What is Taiwan Art History?

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These days there has been much noise in academe, in museums, in art and culture centres as well as in the public media about “Taiwan Art”, usually called Native Art or 本土藝術. Taiwan art has become a hot item and has spurred some academics on to create separate, autonomous institutions of Taiwan studies as if it were a new discipline, like AI (Artificial Intelligence) or, say, “Outer Space Microbiology.” But here hype definitely exceeds substance and demands reconsideration of the nature of the subject.

The art history of Taiwan as discipline does not differ from the art history of France, The Netherlands or Korea. Here we speak of literate cultures complete with their own sets of artistic expressions including dance, music, theatre and where the visual arts form a continuous stream with constant internal evolution. In institutions established in the study of art histories, Taiwan’s is grouped under the art history of China which in turn is offered in the division of East Asian Art History along with the art histories of Korea and Japan, sometimes including Southeast Asian Arts of the Hinayana Tradition, forming a major subdivision in Departments of Art that had begun with various aspects of Western art history (that in turn is subdivided into Antique and Classical Art, then with increasingly finer divisions with the onset of the Renaissance).

In the East Asian section, Chinese art (including Taiwan) is subdivided into genres such as Material Culture (bronzes, ceramics, jades), Buddhist Arts (architecture, painting and sculpture), as well as painting and calligraphy. Woodcuts
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and folk arts are sometimes also included, depending on the interest and expertise of instructors. And, like Japanese, French, Italian or Netherlandish art, Chinese art is discussed in terms of categories and historical periods, where research and specializations converge on problems in one genre (one artist or group) of a certain period.

Aside from this three-hundred odd year history of Chinese colonists’ art in Taiwan on the other hand, the spheres of Aboriginal Art and pre-historic or Neolithic Archaeology, have far longer histories. As disciplines, they are quite distinct from art history. While indications to date show a relationship between Mainland and Taiwan Neolithic archaeology, the Aboriginal art of our myriad Melanesian tribes form part of the study of Aboriginal Culture that is largely undertaken by anthropologists, where the “art” is treated in the same corpus of Aboriginal Art that include the arts of Oceana, Melanesia, the Maori of Papua New Guinea and the Aboriginals of Australia. Circling around the Pacific Rim in some institutions, this Pacific Rim anthropology may include the Japanese Ainu of Hokkaidô, the Eskimo tribes of Siberia, the Native “Indians” of North, Central and South America from the Haida –Quakiyutl Indians of the Northwest down to the Amazon Indians, forming a synchronic swath over time and space. In macro terms it is regarded as “Anthropology of the Pacific Rim”.

In contrast to the study of “art history” or the so-called “fine arts” of literate societies where aside from iconography, style plays a major role as it manifests itself in internal changes through time, Aboriginal art (of any non-literate society) is less subject to stylistic evolution. Largely totemic or otherwise symbolic in nature, Aboriginal art tends to follow strict rules of iconographical “composition” that in principle preclude change (unless societal “rules” or beliefs change). Its inherent significance and function in comparison remain fairly constant (as do its forms). Here we study not so much the “art object” itself but the society that produced it, in terms of
their behaviour, rituals, beliefs. The study of societal behaviour is an aspect of anthropology rather than of art history.

Art history studies the nature and role of change(s) within well-defined streams, schools or styles, and is a function of form, structure and content that provides a clear profile of internal evolution over time. Aboriginal art on the other hand, comprise specific “transcription codes” used in non-literate societies, and is a function of social structure and group belief. And here change is a function not of style, but of society or belief.

The above notwithstanding, there have been voices in Taiwan to make of Taiwan art history an autonomous and self-contained area of enquiry. This absurd notion reflects insufficient understanding of both the distinctions between art history and aboriginal art, and the basic principles governing the organization of academic disciplines, and can be attributed only to political ambitions of its promoters who seek their niches of exclusivity, riding high on the recent wave of all-Taiwan fever, and also to the misguided over-patronage on the part of funding agencies of “Taiwan” projects. From a global perspective, exploitation of political moods for private benefit is only too transparent and would make a mockery of Taiwan academe.

It is perfectly legitimate, and about time however, that the interesting and complex history of Taiwan be added to our corpus of art historical knowledge. There are in all three distinct disciplines requiring different types of training and expertise. Yet this has for some reason not been made clear. There are altogether three distinct phases that we can identify in Taiwan’s (literate) art history, and each requires different methodological considerations. For while continuous, Taiwan’s special political history involving its cultural twists and turns demand more complex apparatus for scholarly research.
Some Basis Premises.

1) Taiwan’s (literate) art history is that produced on this island by its Chinese (Minnan or Hakka)-speaking colonists who have massively emigrated from the Mainland at the end of Ming and early Qing periods.

2) Taiwan’s Archaeology includes the ancient artefacts now coming to light in increasing numbers, artefacts produced in the Neolithic period and relating to greater and lesser extents to comparable artefacts excavated on the Mainland, and possibly forming groups with some Mainland types.

3) Taiwan’s Aboriginal Taiwan Art belongs to the discipline of Anthropology and includes the dozens of Melanesian tribes (who may or may not be related to the Neolithic cultures spanning the Straits mentioned above). The totemic carved designs and colour dot-based patterns still faintly discernable on the vestigial remains of their original (pre-Retrocession) costumes, basketry and carvings indeed show ties to Aboriginal cultures of the Pacific Rim.

These, then, are our three basically distinct spheres of academic study relating to Taiwan’s arts and art history.

Let us now have a look at the three phases discussed above and see how the methodologies in the treatment of each will differ, summoning in each case artistic ingredients different from the rest.

The First Phase (ca 1600-1895)

Regarding the first, pre-modern (literate) art produced by Taiwan’s Chinese-speaking colonial populations, voluminous tomes have been compiled,

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1 Many early Taiwan artists are sumptuously featured in a lavish production Ming-Qing shidai Taiwan shuhua zuopin published by the Council for Cultural Planning and Development in 1984. 陳奇祿發行, 《明清代台灣書畫作品》台北, 1984, 行政院文化建設委員會策劃. Panomaric sweeps of Taiwan art of the past three hundred years have also been published in recent decades, among them the Hsiung Shih Monthly of Art’s production with the Taiwan Museum of Art, 300 Years of Fine Arts in Taiwan Taichung, 1990, Taiwan Museum of Art. 臺灣省立美術館主辦, 《台灣美術三百年》臺中, 民79年.
heavily subsidized in the wake of this new but as yet undefined cultural identity (crisis). The Council for Cultural Planning and Development (文建會) as well as several publishers have issued anthologies featuring the works of Taiwan artists. These books contain biographies or artists and are accompanied by images of their works. This type of work is little more than a show-and-tell exercise and cannot be dignified with the name of art history. It is here that we must redouble our efforts and clarify our intentions: do we wish to gain some quick benefits while the “Taiwan” topic is hot, or get down to solid work that requires a good deal more background training than Mainland Chinese art history alone? While “shorter” than “Mainland Chinese art history”, Taiwan art history requires a good knowledge of Chinese art history plus a lot more. We must familiarize ourselves with late-Ming early Qing Chinese art history up until the Japanese occupation in 1895 and focus since the end of Ming on the peripheral, southern schools of Guangdong and Minnan that, not being mainstream, have been less avidly recorded by the ancient chroniclers. For our purposes however, it is only when the regional distinctions are properly understood that the particular flavour of Fujian, that is Taiwan painting can be identified (as seen in early scroll paintings and architectural décor that have survived). To claim that “Taiwan art history begins with Zheng Chenggong (鄭成功)” would be a political and not a scholarly notion, and reflects a failure to understand the nature of art history.

Regarding art history of the earliest Huaren 華人 or Chinese-speaking colonist-immigrants from southern Chinese provinces like Fujian and to lesser extents Guangdong during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, we find that their works range across various genres. These include large- and middle-size calligraphy in the semi-cursive 行書 and the more cursive 行草 type, ink-play examples of ink bamboo 墨竹, ink lotus 墨荷, ink prunus 墨梅, examples of local flora and fauna, including cymbidiums 蘭、蕙, banana, white egrets 白鷺, ducks and lotus, fishermen and
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sometimes self-portraits 自畫像 as well as landscapes. The works as a “group” differ remarkably from mainstream Qing painting as represented by Palace collections, but form a striking body apart with a strong regional style that must be acknowledged as a distinct School. We may call it the Fujian School 福建派 or 闽派.

Concerning our group of early Taiwan painters, the works as a “group” differs markedly from mainstream Qing painting as collected and preserved in Palace collections. Why should this be so? Because whilst the Palace collections under the Qing emperors reflected in the main the aesthetic of the powerful literati 文人 styles, especially according to the very narrow dicta of Dong Qichang, our group of early Taiwan paintings form a striking body with such a strong regional style that they must be acknowledged as a distinct School, with its own aesthetics and techniques. And it is up to the art historian to define the special characteristics of this school, and identify their specific sources and technical idiosyncrasies. But why were these Taiwan artists not recorded in art historical annals? Why don’t their names appear in the histories or their works in the Palace Collections? This question touches on the concepts of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in traditional Chinese art criticism. The elite 文人 chose their own style as orthodox, and anything not conforming to their own, highly refined brush methods was considered heterodox. The comparatively wild and “unrefined” brushwork of Fujian painter Huang Shen 黃慎 And while (雖然) the heterodox artists (or thinkers) were not punished or ostracized outright, they were “non-persons” in the elite society and in their chronicles. ² Guangdong artists like Lin Liang 林良 (active during the Hongzhi 弘治 Reign 1488-1505) and a century later the Fujian painter Huang Shen 黃慎 (1687-1768) were exceptional in winning the attention of the orthodoxy — but typically no one from the orthodoxy emulated their

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² Something of this feudal attitude remains in Taiwan society and academe to this day, it may be observed.
style, and in fact considered all non literati manifestations as heterodox 邪派 and Huang was grouped among the “Eight Weirdoes of Yangzhou” 揚州八怪 were physically far removed from the Mainstream culture that was dominating Chinese culture centres from Jiangnan up to the Capital of Beijing. It is also because Fujian culture had always been a thing onto itself, isolated but more than that, self-isolating.

This may be called the Fujian School 福建派 or 闽派 and as such had made its presence strongly felt in Japan during the Tokugawa period (1610-1865) This is the very same time many Fujian settlers or colonists moved to Taiwan and made their paintings. Be that as it may, it was precisely this Regional or Heterodox Style that had been identified as Literati painting among the late-Ming-early Qing Chinese imports to Japan during the transmission of Chinese painting styles and techniques to Tokugawa Japan. Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 was vigorously promoting Chinese Confucianism to awaken in the Japanese a sense of fealty 忠 to his own person, and ordered many Chinese colleges 漢學學墅 to be set up. During the latter 17th up to the early 19th century then, China fever was dominant in political Japan. It was in that endeavour that the new Chinese Chan 禪 monastery of Mampukuji 萬福寺 was founded in Uji 宇治 south of Kyoto 京都. It can only be called for its time the

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3 The monastery is nested in its own giant woods, but maintains an entirely Chinese (late Ming) appearance that contrasts markedly with prevalent temple architecture of the Japanese mode. It is commonly thought that Mampukuji comprised a group of Chinese refugee clerics who fled to Japan from unsettled conditions at home. Actually the founding fathers were invited Chan masters at first reluctant to leave China. They were persuaded by the Chinese residents of Nagasaki 長崎 who had erected several Buddhist temples and Mazu 媽祖 shrines (dedicated to the Goddess and protector of seafarers, revered along the southern coasts) during the Tokugawas’ anti-Christian persecutions. The Chinese community in Nagasaki was becoming steadily more vital since Japanese traders were banned from foreign travels and trade with China had to be conducted by Dutch and Chinese merchants. Increasing numbers of Chinese vessels and traders called at Nagasaki, and the Chinese community there grew accordingly. There developed by then a true and urgent need for several qualified Chinese abbots to head the Chinese temples in Nagasaki and underscore their non-Christian affiliations. The great Huangbo 黃檗 master Yin yuàn Longqí’s mission to Japan was precipitated by the death of his disciple Yelan Xinggui (J. Yaran Shōkei, ) who had been dispatched to head the Sōfukuji 相福寺 in Nagasaki, but who drowned at sea in 1651. Thereupon the aged prelate decided to make the treacherous crossing himself and arrived in Japan in 1654, intending to return after three years tour of duty. Of course, he was so much needed in that opening phase of the spreading of Chinese influence at the invitation of the Japanese emperor and Shogun, that he had to stay there till he died.
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"Chinese Culture Centre" in Japan.

Inaugurated in 1661 under the aegis of the Emperor himself, with the Fujian Abbot Ingen Ryūki Zenji 隱元隆琦禅師 as founding prelate, this branch temple of Wanfusi of Fuzhou 福州 for the next century or more flourished with all manner of new and exciting imports from China in spite of Japan’s isolationist sakoku 鎖國 policy.4 Abbot Yinyuan and his mostly Fujianese entourage included many who left calligraphy works and paintings in four main categories: ink plays like ink flora and small fauna, landscape, informal figure paintings, realistic portraits. There was also a dabbling in finger painting 指頭畫, popular for a while because the Manchurian founding emperor, Shizu 世祖 the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (r.1644-1662) was immensely interested in practicing it himself. This promoted several well-known painters to produce finger paintings, most famous among them today are numbered Gao Qipei 高其佩 (1672-1734) and Gao Fenghan 高鳳翰(1683-1747) among others. And it was during this time that finger-painting was spread to Japan, and to Taiwan. This situation matches precisely the evidence found among early Taiwanese artists, in content, in style, and in techniques.

The Fujian monastery in Japan yielded many of the actual Chinese source(s)5 that lay behind the sudden effulgence of Nanga 南畫 painting in Japan where the new-styled Japanese paintings, while claiming descent from legendary names like Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1354), Mi Fu 米輔 (1057-1107) etc, in reality bore little direct resemblance to these masters’ works. The Fujianese works preserved in Mampukuji come closer to providing direct links between Chinese models and their Japanese recensions, and these were by no means Mainstream

5 The very large but so far unacknowledged formative influence on Nanga by Korean literati painters who had inherited the Li-Guo and Ma-Xia traditions since the Yuan and had since developed these into quite an impressive Schools, is omitted here.
Chinese painters like Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509), Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), or Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636) as then touted in Edo 江戶 period treatises and subsequently in contemporary scholarly papers, but this mottled group of Fujianese clerics and attendant personnel attached to the Monastic community.

What was Japanese painting like before their artists decided to emulate the Chinese “Southern Tradition”? And How did they “study Southern Masters”? Which particular aspects of Chinese literati painting or 文人畫 were selected by Japanese painters, and how, specifically, were these traditions transformed in their hands? This is the stuff of Japanese art history, but the Fujian School of painting identified through research on the subject coincides with the phenomenon witnessed in Taiwan during the Qianlong reign (r.1736-1796) and provides the foundation of Chinese painting in Taiwan.

Here at once we face the problem of methodology and complex issues of Japan’s misunderstanding of Chinese literati painting aesthetics and methods on the one hand, and their own absorption of and Chinese “literati manner”. Were we to accept at face value all the self-inscriptions on the paintings, and all the accounts describing these Japanese Nanga 南畫 artists of the Tokugawa 徳川 period, we would be wide misled. For a better understanding we must perform visual analyses of the works themselves, and here we can look at early Taiwan artists and their contemporaries in Japan: both represent the Fujian Style and are not to be confused with fashionable references to the elite literati tradition.

**The Fujian Style of Painting**

Putting together the paintings of early Qing artists active in Taiwan gathered in the publication on *Ming and Qing Calligraphy and Painting Works of Taiwan Artists*.

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6 The earliest painters and calligraphers actually begin to appear only in the Qianlong period that is during the 18th century.
we find that as a regional characteristics match those of Fujian artists who had left
works in Japan a century earlier. Here we may briefly sketch some visual details. Let
us examine some of the most typical images, that is, works whose artistic intent is not
wenren brushwork-excellence but a free-wielding, almost wildly expressive mode of
impacting a sense of life to the work by means of both a new mode of brush
expression and a highly narrative mode of depiction. Let us see artists from both
Taiwan and the Fujianese Mampukuji Community in Japan:

For Fujian artists in Japan during the early Qing we find the following **Distinctive
Fujian features.** The handscroll of birthday felicitations in honour of Yinyuan the
Abbot was brought to Uji by the Founding Abbot. Sections include of a landscape by
Cai Hui (fig.000), of whom virtually nothing is known. The signature reveals him to be
a native of Jinjiang, 晉江 Fujian. The style echoes the writhing movement shaking
late-Ming landscape painting in general.⁷ In particular, certain features recall works by
men active in Fujian such as Wu Bin, 吳彬 Wang Jianzhang, 王建章(fl.1628-1644)
and Zhang Ruitu 張瑞圖.

Two scholars who have trod the earthen path entering at the right where now
attendants follow, are rendered in abbreviated manner as they begin their ascent. The
path disappears behind a large foreground rock, crosses the stream over a covered
bridge and leads to the monastic compound up on the rocks to the left, presumably
their destination. Of note are the crumbling and gloomy grandeur and the bizarre rock
formations. To the left, tall sharp peaks in the middle and far distance are imaginary
stone pillars pointing to heaven. They are convoluted in staggered outcroppings,
miniature elongated versions of the large central rocks.

The pine trees recall those by fellow Fujianese monk Jifei (fig 000): slender,
relatively upright trunks with clear, dark contour lines, discreet knot holes, and

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⁷ See James Cahill (1971) for discussion of the late-Ming restless landscape syndrome.
diligently drawn pine needles. Soft, thick bands of mist flow laterally across the picture, clarifying planes among tree groups and between peaks. Considerable contrast in light and dark areas not only defines concavities but serves also as abstract accent. Darknesses are intensified where moss dots are grouped in exaggerated density and drawn in darker ink tones.

It is understandable that works by Fujian artists and those in other resistance centers were imported to Japan and Taiwan in large quantities by Chinese fleeing the Manchu invasion. The distinctive features associated with Fujian and other resistance centers, are transmitted to *nanga*. These peculiar features include rising rocky precipices that knuckle up at the top like fists, dramatic concentrations of modelling strokes or dots forming high contrasts of light and dark, and the dense mists suggesting unusual agitation. Some or all of these features find their way into representative Nanga.

Zhang Ruitu (1576-1641) of Fujian was admired in Japan and his works were collected in the late seventeenth century by men of lofty erudition like nobleman Konoe Iehiro 近衛家熙 (1667-1736), better known by his Buddhist name Yorakuin 予楽院, also a patron of the Obaku fathers.

Zhang's calligraphy is individualistic with bold, foursquare characters in dark ink and an exaggerated disproportion between various elements which achieves a new overall balance. The brush is held consistently aslant so that strokes resemble knife-cuts. Paintings by Zhang Ruitu were treasured in Japan as well, including a spurious landscape bearing his name that is still in the Mampukuji Collection. *Mountains and Misty Forest* (1633) in the Brandon Collection (Cahill 1971: 53) reveals correlations with the Cai Hui handscroll. Convoluted, craggy rock formations (here with rounded contours) also feature bands of densely grouped texture strokes providing a high contrast with blank areas, forming near-surrealist strata of light and
Another Zhang Ruitu landscape, *Towering Peaks and Cascading Falls* (fig.000), reveals a more angular mode with craggy formations modelled in oblique axe strokes. White mists below silhouette the trees and separate the planes while eerie pointed spikes, much like the Cai Hui ones, rise from undefined space. It shares many compositional features with the left-hand section of the Cai Hui work where principal peaks twist inward like knuckled fists, and are accompanied by slender spikes; they are skirted by slender-trunked deciduous trees and floating bands of mist. No attempt is made to define the space from which these elements issue. Both compositions feature elongated twisting and contorted granite forms which like projectiles soar skyward - from an undefined groundplane. A sense of monumental instability pervades the scene in both works and the message is unmistakable.

Peculiar features include wafting, restless bands of mist, markedly slender trees, and dramatic, uneven concentrations of *cun* modelling strokes producing exaggerated contrasts in dark and light.

What Zhang Ruitu did in a coarse, free, and amateur manner was being done at court by fellow townsman Wu Bin 吳彬 (circa 1568-1626), some years his senior.\(^8\)

Apparent structural inconsistencies in Wu Bin's work are not born of awkwardness but indicate artistic choice. Wu Bin's name was known in Japan where an excellent and very large (400.2 x 208.4 cm) *Nirvana* painting (Miyata 1975, pl. I) dated 1610, has been a proud treasure of Sōfukuji in Nagasaki.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Unlike Zhang, Wu openly denounced corrupt eunuch Wei Zhongxian and was incarcerated. Some years later, tribulations befell Zhang for his pro-Wei sentiments. Political views aside, as painters both men echo not only seventeenth-century landscape convolution in general, but Fujian idiosyncrasies in particular. Wu Bin's works, however, are professional and scrupulously executed to the last detail, and thus lack the wild emotionality of Zhang's impetuous ink works.

\(^9\) The monastery was founded by the Fujianese monk Chaoran Wai (1567-1644) who arrived in Nagasaki in 1629, received permission to build the monastery in 1632, which was inaugurated in 1635 (Miyata 1975, 12) where the Wu Bin Nirvana may well have been a central monument.
A friend of Zhang Ruitu of whom little is known, Wang Jianzhang 王建章, came from Jinjiang, home town of Cai Hui. Wang Jianzhang’s paintings are also largely unknown in China, but treasured in Japan. The repertoire was varied and he evidently handled diverse genres with ease, producing landscapes in several modes, impromptu inkwash sketches and Buddhist figures seated among twisted trees. A contorted rocky mountain landscape, Searching for a Poem in the Mountain Shade. (fig 000), features rising clenched-fist mountains, a vague and turbulent ground plane, concentrations of modelling strokes in high contrast with white areas. Interrelation of parts is no more cohesive than in previous examples. While foreground trees rise from a rocky spit, the rock group is in imminent danger of being engulfed by raging waves. Consistency is not the message: every element marks dissolution of order, mirroring that in China’s political and military spheres.10

Adoption and Transformation in Japan The Confucian scholar Hattori Nankaku 服部南郭 (1683-1759) famous disciple of Ogyû Sorai 荻生徂 (1666-1728), was an advocate of ancient learning, poet and, in his own way, a dabbler in painting. He was renowned for his ink bamboo and ink landscapes, but upon his death in 1759 all traces of his brushwork were removed from his studio for safe-keeping and reverencing by his pupils. An ink landscape (fig.000) is a telling example of the genre from his hand. Nankaku’s use of ink monochrome refers more clearly to Muromachi 室町時代 landscapes of the Shûbun - Sesshû 周文 - 雪舟 tradition, and to the Ming loyalists from Fujian, - than to any Southern Tradition or wenren hua.12 Its most modern aspects may be found in the peculiar features of

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10 Description of Fujian works in Japanese collections in the section above is taken from my study on the subject, Transmission, op cit, 51-56
11 For Nankaku, see Joan Stanley-Baker (1980, 14-18)
12 I refer in particular to the jet-black dots-and-dashes mode of modelling the surface, from the contours inward, covering the upper portions of large rocky boulders, and see in the Hattori work’s rock modelling in the foreground boulder. The evolution of this curious dots-and-dashes mode in China is seen in mid-Ming academy painting in which brush-modes are distilled from modeling techniques in Northern Song monumental painting where jagged rocks with foursquare protrusions had been
painting by Ming loyalists from Fujian, or its “Fujian Style” appearance, here more concentrated and exaggerated than in the Fujian painters themselves: Note the concentrations of black dots and strokes, brooding contrast of light and dark and the curious, swelling rock that expands at the top. Features especially prominent in the Cai Hui landscape appear in the Nankaku work: combination of slanted, angular, jagged contour strokes with a thick peppering of round dots, both within the rock form and outside to suggest vegetation, where the dots are highlighted against a blank background for high contrast. This indicates swift apprehension in Edo of news entering from the Kyūshū 九洲. As might be expected, these features also appear in Nanga paintings from Kyoto in the works of major Nanga masters who had frequented the Monastery: Gion Nankai, Takebe Ryôtai (1719-1774) Yosa Buson’s, and even on Ikeno Taiga, in whose Fishing Boat in Autumn Stream (fig.000), a clear reference to Wang Jianzhang’s gentler treatment appears in the over-extended, slender foreground trees craning up toward receding layered peaks modelled with dense hemp-fibre strokes and dotted in clusters of dark ink.

Later Nanga masters were to echo these ideas in diluted form: brooding gives way to playfulness in light and dark, and dots become more evenly dispersed in graceful, lyrical patterns. Examples include Okada Hankô (岡田漢江，1782-1846) and Nagamachi Chikuseki (長町竹石，1747-1806), whose Moon Gazing from the Bridge (15f) was painted in his last year. The list is by no means exhaustive but serves to illustrate the proliferation in Japan of features peculiar to late-Ming Fujian painting and to certain painters associated with anti-Manchu resistance. For Fujianese features, Cai Hui’s landscape offers secure evidence of their entry into Japan by 1654. What

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*modelling with L-shaped black ‘contour lines’ and downward hacking axe-stroke, and covered over with inkwash.  
*13 This sort of energetic modelling was deplored in Chinese wenren circles as “too exposed” baolu,暴露， but is typical of the work of Zhang Ruitu and Wang Jianzhang.*
Japanese artists did with the newly imported cultural elements was largely to adopt the expressive angularity of Fujian or Minpai 閩派 brushwork, the liberal deployment of wet wash and shading. What they added to it was a lyricism in expression that was in contrast to the brooding defiance visible in the imported models. In Japanese hands, the ‘naturalized’ paintings then (erroneously) ¹⁴ considered “Nanga” or the prestigious “southern School Painting” was a transparency and evocative quality that has been quintessential to Japanese painting since the 11th century.

In Taiwan itself, with Fujian painters or descendants of Fujian immigrants, the situation was a direct continuation of the Mainland practice. Although evidence indicates the existence of several distinct traditions at work including the professional Zhejiang School, and faint echoes of the elite and elitist Literati School, it was the Fujian School that was the most active, most lively – as if the tradition had found new and nurturing soil in which to develop. However, this was soon interrupted by the arrival of the Japanese and their mode of art education.

**The Second Phase (during Japanese Occupation 1895-1945)**

Students wishing to study Taiwan artists of the Second Phase must have detailed knowledge of Chinese art history proper preceding Chinese colonization of Taiwan, especially that of the late-Ming Fujian School, but on top of this they must also acquire an in depth familiarity with Japanese art history, especially that complex and dynamic modernizing phase under the Meiji -Taishô (明治 - 大正) eras (1867-1925), focussing first on Japan’s own processes of selection, absorption and transformation of foreign cultural stimuli (here it is European artistic traditions) that have been imported to Japan from the sixteenth century onwards. Areas that must

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¹⁴ Southern Painting in China denoted a centered brush-wielding, a reserved mode of painting where most is left unsaid. This was in utter contrast to the wild and freewheeling brush deployment of Fujian painters who were considered in Chinese literati circles as beyond the pale, and dubbed Minxi 閩習 or (undesirable) Fujian Practice.
first be studied include, aside from the genres of architecture, ceramics and sculpture, the two-dimensional genres of oil painting, water-colours, Chinese and Japanese inkwash painting, and the emerging art of the modern woodcut print. The same questions asked regarding Japanese transformation of Chinese literati painting in the 17th and 18th centuries, must also be asked regarding the transformation and “nationalization” in Japan of European modes of painting. How, in which specific ways, did Western oil painting acquire its post-Meiji Japanese look? For beneath the placid, calm surface of Japanese art history there undulates myriad subtle layers of cultural undercurrents with borrowings and adaptations that throughout time are shown to have been transforming the very nature of Japanese art and arts. This chameleon-like process is especially clear in painting. And only after understanding the Japanese themselves, can we in turn consider problems of Taiwan’s reception and transformation of foreign stimuli. For in imparting their art techniques to Taiwan students, Japanese artists also transplanted something of the aesthetics informed by their very special native sensibilities.

What Taiwan students learned in Japan was neither Chinese traditional painting, nor Western Oil painting direct, but something extracted and transformed from these two traditions and homogenized into vibrant, viable Japanese artistic expression, the quintessence of such processes being Nihonga (日本画 or Japanese Style Painting, in Taiwan going by the vile name of 膠彩畫 or “Bone-glue Colour Painting”) which is in effect a Japanisation of China’s own thousand-year-old “Blue-Green Landscape” tradition (青綠山水 or in Japanese “Gold-paste” landscape or

15 Western engravings depicting cityscapes, figures, and interiors were circulated in sixteenth-century Suzhou and Hangzou. By the seventeenth century, Chinese woodblock prints for New Year felicitations began to show a marked Western influence in composition and perspective rendering, not to mention shading. Many of these Suzhou prints found their way into eighteenth-century Japan and contributed to the development not only of the woodblock prints of the Floating World, Ukiyo-e, but to aspects of eighteenth and nineteenth century painting in Kyoto. See in particular Sasaki Jôhei Okyô and the Maruyama-Shijô School of Japanese Painting, 1980.
金泥山水，using animal bone-glue and mineral-pigment-based colours for painting on silk). In Japanese hands, the age-old Chinese media and techniques (used also in Japan itself for nearly 800 years) now rearranged in Westernized formats and coloration, achieved as a genre a unification of motif and ground, where subject and background are integrated to form a compelling whole with a sole point of focus, say, in the eyes or a particular spot in the painting, then to radiate outward and imbue the whole work with its particular timbre and emotional impact. The quint essence of Nihonga is this sort of poetic transparency where each painting is a technical tour de force but also delivering a single impact like a verse in haiku. One may see it as a Minimalist form of expression.

When these thoroughly transformed manners of doing Oriental and Occidental painting were transmitted to Taiwanese student-artists, they once more were subjected to processes of selection, adaptation and transformation, once more, now in Taiwan. What were these changes? How are they manifested in the works? How were these subtle transformations and retransformations achieved? It is such enquiries that make the stuff of art history and not the taxonomic “painting that so-and-so painted of the X bridge on Y river in ... the year N” that have filled our many “Taiwan art history” texts to date.

Most obvious in an overall view of the transformation process of painting in the “Nihonga” style in Taiwan hands is the restoration of perennial Chinese elements: solidity, concreteness. The ethereal transparency and poetic artistry of Japanese expression gives way to opacity and narrative clarity where motif and ground are sharply separated – as in Chinese calligraphy where spaces untouched by the brush remain inert matter: paper (or silk) – without expressive potential.

The Third Phase (Post Retrocession, 1945-)

Students interested in the modern, post-Retrocession Taiwan scene must have mastered not only the above two types of art history, but must have a thorough grasp of art developments in the West, beginning with Russian modernist experimentation, covering all the subsequent minor art movements, with especial attention to the major breakthroughs brought on by the Abstract Expressionist movement in mid-century America, followed by the general decline of “fine art” in the West since the late sixties with the onset of happenings, installations, conceptual and virtual art, etc. Many of these later fashions brushed through Taiwan briefly, leaving certain residue in their wake, and have been misunderstood as “art” by Taiwan’s innocent public. When examining Taiwan’s contemporary scene, therefore, we must be able to peer through the shallow façade of these imitations and third-hand productions to determine whether there may lie beneath any of them some vestigial substance from the more solid art decades that had gone before, for unlike Americans who have tended to start their artistic “revolts” from scratch, many Taiwan artists who have been trained in certain aspects of Taiwan’s historical arts mentioned above should provide modern Taiwan art with its distinctive flavour and content that reflect certain elements of their disparate older traditions. (Here in recent years socio/political and monetary interests have engendered a large number of empty “art” productions which have in turn been boosted by vapid, shallow “criticism” in a series of sham processes that border on white-collar con-games - viz the Emperor’s New Clothes. While these may win quick fame or money for their perpetrators, they will not survive in the annals of our longer histories, even less survive among Taiwan art works of true worth). However there are outstanding artists, rare as hen’s teeth, who are active today in traditional ink painting as well as installation art, but they are not necessarily recognized by the popular media and even less by the hack “mod crit” (modern criticism) people. The best of the most contemporary, most "international"
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artworks produced by Taiwan artists in fact all reflect aspects of their indigenous culture and have a recognizable Asian – if not exclusive “Taiwan”, feel. These are the works and the artists that should be identified, as they truly represent the artistic spirit of Taiwan.

It is in these manifold to-and-fro artistic transpositions from culture to culture, their intrinsic development on native soil through time, their attendant aesthetics and evolving techniques that we find the true substance of Taiwan’s art history. Once we clarify our goals and set out sights on genuine enquiry, there are ample resources here and abroad to make our work eminently enjoyable and worthwhile.

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Abbreviations:


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According to Tanomura Chikuden in Sanchūjin josetsu (Talks on Painting, pref. 1834), Zhang Ruitu had been close to the Chinese monk Yueshan Daozong (1629-1709) who eventually became seventh abbot of Manpukuji, and who had brought many Zhang works with him to Japan (Tanomura 1834: 543). A notation in the Iwanami edition claims that Yueshan died in the sixth year of Hôreki (1756),
which would have made him one hundred and seven years old. I have used the terminal date of 1709
given by Otsuki (1977:107) which is the sixth year of Hôei.