1998. *Quanqiu huaren meishu cezhanren huiyi wenji* [Final Report of the 1998 International Chinese Curator Conference]. Taiwan Art Museum, ed. Taichung: Taiwan Art Museum. Also see Yang Wen-I. 1998. "Qianxiandaihua yu lei guojihua qingjing: Cong Taiwan guanbanzhan zhi dingwei yu guanfang jiaocao tanqi" [Pre-modernism and Quasi-Internationalism: Understanding the Role of the Taiwanese Government in Officially Funded Exhibitions]. In Taiwan Art Museum, ed. pp21-33.

83 Lu Rongzhi Victoria. 1993. "Taiwan 90s xinguannian zuqun" [New Art, New Tribes: Taiwan Art in the Nineties]. In *New Art, New Tribes: Taiwan Art in the Nineties*. Taipei: Hanart Gallery. p9. Together with *New Art, New Tribes: Taiwan Art in the Nineties*, Hanart Gallery simultaneously mounted another show, *China's New Art, Post-1989*. Johnston Chang, the gallerist of Hanart (Taipei and Hong Kong), was the first to show Chinese contemporary art in Taiwan. Earlier, in 1989, he had introduced the Stars, one of the first avant-garde groups to emerge at the beginning of the 80s in China, to the Taiwanese public. See Hanart Gallery, ed. 1989. *Xingxing shinian* [The Stars: 10 Years]. Taipei: Hanart Gallery.

84 Lin Xingyue. 1993. *Maixiang dianfeng: Taiwan xiandai meishu dazhan*. [The Contemporary Taiwanese Art

With its powerful energy already manifest at home, by the mid-90s the time had come for Taiwanese contemporary art to enter the international arena. In 1995, at the same time as Lee Teng-hui, shortly afterwards to be the first directly elected President of Taiwan, visited Cornell University, in an effort to break Taiwan's diplomatic isolation, the TFAM successfully launched an exhibition of five artists, selected by an international jury, as Taiwan's first official participation in the Venice Biennial. This was the beginning of a new page in Taiwanese art history, as it made clear to all the creativity and the willingness of Taiwanese visual arts to be part of the global art community. As Wolfgang Becker, the chairman of the jury, remarked at the time, "since the lifting of martial law, Taiwan's art scene has developed its own strong dynamics, through which new openings on many levels are now possible: Openings between media, openings in an international context, and the opening of a system in which the official artist as much as the dissident now gains the status of a free artist."⁸⁵

Exhibition Toward Apex]. Kaohsiung: Jichan Yishu.

- 85 See Becker, Wolfgang. 1995. "Art in Taiwan Today". In *Art Taiwan*. TFAM, ed. Taipei: TFAM. p11. For more information on the first Taiwanese participation in the Venice Biennial, see Yang Wen-I. 1997. "Tiaozhan yu chuangzuo: zuowei weinisi shuangnianzhan 'Taiwanguan' shuojie zhanlan chengbanren" [Challenge and Creation: Taiwan's First Participation in the Venice Biennial and the Role of the Curator in this Exhibition]. In *Cong zhanlan chouhua chufa: bowuguan shiwu yantaohui lunwenji* [Proceedings of the Museum conference: Australia - Taiwan Dialogue]. National Museum of History, ed. Taipei: Lishi Bowuguan. pp82-92. Zeng Shaoqian. 1998. "Culture and Representation: Taiwan's Debut at the Venice Biennial," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Art Association, Toronto.

3. Re-creating Taiwanese Identity

In the book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, by the Australian authors Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the critical importance of building a "national literature" is argued on the example of countries previously under the hegemony of the British Empire. As positive examples for this undertaking, the authors praise the literatures of Nigeria, Australia, and India, which have achieved a certain degree of independence and are more than just "the branches of the tree," or "an offshoot of the 'parent tree'."¹ Yet before developing a national literature, the authors emphasize, "the study of national traditions is the first and most vital stage."²

The quest for national tradition or national cultural identity has, however, not exclusively been a phenomenon of the present post-colonial countries. 19th century European nationalism, nation-building, and the retroactive construction of national history were likewise inseparably connected with the search for traditions and identities. This was equally true for nations which had not yet come into existence, such as early 19th century Germany and Italy, and for centuries-old nation-states like England, whose traditions, as handed down to the present day, were to a great deal "invented" during that same century, as the British scholar David Cannadine has convincingly shown.³ The quest for political unity or emancipation, the consolidation of power, and the threat of "the other" have all triggered as a common reaction the search for one's own identity.

In the case of Taiwan, the matter is more complicated. For the greater part of the century, the question of the national identity of the Taiwanese was answered by others on their behalf: The former colonial power tried to turn them into Japanese, the KMT to convince them of being part of the "Greater Chinese" tradition. Paradoxically, as far as visual art was concerned, it was the modernist movement of the late 50s and early 60s which first made it apparent that there actually *was* a problem of Taiwanese identity. The modernists had successfully broken the Japanese colonial mode of artistic creation "while opening up international perspectives." Their aspirations and search for new artistic means were grounded in their frustration with their environment and a sense of "rootlessness." While trying to underpin their appropriation of Western trends of abstraction with principles of Chinese philosophy, the movement failed to respond to its immediate surroundings and remained "alienated from its own historical tradition

1 Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, & Tiffin, Helen, 1989. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature*. London & New York: Routledge. pp16-17.

2 Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, & Tiffin, Helen, 1989. p17

3 Cannadine, David, 1983. "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' c. 1820-1977." In *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm, Eric, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp101-164.

and social reality."⁴

Partly a reaction to this lack of local relevance, the Nativist or Localist movement which arose in the latter part of the 70s is to be regarded as the first indigenous pursuit of a Taiwanese identity of its own. It proposed a new awareness which identified with the physical location of Taiwan rather than with the imaginary "homeland" of Mainland China. Primarily a literary movement, it however extended towards visual art as well. Hong Tong and Zhu Ming, two "marginal" or "primitive" artists previously unknown to the art world, were discovered, extensively reported on and enthusiastically received by the public. As the art historian Lin Xingyue has pointed out, the fact that these two unassuming artists were elevated to the status of heroes was actually "a subversive strategy of the Nativists against the Modernists."⁵ Lin recognized, however, the potential in their powerful primordial creativity and remarked that "the primitive art and the folklorist art ... have reminded the elitists ... of their creative resources, which are worthy of re-evaluation, excavation and absorption."⁶

The project of searching for cultural roots and national identity was intensified in the following decades. On the one hand, the ruling power, the KMT, made decisive moves toward liberalization. On the other, with democratization progressing and "self-awareness" growing, the new quest for identity by the Taiwanese gradually replaced their old self-definition as part of the Chinese culture. However, the question remains, while coming into terms with the external reality in which to situate oneself, how did the protagonists of the movement define their "cultural identity projects" so as not to make that identity merely appear "an offshoot of the 'parent tree'?"

A number of current artists have dealt with issues of identity in a way which clearly reflects their cultural location within the Taiwanese environment. Yang Chengyuan (1947 -), for instance, a young painter and printer, has documented the architectural past of Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period, while Guo Zhenchang (1946 -) has emphasized issues concerning the roots of Taiwanese culture, often drawing on elements of Taoist folk religion. Other artists are politically oriented and more individualistic, among them Zheng Zaidong (1953 -) and Chen Shunzhu (1963 -), who concentrate on their family memories or on their personal relationship with their respective birth places in Taipei and Penghu, the former through paintings, the latter in the medium of photography, or Lu Xianming (1959 -), a conscious urbanite, who embarked on a dark journey through Taipei's bridges at night. His oil paintings depict cold and gray geometric constellations, an empty metropolitan world rendered with sober objectivity. All these artists have tried to establish their own personal styles by concentrating on a specific subject matter, which reflects an identity they share as a person with the living space surrounding them.

However, "the first and most vital stage" in the quest for cultural identity, according to the Australian authors Bill Ashcroft and others quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is "the study of national traditions." Accordingly, two figurative oil painters who are concerned with this very subject will be discussed in this chapter: Huang Chin-ho and Yang Mao-lin, who, respectively, have expressed their ambitions to create a "national aesthetics" or a "national history" for Taiwan. The proposing of such a program, despite its being on a national scale, need not necessarily be closely associated with politics or ideology. In the case of Yang Mao-lin, we witness a detached,

4 Lin Xingyue. 1995. "Bainianlai Taiwan meishu de sici geming" [Four Revolutions in the Taiwanese Art of the Last Hundred Years]. In *Bainianlai de Taiwan* [Taiwan in the Last Hundred Years]. Conference paper. Taiwan Yanjiu Jijinhui, ed. Taipei: Qianwei Chubanshe. p259.

5 Lin Xingyue. 1995. p263.

6 Lin Xingyue. 1995. p263.

rational yet engaged treatment of history resulting from his own sense of rationality but also from autobiographical elements. In the case of Huang Chin-ho, the oil paintings he has created are uniquely personal, determined by his religious perceptions, but not devoid of a clear political stance. Strongly opposing the KMT as a colonial power, and so echoing the official standpoint of the DPP, Huang expresses a powerful critique of current social phenomena. Targeting the contemporary excesses of materialism, Huang's works reflect his personal agony in the face of "the colonial rule that has afflicted Taiwan for centuries."⁷

7 Huang Chin-ho. 1995. "Artist's Statement." In *Art Taiwan*. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p53.

3.1 Huang Chin-ho: A New Taiwanese Aesthetics

Born in Jiayi in south-west Taiwan, the figurative painter Huang Chin-ho (1956-), self-taught as an artist, emerged as an oil painter at the beginning of the 90s. Huang's art can best be regarded as a reflection of the search for cultural identity. With his outspokenly post-colonial viewpoint, he has strongly condemned the KMT government and rejected the styles associated with the cultural hegemony of the West as well as with that of China. Consequently, ideas, symbols, and mythological figures drawn from local folk religion have come to be among his major artistic resources as well as a spiritual support for his creativity. Far from limiting his ambitions to a synthesis of received elements, however, he boldly postulates the creation of a new Taiwanese aesthetic.

Fire (Huo, 火, fig. 1), Huang Chin-ho's painting to be discussed here, is a critical work dealing with the over-materialized and excessively sexualized world of contemporary life in Taiwan. As a visual interpretation of a "degenerate" society, the painting has a complex body of content, operating with realistic, symbolic, and surrealistic elements. The inclusion of folk-religious *Weltanschauung* into the work is one of the picture's most significant features. What made the artist fashion his work in this particular manner? How did he blend the contemporary world with that of folk religion, and for what purpose? Apart from searching for answers to these questions, in this chapter I will further examine why the artist has come to be attached to religion in the first place, and how this choice is articulated artistically. Moreover, besides reviving popular traditions in concept as well as in imagery, the artist has also claimed to set a new "Taiwanese aesthetic" to work. Has there ever been such an aesthetic in Taiwan before, and what heritages have been included or excluded in the works of the artist? These are some of the main topics to be discussed in what follows.

3.1.1 The Work *Fire*

A Strange Company in a Glittering Night

Huang Chin-ho's *Fire*, painted between 1991 and 1992, is already recognizable as an ambitious work from its immense dimensions alone: 450 x 800 cm.¹ Consisting of five canvases of identical measurements (450 x 160), the oil painting makes a strong visual impact. The glittering, flamboyant and overcrowded night scene conveys a world full of configurations of surrealistic and sexually charged characters who seem to be celebrating the human desires. On the other hand, it is also a realistic, meticulously rendered world, with vegetation abundantly filling the scene. Peculiar specimens of architecture are prominent in the middle-ground, while in front of them a strange company of four human figures is depicted, all either naked or half-naked, some frontally facing the beholder, others about to turn towards him.

1 *Fire* was first shown in 1993 at the Railroad Factory No.15, Taichung, the artist's studio. Later, in the same year, it was exhibited at the K18 in Kassel, Germany, an exhibition parallel to the Documenta. In 1995, it was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and at the Venice Biennale. Since 2000, the piece has belonged to the collection of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. It is reproduced in the two 1995 catalogs (See bibliography).

A headless transvestite of gigantic dimensions standing on the left is the most striking character in *Fire*. Almost completely naked, with the strong muscles of a body-builder, he wears tiny woman's underpants and a brassiere, both in dark purple and beautifully ornamented with glittering diamonds. Erotic implications are especially present in his waist belt. Silvery, and again studded with diamonds of various colors and forms, this broad belt made of a metallic material is ornamented with thin pearled threads like a pearl curtain. In strong contrast to his colossal, giant-like body is the single flower blossom carefully and preciously held in his left hand, while his right hand is hidden behind his back. In the place of the head, the truncated body's neck emits a blue-white band which could be smoke, steam, or hot air. Though headless and with both legs tightly pressed together, this strongly-built male body is seen standing in an erect and frontal posture. As witnessed by the exceedingly broad shoulders and muscular chest and arms, the figure, in spite of its female accessories, projects a sense of glorification of masculinity, of a peculiar kind of male body.

Beside him there sits an equally powerful and grotesque figure, naked, in shining blue, and gripping a black pointed stele with three moon-shaped signs and the inscription "Five Thunders" (the sign and epithet, respectively, of the Taoist Thunder God) in his, or her, right arm. Is it a man, is it a woman, or is it a mechanical robot, as the whole body and especially the animal-like claws reflect light in the manner of metallic surfaces? The robust figure unmistakably possesses female characteristics, such as huge breasts and bright red lips, with black sunglasses (which completely prevent any sight of the eyes) thrown in for good measure. However, the moustache and facial features make the person resemble more a man than a woman, and a man with monstrous and horrifying looks at that. The face under the flying, wig-like hair seems mainly made up of circular forms, with hanging round cheeks to both sides of a round nose. In the lower part of the face, the motif of the circle reappears as a spherical chin surrounded by upward-curving lines in three concentric arcs, while the forehead is highlighted in white, as are the nostrils and the sunglasses.

In the foreground to the right, surrounded by plants, two figures of less dominating dimensions are to be seen. The smaller one is standing in frontal half-nudity, only clad in tiny tight-pants, on a lotus base, flanked by high cactuses in ceramic pots, with an eagle resting on top of the plant to the right. The body has child-like proportions, but the features seem aged, with white beard and double-chin, a red round nose and slightly opened oval red lips. The eyes are especially de-familiarized, as they are shown pupil-less, just two white round circles, again denying eye contact with the observer. The breasts are particularly stressed, giving this figure, too, a hermaphroditic appearance.

Finally, further to the right, we have a figure of more unambiguous femininity, if judged from the mighty breasts, the garish dark blue skirt she wears over her robust shiny red-skinned body, her long gloves, as well as the name card on her waist which identifies her as a prostitute. Leaning forward slightly, she seems to have halted for a moment her advancing steps; her face, with eyes closed, is turned toward the observer. Yet even here it is hard not to associate her with a mechanical robot, as her hair standing upright almost resembles electric wire and her skin emits a metallic shine. In this, as in her facial features, the figure appears close to the blue-skinned stele-holder further to the left.

Despite the fleshy, grotesque, and sexualized appearance of the four characters, *Fire* is no less a world of exuberant and fantastic architecture and vegetation which are quite on a par in strangeness and visual power with their "human" counterparts. This is a very complex and overcrowded environment, crammed with all kinds of flowers, plants, vases, and gigantic architectural motifs. Directly behind the smaller male figure, a large building meets the eye,

consisting of a round central tower with adjoining side wings lined with blind-window galleries in a rectangular configuration, dramatically depicted in perspective shortening, while the whole structure seems to be dangerously tilting to the right.

The inclined central tower itself consists of five different sections: First, a black base below a yellow section of irregular shape, and then a silvery, shiny middle section, divided by grids. Attached to the red upper section are eight pairs of cone-shaped silver ornaments, obviously implying segments of diamonds, while the top of the tower is formed by a round opening which is either blowing out, or more likely sucking in, a blue band of steam or air – the other end of the same blue band emitted by the headless figure on the left. The blind windows of the side wings are covered by an oblong, yellow, blue-rimmed ornamental form on red ground. At the end of each wing, a rectangular, more simply fashioned concrete tower topped by a hexagonal spire in blue and pink can be seen; they seem more like parts of an altogether different building.

Further to the right, behind the call-girl, another complex of motifs appears: a combination of architectural elements, sculptures and plants. Upon a huge square base of concrete stands a tall blue, oval, vase-like form with decorative tiles on both top and bottom, surrounded by lions sitting on small green-tiled bases on, presumably, each of its four sides, although only three are actually visible. Behind it rises a tall bamboo pole, flying a small standard with the character *ling* (order, 令), while a similar, shorter pole on which a red flag has been hoisted, is partly hidden behind the architecture.

Balancing the architectural complex on the right side of the painting, another, even more garishly decorated building looms on the left side of the painting, behind the large figure of the transvestite. Mostly colored in dazzling red and purple and seemingly constructed of cardboard, with round, pointed, rocket-like corner pillars, its two stories are open to the outside, their windows and arcades partly shaded by pink curtains. The architecture itself appears highly unstable, as if swinging and almost dancing. In front of the building and behind the blue-skinned sitting figure we find a decorated vase with a large bunch of various flowers, including lilies, chrysanthemums, peonies, and tulips.

All these figural and architectural elements appear before the background (most visible in the right section of the painting) of a lush, dense vegetation of bushes and trees, among which portions of a red brick wall, like an old city wall, can be seen, with a small leftward-slanting lookout tower located almost at the horizontal center of the painting. Above this landscape there stretches a sky of night-like dark blue, across which massive clouds are floating, depicted in white and red and in the form of bubble-like whirling circles.

Finally, in strong contrast to the beautiful flowers collected in the vase, two simple vegetables are vigorously thriving and blossoming in the foreground (although some of the leaves have obviously been attacked by worms): cauliflower and mustard, their yellow (mustard) and white blossoms (cauliflower) placed alternating between and on both sides of the figures, with the two central positions dedicated to the cauliflower.

3.1.2 The Sources of the Pictorial Elements

The Naturalistic and Contemporary World

As described above, *Fire*, a world of dazzling colors and flamboyant atmosphere, incorporates and juxtaposes a large number of disparate images, including plants, architecture, clouds, a flow of colored air, human figures and, possibly, gods. Some of these elements, especially the vegetable and architectural, point to a natural, realistic environment, while others, like the

headless transvestite, appear entirely surrealistic. Yet this simple distinction falls short of a deeper understanding, for even those motifs which are seemingly treated in the most realistic manner are in fact, as stressed by the artist himself, to be read on the symbolic level.

In spite of this, it is the purely realistic level which shall be discussed first, for it is important to determine just what elements of the artist's actual environment have been incorporated into the picture. To begin with the architectural motifs in the painting, all are taken from authentic buildings in Taiwan, yet have undergone a certain degree of artistic transformation. The building to the right with central round tower and side wings, for instance, is the locally renowned "health club," "Nepal Health and Recreation Plaza" (fig. 2), located on the crossroad of Zhonghua Road and Minquan Road in downtown Taichung (Central Taiwan), where the artist currently lives, while the two spire-topped towers adjacent to its wings are architectural details taken from a children's recreation playground. Its counterpart, the two-storied building on the left, is a temporary architecture for real estate sales, also in downtown Taichung, on Chongde Road (fig. 3).²

However, the artist has certainly not incorporated these buildings into his work without making some alterations. In the case of the "Nepal Health and Recreation Plaza" (apart, of course, from the general tilt which the structure has been given, and the surrealistic airflow coming out of or vanishing into its tower), it is the upper floor of the building which is to be seen in the picture. Its details, such as the cone-shaped and diamond-like ornaments, have been practically all retained, with only the Chinese name of the club, originally in large characters affixed to the silvery grids on the tower, omitted. Further changes have, for instance, been made to the enclosure of the windows, the elaborate ornaments of which are left out in the painting, as well as in the small protruding element attached between the upper parts of the windows added by the painter.

Thus, when comparing the painting with its real-life models we find that their structure, angles, and ornaments have been changed³ - as I would argue, to meet the artist's specific needs. The artist's choice of architectural motifs was certainly not made at random. Both main buildings are in fact associated with certain aspects of Taiwanese contemporary life. The architecture for real estate sales was clearly selected to exemplify the materialistic lifestyle sweeping the country. In order to attract customers, those architectures are built from temporary materials yet in the most fancy, and mostly "Western" styles, with dazzling colors and an air of exclusivity. In the case of the "health club," on the other hand, this is clearly, above all, also a place for prostitution.

In order to better understand what is going on here, it is necessary here to briefly explain the background to the so-called "special businesses" in Taiwan. Due to the official ban on prostitution and lack of public regulations in regard to the opening of sex businesses, the entire profession operates as part of dance parlors, karaoke restaurants, health clubs, and sometimes even pubs and coffee shops, among other locations. Enjoying a recent boom almost everywhere in Taiwan, these new businesses, even though in fact illegal, have become multifunctional places of social activity, offering luxury services which often include sex. Thus, the appearance of the

2 The identification of the two main architectural and other motifs in the work follows two statements written by the artist at the request of the author. Most of the identifications in *Fire* which will be discussed in what follows are taken from these documents, dated 05 & 16, Nov. 2000. Interestingly enough, however, some other elements, such as the stone lions as well as their entire base, remain unidentified by the artist himself. The Nepal Health Plaza and the place for real estate sales have been photographed by the Australian artist, George Gittoes while visiting Taiwan, and subsequently by Huang himself, in Taichung in 1994. Both images are reproduced in the catalog *Art Taiwan*. 1995. Jose, Nicholas and Yang Wen-I, eds. Sydney: G+B Arts International. pp59 & 77.

3 The sells architecture has undergone changes as well: a one-storied building has been turned into a two-storied one, the fancy red curtains have been added, while the pointed pillars are close to the original. See note 2.

"Nepal Health and Recreation Plaza" as well as of the other building in *Fire* is not accidental: they illustrate these latest developments in Taiwan.

Also related to the sphere of sexual entertainment in Taiwan are the figures of the transvestite and the red-skinned prostitute, in this case, however, alluding to popular open-air striptease shows known as "beef shows" and "Electric Flower Cars."⁴ Having emerged in the mid-80s and mainly conducted by travelling companies, such shows are often staged at events like wedding or celebration banquets, but also at temple festivals and even funeral ceremonies. Due to their open-air character accessible to everyone, they are often condemned as morally corrupting, yet in the countryside, these sensational and temporary kinds of show apparently enjoy great popularity. The artist himself has pointed out that the prostitute in his picture is indeed modeled on a "beef show" striptease dancer, while with the figure of the transvestite, he had superimposed the image of a "beef show" girl on that of a deceased former college friend of his.⁵

The cement base on the far right of the painting is symbolic as well. Unidentified by the artist as to their origins, the three (visible) lion sculptures sitting on their green tile bases are to be associated with protectors of temples or cemeteries. Furthermore, the flag inscribed with the character "order" on the bamboo pole which grows out of this base is the "spirit-calling flag" which is to be seen in cemeteries.⁶ And, not least, the "Nepal Health Plaza" with its steam-emitting or, rather, steam-swallowing tower is intended as "a crematory" and thus carries the image of death as well. As regards the plants and flowers appearing in the foreground of the picture, cauliflower (with white blossoms) and mustard (with yellow ones) belong to the most common plants and vegetables which grow in the Taiwanese countryside. They are reminiscent of the agricultural society in which the artist grew up, while the trees and grasses in the background are typical for the vegetation on overgrown cemeteries and thus again strongly associated with death.

One flower, however, occupies an especially prominent position in the painting: the one which the headless man holds in his left hand. Being a red, five-petal flower with a large protruding anther, it is obviously a hibiscus, a common flower in most parts of the Taiwanese countryside. As this flower is so vividly presented and depicted in *Fire*, it seems to carry either a religious meaning or, on the other hand, a sexual connotation, as in the images of "plucking a flower" or "sucking the flower juice" which are conventionally identified with men taking sexual advantage of women. According to the artist, however, this hibiscus is simply "a traditional flower in Taiwan's countryside" and as such "a symbol of Taiwanese consciousness."⁷

Taoist and Buddhist Sources

While the artist has gone to great lengths to establish an environment closely related to the reality of Taiwan's contemporary society, the two figures in the center are predominantly of "divine" nature; they incorporate motifs from Taiwanese folk religion as well as from Chinese historical, literary, and religious sources. The blue-skinned sitting figure is to be identified as the Taoist Thunder God, as suggested previously. His identity is verified by his attribute, the black stele with written characters. The small standing figure, unsurprising, in spite of his rather fearful-looking and aged face, to those familiar with Buddhist iconography, follows the

4 Hou Chun-ming, another artist discussed in this paper, also deals with these eccentric performances. For more information and comparison, see section 5.2.3.

5 See note 2.

6 See note 2.

7 See note 2.

canonical form in which the newborn historical Buddha Shakyamuni is depicted; who, according to tradition, proclaimed: "Heaven above and earth below, I am the sole almighty."⁸

The Thunder God and the little Buddha in the painting are, strictly speaking, divine figures belonging to different religious pantheons: the latter one, of course, to the Buddhist, while the Thunder God has a firm place as a general of the Almighty God in the Taoist religion. Nevertheless, the Buddha, just like Confucius and many other mortals, have long been incorporated into Taoist folk religion and worshipped in Taoist temples as well. Buddha, as he appears in this painting, is thus of an ambivalent religious nature and could also be understood as a Taoist divine.

The Thunder God is first mentioned in the works of the half-legendary southern China poet and statesman Qu Yuan in the 3rd century BC, as a protective deity. Later, in the *Shanhaijing* (Classic of Mountains and Seas), the earliest account of mythological geography, written in the first century BC, the Thunder God is described as a compound figure with the body of a dragon and a human head. The *Haineidong* (The Great Beyond the East) chapter of the work states: "In Lei (thunder) marsh is Lei Shen (thunder Spirit), who has a dragon body, a human face, and a bulging belly. This is west of Wu."⁹ Not long afterwards, however, the god already appears in anthropomorphic form, as testified by the philosopher Wang Chong (27-97 AD), who states: "The Thunder God looks like a giant of huge strength."¹⁰ His main character as a god of punishment also appeared early. The *Shiji*, the most important early Chinese work of historiography, written around 100 B.C., records of an early emperor of the Shang Dynasty: "Wu Ding violated the Tao and was struck dead by sudden thunder."¹¹ We also learn that in the late Tang Dynasty (618-907), many Taoist ceremonies for procuring rain were directed at the Thunder God. Likewise, in the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279), due to constant draught, the worship of the Thunder God became particularly widespread, and special thunder incantations were developed.¹²

The Thunder God himself subsequently underwent further transformations. After examining different narratives, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty (1644 -1911), Huang Feimo, concluded that "today, the Thunder God, as conventionally sculptured, looks like a giant, with naked chest and belly, with two wings on his shoulders, three eyes, a face as red as a monkey, a long and pointed chin, feet like those of an eagle and even sharper claws. In his left hand he holds a wooden wedge; while his right wields a hammer in the position of launching a blow."¹³

In this account, two sections in particular of the description, namely the god's "naked chest and belly" and "feet like those of an eagle and even sharper claws" are reminiscent of the Thunder

8 See Morohashi Tetsuji. 1976. *Dai kanwa jiten*. Tôkyô: Daishûkan shoten. 2.3761..34. The artist also mentioned that this image is adopted from a sculpture in the Tanhua fotang [曇花佛堂], located in Zhanghua City. See note 2.

9 *Shanhaijing: Legendary Geography and Wonders of Ancient China*. 1985. Cheng Hsiao-chieh, Pai Cheng, Hu-chen, Thern, Lawrence Kenneth, trs. Taipei: National Institute for Compilation and Translation. p203.

10 The birthday of the Thunder God - or Thunder Gods, also known as the Five Generals of Thunder (General Deng, General Bi, General Liu, General Xin, and General Pang) - is celebrated on 24.06 each year; he is especially worshiped in the Pili Gong (Temple of the Thunderbolt), Zhonghe, Taipei. See Ma Shutian. 1993. "Leishen" [Thunder God]. In *Huaxia zhushen: daojiao juan* [Chinese Gods: Taoism]. Taipei: Yunlong Chubanshe. repr. (Beijing: Yanshan Chubanshe. 1898). pp258-270. Dong Fangyuan, 1984. *Taiwan minjian zongjiao xinyang* [Folk Religion in Taiwan]. rep.(1975). Taipei: Changqing Wenhua. p202. See also Kohn, Livia. 2000. *Daoism Handbook*. Leiden. Boston; Köln: Brill. pp423-426; 527-528.

11 Ma Shutian. 1993. p259.

12 See Ma Shutian. 1993. p260.

13 Quoted from Ma Shutian. 1993. p262.

God in Huang Chin-ho's *Fire*; with the notable exception, of course, of the latter's female features. While the Thunder God, according to the written record, has "two wings on his shoulders," his long hair flying out on both sides of his head does not actually need to directly mirror this image. Furthermore, the Thunder God's attribute in Huang's painting, the black stele, contains the two Chinese characters *wulei*, "Five Thunders," referring to what is known in religious tradition as the "Five Thunders Order Tablet" (*wulei lingpai*, 五雷令牌) and thus to the five protectors of the Almighty God: the Thunder of Heaven, the Thunder of Water, the Thunder of the Earth, the Thunder of the Gods, and the Thunder of Demons. Commonly-used attributes of this fierce God are, as we learn from the historical texts, axe, hammer, flag, drill, and wedge. Although the immense black stele in the painting cannot be directly identified with any one of these, a possible association, from its form, would be that of the wedge,¹⁴ as a divine attribute, a symbol of power bestowed by the heavenly Almighty, and, more importantly, a sign of mandate, of God's order carried when executing necessary punishment.¹⁵

Due to his relatively small scale and his position, partly hidden in the midst of vegetation, the small Buddha in the painting assumes a less prominent role in the painting. What is striking, however, is that the Buddha, in spite of the fact that his overall posture corresponds with traditional iconography, has undergone several strange modifications, as mentioned above: invisible eyeballs, a red-glowing nose, white moustache and goatee, tight blue underpants, a facial expression that appears more demonic than benign. As blatant as these contradictions to Buddhist iconography appear, they certainly fit well into the context of the painting where, for instance, the Thunder God is given an even more horrifying appearance.

This "demonization" and even "sexualization" of divine beings would seem to border on the sacrilegious, at least as far as the common conception of gods is concerned. What is the function of the two strangely transformed deities in the painting, and why are they presented together with two "mortals?" Furthermore, while appearing in the company of other anthropomorphous figures, why for instance is the Buddha, the highest-ranking figure in Buddhism, depicted on a smaller scale and in a minor position? While attempting to answer these questions in what follows, we shall look more closely at the painting and its artistic aspects as regards its composition and use of colors, and gather visual information for the further discussion of *Fire*.

The Artistic Scheme and Its Strategies

From a visual aspect, *Fire* is a powerful and provocative composition, dealing with the lust of human beings, with human desire and sexual ambiguity, but also including the transformation of the human body into a robot-like creature, as exemplified by the four grotesque figures dominating the work. They are placed into cramped, overcrowded surroundings, which combine natural elements with the glittering world of Taiwanese nightlife. Although the details of the environment are naturalistic, the scene as a whole seems hardly to be real. Instead, surreal elements abound, such as the headless transvestite, indicating in fact a realm after death, while the presence of both gods (the Thunder God and the Buddha), points to a world that could be

14 In imperial China, wedge-shaped wooden tablets inscribed with notes or memoranda were carried by court officials when reporting to the emperor during audiences. Another time the wedge shape was employed was with imperial edicts, carrying the order of the Emperor and thus symbolizing a power directly authorized by the Son of Heaven. It was this latter association of the wedge with the Emperor which became appropriated by folk religion as a divine attribute, the respective gods being depicted as holding them in both hands as signs of their mandate received from the highest ruler of Heaven.

15 According to information provided by the artist, this tablet of the Thunder God is modeled after one collected in the Miaotiangong tan [廟天公壇 Temple of Heavenly God] located in Zhanghua City. See note 2.

either heaven or hell.

This juxtaposition of different worlds is a driving force of the work and the main strategy employed in its makeup. A second prominent characteristic is the manipulation of the pictorial space, which seems to follow the principle of compression in order to achieve an effect of suffocating *horror vacui*. The various images taken from different categories of the outside world, from the vegetable, the architectural, the figurative, as well as the clouds floating across the sky, have been agglomerated as densely as possible, using the techniques of overlapping, covering, and cutting off. Almost no space is left unoccupied. Moreover, the compression and distortion of space and images has been consciously intensified so as to cause a feeling of uneasiness and disturbance.

This effect is predominantly achieved by the distortion of images as regards their shape and size, as demonstrated most vividly in the four figures which people the painting. Apart from their ferocious outlook and hermaphroditism discussed above, what is most striking is their contrast in size. This is especially the case with the body of the transvestite on the left, which appears dramatically enlarged. It is this giant figure who shows the painting at its most surrealistic, due to his towering body, equal in size with the surrounding architecture, and his missing head. A similar sense of grotesqueness and perversity is present in the adjacent figure of the Thunder God. However, the second large vertical motive in the composition beside the transvestite is the health club with its central round tower. Both share their considerable scale, the dominant color yellow, and not least, they are connected by that blue wave of steam or air.

Another important factor contributing to the de-familiarization and surrealistic alienation of the depicted figures is the choice of color. Contrary to the natural colors of human beings, they are painted in either of the three primary colors: yellow, blue, or red. Moreover, these colors recur in many elements of the surroundings and are thus distributed in a carefully calculated and almost symmetric manner all over the painting. The bright yellow of the transvestite, for instance, reappears in the base and side wings of the health club. The color blue is to be seen in the dress of the call-girl, the Thunder God, the building on the left and the wave-like band of steam or air. Furthermore, the constellation of blue and white in the latter is almost exactly repeated in the shining blue of the Thunder God, which is heightened with white. In lighter or darker shades, this color is, moreover, scattered through all major motifs of the painting, from the beams of the left architecture, the underwear of the transvestite and the Buddha, to architectural details of the health club, the spires of the two kindergarten towers and the funeral architecture on the right. While the three primary colors, and especially the color blue, are thus, in different variations, dispersed all over the picture, the space in-between, between the figures and the primary-colored objects, is relatively consistently filled with naturalistic green vegetation.

The effect of corresponding colors is repeated in other motifs of the painting. While the pink clouds in the sky are spread right across the upper part of the painting, evoking a sense of rhythm and unity, a similar, if rather more sophisticated device is to be observed in the pattern in which the mustard and the cauliflower are distributed in the lower foreground, both as regards the repetition of similar colors and their intervals. Of course, we are reminded that the same rhythmical motif of four found there clearly dominates the painting as a whole in the form of the four central characters. Incidentally, the number four also recurs in the fact that *Fire* is composed of images from four categories: plants, architecture, human figures, and sky motifs.

Finally, it also needs to be mentioned that although the headless man in front is the most striking figure, it is, however, the Thunder God with his blue body and the black stele who serves as the central stabilizing element of the painting. Placed right under the blue wave-like stream, the Thunder God could be regarded as the key figure in the painting, insofar as he forms the

centerpiece of a triad composed of the transvestite, the Buddha, and himself. In this respect, the round tower of the health club should be seen as an extension of the Buddha, providing his tiny figure with a background mass large and high enough so as to form a counterpart to the transvestite.

Hence, the painting, in spite of its seemingly chaotic overcrowding of images and instability of form, has in fact been carefully arranged to maintain a sub-structural sense of balance. Furthermore, with all its sophisticated compositional devices, *Fire* is also a highly calculated and carefully conceived work in its complicated use and distribution of colors. As reflected on above, the painting creates numerous references and relationships between the depicted motifs by means of composition and coloring. In this way, a connection is established between the transvestite and the health club, as well as a triad relationship between the Buddha, the headless man and the Thunder God, with the latter as the central figure. In addition, the corresponding relationship between the Thunder God and the stream of air is evident already from the fact that they share the same colors, blue and white. Resulting from this visual information and analysis, it seems to be clear that the depiction of the transvestite as a "headless" man relates to the health club on the one hand and on the other with the Thunder God, to whose punishment his headlessness could possibly be attributed. On the other hand, what links the transvestite and the "Nepal Health Club" and what I have tentatively described as stream, smoke, or air, is obviously to be interpreted as the headless figure's life energy, or *qi* [氣] in Chinese, which is being sucked out of him by the senseless diversions of the sex industry. Thus, juxtaposing the different worlds of human figures, divine beings, plants, and architecture, *Fire* depicts the confrontation of contemporary Taiwanese mortals with the immortals of religion, a surreal world concerned with the revenge of the gods on fallen human beings. Could this be the intention of the artist - to situate impending death and punishment within a highly realistic environment ostensibly celebrating sexual desire? In the following section, before discussing the painting further, a look at the artist's own statements on his painting is required, to allow another dimension of the work to be considered.

3.1.3 The Work in Context

The Artist's Statement

Huang Chin-ho's intrinsic relationship with his painting *Fire* is, as a matter of fact, determined by religious factors. His belief in the ambiguity of human life is explained in his statement accompanying the exhibition of the work at the Venice Biennial, 1995, which also informs about his intentions when creating *Fire*. In the following, I will discuss this explicit commentary by the artist on his own work, particularly under the aspect of the role of folk religion in the painting. In his statement, published in 1995, Huang remarks:

At its very core, my work expresses my deepest feelings toward life: the boundless desires, the transience and impermanence, and our powerlessness facing it all. It reflects a strong sense of warning of impending danger.

I believe that life is both the Buddha and the devil, two sides of the same coin, who engage in an endless battle until destruction. The body is born and dies like all plants and critters; only the soul lives forever, from one incarnation to the next. Neither the suffering nor the happiness of this life have any significance whatsoever. One must accept everything that

*happens with equanimity.*¹⁶

Unambiguously religious, this statement contains a strong conviction of the transience of physical life and the immortality of the soul perpetuating itself through innumerable re-incarnations – a concept closely related to (albeit, strictly speaking, not entirely corresponding with) Buddhist teachings. The "equanimity" he postulates when facing the vicissitudes of life is, however, somewhat counter-balanced by the more dramatic aspects of his world-view: life as an "endless battle" between conflicting forces, and moreover, a sense of "impending danger." However, in that same statement, the artists also points to another important message of the work:

*The content of my canvases strongly condemns the degeneration of the country's living environment and the distortion of the people's spirits by the colonial rule that has afflicted Taiwan for centuries, and my work is a metaphor for the tragic fate of the Taiwanese, who have been dominated by outsiders throughout their history.*¹⁷

According to the artist, the painting is thus not only a vehicle of warning but also of criticism, as it comments on the deterioration of both the material and spiritual environment in Taiwan; furthermore, he sees the work as a "metaphor" for that open wound in the consciousness of many Taiwanese, the colonial past. How these disparate themes connect is explained by the chain of causality established by the artist in his text: From his perspective, the need for warning is, among others, motivated by the state of crisis Taiwan and the Taiwanese are to be found in; this, in turn, is, as stated by him, the result of "the colonial rule that has afflicted Taiwan for centuries."

To put the blame for the present societal disorders on the various colonial rulers of Taiwan, as Huang Chin-ho does, is certainly less a sound historical argument than a post-colonial ideology shared by many anti-KMT intellectuals. In this way, condemnation and warning, two central messages of *Fire*, are rooted not only in the artist's relationship with religion but also in his post-colonial ideas. This combination of two very different perceptions makes it understandable, albeit not quite convincing, that one who can make as fatalistic a statement as "Neither the suffering nor the happiness of this life have any significance whatsoever" could be so disturbed by the sight of a disordered society that he is moved to the strongest criticism.

Huang Chin-ho's strong post-colonial position can be detected also in his artistic ambition, which is far from moderate. On the contrary, in the same statement he declares the desire that his works have an impact on a grand scale:

*I seek to make an overall assessment of Taiwan's cultural tradition in order to open up new frontiers for the country's new aesthetics which are distinct from those of China and the Western world.*¹⁸

Apart from mentioning their traditional sources and asserting what they are *not* to be, Huang does not go into the specifics of these "new aesthetics," except as regarding the form and style of *Fire*:

16 Artist's statement. In *Art Taiwan*. 1995. Taipei Fine Aarts Museum. ed. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Translated by David Toman. p53.

17 Artist's statement. 1995. p53.

18 Artist's statement. 1995. p53.

*The style of my works, as far as the form concerns, is greatly influenced by Taoist folklore, as well as by the messages emanating from contemporary Taiwanese society.*¹⁹

In his statement, the artist has mentioned a number of points, perhaps more apt to raise questions than to provide answers. Among them are "Taiwan's cultural tradition," "the country's new aesthetics," and the stylistic influences on *Fire*, originating both from Taoist folklore and from contemporary issues. All these, as well as the specific intentions of the work, the critique of contemporary society and a warning of future evils, need to be examined more closely in the following section. However, at this point, a look back on Huang's early artistic formation could provide some essential background information, enabling us to locate his present position more accurately.

Early Works

In December 1990, Huang Chin-ho opened his first solo show at his own studio, a former warehouse next to the Taichung railway station. This exhibition was surprisingly well received and hailed by a local critic as "an overnight success."²⁰ Huang Chin-ho was then already thirty-four. A university graduate who had majored in history, but self-taught as an artist, Huang made his first artistic experiences as painter of large movie advertisements for cinema billboards, while at the same time creating his early works, not yet very promising life-size figurative works in the manner of Chagall.²¹ However, with their figures floating in unspecified gloomy locations, these lyrical descriptions of alienated human beings revealed Huang's keen interest not so much in the physical as in the psychological or spiritual location of human beings, a subject often treated by other Taiwanese artists as well.

His debut show in 1990, however, marked a decisive break with his earlier style. Although perhaps at that stage not yet going as far as to present himself as the protagonist of a new era launching a new Taiwanese style, a role he often claimed for himself later, Huang proved to be a promising new talent, advancing into territories until then little explored by the Taiwanese art community. Furthermore, the art critic Wang Fudong praised the artist enthusiastically for the fact that there was "no material applied by Huang Chin-ho in his paintings that did not originate from our living and social environment, including folk religious temple rituals, wedding or funeral ceremonies, celebrations, posters of striptease performances, and 'Electric Flower Cars'."²² All these, Wang Fudong concluded, "vividly reflect the 'new' or 'sub-altern' cultures of present Taiwan."²³ Obviously, it was the familiar materials and images appropriated by Huang Chin-ho, which no other artists had previously applied in such a consequent mode, that led to the critic's remark that that Huang's works possessed a "double character, ... a combination of 'avant-garde' and 'Taiwanese taste'."²⁴

Huang Chin-ho's paintings exhibited at his first solo show were definitely not a realistic

19 Artist's statement. 1995. p53.

20 "Within a short period of one year [after Huang's first solo exhibition in 1990] it seems that no one did not know of a 'prophet' living in Taichung." Wang Fudong. 1993. "Ta de zuopin shi you Taiwan weidao: Huang Jinhe de minjian fushihui" [His Works Have a Taiwanese Flavor: Huang Chin-ho's folkloristic World]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 251, January 1992. Quoted from reprint in *Taiwan xinshengdai meishu xunli* [An Overview of the New Generation of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huanguan Wenxue, (1993). p42.

21 As these early works have not yet been publicly shown, I was fortunate to be invited to view these pieces at a collector's home in 1994 in Taichung.

22 Wang Fudong. 1993. p44.

23 Wang Fudong. 1993. p44.

24 Wang Fudong. 1993. p42.

depiction of the ordinary Taiwanese living environment, yet they were figurative and concerned with the human condition. In one painting, *Untitled* (Wuti, 無題, fig. 4), three grotesque figures, facing the viewer frontally, appear standing against the background of a realistically depicted, idyllic landscape with trees, mountains, and clouds. While the landscape elements are strongly foreshortened toward the horizon, the three human figures, by contrast, obscure the view by completely occupying the vertical space of the painting. More than unpleasant, they are depicted in a disproportional and rather frightening manner. The young man on the right, only clad in pants, holds a knife in his right hand. The person in the middle is a bearded hermaphrodite or transsexual with a male body but a female haircut and dress, while the third figure on the left, although an old man, is no less weird a cross-dresser, as he sports dark sunglasses, a blue shirt and a red skirt.

This strange company of three grotesque figures strongly reminds us of the ensemble of four in *Fire*; as does the subject of man in the midst of nature, in an environment with strongly symbolic implications. Huang Xiwen, an artist himself and a friend of Huang Chin-ho's, has identified the three figures in his testimony as a rich greedy boss, a gangster, and a professional killer. "They represent the money and the violence prevailing on the streets, superficial richness, and a scoundrel-like mentality."²⁵ For Huang Xiwen it is also clear that the painting is a protest against degeneration; it is "requesting to cut off one's desire, meditating on blissfulness, and hoping for the elimination ... of the barbarity of human beings."²⁶ This almost religious message is hardly directly and visually reflected in the picture. At most, the background landscape, peaceful and idyllic, offers a strong, almost paradisaical contrast to the "fallen" characters in the foreground, emphasizing the alienation of human beings from nature. It is through this contrast, and indeed in this landscape, that we find no shortage of symbolic and religious imagery, such as the pine trees which commonly stand for longevity, which confirm the picture's appropriation of the harmonious world, the lost paradise found often in traditional folklore and folk art.

Huang Chin-ho's attachment to folk religion became much more evident in the works which followed *Fire*. In his next solo show in 1993, the artist exhibited his recently finished major work, *Fire*, as well as a few smaller pieces which also dealt with contemporary life, with the "newly prosperous denizens of Taiwan in a world of exuberant grossness and garish transformation."²⁷ All these paintings revived a large amount of symbols from local popular religion and material life.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that Huang's undeniably strong involvement with Taoist-Buddhist folk religion was a direct outgrowth of his upbringing and socialization in rural Taiwan.²⁸ In fact, his mature style evolved only after a five-month stay in New York from 1989 to 1990. Huang's trip to New York, that center of world art, must have been both revealing and crucial. For something made Huang Chin-ho abandon his former, Chagall-like, style and, shortly

25 Huang Qiwen. 1991. "Manchong de diaogui chengshi: Huang Jinhe Taiwan renwen guanzhao de xinhuihua guiqu" [Paradoxical Mirage: Huang Chin-ho's Taiwanese Concern and Tendency of New Painting]. In *Yishujia*, 188, January, pp292-3. While requesting for permission to reproduce this work in 2005, the author learned the artist has renamed the work from *Untitled* to *Hooligans in Heaven*.

26 Huang Qiwen. 1991. p292.

27 Jose, Nicholas. 1995. "Taiwan Treasure Island: An Introduction." In *Art Taiwan*. Sydney: G+B Arts International. pp15-16.

28 Huang himself has affirmed his belief in Taoist incarnation and was "strongly influenced by the Taoist temple ritual." See Xu Hailing. 1990. "Huang Jinhe huazuo chungman guiyi qifen" [Huang Chin-ho's Weird and Strange Paintings]. In *Zili wanbao*. 15. November. Huang's belief in Taoist religion is in fact a very rare phenomenon among university graduates. The art critic Wang Fudong has written: "Probably because he was grown up in a village [he was] strongly influenced by the Taoist ritual." Wang Fudong. 1993. p44.

afterwards, venture into a complete new territory of artistic language. Little has been articulated by the artist in regard to the experiences he made there, apart from the fact that he and his family, his wife and three children, had actually planned a much longer stay. It is hard to tell what exactly was the decisive impulse, positive or negative, he received there; it can only be conjectured that, like many other artists, he realized his own position and cultural roots only after having left his native land.²⁹

According to the Australian author Nicholas Jose, who has had many talks with Huang Chin-ho, it was in New York that Huang "realized that the art he most passionately wanted to produce was inseparably bound up with Taiwan itself."³⁰ More self-confident and assured of his own cultural location, Huang returned to Taiwan and embarked on a discovery of the indigenous culture, uniquely Taiwanese in its spirit and formal imagery.

3.1.4 The Artist and the Tradition

Folk Religions: Buddhist and Taoist

Despite Huang Chin-ho's new awareness of the indigenous culture and his determination to create an art that grows out of his place of origin, Huang Chin-ho's involvement with folk religion was far from being simply a strategy. On the contrary, as we have learned from his artist's statement quoted above, the religious impact revealed in *Fire* not only determines details of form and imagery but the artist's entire conceptual intention.³¹

Generally speaking, there are three categories of elements in *Fire* which are closely related to folk religion. Shakyamuni and the Thunder God with his "Five Thunders" stele are visual motifs unambiguously drawn from the Buddhist and Taoist religion. Less immediately recognizable are the red-white clouds floating across the sky – a motif appropriated, as confirmed by the artist, from a specific genre of Taoist religious painting, the "Hell Scrolls."³² A second category are those religious concepts and beliefs of the artist, mentioned in the artist's statement, which lack any direct visual counterpart but are nevertheless clearly expressed and indicated in the picture;

29 According to one newspaper report about the artist, before going to New York, "Huang prepared a C.V. and portfolio. ... In the gallery areas of New York, Huang introduced himself, going from door to door. The praise of a few gallerists ... encouraged him to discuss the works with them. Other gallerists refused to meet with him at all as he had made no appointment by telephone beforehand." (Li Meiling. 1990. "Huang Jinhe: cangku li de yishujia" [Huang Chin-ho: The Artist in a Ware House]. In *Zhongguo shibao*. 23, June.)

30 See Jose, Nicholas. 1995. p15.

31 How deeply the artist is involved with Taoist and Buddhist thought can be seen in the written information he provided in 2000, in which he remarked that *Fire* is in fact rooted in four different concepts: "1) The passage of the Lotos Sutra [*Saddharmapundarikasutra*, or *Fahuajing* in Chinese]: "Sanjie wu an you ru huozhai. Zhongku chungman shenke buwei" [三界無安, 猶如火宅, 眾苦充滿, 甚可怖畏, No peace prevails in the three worlds. They resemble a burning house. Misery abounds everywhere. This is frightening indeed!]. 2) The rebirth of the soul and the theory of condemnation by the Hell King in Taiwanese Taoist religion. 3) The theory of reincarnation in Buddhism and its meditation teachings. 4) The theory of impurity in Hinayana Buddhism and its meditation teachings." (See note 2) It is fairly obvious that the title of Huang's work is derived from the passage quoted from the Lotus Sutra.

32 Floating clouds were depicted in each "Hell court," as to be seen, for instance, in the early 20th-century "Ho Scrolls." However, these clouds are blue, not red, in order to stand out before the red background of each scroll. The scrolls are reproduced in Donnelly, Neal. 1990. *A Journey Through Chinese Hell: Hell Scrolls of Taiwan*. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe. pp22-63. See also Liu Wensan. 1995. "Shidian Yanjun" [Lord Yama and His Ten Courts]. In *Taiwan zongjiao yishu* [Taiwanese Religious Art]. repr. (1976). Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu. pp81-100. Xi Dejin. 1974. *Taiwan minjian yishu* [Taiwan Folk Art]. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu.

namely, his belief that "life is both the Buddha and the devil" and that "the body is born and dies like all plants and critters." Lastly, there are certain other artistic features in the painting which are "influenced by the Taoist folklore," as stated by the artist. In this case, the "Hell Scrolls" as well as other religious objects in Taoist temples serve not as direct models, but certainly as sources of inspiration. This third category will be dealt with in a later section of this study, when discussing the stylistic questions of Taiwanese aesthetics.

Three major motifs in *Fire*, the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Taoist Thunder God, and the latter's "Five Thunders" stele were analyzed earlier in this chapter in terms of their iconographical aspects. Although it was possible there to pinpoint a number of specific sources, it has now become clear that the artist created his figures and their attributes rather freely from the conventional images canonized by tradition. And we have observed that the striking transformations toward the demonic undergone by the divine beings depicted are rooted in the artist's belief that "life is both the Buddha and the Devil."

The artist's concept of a double identity of the gods, containing both good and evil traits, is apparently an early Buddhist concept and without doubt crucial for the evaluation and understanding of *Fire*. Already in the widely popular *Heart Sutra*, the coexistence of opposites rather than their mutual exclusion is a familiar concept, stating, for instance, that "the world of senses does not differ from the void; the void does not differ from the world of senses."³³ More explicitly, the priest Zhiyi (538-596), the founder of the Tiantai school of esoteric Buddhism, emphasized the concept of an undivided world of both the Devil and the Buddha. In his commentary on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, Zhiyi stated that "... the devilish is contained in the ten realms and hundreds laws. ... Without leaving the world of Buddha, there is the world of the Devil. No divergence, no difference. ... The world of the Devil is the world of the Buddha. People are not aware of it. They indulge in the world of Buddhism and the world of the Devil rises."³⁴

The respective passage in Huang Chin-ho's statement clearly echoes this early Chinese Buddhist concept. The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the earliest document to postulate the inalienable devilish features within the Buddha nature, or the ambiguous character of the Buddha, enjoyed great popularity in China, especially after the inclusion of Zhiyi's commentary. By the 16th century, this concept was already firmly imbedded in popular literary texts. In one of Huang's favorite Taoist novels, *Fengshenbang* (The Investiture of the Gods), we find a world with quite peculiar standards of behavior. Treating historical figures and events in a Taoist spirit, the novel deals with the so-called "battles between gods and devils." Interestingly enough, after the hostilities have ceased, just who in the end becomes "invested" by the ruler of Heaven is not at all decided by his being a "god" rather than a "devil." Instead, as the contemporary literary scholar Li Yuanzhen writes, "all those [among both gods and devils] ... who are Taoists are after their death invested as gods."³⁵ As one of the most popular classical novels, *Fengshenbang* testifies to a world-view that is beyond our common perception dividing "devil" and "god," good and bad. More important is the process of the battle, the struggle itself.

Thus, in the Taoist and the Buddhist world view, both traits of good and evil, both "Devil and the

33 *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. 1963. Takakusu Junjirō & Watanabe Kaigyoku eds. Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan. No.251, 8. p848.

34 *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. 1962. Takakusu Junjirō & Watanabe Kaigyoku eds. Tōkyō: Daizō Shuppan. No.1911, 46. p116.

35 Li Yuanzhen. 2000. *Fengshenbang: Xi Zhou yingxiong chuanqi* [The Investiture of the Gods: Legends of the Heroes of the Western Zhou Dynasty]. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe. p6.

Buddha," are parts of human nature, a view shared by the artist himself, according to his own statements. Consequently, the "demonization" of the two divines in *Fire* is a reflection of this concept in the visual dimension. Furthermore, in this context we also come to understand the reason why the Thunder God, as explained by the artist, embodies multiple images, sources, and identities, encompassing several different gods (among them the King of Hell), the Devil, a dictator and a striptease dancer. It seems now that the Thunder God represents at least two mutually exclusive concepts: his original nature, that of a god of punishment, and a second one, his "devilish" aspect, a composite character which encompasses all possible sorts of evils spirits. His identity as a "dictator" is obviously inspired by and symbolizes those colonial rulers of Taiwan so strongly detested by Huang Chin-ho, while the striptease dancer, that aspect of the figure which is responsible for his or her female bodily features, is certainly drawn from the "messages emanating from contemporary Taiwanese society" which the artist also vehemently criticizes. The reason for the inclusion of the King of Hell should be looked for in his rule over man's fate in the after-life, and as a sign of warning. His power to judge every person after death differs from the power of punishment which the Thunder God wields mostly over the living, yet both figures share the admonitory function. The incorporation of the King of Hell here certainly adds to the image of judgement and its power in the painting, despite theological inconsistencies. The demonization of the Thunder God is thus a highly complex matter. For the artist, the character of the Thunder God figure is central to his work. Apart from the sense of warning he embodies in his capacity as King of Hell, he also represents "the evils" of contemporary society, of politics and the degenerated social development in present-day Taiwan.

The Buddhist concept of the identity of "both the Devil and the Buddha," as discussed above, is in fact only one major religious idea recruited by the artist in his painting; the perceptions of Taoist folk religion may prove to be as crucial, if not more decisive. The ambiguity of life, as mentioned in the early priest Zhiyi's text as well as in the artist's statement, has been visually translated as far as the Thunder God and the Buddha are concerned. The remaining two characters in *Fire*, the transvestite and the prostitute, on the other hand, have been unmercifully excluded from this blessing, and so serve as a contrasting model. Without the possibility of salvation by a "Buddha" part within them, these two human beings should consequently face their own downfall and await the judgement and punishment of the gods.

As a picture which intends "to warn of impending danger," *Fire* resembles, with regard to this function, the Taoist Hell Scrolls as well as the "Last Judgement" in Western art. Unlike these examples, however, the "horrors" envisioned in Huang's painting seem to take place not solely in the after-life, but also in the "present," in the oversexed environment of the real-life society of contemporary Taiwan. Only the transvestite with his head blown away and his trunk connected with the "crematory tower" of the "Nepal Health Plaza," together with the floating red clouds, may convey that sense of death, the image of warning and the vision of horror, at least as far the underlying concept of the work (as laid down in the artist's statement) is concerned.

The Exclusion of Chinese Tradition and the Post-colonial Condition

Huang Chin-ho's post-colonialist position is succinctly expressed in his statement of 1995, where he accuses "the colonial rule that has afflicted Taiwan for centuries" of being responsible for "the degeneration of the country's living environment and the distortion of the people's spirits." This political statement is crucial for the understanding of his work. In particular, we are further informed of how he regards his artistic creation as interwoven with the country's fate, since he called *Fire* "a metaphor for the tragic fate of the Taiwanese, who have been dominated by outsiders throughout their history."

Knowing the artist to be under the spell of the post-colonialist ideology, it is no surprise to read in an interview conducted as early as 1991 his vehement critique of the KMT regime and, in the same breath, of Chinese ink painting: "After the Kuomintang government came to Taiwan, ink painting was promoted. Fine arts departments of different institutions, such as the Political Strategy University, National Normal University, Chinese Culture University, National Art School, all offered the training of ink painting. This is why ink painting, which has not the slightest relationship with the geographical landscape of Taiwan, came into existence here."³⁶

Huang's harsh criticism of ink painting is in fact unfounded. Since the 1950s many ink painters both of mainland and local origin have created works depicting the landscape of Taiwan as well as its people. It is also unreasonable to deny the existence of the literati paintings created before the Japanese occupation of 1895, not to speak of the tragic fate of ink painting under the Japanese colonial rule, when it was systematically repressed.

Huang's viewpoint is subjective and ahistorical, but politically determined. His rejection of the "outsiders," the KMT, echoes the political opinions of the DPP, by which the KMT has been labeled a "foreign power." More interestingly, in the same interview we learn of Huang Chin-ho's views on the oil paintings of the older generation: "Impressionism and Fauvism, transplanted from Japan onto Taiwan during the Japanese occupation, ... had completely lost their essence and original taste. Yet the Taiwanese painters still enjoy playing with oil colors. ... This is the reason why the concept of painting went into a direction totally estranged from social reality."³⁷

While recognizing oil painting in Taiwan as being a transplant from Japan (not unlike, in fact, ink painting being imported by the KMT), Huang Chin-ho is unwilling to give credit to the early works of the older generation, who in his view watered down the original styles of oil painting to a mere dallying with the oil medium. Interestingly enough, his critique of oil painting is not concerned with the way it came to Taiwan, but with its current going astray towards escapism and meaningless *l'art-pour-l'art*. As a matter of fact, Huang's comment is quite understandable, since he himself is an oil painter and somehow the genealogy of Taiwanese oil painting requires to be accepted. Only after admitting oil painting into "legitimate" Taiwanese art do his own line of work and contribution obtain validity, especially as it strives to reverse the older generation's "estrang[ement] from social reality."

To accept Japanese oil painting as part of the Taiwanese tradition has further merits. In this way, it is possible to negate its relationship with current Western influences. In his 1995 artist's statement, Huang declared: "I hope to make an overall assessment of Taiwan's cultural tradition and to open up new frontiers for the country's new aesthetics which are distinct from those of China and the Western world." Huang Chin-ho's rather vast ambition to create a Taiwanese aesthetics, while at the same time rejecting Chinese as well as Western influences, supposedly rests on the two pillars already discussed above: oil painting, which in Huang's view obtained its status of a national tradition through its import from Japan, and Taiwanese folk religion, as the artist himself has stated: "The style of my work [i.e. *Fire*], in regard to its form, is greatly influenced by Taoist folklore, as well as the messages emanating from contemporary Taiwanese society."³⁸

Huang's personal artistic concept, as seen above, is both complex and strangely entangled. The

36 Huang Qiwen. 1991. "Taiwan de yishu yu shehui guanxi : Huang Jinhe vs. Su Zhenming" [Taiwanese Art and its Relationship with Society: Huang Chin-ho vs. Su Zhenming]. In *Ziyou shibao*, 25, March.

37 Huang Qiwen. 1991. 25, March.

38 Artist's statement. 1995. p53.

break in his style after his return from New York and, consequently, his attachment to folk religion are closely related to his rejection of the Chinese tradition, his recognition of the history of oil painting as indigenous (though not its recent developments), and, not least, the distinction he makes between his own brand of painting and that of the "Western world." Now is the time to return to the discussion of the Taoist-Buddhist concepts reflected in *Fire*, which had been left unfinished in the previous section, this time focussing on the artist's ambitious aesthetic program.

Taiwanese Aesthetics?

Stylistically speaking, *Fire* is constructed, as discussed above, on the basis of a series of major artistic techniques, such as the use of garish and dissonant colors, the juxtaposition of diverse images, and the arrangement of both in an over-crowded pictorial space permeated by a tremendous *horror vacui*. The juxtaposed or appropriated images are not ready-mades; although mostly taken from the artist's real-life environment and from the world of religion, with the exception of the more surreal ones, they have all been subject to alterations according to artistic requirements. Even if the painting is composed of mainly realistic elements, it has to be regarded as symbolic and allegorical. The blending of the contemporary living experience with surrealism and religion is one of its most unique features, for it treads a terrain that has hardly been ventured upon in Taiwanese art before. *Fire* is not only very much unlike the realistic oil paintings of the older generation of Taiwanese painters, it also differs from the mythological works created in the mid-80s by the 101 Art group.³⁹ Considering this and other artistic schemes and strategies applied in Huang's *Fire*, one is prompted to pose the question: What exactly were the artistic resources Huang drew on to achieve such a considerable degree of visual impact and energy?

The "*horror vacui*" we have made out as a major characteristic of the painting's artistic scheme could have found its inspiration in the primitive works of Hong Tong discovered by the localist movement in the mid-70's, which have been highly praised by Huang Chin-ho.⁴⁰ It would be futile to enumerate the many examples in Western art, especially medieval, primitive, and contemporary, although the works of graffiti artists like Keith Haring as well as those of the COBRA group and the French painter Robert Combas could be mentioned, the latter two of which have also been shown in Taiwan.⁴¹ It is, however, the paintings of the Mexican modernist, Diego Rivera with which Huang's paintings most closely share certain artistic as well as ideological features; a possible relationship which certainly deserves a closer look.

In an article on Mexican art published in June 1991, during the time when Huang Chin-ho was

39 After the decline of the localist movement which had dominated the 70s, the 101 Art Group became one of the most innovative forces in the mid-80s. Including Wu Tianzhang and Yang Mao-lin, the latter of whom is also discussed in this study, this group received inspiration from the international new painting movement and launched their mythological paintings as a response to the international artistic tendency of 're-reading history.' Wu Tianzhang's *A Symptom of the 'Syndromes of the World Injury'* depicts a scenery of struggling figures, among them one over-sized giant as leading character, quite similar to the compositional position of the transvestite in *Fire*. As a prize-winning work at the Taipei Biennial 1986, Wu's piece enjoyed great recognition. See chapter 2.2.

40 The colorful and imaginative style of the primitive artist, Hong Tong (1920-1987) could indeed have inspired the young artist, in particular because he was much impressed by Hong's indigenous roots, free of any foreign influence.

41 Taipei Fine Arts Museum held exhibitions of the COBRA group between 10. Jan. and 15. March, 1987, and of Robert Combas between 09. Feb - 21. April, 1991. See Taipei Fine Arts Museum. ed. 1993. *Taipei Shili Meishuguan shizhounian zhuanji* [The Tenth Anniversary of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p174.

about to begin working on *Fire*, the author Li Yu remarked on the artistic achievements of the Mexican modernists, Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. For the art historian based in New York, the post-colonial condition shared by the Mexican modernists and the Taiwanese contemporary artists was her departure point and central argument: "If after the colonial period and while entering the twentieth century Rivera and Orozco had still followed a second-hand Cubism, Fauvism, or Surrealism, if they had still followed the steps of the Europeans, colonialism in Mexico would have continued to be a nightmare and a tragedy."⁴²

Could the post-colonial painter Huang Chin-ho, an artist both detesting colonial rule and striving for "new frontiers for the country's new aesthetics," have found conceptual as well as technical inspiration in the works of Rivera, whose ideas and positions would have been highly appreciated by the artist? Although he never explicitly refers to any previous knowledge of Mexican art, it is striking to see shared artistic devices in the works of Huang Chin-ho and the Mexicans, especially Rivera. The tremendous size chosen for *Fire* alone points to Rivera's favorite field, the mural. The painting's overcrowded composition, its over-dimensional central figures surrounded by smaller ones, and the blending of naturalistic or realistic depictions with surreal or symbolic (allegorical) elements are all reminiscent of the works of the Mexican artist. Also, the object of both artists' critique as well as the inclusion of indigenous elements on a grand scale seem comparable.

I will not, however, go into a comparison of details here, nor suggest any definitive connection.⁴³ More significant is the fact that many non-Western artists, while confronting the West, follow the artistic project to return to their indigenous culture in search for an identity. Huang's choice of folk religion was rooted in a post-colonial position similar to that of the Mexican modernist, faced by similar critical issues half a century earlier. It is certainly significant that Huang's massive visual images and his impressions taken from folk religion, as well as his personal involvement with Taoist and Buddhist belief, became his starting point for artistic creation only after having encountered "the other," after his return from New York. It remains to be asked what exactly were the resources on which the artist drew for his project of "mak[ing] an overall assessment of Taiwan's cultural tradition and ... open[ing] up new frontiers for the country's new aesthetics," and in what sense did he intend to establish "a new Taiwanese aesthetics."

Strictly speaking, there is no single specific Taoist painting which could have provided Huang Chin-ho with substantial assistance in creating his *Fire*. Undoubtedly, there is a very large number of Taoist temples in all parts of Taiwan, bearing witness to a tremendous output in religious art. For the most part, these works were (and still are) produced by more or less anonymous artisans; they include plastic works, reliefs, and sculptures, made of wood, ceramics, or stone, as well as various decorative carvings and paintings adorning roofs, windows, gates and entrances, pillars and columns, staircases, and altars, not to mention countless religious or ceremonial objects. All of these are unlikely to have supplied any direct inspiration, not even the painted Door Gods who adorn the double doors at the entrance gate of most temples. On the other hand, one striking feature of Taiwanese temples is the overall application of bright colors. When entering a temple, one finds oneself in the midst of a pandemonium released by an incredible zeal for decoration, joyous, glittering, gorgeous, even kitschy, scattered in

42 Li Yu. 1991. "Cong Moxige dao Taiwan: wenhua ruqin ruoshi fengge de yayi he fuxing" [From Mexico to Taiwan: Cultural Invasion, Repression of Style and Revival]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 244, June, p113.

43 It needs to be mentioned that the stylistic change from Huang's *Untitled* (afterwards *Hooligans in Heaven*, see note 25) of 1990 to *Fire* of 1991 - 1992, took place at the time, when Li Yu published her article in June, 1991.

innumerable segments across ceiling, altar, and walls.⁴⁴

Whereas the penchant for a compressed composition and the pleasure of depicting details could well be associated with Taiwanese Taoist temple art, one local art critic has seen these artistic features as rooted in quite a different source. In 1991, the critic Wang Fudong pointed out in Huang Chin-ho's style "the way he usually completely stuffs the pictorial space, which perfectly corresponds with the sense of suffocation in a crowded space in which the Taiwanese people live." Wang went on to state that Huang's "subject matter comes entirely from our social and living environment ... [and his] use of bright and gaudy colors as one of the characteristics of his paintings [is] fully comparable to our 'images of society'."⁴⁵ Indeed, in an article written in 1992, the artist has himself offered a veritable list of things which his art is actually influenced by and closely related to in "our social and living environment." Sources of influence include, as Huang remarked, religious icons, embroidery, Hell Scrolls, the style of Taiwanese temple decorations, traditional Taiwanese opera, religious processions such as that of the "Eight Generals" and other performances, "Electric Flower Cars," paper sculptures for funeral purposes, old posters, "Beef Shows," temporary architectures for real estate sales, and the facades of karaoke parlors.⁴⁶

This diverse list encompassing religious, popular, and even sex culture conforms with the artist's own testimony mentioning "Taoist folklore" and "the messages emanating from contemporary Taiwanese society" as his major influences. It is this list of "influences" which might give us a clue for understanding the artist's ambitious project of creating a new "Taiwanese aesthetics," which, given the early date of the document, must have been consciously mapped out at the very outset of his artistic undertaking. With his great effort to recruit, incorporate and synthesize various forms and sources of Taiwanese indigenous, popular, and less noticed "lower" culture into his art, Huang has certainly succeeded in opening "a new frontier" of aesthetic sensitivity, if not for a whole country, then at least within his own creative territory.

44 The artist's own early artistic experience as a painter of large movie advertisements for cinema billboards may have played a role in the formation of *Fire* as well, in particular a feature of the narrative mode, that of presenting one central oversized figure in order to attract immediate attention. The artist himself, however, has offered a different explanation: "The oversized and simplified images of the human characters are adopted from those icons of folk religion, the images of Qiye and Baye." The two "icons" mentioned by the artist are semi-divine protective spirits in Taoist religion. With frightening masks and twice the natural size of humans, their images are often carried ahead of religious processions. See Xie Jinrong. 1993. "Juchangli shanshuo zhe jidui liangjinjin de 'xiandaiyan': xiandaihua zai Taizhong de fazhan jinguo" [Some Pairs of 'Contemporary Eyes' Glittering in the Juchang Meeting Place]. In *Xinxingwen zhoukan*, 16-22, May, p90.

45 Wang Fudong. 1993. p45.

46 Jian Dan. 1992. "Zhaoxun Taiwan chuanguozhe gongtong de yuyan: Huang Jinhe Taiwan qingjie de shengceng chengxian" [In Search for a Common Artistic Language: The Taiwanese Complex as Expressed by Huang Chin-ho]. In *Zili zaobao*. 14, September.

3.2 Yang Mao-lin: Re-presenting History

Yang Mao-lin's art closely relates to the changes within Taiwanese society. Particularly his early series *Mythological Heroes*, created shortly before the lifting of martial law, testifies to his position as an artist who successfully grasped the pulse of his time. Although entirely trained in the local academic environment, Yang Mao-lin came into contact with the artistic expressions and techniques current in the international trends of "new painting," notably in German Neo-expression and Italian Transavantgarde. Shortly afterwards, he developed a more or less "postmodernist" style,¹ encompassing, for instance, the technique of appropriation and the breaking of a single time line.

Around 1991, Yang Mao-lin launched an unprecedented project designed to be conducted on a "national" scale: Taiwan's history was to be chronologically dealt with from its early times as a *terra incognita* up until 1895, when the Japanese colonial rule began. Yang remarked: "I thought to use painting to write Taiwan's History."² Perhaps the most interesting among this corpus of several series is the *Zeelandia Memorandum* series, of which *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301*, (Relanzhe jishi, 熱蘭遮紀事 L9301, fig. 5) the painting to be discussed in this chapter, is one example. A complex body of critical issues is to be treated, with the concept of a re-presentation of history, probably even to be considered as a re-invention of history, as the most crucial theme. Created under the premise of a national cultural identity, the overlapping of the personal and the collective, i.e. of national memories, frequently occurring in post-colonial societies, is evident in these works.

In what follows, *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301* will be examined in detail, together with the artist's viewpoint on his artistic concept as expressed in his comments and statements, with the emphasis laid on the artistic sources of and concepts central to that viewpoint. While the painting's artistic techniques, compositional structure, use of colors, and mode of presentation are discussed, special attention will be given to the form of the double portrait, on which the work is ultimately based. As I have been speaking of an "invention of history," the work inevitably challenges the conventional reading of that history. Yet is this new reading artistically plausible? What artistic strategies does the artist follow, and what impelled him to work in that direction? In order to answer these questions, I will first look at the genre from the historical aspect. Another major area to be dealt with is the artistic sources which made this re-reading of

1 Around 1984, the art critic Wang Fudong, who at the time resided in New York, wrote that the "painterly language of the new images" of the 101 Art group resembled that of the East Village, New York, which "intrinsically connected the group to the New York art community." Wang Fudong. 1993. "Zongrong zhuyizhe huo mingzhu de dianjiren: Wu Tianzhang de Zhongguo qingjie" [A Champion of Laissez-faire or the Founder of Democracy: Wu Tianzhang's China Complex]. In *Taiwan xinshengdai meishu xunli*. Taipei: Huangguan Wenshue. (Rep. 1992). p38. In 1991, an exhibition Postmodernist Paintings in Taiwan: A group Show of Six Artists was held at the Dimen Art Center, and included three members of the 101 Art Group, Yang Mao-lin, Wu Tianzhang, and Lu Yizhong. See the introductory text by Lu Rongzhi Victoria. 1991. "Cong moni yu zaixian de weiji: kan Taiwan houxiandai shikong de yishu guiji" [The Crisis of Pastiche and Representation: The Artistic Traces of Taiwanese Postmodernist Approaches]. In *Taiwan houxiandai huihua liuren lienzhan* [Postmodernist Paintings in Taiwan: A Group Show of Six Artists]. Taipei: Dimen Yishu Zhongxin. Unpaginated. See also Chapter 2.2.1.

2 Findlay, Ian. 1997. "Pop Goes a Culture." In *Asia Times*, 04, March.

history possible in the first place. As noted before, the international new wave of the return to easel painting brought about by the Italian Transavantgarde and German Neo-Expressionism, introduced to Taiwan around 1983, played a crucial role in this respect. This postmodernist style, together with its theoretical framework, offered the artist an indispensable instrument at an early stage of his development and the formation of his style. Finally, the shift in the subjective feeling of cultural identity, from Chinese to Taiwanese, which occurred during the 90s, played a central role as well, to such a degree that without considering this background the views manifested in this painting would be entirely out of context.

3.2.1 *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301*

Two Historical Heroes: A Chinese and a Westerner

Painted in 1993 and measuring 112 x 194 cm, *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301* is an oil painting representing a double portrait of a Westerner and a Chinese.³ Each framed by a colored line, the two portraits are placed side by side. On the right, in an orange frame, a middle-aged, bearded Chinese in historical costume is rendered strictly frontally, while his counterpart to the left, surrounded by a red frame and dressed in the Dutch fashion of his time, is given in two-thirds profile. The figures portrayed clearly dominate their respective parts of the pictorial space, the left one against a yellow background, the right against a background predominantly of dark gray. Around them, various smaller and often fragmentary objects are arranged, such as battleships, small houses, a flag, cannons, and silhouettes of maps.

The appearance of two persons of different ethnical origins in the picture comes as something as a surprise to anyone not familiar with the subject matter of the painting. The latter, however, is clearly given in the title of the work. "Zeelandia" was the name of the Dutch fort built in 1624 by the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company) on the south-west coast of Taiwan. The fortress itself appears in the left corner of the painting, flying the Dutch colors red, white, and blue. Close to it, in the lower center, the VOC monogram reappears.

The insignia of the VOC, which sets the historical background, also helps to identify the two personalities portrayed as the Chinese general Zheng Chenggong, better known as Koxinga, and the Dutchman of Swedish extraction, Frederick Coyett, who was the last governor of the fort. Koxinga was the son of a powerful pirate and later a champion of the cause of the Ming dynasty recently toppled by the conquering Manchus. The most momentous historical event connected with the name "Zeelandia" was the battle of 1662 between Dutch and Chinese Ming-loyalist forces, which ended in the defeat of the former, the conquest of Zeelandia by the Chinese, and the end of forty years of Dutch colonial rule in Taiwan. Koxinga and Frederick Coyett were the commanders-in-chief of the two armies in that battle.

The two historical personalities are portrayed in a manner strongly resembling the traditional Chinese style of portraying emperors, ancestors, or other dignified individuals. This is especially true of the portrait of Koxinga on the right, as he is depicted in a strictly frontal posture. Before a gray, black and dark brown background, which perhaps indicates the sea, Koxinga occupies the middle and lower part of the painting. He is dressed in a purple-colored official robe with

3 This painting was purchased by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1995 and is reproduced in the catalogs of *Art Taiwan*, Nicholas Jose & Yang Wen-I, eds., a touring exhibition in Australia in 1995-96 (pp34-35) and of *VOC: Handle with Care: Huang Yongping and Yang Mao-lin* at the Venice Biennial 1999 (pp46-47), the two exhibitions where the work was shown in an international venue. See the bibliography.

ornaments which are unrecognizable in detail and a collar of dark green, and wears a black official's cap with simple ornaments in bright red. He looks straight out of the picture with a facial expression that is intense, canny, and somewhat sinister. The face is carefully drawn, with high eyebrows and almond-shaped eyes, a narrow moustached upper lip and a somewhat fuller lower one, and a small goatee in the Chinese fashion. Beside the broad and apparently slightly hooked nose, two symmetrical lines, indicating wrinkles, give the portrayed an aged appearance, although the historical Koxinga was only thirty-eight at the time of his death.

Koxinga is placed in a dark ambience out of which only one strong color is shining, the red parts of his cap. It is a two-leveled cap in black, lined with borders and ornaments in bright orange and cinnabar-red, among them a thick horizontal line in the middle, and thinner lines in the upper and lower sections which follow the contours of the cap; from the top of the cap, three ornamental elements protrude. This cap partly hides what becomes only on a second glance recognizable as the greenish silhouette of a map of Taiwan, with its eastern part facing upwards, looming behind Koxinga's head. The appearance of the map alone, indicating a geographical and political territory, would not cause friction in the makeup of the painting, were it not for two cannon-barrels, the least obvious objects in the picture, which seem to grow out of Koxinga's shoulders and be aimed directly at the map of Taiwan.

Due to their gray color set against darker surroundings, the identification of these two cannons invites a closer look. For at first sight they could just as well be mistaken for a pair of pillars or other cylindrical objects. Further examination, however, reveals not only their exact rendering as far as the technical details of 17th century artillery is concerned, but also the fact that they are, in fact, visual ready-mades, taken from historical cannon models.

While the Chinese figure has been placed into somewhat darkish surroundings, his counterpart, Frederick Coyett, is exposed to a world of bright colors, of red, yellow, and orange. In contrast to this background, however, Coyett, at its center, is rendered in black and white and in a clearly graphic manner. Situated in the center of the painting, the Dutch governor appears as an elderly man, tired and apparently lost in thought. Wearing a black coat with white collar, Coyett wears long, curly hair falling to his shoulders. His face is characterized by wide-open eyes surrounded by wrinkles, a large nose and a firmly-closed mouth with moustache. He stares out of the picture in a leftwards-slanted direction and with a somewhat doubtful air. Most peculiar is the exaggerated form of the collar, which is given a monumental and almost architectural form resembling two arches leaning against each other. This geometric form is significant, for it consolidates compositionally the objects otherwise loosely dispersed around the portrayed figure.

Behind Coyett's back and to his right several small models of houses can be seen, and to his left the silhouettes of two battleships. Heading towards the background, both ships are shown in red; both are only partly visible, with one of them only discernable by the bow protruding from behind the portrayed figure. This pattern of fragmentation can also be observed with the other accessories in the picture. The fortifications of Zeelandia in the left corner would be difficult to recognize were it not for the prominent Dutch flag. The four architectural models are scattered, on a very small scale and isolated from any surroundings. Immediately above Coyett's head, small green silhouetted areas indicate fragments of a map, obviously showing a part of the Taiwanese coast.

In terms of artistic form, Yang Mao-lin was facing the major problem of how to unite the two separate sections of his painting. As a clear separation between the two parts is intended, no attempt is made to use formal devices such as a unifying perspective to hold them together. Instead, the artist uses color and style as joining forces in order to achieve the necessary sense of

unity.

As far as the colors are concerned, it is the fundamental colors green and black which serve as combining elements. In both sections, for instance, we find green maps of Taiwan, and, more eloquently, two identical green labels on the lower part of each frame with the black inscription "Made in Taiwan." The color black reappears in Coyett's coat as well as in Koxinga's cap, forming another kind of correspondence.

Further evidence of the use of colors to establish connections can be found in the red and orange parts of that same cap. For these colors simultaneously dominate the left and the lower part of Coyett's portrait, as seen in the battleships, the fort, the VOC monogram, but they are also subtly reflected in the standing collar of the governor. This exaggerated and enlarged collar bears, as far as the application of colors is concerned, and certainly compositionally unique, the least pure color in the picture, for it contains quite an amount of orange in itself. Apparently taking on this specific hue by the reflections of the adjacent Fort Zeelandia, this collar, in a quite exceptional fashion, also functions as a bridge between Coyett's face and the fort, as well as correspondingly referring back to the orange frame of the Koxinga portrait.

In regard to the stylistic aspects of the work, several different techniques are applied. The ways, for instance, in which the faces of the two portrayed figures are rendered differ strikingly from each other. While the depiction of Koxinga's face reflects a linear approach quite close to the classical Chinese style, Coyett is rendered in the manner of Western graphic art, with shading and an effect of three-dimensionality. The juxtaposition of these two different styles within each section of the painting and crosswise between them - one flat and rigid and the other more spontaneous, with clear strokes and shading - is striking. In the left section, for instance, the yellow background is given in undifferentiated flatness, as are the green segmented pieces of the coastal map, the flag and the black dress of Coyett, whereas in the rest of the section, and especially in the portrait, the emphasis lies more on strokes and shades.

In the other half of the painting, matters are reversed: the face of Koxinga is painted in the "flat" style, while elsewhere, a powerful style with visible brushstrokes dominates. The dark background is painted in alternating shades of gray and black-brown, which rules out flatness and conveys a feeling of depth. A similar technique is to be observed in the greenish island, which, upon closer observation, also reveals itself to have been painted in different shades and hues.

The necessity of achieving a persuasive visual unity within the painting was without doubt challenging. As we've just seen, the two major effects just described contribute to this, firstly through the recurrence of the colors black and green on both sides, and secondly through a crosswise application of two main styles in distinct parts of the two sections. Furthermore, the resemblance in the compositional patterns provides a sense of connection as well, for in both parts of the painting a similar compositional pattern has been executed, with the dominating figure in the center given in a triangular form, while also both areas are framed by hard-edged bands of color of the same size. Finally, across each area various objects are scattered, all associated with the very war which is the implicit subject matter of the picture. In this way, apart from various devices on a formal level, the actual and most important linkage between the two sections must be looked for in the painting's theme: the decisive historical war of 1662.

3.2.2 The Work and its Sources

The Background and Biography of the Characters

Descended from a noble Swedish family in Stockholm, Coyett entered the service of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company, which eventually sent him to the Far East, first to Batavia and Japan and then, in 1657, to Formosa as Governor of the Dutch settlement. The VOC, founded in 1601, was the counterpart of the English East Indian Company. During its two hundred years of history, more than three hundred trading posts were founded, from the Cape of Good Hope to South-east Asia. From a recent exhibition organized by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, we learn that the VOC was "a complex organization with many facets. It was both merchant and shipowner, as well as shipbuilder; in some parts of Asia it was regarded as a kind of sovereign; at sea, but also on land, the VOC was powerful and feared."⁴

In the seventeenth century, Taiwan was still primarily inhabited by its aborigines. In 1629 the Spanish, the second Western power to enter Taiwan, had successfully established Fort Santiago at the northern tip of the island. Earlier, in 1624, the Dutch East India Company had occupied the coastal region of Dayuan, to the west of present Tainan city, in the south-west. Their military superiority allowed the Dutch three decades of prosperous trade on the island, especially after defeating the Spanish and driving them out of northern Taiwan. As a transit base for the East China Sea, but also as a trade center for export goods from Taiwan, the colony contributed considerably to the Company's operations in the Far East. (See chapter 1.1).

However, this stability and commercial growth was soon to be interrupted, due to the downfall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644 at the hands of the Manchu invaders, which proved to be of far-reaching impact on Dutch governance in Taiwan. Of the remaining Ming-loyalists, it was Koxinga whose efforts to fight back the Manchus and reinstall the Ming seemed the most promising. Failing to take Nanking after an initial series of victories, he turned to Taiwan as his base for an eventual recovery of the mainland.

Of course, first he had to drive out the Dutch of their stronghold. In January of 1662, after a nine-month siege, the Dutch finally surrendered – a bitter loss for the fortunes of the Dutch in East Asia. Coyett, the last governor, barely escaping a death sentence, was banished in 1666 by his superiors to a small island in the Banda Group, Pulo Ay, to be pardoned nine years later. In 1675, he published the book, *'t Verwaerloosde Formosa* in Amsterdam, where, defending himself, he wrote the "true story [of how] ... through the neglect of the Dutch authorities in the East Indies, the Island of Formosa has been invaded, subdued, and conquered by the Chinese pirate Koxinga."⁵

Koxinga played the single most decisive role in the early history of Taiwan. As the son of a once powerful pirate active in the East China Sea, who was later pardoned by the Ming Emperor and granted high official titles, including that of Grand Admiral, but later forced to serve the Manchus, Koxinga was determined to defeat the foreign invaders and restore the Ming royal house.⁶ Only two years before targeting Taiwan, in the summer of 1659, Koxinga and his troops

4 *Dutch Enterprise and the VOC (1602-1799)*. 1998. Catalog of the exhibition organized by the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Amsterdam: Harm Stevens Walburg Press. p7.

5 De Beauclair, Inez, ed. 1975. *Neglected Formosa: a Translation from the Dutch of Frederic Coyett's 't Verwaerloosde Formosa*. San Francisco: Chinese Material Center Inc. p15. Coyett's original text was published in Amsterdam in 1675.

6 Koxinga was born in 1624 in Hirado, near Nagasaki, Japan. His mother was a Japanese surnamed Tagawa. See Twitchett, Dennis & Mote, Frederick W., eds. 1998. *The Cambridge History of China. 8. The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644*, Part 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp369-374, 330-375. Croizier, Ralph C. 1977.

advanced as far as the region of the Yangtze River. Had he taken Nanking, once the capital of the empire, Chinese history in the 17th century would have taken a different course. Formosa, a remote island on which he had never set his foot before, was in itself of no particular interest to him, and significant only as the strategic base from which to prepare for his long-term return to the mainland. The fate of Taiwan remained in the hands of his descendants and followers for the next twenty-one years, until 1683, when they were finally defeated by Manchu military forces. Only then did Taiwan for the first time come under imperial Chinese power as part of the Manchu Empire.

With regard to Koxinga, several documents concerning his life and deeds have been passed down to us, but unfortunately, as the American scholar Ralph C. Croizier has remarked, "the primary sources are so few and the secondary sources so many," that the "reliable facts [are] difficult to separate from the rich accretion of legend."⁷ As "one of the greatest personalities of his era," whose "life-work and dream had been to restore a lost empire,"⁸ Koxinga has drawn the attention of numerous writers with quite disparate backgrounds.

Out of quite different motivations, as many as four parties have contributed to Koxinga's posthumous transformation into a myth and a symbol. His European contemporaries (in particular the Dutch and the Spanish) saw him as the destroyer of their commercial and political interests. The Japanese considered him a Japanese with a Chinese father; as a warrior and adventurous hero, Koxinga became a popular figure on the Japanese theater as early as the beginning of the 18th century. In recent history, mainland China has made him the symbol of anti-imperialist liberation. By contrast, Koxinga's efforts to restore the Ming Dynasty qualified him as him a historical model for the KMT in Taiwan, itself (unsuccessfully) planning to recover the Mainland.

Among the Taiwanese, on the other hand, Koxinga was commemorated, mythologized and, soon after his death, deified. In 1919, according to an official Japanese survey, there were a total of forty-eight temples dedicated to Koxinga island-wide.⁹ Evidence shows that after the takeover of Taiwan in 1683, Koxinga was first worshipped by the local people for a quite another reason to those already mentioned, namely as the spiritual leader in their numerous rebellions against the current Qing rule.¹⁰ This resistance became the reason for he Qing to have the bodies of Koxinga and four of his family members officially transferred to his former residence, Nan'an, Fujian, in 1700. But despite the removal of his remains from Taiwan, the worship of Koxinga did not cease: his cult was just continued under the disguise of other gods. The contemporary scholar Cai Xinghui has convincingly demonstrated that the popular Taiwanese gods, Wangye [the King, 王爺] and Jiangjun [the General, 將軍] are to be traced back to Koxinga.¹¹ As late as

Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth and the Hero. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

7 Croizier, Ralph C. 1977. pp1-6.

8 The Belgian scholar, Christine Vertente asserts that Koxinga was no "vulgar pirate, as his enemies often wilfully misportrayed him, but a noble man who never waged war for personal profit", while also the fact that "he offered his continental and Formosa possessions as a welcome refuge to all Ming loyalists prove this beyond doubt." (Vertente, Christine. 1991. "Koxinga Reconquers Taiwan." In *The Authentic Story of Taiwan*. Hutsebaut, Marc, ed. Taipei: Nantian Shuju & Knokke: Mappamundi Publishing Co. p102.)

9 Cai Xianghui. 1989. *Taiwan de cisi yu zongjiao*. [Worship and Religions in Taiwan]. Taipei: Taiyuan Chubanshe. p68.

10 Between 1683 and 1721, there were at least nine rebellions against the Qing rule in Taiwan. Based on the local annals, the author Cai Xianghui has, however, concluded that "due to limited historical documents, it is hard to tell how strongly those actions against the Qing were related to the worship of Koxinga and his son." Cai Xianghui. 1989. p79.

11 Wangye is the second most popular God in Taiwan. Among scholars, two conflicting versions regarding its

1875, Koxinga was finally officially commemorated: a memorial hall was built on the spot where the Dutch had built their second fort, Provintia. There, he was (and is still) worshipped as "National Hero" and "Savior of Taiwan."

The Iconographical Sources

Strangely enough, Koxinga's heroic deeds and his unique role in popular religion are little reflected in Yang's painting. In an apparent contrast to the more narrative and more richly documented rendering of Coyett, the young Chinese idealist is apparently depicted in a night scene, with its main features two cannons aiming at the map of Taiwan. As the artist himself has confirmed, the image of Koxinga (fig. 6) is modeled after a portrait of the late 19th century,¹² and a comparison with the latter work should help to determine the character the depicted is given by Yang Mao-lin. In that earlier portrait, Koxinga is seen in the manner of most of the traditional ancestor portraits, sitting on a chair in a dignified pose, his right hand placed on his knee. The painting itself is done on silk; face and gestures are delicately rendered. Yang Mao-lin has followed this model to a considerable degree, concentrating, however, on the upper part of Koxinga's body, and especially his face. Despite this "zoom" effect, the overall outlook of the portrayed character is closely reconstructed, such as the purple robe, the official's cap, the frontal posture, and in parts even the painting style.

Nevertheless, there are major differences, and pointing them out yields some important insights. As in the original painting, Koxinga is given by Yang as a middle-aged man whose features roughly correspond to that of his model. However, his facial expression has been dramatically altered from that of the original. Instead of being represented as venerable, dignified, and introvert, Yang's Koxinga has become a sinister, unpredictable, not very trustworthy-looking, and cunning character. This modification is achieved mainly through the treatment of the eyes, which the artist has considerably enlarged so as to project a feeling of aggressiveness. Moreover, the patterns and ornaments of Koxinga's official robe, already blurred in the original by the decay of the materials, are in the present painting deliberately made unrecognizable. This is significant, because in the bureaucratic hierarchy, robe patterns were essential to document a person's official rank; to ignore them means to dismiss its bearer's position in that hierarchy, if not the entire system of protocol. Finally, no attributes are given in the original, let alone cannons as in Yang's painting. These pieces of evidence conclusively point to the fact that the artist intended to present an entirely new face of Koxinga, not as a celebrated national hero but as an aggressor who intruded into Taiwan by means of military force.

The portrait of Coyett (fig. 7) derives, as a matter of fact, also from a historical image, an illustration reproduced in a Japanese book on early Taiwanese history.¹³ Similarly to the treatment of Koxinga, the subject is given in close-up. Generally faithful to the illustration, Yang Mao-lin has followed the original rendering, showing Coyett in two-thirds profile, his gaze

origin are offered: One sees him evolved from the old God of Diseases, the other one from the figure of Koxinga. Comparisons of the mode of worship and the images of the Taiwanese Wanye with those of the God of Disease popular in Mainland China, as well as the examination of the historical documents and their dating, seem to prove the latter theory to be the more convincing one. See Cai Xianghui. 1989. pp62-92.

12 Information provided by the artist while I was preparing the exhibition *VOC: Handle With Care. Huang Yongping and Yang Mao-lin*. A detail of the portrait is reproduced in the catalog. Yang Wen-I & Chen Huidai, eds. 1999. Taipei: Lin & Ken Gallery. p47. A full reproduction of this portrait is included in Hutsebaut, Marc, ed. 1991. p83. The portrait now belongs to the Koxinga Museum, Tainan, Taiwan.

13 A reproduction of this portrait is included in Huwai Shenghuo Tushu, ed. 1986. *Taiwan sanbainian* [Three Centuries of Taiwan]. Rep. (1981). Taipei: Huwai Shenghuo Tushu. p32.

diagonally passing by the beholder, and with his dress and hairstyle mainly unaltered; the only exception is the collar, with its prominent coloring of mixed orange and yellow and its re-modelled, dramatized, and enlarged form. Further, the features of the graphic technique have been retained even during the image's translation into oil painting: the governor is rendered in black and white and in a more linear than painterly style. More importantly, just as in the case of Koxinga the model's serene facial expression was replaced by an almost fierce one, Coyett's appearance has also been changed dramatically. However, the change made now works in favor of the portrayed rather than against him. For the person in the early portrait seems uneasy and nervous, while Yang Mao-lin's governor now appears definitely much more composed, and at most pondering his sudden change of fate. These details would seem to indicate that the artist has depicted the Western figure with greater interest and more sympathy than the Chinese one.

Coyett, according to his own account the tragic victim of the VOC's inefficiency, is situated in a phantom-like atmosphere. The coastal region, appearing as the fragment of a silhouette-like map, is the very place where Zeelandia was located and where Coyett in vain tried to stave off his opponent's attacks. The ships behind him are ones he desperately waited for but were never to appear in time for the rescue. The fort Zeelandia is about to be submerged in a yellow sea whose fiery light is reflected in the anxious face and the collar of the hapless governor. The few scattered houses must have been of strategic importance in the final battle. Only the blue-white-red flag of the Dutch Republic waves still in the last light of a lost Empire.

As we have seen, both main characters in the painting are authentic historical figures. In addition, their lives and surroundings have been well documented by written and pictorial material easily accessible to a present-day painter in Taiwan. In 1992, the local magazine *Hansheng (Echo)*, founded in 1978, published an issue entirely dedicated to an exact reconstruction of the battle between Koxinga and Coyett from April 1661 through February 1662, and furnished with documents from the archives of the VOC, den Haag, as well as reproductions of numerous contemporary illustrations and material objects such as depictions of 17th century Fort Zeelandia and military weapons used by both sides.¹⁴

While working on the present painting, Yang Mao-lin extensively consulted these historical materials. In particular, the fragmented accessories surrounding the protagonists are almost without exception drawn from that source. The cannons in the Koxinga portrait, for instance, with their rather primitive form, follow exactly the pictures of historical cannons in the *Echo* magazine. These two cannons are not weapons of the Dutch, as one might assume, but the very historical cannons (fig. 8) used by Koxinga's army during his wars and now preserved in the Koxinga Memorial Museum in Nan'an, Fujian.¹⁵

Also shown in *Echo* is an ink-wash drawing by Johannes Vingboons of 1669, a very fine and detailed bird's-eye view of Zeelandia together with its adjacent township and surroundings.¹⁶ From this work representing the entire fortress, Yang Mao-lin copied just one detail of Zeelandia, the eastern corner with the flagstaff, as well as a number of smaller buildings outside the fort which reappear in the form of small architectural models surrounding Coyett: clockwise, they can be identified as a horse stable and a sheep stable, the detached fort "Utrecht," and two houses

14 *Hansheng (Echo)*, ed. 1992. *Zheng Chenggong he Helanren zai Taiwan de zuihou yizhan ji huanwen dihe* [The Last Battle and the Exchange of Treaties between Koxinga and the Dutch]. Taipei: Hansheng zazhishe, 45, September.

15 *Hansheng*, ed. 1992. p38.

16 *Hansheng*, ed. 1992. pp12-13.

belonging to a goldsmith (fig. 9, 10, 11).¹⁷

As far as these four toy-like models are concerned, they are certainly not chosen at random. According to the historical documents, the four architectures played crucial roles in the battle, particularly the sheep stable, used by Koxinga in the last days of the hostilities as his headquarters and also the place where the Dutch surrender was signed. The horse stable was used by the Dutch as an outpost for nightly patrols, but also saw cease-fire negotiations between both parties. The goldsmiths' houses were used to hold a Dutch battery and ammunition storage. As to the Utrecht fort, it was the final stronghold of the Dutch, whose fall on the 25th of January decided the demise of Dutch rule. In addition to the architectural details, the two battleships appearing in the painting have also been adopted from reproductions in the *Echo* issue mentioned above.

The details of a silhouette map above Coyett's head which indicate the coastal geography of Taiwan are also based on historical material, an 18th century copper-engraving after a sea chart by an unknown cartographer, re-published in 1991 in the book *The authentic story of Taiwan*, where the historical portrait of Koxinga is also reproduced. Not surprisingly, the model for the island's map above Koxinga's head can be found in that book as well.¹⁸

3.2.3 The Work in Context

History Painting and the Double Portrait

The painting *Zeelandia L9301* was created, as we have seen above, on the basis of a series of "ready-mades," appropriated images taken from historical documents. No single element, including the two dominant portraits, stems from the artist's invention; all are subordinated to historical evidence. This artistic device of the picture reminds one of the tradition of history painting, defined by one author as "the depiction of several persons engaged in an important or memorable action, usually taken from a written source," and once regarded in the West as "the most demanding and exalted type of paintings, the form most conducive to public edification."¹⁹ From a historical perspective, it had taken quite a long time for history painting to find its way into Taiwanese art. No works of art concentrating on the past were created during the Japanese colonial period.²⁰ During the post-war KMT regime, examples of the genre came to be displayed

17 Hansheng, ed. 1992. pp14-15.

18 *Kaart van het Eyland Formosa*, a 18th century Dutch map of Taiwan after a 17th century manuscript map and engraved and published by J. van Braam and G. Order de Linden, gives a close description of the coastal region where Fort Zeelandia was situated. The respective detail reappears, slightly dramatized, in Yang Mao-lin's painting. The silhouette of Taiwan behind Koxinga, on the other hand, seems to be a free adoption of the early manuscript map *Pekan o Ilha Formosa*. See Hutsebaut, Marc, ed. 1991. pp42-3.

19 "History Painting." In *Dictionary of Art*, 14. Turner, Jane, ed. New York: Grove's Dictionaries Inc. pp581-589.

20 Discussing their influence and impact on the later generation, the art historian Wang Xiuxiong sums up major themes treated by the first generation of oil painters. Landscape appears as the most popular subject matter, followed by still lives and nudes. "As to group paintings representing the human character," Wang remarks, "this subject was rarely treated." (Wang Xiuxiong. 1990. "Taiwan diyidai xihujia de baoshou yu quanwei zhuyi ji qi dui zhanhou Taiwan xihua de yingxiang" [The Influence of Conservative and Authoritarian Practices of the First Generation of Oil Painters in Post-war Taiwan]. In *Zhongguo, xiandai, meishu, jianlun Ri-Han xiandai meishu guoji xueshu yantaohui* [China: Modernity and Art and A Discussion of Modern Art in Japan and Korea, International Symposium]. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. Taipei: TFAM. p172.) The reason for the limited interest in themes other than the above-mentioned is certainly complex. A simple explanation might be that the official art exhibitions held by the colonial government explicitly promoted those works which "reflect[ed] the characteristics of the local environment," as noted by art historian Yan Juanying. (Yan Juanying. 1993. "The Art

on the walls of the country's memorial buildings, such as the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall and the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall. Dealing with the glorious past of the KMT or significant moments in its leaders' biographies, these works do indeed testify to the introduction of Western history painting into Taiwan.²¹ Artistically, however, the paintings, although publicly accessible, remain of limited interest outside their governmental showcases.

This lack of interest in the past changed significantly during the 80s and the 90s. At first, autobiographical subject matter, such as personal memories and those of an artist's family, was introduced into their works; these were certainly no history paintings in the strict sense of the word, as they were dealing with private, not public, history. Later, around the beginning of the 90s, a small number of artists set out on a more wide-ranging reflection on history, collective memory and material unearthed from the national past: with unorthodox and critical results, both in stylistic and conceptual terms. Their interests and attitude certainly relate to the political and cultural climate after the lifting of martial law and the new wave of searching for cultural identities. More significantly, they symbolize the beginning of a new approach toward the past in the visual arts.

Wu Tianzhang, like his friend Yang Mao-lin a member of the 101 Art Group, has already been mentioned in this study because of his compendium *Historical Icons: Emperors' Portraits*, which depicts, in several variations, four modern political leaders, or, more precisely, as the artist sees them, dictators: Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping. The first corpus of works in this group, the groundbreaking series *The Rule of Chiang Ching-kuo* of 1989, earned him the title of the "first artist to break the political taboo."²² Strongly relying on the technique of physiognomy, these images of the four most influential personalities in modern Chinese and Taiwanese history cannot, however, be strictly considered history paintings, despite the incorporation of unspecified narrative elements which indicate the exertion of military oppression. (See chapter 2.3.1)

Not portraits, but historical architecture is the theme of another artist, Yang Chengyuan, who objectively, to the most minute details, draws and re-produces major Western-style buildings of the colonial period. The relics of the past documented here are reminders of highly unpleasant memories, namely of the Japanese occupation, which are still to be seen on the streets of Taiwan's cities.²³ Despite their apparent lack of narration, these colonial architectures are a

Movement in the 1930s in Taiwan." In *Modernity in Asian Art*. Clark, John, ed. Sidney: Wild Peony Press. p53.)

21 No study on history painting in Taiwan has yet been undertaken. Its introduction to Taiwan and the execution of its early examples go back to the oil painters who came to Taiwan after 1949. Liang Dingming (1895-1959) and Sun Duoci (died 1975) are among the representatives of this genre. The latter had studied with Xu Beihong, the first artist to return from study in Paris in the 20s and the protagonist of history painting in China. See Peng Minghui. 1984. "Liangshi jiazhu yu jindai Zhongguo yishu lungao: yi Liang Dingming wei ximing" [The Liang Family and Modern Chinese Art: The Example of Liang Dingming]. In *Zhongguo meishu zhuanji yanjiu* [Monograph Series on Chinese Art]. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. Taipei: TFAM. pp46-93. Wang Jiacheng. 1975. "Nian Wushi: Sun Duoci jiaoshou" [In Memory of My Teacher: Prof. Sun Duoci]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 51, May, pp24-30.

22 See Ni Zaiqin. 1995. "Wu Tianzhang de lishi tuxiang" [Wu Tianzhang's Historical Icons]. In *Yishujia - Taiwan meishu : Xishuo congrou ershinian* [Artist Magazine - Taiwan Art: Looking Back on Twenty Years of History]. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe. p156. See also Yao Jiang. 1990. "Zai lishi langchao zhong fangun: Wu Tianzhang shixue tuxiang de sige shidai" [Riding the Tide of History: Four Eras of Wu Tianzhang's Historical Icons]. In *Xiongshi Meishu*, 235, September, pp159-161.

23 See Wang Xiuxiong. 1987. "Yang Chengyuan de shijue yuyan" [Yang Chengyuan's visual language]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 199, September, pp127-8. Chen Shuicai. 1993. "Yuedu 'Taiwan jindai jianzhu' tuxiang: shixi Yang Chengyuan yijiujiusan nian xinzu" [Reading the Images of 'Modern Taiwanese Architecture': Comments on Yang Chengyuan's New paintings of 1993]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 266, April, pp81-86.

powerful retelling of history and memories held in common by Taiwanese. While the works of the artists mentioned above in a sense fall short of the definition of "history painting," since they lack narrative elements and the concentration on specific historical events, Yang Mao-lin's approach as reflected in *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301* would seem to comply more with the requirements of the traditional notion of this genre. However, there are two aspects to the work in which it departs radically from the traditional concept. One is the choice of the form of the double portrait, another the specific mode of narrative, one characterized by a broken and discontinued time line.

The picture is without doubt a narrative one. Visual evidence and indeed all "attributes" in the work exclusively direct the beholder to the fatal battle of 1662. These "ready-mades" taken from the historical documents have been carefully put together like pieces of mosaic. However, the narrative constructed out of these pieces is realized in an atmospheric manner, as opposed to the more conventional single perspective. This means that the "important or memorable action," the confrontation of the two protagonists itself and the events of 1662, are in fact only indirectly implied; they are the hidden subject of the painting, only phantom-like present in the double-portrait. This reluctance to depict concrete action is, in my opinion, due to the artist's wish to convey an urgent message, a specific intention which has determined the artists' mode of presentation.

To reconstruct and re-visualize that specific event of the past, i.e. the battle itself, would mean to position the painting's content in a specific frame of time and space, in 1662 and in front of Fort Zeelandia. But if that were the case, the picture would limit its content to that particular event, and thus indeed fit neatly into the category of history painting. Yet this treatment would require the great sacrifice of losing the possibility of commenting more thoroughly – and more subjectively – on the historical events. A depiction of the actual battle would inevitably have to show Koxinga in a victorious position, something which the artist obviously doesn't want to do. By insisting on the portrait genre, Yang Mao-lin has managed to avoid such an unambiguous "ranking" of the protagonists according to the historical outcome of their struggle, and consequently obtains the space he needs for personal comments.

Apparently, – and here Yang's personal commentary comes in – the double portrait, a parallel depiction and juxtaposition of two figures, puts Coyett and Koxinga on one and the same level and makes them share an equal status – the status of a foreign aggressor. The true face of the colonizer, namely that of Coyett, whose negative role here is historically less disputable, is transmitted to and projected onto the figure of Koxinga, the Chinese colonizer. Hence, the double portrait intrinsically fulfils the artist's intention of characterizing both figures depicted as conquerors of Taiwan.

"The object of desire" of the two powers, the territory of Taiwan is, on the other hand, present not in a descriptive but in an abstract form, as geographical maps. It appears twice, once in the fragment right above Coyett's portrait as the ragged coastline of bays and isles where Fort Zeelandia is situated, and a second time in its full, unbroken silhouette, yet clearly overlapped by Koxinga's portrait, which intentionally symbolizes the subsequent takeover of Taiwan by the latter. Strategically, as we have seen, scenes of the actual conflict were avoided in order to convey the artist's implied message. It is the result of the historical events which the artist has preferred to address or, rather, to re-present, in accordance with his intention of proposing a new viewpoint on the incident.

While having clarified the choice of the double portrait, we now still need to return to the question of history painting, the genre to which this work thematically belongs. However, as we have seen, despite its exclusive "archeological" use of historical elements, the painting's

fundamental narrative mode, which is indirect and free of the framework of the historical time and the actual incident, differs greatly from that of conventional history painting.

Early Works and Negative Depictions

Two further questions are raised here. What are the cause and the background for this new reading, and what circumstances impelled the artist to reach his own interpretation of history? Another question concerns a re-evaluation of the function of the portrait, which this new viewpoint conceptually requires.

The recent rise of nationalism in Taiwan together with the awakening of a Taiwanese consciousness is certainly a major factor to be considered here. In order to establish an indigenous Taiwanese view and a historiography seen from the Taiwanese perspective, a clear separation from Chinese history was inevitable. The views expressed by Yang Mao-lin in his work bear witness to this change. Only against this conceptual framework could Koxinga, the long-revered hero who had "recovered" Taiwan from the hands of the Dutch, be re-considered and re-read. However, this undertaking conveys a political viewpoint which is not entirely new in Yang's work. In his earlier creations, we find similar attitudes aimed at re-defining the "hero," and in particular at challenging the conventional concepts of good and bad.

The re-interpretation of a positive into a negative person, a "negative" depiction, was first undertaken by Yang Mao-lin in his series *Mythological Heroes*, executed in 1984/1985. As the title suggests, the series concentrates on the depiction of the lives and deeds of several personalities of ancient Chinese mythology. These include Gun, Gonggong, Houyi, and Chiyou, who traditionally were in fact never seen as "heroes" but as losers or tragic figures, if not as negative models against whom the victors, gods or mythical rulers, could shine the brighter. Clearly, here Yang Mao-lin is challenging the common moral perception aptly summed up in the saying, "Whoever wins is the king, whoever loses is a rascal," [成者爲王, 敗者爲寇], and the fact that these works were painted shortly before the founding of the DPP, the opposition party, makes this series particularly meaningful. The rehabilitation of the loser, the defeated, runs, of course, in the other direction to the deflating of a formerly positive hero in "Zeelandia," yet the impetus to re-evaluate traditional judgements and to question conventional perceptions as regards the idea of the "hero" remains the same.

One art critic explicitly pointed out around 1986/87 that *Mythological Heroes* did indeed contain a political statement, and that the artist had "directly expressed his support for the forces of opposition,"²⁴ while another critic, Jiang Xun, stated that such a "positive interaction between art and the political and social trends has never been seen before" in the traditional art scene.²⁵

24 Huang Haiming. 1991. "Zuo wei yizhong jianju fanying ji pipan de yishu: shitan Yang Maolin de zuopin" [Art as Reflection and Critique: A Comment on Yang Mao-lin's Paintings]. In *Dangdai zazhi*, 57, January, p80. While discussing Yang Mao-lin's works in the second half of the 1980s, John Clark wrote that "the lifting of martial law in 1988 had some effect on such artists for this meant that Yang Maolin could depict with a much more eviscerating intensity than hitherto the forces [in Taiwanese society] ... Yang does not appear to subscribe to any particular political philosophy, but he does seem to have taken a step forward from his early work at the end of the 1980s." However, in *The Scene of Killed Gun II* (fig. 12) of 1986, as reproduced in Clark's article, we find, as Larry D. Lutchmansingh remarked, "the image of the sun, the national flag, being trampled underfoot," while according to him another painting of 1986 "related to the red giant series made this act of political vandalism unmistakable." (Clark, John. 1993. "Taipei Modernism in the 1980s." In *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*. Turner, Caroline, ed. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. p154. Lutchmansingh, Larry D. 1992. "Yang Mao-lin: A Retrospective View." In *Yang Mao-lin: Made in Taiwan* [Yang Maolin Taiwan zhizao]. Taichung: Galerie Pierre. p10.)

25 Jiang Xun. 1992. "Zhixing yuedu de zhixing zhiyi: yuedu Yang Maolin" [Intellectual Questioning: Reading

Yang Mao-lin's idea of using mythology to express a political message is also striking, particularly as we know that Yang's earliest works previous to this series tackled either environmental or existential problems, criticizing the pollution of Taiwan or depicting the dislocated and alienated urban youth. Something must have happened between 1983 and 1985 which significantly changed the artist's direction and his creations.

Indeed, the years between 1983 and 1985 were a critical period for Taiwan's democratic development. While the opposition forces continued to grow, it was still unclear how far the KMT would tolerate them. On the artistic front, with the founding of the public museums, new energies came to be felt. The wave of internationalism powerfully affected the local art scene, with the post-minimalist approach emerging as the leading force. On the other hand, Yang Mao-lin and his friends, members of the 101 Art Group, were graduates from the Fine Arts Department of Chinese Culture University, an artistic circle primarily working in the photo-realist style. Yang's earliest paintings dealing with environmental issues or the alienated urban society were not satisfactory. As he recalled, he was dissatisfied with the works because his technique was "unable to depict the very dirtiness" of the polluted environment.²⁶ The same was true of his works on social problems; their "questioning of the living space resulted from the reading of existentialist texts, ... but it was not what lay in my own character."²⁷

The Re-reading of History and the International Trends

The introduction of the latest international trends of new painting, in particular those of the Italian Transavantgarde and German Neo-expressionism, was advantageous. Not only technically, but also conceptually the group obtained considerable artistic assistance and inspiration from these tendencies. Based on articles written by overseas observers, and a series of discussions on slides sent back by artists studying abroad, Yang Mao-lin and his friends were able to grasp much more firmly their own intentions and possibilities. Between 1983 and 1985, in the short span of two years, Yang and his friends abandoned their earlier photo-realist style and headed toward a completely new artistic direction. (See chapter 2.2.1)

In an article published in July 1985 by the 101 Art Group, major artists from different national schools were introduced together with their stylistic features, including German Neo-expressionism, Italian Transavantgarde, French New Figuration and a number of American artists. Yet they were introduced not according to nationality but under three thematic categories: 1) The re-reading of history; 2) The re-reading of art history; and 3) The significance of the value of popular culture. This thematic classification of international trends is interesting, for it offers a perspective on their perception by these Taiwanese artists, who explicitly praised the New Painting as "an artistic trend which values both 'tradition' and 'modernity,' ...and this is the time for the native modernist artists to make the best use of it."²⁸

Yang Mao-lin himself has openly spoken about his relationship with this artistic trend, and especially with the compositional principles of the Italian Transavantgarde. As he later said, what impressed him most was, for instance, "the pictorial space, which was an almost totally free and liberated area; the half-figurative lines conveying dynamic movement, which is a new

Yang Mao-lin]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 253, March, p21.

26 Liu Peixiou. 1992. "Xianyan er dai ci de guanmian: fang Yang Maolin" [A Bright but Thorny Crown: An Interview With Yang Mao-lin]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 253, March, p37.

27 Liu Peixiou. 1992. p38.

28 Yang Mao-lin & Lu Yizhong. 1985. "Shidai de sichao: sichao zhongde shidai" [The Trend of the Time: the Time in Trends]. In *Yishujia*, 122, July, pp196-201.

technique of expression; also multiple juxtapositions of different times and spaces, together with a pluralism of themes (political, historical, and current events), and not least their inter-relationship. All these could appear and be realized just on one single canvas."²⁹ He further recalled "quite a different visual experience to the one offered at the Taiwanese academy where I was at the time."³⁰

Impressed by the technical possibilities, from which Yang Mao-lin profited tremendously, the artist did, however, not forget to mention the direct influences on his subject matter. He later said: "I was influenced by the concept of a 're-reading of history.' I looked for images from the Chinese mythological system which were not yet *constructed* and nationalized in order to freely express my imagination and artistic ability."³¹ The series *Mythological Heroes* which he began in mid-1984 is unquestionably the result of Yang Mao-lin's encounter with these latest international trends in painting. Both stylistically and thematically, the artist had indeed "made the best use of it."

However, while new paintings from abroad opened the door to history and mythology, Yang Mao-lin's way of operating was purposely and determinedly political. First, in 1984/85, he paid tribute to the rebels, the tragic heroes of mythology, in order to reflect on and question the traditional role of these "troublemakers." Much later, in 1993, he overturned the image of a national hero, Koxinga, and re-drew it, showing the face of a colonial ruler. Interestingly enough, his re-presentation of history, despite its post-colonial and nationalistic character, relates to the "re-reading of history," regarding which the artist has been conceptually inspired by European painters. Certainly, the *Emperor Portraits* series of Yang Mao-lin's friend, Wu Tianzhang, finished in 1989/90 and mentioned earlier, was another early example for this method. Nevertheless, Wu's "Emperors" differ from Yang Mao-lin's double portrait, especially in two specific aspects. One is the latter's strong efforts to create an authentic historical environment, while at the same time intending to "invent" history; the other is the objective of creating identity. Wu's portraits, on the other hand, are an examination seen from a "Greater Chinese" perspective, as opposed to Yang's exclusively Taiwanese view.

3.2.4 The Artist's Cultural Position

Changing Cultural Identities

When art gets involved with political messages, it often becomes subject to some kind of ideology. Historical memories often turn out to be a litmus test for detecting changes and directions of national ideologies. The historical memory of Koxinga has undergone a dramatic change, as eventually witnessed in Yang's artwork. In different political eras, Koxinga mutated from a patriotic young warrior to a national hero, and finally, in our present painting, to a colonial aggressor. This shift of identity is closely related to the political change in Taiwan, and it is strongly determined by ideology. During the high tide of searching for political and cultural identities, a new status for Koxinga, as a Chinese aggressor rather than the liberator of Taiwan, was urgently required to comply with the current rise of nationalism.

Nationalism in Taiwan resulted from the awakening of Taiwanese consciousness, a movement

29 Lin Yuxiang. 1992. "Taiwan wutuobang tuxiang de xinpinpai" [A New Brand of Taiwanese Utopian Images]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 258, August, p60.

30 Lin Yuxiang. 1992. p60.

31 Lin Yuxiang. 1992. p60.

which started in the mid-70s and has paralleled the democratic process since the 80s. The critical issue of a possible reunification with China was and is, however, the decisive factor which has turned people in Taiwan not only away from, but apparently against China. The tense relationship between the political entities on both sides of the Taiwan Straits was both new and old. Forty years of separation after the war finally seemed to have enabled both sides to reach a quiet co-existence, although in reality they were sharp ideological adversaries. In the 90s, governments from both sides initiated dialogues on the question of unification. The PRC (People's Republic of China) still continues to insist on an unification under its own rule and on its own terms, and warns it will eventually use military force in the case of Taiwan's non-compliance. The hostility of the Taiwanese toward the Chinese government intensified after the Tiananmen massacre of 1989. In 1992, in reaction to the KMT's call for the establishment of a National Unification Committee in the previous year, the DPP explicitly opted for Taiwanese independence by including this goal in its party program.

This change of political attitude occurred within the short span of a few years. Not only the country's official name, "Republic of China," increasingly came under criticism, but also the term "Chinese," once so naturally applied, disappeared completely around 1989 (See chapter 2.3.2) Against this background, Yang Mao-lin's re-reading and re-interpretation of the figure of Koxinga is perhaps less audacious or avant-garde than expected. At the least we must bear in mind that without this alienation from mainland China and the change in the political wind, the idea of a re-presentation of Koxinga would not have made sense. Certainly, the development of Yang Mao-lin's own art from *Mythological Heroes*, in which the Chinese tradition still served as an indispensable source for his works, to our present picture criticizing Chinese hegemony, vividly testifies to this change.

Yang's double portrait was thus evidently created, and is to be interpreted, in the light of recent nationalist tendencies. Yet it should also be mentioned that *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301* belongs to a series of more than twenty paintings dealing not only with the colonial history of Taiwan but with colonialism in general as well. For, beside those paintings directly related to Taiwan's history, there is a group of works depicting European discoverers, such as "the first man to venture around the world, Magellan, (Opus L9305), the discoverer of the passage to India, Vasco da Gama (M9303), and the founder of Virginia and supplier to the old world of potatoes and tobacco, Sir Walter Raleigh (XL9301)."³² While incorporating Europe's colonial past into a Taiwanese context, Yang Mao-lin also probed, further back in time, into early Taiwanese history as witnessed in his two series, *Yuan Mountain Memorandum* and *Lily Memorandum* created between 1990 and 1992. In regard to this historical program drawn up in 1990 by Yang Mao-lin as his own artistic goal, Larry D. Lutchmansingh, a visiting professor from the United States, correctly pointed out in 1992 that what Yang plans to do is "a larger, ambitious artistic project relating to the national identity of Taiwan, in its traditional and modern, historical and political, cultural and artistic dimensions..., suggesting something along the line of a national allegory, a modern artistic equivalent of ancient myth and epic."³³

Re-creating National History

Indeed, Yang Mao-lin has drafted a plan unprecedented in the history of Taiwanese art. Encompassing a total of four "chapters," the artist intends "to document the past and present of

32 Yang Wen-I. 1999. "VOC: Parallel Histories." In *VOC: Handle with Care. Huang Yongping and Yang Mao-lin*. Taipei: Lin & Ken Gallery. pp8-9. See this catalog for more information on the *Zeelandia* series and the VOC.

33 Lutchmansingh, Larry D. 1992. p9.

Taiwan." These four parts, begun in 1987 and as yet unfinished, consist of the following sections: Taiwanese society and politics; Taiwanese history and culture; Taiwanese people and customs; and finally, Taiwanese art history.³⁴ The undertaking bears testimony to the artist's goal once mentioned in retrospect: "I thought to use painting to write Taiwan's History."³⁵

"But the importance of Yang Mao-lin's art," Professor Lutchmansingh continues, "goes far beyond this, as to say, which raises questions not only of its feasibility, of the ambition of the artist, and of the nature and function of art in contemporary Taiwan..., but also of such vexed issues as the definition of the Modern and the Postmodern, the complex relationship of Western and non-Western art, and the cultural situation of societies that have both inherited a legacy of imperial domination and adopted the instruments of global modernization."³⁶

Indeed, Yang Mao-lin's artistic project touches upon a vast number of "vexed issues." The three pairs of dichotomies mentioned, namely, modernism/postmodernism, Western/non-Western art, imperial legacy/global modernization, are, however, general features shared by many contemporary Taiwanese artists. More interesting are the questions raised by the American professor regarding "the feasibility [of such a program and] the ambition of the artist." Could nationalism be the motivation for it? Or, what kind of background brings an individual into the position to launch such a grand project of indeed "national" dimensions?

One element in Yang Mao-lin's *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301* which so far here has not been discussed in detail is the green label "MADE IN TAIWAN" attached to the painting. It was used as the title of a series of Yang's series which began in 1989. "In deep search for what symbols or signs could represent this land," the artist said, "I found 'Made in Taiwan' the most suitable... The reason I put this into my work is that it simultaneously implies self-confidence and self-irony. 'Made in Taiwan' conveys the impression of the second-best, ordinary, even the imitated, and such are the structure of the parliament, democratic politics, the quality of the people, and general merchandise. None of these has reached the standard of developed countries, and neither has Taiwanese art history. But by means of self-irony, it also expresses a certain degree of self-confidence which arises from self-criticism."³⁷

More strikingly still, Yang Mao-lin's inclusion of the "Made in Taiwan" label in his painting also reveals a post-colonial perception, the artist's own comparative view of the location of Taiwan, which, according to him, is inferior to the "developed countries," its art history included. Despite the obvious fact that "the West" is certainly not "the best," but different, Yang's use of the "national" label demonstrates the readiness of the individual to project himself on or be incorporated into the domain of nationalism.

In an interview conducted in 1992, Yang Mao-lin gave his audience an even more revealing idea about the energy and the motivation from which he drew the plan for his project. He said that "by the time I had finished the series *Mythological Heroes*, I clearly knew that I care about this place. Within myself I could feel the vibration of this place, its happiness, sadness, anger, and joy. The Greater China ideology we were indoctrinated with in our several schools became more and more remote. ... Lots of problems needed be solved during the lifting of martial law. That was what I cared about most."³⁸

Despite the early date of this statement, Yang Mao-lin has given a clear picture of how he

34 Liu Peixiou. 1992. p39.

35 Findlay, Ian. 1997.

36 Lutchmansingh, Larry D. 1992. p9.

37 Liu Peixiou. 1992.p39.

38 Liu Peixiou. 1992. p39.

became emotionally involved with his place of origin, its changes and problems. This close connection with Taiwan is partly related to his biography. Coming from a leftist family, Yang Mao-lin started to learn his political lessons at an early age by listening to stories of his grand-uncles who were political activists during the Japanese colonial period and later fled from Taiwan to China after the 2-28 incident.³⁹ By contrast, his father was totally Japanese-educated and was sent to Manila during the Second World War to fight in the Japanese army.⁴⁰

Yang Mao-lin himself is aware of the complexities of his family history and has said, "I have discovered the tragedy of our history. Within three generations we've gone through the Qing Dynasty, the Japanese occupation and the Kuomintang government. That represents the last three generations of my family. Myself, my father, and my grandfather. I have discovered that each generation has gone through many changes, politically, socially and culturally." It's these circumstances which have brought about that in Yang's family "there are gaps of identity between all three generations, which we have never been able to close. This is my family's problem, and it is also a historical issue in Taiwan... This gap is unquestionably an important driving force for me." Despite these changes occurring in three generations, the artist has observed that "with each change the previous changes were rejected... [Yet] there can be no true understanding of the present, if 'you' cannot come to terms with the past."⁴¹

The problems of identity within Yang Mao-lin's family are strongly entangled with the historical twists and turns of Taiwan in the past one hundred years. While dealing with national history, the artist is in fact exposing his very personal views. The boundary between the personal and the national is thin, both areas overlap. Yang Mao-lin feels he has been given the "right to speak" through his works, as he once said: "I thought to use painting to write Taiwan's history." This statement again testifies to the belief of an individual to be able to launch "a national allegory, a modern artistic equivalent of ancient myth and epic."

39 The artist has mentioned to me his striking experience that while doing his military service in 1975 he saw pictures of his grand-uncles, then "representatives of Taiwan" in the Mainland Chinese parliament, displayed at the military base and labeled as "communist bandits." Conversation with the artist, March 15, 1994. See also Chen Fuyu. 1992. "Yang Mao-lin he ta de shidai" [Yang Mao-lin and His Time]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 253, March, p32.

40 Chen Fuyu. 1992. pp29-35.

41 Findlay, Ian. 1997.

4. Mapping Cross-culturality

The works of Lien Te-cheng and Wu Mali are situated on the frontline of movements connecting contemporary Western visual culture with the local Taiwanese society, while in turn initiating a visual dialogue with the world beyond the island's boundaries. This is nothing extraordinary, given the current trend of globalization which is reaching even the remotest places. Moreover, the fact that both artists have studied in the West, Lien in the U.S. and Wu in Germany, was likely to increase any tendency toward cross-culturality. However, within the local artistic context of Taiwan, the efforts of both artists are pioneering, and they continue to experience struggles and clashes with the local art community.

As an artistic position situated between cultures, cross-culturality is in fact only possible when one's indigenous cultural space is not enclosed, but opened up for cultural "otherness." In an earlier period of Taiwanese art, the Modernist Movement towards the end of the 50s and the beginning of the 60s was the first manifestation of local artists opening toward an international style, this time abstraction. In its time, this artistic approach faced serious criticism from the conservative forces, to the extent of being accused of "opening inroads for communism."¹ In the mid-70s, the arrival of Localism meant another "closing of the Taiwanese mind" and was regarded as a reaction against tendencies of internationalization and Westernization. As late as 1992, during the local debates on Taiwanese consciousness, works of art executed in "this kind of form," i.e. in the Western style, were still labeled as "dependent" and "imitative." How hard it was to gain recognition can be seen in the struggle both artists experienced in 1990, when they founded the group Taiwan Documentary Room. They stated at the time that their artistic expression aimed to "permit more people, including artists and the audience, be aware of and recognize that there also existed an art in this kind of form."²

While the "nationality" of an artistic language has often been considered by local critics a major criterion for judging works of art, the transgressors of cultural boundaries also run the risk of facing international prejudices or criticism. There is a typical Western form of critique which berates non-Western artists or writers for being, so to speak, not non-Western, i.e. not traditional

1 Xu Fuguan. 1991. "Xiandai yishu de guiqiu" [The Tendency and Direction of Modern Art]. In *Dangdai Taiwan huihua wenxuan, 1945-1990*. [Essays on Contemporary Painting in Taiwan, 1945-1990. Kuo Jason C., ed. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu Chubanshe. p228. (first published in *Huaqiao ribao*, Hong Kong, 14, 08, 1961). Xu, an eminent philosopher, saw the nihilism and individualism expressed in Modernism and especially in Surrealism as directly leading to communism. He was probably unaware that he was repeating the identical arguments which the theoreticians of Socialist Realism were directing against Modernism as a form of Western bourgeois decadence.

2 Gao Yi. 1990. "Ganzaidian li kuhan ziyou: Taiwan Dang'anshi de yishu chuangzuoqun" [A Cry for Freedom at the Ganzaidian: The Artists of Taiwan Documentary Room]. In *Minjin zhoukan*, 171, p35.

enough. While reviewing a volume of contemporary Chinese poetry, *The August Sleepwalker* by Bei Dao, the well-known American sinologist, Stephen Owen remarked that "most of these poems translate themselves. These could just easily be translations from a Slovak or an Estonian or a Philippine poet."³ The Harvard Professor was apparently less worried about the international character of the poetic language than about the loss of "national cultural heritage." Yet his implied criticism of the uniform outlook of the verses, a view on the works of a contemporary non-Western author, is without doubt shared by many Western viewers.

The artistic position of being situated in between cultures has become a reality rooted in the global process of a constant flux of "contaminated" and "transnational" experiences, resulting from fundamental changes in communications and information technology. Recognizing this as our daily reality, the cross-cultural artistic approach is more than any other apt to map out new frontiers, initiate dialogues, and offer formerly undetected viewpoints. The fact that both artists were trained in the West, and that both are active in mediating the ideas of contemporary Western art as, respectively, a teacher and a translator, sets up a cultural location in which their daily artistic practice is situated. As they share parallel experiences, their works are characterized by the employment of Western artistic forms, languages, and ideas. Contrary to the recent works of several Mainland Chinese artists living in the West, whose obvious strategy is to use elements of their indigenous cultural heritage while addressing a Western audience, the works of both artists discussed here are far from any exoticism while at the same time being firmly rooted in the local context.

However, it also needs to be stressed that being trained in the West or having "cosmopolitan" experiences does not necessarily lead to a cross-cultural approach. Among the contemporary Taiwanese artists with a "Western experience," there are also those who are anything but obsessed with cultural issues. Their thematic range can be partitioned into at least two categories. Chen Kaihuang (1960 -) and Zhu Jiahua (1960 -) are conceptualists who are intellectually interested in questioning the nature and function of art or the art system. Zhuang Pu (1947 -) and Chen Huiqiao (1964 -), two major figures of the alternative space IT Park, emphasize the lyrical aspects of their art. Also worth mentioning is Fan Jiang Marvin Minto (1955 -): using gold and wheat, two essential elements of livelihood and commerce in human history, he addresses in his installation works issues of the environment as well as of the development of human history.

By contrast, Wu Mali and Lien Te-cheng became involved with Taiwan's rapidly changing society, and created works carrying strong political and social messages. The Taiwan Documentary Room in particular, as mentioned previously (chapter 2.3.1), set an active engagement with political issues as its goal, but relying on the instrument of ridicule and satire rather than heavy-handed or moralizing argumentation. Yet its involvement with politics proved to be only short-lived. Both artists have retreated from the political front and set out on projects of much more complex and deep-reaching meaning. Wu Mali's *The Library: Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words* and Lien Te-cheng's *Particular Tao*, the works discussed in this chapter, were both executed in 1995, although their inception phase can be traced back to 1992/3, shortly after the dissolution of the TDR. They are thus approaches which, however cross-culturally conceived, are also very much rooted in the complex problems of the local environment.

3 Owen, Stephen. 1990. "The Anxiety of Global Influence: What is World Poetry?" In *The New Republic*, 19, November. pp28-32, p31. See also the discussion by Chow, Rey. 1993. "Introduction: Leading Questions." In *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. p1.

4.1 Lien Te-cheng: The Erotics of Interpretation

Lien Te-cheng's art poses critical questions concerning the adaptation and application of Western contemporary discourses. The presence of three different elements – figurative, abstract, and textual – in one and the same work is deliberate, as well as provocative. If one considers that these are juxtapositions of components rooted in different cultures, the map drawn by his concepts becomes even more complex. Taken from either Japanese, Chinese, or Western cultural traditions, Lien's method of juxtaposition is stylistically and culturally hybrid; it is, in Mikhail Bakhtin's word, a heteroglossia. This speaking in "different tongues" could well serve as a paradigmatic example of cross-culturality.

There are fundamental questions to be raised about the reliability of the work, reflected in the inter-relationship between genres and cultures. Behind his almost dogmatic artistic program, is there any theoretical concept supporting Lien's work? Why and how has the artist reached this point of cross-culturality? To what extent is this representational mode, the juxtaposition of three elements, more than just a fashion, a simple assemblage or pastiche of the popular post-modernist commodities? His *Particular Tao* (Feichang dao, 非常道, fig. 13), the work to be discussed in this section, which was executed in 1995, is a good example with which to introduce Lien's artistic project and address the questions mentioned above. Particularly when we put Lien's work back on his time line, with respect to both his personal artistic development and the social and political context of Taiwan, it becomes clear that Lien's *Particular Tao*, a work situated in the Western postmodernist discourse, also serves a local purpose – a purpose which is in fact one of its main keynotes.

In this chapter, I will begin by outlining Lien's artistic development, which gradually laid the foundations for his major work *Particular Tao*. While providing this background information, this chapter will frequently refer to a theoretical document of Lien Te-cheng's, written as recently as 1999 and entitled "The Pursuit and the Reconstruction of Meaning: A Reader's Creation of Art," in which his artistic and conceptual framework is systematically explicated and discussed. While attempting to provide a reading of the work, the questions of how "Western" his *Particular Tao* in fact is, of what functions the Western discourses possess, and, not least, of the plausibility of their application will be dealt with in detail as the central issue of this chapter.

4.1.1 From Painter to Conceptual Artist

Lien Te-cheng's first Solo Show of 1986

The beginnings of Lien's art were situated in an academic milieu. With a B.A. degree from the Fine Arts Department of National Normal University, Taipei, and a Master of Fine Arts from the State University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA, Lien Te-cheng was already equipped with sound academic knowledge when he held his first solo show in 1986 at the Nan Gallery, Taipei. Depicting objects of daily life and stylized scenes from contemporary Taiwan, the exhibits, exclusively two-dimensional oil paintings, revealed a penchant for a mixture of different styles, a synthesis of various modern and contemporary techniques of Western art.

The exhibition, held shortly before the lifting of martial law, drew the attention of two reviewers

with different perspectives, who, however, shared the same opinion about the artist's ambitious artistic project. As Wang Zhexiong, a Professor at National Normal University, Taipei, remarked, these oil paintings show "a condensed composition made up of color fields combined with geometric configurations. The objects and human figures depicted here have been essentially simplified to the degree of minimalism, so that, at first glance, they look like geo-abstract works. But in fact ... they are not."¹ Analyzing possible artistic sources, including that of the futurists and Fernand Léger, Wang eventually concluded that Lien's "artistic source... was Jean Dubuffet's 1962's series *Le cycle de l'hourloupe*, ... in his construction of a large number of compressed figures and distorted forms."²

Lien's early works, as discussed by Wang, were multi-layered and in fact only indirectly connected with his later works. Most significantly, Fu Jiahun, the second of the two reviewers, reminds us of their "postmodernist character." She remarks that the exhibits were actually "suffused with narrative, appropriations and allegorical meanings, and that the artistic languages of numerous schools of traditional modernism were present in these works, such as the colors of Gauguin and Matisse, Dubuffet's puzzle-like forms, Pollock's web-like spaces formed by the intersection of planes and depths, and the everyday objects of Pop art and Assemblage."³

Executed immediately after his return from the U.S., Lien Te-cheng's first exhibited works clearly showed a broad artistic interest in interacting with various Western styles rooted in different periods. Lien's confrontation with artistic questions such as shapes, colors, forms, and spaces may serve as evidence of how deeply the artist was embedded in the artistic and aesthetic traditions of the West, which in turn reveals his outstanding adaptive ability. In addition, Lien did not conceal his leanings to the "white/male/center" masters, as explicitly reflected in the titles of the exhibits, such as: *Mondrian's Metamorphosis* (1986), *Still Life: Homage to Frank Stella* (1986), and *Still Life: Secret Guardian / Homage to Pollock* (1986).

Taipei Street Impression (1985), an oil painting also shown at the exhibition, is an exception in this respect. Regarding this piece, Professor Wang made the somewhat peculiar comment that the artist "perfectly manages to solve the complex question of 'using Western techniques for Chinese purposes' [*zhongti xiyong*, 中體西用],"⁴ arguing that "with his power of observation as well as his sensibility, Lien Te-cheng has clearly grasped the impression of the streets of Taipei: overcrowded, chaotic, a world of the egotistic pursuit of one's individual goals and of disregard for the others."⁵

Stylistically, *Taipei Street Impression* is hardly different from the other exhibits: executed in a

1 Wang Zhexiong. 1986. "Yongji de shijie: Pingxi Lien Decheng de huihua" [An Overcrowded World: An Interpretation and Analysis of Lien Te-cheng's Paintings]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 188, October, p134.

2 While analyzing Lien's paintings, Wang remarks that "their compositions easily remind one of the futuristic painters... But unlike the futurists who applied segmented shapes, Lien uses the technique of overlapping forms, i.e. he suggests space by means of arranging his objects so as to make them appear either standing in front or receding, in which way his treatment resembles more closely that of Fernand Léger." The artist himself has confirmed that Jean Dubuffet's series *Le cycle de l'hourloupe* was the major source of inspiration for his work. See Wang Zhexiong. 1986. p134.

3 Fu Jiahun. 1986. "Houxiandai jingwu: Lien Decheng huazhan" [Postmodern Still Lives: Lien Te-cheng's Exhibition]. In *Yishujia*, 137, October, p261. Fu, who had also studied at the State University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA, is Lien's wife and an artist, writer, and translator herself.

4 *Zhongti xiyong* was a slogan coined by Zhang Zhidong in 1895 to describe his recipe of how to confront Western civilization rather than submitting to wholesale Westernization. The term continues to be current to this day. In the 90s, against the background of a rising Taiwanese consciousness in opposition to the "imperialist" Western culture, the Taiwanese art community became involved with this issue again. See chapter 2.3.2 and Wang Zhexiong. 1986. p135.

5 Wang Zhexiong. 1986. p135.

vivid, compressed, overcrowded manner, the canvas is filled, as if overcome by *horror vacui*, with Dubuffet-like figures. Interesting in terms of reception history are the reasons of just why Wang Zhexiong stresses the exceptionality of this work: they lie simply in the fact that the painting successfully treats a local subject matter. An even more obvious focus on local matters, this time on traditional folk art, is to be seen in the oil painting *Door God II* of 1989, which Lien submitted to the "Special Exhibition on the Artistic Development in Modern Times," organized by the National Museum of History:⁶ it is the image of a god prominent in Taiwanese folk religion, traditionally dressed and standing solemnly with swords in both of his hands.

Around 1990: The Political Years

With radical political and social change affecting all aspects of life in Taiwan, Lien's art, too, saw a dramatic transformation; one which, however, originated from external rather than internal factors. Lien became involved with a number of like-minded artists, resulting in the founding of two groups: first of Space II [*Erhao Gongyu*, 二號公寓] (1989–1994), then of Taiwan Documentary Room [*Taiwan Dang'anshi*, 台灣檔案室] (1990–1991). Both art groups were to be short-lived and their natures were quite different, at least from the artist's own perspective.

Perceived by many as "the leading figure of this avant-garde group,"⁷ Lien Te-cheng commented in 1993 on Space II that it was "a space of neutrons," a place "of experimentation with 'avant-garde' art forms, ... [for] pure aesthetic discussions and the pursuit of artistic autonomy."⁸ But in their earlier group show in 1991, Lien's own installation work *Liduo Gallery* [麗多畫廊: the title literally means "much beauty," but the Chinese word for "beauty" is homophonous with *li* 利, i.e. "profit"] carries a sarcastic sneer on contemporary culture: As might be expected, the "Much Beauty Gallery" is a satirical representation of phenomena of Taipei's commercial art scene.⁹ In a showroom window filled with piles of illustrations, magazine ads, invitation cards, with reproductions of Impressionist paintings hanging randomly on the walls, the name of the place is written in particularly large characters on the windowpane, as often seen in Taipei's commercial galleries.¹⁰

Lien Te-cheng's critical viewpoint toward both the artistic and the political environment Taiwan's was a new approach, one paralleled by his use of new media, as well as of textual elements. Intended to "emphasize the close connections between *Zeitgeist* and actual reality,"¹¹

6 National Museum of History, ed. 1989. *Dangdai yishu zuopin zhan* [Special Exhibition on the Artistic Development in Modern Times]. Taipei: National Museum of History, exhibition catalog. p26.

7 See Ni Zaiqin. 1993. "Lien Decheng: Cong gongyu jinru meishuguan de bazhu" [Lien Te-cheng: The Leading Figure of Space II Enters the Museum]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 255, May (1992), Quoted from the article's reprint in *Taiwan dangdai meishu chutan* [A Review on Contemporary Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huangguan Wenxue. p47.

8 Lien Te-cheng. 1993. "Duoyuanzhuyi yu tidai kongjian" [Pluralism and the Alternative Space]. In *Taipei xiandai meishu shinian* [Ten Years of Modern Art in Taipei]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p116. For more information see also chapter 2.1.3.

9 According to Huang Haiming, this installation satirizes the way in which "galleries make trash into art." See Huang Haiming. 1991. "Tan qianwei yu shiyan zhan: *Gongyu 1991*" [Discussing the Avant-garde and Experiment Exhibition: *Apartment 1991*]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 244, June, p196. As a special exhibition program, Taipei Fine Arts Museum initiated the *Avant-garde and Experiment Exhibition* in March 1991. It was conducted through application and the works then selected by a jury. Space II was the first opening show of the series.

10 This group show was well received and hailed by one local artist as "one of the most avant-garde exhibitions" to date. (Ni Zaiqin. 1992. "Taiwan qianwei meishu tansuo" [In search for the Taiwanese Avant-garde]. In: *1992 Taiwan meishu nianjian* [Taiwanese Fine Arts Yearbook, 1992]. Taipei: Xiongshi Tushu. p73.

11 Gao Yi. 1990. "Ganzaidian li kuhan ziyou: Taiwan Dang'anshi de yishu chuanguoqun" [A Cry for Freedom at the Ganzaidian: The Artists of Taiwan Documentary Room]. In *Minjin zhoukan*, 171, p37.

in 1990 and 1991 the group Taiwan Documentary Room launched two critical exhibitions with a clearly subversive strategy, to attack or ridicule current political events. Lien's entry to the TDR's first show was a small canvas filled exclusively with written text. Alluding to rampant media speculation about who would be named Prime Minister, on the eve of the inauguration of the new President on May 20, and to what Lien saw as a clear manipulation of public opinion by these media, he simply wrote the sentence: "If President Lee Teng-Hui nominates me as Prime Minister, I will not evade, nor reject him, for reasons of integrity."¹² This was only one of several critical or satirical comments on politics made by Lien at the turn of the decade, making politicians and other representatives of the state as well as political slogans and national symbols such as the country's official name, flag, and anthem the objects of ridicule and satire.¹³

Social and Political Criticism vs. Postmodernism

Nevertheless, parallel to this, a body of works was created which proved to be more significant for the artist's further development. In December 1990, six months after President Lee's inauguration, Lien Te-cheng held his second major solo exhibition at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Here, Lien surprised viewers and critics alike with his latest development, works which need to be "read" as well as to be "seen."¹⁴ Pure oil paintings disappeared completely. In particular, postmodern concepts clearly took the stage; these were to become inseparable from Lien's future works.

As the art critic, Huang Haiming, pointed out at the time, three levels can be detected in the works of this show: "The first relates to the idea of the ready-made, the second to specific social realities, and the third to the conceptual, the latter being concerned either with the 'idea of reproduction,' or with language, or with a re-examination of general cultural, political, or social issues."¹⁵ Among the various works, the one most worth mentioning here is certainly the series *News Paper Paintings* [Baozhi huihua, 報紙繪畫], from the third category. Newspapers, found objects serving as painting grounds or "flatbeds,"¹⁶ have undergone a de-constructive process, in

12 Chen Meimao. 1990. "Daolan Dibaren Jiang Zongtong jiouzhi wenyi meizhan: Cong tizhi de fanpan dao xingzhi de fanpan" [A Guide Through the Exhibition in Commemoration of the Inauguration of President Chiang on his Eighth Term: From Institutional to Formalistic Rebellion]. In: *Zili zaobao*, 4, June. See also chapter 2.3.1.

13 In the work *Singing the National Anthem* (Chang Guoge, 唱國歌, fig. 14), the artist wrote a text of 48 characters, one character to one piece of paper, and arranged them on a red wall. In each of two passages, one character is missing, namely the words *dang* ("party"), and *fei* ("bandit," the KMT term for "communist"). The pieces of paper are kept in perpetual motion by an electric fan placed in front of them. Thus, while the work is ostensibly "a self-representation of the 'Communist Party,'" in fact it is about the KMT. (Ni Zaiqin. 1993. p47.)

14 Wang Fudong. 1993. "Jianghu shang sowe de minzhu: Lien Decheng suo gouhuichu de xianshi shijie" [The So-called Democracy: The World of Realities, Depicted by Lien Te-cheng]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 251, January. Quoted from the reprint of the article in *Taiwan xinshengdai meishu xunli* [An Overview of the New Generation of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huangguan Wenxue, (1993). p60.

15 Huang Haiming. 1991. "Shitan Lien Decheng de zuopin" [A Preliminary Discussion of Lien Te-cheng's Works]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 240, February, p158. Two other critics have pointed to Lien's appropriation of Dada and Pop Art in this show, but rather from the perspective of the application of the materials. See Wang Fudong. 1993. p60 and Ni Zaiqin. 1993. p47.

16 "Flatbed" is a term used by the art critic Leo Steinberg in discussing Robert Rauschenberg's work. He states that Rauschenberg turned the painted ground into a "flatbed" with similarities to the device used in printing. As to his own "flatbeds," Lien writes: "My flatbed in the 'News Paper Paintings' is slightly different from Rauschenberg's, for his flatbed is a 'printed reproduction' of 'cultural images,' while mine is a 'painted reproduction' of the images contained within the newspaper." There is, however, another difference left unmentioned in Lien's statement. While Rauschenberg worked with appropriations of various kinds of images, this procedure is absent from Lien's working process. Instead, he writes, "I used actual newspaper as my canvas,

which the artist has "erased most parts of the newspaper text, leaving standing only a few headlines, keywords and images. In doing so, he was able to achieve a free association of images and word-plays."¹⁷

Curiously enough, the *News Paper Paintings* were created when, after the lifting of martial law and other restrictions, Taiwan for the first time saw the advent of a free press. Yet Lien's "re-editing" of ready-made newspapers, far from hailing the "brand new era" of unlimited freedom of publication, takes on the form of a mimicry that is in fact both a parody and a postmodernist analysis, so demonstrating the artist's critical approach to the new liberties and manipulations of the media.

According to Lien himself, his *News Paper Paintings* are in a sense "a concrete representation of Jean Baudrillard's statement, "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning."¹⁸ Or as Fredric Jameson warns: "The very function of the news media is to relegate ... recent historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past. The informational function of the media would thus be to help us forget, to serve as the very agents and mechanisms for our historical amnesia."¹⁹

The postmodern discourse can well serve as an outer framework for the works, but it can also be more convincingly and instrumentally applied, as seen in another case: the artist's appropriation of Gilles Deleuze's term "deterritorialization" to elucidate his artistic practice of eliminating the separated printed pages, different categories of news, the paper's sections, divisions, or columns, in order to present "a mass of images, ... a carnival-like ecstasy of images, a complete openness resisting any meaning or distinction ... as well as a state of homogeneity between reality and fiction, between high and popular cultures."²⁰

A fundamental question that needs to be raised here is just how postmodern criticism of the media is made compatible to the local environment of Taiwan in Lien's works, as implied by the analogies in the artist's self-interpretation. As a critical discourse, postmodern media theory is a body of philosophical observation which emerged within the Western information society during its long decades of development. Taiwan, on the other hand, has begun to enjoy freedom of publication only recently. Lien Te-cheng's critique of the Taiwanese newspapers reflects his discontent with the mass media's monotonous reporting of "an excess of confusion within the social order and the political system."²¹ For an individual deeply disturbed by a sense of discomfort and "dis-adjustment," the Western discourses, despite their different points of reference, were apparently a proper means to face and counter a tremendously changing society. By 1992, Lien Te-cheng was ready to transform the format explored in his *News Paper*

copying its existing pattern and images, and, more importantly, I blotted out its long articles with paint...." In this way, the act of reproduction is, in Lien's case, conducted by a human, not by a machine. Thus, what the artist achieves is more like a mimicry of newspaper production. (Lien Te-cheng. 1999. *Yiyi de zhuixun yu chungjian: duzheshi de chuanguozuo* [Pursuing and Reconstructing the Meaning: A Readers' Creation]. Taipei: Zeyan Chubanshe. pp3, 6 & note 6.

17 Fu Jiahun. 1992. "Shidu Lien Decheng de *Xinwen IV*" [A Tentative Reading of Lien Te-cheng's *News IV*]. In *1992 Taipei xiandai meishu shuangnianzhan* [The Taipei Biennial of Contemporary Art, 1992], Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p22.

18 Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media." In *Simulacra and Simulation*. Tr. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, (1994). p79. Originally published by Editions Galilee, (1981).

19 Jameson, Fredric. 1983. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In *Postmodern Culture*, Foster, Hal, ed. Mass: Pluto Press, 1983, (1st edition), here 1990, (4th edition). p125. The passage is quoted in Chinese in Lien, Te-cheng. 1999. p6, notes 4, 5.

20 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p5 & note 2.

21 Wang Fudong. 1992. p61.

Paintings into a more concise and clearly formalistic juxtaposition of different fragmented parts. This was not due to a loss of interest in criticism of the media, but was done "in order to escape from being a accomplice of the media myself."²² The latest of these works, *News IV*, which, incidentally, won a major prize at the Taipei Biennial of Contemporary Art,²³ was to be the first of a series of works which have occupied the artist until the present day. It consists of altogether three panels, or, as the artist himself calls it, "the juxtaposition of three [images]" [*sanpin*, 三拼]: a geo-abstract piece (a configuration of blue and white planes), an appropriated image (from an ancient Chinese woodcut illustration), and a two-character piece of Chinese text reading *xinwen*, i.e. "news." The work, according to Lien, "brings to full development the approach that began with the *News Paper Paintings*; it is a re-arrangement /reterritorialization of the deterritorialized elements" of that series.²⁴

The period between 1989 and 1992 was crucial for Lien's artistic development. On the one hand, there are quite conventional canvasses such as *Door God II*, finished in 1989, on the other, the highly original postmodernist piece *News IV*, from 1992. Within that short period, Lien had transformed himself from a near-academic into a decisively progressive, avant-garde artist. This shift of interest can also be detected in the translation of Gregory Battcock's study *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology*, which was published in May 1992 (to be followed three years later by a translation of Rosalind Krauss' *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*).²⁵

The main catalyst for this transformation was Lien's critical approach, which replaced his former pursuit of purely artistic questions, involving him now with social and political issues. Gradually, however, Lien's political sarcasm and criticism of the authorities, whether new or old, gave way to the more detached approach of his works of juxtaposition. In this new body of works, Lien does not depart from the political or social subject matter entirely but, rather, shifts his perspective, since his works, while operating within a global theoretical framework, still focus on local issues such as Taiwan's cultural identity. Certainly, the postmodern discourse remains essential to Lien's creations, regardless of the gap that separates it from the development of Taiwanese society, and keeps providing Lien with state-of-the-art tools for erecting the conceptual superstructure of his works.

22 The artist continues that the painting would become, in Fredric Jameson's words, "a neutral practice of [such] mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, ... a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language." (Lien Te-cheng. 1999. pp7, 8 & note 7.)

23 The Taipei Biennial of Contemporary Art, 1992 [*1992 Taipei xiandai meishu shuangnianzhang*] was a competition exhibition primarily promoting local artists. Taiwanese artists were requested to submit their portfolios, to be first evaluated by a local jury and later by an international jury, each consisting of five jury members. The latter was comprised of two local scholars (Wang Zhexiong and Lü Qingfu), and three museum directors from abroad (Yasunaga Kôichi from Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan, Claude Fournet of the Museums of Nice, France, and Wolfgang Becker from the Ludwig Forum fuer Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany). This biennial is in so far important as it was the first time that the classification according to different media was abandoned. See exhibition catalog. 1992. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed.

24 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p5 & note 2.

25 Battcock, Gregory. 1992. *Guannian yishu* [*Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (1973. New York: Dutton)]. Tr. Lien Te-cheng. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe. Krauss, Rosalind. 1995. *Qianwei de yuanchuangxing* [*The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1984. Cambridge: The MIT Press)]. Tr. Lien Te-cheng. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe.

4.1.2 The Work *Particular Tao*

The Background

Consisting of different parts "juxtaposed" to each other, *Particular Tao*, finished in 1995, is a peculiar and somehow disturbing piece. Visually, it is a mixture of hybrid and heterogeneous elements. Formally, it combines one figurative and one abstract canvas with a piece of written text and a found object. And in terms of content, an abstract panel, a fragment from a Chinese classic and a dislocated motorcycle wheel are to be found in the shocking as well as amusing neighborhood of an erotic painting, Japanese-style.

In 1992, three years before the creation of *Particular Tao*, Lien wrote the following statement for his prize-winning work, *News IV*:

At present, my works are mainly in the format of combining and assembling several canvases (objectively speaking, a kind of juxtaposition). I attempt to synthesize three representational modes of two-dimensional paintings, i.e. the figurative, the abstract and the literary. Of course, this format is not my invention. However, I explore it in a more radical way and do not fear its abruptness.

What I am interested in is the juxtaposition of portions from three different or origin-less (sometimes even unidentified or origin-less) resources. And in the combination of these elements, on the one hand the wholeness of the fragments can be secured, on the other, the mutual seduction among them can also be fully expressed.

*What I am after is a kind of erotics of interpretation.*²⁶

This earlier statement was re-used by the artist to accompany his 1995 piece *Particular Tao*, except that that work consists of four, not three, elements. In particular, the statement clearly elucidates the deliberate attitude adopted by the artist when planning his works and choosing the heterogeneous components they consist of. According to the artist's own words, the concept of juxtaposition, which originates from the artist's quite radical and ambitious technique of assembling different kinds of "representational modes," is part of the rules of his game, a game which implies an "erotic of interpretation" in that there is a "mutual seduction between those different elements."

The Work Described

Particular Tao was first shown in 1995 at the *Art Taiwan* show which constituted Taiwan's first participation in the Venice Biennial. Being primarily executed, as far as the three two-dimensional panels are concerned, in the oil painting technique, the work also includes, as mentioned, a ready-made part of a vehicle of transportation: a motorcycle wheel.

The figurative "painting" on the left is certainly the most amusing part of the work. Depicting a courtier and a court lady in Japanese aristocratic surroundings, it narrates a simple story of human desire, of sexual actions performed as if in a kind of ritual. The style, that of twelfth-century Japanese *yamato-e*, at once realistic and delicately mannerist, seems to suit the scene perfectly in its mixture of detached coolness and comical naiveté.

26 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1992. p19. Translated by David Toman. This statement was reprinted, in 1995, in the exhibition catalog of *Art Taiwan*, the exhibition in which Lien, together with four other artists, represented Taiwan at the Venice Biennial, 1995. *Particular Tao* was then shown publicly for the first time. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1995. *Art Taiwan*, Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p65.

The long-haired Japanese lady loosely wears an open gown that fully reveals the lower part of her body. A courtier in his official robes approaches her on all fours, prostrated on a purple carpet, in an action that is hardly realistic yet still bears some dignity. The ambience is a simple traditional Japanese wooden house, and the scene is situated on and before its veranda. Sharp-angled geometric lines (in the "false perspective" we know from Japanese painting) define a clean and austere interior and its different compartments. A greenish door with blue frames is set against the yellow ground. With its bright color, the door corresponds to the clothes of both the courtier and the court lady. Two horizontal stripes in emulation of Japanese-style decorative clouds, yet somewhat strangely modeled and textured, cross the upper part of the picture.

The lady sits elegantly on the veranda, one leg stretched out, the other drawn up, with her elbow propped upon her knee and chin resting on her hand, which is covered by her sleeve. Her open kimono is decorated with varied and intricate textile patterns, in red, green, and blue, as well as with a gray pattern of sea waves. Legs parted in an inviting manner and the lower part of her body exposed, her sexual organ, given in perfectly realistic detail, reveals itself as the object of the man's voyeurism.

Unlike the loosely dressed lady, her counterpart, the courtier, appears in full dress. Wearing a long blue undergarment and a robe in bluish green decorated with five-leafed flowers, this gentleman has not even bothered to remove his black official cap. It is undeniably funny that a scene of seduction and temptation (from the side of the female) is conducted with such seriousness and solemnity.

Intrinsically funny is also the fact that the man's prostrated posture can hardly be physically realized. Both his feet, one touching the ground and the other lifted up, are just as impossibly poised as the hand which holds the foot of the lady to the side of his head. The humorous, almost ridiculous aspect of this picture is continued in the seriousness of the man, expressed in the form of his fine and formal dress as well as the rigid horizontal position in which he pays full attention to the object of his desire, the female sexual organ. The painting clearly embodies one unique feature of the depiction of the erotic in *yamato-e*, on the one hand the obsession with sexual desires, on the other the very formalized treatment of these desires.

In contrast to this figurative picture, the two parts "in-between," a wheel and an abstract design, do not at first sight bear any immediate associations. The motorcycle wheel, a means of transportation here deprived of its function, and also a found object often to be seen on the street corners of Taipei, is placed upright on top of the abstract piece. It occupies a dominating position, on the vertical axis of the work and higher than all other elements, something which appears most improper and provocative. Situated below the wheel is a painted canvas, a geo-abstraction predominantly consisting of a monochrome dark blue, apart from a thin yellow vertical line which cuts the plane into what at first sight seem to be two exact halves. This clean cut, running directly from top to bottom, is so uniquely and precisely drawn that the yellow line between two dark blue planes appears to bear a peculiar significance. Yet the dark blue, too, is both finely and self-assuredly applied, without any texture or shade, so that the inter-relation between these two near-complementary colors, yellow and blue, becomes intrinsically rational.

On the right side of *Particular Tao*, likewise in oil on canvas, is a section consisting of a Chinese text written in black and in traditional regular script against a light yellow ground. The text contains only two large characters, with the lower part of the second character cut off, and a small circle on the right side of each character. The latter, too, are cut off by the right edge of the canvas. Although no more than one and a half characters are given, the text quoted here is immediately recognizable by every educated Chinese as a classic, if not sacred, text from Chinese antiquity, Laozi's *Daodejing*. It begins with the two words "Tao" [道] and "ke" [可],

which, put together [道可], offer a pictorial as well as a textual context for the work. As to the circles to the right of both characters, the Chinese viewer would recognize them immediately as a traditional way of emphasizing parts of a text, used by Chinese scholars for centuries.

The Painter at Work

Although the piece, in terms of artistic categories, is far from being a painting in the traditional sense, its visual quality, color, form, and shape, as well as its overall physical construction, play roles which are no less interesting. In terms of form and composition, too, the ready-made as well as the three painted pictures - the figurative, abstract and scriptural works - are in fact closely inter-related. Lien Te-cheng has himself remarked that "the greatest challenge for me is the 'inter-challenge' between different elements: how I choose them, ... by what kind of mechanism, ...even the proportion of their sizes, order and position ... etc."²⁷

The physical location, i.e. the composition of these four parts is asymmetric, with each also differing disturbingly from the others in size. The largest, dominant space is given to the narrative yamato-e painting. The central block formed by the abstract painting and the wheel, though narrower than its counterparts to either side, protrudes from the upper and lower margins of the composition. The Chinese text on the right occupies a position higher than the abstract but slightly lower than the yamato-e painting. This asymmetric arrangement intentionally veils the fact that all three painted elements are of roughly the same height. The overall picture seems to be composed without respect to harmony, balance or proportional principles, which form part of the conventional criteria for the quality of art.

In fact, an attempt to unify these various elements is pursued by the artist, but on the basis of color and formal motifs. The different shades of yellow, for instance, are deliberately made to reappear continuously throughout the different parts of the work: as the ground of the text, the straight vertical line in the central piece, as well as the wooden floor and the ground of the yamato-e section. Black, another dominating color, unites different elements, as seen in the written characters, the beautiful black circle of the wheel tyre, and, in the "Japanese" picture, the borders of the carpet, the cap of the official, the lady's hair, as well as in a wooden shutter to the far right corner of the painting.

As far as the formal motifs are concerned, their compositional function is less obvious. Several details, however, should be mentioned here. One, certainly, is the yellow strip in the abstract part of the work, which, on closer examination, is by no means situated exactly in the center: the yellow line is in fact drawn a little to the left of center, obviously to offer more "illusionary" space for the right part of the work. Another is the form of a circle, seen on the "Tao" panel where two cut-off circles are painted on the right edge of the piece; while, of course, the ready-made wheel is a circular motif. And in the yamato-e, the robe of the official is dotted with round patterns which also unmistakably point to the form of the wheel as well. To return to the yellow line in the abstract piece: less obvious, but definitely more significant, is the motif here of a single line dividing a given background. This artistic pattern of the dividing line, which sometimes occurs with a lighter color against a darker background or also vice versa, is repeated at several significant places. The first stroke of the second Chinese character, the gray wooden horizontal pillars, the white belt of the official, the lady's long strand of black hair, but also the form of the vagina itself reflect a thorough and detailed formal design. Most conspicuously, the green door in the rear part of the Yamato-e, cut into two halves by its bluish frame, closely

27 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p20.

reproduces the form of the central abstract picture, albeit on a smaller scale.

Hence, as much as the artist may consider himself a conceptualist, it cannot be denied that *Particular Tao* very much shows the painter's skill at work, something which reminds one of the earlier undertakings of the artist. Lien's efforts to create a coherent, homogeneous piece through technical means, such as the repetition of forms and shapes or the reappearance of colors and motifs, is quite evident. Nevertheless, these formal subtleties merely form the background for other, more striking features of the work, especially the fact that it is put together out of hybrid and mutually incompatible components.

4.1.3 An Open Reading

Signifiers and signification

Following the description of the discussed work, the present section now intends to make sense out of what has been described. I begin with the text panel to the right. As already mentioned, the one and a half characters visible are extracted from one of the most frequently quoted classical texts of Chinese philosophy, the *Daodejing*, whose first sentence runs: *Dao ke dao, fei chang dao* [道可道、非常道], meaning: "The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao" - where "Not the Eternal Tao" [非常道] is also the literal translation of the work's Chinese title, and in fact corresponds to the orthodox Chinese reading, whereas the artist himself has decided for another possible English rendering, *Particular Tao*, rather than the orthodox one.

In Chinese, the two characters in the painting carry a multitude of various meanings. Their semiotic layers include the classical meaning as seen in the sentence from the *Daodejing*, the central Chinese philosophical concept of the "eternal Tao," the profound truth of knowledge, such as in philosophy, cosmology, or ethics. But, on an ordinary daily basis, stripped of the cloak of the "grand narrative," to use Lyotard's nomenclature, this same word "Tao" (or, rather, *dao*) is often simply used to denote a method, a course, a way, or a road.

In the case of the two middle components, the found object and the abstract painting, there is a similar confrontation of meanings. We have the level of the literal and the obvious (a disjoint motorcycle wheel, and a canvas almost entirely covered by dark blue paint, with a narrow stripe of yellow in the middle), and there is, of course, a level containing cultural connotations, ones in fact closely connected with Western art historical phenomena.

The components of the middle section point to no less than two ground-breaking movements in twentieth-century art. One is Marcel Duchamp's revolutionary act of declaring, in 1913, a found object, a ready-made, to be a work of art - witnessed, to name just one work, by his famous *Roue de bicyclette*. The other is the major contribution to abstract art made by the color-field paintings of Barnett Newman, which convincingly expanded our perception of colors and their inter-relationships. So, there are two layers of meaning here, each providing a different perspective on the work. On the other hand, if one may take into consideration culturally more distant regions, could it be that the wheel - especially in respect to its dominating location in the center and high above all other elements of the work - is an avatar of the famous "Wheel of Life" of Buddhist symbolism? Or, in a plain and secular meaning, the wheel as a object deserted then found on the streets of Taipei might symbolize the throwaway society of Taiwan, abandoning one of its most-produced merchandises.

With regard to the *yamato-e* painting, the image has been appropriated by the artist from a

reproduction in the book *The Erotic Art of Japan* showing a part of a scroll by Tosa Mitsuoki (1617-1691) of the Tosa School.²⁸ This is in turn a copy of an earlier *yamato-e* work entitled *Kenjo no maki*, a scroll designed for sexual instruction. In short, we have here the copy of a reproduction of a copy. The American art critic Jonathan Goodman, when interpreting this part of Lien's work, simply refers to a general human condition: "Desire is universal ... the biology of sexual excitement is not culturally determined."²⁹ True as this statement may be, it in no way explains the position of this "Japanese" scene within *Particular Tao*. For it is exactly the *cultural* dimension of this image which endows it with a specific significance. It points to the prominent role of sexuality in Japanese art, culture, and literature and, even more, to the way this aspect has determined the image of Japan in the eyes of foreign observers.

In spite of the observations just made, it would be hard to arrive at a meaning to any of these images if one regarded them only in isolation from the others. Instead, the clue to their interpretation must lie in their inter-relationships and in the metaphorical connections within the whole ensemble. What, then, do the four parts of the work have in common, in the sense of being the components of a simile or of a metaphor? The most appealing among the diverse concepts representing the "signified" in the semiotic equations mentioned earlier is certainly that of the "Tao," for it allows multiple layers of meaning, ranging from "way" or "road" to complex ethical and metaphysical connotations and, as such, would seem to pertain to all four parts of the work, each in a different aspect.

Being the most basic means of transportation, the ready-made that crowns the whole ensemble, if stripped of all possible metaphoric meanings, certainly embodies the concept of the "way" or "road" in its most literal sense, that is, on the level of *content*. Moving on to the level of *visual appearance*, it is the narrow yellow line in the midst of an otherwise monochrome color field which can be associated quite directly with that concept. In the *yamato-e* painting, on the other hand, the object of the man's voyeurism is the female body, or more precisely the female sexual organ, provocatively exposed and obviously the focus of the male's gaze. Strikingly enough in this context, the Chinese term for the vagina, *yindao* [陰道], literally means "the Yin road." Clearly, we have here a *metaphoric* use of the "Tao" concept, in the sense that the artist seizes on a metaphor already inherent in the Chinese language and (literally) *embodies* it within a, so to speak, pre-fabricated painting. Finally, the word *dao* or "Tao" in the fourth, the scriptural part both serves as a key to what all elements of the work have in common and represents the term in its *philosophical* sense – the Tao as an ethical and even metaphysical "way".

Focusing for the moment on the inter-relationship between the wheel and the *yamato-e*, one is tempted here to detect a dialogue between them as well. As a ready-made, the wheel in Lien's piece first reminds us of Marcel Duchamp's act of 1913, when he declared a bicycle wheel placed on a stool to be a work of art. The *yamato-e* part, as explained above, is to be considered a voyeuristic scene concentrated on the female sexual organ. These seemingly unrelated motifs appear, in fact, to be linked by Duchamp's works and even through his biography.

Duchamp's fascination with sexuality and the erotic forms an intrinsic part of his artistic temperament. Major works like *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), as well as works on a smaller scale, such as *Egouttoir* (1914) and *Fountain* (1917), all put the

28 Information given by the artist in November, 1996. See Beurdeley, Michel. [1987]. *The Erotic Art of Japan: The Pillow Poem*. New York: Leon Amiel Publisher. p13. According to Lien, the book was given to him by a friend during his stay in the U.S.

29 Goodman, Jonathan. 1998. "Sign Language: Sex, Politics and Culture in the Work of Te-cheng Lien." In *Art and Asia Pacific*, 19, p63.

ready-made, the industrial product, or the image in the service of evoking sexual associations. In 1920, Duchamp made Man Ray take a photograph of himself as a woman and signed it "Lovingly, Rose Selavy, alias Marcel Duchamp." This "Rose Selavy" was later identified as *eros c'est la vie*. However, it is the last work of Duchamp, *Etant donnés: 1. la chute d'eau, 2. le gaz d'éclairage* (1946-1966), now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, through which we seem to be able to gain access to Lien's *yamato-e* adaptation.

In this installation work by Duchamp, the audience is coerced into taking the role of the voyeur, looking through two small holes in an old wooden door, behind which a fantastic landscape, including a waterfall, terrace, and mountains, unfolds before us. Most striking is of course a naked woman, supine in the foreground. With both legs stretched out and parted wide, her sexual organ should be exposed. However, to rather shocking effect, this critical part is completely missing. Just as in Duchamp's work the vagina is emphasized precisely through its absence, in Lien's *Particular Tao* the exposure of the sexual organ, seen in the same context as the Duchampesque bicycle wheel, would seem to be pointing to the one missing in *Etant donnés*.

In statements from 1992 and 1995 Lien mentions that he strove for an "erotics of interpretation." This idea is certainly open to and invites free associations and readings. What I have attempted here is to propose such a reading arrived at by associative operations of meaning. Ultimately, this interpretation points to the artist's intention to secularize, de-mystify, and de-construct the notion of "Tao," if not those of Duchamp's "ready-made" and Newman's abstraction too.

The Theoretical Framework

The work *Particular Tao* is structured around a number of concepts, or artistic grammars, such as juxtaposition, appropriation, reproduction, and semiotics, terms which clearly point to the latest Western postmodernist "commodities." In what way and for which reasons did Lien Te-cheng make use of them and consider them indispensable for his personal artistic creation? If he did not simply intend to present an assemblage of Western goods, how did he conceptualize his work and make it plausible? Did he put his incorporation of the postmodern discourses solely in the service of illuminating the ancient Chinese philosophical notion of the Tao, in the semiotic sense? Or was his dogmatic program of the juxtaposition of figurative, abstract, and textual elements perhaps no more than an act dictated by fashion, of "showing off," reflecting the artist's absorptive and progressive intellect?

In a theoretical text by Lien Te-cheng published in 1999 his artistic program since 1992 is described and documented. Not surprisingly, the text itself is an eloquent summing up of contemporary postmodern discourses. In order of appearance, the advocates of Western theories and their reference points are given as such: the concept of the "pastiche" of the postmodernist theorist Fredric Jameson and his mass media theory; the French structuralist Gilles Deleuze's definition of "deterritorialization;" the American art critic Leo Steinberg's term "flatbed," used in discussing works of Robert Rauschenberg (all these three authors are cited to elucidate the artist's "News Paper Paintings" as mentioned earlier); the English author John Berger's use of the term "gap" when writing about Magritte's work *The Key of Dreams* for explaining the relationship between text and image; the French author Roland Barthes's famous concept of "myth" in its "close" relation to "appropriation," allowing the revitalization of meaning, the American art critic Cheryl Bernstein's comments on Hank Nerron's "reproductions" of Frank Stella's paintings, which are, so to speak, the "essence" of appropriation and thus the ultimate "negation of authenticity;" Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, and finally, as concluding

figure and high priest of the Olympian realms, Roland Barthes, yet again, with his theory of the "death of the author."³⁰

As a theoretical thinker and a conceptual artist, Lien has mapped out a personal artistic territory of his own, a territory which is self-contained and self-explanatory. Quite convincingly, for instance, he justifies his adoption of the "juxtaposition" format. Departing from his News Paper Paintings, "in order to escape from being an accomplice of the media [himself]," as mentioned earlier, Lien started his "juxtaposition of three" format in 1992, in what was according to him "a complementary development," "a re-arrangement/ reterritorialization of the deterritorialized elements on the reproduction flatbed of the News Paper Paintings."³¹

Lien says:

"I usually compose a kind of 'shaped canvas' by means of combining three, or more than three panels (sometimes a rectangle, occasionally a round form or triangle). This juxtaposition of shaped canvases differentiates itself clearly from traditional canvases (possibly giving it a modern outlook?). In this way, 1) it reflectively expresses its own interesting form, and 2) it sets off the void around it. The void, as used in [my] News Paper Paintings, plays a positive and significant role. To start with, it is a completely new layout/territory vertically juxtaposed. Secondly, with this form, in particular with the emergence of the text part, it emphasizes the flatness of the vertical expansion of the plane, and turns it into a text, thus differing from regular representational paintings and their visual space. ... The result is that within the 'juxtaposition of three,' the image part becomes a mere picture. Thirdly, ... [what I] intend to pursue is, beside the topography of a vertically expanded territory, a horizontal interpretation of meaning (in regard to the sources of quotations and their transformation in time and space), a geological meaning in its structure and in its depth."³²

While every artistic device in the work is carefully described and given a theoretical foundation, it must be noted that the artist establishes his theory exclusively on the basis of contemporary Western sources. In spite of being a Taiwanese and writing in the Chinese language, any mention of Chinese concepts of thinking, or indeed of any Chinese artist, remains conspicuously absent. With one exception: at one point, when talking about inter-relationships within his "juxtapositions of three," Lien Te-cheng quotes two parallel verses from a famous poem by the painter and poet Ma Yuan (ca. 1190-1225): "Small bridge, flowing water, people's dwellings, / Withered rattan, old tree, dusk crows" [Xiaoqiao liushui renjia, 小橋 流水 人家 / Quteng laoshu hunya, 枯藤 老樹 昏鴉]. The capricious stringing together of seemingly isolated images serves the author as an example for what he calls the "gaps" between different elements of one work. "The larger the gap between two elements, the more poetic their combination, as in Lautréamonts sentence often quoted by the Surrealists: "The sense of beauty created by the sheer touch between a sewing machine and an umbrella placed upon a surgery table'."³³

Certainly, among all Western authors, the eccentric French thinker, Roland Barthes enjoys Lien's major attention. In his paper, Lien quotes the following passage from Barthes' *L'empire des signes*: "The text does not 'gloss' the images, which do not 'illustrate' the text. For me, each has been no more than the onset of a kind of visual uncertainty, analogous perhaps to that loss of meaning Zen calls a satori. Text and image, interlacing, seek to ensure the circulation and

30 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. pp5-19.

31 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p5.

32 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p9.

33 Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p. 16.

exchange of these signifiers: body, face, writing; and in them to read the retreat of signs."³⁴ Lien's "appropriation" of Roland Barthes's thought primarily stems from his attempt to explain the confrontational effect between text and image. It is again Barthes whose critical concepts, such as 1) "signifier without signified," and 2) the "death of the author" belong to the most important supportive pillars of the artist's work. Its seminal idea, however, might stem from yet another source of contemporary Western discourse, at least if we take the artist's own statement into consideration. The concept of a "mutual seduction between those different elements," an "erotics of interpretation," which Lien Te-heng mentioned in 1992 as the ultimate goal of his work, goes clearly back to Susan Sontag's idea of "an erotics of art."³⁵

4.1.4 The Work in Context

Appropriation and Other Artworks

Within the discourse of postmodernism, the term "appropriation" is regarded as one of its main critical features. Used as a strategy against modernism, appropriation is seen as an instrument for refuting the concept of originality characteristic of the avant-garde and thus of modernism. In the field of fine arts, appropriation has become an ubiquitous commodity. As the American art historian Irving Sandler puts it, "If the art of the 1980s could be characterized by any one technique, it would be appropriation."³⁶

In the American contemporary art scene, for example, there is a long list of names associated with that technique: Mike Bidlo, Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, and Hank Nerron, also mentioned by Lien Te-cheng in his paper. The Californian John Baldessari who, in 1967, combined "paintings with photographic images and narrative texts,"³⁷ is an example worth looking at here. Regarding his seminal work, *Blasted Allegories*, one American author remarked that Baldessari "investigated the verbal and the visual nature of narrative. In one group of composite photo works, *Blasted Allegories*, he flip-flopped words and pictures so that any number of readings was possible."³⁸ Or, according to Kristine Stiles, editor of *Theory and Documents of Contemporary Art*, the artist in fact "confounded the expectation of a coherent image-text relationship and invalidated the idea of a unified visual narrative."³⁹

Sherrie Levine probably gives the best insight into to why artists are keen on applying the technique of appropriation when she says: "We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. ... We can only imitate a gesture that is always interior, never original. Succeeding the painters, the plagiarist no longer bears within him

34 Barthes, Roland. 1982: *Empire of Signs*, tr. Richard Howard New York: Hill and Wang. p78. See Lien Te-cheng. 1999. p17.

35 Lien writes: "In *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag wrote that 'in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.' I changed this into 'erotics of interpretation.'" (Lien Te-cheng. 1999. Note. 9). Susan Sontag in fact advocated what she called "transparency," which means "experiencing the luminousness of thing in itself, of things being what they are." Sontag, Susan. 1978. "Against interpretation." In *Against interpretation and Other Essays*. 2nd edition. New York: Octagon Books. p13, p14.

36 Sandler, Irving. 1996. *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s To the Early 1990s*. Boulder: Westview Press. p321.

37 Stiles, Kristine & Selz, Peter, eds. 1996. "Language and Concept." In *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p814.

38 Sandler, Irving. 1996. p322.

39 Stiles, Kristine & Selz, Peter, eds. 1996. p814.

passion, humors, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense encyclopedia from which he draws."⁴⁰

Two other artists whose work depends heavily on appropriation are Eric Fischl and David Salle, two former students of John Baldessari's at the California Institute of Art who emerged in New York at the beginning of the 80s. While in some of Eric Fischl's works appropriated images of different sizes are juxtaposed, the approach is especially important in the works of David Salle, an artist whom Dan Cameron has called "the sole painter of his generation to have brought appropriation onto a grand scale."⁴¹ Salle often puts together different images from diverse cultural origins and from different artistic genres. On the other hand, Salle has stated in an interview: "I would never break up a painting into ... component parts."⁴²

It is not the author's intention here to search for formal counterparts to Particular Tao, nor to imply any direct adaptation. What I am trying to draw attention to is that Lien's artistic pattern of juxtaposition, the combination of different-sized parts, and his massive use of appropriation, developed comparatively late, in the 90s, and that the inter-relationship between images and text, the act of imitation or appropriation, or the absence of unified visual narratives, had all been introduced by Western artists earlier. Lien himself has, rightly, remarked that all these "representational modes", are "not [his] invention."⁴³ Thus, the question is indeed: what makes Lien Te-cheng different from other artists? What are his personal features and contributions, if any?

Traditions/Identity: Personal, Local, or National

"Cross-culturality" and "grand narrative" are perhaps two keywords applicable to Particular Tao considered as a whole. As mentioned above, the technique of appropriation is nearly a century old and has gained special importance during the last two decades. The question which should be raised here is less about the technique than about the object of appropriation. In the work discussed here, it is, from the viewpoint of cultural sources, the appropriated four components which are most intriguing, for they form nothing less than the artist's presentation of a cross-cultural hybrid commodity. To recapitulate: they include an ancient Chinese text, imitations of/allusions to a French/American and to an American protagonist of classical modernity, a fairly close copy of a Japanese yamato-e, and to a motorcycle wheel and/or a found object from the streets of Taipei. From what has been chosen, selected, "depicted," or indeed from the sheer visual appearance of the piece, it resembles a magic box or treasure chest filled with gems of different cultural origins. Those precious gems, or fragmented representatives, are: the "Tao," the highest philosophical principle of Chinese culture, the yamato-e, a significant symbol of the Japanese cultural tradition, sexuality, and two iconic symbols of European and American modernism. The point in which this selection differs from that of other artists using the technique of appropriation is that it is decisively culturally oriented and determined, and thus inevitably reflects a certain ideology.

In the case of the American artists, their appropriations are mostly founded on a critical approach, either intending to parody or to de-construct the mass media, as well as on the spirit of negation characteristic of the avant-garde, as seen in Duchamp's "L·H·O·O·Q" or Sherrie Levine's

40 Stiles, Kristine & Selz, Peter, eds. 1996. p379.

41 Farrow, Clare. 1991. "David Salle, An Art & Design Interview." In *New Art: An International Survey*. Papadakis, Andreas & Farrow, Clare & Hodges, Nicola, eds. London: Academy Editions. p135.

42 Farrow, Clare. 1991. p136.

43 Statement of the artist from 1992 and 1995.

appropriated photographs – both have been explicitly mentioned by the artist himself.⁴⁴ For Lien, on the other hand, his interest lies in mapping a new cultural territory. His fragmented appropriations are the carriers of strong cultural messages. He engages in an inter-cultural dialogue, and simultaneously, he draws the cultural map of current Taiwan, which is hybrid, consisting of American, Chinese, and Japanese influences.

As mentioned in chapter 2 concerning the developments of the 80s and beyond, cultural identity was the subject of hot debates between the local art critics and artists around 1991 and 1992, a time when Lien retreated from the arena of social and political criticism and transformed his style from the News Paper Paintings to his "juxtaposition" works. As an art critic himself and a penetrating and frequent writer, Lien, quite surprisingly, did not participate in the long debate, yet his newly evolving works can be seen as his answer to controversial and frequently raised questions, such as: what is Taiwan culturally, how might Chinese be culture separated from Taiwan or, how should a Taiwanese indigenous art be established?

Against this background it is crucial that despite Particular Tao's being composed of "gems" of Western postmodernist discourses, it is created out of and closely related to a local cultural condition and context. In particular, the core of Particular Tao, the quotation from Daodejing, signifies the orthodox Chinese tradition, which in the 90s was rejected by the mainstream of Taiwanese intellectuals, writers, and artists. The very evocation of this tradition signals an oppositional stance toward these mainstream tendencies. Hence, although not a restorer but, rather, a critical re-evaluator of the Chinese culture, with his personal answer to the questions of cultural identity, Lien Te-cheng consciously places himself in a marginal position.⁴⁵ Yet, it is precisely due to these intrinsically complex circumstances of locality that the work itself differs from purely postmodernist pieces. For the appearance of the concept of "Tao" in his work while being, in the form of the fragmented Daodejing quotation, an appropriation in the strictest sense of the word, also conveys a sense of the orthodox, high, and seminal, of belonging to the category of the "grand narrative."

Post-colonialism or Grand Narrative

In their analysis of post-colonial literature, the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* discuss the confrontational strategies within post-colonial cultures and their distinct processes, one of which is "the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the center, the process of capturing and remolding the language to new usages, [which] marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege."⁴⁶ Regarding the term "appropriation," which in this context most interests us, the authors explain that it "is the process by which the language is taken and made to bear the burden of one's own cultural experience or ... to convey in a language that is not one's own, the

44 Lien, Te-cheng. 1999. p12.

45 In 1992, Lien had already chosen an orthodox Chinese symbol as the subject of a "juxtaposition" work entitled *Untitled (Confucius Says)*, fig. 15). It consists of one panel with the Chinese characters "Confucius says" [Ziyue, 子曰], another with a "Japanese" sex scene and a third "abstract" piece in which a black-red "sun" form with white rim is set against a gray background. The quotation "Confucius says" points to the master's saying: "Sexuality and eating are part of the human nature." [Zhice xingye, 食色性也]. While the sexuality is represented by the Japanese image, the abstract piece implies the notion of the "eclipse" [shi, 蝕], homophonous in Chinese with the word for "eating." The reproduction is included in the volume 1995. *Art Taiwan*, Nicholas Jose & Yang Wen-I, eds. plate 10. p46.

46 Shcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, & Tiffin, Helen, eds. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature*. London; New York: Routledge. p38.

spirit that is one's own."⁴⁷

In a way, the quotations given above clearly demonstrate that Lien Te-cheng's artistic project, and particularly his application of the technique of appropriation, is well grounded. Firstly, it is applied as an artistic instrument in a general sense; secondly, it means "to convey ... [with what] is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own." Yet does Lien Te-cheng bear "the burden of [his] own cultural experience" at all? The answer must be affirmative; at the very least given his intense involvement in this issue in his works of the early 90s. Also, in his "juxtaposition" pieces, namely after 1992, we witness works which deal critically with national symbols and Taiwanese identities. Not surprisingly, after 1995, when he began to shuttle between residences in Taipei and New York, the issue of Taiwanese identity became less prominent within his artistic agenda. *Particular Tao* stands on the watershed of Lien's artistic career. With its powerful appropriation of different major cultural symbols, it initiates a process of cross-cultural dialogue which is didactic and even illuminating. It is unfit to serve any ideology. On the other hand, the work – consisting, as it does, of fragmented foreign elements, with the subject absent – unquestionably maps out a new topography of Taiwanese culture. Lien's is a project which definitely belongs to the most interesting in contemporary Taiwanese art. Even more audacious is the rhetoric of his concept, as it "juxtaposes different cultures which co-exist peacefully and democratically [各文化共置、和平民主共存],"⁴⁸ as the artist remarks with respect to *Particular Tao*.

So what confronts us in the end is a complex new model where modernism and contemporary Western discourses appear internalized, incorporated, their "hi-tech" know-how instrumentalized in order to create a "new product." Designed in the service of the user, based on his local requirements, this new commodity carries, along with its hi-tech components, also its special local features. In our present case, *Particular Tao* of Lien Te-cheng, its significance lies in its operating system and the artist's personal engagement in proposing a realistic map of the present location of Taiwanese culture.

47 Shcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, & Tiffin, Helen, eds. 1989. pp38-9.

48 Information given by the artist in 1996. (See note 28). David Clarke, an art historian based in Hong Kong, has remarked that "clearly a reference to the specific situation of Taiwan is being made by an inclusion of samples from the three main cultures that have influenced the island in this century." (Clarke, David. 1996. "Foreign Body: Chinese Art at the 1995 Venice Biennale". In *Art and Asia Pacific*. 3,1, p33.)

4.2 Wu Mali: Re-constituting Knowledge

The installation work *The Library: Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words* (Tushuguan: Yaowen jiaozi, 圖書館: 咬文嚼字, fig. 16) by Wu Mali, first shown in 1995, is a piece summing up this artist's artistic creation, in the field of objects and of installations, in its use of material, and in its theoretical concepts. In particular, it demonstrates well the ambiguous position of an artist situated between Europe and Taiwan. Two almost unbridgeable cultural locations: the one where she grew up and in which she is now engaged, the other where she studied and from where her fundamental ideas and artistic styles originate.

The Library certainly plays an important role, too, in regard to the issue of tradition, the central question investigated in this study. For this piece itself intrinsically provides a clear and vivid, yet complex picture of how different traditions have been forged, operated and syncretized: on the one hand the subversive concept of Dadaism, its anti-authoritarian and anti-traditional attitude, on the other the sensitivity and playfulness of her personal style. Less evident, but still significant, is the blending of Zen or even Taoist traditions. All these are again merged with contemporary discourses, especially that of French post-structuralism. Nevertheless, it is also the case that without the complex situation in Taiwan itself, a society in transition in almost every aspect, this work would not have been motivated and realized in the present form.

In this chapter, I will examine how and under which circumstances these different forces were forged together. Undoubtedly, this highly intellectual installation touches upon a series of critical issues such as human knowledge, collective memories, feminism, and the question of power. But how were these various lines of discourse blended? As the artist has herself said, this work is "the [one] most suitable for an international venue."¹ What is it that gives it this quality? Furthermore, how do the different facets of the artist – writer, translator, and feminist – merge into her personality as a visual artist? Finally, while Wu is among the Taiwanese artists who acquired the broadest of experience and knowledge of the West, how exactly did she transform these into her artistic practice? How, ultimately, did she manage to retain her individuality, her personal artistic nature and perception in this complex nexus of knowledge from East and West, as exemplified with such clarity in the piece to be discussed here, *The Library*?

4.2.1 *The Library: Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words*

A Description of the Work

The Library was first shown at the Palazzo delle Prigioni, Venice, where Taiwan's contemporary art made its debut at the 1995 Venice Biennial. Wu Mali had been chosen, together with four male artists, to represent Taiwan, and *The Library* was her personal contribution for that occasion. The central halls of the Prigioni, the famous Venetian prisons, a high-ceilinged medieval stone building without any religious ornaments apart from one late Renaissance

1 Wu Mali. March, 1995. *Weinisi shuangnianzhan zuopin jihua: Yaowen jiaozi tushuguan* [The Project for the Venice Biennial: *Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words: Library*]. Unpublished MS. This document will be consulted later.

altar-piece, consist of three exhibition rooms, one main hall and two adjoining smaller halls. In addition, there is a small vaulted room leading to a bar, which is currently used as a cloakroom. Interestingly enough, it was this rather tiny area which was chosen by Wu Mali as her exhibition space.

In spite of the smallness of the room and its marginal location, her choice seems appropriate, not only because her conceptual art differed greatly from the works of her male co-exhibitors, which were mainly related to images of sex, but because a "library" by its very nature needs a more secluded space. Opposite the entrance to the room, a window provided for natural light. The only alteration made was to remove the racks and de-mount the entrance door so that the whole space became an open rectangle. In this delicate, clear and neat room of 4 x 6 meters, the artist built her *Library*.

The structure of this "library" was quite plain and simple. Only six bookshelves were installed, face to face, on both side walls. An iron-footed wooden table was moved into the room and placed at its center; upon it the artist placed a glass bottle. To help bring about an atmosphere of intimacy, a half-transparent white cloth replaced the original long and heavy curtains shading off the window. A wooden chest in front of the window remained in place, supplemented by the artist with two flowerpots.

By conscious choices and careful arrangements (the half-transparent cloth covering the window, the flowerpots, the table in the center), Wu Mali obviously aimed at creating an intimate and almost homely atmosphere. To the observer who enters this room and examines the bookshelves, the impression is mixed. On the one hand, their contents are uniformly arranged, in perfect order, and look identical. Every "book" has the same silvery-white appearance, with golden letters on the spine giving the title. The color gold against the silver white conveys a glittering effect as it reflects the dim light falling through the windows. Yet, upon closer inspection, what seemed to be books turn out to be rows of transparent acrylic containers simply shaped like books, and filled with small grain-like pieces of paper of different colors.

These volumes of acrylic, while identical in shape and material, vary slightly in size. Of the same standard length and height (16 x 21 cm), their thickness ranges between 2.8 cm, 4.8 cm and 6.8 cm. The shape of paper particles included is consistently rectangular and thus identical, so that the overall visual appearance of each volume's contents is virtually the same. In true library fashion, the titles are divided into categories such as Politics, Economics, Philosophy, Classical and Popular Literature, and Religion. Accordingly, this small library holds the world famous classics of the East and the West. Fundamental text books for any Chinese reader are included, such as the *Four Books* and the *Five Classics*, the Code of Law, Sun Yat-sen's *Three Principles of the People*, as well as influential representatives of Western knowledge, such as the Bible, Greek Mythology, *Das Kapital*, the complete collection of the recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature and a collection of world art.² The total number of books included amounts to some three hundred. And included they are, albeit in altered form: for the confetti-like contents do in fact stem from the very works the golden spine titles proclaim them to be, only that these books have first been put through a shredder before being filled into their book-like containers.

Containing important, classical, and often canonical texts of the East and the West, this collection of human knowledge certainly resembles the concept of a library – with the slight difference that these books are neither readable nor even to be opened. Having undergone, in a

2 The other titles include: *The Sayings of Chairman Mao*, *Mein Kampf*, *The Theory of Evolution*, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, *Don Quixote*, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as Buddhist Sutras (as quoted in the document mentioned in note 1).

sense, a structural transformation, from a normal reproduction in print to shredded and segmented texts, the lives of those books confined in the acrylic have been transformed into small particles, like grains of rice, but even more similar to the movable printing letter or even to computer microchips.

Two quite different and contradictory effects are evoked. One is the artist's subversive act of destruction and violence, which is both shocking and provocative. The second one is a sheer visual fascination, due to the precious, symbolic, and religious color of gold, not least in its inter-relationship with the transparent, silvery acrylic and the tiny paper grains of various colors. This certainly looks like a poetic piece of post-minimal art, or a feminist "pattern and decoration" work. Yet it is a picture produced by dissolving human knowledge, an act which evokes both feelings of pleasant visual surprise, and a sudden shock – a contradictory position which might most aptly characterize *The Library*.

The Artist's Statement

In the artist's own words, the idea of shredding books and the concept of the whole work has been stated as follows:

... I took books of historical impact and fed them through a paper shredder. Next, the resulting shreds were placed within plexiglass covers to which their original names were affixed in gilded lettering. These books run the gamut from politics and popular literature to world classics such as the Bible, Buddhist sutras, the Four Books of Confucianism, and Greek mythology.

These influential books carry a certain historical value. But as they may not fulfill the demands of today's context or may have been refuted by today's learning. Thus, the act of shredding them up destroys the original written structure and hence is akin to re-writing. Once shredded, the beautiful patterns and structures formed of the fragments become works of art in their own right and take on eternal value. This work represents my personal reflection and contemplation of human civilization as a whole.³

From this statement, it is evident that the artist's intention lies less in the act of total destruction of books influential in history, as the audience are bound to at first suspect, than in an act of re-writing, in "destroying the original written structure." It is a subversive act, a challenge to our perceptions of the canonical books as well as of the act of writing itself. The idea of using an electric machine - the shredder - as a "writing tool" is absurd as well, as it is certainly similar to Dadaist concepts. Placing the "written results," the shredded texts, into containers posing as books and eventually as an entire library is meant as a camouflage technique which again creates an absurdity ultimately testing the audience's limit of tolerance. With the same kind of absurd logic the artist stresses that "once [those influential books] are shredded, the beautiful patterns and structures formed become works of art in their own right and instead take on eternal value."⁴ As to the artist's personal argument on why these canonical books should be "re-written" in the first place, we are informed that this is so because they "may not fulfill the demands of today's context or may have been refuted by today's learning." Thus tradition and history are sharply

3 Wu Mali. 1995. Artist's statement published in *Art Taiwan*. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. Translated by David Toman. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. p79.

4 Wu Mali. 1995. p79.

separated from the present and, more importantly, preference is assigned to the latter. The artist's option for the contemporary almost implies a consciously ahistorical approach, an attitude that would later prove to be a major feature of Wu's artistic character and which will be examined more closely later in the chapter. From the statements just quoted, it is also clear that the process of re-writing is not meant to be identical with the destruction of fundamental and influential books in history. The result of the shredding of texts is contained and preserved in the acrylic boxes, so that what we optically perceive is a new visual and poetic aspect of those books, which emerged only after they had been shredded or, in her own words, "re-written" by the artist.

Possessing distinctive poetic and visual qualities, *The Library* is at the same time absurd, romantic and provocative. In a quite unique manner, optical effects and qualities normally considered diametrically opposed emerge concurrently, such as explosiveness versus visual delicacy, eloquence versus inconsequence, deconstruction versus construction. The presence of these contradictory energies is rooted in the artist's individual aesthetic perceptions and rationality, among which two "separate identities" of hers apparently play a crucial role. One, dating from the beginning of the 80s, is the role of the writer, author and translator, which Wu Mali has never abandoned. The other is her unique personal approach to feminism and the female nature. The question to be raised now and to be dealt with in what follows will be: Why have books been chosen as subject matter in the first place, and under which circumstances have these materials been transformed artistically? It also inevitably comes to mind that the "librarian," that is to say the artist, is also a writer and thus a person of the written word herself. Shouldn't her own publications be included in this "re-writing" program, or is the latter reserved for writings of the past? Finally, while we question just how this work is contextually positioned in the contemporary society of Taiwan, the issue of "re-writing" will require further discussion as well.

4.2.2 The Transformation of the Materials

Early Studies: Intervening Into the Materials

In the catalog for *Segmentation/Multiplication: Three Taiwanese Artists*, an exhibition shown at the Venice Biennial, 1997, I commented on one unique artistic technique applied by the participating artists: The materials chosen (ceramic pots, printed matter, and wheat grains) have undergone a transformation parallel to the life cycle of the biological cell. The materials have first been segmented, divided into parts, often by use of force, and as a result they appear multiplied, as far as their number of single entities is concerned, yet unchanged in the mass and quantity of their matter.⁵ Although this characterization was originally employed to describe another work by Wu Mali, it touches upon a major and frequently reappearing mode of her artistic expression in the past two decades. In order to understand the full context of this development, it is necessary at this point to provide a short outline of some of Wu's major works preceding *The Library*.

Her studies at the famous Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, from which she graduated in 1986, must have been an exciting experience. However, when she enrolled there in 1982, it was not because of the aura of Joseph Beuys, as one would imagine, but rather because of the freedom its

5 Yang Wen-I. 1997. "Segmentation/Multiplication: Three Taiwanese Artists." In *Segmentation/Multiplication*. Yang Wen-I, ed. Exhibition catalog. Taipei: Choice Communication Co. pp9-13.

students enjoyed.⁶ In fact, Beuys, whose work she did not know well until a few years later, exerted no special attraction on her – it was still too early for that for the young student from Taiwan who had come to take up arts almost by coincidence and who until then had only spent two years studying sculpture.⁷ Two of her teachers were nonetheless significant: one was the famous German minimalist Guenther Uecker, her teacher in sculpture, which was her major, the other was Paul Good, with whom she took philosophy courses, and who opened the door of contemporary post-modern discourse for her.

At the same time, as a writer, Wu Mali started the first of her translations of works on Western art which were to be her main source of income as well as the means she employed in her decade-long mission to introduce Western art to the Taiwanese art community. The first two translated books, both published in 1985, one year before her graduation, were *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* and *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, both by Wassily Kandinsky⁸.

Not surprisingly, her first series of works created in Düsseldorf consisted neither of conventional paintings nor of figurative sculptures⁹ but, instead, of abstract pieces particularly emphasizing the surface, the physical and textural transformation of the materials, all paper or different kinds of cardboard. Paper, plain and two-dimensional, has been her favorite material ever since. Instead of treating it as a painting ground, as a mere tool, she has given it an individual life of its own. By means of folding it, pressing it, crumpling it, tearing it, or tearing it up, almost playing with it, she gives the material new visual aspects, even a new life. Being attached to the wall, the single paper elements also take on a sculptural, three-dimensional quality. This act of re-formation and transformation is simply, and significantly, operated merely by the artist's two hands.

The series and Wu's further development of the material have been vividly described by her philosophy professor Paul Good, as an "archaeology of the paper" (Archäologie des Papiers). He recalls: "Durch allerlei Einriße an den Seiten [des Papiers] und durch das Ablösen von Schichten auch im Innern der Flächen hat sie unterschiedlich durchsichtige, amorphe Papierobjekte geschaffen, die sich auf originelle Weise mit Material- und Formfragen auseinandergesetzt haben... Was das Paper alles macht, ... das war der experimentelle Ausgangspunkt dieser Künstlerin."¹⁰

However, "Einreißen," to tear, or "Ablösen," to peel off, those two techniques mentioned as evidence of her "archeology of the paper," are also rooted in the psychology of the artist. In an article written in May 1985, she revealed that during the process of creation she would experience a vision of a world full of images which appears to her as "a thousand worlds of

6 Wu Mali first studied sculpture at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna from 1980 to 1982. The traditional academic training there dissatisfied her. When informed about the Düsseldorf Academy by a friend, she successfully applied for the transfer. See Hu Yongfen. 1995. "Cong danchun meigan xuqiu dao neizai shengceng xuqiu: Wu Mali: wo bu juede ziji xuyao qu zhangwo yige xingti" [From Simple Aesthetic to Inside Need: Wu Mali: I Don't Feel Like Having the Need to Grasp a Form]. In *Diancang yishu*, 35, August, pp166-167.

7 Yang Huiting. 1999. "Wu Mali: shengming zhong buduan de yuhe zaojiu jinri" [Wu Mali: Today is Being Made of Ceaseless Encounters in Life]. In *Yuanjian zazhi*, special issue 3, December, p44.

8 Kandinsky, Wassily. 1985. *Yishu de jingshenxing* [*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. (1973. Bern: Benteli, 10. ed.)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe; Kandinsky, Wassily. 1985. *Dianxianmian*. [*Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente*. (1973. Bern: Benteli)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe.

9 In Summer 1983, I visited the artist in Düsseldorf, where she showed me a stone sculpture of hers, a human head executed in a Giacometti-like manner.

10 Good, Paul. 1998. "Die Bücher durch den Reißwolf schicken: zur Kunst von Mali Wu." In *Minimalia zur Gegenwartskunst*. Düsseldorf; Bonn: Parerga. p129.

eyes," confronted by "a thousand times myself." She writes: "We need to have distance in order to create a picture, to let a picture be born. Yet, while focusing the distance, tightly and nervously zooming in and out, it feels more like tearing, and the [act of] tearing is repeating itself."¹¹ This description by the artist adds a psychological and metaphorical dimension to the technique she applies. As a reflection of the artist's mental and imaginary world, it seems unsurprising therefore that when in 1985 her class was given the assignment to use newspapers as working material, Wu was ready to take a rational and systematic step. Instead of tearing, she now adopted a new technique: cutting. In her floor piece *Untitled*, shown at the Academy's annual exhibition, she used no other tool but a pair of scissors to cut hundreds of newspapers into small pieces and dispersed them on the ground, forming a rectangle of considerable size (2 x 1 x 0.7 meters).

Two decisive aspects were new in this work: one was the technique of cutting, reflecting a distinct move away from her earlier works and an even more deconstructive approach which already bore the seeds of *The Library*. The other was the material: newspapers, a new medium undoubtedly pointing to a critical dimension in the work. The function of newspapers as printed texts, but particularly as the transmitters of daily information and as one of the most powerful mass media is deconstructed, if not utterly destroyed. In transforming the material to a point where no further development is possible, this act of intervention and deconstruction is innovative as much as it is radical. As she later recalled, it earned the artist much applause. Yet the conceptual or theoretical background of this piece, its critical stance against the mass media or even our entire information society, is somewhat ambiguous and unclear. For on the one hand, the choice of material (newspapers) had been an external precondition, and on the other, what had attracted and fascinated her was, as can be seen from the artist's earlier creations and according to her own words, the "form, materials, so to say the pure and spiritual aspect,"¹² rather than any immediate criticism.

Time and Space of 1985

Later that year, in December of 1985, another work, *Time and Space* (Shijian kongjian, 時間空間, fig. 17), was created. It was the artist's first installation done in Taipei, *in situ* and shortly before the artist's graduation from the Academy. As her debut at home, the work was noticed and reviewed by Guo Shaozong, a local art critic active in the 80s. "Into a basement gallery in Taipei," Guo wrote, "have been brought tens and thousands of newspapers. Young people are busy here and there, crumpling the newspapers and pinning them piece by piece onto the walls, until everything from ground to ceiling and pillars is completely 'occupied' by old newspapers. Among the heaps a few neon lights are placed randomly ... In one corner a tape-recorder plays the sound of street noises."¹³

11 This article by the artist will be consulted in later part of this chapter. However, its concluding sentences shall be quoted here: "I don't feel like tearing myself, but I feel that the phenomenon of tearing is reproducing itself." (Wu Mali. 1985. "Silie" [Tearing]. In *Yishujia*, 122, July, pp88-9. For illustrations, twelve close-ups of Arnulf Rainer were reprinted. Although published in July, the article is dated "May 1995, Düsseldorf.")

12 "In general, my artistic development can be divided into two periods: One is the period of my studies in Germany, when the works I created concentrated on form, on materials, on the pure and spiritual aspect, so to speak. During the second period, beginning with my return to Taiwan, due to the great changes taking place in society which influenced me and made me feel limited by formalism, my works became an expression of a social orientation." (From a statement given to the author by Wu Mali in November 1996, unpublished MS.)

13 Guo Shaozong. 1986a. "Jiu baozhi de jingshen kongjian: Wu Mali de gezhan *Kongjian yihao*" [The Spiritual Space of the Old Newspaper: Wu Mali's Solo Show *Space I*]. In *Taiwan shibao*, 08, January. In another article by the same author published one month later, Guo wrote that "this piece vividly reflects the environmental

Time and Space was an important step in Wu's development, for it showed the artist's successful adaptation to the local environment, and later won her international recognition.¹⁴ Newspapers, the familiar material of the artist when she was in Germany, have been given a different and even more persuasive dimension. As the art critic Guo observed at the time, this piece was obviously dealing with "the environmental pollution of present-day Taiwan [...] from the social perspective. [The work] is certainly a satire on an era of the explosion of the mass media, into which modern people are placed in spite of themselves."¹⁵

In the artist's own view, the idea of this piece is the following: "From newspapers – visual noises – to the noise of the streets. I made the audience walk into an environment which was both visually and aurally unbearable. This is an instinctive reflection of our living environment."¹⁶ Hence, newspapers as used in *Time and Space* are not so much carriers of information as "visual noise" - which is certainly a rather metaphorical approach. The words that she has inserted in the first sentence confirm our suspicion that this is "a piece to be felt by means of multiple senses, and even through bodily presence, which unites my long personal fondness for literature and the theatre."¹⁷

However, there might also be another, decidedly critical aspect to this work, as pointed out some years later by the Australian author, Linda Jaivin. She reminds us of its time of origin, of reading the work as "ein politischer Akt," because "Besucher tappten durch die Papiermassen, trampelten ueber die Texte, ...[die wie] alle taiwanesischen Zeitungen zu dieser Zeit vom Staat kontrolliert wurden."¹⁸ Tempting, if not persuasive, as this interpretation may be, it is not explicitly corroborated by the artist's own testimony. According to her statement quoted above it seems that the artist was much more involved with the formal aspects of the work, an artistic pursuit which developed during her stay in Germany, as well as its "multi-sensual" effects, while both the content and the potential connotations of the medium assume only a secondary position.

Between 1986 and 1991, Wu Mali's concern with newspapers as an artistic medium did not cease,

pollution of present Taiwan. Its visual impact is outstanding, the feeling of presence is even stronger. ... [It is] an usual art work, ... most progressive, complete, and shall leave an imprint in local art history." (Guo Shaozong. 1986b. "Jianduan chedi de zaoxing yuyan: kan Wu Mali *Kongjian zhan*" [A Progressive and Thoroughgoing Artistic Language: A Review of Wu Mali's *Space* Exhibition]. In *Diyi huakan*, 01, February.) The piece was first entitled *Space I*; later, as the artist re-installed it at the Taiwan Art Museum in 1988, the work received its present title *Time and Space*.

14 Local recognition for Wu came only late, at the beginning of the 90s. However, when *Time and Space* was re-made at the Taiwan Art Museum in 1988, the Japanese art critic Chiba Naruo saw the piece and subsequently invited the artist to take part in the Third International Biennial of Ushimado in the following year. The installation *Asia* she created there, an outdoor piece made of wood, was a geometrization of the Chinese character for "Asia" [ya, 亞] measuring more than 10 x 10 meters. The empty section in the middle was in the form of a cross painted in red, which the viewers could walk into. There, it became a dark passage with turns and twists, similar to a labyrinth. As Cai Guoqiang, who was then studying art in Japan, commented, the piece "intrinsically symbolized the present condition of the Asian countries looking for the light of the future." Cai praised this work highly as being of "high value and artistic standard." (Cai Guoqiang. 1989. "Yazhou de nianqing yishu: Riben Niuchuang guoji yishuji suigan" [Young Art of Asia: Remarks on the Ushimado International Art Festival, Japan]. In *Yishujia*, 175, November, p114.)

15 Guo Shaozong. 1986b.

16 This artist's statement is reprinted in the article of Wang Fudong. 1993. "*Kan dao Fo jiou ba Fo shasi: Wu Mali de Taiwan qingjie*" [Kill the Buddha, Once the Buddha Appears: Wu Mali's Taiwan Complex]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 251, January, 1992. Quoted from reprint in *Taiwan xinshengdai meishu xunli* [An Overview of the New Generation of Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huangguan Wenxue, (1993). p71.

17 Wang Fudong. 1993. op.it. p71.

18 Jaivin, Linda, 1995. "Wu Mali." In *Balanceakte*, exhibition catalog. Lenz, Iris and Winkler, Monika, eds. Stuttgart: Institut fuer Auslandsbeziehungen. p41. This article appeared only in German.

in spite of the fact that her major interest had by now turned towards installation and objects, and was now mainly socially and politically oriented.¹⁹ A series of wall pieces created in 1988, consisting mainly of open double pages of newspapers on which a fine thin layer of grained newspaper "powder" had been evenly spread, was a further dis-functioning of the original medium. Later, in 1989, Wu used printed matter instead of newspapers to create a floor piece that was clearly a remake of her earlier work at the annual Academy exhibition at Düsseldorf in 1984. However, it was given a new title: *The Zero Point of Literature* (Wenxue lingdian, 文學零點)²⁰ Then, in *History and Memory* of 1991, three transparent boxes made of acrylic and sized 55 x 55 x 10.5 cm were filled with shredded newspapers, minimalist segmented units or particles which were undoubtedly poetic. The work became the artist's first piece to be acquired by a public museum.²¹

The Shredded Bible and Other Books of 1993

The technique of dissection, executed in a regular form and a minimalist style, has, since 1985, never completely vanished from the artist's oeuvre. The material has continued to be newspapers or, later, often other kinds of printed matter which were shredded or otherwise segmented and placed in acrylic cases or simply dispersed on the floor. In particular, we can observe that now work titles such as *The Zero Point of Literature* (1989) or *History and Memory* (1991) appear, and broaden the range of subject matter beyond, or parallel to, the topics involving current political issues or social problems favored by Wu until then.

It was, however, not until 1993 that the shredding machine became part of her working tools. At the same time, she shifted her use of material from newspapers to particular and specific books. Never lacking confidence, the first book she chose to be shredded was nothing less than that worldwide, all-time bestseller, *The Bible* (Shengjing, 聖經, fig. 18) The results of Wu's operation were put into a glass bottle labeled *Shengjing* (*The Bible* or, literally, "Holy Classic") in two golden Chinese characters.

This work was to become only the first of a series. In the solo show *Gnawing Texts & Reaming Words* of 1993, the shredded texts were placed in the above-mentioned acrylic cases and displayed on a bookshelf. Although not conceived of as a "library," the entire exhibition space was elegantly and sensitively filled with nothing but shredded texts of all kinds. As the artist later stated, *The Library* of 1995 is "an enlargement in scale of *Gnawing Texts & Reaming Words*."²²

As regards the selection of books in the *Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words* show of 1993, one

19 In 1989, Wu Mali participated in the 5-20 Commemorative Exhibition, a show in memory of the farmers' protests on the May 20, 1988 (see chapter 2.3.1), following an invitation by Wu Yongyi, a college friend of hers who is a writer, editor and political activist working closely with the DPP member of parliament, Lin Zhuoshui. (Information provided by the artist, November 1996.) In 1990, Wu founded, together with four artists, the avant-garde group Taiwan Documentary Room which held two exhibitions between 1990 and 1991. For more information on TDR see chapter 2.3.1.

20 This installation work is reproduced in the catalog *Dangdai yishu zuopin zhan* [Special Exhibition for the Artistic Development in Modern Times]. National Museum of History, ed. Taipei: National Museum of History. 1989. p39. Later, between 1995 and 2000, this piece was again exhibited in Germany, Italy, and Belgium.

21 Consisting of three acrylic boxes, this piece is the first example of the use of this material by Wu. In their cubic form, they resemble the book-like containers in *The Library*. More general than specific in its message, *History & Memory* was acquired by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and is reproduced in the catalog *Taipei Shili Meishuguan diancang tulu zonglan 1983 - 1993* [The Taipei Fine Arts Museum Collections 1983 - 1993]. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. 1993. p50.

22 Wu Mali. March, 1995. Artist's statement, unpublished.

newspaper review quoted the artist's words: "I chose influential books from the past whose arguments have since been refuted or who have otherwise lost their former influence."²³ Among the book titles represented were, as quoted by the journalist, "*The Bible*, *Dou Shu* (Astrology), *Zi Wei* (also Astrology), *Mianxiangshu* (Physiognomy), ... as well as books by Qiong Yao or San Mao."²⁴ It is striking that, in fact, none of these books is out of fashion. On the contrary, they are among the most popular books in Taiwan. According to the statistics, a quarter of Taiwan's population currently believes in Jesus Christ, all sects and denominations included. The next three books, on fortune telling, are particular favorites among business people, politicians, and even intellectuals. And the two contemporary woman writers, Qiong Yao and San Mao ranked among Taiwan's best-selling popular novelists for decades.

From this perspective, the books mentioned above are far from being just "books of the past," particularly in the eyes of the general readership in contemporary Taiwan. Although some of these books do indeed date from antiquity or contain centuries-old knowledge, their "arguments" certainly have not "lost their former influence." Wu Mali's aim is clearly subversive, a symbolic reminder evoking a re-thinking and a re-consideration of the value of influential texts. What the artist targeted is our conventional perception of knowledge, be it of canonical importance or just vastly popular.

However, in the same exhibition not just the Bible but a whole body of Western books was also included. A newspaper article of the time, entitled "How do Avant-garde artists 'Look'?" remarked on the selection: "The books chosen by Wu Mali ... are ones defined by her as existing 'in the past tense.' Furthermore, there is a series subtitled *Grandfather Series* whose material are books containing sexual discrimination. 'Grandfather' stands for the patriarchal society whose way of thinking has been handed down from the father's fathers for generations. Books included in this 'library' are *The Bible*, *Greek Mythology*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, *Three Discourses on Sexuality*, and *The Interpretation of Dreams*."²⁵ Interestingly enough, the feminist approach of the artist is here exclusively applied to the Western classics.

From the chronological development of the materials given above it is evident that Wu Mali's *The Library* in fact sprang out of a long journey of transforming materials she had chosen early on in her development. The technique of shredding, used in *The Library*, resulted from the earlier treatment of pressing, folding, crumpling, tearing and cutting. Also, the material chosen for that work had already gone through a number of stages, from various kinds of paper, cardboard, newspapers, and printed matter, to influential books. And, not least, the early appearance in her work of fragmented grains of newspapers or books contained in acrylic is noteworthy. While these two artistic features testify to a gradual progression of the artist, the categories of books which have been shredded document the artist's ideological preoccupation, marked by a strongly feminist viewpoint.

23 Lai Suling. 1993. "Yaowen jiaozhi tushuguan" [Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words]. In *Minshengbao*, 09, April.

24 Lai Suling. 1993.

25 Zhan Meijuan. 1994. "Qianwei yishujia ruhe 'kan'?" [How Do Avant-garde Artists 'Look?']. In *Lianhebao*, 09, June.

4.2.3 The Library in Context

The Avant-garde Artist

As we have just seen, under the aspect of its material and technique, in many ways *The Library* sums up the artist's earlier creations and forms the final point of a long period of transformation. Returning to the work itself, in the following I will discuss three points fundamental to it: the feminist aspect, the artist's critical attitude, and her role as a writer. Being closely inter-related, these three aspects have contributed to Wu Mali's *Library* conceptually as well as stylistically.

While the lifting of martial law in 1987 marked a watershed in recent Taiwanese history, for Wu Mali, the decisive change occurred in 1989. Later, she recalled that she was "influenced by the tremendous changes within society." As already noted, she subsequently "felt the limits of formalism" and "started to express herself in social terms."²⁶ However, one year earlier, Wu had just published her fourth translation *Dada - Kunst und Antikunst*,²⁷ and her next translation project, a biography of Joseph Beuys, was under way, to be finished in 1991. In 1989, as one of the first artists to do so, Wu participated in a political activity, namely in a memorial exhibition dedicated to the 5-20 incident (see chapter 2.3.1). Following this exhibition, which mainly protested against the misconduct of the authorities, Wu Mali, together with a few other artists, founded the progressive art group Taiwan Documentary Room (TDR) in 1990. As one of its central figures, Wu, together with other artists, organized two exhibitions in 1990 and 1991, the latter of which was hailed as a "cry for freedom" in an article published by the weekly news magazine of the opposition party.²⁸

Wu Mali's works at this stage exhibited a strong social and political criticism expressed with directness and immediacy. In her installation work *Violence?*, shown at the 5-20 commemorative exhibition, for instance, she used a series of copies of the original photographs taken on the spot to form a two-dimensional image of a tank, in front of which a heap of bricks was placed. What was shocking for the artist here was to experience how the conflict between the farmers and the policemen demonstrated that "violence widely exists in our life."²⁹ Another piece, *Movement to Love One's Own Country*, shown at the first TDR exhibition, was a ready-made, a work of object art assembling a number of electric animal toys dancing in a circle, surrounded by the Chinese characters representing its title. Another work which consisted of a decaying cake decorated with the national flag clearly ridiculed political symbolism.³⁰

Wu Mali's critical works, installations as well as objects, earned her the title of the most avant-garde among the local artists, yet that characterization was not made without qualifying undertones. In 1993, Huang Haiming, an art critic who was then studying contemporary art in Paris, wrote that "in general, we tend to say that Wu Mali's works are too direct, seemingly without 'multiple meanings,' or they are visually too simple..."³¹ One year earlier, in 1992,

26 Wu Mali. November, 1996. Artist's statement, unpublished.

27 Richter. Hans. 1988. *Dada: Yishu yu fan yishu [Dada: Kunst und Antikunst]*. (1978. Köln: DuMont). Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe.

28 Gao Yi. 1990. "Ganzaidian li kuhan ziyou: Taiwan Dang'an shi de yishu chuanguoqun" [A Cry for Freedom at the Ganzaidian: The Artists of Taiwan Documentary Room]. In *Minjin zhoukan*, 171, p37.

29 Li Fei. 1990. "Sixiang shijiao de Taiwan qingjie: Wu Mali" [Wu Mali: The Taiwan Complex Out of Focus]. In *Zili wanbao*, 01, May.

30 Chen Meimao. 1990. "Daolan Dibaren Jiang Zongtong jiu zhi wenyi meizhan: Cong tizhi de fanpan dao xingzhi de fanpan [A Guide Through the Exhibition in Commemoration of the Inauguration of President Chiang on his Eighth Term: From Institutional to Formalistic Rebellion]. In *Zili zaobao*, 04, June. See also chapter 2.3.1.

31 Huang Haiming. 1993. "Diwujie meizhan zuoping pingxi" [An Analysis of the Award-winning Works of the Fifth Art Exhibition]. In *Taipeixian Wenhua Zhongxin diwujie meizhan zhuanji* [The Fifth Art Exhibition of the

another local artist remarked that in fact Wu Mali "is more an avant-garde writer" than an artist. For upon "reading her literary words [i.e. her artist's statement], the meaning of the works became 'instantly to be understood,' without contemplation, taste, or substance."³² Only Wang Fudong, himself an artist who had studied in New York, was more reserved and cautious. He pointed out: "It is a fact that the audience has difficulties in accepting Wu Mali's work. However, her creative driving force is exactly her familiarity with and her application of the Western 'avant-garde' trends, which she combines with local 'ready-mades' (social or political phenomena), responding to 'the state of mind' of the island of Taiwan. This is most obviously the message transmitted by her works." Accordingly, in Wang's opinion, Wu Mali is definitely "one of the most representative bearers of the avant-garde spirit."³³

The Feminist Artist

As an avant-garde artist in Taiwan, and especially against the background of her deep penetration of Western art, Wu cannot be as easily labeled as producing "simple" works or works "instantly to be understood," as the art critic quoted above would have it. Rather, the "simplicity" of the works must be regarded as a deliberate artistic scheme, her very individual choice of style and a resistance against the main trend of male aesthetic concepts, or even art history itself; as she once remarked, "It is not a good thing to find one's own work co-relating to ones in art history."³⁴ The substantial body of works created over a period of more than fifteen years is intimate, colorful and unique, with an unmistakable sense of lightness, at times poetic, at times playful and witty. In particular, these works reveal a style typical of many female artists: rejecting to follow the rules of the art system exclusively made by the male artists. Although embedded in a rational approach, emotionality and sensitivity for visual qualities remain a dominating component. Not least, the artist's creative process itself is determined by feminine characteristics such as the frequent working of the materials with bare hands, i.e. through repetitive cutting, tearing off, and crumpling, as if in a kind of inverted handiwork.

Indeed, *The Library* serves as an appropriate example for her feminist approach. It would perhaps not be going too far to call the technique of shredding, especially in its earlier form, cutting, a kind of feminist activity. For it is the monotonous, repeated, long-drawn activities which have always been associated with women's work. The visual qualities of the work, stressing a sense of lightness, transparency, delicacy, and poetic sensibility, may also be typical for the female identity of the artist.

Is it possible then to classify Wu Mali as a predominantly feminist artist? Indeed, since 1990, Wu has created a whole body of works conceived from a feminist perspective, and in particular her choice of ready-mades with specifically "female" connotations, such as cakes, brassieres, jewelry, or small toys, seems to show a deliberate adoption of what would commonly be seen as the characteristics of a woman artist.³⁵ In many ways, we could say that Wu's feminist approach

Culture Center of Taipei County]. Taipei: Culture Center of Taipei County. p21. Huang however added: "I think it is often important for a work of art stressing a conceptual idea to have a simple outlook." p21.

32 Ni Zaiqin. 1993. "Wu Mali: qianwei meishu de fanyizhe" [Wu Mali: The Translator of the Avant-garde]. In *Taiwan dangdai meishu chutan* [A Review on Contemporary Taiwanese Art]. Taipei: Huangguan Chuban. p54. (Originally published in *Xiongshi meishu*, 255, May, 1992.) As he wrote, upon "reading her literary words [i.e. the artist's statement], the meaning of the works became 'instantly to be understood...'" p54.

33 Wang Fudong. 1993. p73.

34 Hu Yongfen. 1995. p168.

35 It is certainly legitimate to locate Wu Mali's art in a feminist tradition, in regard to her long engagement with feminism and her feminist works, starting from around 1990. However, to label her entire artistic creation as

or her status as a feminist kept her away from the tradition, as well as serving her as a touchstone, a power of resistance in her confrontation with the overwhelming force of Western art predominantly created by male artists.

Nevertheless, while insisting on a personal feminist style, with *The Library* Wu Mali created a work suffused by a powerful rhetoric normally associated with male artists. This is especially the case with the overall goal of the work which, according to the artist, is her "personal reflection and contemplation of human civilization as a whole," a theme akin to what has been called "grand narratives." The answer as to the origins of this strong and critical energy might lie in the interacting roles played by Wu Mali, who appears not as an introverted woman artist concentrating on personal issues, but as a feminist and avant-garde artist, as well as, even more importantly, an engaged writer.

The Writer-Artist

As mentioned previously, the political and social criticism launched by Wu Mali has won her the title of an avant-garde artist; which position, in its turn, was the result of an interactive relationship between herself and her surroundings. In order to understand her critical approaches, including her feminist stance, any discussion must inevitably turn to her role as a writer embedded in Western contemporary art and the post-modernist discourse, and as a mediator between the West and a local society in rapid change.

Wu Mali's status as an author was her earliest "identity" and continued to be present alongside her artistic creation. Her undertakings encompass translations, reports, writings on art, and the editing of art books. Upon returning to Taiwan from Germany in 1986, Wu Mali had already acquired an enormous knowledge in the field of art. In particular, in her writing she had combined her knowledge of art and of the German language, devoting herself to providing information on modern and contemporary Western art as well as remaining an insider within the current art scene. Wu Mali's contribution during the past two decades to the promotion of modern and contemporary Western art has certainly been considerable. Writings by Kandinsky and Paul Klee, as well as works on Dada, Joseph Beuys, Object Art, and Performances have been translated by her into Chinese.³⁶ Most of these translations have become standard

such, would be misleading. As regards the artist's own idea of feminism, she once said: "When I was a student at university, my teacher Li Yuanzhen [one of the earliest feminists in Taiwan, author's note] conveyed the message to us that women could strive for their own independence. So, I always regarded myself as a new woman... For me it is so natural that man and woman are equal that I never thought much about feminism or women's issues, because I am practicing this concept in my daily life." See Wang Shiyong. 1995. "Shengming yu chuanguo huxiang chengzhang: Wu Mali, Yan Minghui & Liu Xiumei tan nuxing yu chuanguo" [Life and Art Growing Together: Wu Mali, Yan Ming-Hui, & Liu Xiumei Talking about Art and Women]. In *Zili wanbao*, 06, March. When asked about her style, Wu also said: that "My earliest works were more abstract. To those abstract works, one can say they were very feminine."

- 36 The translated works are given here in chronological order: Kandinsky, Wassily. 1985. *Yishu de jingshenxing* [Über das Geistige in der Kunst. (1973. Bern: Benteli, 10. ed.)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe; Kandinsky, Wassily. 1985. *Dianxianmian*. [Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente. (1973. Bern: Benteli)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe; Geelhaar, Christian. 1985. *Baoluo Keli: Shenghuo yu zuopin* [Paul Klee: Leben und Werk. (1977. Köln: DuMont)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe; Richter, Hans. 1988. *Dada: Yishu yu fan yishu* [Dada: Kunst und Antikunst. (1978. Köln: DuMont)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yishujia Chubanshe; Stachelhaus, Heiner. 1991. *Boyisi zhuan* [Joseph Beuys. (1987. Düsseldorf: Claassen)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe; Rotzler, Willy. 1991. *Wuti yishu* [Objektkunst. (1981. Köln: Dumont)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe; Schilling, Jürgen. 1993. *Xingdong yishu* [Aktionskunst: Identität von Kunst und Leben. (1978. Luzern: Bucher)]. Tr. Wu Mali. Taipei: Yuanliu Chubanshe.

textbooks for art students. Beside her translating work, she has also, since the beginning of the 90s, been the editor of a series of more than forty books on Western contemporary art and artistic discourse. In addition, she has reported on the latest art trends or exhibitions, publishing, for instance, a review on the Documenta IX in 1993. Even more important was a series of articles introducing the feminist art movement in the USA, which appeared in 1994.

Wu Mali's writing, translating and editing work runs parallel with her artistic creation. Interestingly enough, this undertaking was above all motivated by her sense of urgent necessity and her responsibility as an artist and an intellectual. As she remarked, it was "her duty and her dedication to introduce the latest trends of the West in order to close the gap between Taiwan and the Western art, a gap which originally amounted to a backlog of ten to twenty years."³⁷

Imbued with this strong conviction, Wu Mali's attitude and judgement as expressed above clearly acknowledge the importance of knowledge and the necessity of information, both invariably presented in the form of books. Thus, the subject matter of *The Library* is not only closely related to one of her favorite activities but, by means of negating her most valued undertakings, also articulates a deeper sense of self-deconstruction. Clearly, on the surface at least, this viewpoint contradicts her statement on *The Library*, postulating a "re-writing" of those books which "may not fulfill the demands of today's context or may have been refuted by today's learning."³⁸ Yet the title of the work itself, *The Library*, in fact embraces a much broader range and scope and conveys a message which goes clearly beyond what had been stated by the artist herself.

4.2.4 The Discourses of the East and West

The Post-structural Touch

The theoretical or philosophical concept of *The Library* certainly reminds one of post-structural discourses, especially that of Roland Barthes and his famous work *The Death of the Author*, whose concluding sentences, for instance, state: "Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer. ...we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."³⁹

Are those influential books chosen for the artist's library in fact the "myth" mentioned by Barthes, to be overthrown in order "to give writing its future?" This may well be the case, since the artist was not unfamiliar with Barthes' writing. Wu Mali once recalled that "she took many philosophical courses at her school [i.e. the Düsseldorf Academy]. At that time (the beginning of the 80s), the post-structuralism of Foucault and Barthes was a big trend. Surprisingly, many years after her return, post-structuralism became popular [in Taiwan], so that now she can make use of it."⁴⁰

We may recall that *The Zero Point of the Literature*, a floor piece created in 1989, openly adopts

37 Ye Saiyun. 1994. "Wu Mali: Laizi guannian yishu de qimeng yu shijian" [Wu Mali: Enlightenment and Practice from the Conceptual Art Perspective]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 282, August, p38.

38 Wu Mali. 1995. p79.

39 Barthes, Roland. 1998. "The Death of the Author." In *Modern Criticism and Theory, A Reader*. Lodge, David, ed. London & New York: Longman (second edition). pp171-2.

40 Dai Yuefang. 1992. "Wu Mali: Zibenzhuyi yishu zhong de qingliu" [Wu Mali: The Fresh Wind in the Art of Capitalism]. In *Danjiang shibao*, 21, October. In an early text by Wu, written in 1985, she wrote "Schizophrenia and tearing are creative sources, as Roland Barthes has mentioned." Wu Mali. 1985. p89.

the title of Roland Barthes's well-known text of 1953 as its own, and that its earlier version, named *Untitled*, dated back to the annual Academy exhibition of 1984, a time when Wu was deeply involved in the philosophy classes offered at her school. Her philosophy professor, Paul Good, related in 1995 in a catalog essay: "Das Verfahren des Reißens und des Zerreißen stand bei Wu Mali anfänglich noch ganz in Dienst ästhetischer Lösungen, im Dienst der schönen Form,"⁴¹ and commented on *The Zero Point of Literature*, also shown in Germany: "Das ästhetische Objekt, nicht die Wunde war das Ziel. Aber Verletzung war der Ausgangspunkt. Durch Zerstören aufbauen, so könnte die Devise solcher Tätigkeiten gelautet haben. Demontage zugunsten von Montage. Dekonstruktion zum Zwecke der Konstruktion. Keine pure Lust des Zerstörens. Konstruktion und Montage waren an modernen Begriffen von "Bild," "Objekt," "Kunst," "Ästhetik" orientiert."⁴²

Good raises a number of interesting points. According to him, tearing, "reißen" or "zerreißen," was originally an act serving aesthetic purposes, while ten years later, this act of deconstruction had become a conscious device employed for reasons of construction. Prof. Good, who himself was the first source of Wu's knowledge of post-structuralistic theory, did not hesitate to give Roland Barthes' ideas a prominent position in his article, as is to be expected. In reviewing *The Library*, he wrote about the shredding of books: "Es ist damit eine Form der unendlichen Bibliothek ... realisiert worden. Der Reißwolf infiniert unterschiedlos alles Geschriebene. Er führt an den Nullpunkt, an den Punkt Zero der Schreibkunst zurück."⁴³

However, for Good it is ultimately two other French philosophers, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, whose ideas were "allen voran verarbeitet" by Wu. "Ihr Begriff der kulturellen Demontage nährt sich von Deleuze's Zerstörung des dogmatischen Bildes von Denken, die nicht in bloße Destruktion endet, vielmehr erst den Raum schafft für ein Denken des Ereignisses, des Zufalls, des Chaoskosmos, der sich selbst immer neu generierenden Kunst."⁴⁴

The philosophical framework mentioned above explains the fundamental concepts of 1) the destruction of the dogmatic way of thinking, and 2) the need for something totally new, a new way of thinking about human knowledge, both of which are vividly revealed in the work. However, it is nonetheless clear that it took the artist almost a decade to reach this point. Hence, what was expressed in *The Library* was not at all a direct and instant adaptation of the Western discourse, but rather the result of a slow and even circuitous process of in her work, conditioned by the development of the materials and the artist's own reactions to contemporary society in Taiwan, and including a strongly feminist approach, her own critical works, as well as her personal beliefs and her engagement in writing.

Situated Between Traditions

Wu Mali's art and her writing, as has been shown above, witness to both a strong attachment to and orientation towards the Western contemporary trends. From the beginning, Wu's affinity to Western culture was evident. As her main subject at university, she chose German Language and Literature, and immediately after graduation she went to Germany. As she later recalled, her reason for going abroad was the sense of eagerness for "cultural otherness, but not for its exoticism; rather, for the possibility of searching for new things and objects." For her, it was also

41 Good, Paul. 1998. p130.

42 Good, Paul. 1998. p130.

43 Good, Paul. 1998. p131.

44 Good, Paul. 1998. p134.

"a possibility of liberation, the possibility to be unfettered by tradition."⁴⁵

"Tradition" as mentioned by her certainly meant the orthodox Chinese culture. Yet not to be confined by tradition was by no means her only motivation for going abroad. As she remarks herself, she was attracted by "cultural otherness" as well. After returning home, Wu seems to have kept herself away from the Chinese tradition more unconsciously than not. But her position is made clear through her works and through her artistic training, which took place entirely in the West, and also through her writings introducing Western art to Taiwan.

Yet, on the other hand, she is a committed Taiwanese artist. From her work and her engagement in the past it is evident that she has completely devoted herself to the Taiwanese environment. The critical works within her *oeuvre* were done with the specific intention of exposing the dark side of the conventions, the habits and the misconceptions in Taiwanese society. *Kill the Buddha as soon as the Buddha Appears* is the title of one of her works. Buddha, far from resembling his original image as an enlightened sage, has been turned into a god of wealth in Taiwanese folk religion – he is almost a symbol of greed, deluding the minds of the believers. Which is why "people must first get rid of him, because it is he who is the source of all confusion."⁴⁶ The grotesqueness of the Buddha's transformation invoked an outburst of rebellious creative energy on the side of the artist.

Thus, despite the fact that Wu Mali belongs to those who have been labeled disseminators of Western art, upon a closer look, it is evident that her ultimate purpose is to re-form and to enlighten her own, Taiwanese, environment. Hence, her translation project was a mission to "close the gap between Taiwan and Western Art." And her first series of shredded books in 1993, including the Bible, books on Chinese astrology and physiognomy, as well as popular novels, was in fact created to raise the audience's critical awareness of an authoritarian society.

The art critic Wang Fudong aptly characterizes Wu's position between East and West when he mentions that "what has supported her and serves as her driving force is her familiarity with and her application of the Western 'Avant-garde' trends."⁴⁷ Yet Wang does not deny her firm dedication to the Taiwanese artistic environment, and continues: Wu Mali "combines these [avant-garde trends] with 'local ready-mades' (social or political phenomena), responding to 'the state of mind' of the island of Taiwan."⁴⁸

In reality, Wu's artistic goal is far from being merely a simple response to the islands' "state of mind," as assumed by Wang. Nonetheless, he rightly points out Wu's immense knowledge of contemporary Western art, which she instrumentalizes when dealing with the local situation. Wu's discontent with the prevailing social and political circumstances has been her source of artistic energy, and her creative works rooted in the Western art are intended to open up a new dimension for the local community.

"Anti-intellectualism", Zen, and the Void

If Western artistic know-how serves Wu as a tool for her artistic realisation of critical purposes, the Chinese tradition, her "mother culture," would seem to be less important, even insignificant for her work. As demonstrated by ample evidence, her general perception and attitude seem decidedly progressive, oriented on the present instead of the past. "Traditionalist art and art education, from plaster-copying in art school to the figurative and landscape paintings

45 Yang Huiting. 1999. p45.

46 Wang Fudong. 1993. p73.

47 Wang Fudong. 1993. p70.

48 Wang Fudong. 1993. p70.

inundating the local art market," she calls "an 'art ritual' left over from the nineteenth century."⁴⁹ In her artistic oeuvre, her viewpoint becomes even clearer, such as in the shredding of "books written in the past tense" in *The Library*.

There is, however, an exception to this almost ahistorical attitude. In an installation created in 1994, *Camouflage*, she quotes an anecdote from Chinese history dating back to the 3rd century which became part of the treasury of classical military stratagems: *The Stratagem of the Empty City* [Kongchengji, 空城計], the text of which was reproduced on the entrance wall. It is thus tempting to presume that Wu was in fact never quite as alienated to her "mother culture" as might appear at first sight. However, as the title of the piece implies, the story referred to, though stemming from the Chinese cultural heritage, serves only as a quotation, an instrument, similar to her knowledge of Western art, to achieve the work's subversive purpose – in this case to question the definition of art as manipulated by the powerful public institutions.⁵⁰

Thus, Chinese culture has obviously not been entirely excluded from her artistic creation and, unlike many of her colleagues, she has never had the intention of attacking it. For her, the "mother culture" could well possess as much valuable information as Western knowledge. Nevertheless, hidden under the surface of her works, there might lie yet another territory of Eastern thought and culture; for upon closer inspection, we may often detect in her work traces of the long history of anti-intellectualism in China, which includes traditions as diverse as orthodox and modernist iconoclasm, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism.

In Chinese history, there is no lack of incidents of the confiscation or destruction of books by the authorities. In recent times, the Chinese have showed even less respect for their cultural heritage. Books, as well as works of art, have fallen victim to revolutionary movements such as the May Fourth Movement or the Cultural Revolution. There is an even stronger tendency toward nihilism in Taoism. One of its major philosophical concepts is the complete negation of knowledge, a most decided anti-intellectualism. Could these traditions have been the seed from which Wu conceived her work? In any case, the act of destroying the repositories of human knowledge, the written books, is at the least annoying and certainly highly provocative. In this connection, Paul Good, Wu's philosophy teacher, has quoted Heinrich Heine's saying: "Wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen." However, in an attempt to refute possible allegations of anti-intellectualism in Wu's work, he also admits that "Zerreißen ist nun aber nicht gleich verbrennen."⁵¹

If the unusual act of disqualifying, of destroying books, and of negating human knowledge - a notion never completely absent from the Chinese collective memory - did not play a certain role in the artist's radical move of shredding the books, at least another resource of tradition, that of Zen Buddhism, may have suggested or supported her concept. In another statement of the artist

49 Dai Yuefang. 1992.

50 This installation used the technique of camouflage. It reproduced the exact environment of an exhibition space, with only spotlights on the wall. The title related to a famous story of the 3rd century AD, in which the enemy was made to believe that a city actually devoid of any defendants was filled with soldiers, and its (in fact very real) appearance of defenseless just a ruse to lure them into an ambush. Based on a historical event, the story was included, in a much elaborated form, into the popular novel *Sanguo Yanyi* (The Three Kingdoms) and saw further transformation on the theater and in popular culture (See Miao Yue. ed. 1984. *Sanguozhi xuanzhu* [Annotated Selections from *The Annals of the Three Kingdoms*]. Peking: Zhonghua Shuju. Vol.3. p683. Lo Kuan-chung. 1976. *Three Kingdoms: China's Epic Drama*. Translated & edited by Moss Roberts. New York: Pantheon Books. pp285-290.) The artist's appropriation here was apparently intended to evoke a maneuver, a strategy, by which the audience was misled and made to reflect about the nature of an exhibition space. This work was shown at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in May, 1994.

51 Good, Paul. 1998. p136.

prior to the one published and quoted earlier, a statement designed as an outline of a project yet to be realized, we come across a section that was omitted in the later text (given here in italics within the published text):

Once shredded, the beautiful patterns and structures formed of the fragments become works of art in their own right and take on eternal value. *The pages of the book, one leaf after another, now cannot be read and opened. Yet they will evoke an understanding smile by the audience, as if the serious illness of books in history is thus taken away from them.* This work represents my personal reflection and contemplation of human civilization as a whole.⁵²

From these remarks omitted in the later version, a further dimension of *The Library* is disclosed. The undertaking to "re-write" the collected books, as stated in the published version, is justified in a somewhat unexpected manner: its purpose is to rid them of a "serious illness." The audience's "understanding smile" which the artists anticipates either in the literal or, perhaps, in the metaphorical sense, points to a Zen saying which claims that a smile symbolizes illumination and can thus ease illness. At first, this statement would seem naïve and, if not absurd, at least idiosyncratic. However, this "understanding smile [huixin huixiao, 會心微笑]" easily reminds one of the famous *Kôans* in historical Zen teaching, in which the Zen disciples would often show unusual reactions when finally understanding the point of a previously incomprehensible story told by the teacher.

One of the decisive qualities of the artist's work lies in that it is both subversive and radical and, at the same time, playful and weightless. The artist almost poses as a surgeon, operating on texts affected by a "serious illness in history" by means of shredding them, in order to "cure" them from their disease and "mercifully" give them eternal life as a work of art. Is it this viewpoint which sums up the artist's "personal reflection and contemplation of human civilization as a whole?" Is there indeed an appropriation of Zen in the work? If this were the case, it would be a new approach to the artist.

Wu's teacher Paul Good has quite interestingly pointed out that he "will Mali Wu... nicht zu einer Künstlerin machen, welche wesentlich aus dem Zen-Denken heraus arbeitet. Dennoch liegt eine besondere Kraft ihrer bilderischen Arbeiten eben darin, wieviel Wirksamkeit sie der Leere zutraut."⁵³ "Die Leere," the void or emptiness mentioned by Good, is indicated quite simply and directly in *The Library*, when after all books had been shredded nothing is left except the void. Yet, this void is transitory, a process which is necessary in order to build up a new horizon of human knowledge.

Possibly, while considering the reaction of the audience to the work, Wu thought of the effect of enlightenment which is the ultimate aim of Zen; an interpretation most fitting to her intention of launching a re-consideration and re-thinking of human knowledge in *The Library*. Reading Zen philosophy into *The Library* would thus be consistent with the general concept of her work.

Perhaps of no less significance, it was in her visionary world that a sense of Zen or Buddhist *Weltanschauung* was indeed revealed. Wu has written that when communicating with the outside world, "I am not only me, but a thousand me. To use one thousand eyes to view the world - the picture. Slightly shifting the perspective another eye is added, one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three, and so to infinity...One single me is also one

52 Wu Mali. March, 1995. Artist's statement (unpublished). See also note 1.

53 Good, Paul. 1998. p137.

thousand me. One is transformed into one thousand worlds."⁵⁴ While writing this article, Wu Mali was in the midst of the transition of her technique from the tearing, peeling off and crumpling of her world of paper to cutting. What concerned the artist was not the infinity of the worlds, but rather the feeling of tearing, "and the [act of] tearing is repeating itself," while in search of the "picture" (probably standing for the German term "das Bild.") The appearance of thousands of worlds is a metaphor for the phenomenon of tearing, which is also a form of self-reproduction. In her interpretation, it is in fact similar to the psychological condition of multiple minds: "This is schizophrenia," Wu writes. "Tearing and schizophrenia are elements of artistic creation, as mentioned by Roland Barthes."⁵⁵ From Wu's Zen-like perception of the world to a contemporary Western author who is himself known to have been involved with Zen – a cross-culturality which had emerged long before the work was created.

What remains without doubt is that the process of re-writing is not meant to be identical with the destruction of fundamentally influential books in history. Furthermore, the result of the shredding of texts is contained and preserved in the acrylic boxes, so that what we optically perceive is a new visual and poetic aspect of those books, one which emerges only after they have been shredded or, more precisely, re-written by the artist. In this case, *The Library* represents not only a question but an answer as well. The influential books require to be re-structured and this re-structuring is destructive as well as constructive. Once they have been re-written, or conceptually de-constructed, they can be re-incarnated into a new life.

54 Wu Mali. 1985. p87.

55 Wu Mali. 1985. p87.

5. The Black Shadow of Tradition

The previous sections focussed on two different attitudes toward tradition: an affirmative one characterized by an ardent identification with what is perceived as elements of a specific Taiwanese tradition, and a detached and analytic one which reflects on the conditions and forms of tradition. However, there is a third group of artists for whom "tradition" is somehow synonymous with repression, with a sinister force which has warped and distorted the Chinese (and Taiwanese) psyche for centuries. For them, the term means the very tradition which continues to exert a decisive influence on the Taiwanese via their Mainland Chinese roots, as well as via the cultural policy imposed on Taiwan after the Second World War: Mainland Chinese culture including Confucianism, and Confucianism's far-reaching consequences on family, society, and the mind of the individual. Paradoxically, or perhaps only consistently, these artists, as said before, make use of the very artistic techniques which are often regarded as epitomizing this tradition – ink painting and the classical Chinese print and book illustration.

The successful establishment of the ideology of "Chinese culture" in postwar Taiwan made it possible for traditional ink painting to become institutionalized and regarded as "national painting." As one of the most significant legacies in the Chinese history, ink painting became, along with oil painting (the "Japanese legacy") and Western modernism, one of the three major artistic styles in contemporary Taiwanese art. Nevertheless, the development of the medium faced severe criticism. In the conference "The Development of Contemporary Art" of 1989, the Chinese-American author Li Yu drew a bleak picture of contemporary ink painting: "Most of the contemporary paintings," she remarked with a fair degree of sarcasm, "would probably pass for good works if created two hundred years ago."¹ Ink painting, she argued, was incapable of modernization because "its aesthetic – the search for harmony with nature or the landscape, in order to attain tranquillity – is rooted in the agricultural society." In this it is fundamentally different from "modern painting [which] originated from the modern society, ... from modern human beings and modern feelings." Moreover, "at the core" of the concept of Chinese ink painting is the idea that "a human being is not purely an individual but is fitted into a certain relationship, such as 'man and nature,' 'man and the nation,' 'man and tradition,' ... and 'man and the world.'"²

Indeed, the questions raised here in fact go far beyond the territory of ink painting. They would also appear to be relevant as regards Chinese culture in general, its up-to-dateness and

1 Li Yu. 1990. "Minzhuzhuyi, jiti huodong, ziyou xinling" [Nationalism, Collective Activities, and Free Mind]. (paper first delivered at the *Diyijie dangdai yishu fazhan xueshu yantaohui* [The First Conference on the Development of Contemporary Art], organized by the National Museum of History in December, 1989) Repr. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 232, June, pp102-103.

2 Li Yu. 1990. p106.

applicability when facing a modern, industrial, and commercial society. Brought and introduced to Taiwan by the Nationalists, Chinese culture faces the problem of being re-presented from the perspective of the ruling party. The people in Taiwan, in Li Yu's words, were not "purely individuals," but indoctrinated and fitted into a close relationship with their nation. While discussing Yang Mao-lin's series Slogans, the female artist Yan Minghui made an indirect comment on this fact: "For decades, our education has unceasingly taught us slogans. From 'The recovery of China will be successful,' 'Everybody must report a communist to the authorities,' and 'Dignity and self-improvement,' to 'Love [your country] to the utmost.'" Yan further questioned the consequences of this education: "For the majority, 'Chinese culture' is an ambiguous concept. How much of 'Chinese culture' has been preserved in Taiwan? The 'Chinese Cultural Renaissance' [movement], and likewise policies and slogans ... have always directed people [only] towards a nostalgia for Chinese culture on the Mainland."³ With a repressive and alienated atmosphere clouding the minds of the people, echoes of this psychological complex are still present in the population even after the KMT regime has come to be regarded by many as a foreign rule and Chinese culture as a form of imperialist hegemony, a view first advocated by the opposition party.

Despite this wave of de-sinization, which might even contain a certain oedipal component, the development of ink painting in Taiwan has in many ways been fruitful. Decisive for this development was, on the one hand, needless to say the presence of the Palace Museum, containing the treasures of imperial China brought to Taiwan by the KMT and open to the public since 1965, thereby providing invaluable and precious masterpieces for study and appreciation; on the other hand, the institutionalization of ink painting as a subject in all major art schools. The production of ink painting has thus never really decreased, while concurrently, the artists of the Modernist Movement have created works which have injected considerable innovations into the ancient medium. Several contemporary artists, such as Yu Chengyao (1898 - 1993) and Yu Peng (1955 -), have transgressed the confinement of traditional ink painting in their different approaches to materials or subject matter. Both are characterized by their idiosyncratic styles. On the other hand, a so-called "New Literati" school of more conservative painters made itself known at the beginning of the 1990s, enjoying quite a lot of attention among the traditionalist circles.

Besides those artists who have intensely committed themselves to ink painting and those who, for whatever reasons, have decisively turned their back on the heritage of "Greater China," there is another small group of artists who, strategically, take a third position. These artists do not reject traditional sources, yet while using them, in form or in technique, do this less for external reasons of political or moral character than for the sake of self-realization, for finding something "new" which is artistically different from the two groups mentioned above. Two artists among them will be presented here: Huang Chih-yang and Hou Chun-ming.

Both born in the 60s and locally trained, the two artists are rather indifferent towards ideological debates on the issue of cultural identity. More fundamentally, it is the "pure individual" beyond its relationship with nature or the nation – that which Li Yu saw as missing from Chinese ink painting – with which both are primarily concerned. While concentrating on repressed, hidden desires or man's existential nature, what interests them in the tradition is in fact its rich reservoir of dark, stark, and strange subject matter, such as that encountered in Taoist ritual, ancient

3 Yan Minghui. 1990. "Yishu, zhengzhi, ren de sanjiao xiti: Kan Yang Maolin de *Zhiti yuyan yu Biaoyu pian*" [Art, Politics, and Human Beings: Reviewing Yang Mao-lin's Series *Body Language and Slogans*]. In *Yishu guizu*, November, p122.

woodcuts, marginal mythological figures, the totems of religious folk art, esoteric texts, the folk art of paper cuts as well as in, naturally, calligraphy and ink painting. Far from reviving the old tradition, both artists are concerned with artistic expression, form, inspirations, and ideas. This artistic effort is significant in the sense that the tradition serves as a tool, or even as a ready-made. Yet, unlike other artists in this third group, the two artists mentioned here have appropriated segments of tradition not solely for simple instrumental purposes, but also conceptually, for reasons of criticism: criticism of certain aspects of the human nature of the contemporary Taiwanese, a humanity formed and determined by the Chinese tradition.

5.1 Huang Chih-yang: Anti-Confucianist Exhibitionism

Huang Chih-yang, born in Taipei in 1965, belongs to the first generation to benefit from the newly established artistic infrastructure. The museums inaugurated during the 80s offered him the opportunity to see original works of local and international artists. At the same time, the alternative groups, IT Park and Space II, began to take shape. Most favorable for Huang, however, was the fact that he had a much better training in art than his predecessors, for by now many artists returning from abroad had begun to teach in art academies and art departments. Among them, Lien Te-cheng, whose works have been discussed earlier, in several ways played an important role in the formation of Huang Chih-yang's art. As a teacher, Lien offered the young artist the latest information on international art and artistic concepts. Furthermore, Lien provided the young artist with a link to the local art community.¹ Later, Lien also wrote articles on Huang's work, acting as his exegete.²

During his studies at the Fine Arts Department at the Chinese Culture University between 1986 and 1989, majoring in traditional ink painting, Huang Chih-yang witnessed the historical transition in Taiwan which was also of decisive importance for his art. The radical political, social, and cultural changes of the period, never seen before, were characterized by street demonstrations, a boom of religious activities in the form of extravagant folklorist processions, the building of temples and, not least, the obsessive new industry of itinerant sex performances. Huang Chih-yang's *The Maternity Room* (Xiaoxing chanfang, 孿形產房, fig. 19) of 1992, which will be discussed in this chapter, sprang from of this context, giving an unusual picture of the human figure in his/her desperate living conditions, which reveals the artist's own effort to come to terms with Taiwanese contemporary society. Without doubt, Huang's interpretations, the depicted deconstructive images of human beings, reflected the artist's own psychology as well as the general state of mind and the collective identity of the Taiwanese.

In the following, I will discuss *The Maternity Room* under three major aspects: its stylistic aspect,

1 Huang emerged early as an artist. The beginnings of his career are closely related to the overall artistic environment and, not least, to his contacts with Lien Te-cheng. In Summer, 1989, the year Huang graduated from art school, he participated in the avant-garde group Space II, of which Lien was one of the leading members. At the turn of 1989/1990, Huang held his first solo show and afterwards, even while he was doing his military service, regularly took part in the annual group shows. *The Maternity Room*, finished in 1992, was also first shown at Space II in the same year. Shortly afterwards, Huang was invited to participate in the exhibition *Dis/Continuity: Religion, Shamanism and Nature*. In 1994, Huang won a major award at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, and in 1995 he enjoyed the even greater honor of being selected as one of five artists to be shown in the country's first participation in the Venice Biennial. For further biographical information see Wu Songming. 1992. "Xiaoxing chanfang de zhongshengxiang" [Collective Images of *The Maternity Room*]. In *Zili wanbao*, 02, June. Huang Qianfang. 1997. "Zhuiqiu yishu de duli zizhu: Huang Zhiyang de chuanguo licheng" [In Search of Artistic Independence: The Creative Formation of Huang Chih-yang]. In *Diancang yishu*, 58, July, pp186-189. For the first solo exhibition, see Lin Yuxiang. 1992. "Yihua de xingtí: Huang Zhiyang gezhan" [Alienated Images: Huang Chih-yang's solo show.]. In *Yishujia*, 253, March, p42.

2 Two major articles on Huang's art were written by Lien Te-cheng in 1992 and 1996, both on the occasion of the artist's solo shows. See Lien Te-cheng. 1992. "Yongwei yiyi: wo du Huang Zhiyang Xiaoxing chanfang" [Utility as the Meaning: Reading *The Maternity Room* by Huang Chih-yang]. In *Yanhuang yishu*, 36, August, pp37-39. Lien Te-cheng. 1996. "Youyu senlin: zhuangzhi yishu" [The *Forest of Melancholy*: Installation Art]. In *Yishujia*, 248, January, pp216-218.

including the brushwork and technique, the rendered subject matter, i.e. images of human beings, and, lastly, its various traditional sources, among them Taoist, Buddhist, and folk religious. While neither of these aspects is separable from the artistic progression of the artist, nor each from the others, I will first deal with the work itself and its rendering of the human body.

5.1.1 *The Maternity Room of 1992*

A Horror Picture of the Human Beings

The Maternity Room is part of a sequence of works painted with ink on rice paper, the earlier group of which, created in 1992, was first shown at Space II, and which was continued in 1996 with the *Zoon* series. Between 1995 and 1999, parts of Huang's piece were widely shown, from Sydney, Venice, and Aachen to New York, making it arguably one of the works of contemporary Taiwanese art most frequently exhibited in the West.³ The more than one hundred hanging scrolls of both series share the same subject matter and certain stylistic and formal features. Their sole subject matter is the standing human figure, in black, or, more exactly, they show hybrid creatures, combining the human, the animal, and the vegetable. These figures appear curved, distorted, thorny, hairy, skeletal, many of them featuring enormous sexual organs, but sometimes even lacking a head, or, rather, with their heads seeming to have just been evaporated into a haze of minute fragments after some huge explosion. Rather than possessing a solid bodily frame, they seem to be an amalgam of anatomic parts loosely put together, stabilized only by the painting ground of the scroll they are confined in – a psychological study of human beings seen from an inside, a dissecting perspective.

Uniformly measuring 60 x 240 cm, each scroll is dedicated to one single image of a human (or humanoid) figure. Painted with Chinese brush and black ink on white rice paper, these creatures are constructed out of loosely connected limbs and trunks exclusively rendered through black calligraphic lines and various patterns of strokes. Each scroll bears several red seals whose inscriptions include three different characters for "sexual intercourse" (all pronounced *diao*) as well as the terms *Baigendang* [拜根黨] (Party of Penis Worshipers), *Xiaoxing chanfang* [孿形產房] (Maternity Room), the title of the work, and lastly *Zun gufazhi xianLieng shengchan* [遵古法製, 限量生產] (Made according to the ancient style in limited number.) They are placed either at the top left or lower right of the respective scroll.

Assembling a group of human beings devoid of any palpable identity, the artist has created the series in a non-realistic and even fantastically exaggerating manner. The bodies of the creatures all possess either elongated or foreshortened legs and arms, while their trunks are composed of clearly separated sections such as breasts, stomach, and belly. While the details of heads and faces are purposely neglected, the figures in the series are, so to speak, characterized by their

3 *The Maternity Room* has been shown since 1995 at the following venues outside Taiwan (in chronological order): *Art Taiwan*, a touring exhibition in Australia in 1995/96 beginning at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; *Art Taiwan*, the first participation of Taiwan at the Venice Biennial, in 1995; at the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany, where the series *Zoon* was created and independently shown; two exhibitions held in New York in 1997 and 1998, *Tracing Taiwan: Contemporary Works on Paper* at the Drawing Center and *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* at the Asia Society and PS1 (both exhibitions included examples of *Zoon* and were subsequently shown as touring exhibitions: *Tracing Taiwan* at the Parish Art Museum and the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, *Inside Out* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Monterrey, Mexico.) With the exception of the solo show, all the other four exhibitions have a catalog; see the bibliography.

sexual features or organs. All sexual parts, be it penises, testicles, breasts, vaginas or clitoris, are monstrously and picturesquely enlarged; they have been given a disproportional attention and are depicted in great variety; it is these details which serve as the identifying feature of each creature and are clearly to be seen as the core of the series.

Taking as an example the works exhibited at the show *Dis/Continuity: Religion, Shamanism, and Nature*,⁴ the four figures at the front, which are arranged according to their sexes, males alternating with females, in fact do not contravene the main features of human anatomy. However, their limbs, trunks, not to mention their sexual parts, are all conceived differently. The body of the female figure on the far right is divided into four sections, breasts, abdomen/clitoris, legs and arms, reflecting a kind of natural mirror symmetry between left and right. Her adjoining neighbor is organized in a more complicated manner: an upper body in slight profile, then an enlarged, disproportional belly (or perhaps two huge testicles) from which a gigantic penis is suspended. The next figure to his left, female again, is made up, among others, of a nutshell-shaped trunk and hugely disproportional legs which surround her belly and sexual organ; these are given in an enclosed space apparently intending to represent the womb. Its form is not symmetrical but corresponds to that of the trunk. The figure on the far left is undoubtedly male. While his interiors are given in a succession of three parts with extending penis, both his arms are extremely long, with his hands probably gripping his own penis. The latter two figures, judging from their hairy head without any facial description, might be portrayed from the back.

The Dissected Body

For further analysis and discussion, the female on the far right shall serve as an example. Her body, possessing long legs and short arms, is dominated by huge breasts. Her relatively small head turns slightly toward the right, its hair divided in the middle. Her face is seemingly aged and full of wrinkles, depicted in short lines similar to that of her hair but less densely applied. No facial expression can be detected, except around her eyes, given in complete black, leaving two white holes. It is not easy to tell where exactly her face ends and her neck begins, for the vertical lines below her black eye mask obviously form or at least indicate the nose. In this case, the blackness extending to her chest would be running out of her mouth, a most unpleasant and almost nauseating sight.

Within this large black area occupying the cross-shaped section between neck, shoulder, and chest, it is unclear what exactly belongs to which. Even more difficult to determine are the two flying vertical rope-like elements emerging from both sides of this black zone. Are they the pigtailed of the depicted figure, or simply her shoulders? The latter identification seems to be refuted by the fact that the "rope" on the right, which is rendered practically isolated and unconnected to the body, differs vastly from the common human anatomy of that area. Functionally, however, these two differently drawn rope-elements fill that very role, of the shoulders, if not representing the upper arms as well.

Treated in an exaggerated and dramatic way, her immense breasts, as one of the central motifs, would normally evoke a sense of sexuality or fertility due to their sheer size and volume. However, in the present work, neither can be supposed to be the case, except for the fact that the sexual aspect of the human existence is strongly emphasized. Formally, both breasts are

4 I have taken this image (reprinted in the catalog *Art Taiwan*. 1995, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. pp. 43-44) as material for my discussion because to its availability and clarity in reproduction. The photograph was taken at the exhibition *Yanxu yu duanlie: zongjiao, wushu, ziran* [Dis/Continuity: Religion, Shamanism, and Nature] held in September 1992 at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and curated by the art critic Huang Haiming.

construed by regular patterns in form of feathers, and rendered inconsistently in shape and contour: While the right breast takes on the form of an outward-pointed cone, rendered in profile, the left one, obviously bigger, more monstrous, almost seems to be suspended directly from the neck.

Passing on to her belly, there is again a dark area, below which the lower part of her trunk is reduced to one single organ, the clitoris. As a sexual organ, the inceptive part of sexual encounter, it is treated in an obsessive enlargement which even surpasses in exaggeration that of the breasts. Yet on the other hand, this human organ has two unusual or even perverse features. One is its form, resembling hanging petals. The other is the fact that it varies from the "narrative mode" of the rest of the body, for here the clitoris, contrary to its "natural" aspect, is depicted in a way which suggests a view of its inside. Upon closer examination, both sides of this independent clitoris, with an opening in the center, are made up of three carefully rendered concentric layers. To produce these, the artist has repetitively applied thick dots to the paper, then, lifting the brush a little, with a quick stroke made these dots run out into sharp, thin, tail-like lines. In the center and near the navel there is a dark zone looking as if a flow of black ink had run downwards into the sexual organ, somehow subsiding towards its lower end. The legs, the supporting pillars of the trunk, again differ from each other in their shapes and their technique of rendering. Interestingly enough, her feet are depicted in a manner resembling leaves of plants or bird's claws.

Deformed, displaced, and abnormally exaggerated, the female body stands not alone, but in the company of three other creatures in the frontal group. While creating her companions, the artist has applied the same compositional scheme, as mentioned above, such as the focussing on and magnifying of sexual organs overshadowing the other body parts, often captured from an interior perspective, or the asymmetric treatment of pairs of limbs. The differences are evident in their overall positions. Although all are standing figures, the couple on the left is clearly rendered with their backs to the viewer, as indicated by the hairy heads obviously seen from the rear, and, in the case of the female, the lack of discernible breasts. In any case, the depicted creatures transgress our common perception of human beings. While examining the physical structure of the four figures in the front, it does not need to be emphasized that the artist has made variety his major goal. Their limbs, legs, trunks, heads and hairs clearly differ from each other. And yet it becomes clear from the appearance of the work as a whole that the artist is aiming here at a picture of a mass of beings who are as disjoint, dislocated, and segmented collectively as are their individual bodies.

Despite of all features of the depicted bodies mentioned above, two aspects make this series of figures so horrifying and grotesque: First of all, the dissecting view of the artist on the human body. Secondly, the artistic style in which the surface and texture of the flesh are rendered. As regards this dissecting view, one feels reminded of the so-called X-ray style known from, among others, the art of the Australian aborigines, a connection possibly revealing the primitive, animal origin of these human creatures. In Australian aboriginal art, for instance, it is not so much the human body but that of animals which is rendered according to a physical, organic construction resulting from an inner perspective, an X-ray close-up rather than an outside look on the body. As to the artistic style, it is characterized by certain calligraphic patterns which are basically not an invention of the artist but apparently appropriated from the natural world, the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Patterns appropriated in this manner include that of tree leaves, scales of fish and reptiles, bird's feathers, or shells. This stylistic quotation certainly carries a message, as it is reminiscent of the animal part still very much present in human nature.

Stroke Patterns and the Zoon Series

Reduced to their primordial features, the human beings in *The Maternity Room* are treated technically, with great expertise, solely through the medium of lines. While creating these creatures, Huang has paid close attention to their individual parts. The brushwork of each body part is highly complex. Although based on lines, the figures are not "drawn" in the conventional sense. Rather, they are constructed by a consecutive repetition of identical patterns of which the entire body, arms, legs, trunk, sexual organs, hair and head, are built up. These calligraphic brushstrokes show a considerable degree of variation: we find crossed, hooked, thorny and pointed lines, short or long ones. Also, the movement, speed, and direction of the brushstrokes vary according to what kind of pattern is to be produced.

Given the nature of the rice paper and the ink, no correction is permitted – unlike in oil painting. Thus, the technique of applying strokes and lines relies on immediacy and irreversibility. Under such circumstances, Huang Chih-yang's creatures must have been rendered in an extremely quick and autonomous manner, not stopping until each part or organ of the body had been finished. Furthermore, in each case the artist has immediately gone to work without any preliminary sketch. In fact, this treatment reminds one of the techniques of action painting such as in the works of Jackson Pollock.⁵ However, the artistic project of the young Taiwanese Huang Chih-yang differs entirely from that of the American artist, in genre as well as in subject matter.

In 1996, while Huang Chih-yang was invited as artist-in-residence to the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany, he created a second series of ink paintings entitled *Zoon* (fig. 20), which presents itself as a further development of *The Maternity Room*. Measuring 338 x 127 cm, each single picture of the series is approximately one and a half times larger than in the earlier series of 1992. Sharing *The Maternity Room's* compositional scheme (a single figure, still grotesque and skeleton-like, occupying the greater part of a vertical sheet of paper of hanging-scroll proportions), *Zoon* differs, however, in the application of the patterns, in that some of the giant figures are exclusively made up of a single pattern of brushstrokes.

The author was fortunate enough to be able visit Huang's studio when he was living and working in Aachen, and to witness his quite astonishing creative process. The huge, longish paper placed on the floor, the artist, a small container of black ink beside him, shoeless and bending down, painted his creatures without any preliminary drawing, starting from the head and proceeding to shoulders, thorax, and extremities. Apparently their size, shape, and proportions had already been firmly conceived and fixed in his mind. He took short breaks to examine the finished parts and to decide on the further direction of the painting. A small ladder served as an outlook, which the artist climbed from time to time to gain an overall view of his figures.

What was most astonishing about his manner of working was the improvised and tremendously quick, if not automatic way of painting. Huang applied his strokes as if in trance, without a single moment of hesitation, unerringly and unceasingly. In the ink painting technique, no correction is, of course, possible. As to the brush, the artist explained that "I like to use a goat's hair brush with a long point. I basically use the brush perpendicular to the paper in the 'centered-tip' manner; there is no great difference from the traditional brushwork. What I stress is

5 While writing on the creative process of Huang, Lien quoted Harold Rosenberg's comment on Action Painting that the operation on the pictorial space was to be regarded as an "event." Lien subsequently commented on Huang that "if this event is releasing enough energy and power, an explosion (even implosion) will ensue". Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p38.

a calligraphic freedom and a sense of the mark."⁶

Huang Chih-yang's *Zoon* creatures are sophisticated in their movement and gesture. Not only are the various anatomic parts closely related to each other, but also, each body as a whole possesses coherence, consistency and persuasiveness. Particularly with regard to style, the series is more intense, unified, and structured than the previous series. One fundamental difference between the two series is certainly the relationship between the creatures and the painting ground, the paper of the hanging scroll, which acts as a frame. The creatures in *Zoon* are conceived more as individuals, with gestures which make them appear as if they were about to break out of their frame, while in *The Maternity Room* the figures are, in a sense, confined within their frames. Certainly, this reflects a new approach in Huang's concept of the human being.

5.1.2 The Brushwork in the Making

Unknown Species: The Early Works

One of the most startling characteristics of *The Maternity Room* is the wildly idiosyncratic brushwork patterns out of which the figures are made. This manner of wielding the brush is, however, in fact the result of several, sometimes abrupt, transformations. The artist's earliest known series, created in 1987 and entitled *The Icons* (Tuxiang, 圖像, fig. 21), did not show landscapes or human figures, but a dark, mysterious "still life" full of all kinds of small, swinging organic creatures or species, perhaps animals, perhaps plants. These elongated, ineffable beings appeared in endless repetition, covering the entire painting ground, overlapping, juxtaposed or freely floating around. They were, however, executed in different shades of black ink, with the lighter beings receding and the darker ones pushing to the front, thus suggesting a clear sense of three-dimensional space.

It is hard to determine just what these elongated shapes are meant to represent – needles of a coniferous tree, floating seaweed, or micro-organisms such as bacteria or viruses? Indeed, they seem to suggest minute objects, enlarged by means of a microscope. This penetrating look into the microstructure of some unknown organism is striking, for it points to the fact that Huang's preference for an internal and existential, if not vivisectioning viewpoint began early. This is no less true of the technical rendering as well, if one observes how the simple, thick lines of a brush sufficiently wet are capable of creating hundreds of small dots or short lines, applied in short, rapid strokes. Without doubt, this requires both an enormous effort and the ability to work in an almost contradictory manner: to wield the brush quickly and spontaneously and at the same time to maintain a firm and disciplined control over the overall form – a form that is irregular, organic, without fixed contours.

Thus, through the black ink and the writing brush, the artist, from very early on, revealed an energetic power of imagery. During his education in his school's ink painting department, Huang Chih-yang studied profoundly the heritage of traditional *cunfa* (brushwork). However, within the artist's own work, these ancient techniques have undergone many transformations. The series *The Icons* already differs greatly from traditional ink painting in its atmosphere, subject matter, and manner of composition. This is reflected well in Huang's own attitude toward this school, as expressed when he was asked in 1997 about his relationship with *shuimo* [水墨] (ink painting)

6 Interview with the artist conducted by Jonathan Hay, for the exhibition *Tracing Taiwan: Contemporary Works on Paper* held at the Drawing Center, New York in 1997. See the exhibition catalog. 1997. Yang, Alice and Hay, Jonathan, eds. Pennsylvania: Becotte & Gershwin. p36.

and *guohua* [國畫]. ("national" – i.e. traditional Chinese – painting): "One can't avoid mentioning the two words, *shuimo* and *guohua*, but at the moment I have no interest in them at all. I remember that when I started art school I already felt great antipathy toward them."⁷ Regardless of this "antipathy," it is this very traditional technique Huang that adopted for his paintings and calligraphy. In an article on Huang's studies at art school, based on the artist's own statement, we read that "he diligently copied the old paintings and calligraphy. Visiting the Palace Museum belonged to his daily homework as well."⁸ Certainly, the application of seals on the scrolls bears witness to an awareness of the traditional form, albeit in a satirical manner. Furthermore, starting already with the artist's earliest works, we observe an inclination toward an artistic style which is characterized by repetitive strokes, and by a sense of *horror vacui* leading to an overcrowding of the pictorial space. Both features could be derived from Chinese landscape painting, such as the works of a Wang Meng of the Yuan Dynasty or of the contemporary painter Yu Chengyao.⁹ However, Huang Chih-yang's paintings strongly differ from the early masters in his entirely new perspective toward the brushwork, which serves his personal contemporary needs instead of illustrating the orthodox philosophical *Weltanschauung* of the harmony between man and nature. His *Icons* series deals with unknown creatures or unspecified species. Moreover, its composition and artistic approach, its pictorial grammar and language is alien to the traditional painting as well. And yet, from introvert, unspecified creatures to the provocations of human beings who are beasts as well, there were many further gaps to bridge.

Buddhist Figures and the Paper Cut

Two years after *The Icons*, in 1989 (the year he graduated from art school), Huang Chih-yang created a second series, *Buddhist Figures* (Faxiang, 法相, fig. 22), which differed from the former one not so much in its technique, which was still the brush-and-ink technique, but, as the title suggests, in its subject matter. By now Huang had moved from semi-abstract fictional organisms to the depiction of human figures. Hardly recognizable as Buddhist figures, they look more like angry gods or horrifying spirits. In one pair of them, of equal dimensions (120 x 240 cm), for instance, we see two "portraits" that have been drawn in a strongly segmented manner. Uniformly divided into various sections of small irregular grids, those aged male faces are non-realistic and highly suggestive. Although certain features such as eyes, nose, ears and mouth are discernible, they are distinctly defined by the size of each segment and the position of their shapes. Furthermore, the thick black dividing lines are hooked a thorny in a manner creating a strong sense of uneasiness.

The segmented treatment, the idea of a dividing composition prevalent in the work, is faintly reminiscent of cubism. However, Huang's icons are built up by means of lines, not by the suggestion of three-dimensionality. And interestingly enough, the segmented shapes do not offer

7 *Tracing Taiwan: Contemporary Works on Paper*. 1997. p36.

8 Huang Qianfang. 1997. p187.

9 According to the historian of Chinese art, James Cahill, Wang Meng (ca.1309 - 1385) "prefers to allow his masses to run together, packing them densely ... [and] builds up his hills and mountains in repeated parallel folds. ... The whole effect is of profusion and, due to the uniformity the ts'un [i.e. the brushstroke] are applied, a strange homogeneity." Cahill, James. 1976. *Hill Beyond A River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty 1279-1368*. New York: Weatherhill. p121. Yu Chengyao (1898 - 1993) held his first solo in 1986 and became one of the most important in contemporary ink paintings by use of a dense application of brushwork while depicting mountains and landscape. See Stanley-Baker, Joan. 1987. *The Art of Yu Chengyao*, Hong Kong: Hanart Gallery.

multiple perspectives as in cubism. Only the person to the right whose face is given frontally and his long hair simultaneously in profile provides such an example. In fact, it is less cubism but Chinese folk art, namely the paper cut, which must have been one of the sources of Huang's style. Comparable to the Western technique of composing stained glass windows, in the Chinese paper cut, as practiced to this day, each object, be it human being, animal, fish, or flower, is partitioned into as many small sections as possible. Moreover, the countless thin and regular brushstrokes with pointed ends which fill the segments of Huang's figures can be directly traced to the paper cut as well – only that here similar lines are reserved for the depictions of fur, feathers and scales, i.e. for animals such as horses, fish, or dragons. Does Huang's application of the technique to human beings intend an appropriation of its iconographical meaning, too? Or, was he, when adapting the paper cut technique, unaware of its connotations?

In any case, traditional Buddhist personalities, ostensibly the subject matter of the work, look quite differently. In Huang's work, the sense of dignity and serenity we expect from them is lacking completely. Closest to their common connotations would probably be to see them as warning spirits or those guardian deities at temple gates, warding off evil demons by their ferocious aspect. However, the title of this series, *Buddhist Figures*, clearly indicates a much broader and general meaning. In addition, the depicted Buddhas, as mentioned above, are more than just ferocious. The wave of hair or pigtail of one figure seems to imply bi-sexuality. Besides, the snake-like necks their heads rest upon convey a particularly uncanny feeling. The artist's interpretation of Buddhist icons is thus a subversive diversion from common types and norms of representation. Only on this background we are able to understand that the wide application in Huang's work of stroke patterns resembling animal-depicting paper cut techniques cannot be an accident.

Huang Chih-yang's confrontation with Buddhism continued during the following years. If Huang, for the time being, shrank back from being too specific and opted for a more ambiguous type of "Buddhist" figures, in his next body of work, created during his military service between 1989 and 1991, Buddhas are quite explicitly his central subject matter. This leporello album, entitled *Buddhist Preaching and Buddhist Figures*, holds a total of twelve double-page drawings measuring 28,5 x 39 cm. It is evident from its form and format that this collection is more or less private in character and a sort of personal documentation. In fact, what we have here is the artist's experimentation with various forms and structures of Buddhist iconography, undertaken in order to explore different artistic possibilities. These Buddhist figures are given in various situations and forms: alone, in trinity, as two attendants, and in a worshipping pose, either standing or sitting.¹⁰ This is the first time ever Huang created human bodies with fixed positions and gestures. Stylistically, they are based on the paper cut technique; hooked lines appear as well. Clearly, Huang Chih-yang's ability to draw lines in a spontaneous and expressive manner is most vividly documented here. Also significant is an interesting interplay between the figurative and the abstract. The free flow and the energy of lines are often so self-reliant and independent that the depicted figures seem to dissolve into a pure dance of lines. Though the artist never ventures

10 The Buddhist aspect in Huang's art would be a topic worthwhile of further discussion and research. In his series *Buddhist Figures* of 1989, where the segmented rendering of the human faces appears for the first time, one is already reminded of certain images in the famous caves of Dunhuang, especially in works prior to the Tang Dynasty. Here, many faces are depicted in a circular form or slightly in profile, although they are not segmented but built up of a strong contrast of colors. After travel from Taiwan to Mainland China became possible in 1987, a large number of publications on ancient Chinese art appeared on the Taiwanese book market; as a student of traditional ink painting Huang would certainly have been aware of these. In the present album, the relationship with Buddhism is, without doubt, even more apparent.

into the realm of abstraction, his preference for the technique of drawing lines repetitively and almost unceasingly in all imaginable manners is going to develop into an even more extravagant and idiosyncratic way, as seen in his major work *The Maternity Room*.

5.1.3 The Work in Context

On the Wall or in the Air: Modes of Installation

In March 1992, *The Maternity Room* was first shown at Space II, in a solo exhibition of Huang Chih-yang which included a total of fifty scrolls. Later in September of the same year, when the artist participated in the group exhibition *Dis/Continuity: Religion, Shamanism, and Nature*, the number of works exhibited was reduced to twenty-seven scrolls. More significant than the difference in number, however, was the manner of installation. While in the solo show, "the fifty scrolls, one after another, cover[ed] all of the walls of Space II,"¹¹ in the later show the scrolls were suspended from the ceiling and hanging in an open space, so that the site permitted the audience to walk between and around the scrolls. The visual impact of two different installation modes certainly affected the viewers' impressions and the work itself as well. Thus, the arrangement of the scrolls in the later exhibition not only offered an entrance from all sides, creating, so to speak, an open end system, but also, due to its irregular shape, loosely forming an open octagon, became more airy and enabled the audience to take an interactive approach.

Huang Chih-yang's option for the hanging mode is understandable. Since then, *The Maternity Room* has been shown exclusively in an open space, as seen in Sydney, Venice or New York. However, the conceptual artist Lien Te-cheng, who reviewed the 1992 exhibition, was of a different opinion. He remarked that the display of fifty scrolls covering the entire wall area of Space II in fact turned "the plain exhibition space into a unique space, ... an enclosed space similar to a cage, ... stressing the isolated visibility of the bodies and situating the view in a system of centralized observation."¹² For Lien, the viewer standing "in the midst of these creatures and almost at eye level with them (Space II has a low ceiling), will find himself being practically a part and a member of the depicted group. ... It is not only the feeling of sympathy or mercy, more importantly it seems that the creatures have become mirrors. What the viewer sees is perhaps just himself."¹³

In spite of the merits offered by an intense and suffocating experience of space, the hanging mode Huang later decided upon implies a quite different dimension. "The artist," the art historian Li Mingming pointed out in one of her articles, "utilized the form of the hanging banners used in ceremonial ritual, limning a skeleton-like body on a broad sheet of rice paper."¹⁴ Without specifying the kind of ritual she has in mind, the author however reminds us of religious processions ahead of which similar banners are carried. The connection to Huang's work appears especially close if we think of funeral processions. In Taoist burial processions, banners are necessarily to be carried at the head of the procession, not only to demonstrate the nature of the

11 Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p37.

12 Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p37. Lien's idea of the cage is, among others, based on the concept of grids. He sees each of the hanging scrolls as a defined area, a confinement of the human figures. Further, Lien quotes M. Foucault's words: "No one will blush when putting crazy people into a cage." p37.

13 Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p39.

14 Li Mingming. 1995. "Chongsu ren de tuji: Weinisi shuangnianzhan yu Huang Zhiyang de *Xiaoxing xilie*" [Re-drawing Human Boundaries: The Venice Biennial and Huang Chih-yang's *Maternity Room* Series]. In *Art Taiwan*. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. p19. Translated by David Toman.

procession, but also to proclaim the deeds of the deceased written on them. At times, they may carry magical and religious formulas giving protection from the spirit of the dead person.¹⁵ Huang Chih-yang's painted "banners" are certainly in many ways different from this. Yet while not praising the dead, they could serve as warning signs for the living.

Huang Chih-yang's mode of installation, despite its allusions to religious rituality, could more revealingly be seen as a consequent progression of his art. The desire of expansion into space is clearly testified by his later installation works, such as *Afforestation Plan B: Mountains and Water* of 1994 or *Forest of Melancholy* of 1996, where ink and paper are replaced by ceramics, black telephone wires, and synthetic hair. As Lien Te-cheng noted later, in 1996, *The Maternity Room*, "put together piece by piece, [was] a direct extension of the two-dimensional space. It could also circumscribe and occupy a three-dimensional space."¹⁶

Experiencing Death

Huang Chih-yang's *The Maternity Room* deals with the human body as seen from a dissecting and deforming perspective, a perspective radically different from that of traditional figure painting as cultivated by the older, post-impressionist generation of Taiwanese artists, as well as from the image of alienated human beings in a polluted or otherwise distorted environment as seen in the works of some of Huang's contemporaries. Even in Western art, neither Goya nor 20th-century artists like Kokoschka, Soutine, or Francis Bacon went so far as to touch upon the animal side of the human nature in a comparable manner. Equally unusual is the fact that Huang's creatures are depicted in a style appropriated from the vegetable kingdom as well, an idea connecting humans with plants. Thus, the questions remain: What exactly is the artist's image of man? And why do his figures look the way they do?

A short look at the physical location in which Huang Chih-yang was raised may reveal interesting aspects. The place he grew up in is situated in the north-eastern part of the old city center where the American military base, a Japanese-built Zen-temple, a Taiwanese Taoist temple, the palace-like Grand Hotel run by the Chiang family, a red-light-district and the world of small artisans and shop-owners were all within close reach. The clash of different bodies of cultures, high, low, foreign and indigenous, was, in a sense, his daily experience. Later, when the hub of metropolitan life moved to the Eastern part of the city, the artist witnessed the inevitable decline of the district.¹⁷ Besides his personal experiences, there was also, needless to say, the much more the sweeping political and social change which seized the whole country during the artist's formative years. Was it this change, and was it the hybrid, ever-changing Taiwan and its metropolis Taipei from which his art originated?

Huang Haiming, the curator of the exhibition *Dis/Continuity*, pointed out another aspect of Huang Chih-yang's oeuvre while discussing *The Maternity Room*: "His recent works, coming

15 Funeral rituals vary from village to village in Taiwan, and so do their procedures. At the funeral of persons deceased at the age of sixty and above and possessing some prestige, so-called *madeng baicai* [Linen Lantern and White Cloth] can be used. They are described as consisting of "a pair of linen lanterns and four to seven pieces of cloth of different colors in the form of a rectangle. While each lantern is carried by one person, the monochrome pieces of cloth are held by two, one on each side. They walk in front of the burial procession." See Huang Wenbo. 2000. *Taiwan minjian yizhen* [Processions and Performances in Taiwanese Folklore]. Taipei: Changming Wenhua. p298.

16 Lien Te-cheng. 1996. p218.

17 Though growing up in one of the busiest districts of Taipei, Huang chose to live and work in the mountains, near Yangming National Park, a place which also provides him a view over the Western part of Taipei. In addition, when working as artist in residence in Aachen in 1996, he pointed out to me that nature, in particular the world of plants, has a special attraction for him, at times even yielding mystical experiences.

from deepest depression and anxiety, are more a silent and hysterical accusation of his time and society." This "rebellious attitude toward cultural and moral taboos" reflects, as Huang Haiming continued, "an awareness and reaction toward non-rational phenomena."¹⁸ However, the terms "depression," "anxiety," and "rebellious attitude" still seem less forceful than what we read from the artist's own statement, which is characterized by a sense of nihilism toward the place of his birth. In 1995, he wrote:

I gulp down vast amounts of gray, hazy air rife with the stench of gasoline and carbon monoxide. Like a halo of fragrance of white chrysanthemum in full bloom over the northern Taiwan basin, my heart lingers in the realm where man and animal intermingle. Man is such an animal. I am such an animal. Carnivores wander through this heavy, absurd, complex society bathed with electric light, moaning their sacred odes of desire. But thanks to this space, which womb-like has nurtured and harbored us during our frenzied rhapsody on the verge of death, we suckle her milk and fashion our art in the name of tradition. Thanks be to our great mother - Taipei.¹⁹

Pessimistic, morbid, almost surrealist, these words strongly reflect the inner outlook of the artist, his artistic concept, the complete despair he felt toward his polluted environment and his fellow human beings. It is the animal-like creatures in his series which seem to linger behind phrases like "Carnivores wander through this heavy, absurd, complex society..." or "... in the realm where man and animal intermingle." Yet while ironically expressing his gratefulness toward the womb-like space of Taipei for giving him its milk to nourish his art, the artist created his human beings "on the verge of death." In the artist's own words, the skeleton-like creatures in the series seem to be his vision of this fin-de-siècle, an apocalyptic scenery of the people living in Taipei. Such a vision occurred to Huang as early as 1992. Again, the scene was Taipei. Huang wrote: "During the rush hour, I stand on a bridge at a crossroad. The entire area looks like a parking lot. Right in the midst of the people who exchange views and carefully brush past each other, I suddenly feel coolness gladdening my heart. I begin to shiver with cold. All these living bodies working hard in a gingerly fashion make me think of death ..."²⁰ Quite uniquely, this experience occurred during the busiest rush hour of Taipei. Lien Te-cheng, who was invited to Huang's studio to view the series before the solo exhibition took place, writes that these fifty creatures, then placed on the ground, made him "think of death as well. Needless to say, these fifty creatures turned out to be fifty dead bodies after a painful struggle, contained in their coffins, their painted paper grids."²¹

The Semantics of Xiao

The Maternity Room, the English title chosen by the artist for his series, provides the key to more dimensions of the work. It reproduces only the latter half of its original title in Chinese, which reads *Xiaoxing chanfang* [孺形產房]. "The Chinese title for this series," Professor Li Mingming wrote in 1995, "contains a new Chinese character composed of two words pronounced *xiao* in Mandarin, meaning 'filial' and 'dutiful' [孝], the sound of which also happens to mean 'crazy' [肖]"

18 Huang Haiming. 1992. Introductory text to Huang's work. In *Yanxu yu duanlie: zongjiao, wushu, ziran* [Dis/continuity: Religion, Shamanism, and Nature]. Exhibition catalog. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. p45.

19 This statement by the artist was written for the *Art Taiwan* exhibition held at the Venice Biennial, 1995. In *Art Taiwan*. 1995. p39. Translated by David Toman.

20 Quoted from Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p37.

21 Lien Te-cheng. 1992. p39.

in the Hoklo dialect spoken in Taiwan."²²

Two years later, in an interview given in 1997, the artist himself explained his choice of title more in detail: "*Xiao* [驍] is a compound written character I invented by putting together two other characters, both pronounced *xiao*. The left-hand one is the *xiao* meaning 'animal species,' as in the Chinese popular tradition of twelve types of animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, chicken, dog, pig. These accompany the twelve zodiacal palaces that Taoist priests talk about, in a particular order which changes from year to year. In China and Taiwan, all children, whether they're boys or girls, whether they're religious believers or not, are assigned a birth animal when they're born. It's also a way of using the characteristics of animals as a metaphor for the child's personality. The second *xiao* character [meaning 'filial devotion,' which forms the right-hand side of the compound] is a very important part of Chinese family ethics." He adds that *xiao* is homophonic with the word for "crazy" in the Taiwanese dialect, as already mentioned by Li. Huang concludes that in fact "the compound *xiao* in my title has all sorts of different meanings."²³

The last point, the multiple meanings of *xiao*, is striking. One does not need to be reminded of the theories of semiotics; it suffices to mention that whether denoting "filial devotion" in Confucianism, "twelve animals" in Taoism, or simply "crazy" in the Taiwanese dialect, the single phoneme *xiao* shows a stunning capability of containing three major cultural sources in Taiwan. The intended artistic message becomes vivid through the artist's explanation quoted above. The Taoist aspect in particular, reflected in the left part of the first character *xiao*, is represented by the concept of the Chinese zodiacal animals, which, according to Taoist belief, do not only leave their imprint on the new-born but determine man's entire life. For this reason it is also artistically persuasive, among others, that all of Huang's creatures are depicted with animal-like body surfaces, either furred or feathered.

From this viewpoint it now appears that *The Maternity Room* is actually conducting an ironic interplay with three major cultures in Taiwan, with that hybrid of ancient Chinese Confucianist tradition and Taoism from which the new Taiwanese culture is being born, but which the artist perceives as abnormal and outright "crazy." This interpretation is certainly tempting, for it receives support both from modern history and from contemporary Taiwanese society. It is indeed the case that both Confucianism and Taoism, as well as Buddhism, have been targeted by fierce attacks in China ever since the beginning of the era of modernization. In the cultural debates among liberals and intellectuals, the teachings of Confucius became discredited for their hierarchical concepts, their valuing of morality over reason, and their authoritarian character. Taoist practices and beliefs met with equally harsh criticism on account of their alleged superstitious character. The title of the work, with its eloquent neologism, or rather neographism, *xiao*, would certainly allow for such connotations. Moreover, in contemporary Taiwan, in particular since the beginning of the 90s, a new sense of Taiwanese awareness has emerged, which rejects the orthodox Chinese tradition. Although the artist has never explicitly endorsed the Nativist ideology, but, on the contrary, often proclaimed to be indifferent to it,²⁴ *The Maternity Room* would certainly fit both contexts. Furthermore, in the formal blending of Taoist banners with calligraphic scrolls, we again have the appropriation and incorporation of the two cultures, Taoism and Confucianism, perhaps undertaken in the sense suggested by the ancient

22 Li Mingming. 1995. p19. Translated by David Toman.

23 Interview with the artist conducted by Johnathan Hay. See *Tracing Taiwan*. 1997. p45.

24 This viewpoint was expressed to me during a conversation in May 1996, while the artist attended the artist in residency program in Aachen, Germany.

Chinese stratagem "To use the enemy's weapon in order to defeat the enemy."

By saying this, it would, however, be unwise to limit Huang's scrolls to being nothing more than a straightforward attack on the traditional ethical values of Confucianism and the popular beliefs of Taoism – even if this statement could be supported by the seals applied on each scroll, which include three most vulgar words for sexual intercourse and one expression concerning the worship of the penis. Huang's *The Maternity Room* is too complex to be reduced to one single message. Through the artist's own semantic explanation, we in fact learn more about the artist's personal cultural position, his intrinsic location between different cultures, and the vehement critique they provoke.

5.1.4 The Artist and the Traditional Sources

Situated Between Cultures

As observed above, the artist demonstrates a complex relationship with tradition. Personally, he expresses his harsh criticism of traditions in society as well as in art. Yet technically and stylistically speaking, there is in fact nothing which is not traditional in Huang's paintings, starting from the brushwork, the calligraphy, the idea of the Taoist banner, the paper cut style derived from folk art, to the Buddhist images seen in his earlier series. His assembly of various resources from these traditions is unique, for it reveals the openness of his adaptation and his capacity for the inclusion not only of "high art" but also of the "low," folk art. This diversity has gone so far as to embrace even the pre-historical X-ray style. Undoubtedly his exposure to Western art has been fundamental as well for his depiction of isolated, alienated human figures, his scrutinizing view, and the uncompromising pursuit of his artistic concept.²⁵

However, it remains fundamental that Huang Chih-yang's art has taken a critical stance toward all these diverse traditions, a philosophical approach, reflected, for instance, in his choice of creating the character *xiao* in the original title of the series *The Maternity Room*. The human beings, his central artistic concern, are portrayed with explosive power. In particular, elements of parody of the traditional form can be discerned: In classical ink painting, the human figure typically appears tiny and insignificant, dwarfed by a vast, tranquil landscape, reflecting the concept of a harmonious relationship between man and nature. In Huang's paintings, this traditional motif is completely reversed. Entirely devoid of landscape or, for that matter, of any other background, they show human beings standing isolated in the middle of the pictorial space. It's true that there are a few examples of a single standing figure as the sole subject matter in late Qing ink painting, such as in the works of Ren Xiong (1820-1857).²⁶ Nonetheless, we find

25 The stylistic richness of Huang's art was mentioned by Jonathan Hay, too, when interviewing the artist. He said: "*Maternity Room* and related works by you can bring to the viewer's mind all sorts of artistic reference points, from *shuimo* painting and calligraphy to folk art, from Abstract expressionism to so-called primitive art. From your point of view, what significance do you give to this cultural complexity and richness?" Huang's answer was detached: "... as a Taiwanese artist I wonder whether my work can contain so many cultural elements: Western and Eastern, Chinese and native Taiwanese." Interview with the artist conducted by Jonathan Hay. In *Tracing Taiwan*. 1997. p46.

26 Ren Xiong painted a self-portrait quite unusual for its time, the mid-19th century, with the prominent standing figure of the artist occupying a large part of the pictorial space without any surroundings or background. This quite unique approach is contrary to the traditional types of, for instance, ancestor portraits, or of paintings of friends or literati standing in a garden or before strangely shaped rocks or a landscape. This sense of self-awareness on the one hand and the technique of blending traditional brushstrokes and Western naturalism, as to be observed here, has made the art historian Li Yu remark that this is "the first Modern painting in Chinese

Huang's creation of bestial and demon-like human beings a modernist approach which focuses on the human nature long neglected, repressed or denied by traditional painting. This critical stance is perhaps easier to see when it's kept in mind that the artist had studied ink painting at university.

Huang's innovative and imaginative way of presenting the human figure is without doubt the major contribution of his art. Yet these human figures are, so to speak, the contemporaries of the tremendous changes undergone by Taiwan in recent years. Instead of aggressively attacking specific phenomena in present-day Taiwanese society, Huang's treatment is an existential one which scrutinizes the roots of human nature. This close-up examination of the human species is introspective, if not vivisectioning. As Huang once mentioned to the author, he sees as his Western counterpart none other than Giacometti, also a profound examiner of the human psyche. Furthermore, he has been much influenced by the writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, and particularly of his book *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.²⁷ Huang's blending of skepticism, irrationality, and existentialism, as expressed both in his words and his art, certainly also has its roots in the West.

However, as Huang Chih-yang mentions in his statement, the people to be encountered in Taipei "wander through this heavy, absurd, complex society bathed with electric light, moaning their sacred odes of desire." The physical location and the living environment which the artist breathes and experiences, where he lives and works, play equally important, if not more crucial roles than the factors mentioned above. "Man is such an animal. I am such an animal," the artist says. The animalization of man, as depicted by the artist, is certainly different from the linking of man and animal in the theory of evolution or, through the concept of reincarnation, in Buddhism. Rather, it is closer to the Confucian concept, which sees humans guilty of moral misconduct as being even lower than animals. Only in this sense can the work release its energetic power as a revelation as well as a statement of opposition, as a strong critique of the wealthy, saturated, and lustful Taiwanese.

Rituality and The Supernatural Power

Taoism, the folk religion popular in Taiwan, also plays a decisive role in *The Maternity Room*. The appropriated form of the banner has already been mentioned, as well as the Chinese zodiac.

art." (Li Yu. 1990. "Minzhuzhuyi, jiti huodong, ziyou xinling" [Nationalism, Collective Activities, and Free Mind]. (paper first delivered at the *Diyijie dangdai yishu fazhan xueshu yantaohui* [The First Conference on Development of Contemporary Art], organized by the National Museum of History in December, 1989. Repr. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 232, June, p112. pp98-113.) Even if Huang knew of this self-portrait of Ren Xiong, Huang's skeletal figures, though created only shortly after that conference, are, of course, conceived in a decidedly different style and mode. However, to couple Huang's figures with Ren Xiong's self-portrait would still be meaningful under the aspect of their formal resemblance – both feature a standing figure in an empty frame without any indication of space and time. While Ren's painting bears witness of the encounter of East and West on a technical level, as well as of a rising self-awareness, Huang's figures are deconstructed and even schizophrenic, reflecting a society on the verge of facing the dis-integration of the traditional Confucian moral system. Ren Xiong's self-portrait is reproduced in the Guggenheim Museum's exhibition catalog, 1998. *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of the Twentieth Century*. Andrews, Julia F. & Shen Kuiyi, eds. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. p35.

²⁷ Information provided by the artist in 1996 during his stay in Aachen, Germany. The Chinese translation of Foucault's book was published by Guiguan Tushu in 1992, the year when Huang exhibited *The Maternity Room*. Since 1987, Western contemporary discourses have been systematically translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan. One of the most important magazines, *Dangdai* [*Con-temporary Monthly*, 當代], has regularly introduced recent Western thought to the Taiwanese public and dedicated its inauguration issue in May 1986 to Michel Foucault's philosophy.

There is still another aspect to the work through which the connection to Taoism is even closer established. Apart from the connotations with the animal and vegetable kingdoms present in Huang's bodies, it is hard not to see a strong association with Taoist diagrams (*fu*) representing maps – magical diagram-maps of actual locations and their geomantic properties, but also of the human body seen as an inner landscape, as mirrored in the Taoist saying: "The human body is the image of a country."²⁸ This is especially true of certain curved lines and forms reminiscent of Taoist diagrams of inner organs which in are in turn likened to mountains, caves, forests, and rivers of life energy (*qi*) streaming through them.²⁹

On one occasion, while talking about the Taoist religion, Huang Chih-yang made the following interesting comment. He said, "Among the Taiwanese people, Taoism is a very important and complex system, with many different branches and schools. Personally I don't have any deep understanding of it. But popular religion has had a lively influence on me."³⁰ While admitting his lack of understanding of Taoism, as well as its earlier influence on him, Huang continued to express his personal interest in this religion: "Through the ritual practices of religion people use their limited intellectual capacity to make contact with an unknown world of unlimited possibilities. This mediation generally needs to take the form of some kind of 'ritual.' Whether it answers some specific question about the unknown in order to guide the worshipper's conduct, or is simply groundless superstition, the worshipper gains some temporary psychological satisfaction from the process of communication. It may even function as a kind of mental therapy. My thinking is that this kind of ritualistic mental therapy may on some level be comparable to the process of artistic creation."³¹

Huang Chih-yang's fascination with religious ritual, or even self- and collective treatment can also be found in his work *Flowers Are Not Flowers* created in 1992, in the same year as *The Maternity Room*. Consisting of eight polychrome hanging scrolls measuring 90 x 240 cm, respectively, each of these eight scrolls has an enlarged central theme of a particular flower detail (at the same time alluding to inner organs of the human body) and a background entirely filled with sutra texts. These small grids of sutra text are in fact printed on the paper ground by means of stamps. Although it is unreadable, the mystical atmosphere is compelling. Besides the texts, several seals are stamped on the left corner of each scroll, in the traditional manner, reading, for instance, "Flowers Are Not Flowers," the title of the work, or "No Increase No decrease," "No Limit and Boundary," "No Fear and No Horror" and "No Birth and No Death," all maxims from Buddhist scriptures. Although a certain degree of irony might be intended here, it is striking that the series was created during the grave illness of a close relative of Huang's,³² a fact which again points to a ritualistic aspect of the work. Here, too, the artist's familiarity with Buddhism is obvious, adding further evidence to go with his earlier series *Buddhist Figures* of 1989 and the album *Buddhist Preaching and Buddhist Icons* of 1990.

The Maternity Room with its hanging banners and its specific mode of installation creates a meditation site which appears to be, among others, Huang's artistic answer to what he recognizes as the power of religious ritual and its "function as a kind of mental therapy." For, in the artist's own words, this mental therapy is "comparable to the process of artistic creation" and thus

28 Schipper, Kristofer. 1993. *The Taoist Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p100.

29 See Needham, Joseph. 1983. *Science and Civilisation in China*. V. *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*. Part 5. *Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Physiological Alchemy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp67-129.

30 Interview with the artist conducted by Johnathan Hay, in *Tracing Taiwan*. 1997. p45.

31 Interview with the artist conducted by Johnathan Hay, in *Tracing Taiwan*. 1997. p45.

32 Information provided by the artist during a conversation in May, 1996. See note 21.

crucial for Huang himself. This viewpoint, mentioned in the given context, obviously reveals that there is an aspect of self-treatment on the artist's own side as well. For him, creating the *xiao* series was certainly not a means "to guide [his] conduct," but "to make contact with the unknown world."

While it is not easy while observing Huang's disclosure of an invisible world full of hidden desires to follow him into the more mystical side of his thinking, it is clear that in its inceptive stage his work depends on the belief of the existence of this unknown world. As the anthropologist, Li Yiyuan has remarked, "in a culture of pantheism and animism, the existence of the supernatural is in fact a part of nature." While discussing the popularity of the folk religion in Taiwan, Li further comments that "in a society with rapid change, ... when people are frustrated and have lost their orientations, it often seems that they find satisfaction or psychological comfort in shamanism, and even in the use of supernatural powers."³³ These words echo Huang's own opinion of the need "to make contact with the unknown world" and of an artistic creation similar to a "ritualistic mental therapy." In this sense Huang's *The Maternity Room* would also be the end product of his very personal rituality.

The Maternity Room is a complex work in regard to its artistic language, form, and content, as well as to its concept. Different sources from all possible points of origin are amalgamated here, making it a work of unprecedented diversity and hybridity. However, what the artist is ultimately concerned with is the human condition in the current society of Taiwan.

33 Li Yiyuan. 1992. "Hexie yu junheng: minjian xinyang zhong de yuzhou quanshi" [Balance and Harmony: Interpretations of the Cosmos in Folk Religion]. In *Wenhua tuxiang* [Cultural Images]. Taipei: Yunchen Wenhua. pp86-89. Quoted in Huang Haiming. 1992. p16

5.2 Hou Chun-ming: Text and Sex

In the past decades, the artist Hou Chun-ming has explored, to a degree attempted by none of his contemporaries, the issue of sexuality, a subject matter scarcely touched upon previously in either Chinese or Taiwanese art. His sexual depictions operate on the borderlines of social conventions, the Confucian moral code and religious creeds. Hou's view on sexuality is also unlike that of many other, predominantly Western male artists; it is not a gaze directed at the female body, but seeks rather to uncover the repressed sexual desires carefully sealed up throughout history by the Chinese moralists. His interpretation is less concerned with the lure of sexuality than with repressed sexual desires on the psychological and intellectual levels. What Hou Chun-ming discusses and discloses in his radical and shocking way is man's deep-set libido, in its relations to the body as well as to power, together with the suppressed and repressed elements in the collective sub-consciousness of Taiwanese society and in Chinese culture in general.

Hou's *In Search of the Supernatural*, the work to be discussed in this chapter, follows a long artistic progression within Hou's prolific oeuvre, which ranges from oil painting and graphic art to installation and performances. The artistic medium Hou Chun-ming chose for the present work was a novel one: paper prints of very large dimensions containing both text and images. In this, he revives and appropriates the classical Chinese book format which combined text and illustrations and thus introduces a new set of artistic vocabulary in which text and images are united, complementary and inter-dependent. Why did he use the ancient book format? What urged him to do so? Beside the ancient book form, here Hou also appropriates or re-discovers ideas from historical Taoist writing. The contemporary Taiwanese society, in particular popular folklorist culture, is the catalyst of his energy sources. Obviously, sources such as these include both the orthodox "high" culture and "low," marginal cultures. How does the artist relate to these in fact contradictory cultural territories? And how have they been forged together, conceptually and artistically? Finally, Hou's work deals with power, with sexual desire repressed by the overwhelming energy of tradition. How is this expressed in his work, and how is it related to his personal experiences? These are the major questions to be dealt with in this chapter.

5.2.1 The Work *In Search of the Supernatural*

Form and Technique

Hou Chun-ming's *In Search of the Supernatural* (*Soushenji*, 搜神記, literally "A Record of Collecting Gods," fig. 23, 24) is a collection of "biographies" of eighteen supernatural beings created in 1993.¹ Consisting of eighteen pairs of image and text and an additional preface, the series includes a total of thirty-seven printed "pages" in black and white executed in the paper

1 The English title of the prints used here follows the translation of the ancient book *Soushenji*, after which the artist has entitled his artwork. See DeWoskin, Kenneth J. and Crump, J.I., Jr. 1996. *In Search of the Supernatural*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Another frequent English title of the prints is *Collecting Spirits*, used for instance in the exhibition *Art Taiwan*, Taiwan's first participation in the Venice Biennial, 1995. See Taipei Fine Arts Museum, ed. 1995. *Art Taiwan*. Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum. pp31-34.

print technique. As they are conceived as a book, the prints share an identical format: one image page facing one text page, each double-page measuring in all 154 x 108 cm.

As mentioned above, the printing technique and the combination of text and image in Hou's work are immediately reminiscent of the illustrated book in traditional China, where, as in the Chinese printing technique in general, one page, text or image or a combination of both, was cut out of a single woodblock. However, in contrast to traditional illustrations, where the images were mostly regarded as an illuminating accompaniment to the text, in Hou's series, text and image, separately printed, are of equal weight, they are interrelated, complementary and mutually dependent.²

Technically, this collection of eighteen spirits, rather than being executed in the traditional woodblock medium, is printed from paper blocks, a rare technique, which was, however, taught in Hou's classes at the Art Academy. Hou used it for the first time in his *Erotic Paradise*, a series of eight pieces, each measuring 102.5 x 79 cm, executed in the previous year, 1992.³ Hou's choice of the paper print technique for the much larger undertaking of *In Search of the Supernatural* lies obviously in its economy, in the simplicity of the equipment and material it requires. Furthermore, the paper print is less time-consuming than the traditional woodblock print, particularly in view of the extraordinarily large size of each sheet. The printing blocks consist of thick cardboard or layers of paper into which the design is cut in a way similar to the woodblock technique, with the areas to be printed in black left standing. Those parts which would be chiseled away with the stembar in the woodblock medium are simply torn off, layer by layer, from the paper block. The amount of paper to be removed is variable, which, contrary to the woodblock print, allows for a certain degree of shading in those areas where only a few layers are torn away. While the prints of the earlier series were done from a single block each, Hou now printed each leaf or "page" from a total of sixteen blocks. The drawback of the technique is the fact that the fragility of the printing medium permits only a limited number of prints from each block. Hou had originally planned an edition of thirty copies but eventually was only able to print seven copies of each page.

Representing a kind of enlarged book, the black and white prints are, consequently, designed in a schematic and often sketchy yet powerful manner. Just as the text can be seen to be written by different hands, the images, too, are lacking in stylistic unity: some images are more oriented towards tradition, while others are definitely contemporary. Often they are treated without any background, others are given merely the plainest setting. Shades of gray appear, as mentioned above, but only in the background, gray being the intermediary tint between the black ink and the white paper ground. The depiction of the eighteen figures, on the other hand, relies solely on black lines and contours.

As to the image part, each print is dedicated to one single "supernatural," each with a specific and, almost without exception, sexual and exhibitionistic gesture. Concentrating on the figures' often

2 The inter-relationship of text and image in Hou's prints is extremely complicated and would deserve a study of its own. The art critic Huang Haiming has pointed out that text and image "are mutually explanatory and complementary. A 'more ideal' meaning lies neither in one or the other of the two, but in between these two elements." Huang Haiming. 1994. "Shouyinban *Xin souchenji*" [A New Search of the Supernatural: The Paper Prints]. In *Souchenji* [In Search of the Supernatural]. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua. p158.

3 *Erotic Paradise* [Jile tuchan, 極樂圖讖], a series of paper prints, was first shown at the exhibition *Yanxu yu duanlie: zongjiao, wushu, ziran* [Dis/continuity: Religion, Shamanism, and Nature] held at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1992. This series of eight pieces is the first example of the artist expressing contemporary issues of sexuality by means of a traditional form, i.e. in black and white and combining text and illustration. As regards its content, it deals with eight types of young males confronting inter-sexual relationships. See exhibition catalog 1992. pp28-29.

obscene sexual behavior, the narrative is depicted without any location or background given. In the image part, the name of each spirit is given in Chinese characters, mostly on the right hand side of the respective figure. The text sections facing their corresponding pictorial page, too, share one common format: a wide opening column which states the title of each piece, followed by six narrow text columns, read from top to bottom and from right to the left in the traditional Chinese fashion. There are two categories of text: the main text written in black on white, and the "commentary" written in half-size double columns and in reverse, i.e. in white on black. The characters, resembling handwriting rather than printed type, follow no fixed style or form.

Within the main text itself, a narrative mode possessing a complex yet regular schema and sequence prevails. Through the graphic devices described above the division between text and commentary becomes clear at first sight. The textual sequence, as a rule, runs as follows: it begins with the name of each "spirit," immediately followed by a commentary, usually a quotation identifying a historical figure or some other characterization. There is then an introduction describing the nature of the discussed figure from the viewpoint of its author. After that, another commentary may appear, but need not do so in every case. Next, a longer text presents one specific author's personal view on the depicted image. This author's personal name and place of residence are indicated in the preceding "commentary" section, which is followed by the Chinese characters *lin'an* [另按] ("according to"). A final commentary concludes the written section.

As this sequence shows, four different kinds of text are included in each print: a historical source given in the form of a commentary, two main texts – one introduction and the opinion of an identified author – and ultimately a commentary which is "real," both in form and content. It hardly needs stressing that the artist is playing at least three different roles here: that of an author, a commentator, and an editor. He acts as an editor as regards the "historical sources" section and the opinion expressed by the third writer, as an author when writing the introductory text, and finally as a commentator when adding the conclusion. In addition, the entire text itself is written in classical Chinese, terse and concise in style, but sprinkled with contemporary vocabulary. As we will see, this constant shift of viewpoints or "speakers" generates a text characterized by the fragmentary, by heteroglossia and contradictions.

I have not yet paid close attention to the initial part of each page-pair, the very first column of the text section. Between elements of floral decoration, a five-pointed leaf at the top and a lotus base at the bottom of the column, the name of each character is given in larger type, followed by the character *zhuan*, [傳, biography]; the name is preceded by its number in the series and the three characters *Wanshanci* [萬善祠], "Temple of Ten Thousand Virtues," (in horizontal order and in white on black circles), indicating the fictitious owner of the printed book.⁴

On the first two occasions when he prints were shown publicly, in 1993 and 1995, they were displayed in two quite different ways. The first exhibition, at the Culture Center of Taipei County, honored the work's emulation of the characteristics of a printed book: they were arranged in pairs on panels forming zig-zag passages as if in an unfolded leporello, and as the panels were situated close to each other and the prints hung only slightly above eye level, an enclosed space was created which possessed an atmosphere of privacy, even secrecy. In 1995, however, when Hou's

4 The artist's concept of establishing a "temple" with his prints can also be seen in his writing. In 1994 he wrote that "the so-called *Wanshanci* [The Temple of Ten Thousand Virtues] belongs to the realm of the Yin. It houses only those who died in foreign places, the bodies floating in the river, or unknown homeless souls from the collective dead." Hou Chun-ming. 1994. "Houshi Xingtian" [Xingtian of Hou]. In *Soushenji* [In Search of the Supernatural]. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua. pp193-194.

prints were shown at the Venice Biennial, (Hou being one of the five artists officially representing Taiwan at that venue) they were directly attached to the wall in several rows, side by side and without any intervals, conveying a much stronger visual impact, but at the expense of the book format.

An Interactive Creative Process

As described in the preface, the prints are the result of an interactive creation, of a complex phase of collective participation. "Eighteen drawings of transformation" were first selected from among the artist's preliminary sketches.⁵ Partly signed and/or dated, all drawings as a rule bore the name of the depicted figure. Serving as visual materials, these preliminary drawings were then distributed to twenty-two writers and other friends of the artist's,⁶ who were asked for a literary text in response to the images, for reasons of "understanding [the] conducts and deeds" of his "supernaturals." Each author wrote an individual text to match the images supplied by Hou Chun-ming. The collected texts were then collated and edited by the artist, who augmented them by further commentaries of his own before finalizing the images.

This creative process is characterized by the interactivity between the creator of the images and the text authors. The texts written by the artist's friends are, as we have seen, literary creations based on the artist's visual images. Once the texts were finished, the artist would in turn adjust his designs so as to fit the texts. In a separately published book, likewise entitled *Soushenji*, (1994) which includes the preliminary drawings, the final prints, and facsimiles of the original texts written by his friends, comparison shows the fruitful results engendered by this interactive process. We learn, for instance, that the original texts provided by his friends were commonly several times longer than the final ones as edited by Hou. To each image, two to four narratives had been submitted. Stylistically, they varied quite a lot, and in most cases they were not written in classical Chinese, as is the case in the final prints. All this reveals the high degree of editing each text underwent at Hou's hands.

As already observed, Hou also made some alterations to his preliminary drawings. As documented in the published book mentioned above, the final prints mostly added a setting or background to the preliminary drawings; in a few cases, the figures were even de-sexualized in order to create an ambience with more coherence between the texts and the images.⁷ On the other hand, in the case of one mythological figure, Nüwa, the final design presents her as a so-called "new woman," standing in high heels on a conference table, because of the feminist interpretation the goddess is given in one of the texts of Hou's friends.

5 In the preface to the prints, Hou writes: "I received eighteen pictures of transformation from Liujiao Houshi [i.e. the name of the artist]. Under orders of Wenchangjun [i.e. the God of Literature] I am to collect spirits and to write their biographies in order to have them widely worshipped by the people. From the ancient books I gathered what they were all about, or I widely collected essays from contemporary authors. Otherwise I supported the palanquin of the god and fell into a trance to understand their conducts and deeds..." Reprinted in Hou Chun-ming, 1994. *Soushenji* [In Search of the Supernatural]. Taipei: Shibao Wenhua. p11. There is a second preface written for the quoted book of 1994 that varies from the previously printed preface. It reads "I received a series of images of transfigurations from Liujiao Houshi. Due to my awkwardness and stupidity, I could not understand their meaning. Luckily, with the support of my friends, in trance and with spirits descending on me, I now understand the deeds and identities of the holy gods." (Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p51.)

6 According to the artist, these friends included "poets, directors, medical doctors, professors, journalists, people working in the record business and others from advertising or computer companies." (Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p51.)

7 A major example of de-sexualization is Xingtian (see below, 5.2.2). In the preliminary drawing, this figure held two penises in both hands, while ten breasts were depicted in the foreground. Both sexual implications were omitted in the final print (fig. 25 & 26). See Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p53.

According to his own words, this interactive process was ostensibly intended by the artist for "understanding [the] conduct and deeds" of the spirits, while the contemporary authors in fact furnished the collection both with a literary aspect and a collective, if fictitious, validation of Hou's pantheon. Consequently, the names of these authors are cited in the commentary parts as contemporary "sources." This, then, was the artistic scheme of the artist to create a fictional, albeit many-voiced textual corroboration of his own private mythology – a creative process which in turn emulated the efforts of story-collecting of that 3rd century collator of mythological tales, Gan Bao, the title of whose work, *Soushenji*, has been directly appropriated by Hou. Before examining the relationship between Hou's work and its sources, however, a more detailed discussion of the prints and the "supernatural beings" depicted therein is necessary.

5.2.2 The "Collected Spirits" and the Texts

Xingtian, The Heavenly Punished

Among the spirits "collected" by Hou Chun-ming, there is only one single figure which is completely exempt from sexual implications: a mythological hero named Xingtian (刑天, literally meaning "The heavenly punished"). As the character opening the work and thus assuming a leading position, he deserves to be examined more closely. Another intrinsic reason why I will discuss this figure here is the fact that, being an "archetype" in the eyes of the artist,⁸ he embodies the fundamental concept from which the series originated, and furthermore reveals some essential aspects of the artist's relationship with tradition.

Stylistically, this first print is no different from the entire series; the figure is schematically given, his contours drawn in strong black lines. Obviously a scene of punishment or sacrifice is depicted here, with Xingtian beheaded and castrated, a figure hanging upside down. His legs are stretched apart and bound with ropes suspending from the upper corners of the image, while his hands are hanging down, grasping what seems to be a broad, flat pot with a burning fire inside. Peculiarly enough, on his trunk we recognize one single big eye with hooked eyelashes. Given without any background, this hanging figure is done in simple, heavy line drawing, and it would be one of the least dramatic figures in the series, were it not for the excruciating posture of his punishment.

The dramatic upside-down suspension of Xingtian's body assumes an Andreas's-cross-like position, which is also reminiscent of St. Peter's headfirst crucifixion. In the history of religious art, the depiction of physical suffering by torture and execution has probably been unique to Christianity. In the form of Christ's crucifixion it even lay at the very heart of Christian iconography and seems to have served religious as well as psychological objectives: the re-enactment of martyrdom, the strengthening of compassion and belief, thus aiming at a renewed form of the ancient catharsis.

In Hou Chun-ming's case, Xingtian is certainly not a religious martyr. However, Xingtian is a divine being, punished, in ancient Chinese mythology, by the "God on High." The *locus classicus* is the *Shanhaijing* (Classic of Mountains and Lakes) written between the 4th and 2nd century BC, where it is stated: "When Xingtian and the Almighty fought for celestial supremacy, God beheaded Xingtian and buried him within the Changyang Mountain. Xingtian then used his

8 The artist has written an article exclusively describing how Xingtian was crucial for his psyche during the years of his studies and later while doing his military service. Strongly identifying himself with that hero, he wrote that Xingtian's image "practically possessed me and became the archetype of my past seven years of creation." See Hou Chun-ming. 1994. "Houshi Xingtian" [Xingtian of Hou]. p191.

breasts as eyes and his belly button as a mouth, and waved his weapons dancingly."⁹

The *Shanhaijing* is a major source for early Chinese mythology and culture but excluded from the orthodox historiography and irrelevant for contemporary folk religion in China as well as in Taiwan where, in fact, it had fallen into complete oblivion. The artist explains his unearthing of the ancient figure as follows: "Images like this blow me away. In order to keep up his resistance, a man who has been beheaded transmutes his physical form so that his body can grow eyes and gaze, like that of a soul who refuses to enter into death peacefully."¹⁰ Hou added, stressing his admiration for the mythological figure: "What captivates me is not just the extraordinary bizarre images of mythology, but the excessive and irreparable regret and hate contained within."¹¹

As he appears in the *Shanhaijing*, Xingtian is a rebel against authority, against the supreme power high on heaven, a kind of Chinese Prometheus or Atlas. As a rebel and counterpart to the Almighty, Xingtian is outstanding in his courageous bravery against the superior god, in his spirit of resistance and his resolve to fight even though beheaded and buried. Unlike Prometheus in Greek mythology, he was not connected with mankind and made no contribution to humanity, whereas his fate distantly resembles that of Atlas, who fought for celestial power, failed, and as punishment was forced to carry the world on his shoulders. While the tales of Xingtian's counterparts are, in their received form, already the result of a long history of literary refinement, the account in the *Shanhaijing* appears to be pure raw material without a trace of literary treatment. In this original form, Xingtian as a person remains vague, the motivation of his rebellion unclear, as is also the mysterious power embodied in him.

In the eyes of the artist, however, Xingtian, a tragic figure who challenged the Almighty and failed, is a warrior and a hero of resistance filled with an "excessive and irreparable regret and hate." "Regret and hate," these are clearly two strong emotions of his own projected by the artist onto the mythological account. The projection is noteworthy because it reflects the artist's sensitivity and psychological attitude toward repression, his deep sympathy for the loser, and his admiration for the spirit of resistance. Hou's emphasis on Xingtian transcends the attempt to rehabilitate a loser, as in *The Scene of Killed Gun II* (fig. 12) by Yang Mao-lin of 1985 (see chapter 3.2.3). Yang's narrative oil painting in fact prefigures Hou's *Xingtian* in its depiction of a mythological figure who challenged the established celestial authority and was likewise defeated. Hou Chun-ming certainly knew this painting, for during the time of its creation, Hou started to study art in Taipei and Yang had just emerged as one of Taiwan's most progressive painters. Although both selected a loser, a figure from the mythical past defeated by the supreme god, Hou's choice of Xingtian is different in the sense that he has rehabilitated, actualized, and even

9 The story of Xingtian is recorded in the *Haiwai xijing* [the Western Lands Beyond the Sea] chapter of the *Shanhaijing*. Fragmentary as this story is, Yuan Ke, a modern scholar of mythology, has interpreted Xingtian's struggle with the Di (Almighty) as "a part of the wars between Huangdi and Yandi," two founding ancestors of Chinese history (Yuan Ke. ed. 1980. *Shanhaijing jiaozhu* [The Classic of Mountains and Seas, Annotated Critical Edition]. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe. p215). An illustration of Xingtian is reprinted in the modern edition (Yuan Ke. ed. 1980. p213), from which Hou has made a copy (60 x 43 cm), with the headless Xingtian "waving his weapons dancingly," as in the original illustration. Interestingly enough, Xingtian's appearance in *Soushenji* prints differs significantly from this historical model. Hou's copy is reproduced in Wu Meisung. 1992. "Jichu yangju de chunfeng shaonianxing: Ji Hou Junming de *Xingtian zaibian zhan*" [Offering a Phallus on a Spring Journey: Writing on Hou Chun-ming's Exhibition, *The Re-metamorphosis of Xingtian*]. In *Yanhuang yishu*, 34, June, p47. The English translation of the original text is taken from *Art Taiwan*. 1995. p25. Translated by David Toman.

10 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p190. The text also appears as the artist's statement in *Art Taiwan*. 1995. p25. The translation cited (by David Toman and slightly altered by myself) is taken from the latter source.

11 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p25.

internalized Xingtian's tragic character as a repressed hero in a contemporary context and as his own artistic creation.

While Xingtian's obstinate spirit of resistance occupies a dominant position at the beginning of the series, it is in the text and commentary part that Xingtian takes an interesting turn to the contemporary. The text begins with the words: "*Xingtian, according to the ancient text, fought against Di [the Supreme God], was beheaded and severely punished. Xingtian used his breast to see and did not give in. Today, he attaches his soul to the body of the young people of our time, who are full of ambitions and ideals. In addition, according to Taipei resident Cai Kangyong, the headless Xingtian moves forward with his hands and feet. His backbone hurts as he grows a huge eye. However, his wound is deep. When he opens his eye, his tears run down painfully and endlessly. So he hangs himself above a fire to dry his tears. When he beholds, the world is clear, politicians become fearful, and all conflicts cease.*"¹² (The "commentary" sections are given in italics). In this text, the ancient Xingtian appears as a savior of himself and others, who not only attaches his spirit to the ambitious and idealistic young men of our age but, more importantly, brings about an ideal world just by opening his new-grown eye.

Spirits in the Temple

According to the artist, the series represents nothing less than "a popular temple," exclusively reserved for the dead. But what in fact does he mean by establishing a temple, and why is it reserved for the dead? Xingtian, as discussed above, is an exception within the series. Though physically transformed, he is free of sexual implications. His heroic spirit of resistance would certainly make him worthy of being enshrined in the "temple." Yet in what way do the other spirits in Hou's series, provocative and outrageous as their images are, deserve to be "worshipped?"

An overview of the spirits depicted reveals in fact no stringent program. Diverse and hybrid as they are, the specific identities of the assembled figures can be discerned by their given names, the ending of which usually points out what kind of "divine being" we are concerned with. Included are religious figures, such as Shen, Shenzu, Tianzun, Zhenren, [神, 神祖, 天尊, 真人; i.e. god, mighty god, Buddha, and Taoist saint). Nature spirits such as the "God of the Hundred Flowers" and the "Lord of the Sweet Dew" appear as well. Apart from those spirits whose names already indicate their divine nature, several specific mythological or historical figures have been chosen as well, such as Nüwa, the creator of the sky, and Xianggong, a transsexual figure whose origins are obscure. Accordingly, the assembled spirits can be classified by their respective sources into three categories: those taken from mythological, historical and literary sources, those who are part of the Chinese pantheon, and those who apparently belong to the artist's private mythology. In addition, there are also those characters whose source is to be found in the artist's own biography.

From the first category, the figures drawn from mythological, literary, and historical sources, seven characters are included, four of whom have their roots in mythology. While Xingtian is a marginal figure, the other two are quite famous. One is Nüwa, who according to the mythological sources collected colored stones for the benefit of humanity to repair the broken sky, but is depicted in the print as a naked woman of the modern age. Provocatively standing on a meeting table with high-heeled shoes and both legs wide open, she has features of both sexes, huge

¹² Translated from the original text from No. 1 of the *Soushenji* series, which is reproduced in the catalog *Art Taiwan*. 1995. pp31-34.

breasts and the glans of a penis as her head. Her identity is not "... *the powerful creator of the human beings, according to the ancient text,*" but a female sexist who "witnesses the dominance of the patriarchal power in the *fin-de-siecle* and re-emerges to hold judgement and to subdue the evil males," as the introductory text states.

The other famous mythological figure is Nazha, who, known to have caused his mother's death in childbirth and later having slaughtered his own father, is depicted as a small black-eyed figure just emerging from the body of a supine woman and even then ferociously holding a knife in each hand and thrusting them into the legs of his mother. Traditionally seen as a negative figure due to his scandalous behavior, yet endowed with enormous skills in the martial arts, the Nazha in Hou's print appears as a rebellious young man. The introductory text narrates: "Nazha is impudent and wanders around in Ximending [one of the busiest districts in Taipei city]. A modern woman is pregnant yet unwilling to bear. After the child is born she is unwilling to raise him. This is the reason for his rebellion." From the above, the opinion seems to be justified that the artist is dealing with certain types of people in present-day Taiwanese society: Nüwa as a female sexist vanquishing "bad men" and Nazha as a disobedient son roaming around. Most significantly, this re-interpretation of the ancient mythological figures cannot be achieved without the assistance of the text.

The remaining mythological figures are Xingtian and Mengshuangshi. Sharing Xingtian's marginality, Mengshuangshi is also a figure documented in the ancient Taoist text *Soushenji* (In Search of the Supernatural), from where the title of these prints originated. Depicted with two heads and the features of both sexes, this ancient figure was exiled due to his marriage to his own sister. Eventually, however, both were happily reunited in a single body after being reincarnated through the magic power of a divine bird, which is depicted at the foot of Hou's figure. In the introductory text, we read: "From incarnation to incarnation, they never separated. After seven incarnations, they tried to tear themselves apart from each other." The following commentary states: "For the independence of both sexes and the pursuit of one's self are the spirit of the modern age."

If the Mengshuangshi lore presents itself as a love story from antiquity serving as a nostalgic contrast to relationships between both sexes in the new "Generation X," two "religious" figures just point to the ugly side of institutional religion. One of them, called Jiuku Tianzun, ("Heavenly Revered Savior from Misery") is sitting in a meditation position on a lotus basis, clad in a Buddhist monk's robe, but his head and upper trunk have been transformed into a vagina which is being stirred by his own hand. The accompanying text points out that this Buddhist "saint" is comforting his female disciples with sex, followed by the remark (with commentary in italics): "The multi-pleated hole of this self-styled Heavenly Revered resulted from deep sin and was caused by pulling and dragging. *His guilt is well deserved, such as that of the crucified Christ.*" The other "religious" figure, called Caiying Zhenren ("Yin-Collecting Taoist Saint"), sports a round head of greatly exaggerated size and is shown sucking the vagina of a headless naked woman, an act interpreted as "collecting the Yin (female) energy" in the Taoist manner. Both images are clear examples of sexual exploitation in the name of religion, known from history as well as in present-day Taiwanese society.

Three personalities in the series are taken from historical sources, at least in name. The names of other figures are derived from personalities in history or otherwise drawn from historical sources. Xianggong was the term for a female impersonator in ancient Chinese theater.¹³ In Hou's print,

13 See Morohashi Tetsuji. 1976. *Dai kanwa jiten*. Tōkyō: Daishūkan Shoten. 8.23151..94.4.

the figure appears as a huge two-legged phallus with a vagina opening on the back of its shaft. Danai Furen (Big-Breasted Lady) is mentioned in the *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* (*An Illustrated Compendium of the Gods of Three Religions*),¹⁴ adopted by Hou as a model for his series, according to which she killed a snake which had damaged her village, destroyed the corps and forced the villagers to offer it their children; she also helped in the birth of a prince; and was eventually invested by the ruler with her present title. Hou, however, casts her in the image of a contemporary media star, her gigantic breasts and body lined by snake patterns. Huajun (Gentleman of the Flower) is simply a historical term for a womanizer, yet in Hou's print the name is applied to those following an artistic profession. According to the text, the rose into which his anus blossoms here is not explicitly, as one might think, linked to homosexual practices, but via the "fragrance" it emits to an artist's vanity. Among the remaining nine figures of this group, two of which, Aiqing Lanniao, (the Blue Love Bird), and Qinggu, (the Love-Bewitched) are personifications of certain aspects of human nature, as their titles already suggest.

Other "spirits" included are named symbolically after natural phenomena with strong sexual connotations. The "God of the Hundred Flowers" (Baihua Shenzu) and the "Divine Lord of Sweet Dew" (Ganlin Shenjun) are both grotesquely phallic; the former being a towering male organ rising not from one, but two tiny bodies seemingly sprung from a flower bud and joined, like Siamese twins, in the lumbar region; the latter a man with three monstrous penises who, most significantly, stands on top of a silhouetted black building shaped like the Presidential Office in Taipei.¹⁵

To recapitulate: the "spirits" assembled in the series belong to a wide range of beings of very different nature and origin. Significantly, however, the "gods" in Hou's temple are mostly socially marginal persons who bear the burden of sexual drives or whose sexual drives are left unfulfilled, such as the old prostitute (Huichun Shennü, the "Goddess Who Brings Back Spring"), the penis-obsessed young man whose male organ has turned into a horse's head (Baima Langjun, the "Lord of the White Horse"), and the male sexist (Zhanshen, the "God of War"). Apart from those who suffer, there are also the sexual abusers, with the "Heavenly Revered Savior from Misery" and the "Yin-Collecting Taoist Saint" mentioned above as most the striking examples. Their presence, among others, testifies that Hou's temple embraces also negative figures, used either as a warning sign or as an objective allusion to present-day societal phenomena. Positive examples are rather rare, with Xingtian as the almost only unambiguous instance. There are, however, autobiographical images, too, as the artist has given himself (as Lioujiao Houshi) and his former girlfriend (as the hermaphroditic Tuodihong) a place in the "temple" as well.¹⁶

It is, of course, a temple which differs very much from what would conventionally would be conceived as one. Far from being a holy place, it is strongly sexually determined, sacrilegious, impure and greatly disparate as far as the nature of these "gods" is concerned. The most

14 *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* [An Illustrated Compendium of the Gods of three Religions]. Rep. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe. 1990. Ye Dehui ed. (1st Edition, 1908). pp182-184.

15 The art critic Huang Haiming has pointed out the relationship between phallus and power as combined in this "spirit." Huang Haiming. 1994. p157.

16 Hou's works often carry autobiographical features. As he himself once said, "each exhibition is in fact [an occasion] to solve a certain problem in my life in order to move further on." To his ex-girl friend who separated from him during his military service he dedicated an installation in 1991 called *A Wedding in the Hou Family*, in which he "juxtaposed images of both wedding and funeral ceremonies." (Jian Dan. 1992. "Dianfu shi ta de benzhi, songdong shi ta de zeren: Hou Junming lingren zhixi de chuanguo nengliang" [Subversion is His Essence, Loosening his Duty: The Breathtaking Creative Energy of Hou Chun-ming]. In *Zili zaobao*, 25, May.)

interesting aspects reflected in Hou's temple are the sexualization of the spirits and the multiple viewpoints from which they are seen. Both traits are inevitably associated with and rooted in the contemporary society of Taiwan and the artist's own experiences within it. Furthermore, the traditional sources play an equally important role. It is these aspects which should be examined more in detail before the concept behind Hou's "temple" itself is discussed.

5.2.3 Marginality and Popular Cultures

The Pendulum and Sexual Objects

The fact that Hou Chun-ming (born 1963), an artist who studied and mainly worked in Taipei, came from a small farming village in south-western Taiwan must have had an enormous impact on his work. A special affinity to his hometown, Liujiao in Jiayi County, is reflected in the old-fashioned way of signing his works as "Liujiao Houshi" [六腳侯氏; i.e. Hou from Liujiao], thus projecting an archaic and almost primitive sense. Moreover, he "immortalized" himself under that very name as one of the spirits in the prints, the second after Xingtian. As Liujiao literally means "six feet," the print shows a six-footed person. Clearly, this naming, with the artist's birthplace preceding his surname, reflects the traditional Chinese emphasis on one's origins. It reveals Hou Chun-ming's inseparable bond to his home, a marginal location as opposed to metropolitan Taipei, his place of study and work. In 1992, aged thirty and after ten years in Taipei, Hou melancholically remarked that each time when, on his way to visit home, the bus leaves the highway and "the road sign indicating Jiayi appears, [he] would automatically start to shed tears."¹⁷

Throughout his life, Hou Chun-ming seems to have constantly been situated on a pendulum swinging between the modern, advanced metropolis and a less developed hometown in the countryside, between the intellectual and the emotional, between the rational and the irrational. However, this pendulum-like state of mind is not exclusively based on a larger geography, represented by the two points, Taipei and Liujiao. Even within the Taipei basin itself the artist went through a similar movement when, in 1985, his school, the National Academy of Arts, moved from the center of Taipei to its rural periphery. Hou recalled that since the transfer of the school in 1985, "I swung between the center of the metropolis and its margin. Each time when I rode my motorcycle along the riverbank to and from Taipei, I felt the vast grandness that stretched between sky and earth, but also a foul smell inexorably brushing my nose. No matter whether new communities were constantly expanding or old and shabby houses emitted the sound of machines from their 'home factories,' ... [I sensed] the great gap between the city and the village, a living picture of the extraordinary toughness of the people, humble as well as absurd, in the quest to survive."¹⁸

The earliest known works of Hou Chun-ming, however, did not explicitly reflect this conflicting experience.¹⁹ Rather, there is evidence of a withdrawal into the personal sphere when confronted

17 See Hou Chun-ming. 1991. "Keyi kuqi ma? Yige nianqing yishu gongzuozhe dui maiyuan zhiji de tiren" [Is it Allowed to Cry? The Understanding of an Artist of the Ritual of Complaint]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 245, July, p153.

18 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p195.

19 In 1990, Hou held a retrospective of his works beginning from the age of eight. On that occasion, a journalist remarked: "Hou's early works were realistic depictions. However, his teacher was dissatisfied with his compositions. He then changed to Abstract Expressionism." (Zhen Naiming. 1990. "Hou Junming fantizhi de liuzhuan" [Hou Chun-ming's Anti-institutionalist Change]. In *Ziyou shibao*, 16, February.)

with a feeling of adversity. In his graduate work *Collection of Pagodas with Paintings and Calligraphy* of 1987, Hou assembled a series of personal objects, such as the "small, absurd, and secret dark boxes or drawers of daily objects, reflecting an interesting sense of displacement and a vitality of sympathy and mercy."²⁰ The art critic, Lin Yuxiang specifically pointed out that what Hou had gathered and assembled in his work was in fact "a huge amount of indicative signs, of transformed images of sex organs of both genders."²¹

In that same year, Hou Chun-ming also finished two paintings – two tondi entitled *The Dragon and the Phoenix* (Peace and Tranquillity) and *The Flowers* (Fame and Prosperity).²² In both works, strong sexual implications are unmistakable. Interestingly enough, the artist had used ready-mades, two pieces of wallpaper decorated with traditional auspicious motives, such as bamboo, peacocks (i.e. phoenixes), and peonies, as his painting ground. He then added, in one tondo, a crawling naked male, his penis erect, seen in profile (certainly to be understood as the crawling "dragon" amid the phoenixes), and in the other one, a huge penis floating between the peonies and even blossoming into one. A combination both witty and weird: the auspicious traditional symbols are paired with symbols of sex, the declared symbol of fortune with hidden primitive desires.

In this play with traditional symbols by using wallpaper as ready-mades, the artist's attempt to establish a dialogue with tradition is evident, even if his point of reference is not some venerable work of art but an industrial product for home decoration. Instead of searching for entirely novel modes of expression, as required by the standard decorum for pre-post-modernist artists, he chose as starting point for his creation of a sexual ambience elements from the visual tradition, and he did it with a strongly satirical undertone. This fundamental approach was to remain one of the major features in Hou's future works.

Another major feature of the two tondi, one that I would call the power of transformation, can be best observed in another piece, his earliest drawing dated 30. December 1986 and entitled *The God of the Hundred Flowers* (fig. 27). This drawing was later developed into the print described earlier.²³ The drawing itself is in fact a very simple and schematic matter depicting a flower bud with two small figures lying on its opened petals. In an enlarged close-up, one flower bud is both funnily and imaginatively transformed into a human sex organ, an erect penis with testicles and breasts, while the opening of the urethra resembles a single human eye. The idea of associating a flower bud with sex, though not entirely original, is doubtless powerful and imaginative. Above all, it reveals the artist's capability to transform, formalistically and conceptually, as the two different species depicted here share a similar ability of reproduction and the flower's stamen is anthropomorphized into two small lying persons.

The Trip to the South

It is legitimate to ask where and what was the source from which Hou Chun-ming drew (and draws) for his unusual subject matter. We would search the brief history of art in Taiwan for such a background in vain, for its output had been much too formal and orthodox to give him

20 Wang Fudong. 1993. "Ta zai gangsuo shang 'fengxiao de wu': Hou Junming de duomianxiang yishu" [His 'Crazy Dance' on the Wire-Cable: The Multi-faceted Art of Hou Chun-ming]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 251, Jan. 1992. Quoted from reprint in *Taiwan xinshengdai meishu xunli*. p78.

21 Lin Yuxiang. 1994. "Hou Junming *Xin souchenji* tuban zhong de shenti zhengzhi yuyi" [Body and Politics in Hou Chun-ming's *In Search of the Supernatural*]. In *Souchenji*. p181. See also Zeng Lirong. 1990. "Huanxiang Houzi de qingyijie: Hou Chun-ming" [Nostalgia and Complex: Hou Chun-ming]. In *Zili wanbao*, 15, March.

22 Both works are reproduced in the catalog *Art Taiwan*. 1995. p30 & 34.

23 This drawing is reproduced in Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p89.

inspiration or to supply him the artistic means he needed. Neither during the Japanese colonial period nor in the post-war era did Taiwanese works of art touch upon such deep dimensions of the psychosexual.

Hou Chun-ming's explosive and exhibitionist art indeed probes into quite elusive terrain. In 1991, Hou himself published an article, mentioned above, where he explains his art as well as his psychological development, giving evidence about the energy and powerful sources from which his art originated. It becomes clear that it was a tour to southern Taiwan, led by one of his teachers, which was of crucial importance. "In 1985," Hou writes, "Mr. Chen Chuanxing, then a teacher at the National Academy of Art, took me and three other students on a trip all over the island. We visited the Longfa Hall in Kaohsiung, Tongyou Temple in Tainan, the home of Lin Yuan at Yushi village, and we even traveled as far as Lanyu."²⁴

The experiences made at these four places had a great impact on the artist. Hou has explained why this trip was fundamental: The Longfa Hall is "a home for psychiatric patients, a place where the mentally disordered spend their lives in confinement," while Tongyu Temple is a place for executing "Taoist ceremonies, for performing rituals to the dark and mysterious souls between life and death."²⁵ As to the third leg of the journey, the primitive artist Lin Yuan's "intuition and his living environment has blended creation and daily life into one." Lanyu, an island south-east of Taiwan and "home of the most remote of the aboriginal tribes, made [him] witness the multicultural aspects of the Yami tribe." For him, these places revealed nothing less than "the instinct, fear and desires of the primitive state of mind, rooted in the deepest layers of life."

Moreover, Hou Chun-ming confessed that "the incredible and mysterious energy of those lives struck me. For me, 'a tiny little intellectual,' who was accustomed to knowledge and conceptual dialectics, who had had retreated from reality and was separated from the real pulses of true life, this [experience] was undoubtedly a 'shock.'"²⁶ Under the spell of this enormous collision and confrontation, Hou started to re-orient himself and undertake a veritable "self-deconstruction," as he defined it himself, in which his sense of "the subconscious, of the instincts awoke, opened up and were released."²⁷

It should perhaps not be left unmentioned that Chen Chuanxing, the teacher to whom Hou owed that momentous confrontation with the margins of society, had studied visual media in Paris, where he came in contact with the latest of contemporary philosophical theory, especially structuralism and post-structuralism. The trip led by Chen Chuangxing may reflect a purely personal interest of that teacher himself, yet the visited places such as an aboriginal settlement and a psychiatric home, sites of the irrational and the primitive, certainly remind us of the major scholarly studies of Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault. Not surprisingly, Chen Chuanxing was to become one of the latter's translators.

Popular Culture and Folk religion

However, for Hou Chun-ming the trip to the South of 1985 was just a beginning, a first encounter with the cultures of "the other," of the lower and marginal strata of society. More complex and irrational terrain, unique to Taiwan, still lay ahead waiting to be discovered. In the article mentioned above, Hou Chun-ming also describes his encounter with the blatant sexuality of Taiwanese folk culture. In the countryside, everywhere "strip dances performed on 'Electric

24 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p154.

25 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p154.

26 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p154.

27 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p154.

Flower Cars' were to be seen at weddings, funerals and other celebrations, at first [appearing] absurd and strange, especially in the light of our stereotyped image of village life as simple, honest, and sincere. Those [shows] make one feel immensely puzzled and even ashamed."²⁸

"Electric Flower Car" performances (so called because they are conducted on a gaudily painted and lighted kind of pick-up truck) originated in the towns of the coastal region of Yunlin County and were at first associated, of all things, with the mourning ceremonies conducted during funerals. To express grief and sorrow for the deceased, the funeral ritual in Taiwanese folk religion includes a ritual of crying and wailing conducted either by the bereaved or, more often, by professionals. Later, other performances were added to increase the effect. By 1984, these performances had mysteriously turned into striptease dances which, moreover, had become attached to almost all other possible ceremonial occasions, amounting to a number of three hundred companies island-wide.²⁹ Hou Chun-ming's experience of the Electric Flower Car performances, as we have seen, was one of shock and shame.

However, as he came to witness more traditional ceremonial performances (*yizhen* [藝陣]) like the *Ploughing Ox Dance*, *Old Ladies' Play*, *Cross the Peach Blossom Spring*, and religious rituals, such as shamans swallowing swords and the sacrificial slaughtering of pigs or sheep, Hou Chun-ming concluded that the striptease dances were in fact only "one of those very disturbing and outrageous phenomena of folk culture which reflect the essence of 'sex' and 'violence' which have been oppressed and confined. While the ancestors were struggling with nature, the unmerciful sky, the earth, and followed the natural instinct to reproduce, the worship of 'violence' and 'sex' gradually developed in various forms. Under the moral and cultural constraints within the society, temple performances and other social mass movements became their unexpected and explosive outlets."³⁰

Hou's interpretation of the striptease phenomenon, of shamanist rituals and even of social movements may seem a bit undifferentiated, it nonetheless clearly points to the major sources which attracted him: irrationality and resistant energy, characterized by popular culture, folk religion, and the protest movements after the lifting of martial law.³¹ "Sex" and "violence," two keywords mentioned by the artist, are of equal importance as well. For Hou had rationalized these fields of obsessive interest, incorporated them into a "theory" and thus prepared them for legitimate use in his own art, as seen in his prints *In Search of the Supernatural*.

In the following section I will discuss another source of Hou's prints: two ancient books from which he drew immediate inspiration, both conceptually and formally. It is from these ancient texts that we obtain a broader view of the contemporary religious performances, which, regardless of how "surreal" or "primitive" they may look, are closely related to tradition.

28 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p155.

29 See Huang Wenbo. 2000. *Taiwan minjian yizhen* [Processions and Performances in Taiwanese Folklore]. Taipei: Changming Wenhua. pp178-182.

30 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p155.

31 After finishing his military service in 1989, Hou, together with Wu Mali and Lien Te-cheng, founded the avant-garde art group Taiwan Documentary Room (see chapter 2.3.1). Later he became deeply involved with the performing arts, working in the field of stage design. He later recalled: "I strongly felt that the individual cannot keep away from the political institutions and their operations. So [I] reacted to the heated atmosphere of the current social or political movements, combined it with the image of Xingtian and engaged in institutional resistance." Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p191. For Hou's experience with the performing arts see Li Huanxiang. 1991. "Juchang Xingtian: Hou Junming zhuangzhi zuopin yinxiang" [Xingtian in the Theater: An Impression of Hou Chun-min's Installations.] In *Zili zaobao*, 18, January.

5.2.4 The Temple of the Repressed

Gan Bao and his In Search of the Supernatural

In Search of the Supernatural, the third-century collection of strange and mythological tales by the Jin dynasty historian, Gan Bao, had almost fallen into oblivion during the centuries which followed and was practically rediscovered by the sympathetic artist. Hou himself has given an explicit account of his relationship with Gan Bao's work: "In the book *In Search of the Supernatural* by the Jin dynasty author Gan Bao, numerous contemporary legends of gods, immortals and spirits with magical power were compiled. What most drew my attention to it was that these were all stories written for a specific purpose; they were regarded as moral teachings or read as signs or prophecies to be applied to the actual political situation. They all were intended as warnings. From today's perspective, while reading those simple stories of cause and effect, one cannot but have a feeling of absurdity, but of an absurdity to such a degree that it projects a powerful energy."³²

Conscious of both the merits and weaknesses of the ancient work, Hou explained Gan Bao's text as a collection of "numerous contemporary legends of gods, immortals, and spirits with magical power." As a committed historian, Gan Bao was not unaware of the "inaccuracies" contained in his book, as what was collected were not only "recent incidents," but also "events of the past thousand years."³³ Intending to prove that "the spirit world is not a lie," Gan Bao's collection consists of eight chapters with a total of 464 accounts and is in fact a compendium of "ancient and contemporary stories of deities, anomalous phenomena, unusual people, and metamorphoses,"³⁴ as its content is summed up in the *Jinshu*, the official annals of the Jin Dynasty. The last category mentioned, i.e. the metamorphoses, was in fact the major focus of Hou's attention. He remarked that Gan Bao's book "also included persons who were unable to attain what they were striving for and were then transmuted into another form to reach fulfillment. This treatment resembles the spirit of my earlier works on Xingtian."³⁵

The transformation of the body, as witnessed in the prints, is the central subject of the entire series and is treated with great consequence. There is no "spirit" in the work who did not undergo some kind of transformation or was not subject to various degrees of physical metamorphosis. This motif, the metamorphosis, as interpreted by the artist, is the result of their unfulfilled wishes. In Gan Bao's collection, both the concept of "collecting" these spirits and the motif of transformation have served as the theoretical framework of the series. It is therefore only consequent that the artist named his work after Gan Bao's ancient text.

There is yet another source from which Hou has drawn. The artist himself has pointed out that he "consulted and copied the text and the illustrations" of the *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan* (An Illustrated Compendium of the Gods of Three Religions), a Qing reprint of a Ming dynasty work, and from this source "developed [his] present work *In Search of the Supernatural*."³⁶ As the title suggests, the book is a collection of more than 130 biographies of deities of the three major denominations in the Chinese pantheon: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.³⁷ It is especially the sequence of text and illustration – one full-page illustration of an individual deity,

32 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p194.

33 See DeWoskin, Kenneth J. and Crump, J.I., Jr. 1996. *In Search of the Supernatural*, p27.

34 Quoted after DeWoskin, Kenneth J. and Crump, J.I., Jr. 1996. *In Search of the Supernatural*, p26.

35 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p194.

36 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p194.

37 See *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushen daquan*. 1990.

followed by the written text – which clearly served as the model for Hou Chun-ming's combination of pictorial and textual parts.

The Commentator of Collected Spirits

As we have gathered from Hou's own comments, the formal roots of his prints were two ancient texts. In Gan Bao's collection, Hou found the inspiration to develop, if not to legitimate his concept of building a modern "pantheon" of contemporary spirits of his own. From the *Illustrated Compendium of the Gods of Three Religions*, he appropriated the illustration-plus-text format. However, one further formal aspect of Hou's work completely missing from these sources has not yet been mentioned: the commentary part.

The commentary as used in the traditional Chinese book format was, as can be imagined, normally reserved for canonical texts and literary classics – the mere existence of a commentary denoted a certain value of the text it accompanied. It could contain the personal viewpoint of the editor as well as a critical apparatus providing textual variants and historical or literary sources for a given passage. Often, commentaries by several authors would cluster over many centuries around especially esteemed texts. The various kinds of "commentary" which appear in Hou's prints mirror – or mimic – all those functions of the classical model. The format of the traditional commentary, as adapted by Hou, retains its validity in the sense that the modern commentator uses it to voice his personal viewpoint and to convey his intended message in the same way as did the ancient one, while other passages may point to certain – genuine or invented – sources for the depicted figures. On the other hand, and quite ironically, the function of the commentary appears in a sense as the exact reverse of the classical one: for what is given as the main texts are in fact commentaries by various authors on Hou Chun-ming's images, and it is Hou himself, ultimately the author of the work as a whole, who in turn comments on these passages. Equally ironic is the fact that a format commonly associated with orthodoxy becomes a channel for the expression of contemporary opinions, adding to the powerful energy and the actuality of those images. Furthermore, the use of a commentary in his series gives the work an established, "classical" outlook and an air of importance – the texts offered by the artist himself as well as those of the contemporary writers are, so to speak, "canonized" by the appearance of a commentary.

Tradition traces the role of the compiler back at least to Confucius, said to have edited the ancient chronicle *Chunqiu* (The Spring and Autumns Annals) explicitly in the function as a compiler, not as an author. This status continued to be in high esteem throughout history due to the emphasis on exact historical records which can be observed in China from the earliest time, as well as for the objectivity implied in the work. It was in this vein that Gan Bao collected and documented the many stories assembled in his *Soushenji*. In Hou's case, this aspect should of course not be overestimated. Yet the concept expressed in *In Search of the Supernatural*, stressing the aspect of collecting (as stated in the preface quoted above) and the intersection of text and commentary, provides a sense of genealogical derivation from the ancient texts and their formats. Despite this resemblance to a traditional classic, Hou's prints are decisively different in their content and the message conveyed; they are subversive in their content even as they mimic the form of the traditional book. This is not always to be seen as irony or ridicule: In the case of Xingtian, for instance, no such intention is actually implied. On the contrary, the given text and image bear witness to the mythologization of the Xingtian figure, transforming him into a hero of the modern age. Yet at the moment when the final commentary reads: "*When he beholds, the world is clear, politicians become fearful, and all conflicts cease,*" we find that Hou's comments about Xingtian parallel, not contravene the intentions of the ancient book in their admonitory and "prophetic"

undertone. Here, the distance between antiquity and the present seems to be eliminated, despite the fact that Hou Chun-ming's own view toward the comments of the ancient text was, "from today's perspective," a feeling of absurdity.

The artistic device of blending text, commentary, and image into one is the premise under which the series has been conceived. Actually, the same artistic concept had been already applied in an earlier series of eight prints already mentioned above, entitled *Erotic Paradise*, of 1992. Each print consisting of one main text and one image, this series is about eight different types of modern young people, with the eight texts characterizing their struggle in society virtually functioning as a commentary to the images they accompany. In *In Search of the Supernatural*, on the other hand, the artist complicates the artistic process and decisively "hides" behind the mask of a commentator and compiler. By doing so, Hou has clearly succeeded in conveying the appearance of objectivity: The spirits he created are ostensible not his own invention but already ones prevailing in contemporary Taiwanese society.

The Rituallity and the Repressed Body

Hou Chun-ming's prints reflect several aspects unique to his work. As discussed above, the work shows a rare use of the traditional format of text, illustration and commentary. Furthermore, there is the multiple role of the artist to be considered, as a "hidden" writer, commentator, and editor, as well as his most basic and original identity, that of a creator of images. Decisive for this approach is the re-discovery of two traditional sources, in particular Gan Bao's text, dating back to one and a half millennia ago and containing mythological and anecdotal narratives about various supernatural beings, mythological and historical figures. Closely associated with the traditional book form and its textual mode, characterized by an interplay between text and commentary, Hou's work is, however, clearly situated in contemporary society and in popular folk religion, the more decadent developments of which made a particularly strong impression on the artist in the form of sexual performances, as witnessed, for example, in the rise of the "Electric Flower Car" performances.

Nevertheless, Hou's temple with his "collected gods" from various sources and of disparate character is also ultimately in accordance with the *Weltanschauung* of Taiwanese religion, in which various categories of gods are worshipped: in the worship of nature, in the worship of the dead (of both positive and negative moral status), in ancestor-worship, animal-worship, and the worship of mythological figures, and even in the worship of certain objects of daily life, as well as that of Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian saints.

The powerful energy released from *In Search for the Supernatural* is most vividly revealed in its transformations of the human body and its sexual features: images such as a penis becoming a horse's head, a woman with a penis gland, a man with a vagina in the place of a head, a human body formed as a penis-cum-vagina, a flower bud again as a penis. The transformed bodies are often sexually indeterminable, hermaphroditic figures abound. On the other hand, these "collected spirits" are predominantly prototypes of sex-oriented human behavior: we find the macho, the masochist, the sadist, the male as well as the female sexist, the sex abuser, the lovesick, the narcissist, the breast fanatic, the transvestite, the bisexual, and the hermaphrodite. What makes them fundamentally shocking is the degree, the radicalism of their physical transformation, the reason for which as given by the artist, as quoted above, being the fact that certain persons "were unable to attain what they were striving for and were then transmuted into

another form to reach fulfillment."³⁸

Here we have the central motif of the work: the phenomenon of unfulfilled or unrealized wishes which is made responsible for these strange varieties of metamorphosis is in turn caused by social and cultural repression. Hou Chun-ming's resentment against this kind of repression is clearly witnessed in Xingtian, the leading figure of the collection, who, suffering torture and cruel death, paradoxically symbolizes the spirit of resistance. In regard to the spirit of Xingtian, Hou wrote: "What captivates me is not just the extraordinary bizarre images of mythology, but the excessive and irreparable regret and hate contained within."³⁹ Fascinated by this tragic figure who challenged the highest god and failed, Hou projected on him everything he felt about repression in contemporary society. "Think," he wrote, "what if under normal circumstances people in our society cannot properly reach fulfillment; what if this same society is constructed out of the frustrated experiences of its majority, unable to obtain happiness. Under those repressive circumstances, the human hearts and human outlooks become deformed, distorted and abnormal, ... and their ejected saliva will be poison."⁴⁰

The contemporary society of Taiwan and its often weird folklore and traditions certainly provide Hou Chun-ming with a powerful source of creative energy. More importantly, it is a society full of irrational elements, one in which indigenous religious beliefs play an important role, both in a positive and a negative sense. Usually it has been the performing artists rather than those working in the visual arts who have found the most inspiration and creative stimulus in the indigenous folk religion, in particular in its various ritual processions. Liu Jingmin, the director of the You Theater Company, wrote about a procession in 1991 carrying the goddess Mazu in a journey of nine days and eight nights, the route and direction of which were not planned but spontaneously "decided by the goddess,"⁴¹ describing it as an experience of "liminals" and transcendence. Another participant commented that the procession itself was "a perfect ritual and this ritual is perhaps 'the form' we are familiar with in the realm of the theater."⁴²

Hou Chun-ming, too, was a frequent participant in religious processions. After six years of active participation and his experience with other forms of popular folk culture, he summed up his psychological change in 1991 as follows: "From critical resistance to close and emotional identification, from acceptance to an internalization of its characteristics, to its becoming my own flesh and blood and [finally] to the point of releasing its energy. This is an interactive and penetrating relationship between me and folk culture."⁴³ This deep conviction in folk culture and its energy lay at the heart of Hou's conception of his series as a "temple," as a "collection" of various hidden spirits, rooted in contemporary society but denied fulfillment by it, which in turn recalls Gan Bao's text of ancient mythology.

However, in contrast to Gan Bao, who genuinely believed in the spirits whose doings he

38 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p190.

39 See note 10.

40 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. pp190-91.

41 Liu Jingmin compares her experience of the "Objective Theater" directed by the Polish theater director Grotovski in California in 1983 with her participation in a religious procession for Mazu. The condition of liminals as mentioned by her is, "according to English anthropologist Victor Turner, the ritual doorstep leading us to transcend mind and body into a new territory." See Liu Jingmin 1991. "Banian zhihou de chaoyue: tubu jinxiang yu *You Juchang* biaoyan xunlian zhi jiechu" [Going Beyond after Eight Years: Contacts Between Processions and the Performance Training of the You Theater Company]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 245, July, p146.

42 Chen Ban. 1991. "Minjian yishu de zhangli: You Baishadunma Beigang jinxiang tan yishu zaidihua" [The Energy of Folk Art: Discussing the Localization of Art While Taking the Mazu Procession of Baishadun, Beigang, as a Starting Point]. In *Xiongshi meishu*, 245, July, p149.

43 Hou Chun-ming. 1991. p155.

chronicled, the contemporary artist also remarked: "What I have collected are not mythological or spiritual beings but marginal figures of the metropolis. By means of this structural device, I hoped to make them holy for the purpose of either worshipping or mocking them."⁴⁴ Hou's view here is ambivalent. While rationally recognizing that his work is not a collection of ancient spiritual beings but a group portrait of "marginal figures of the metropolis," he nevertheless affirms the religious and ritualistic aspect of his undertaking. This ultimate goal of establishing a "temple," the "Temple of Ten Thousand Virtues," is certainly determined by religious thought reflecting animist beliefs which are rooted in the traditional as well as in the present-day society of Taiwan. Exposing sex and the human libido at its most primitive, Hou's prints embrace both its virtues and its vices.⁴⁵ It remains significant – and ironic – that this depiction is operated by means of a traditional form, a form embodying the very tradition from which the repression of the human drives and desires originated, the same repressive tradition which in turn generated the very creative energy of the artist.

44 Hou Chun-ming. 1994. p194.

45 In a report on Hou's building a "temple," the artist interestingly talked about two affirmations intended in his prints: of sex and of vice. The author wrote: "Hou does not want to pursue so-called 'beauty', but instead to confirm 'vice'. 'Sex' and 'vice', which have been re-defined, praised and ridiculed in the prints". See Su Huizhao. 1993. "Nage gai miao de nanren: Hou Junming ba zhongguo chuantong 'jiezhi' shang bentu yishu" [Look at that Male Building a Temple: Hou Chun-ming's Grafting Chinese Tradition onto Local Art]. In *Taiwan shibao*, 07, July.

6. Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to show how the manner in which traditions are "negotiated" in contemporary Taiwanese art differs radically according to which artistic, intellectual, and/or ideological school the respective artists can be subsumed under. This is a situation which in this specific form could probably arise only in a country which has been subject to cultural influences as diverse as Taiwan. As a consequence, not only do terms commonly used to describe contemporary conditions such as, for instance, "post-colonial," take on quite specific meanings when it comes to Taiwan, but the very term "tradition" itself is in need of re-definition as far as Taiwan as a whole, but also what particular school of thinking is concerned. The question of what Taiwan and Taiwanese culture and tradition "really are" still lacks an answer which is able to receive common agreement.

This cultural and stylistic hybridity is a phenomenon, which is not unique in the history of art. In the history of the West, there has been no lack of periods in which works of art were created bearing features of a cultural "in-between." The art of late Roman antiquity, for instance, adopted elements from the empire's eastern provinces, while other artists of the age attempted to re-create the style of an earlier, Hellenistic, era. Other examples are the European "Renaissance art" created in regions outside of Italy (or a few centers in Italy), or the gradual development of the earliest Buddhist icons from their immediate model, Greek sculpture. These examples testify to the fact that confrontations and negotiations between cultures are not novel and that artistic traditions are never static. However, all these examples illustrate a relationship of cultural centrality and marginality, whereas the present situation is characterized by the almost complete lack of a cultural "center." While human knowledge, either in the form of inventions, technology, or theories of social and political nature, has always proved to be dynamic and capable of transgressing and breaking regional, ethnic, and national boundaries, in present-day visual art a movement of globalization is taking place which provides an unprecedented artistic freedom, but at the same time leaves artists and the audiences no choice but to come to terms with it.

This tendency is illustrated by events such as the recent exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s - 1980s*, initiated by the Queens Museum of Art, New York, in 1999, which offered a view on conceptual art as a global phenomenon. The exhibition focused on shared features and approaches which are to be found world-wide, as shown in 240 works by more than 130 artists from over 35 countries. In the introductory text of the catalog, the art historian Stephen Bann states: "Global conceptualism marks a radical shift, not merely in the morphology of modernist art but in the pattern of art's development and diffusion worldwide. ... Global conceptualism may be the visible proof that the Western hegemony in ways of seeing, ushered in

by the perspectival science of the Renaissance, no longer holds sway."¹ Rather, the exhibition documents the active incorporation, or, anthropologically speaking, the "cannibalization" of conceptual art and idea art by a whole regiment of "others," of artists and art communities around the world which are the very representatives of "otherness." As is to be expected, this artistic form is already on the way to developing into something very different from what it had originally been and towards solving different sets of problems.

Stephen Bann further points out that at least in the Soviet Union, Japan, and China, the emergence of conceptualism in fact resulted from a quite different context than the "original" in New York. The curators of the exhibition, Luis Camnitzer and others, add that "while much of the work in the early stages of conceptualism in the market centers remained tied to questions of art and the art system, in other areas conceptualism became the means for expanding art to function as an act of political engagement or resistance. ... This conceptualism can only be properly understood in its local context, where it often fulfilled a precise consciousness-raising."² Without doubt, taking into account the local context is a vital premise for understanding the works of "other" artists. We further learn that the said "consciousness-raising" ranges from initiating "struggle[s] against authoritarian regimes" in the case of Latin America and opposing "state ideology and an intrusive bureaucracy" in the case of Mainland China to engaging "with political issues such as unification" in the case of Korea, to mention only a few.

The example of *Global Conceptualism* shows that this art form apparently contains a strong expansive energy; it "travels" to as many and varied points of arrival as globalization allows. Moreover, once the art form has reached an appropriate place or a new "home," it is likely to experience a new life, to transform itself and develop into a different configuration and for other purposes.³ What is exemplified here in a single and very recent form of expression has been a constant experience in Taiwanese art and is connected with a variety of very different styles and traditions. The genre of oil painting transplanted from Japan, for instance, took on a new life when it became the point of departure for Huang Chin-ho, who labeled it the appropriate "indigenous" artistic medium for launching his ambitious project of a new Taiwanese aesthetic. Yang Mao-lin's oil paintings, too, bear evidence of the strongly "local" connotations ascribed to the medium as the artist employs it in his undertaking to write the national history of Taiwan with the means of art. On the other hand, Yang's concept of re-reading and the technique of appropriation were adopted from the New Painting movement then current in the West, while the parallel position assigned to Taiwan's two early colonizers in his *Zeelandia L9301* double portrait was recruited from ancestor and emperor portraits in the Chinese tradition. More consistently and actively involving Western culture are the conceptual works of Wu Mali and Lien Te-cheng, into which recent postmodernist discourses found their way, too, and whose most relevant artistic development took place, as I have shown, entirely within a local context. Wu's early artistic endeavors using paper objects, and in particular the technique of cutting, was revived and now blended with social criticism. Lien Te-cheng had studied oil painting in the U.S., but developed his conceptual works out of the interaction with other local artists of the group Space II.

1 Bann, Stephen. 1999. "Introduction." In *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*. New York: The Queens Museum of Art. p1.

2 Camnitzer, Luis, Farver, Jane, & Weiss, Rachel. 1999 "Forward: Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s." In *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*. New York: The Queens Museum of Art. pp VII-XI. pIX.

3 I am referring here to Edward Said's term "traveling theory" as an analogue to the expanding energy of an artistic style or form. See Said, Edward. 1983. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. pp226-247.

Contrary to works closely related to Western art, with all its contemporary attributes, those which refer to the Chinese culture are the strongest when they make use of the traditional media and ideas, such as calligraphy, the book form, mythology, Taoist and Buddhist religious concepts, paper cuts, and the Taoist popular belief in zodiacal palaces, as we have seen in the works of Huang Chih-yang and Hou Chun-ming. Significantly, formerly separated cultures, the orthodox and the marginal, the high and the low, have now re-emerged in symbiotic constellations in the works of contemporary artists. Moreover, all six works of art discussed here reflect the interplay between the East and the West. In the work of Wu Mali, the radical move of destroying books, while referring to a theory by Roland Barthes, is also founded in Zen thought, as far as its weightlessness and the viewer's supposed "understanding smile" are concerned. On the other end of the cultural spectrum, Hou Chun-ming's *In Search of the Supernatural*, while seemingly imbued with the Chinese tradition, contains strong elements stemming from his early encounter with the marginal and the repressed, which was initiated by his teacher, a scholar of semiotics of the Foucault school. However, the fundamental base, the context within which these works were created, remains the contemporary Taiwanese society itself, and it is from this local ground that the artists launch their critical comments.

In Eugenia Shanklin's words quoted in my introduction, "tradition is used as a decisive tool to further individual or group ambition."⁴ Likewise, Edward Shils points out that there is "the perceived past. This is a much more plastic thing, more capable of being retrospectively reformed by human beings living in the present."⁵ While both anthropologists refer to "tradition" in its singular form, the works discussed here have demonstrated a variety of traditions, to be observed in a mutual interplay and in the process of being forged and "negotiated." Only under such circumstances we understand the simultaneous appearance of Italian Transavant-garde and the form of the Chinese ancient ancestor portrait within one piece of art, contemporary social criticism blending together with an ancient religious concept evoking a sense of warning, and, not least, the peculiar juxtaposition of a Japanese *yamato-e*, a Bernard Newman imitation, and a quotation from Laozi's *Daodejing*. One single set of tradition alone does not seem to be adequate for provoking creative inspiration. Likewise, traditions, be they seen as "static" deposits and storage repositories or as flexible, multi-faceted entities containing the orthodox and the marginal, the high and the low, are able to be revived or re-used. Stemming from different points of origin and often situated on separate timelines, of often of heterogeneous ethnic origin, traditions can be compared to a set of tools, to be freely applied, appropriated and instrumentalized in order "to further individual ambition." Fragmentized, displaced, and segmented as they often appear, traditions can serve as raw materials for creative purposes, to be re-arranged, re-shaped, negotiated and re-construed.

Within the era of Taiwanese art covered in this study, the developments that I have pointed to reached a climax between 1989 and 1995. Before this period, the expressive potentialities were still in a state of pupation; afterwards, the rebellious energies increasingly dissipated. Yet during these six years, the state of creative chaos in which the society and body politic found themselves incited (and even compelled) the artists to search for new ways of articulating their own stances toward the changes around them. The answers they found were wildly different; however, all were engaged in a dialogue with society and were reacting to—or offering some kind of moral commentary upon—its phenomena. Their close connection to the times in which

4 Shanklin, Eugenia. 1981. "Two Meanings and Uses of Tradition." In *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 37, p77.

5 Shils, Edward. *Tradition*. London & Boston. p195.

they were expressing their creativity was inevitably conveyed in a radically critical and deconstructive attitude.

With the growing urge to express themselves in new ways, the artists had several means or instruments at their disposal. There was Chinese tradition, but only some of them ever sought to actually make use of it: after all, what they were witnessing was the emergence of "New Taiwan." The possibilities of Western styles, techniques, and discourses seemed closer to hand, along with the implications of post-colonialist theory, the awareness of the margins of society as explored by Foucault, and Western cultural pluralism. Perhaps even more important, artists, for the first time, were able to draw on all sorts of cultural strata, whether "high" or "low" culture, folk religion, or the "aesthetics" of consumer society. While tradition is located within this system of coordinates, it appears to have almost ceased to be an object of identification and to become much more a force that the individual is unable to resist. Whereas the center/margin relationship observed in the historical examples cited in the beginning of this conclusion contains an element of "fate" (the lack of free will) and while freedom of choice in contemporary "Global Conceptualism" is more or less limited to a single alternative, present-day Taiwanese art presents a multilateral situation and absolute independence in deciding which "tool" is used to reach specific artistic goals. Consequently, we have seen very different approaches toward tradition. However, these approaches are united by one commonality: tradition's deliberate and strategic employment as an artistic instrument.

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Illustrations



1 **Huang Chin-ho**, *Fire*, 1991-2, oil on canvas, 400 x 815 cm. Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



2 Nepal Health & Recreation Plaza, Taichung, Taiwan. Photo: George Gittoes



3 Building for real estate sales, Taichung, Taiwan. Photo: George Gittoes



4 Huang Chin-ho, *Hooligans in Heaven*, 1990, oil on canvas, 277 x 495 cm. Private collection.



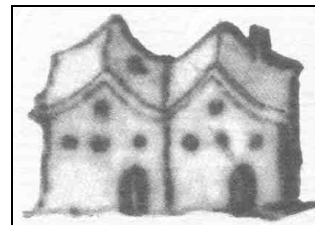
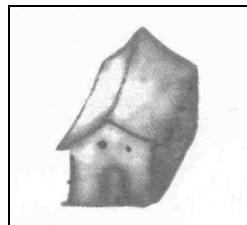
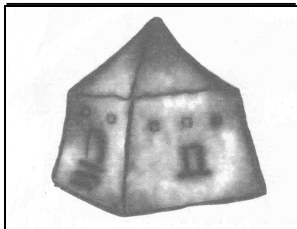
5 **Yang Mao-lin**, *Zeelandia Memorandum L9301*, 1993, oil & acrylic on canvas, 112 x 194 cm. Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



6 Portrait of Koxinga, ink on silk, Koxinga Museum, Tainan, Taiwan.

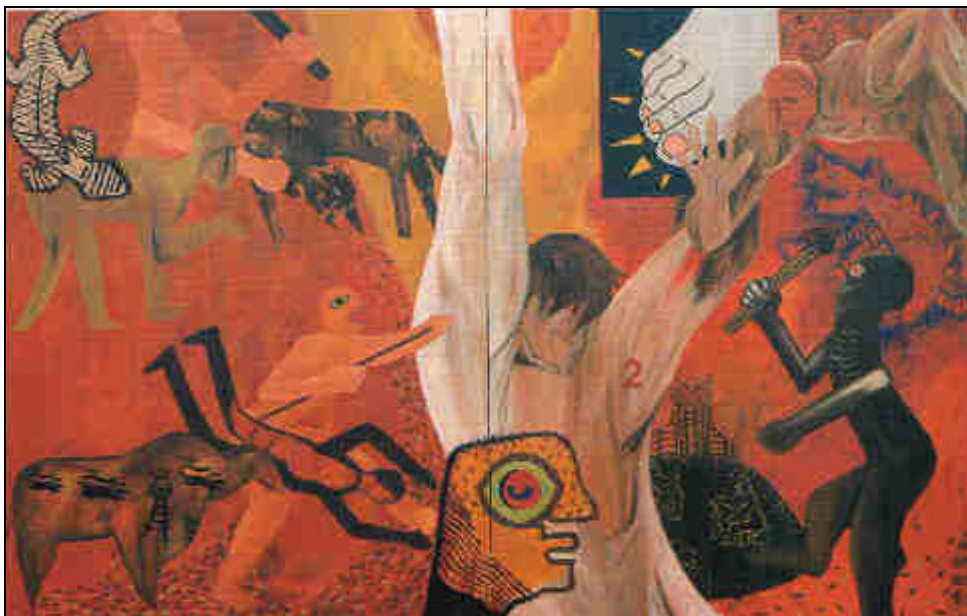


7 Portrait of Coyett, taken from *Three Centuries of Taiwan*, p32.



- 8 Cannon of Koxinga
- 9 Fort Utrecht (top left)
- 10 Sheep Stable (top middle)
- 11 Goldsmith's shop (top right)

Details taken from *The Last Battle and the Exchange of Treaties between Koxinga and the Dutch*, pp14, 15 & 38.



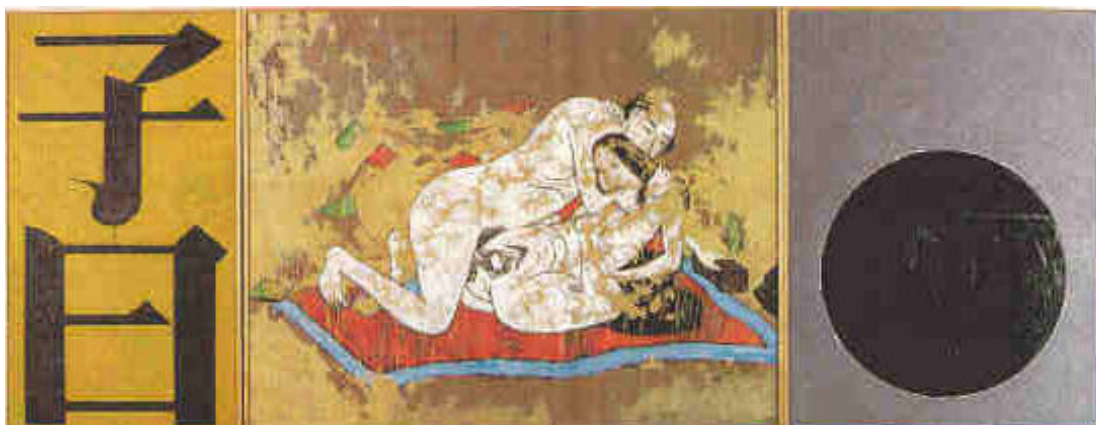
12 **Yang Mao-lin**, *The Scene of Killed Gun II*, 1986, oil on canvas, 160 x 260 cm. Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



13 Lien Te-cheng, *Particular Tao*, 1995, mixed media, 320 x 188 cm. Artist's collection.



14 Lien Te-cheng, *Singing the National Anthem*, 1991, installation. Artist's collection.



15 Lien Te-cheng, *Confucius Says*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 320 x 132 cm. Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



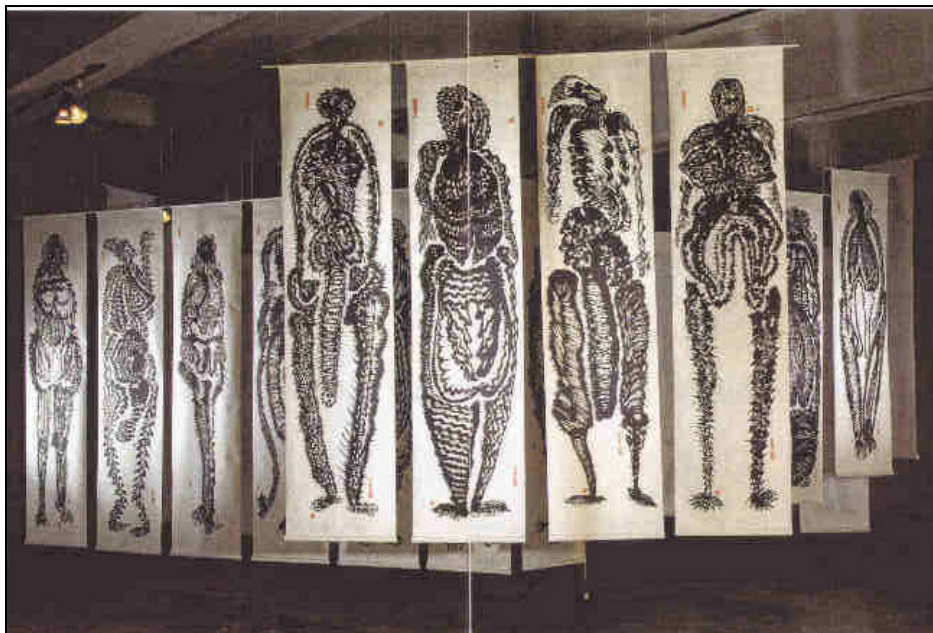
16 **Wu Mali**, *The Library: Gnawing Texts and Reaming Words*, 1995, shredded books, acrylic glass, golden paper, shelves. Private collection.



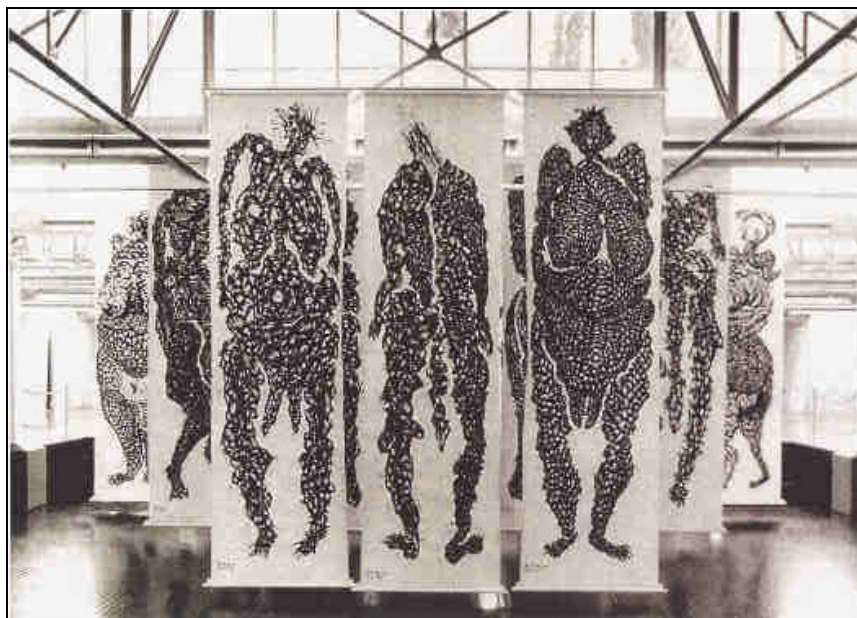
17 **Wu Mali**, *Time and Space*, 1985, installation. Artist's collection.



18 **Wu Mali**, *The Bible*, 1993, glass bottle & shredded book. Artist's collection.



19 **Huang Chih-yang**, *The Maternity Room*, 1993, ink on rice paper, 60 x 240 (x18) cm. Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



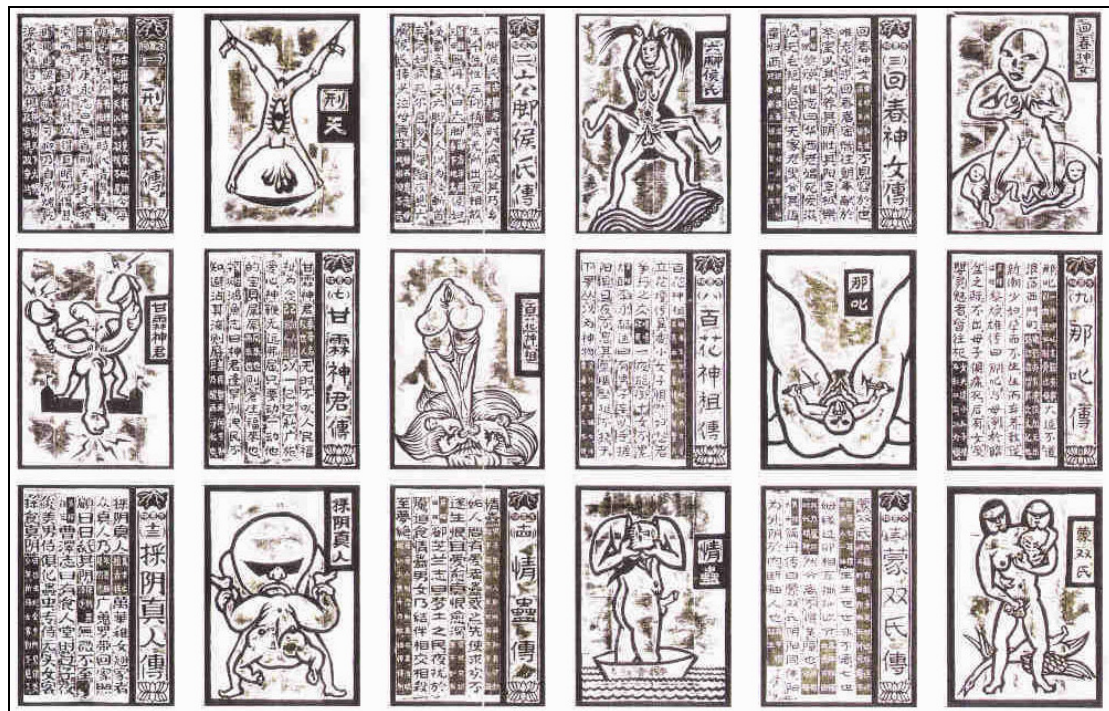
20 **Huang Chih-yang**, *Zoon*, 1996, ink on paper, 338 x 127 cm each. Artist's collection.



21 **Huang Chih-yang**, *Icon*, 1986, ink on rice paper, 120 x 120 cm. Artist's collection.



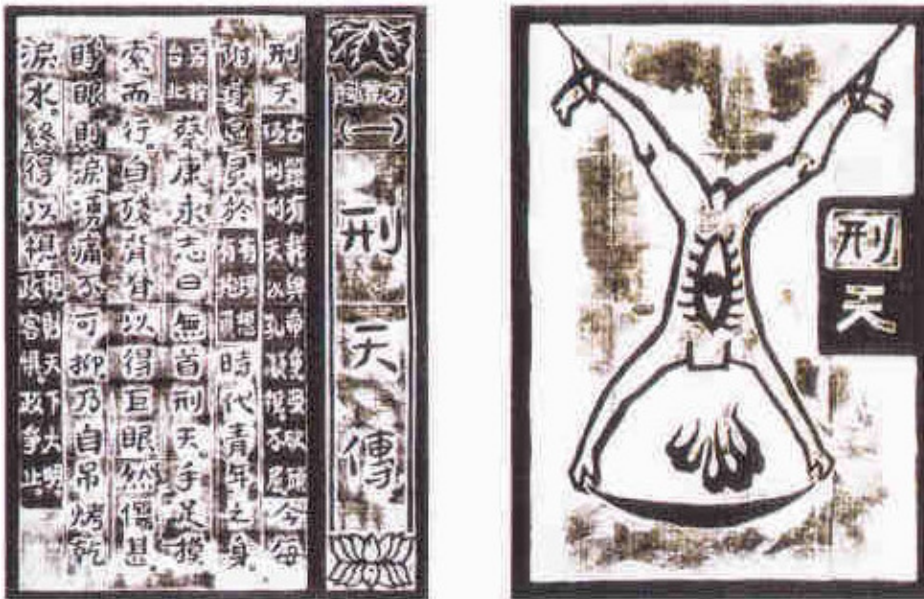
22 **Huang Chih-yang**, *Buddhist Figures*, 1989, ink & color on rice paper, 120 x 130 cm. Artist's collection.



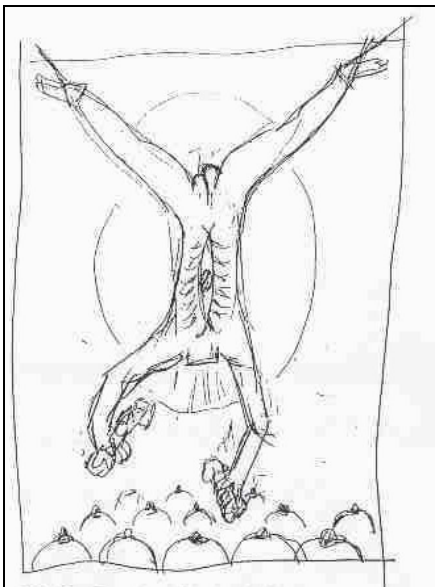
23 Hou Chun-ming, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 1993, 37 paper prints, 154 x 108 cm, each (detail). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



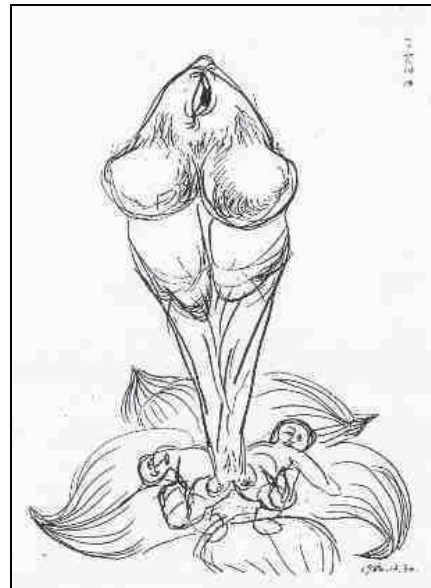
24 **Hou Chun-ming**, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 1993, 37 paper prints, 154 x 108 cm, each (detail). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



25 Hou Chun-ming, *Xingtian* (detail of *In Search of the Supernatural*).



26 Hou Chun-ming, *Xingtian* (sketch). 1992, 29 x 21 cm. Artist's collection. (left)



27 Hou Chun-ming, *Baihua Shenzu* (God of the Hundred Flowers, sketch). 1986, 29 x 21 cm. Artist's collection. (right)

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Yang Mao-lin: fig. 5, 12