

## The Colorists of Taiwan 臺灣的色彩大師

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**關鍵詞：**色彩、臺灣、原住民、石川欽一郎、繪畫、張大千、陳澄波

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## Abstract

Taiwan's painters were leading contributors to a revolution in color that dramatically reshaped East Asian art. Their world-class achievements have been underappreciated. During the early twentieth century, new techniques of on-site sketching and the introduction of oil paint shook the foundations of Chinese and Japanese ink painting as it had been practiced for centuries. The Japanese colonization of Taiwan, a period when educators such as Ishikawa Kinichiro 石川欽一郎 (1871-1945) systematically introduced European painting methods, produced a cohort of painters professionally trained, cosmopolitan in outlook, and committed to watercolor and oil painting. These included Chen Cheng-po 陳澄波 (1895-1947), Lee Tze-fan 李澤藩 (1907-1989), Li Mei-shu 李梅樹 (1902-1983), Chen Hui-kun 陳慧坤 (1907-2011), Yen Shui-lung 顏水龍 (1903-1997) and Liao Chi-chun 廖繼春 (1902-1976). Building on international art trends like Impressionism and Fauvism, they developed a distinctive palette reflective of the island. Influences from ink painting, local geography, temple architecture, porcelain, and aborigine customs informed their approaches. Painters who moved from China to Taiwan after 1949, like Chang Dai-chien 張大千 (1899-1983) and Liang Dan-fong 梁丹丰 (1935-), remained committed to ink painting but expanded its boundaries. Appreciative of the sanctuary Taiwan offered them, they saw themselves as ambassadors of a resilient art form centered on brushwork practice. Their travel abroad did not persuade them to borrow from Western models. It confirmed their determination to preserve Chinese painting's distinctiveness. Though most Chinese painters of recent centuries used color sparingly and regarded it as secondary to ink, these two saw ample precedent in China's tradition for a more serious engagement with color. Liang Dan-fong employed color poetically in her travel-sketching. Chang Dai-chien, an unmatched master colorist, created his final masterpiece in Taiwan, entitled *Panorama of Mount Lu* 廬山圖.

## 摘要

由臺灣畫家主導的一場色彩革命，曾經重塑了東亞的藝術景觀；然而，這世界級的成就迄未得到充分的評價。二十世紀早期，由於即景寫生的技法和油畫的引進，在中、日兩國行之已數個世紀之久的水墨畫傳統受到強烈挑戰。日本殖民期間，透過石川欽一郎（1871-1945）等教育家系統性地引介歐洲的繪畫技巧，臺灣產生了一批訓練有素，具有國際視野，且寄情於水彩和油畫的藝術家。陳澄波（1895-1947）、李澤藩（1907-1989）、李梅樹（1902-1983）、陳慧坤（1907-2011）、顏水龍（1903-1997）和廖繼春（1902-1976）等人均屬此陣容。呼應著當時的國際藝術潮流如印象派、野獸派等，這群畫家以其獨特的用色反映了臺灣島的風貌；他們的藝術技巧同時受到水墨傳統、本土地理、寺廟建築、陶瓷器、原住民風俗等諸多因素之影響。另一批於一九四九年後遷臺的畫家如張大千（1899-1983）和梁丹丰（1935-）等，雖仍忠於水墨，卻溢出了傳統界限。棲身臺灣，他們感激島嶼所提供的庇護，但也自詡為歷久不衰的毛筆藝術的代言人。他們行腳多方，然並未借用西洋技法；相反地，廣泛的遊歷堅定了他們保存中國繪畫特色的決心。儘管近幾個世紀來的中國畫家鮮少使用，甚且不太重視色彩，張和梁卻發現了中國繪畫的用色傳統。梁丹丰在其旅行寫生當中，極富詩意地運用色彩；至於張大千，這位無與倫比的色彩大師，則在臺灣完成其最後的巨作《廬山圖》。

"Colour...when rightly used...can make of the picture a living thing."

—Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911)<sup>1</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the invention of chemically synthesized pigments and advances in the science of optical perception paved the way for artists such as Claude Monet (1840-1926), Georges Seurat (1859-1891), Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), Henri Matisse (1869-1954), and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) to revolutionize how painting was practiced across the globe. The admiration for color inspired by Modernism in Europe was particularly consequential for Asian artists whose high art traditions centered on monochrome ink painting. When color was employed at all in Chinese, Japanese or Korean ink painting, its application tended to be sparing, delicate and poetic. The vivid palette associated with oil paint galvanized Asian artists to start painting more colorfully and boldly. Taking their brush and easel outdoors sensitized them to the multiplicity of colors found in sunlight and shadows. Some sought to more truthfully capture nature: the blues and greens of mountain mist and the oranges, reds, and whites of the tropical sun. Others found inspiration in the properties of paint itself. The convenience of buying pigments, ready-made, in collapsible tubes encouraged artists to become more mobile and fueled a color revolution which continues to this day.<sup>2</sup>

The intensification of color in painting was not solely a product of Western civilization. East Asia was a co-inventor. Modernist art, as it developed in Europe and America, was already a cross-cultural, East-West phenomenon. Masters of color like Monet, Van Gogh, and Whistler acknowledged their debt to Japanese

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1 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. and with an introduction by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. 45.

2 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 170, 183, and 337.

prints.<sup>3</sup> Other imports from Japan and China—such as textiles, wallpaper designs, and porcelain tea sets—enriched the color sensibilities of Victorians, whose staid interiors were significantly brightened by the hues of the "Orient." Another founder of Modernism, Gauguin liberated himself from the dark color schemes of Old Master painting by *leaving* Europe. Life in Tahiti among the native peoples and tropical sunlight encouraged him to use a bolder palette. Red cinnabar, lapis lazuli, and other mineral pigments were developed in China first, and only later came to the West.<sup>4</sup> As these examples suggest, the impetus for intensifying color in paintings had its origins in a cross-fertilization of global legacies.

Homeland to aboriginal tribes for several millennia, a frontier settlement of China from the Qing dynasty, and a Japanese colony from 1895 until 1945, Taiwan inherited aboriginal, Chinese, and Japanese cultural traditions. Aboriginal traditions contributed greatly to fostering a culture of hospitality, knowledge of local flora and fauna, and the development of fishing practices on the island. As subjects of the Japanese empire, the Taiwanese people fought on the side of the Japanese during World War II, but were returned to Republican Chinese control in 1945 as a result of the Allied victory. Following the Communist revolution on the mainland in 1949, the President of the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887-1975) retreated to Taiwan with approximately two million people and established a new national government there. During the Cold War era, President Chiang continued to cultivate America as an ally, hoping to find safety on the island for the evacuees and build up military strength, so that his Nationalist Party could one day retake China.

Some of China's most famous painters—Chang Dai-chien 張大千 (1899-1983), Huang Chun-pi 黃君璧 (1919-1991), and Pu Hsin-yu 溥心畬 (1896-

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3 Colta Feller Ives, *The Great Wave: The Influence of Japanese Woodcuts on French Prints* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974).

4 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color*, pp. 64-65, 92.

1963)—fled Communism and settled in Taiwan. The Nationalist government gave these ink painters, later known as the "Three Masters from Across-the-Straits," an honored status. The government-in-exile made use of these painters' presence on the island to enhance its aura of authority. On the other hand, native-born Taiwanese painters educated under the Japanese system faced a difficult transition once the evacuees arrived. Although they were highly prized cultural figures in pre-War Taiwan with much international contact and exposure in Japan and beyond, the Kuomintang (KMT) sponsored their own national artists. Many of the prominent local artists worked as art school teachers at the university or high school level. Suddenly, at mid-career, not only were they required to switch from speaking Japanese or their local dialect to Mandarin Chinese, but they lost their social prominence and international ties. They typically picked up sufficient Mandarin to keep their teaching jobs but not enough to speak fluently and could not compare with new arrivals who spoke Mandarin with ease.

Initially, the native population greeted the return of Taiwan to Chinese control in 1945 warmly and with enthusiasm; but social problems caused by Nationalist troops, official corruption, arbitrary rule, Mainlander monopolization of positions of authority and power, and a brutal repression of Taiwan's educated elite just a few years after the handover altered native opinion. Discussion of this tragedy was officially taboo until Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui 李登輝 (1923-) publically apologized for it in 1995. Ironically, President Lee himself was Taiwanese. Today, out of a total population of 23 million, about 85% are considered native Taiwanese, meaning that they were the locals when the evacuees came to the island. Most of the population considered native Taiwanese emigrated from southern China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Since the lifting of martial law in 1987, native Taiwanese have gained the right to participate in Taiwan's government.

Aboriginal peoples notwithstanding, the island of Taiwan was considered a remote outpost of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) before the twentieth century. In

1680, the Qing government officially claimed it as a frontier territory of its empire. Prior to then, Spanish, Dutch, and British commercial interests controlled Taiwan's coastline as a stopover point on the way to the mainland. The island's oldest inhabitants, the indigenous minorities of Malayo-Polynesian origin, known as aborigines currently account for only 2% of Taiwan's population. However, their DNA is present in 80% of the Taiwanese people. Most of the early Chinese settlers came over as bachelors and married locally. And until the arrival of the Japanese and the KMT, aborigines were numerous and influential in Taiwan.

During the Japanese colonial period, the aborigines in Taiwan's mountainous interior were severely mistreated. Many were subject to forced labor on behalf of the timber industry. On the other hand, Japanese anthropologists recognized the value of aboriginal culture and did careful studies of their languages and customs. However, when the KMT arrived, they attempted to purge their languages and cultures. Today, much of their distinctive folk customs have been lost, due not only to official repression but also to forces of modernization spreading to every corner of Taiwan, including the tiny satellite islands where many of the aborigines live. Fortunately, after Taiwan democratized and an opposition candidate was elected to office, it became legal to devise writing systems for the aboriginal languages and to study and promote their native customs. The aborigine commission was enhanced, and research money was set aside for studies of their languages and customs and of their ties with other communities in the region and the south Pacific. The aborigines and their impact are very important for the claim of Taiwan's distinctive uniqueness vis-à-vis mainland China.

As home to aborigines and immigrants from South China, entre-pot for sea-faring merchants from Europe, colony of Japan, and sanctuary for Chiang Kai-shek's allies from China, Taiwan's collective identity has been in constant flux. The island's hosting of so many diverse populations and its history of repeated political changeovers has made it difficult for Taiwan to develop a cohesive

culture. On such matters, Taiwan's painters fell into two camps. The native-born painters focused on building up a distinct identity for Taiwan and a local style specific to the island. Their quest was to establish an art form rooted to their native place. The pioneer Taiwanese artists were well-connected regionally and globally and sought to employ the latest styles and methods in their work.<sup>5</sup> The mainlanders who fled Communism held different concerns. Taiwan was for them, a sanctuary, but not their homeland. They were new immigrants and still deeply attached to the mainland. They cared about preserving the best of China's ancient civilization on Taiwan, because they felt that the wisdom of their ancestors had not been well stewarded on the mainland.

As we shall see in the following case studies of individual artists, color plays into these complicated notions of identity. Beginning in the twentieth century, monochrome ink painting no longer dictated artistic practice, but its aesthetic remained influential. Many defenders of ink painting and calligraphy rejected color as an emblem of the West and an unwanted disruptor of inherited art forms. Taiwan's artists had to find their way in an era in which splashes of color could be interpreted as emulating the West too closely. A painter's choice of palette, media, and subject matter risked inciting negative associations. Each of the following painters forged ahead to engage with color despite conservative biases.

## **Chang Dai-chien's Azurite Blue and Malachite Green**

Chang Dai-chien, a native of Sichuan, China, was the most illustrious, and notorious, of the painters who took refuge in Taiwan after the Communist

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5 On the issue of identity in Taiwanese society, see Thomas B. Gold, "Civil Society and Taiwan's Quest for Identity," in Stevan Harrell and Chun-chieh Huang (eds.), *Cultural Change in Postwar Taiwan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 59-61. For a concise introduction to Taiwan's history and present, see Shelley Rigger, *Why Taiwan Matters: Small Island, Global Powerhouse* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2011).



victory. During the second half of the twentieth century, he was likely the most famous living Chinese painter anywhere in the world. Before settling in Taiwan in 1976, Chang lived abroad in Brazil and the United States. His knowledge of ancient painting and his capacity for emulating traditional styles of calligraphy and brushwork gave him considerable stature. Indeed, he was able to copy ancient masters so brilliantly that he could fool connoisseurs, including the curators of major museums in America and Europe, into buying his forgeries of ancient paintings.<sup>6</sup> Some considered him morally reckless for selling forgeries to unsuspecting buyers; but no one questioned his painting talent. There is about his landscape paintings, as one critic said, "an atmosphere of greatness."<sup>7</sup> He was praised as the kind of superlative painter that appeared only once in five hundred years. According to Shen C. Y. Fu, author of a definitive catalogue published by the Smithsonian Museum, Chang Dai-chien was "one of the best colorists in all China's history."<sup>8</sup>

Chang Dai-chien is particularly celebrated for his so-called "splashed color" or *po cai* 潑彩 technique. Initially, he began mixing vivid, mineral-based paint with ink in response to failing eyesight. From the late 1960s on, he could no longer paint in his customary precise manner, so he began experimenting with a semi-abstract approach comparable to Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956) or Helen Frankenthaler's (1928-2011) spreading and pouring of paint. Chang's new method sparked controversy among tradition-minded connoisseurs who saw the technique as pandering to Western tastes. Chang himself denied having been influenced by Western art at all; however, his exposure to Abstract Expressionism

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6 For example, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston acquired what they thought was a 10<sup>th</sup> century painting from Chang Dai-chien's collection in 1957. The painting was entitled *Drinking and Singing at the Foot of a Precipitous Mountain* 岸曲醉吟圖. Curators later decided it was a fake by Chang Dai-chien, when they discovered a pigment on it that was not available until modern times. *The New York Times*, Feb., 24, 2008, Art & Design, p. 40.

7 Gao Ling-mei 高嶺梅 (ed.), *Chang Dai-chien Hua* 張大千畫 (Taipei: Art Book 藝術圖書公司, 1988), p. 13.

8 Shen C. Y. Fu, *Challenging the Past: The Paintings of Chang Dai-chien* (Washington, D.C.: University of Washington Press, 1991), p. 65.

while living abroad must have had some impact on his consciousness. After all, he had traveled extensively in Europe, Japan and the United States, visiting major museums and exhibiting and selling his work in galleries. Although a traditionalist in many respects, he was not immune to the appeal of modern art. During a trip to France in 1956, Chang Dai-chien famously arranged to meet Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). Chang admired Picasso's vigor for work and his mission to transform the art of his time, qualities that the Chinese painter recognized in himself.<sup>9</sup> According to Chang, Picasso discussed his strong interest in Chinese painting during their meeting. Chang took satisfaction in discovering that the West's preeminent modern master was looking to the East for inspiration.<sup>10</sup>

According to Ba Dong 巴東, a scholar who specializes in the study of Chang's painting, the impact of Western art on Chang's "splashed color" style of painting should not be overemphasized.<sup>11</sup> While the blue-green mist in his landscapes resembles the hovering, non-representational color of Mark Rothko (1903-1970) or Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), and his loose, sweeping strokes may suggest Jackson Pollock, Chang's "splash" technique cannot be presumed to be merely the product of what he saw abroad. Throughout his life, he was immersed in the study of ancient Chinese paintings. He believed that Chinese tradition was not a spent force, but rather, a springboard for innovation. He devoted his life to opposing the prevailing notion that Chinese painting had come to a dead-end. So, with great determination to make tradition vital again, Chang combed China's traditional legacy for fresh ideas. For example, he admired the "splashed ink" (*po mo* 潑墨) technique associated with the ninth-century painter, Wang Chia 王洽 (?-805), and the 13<sup>th</sup> century painter Liang Kai 梁楷 (1140-1120). So, when Chang "splashed" blues and greens, he

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9 Shen C. Y. Fu, *Challenging the Past: The Paintings of Chang Dai-chien*, p. 72.

10 Gao Ling-mei 高嶺梅 (ed.), *Chang Dai-chien Hua* 張大千畫, p.18.

11 Ba Dong 巴東, *Pocai Dunhuang: Chang Dai-chien de yishu yu shenghuo* [The Significance of Dunhuangmurals on Chang Dai-Chien's Painting] 潑彩敦煌：張大千的藝術與生活 (Taipei: Diancang yishu jiating 典藏藝術家庭, 2005), pp. 30-31.

could legitimately claim to be following the ancients. A precursor for his choice of blue and green, specifically, was the so-called "blue-and-green style" of Li Cheng 李成 (919-967). Li Cheng's colorful style of painting was common during the Tang dynasty (618-907), but later fell out of use. Chang considered the Tang dynasty to be the peak era for combining ink with a colorful palette. To him, the painting of China's most recent dynasty, the Qing (1644-1911), was overly conservative and should not be seen as epitomizing Chinese art. Chang criticized the Qing dynasty master Wang Hui 王翬 (1632-1717) for his "anemic color scheme" and "paltry spirit."<sup>12</sup>

Chang's bold palette was a radical break from what had been considered high art for most of Chinese history. According to the American art historian James Cahill (1926-2014), "Chang Dai-chien made heavy color in Chinese painting respectable again."<sup>13</sup> Typically, Chinese connoisseurs prized a restricted palette, emphasizing spirited brushwork in ink alone or accompanied by very light color. Color was "a superficial embellishment" applied by assistants or omitted altogether.<sup>14</sup> What made Chang see color differently? Ba Dong argues that Chang's experience of copying Tang-era Buddhist wall paintings at the Dunhuang 敦煌 caves along the Silk Route opened his eyes to the potential of color.<sup>15</sup> During World War II, he recruited a team of Tibetan monks to help make copies of the vividly-colored frescoes at Dunhuang, an aesthetic treasure neglected for centuries and endangered by wartime chaos. Ba Dong argues that this seminal experience of copying the wall paintings at Dunhuang made Chang appreciate bright color; and trained him to mix pigments, and apply them diligently, layer upon layer, to match the originals. The experience of being completely surrounded by frescoes in the caves, both on the ceilings and on the

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12 Shen C.Y. Fu, *Challenging the Past: The Paintings of Chang Dai-chien*, p. 46.

13 Quotation from an interview of James Cahill in Carma Hinton and Richard Gordon, *Abode of Illusion: The Life and Art of Chang Dai-Chien* (Brookline, MA : Long Bow Group film, 1993).

14 James Cahill, *The Painter's Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 107 and 136.

15 Ba Dong, *Pocai Dunhuang: Chang Dai-chien de yishu yu shenghuo*, pp. 36-37 and 40-41.

walls, gave him a new sense of scale and focused him on color's expressiveness. This must have kindled his ambition to someday create something akin to this.

Chang had the opportunity to work on such a masterpiece after he settled in Taiwan. Responding to a commission from an old friend who owned a hotel chain, he produced the largest silk painting of his life, a painting large enough to fill a hotel lobby (178.5×994.6 cm/approx. 5'10"×32' 8"), and one that he would work on for two years before he died in the process.<sup>16</sup> The painting, *Panorama of Mount Lu*, now belongs to the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. (Figure 1) By the time he began work on it in 1981, he had built his final



Figure 1: Chang Dai-chien, *Panorama of Mount Lu*, handscroll, watercolor and ink, 1981-83, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

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16 Ba Dong, *Zhongguo Jujiang Meishu Zhoukan: Chang Dai-chien [Masters of Chinese Painting]* 中國巨匠美術週刊, No. 076 (Taipei: Fairview Press 錦繡出版社, 1992), pp. 26-27.

residence, called the Abode of Illusion 摩耶精舍, in the suburbs of Taipei, at a picturesque site where the Wai shuang Hsi River 外雙溪 divides. From his garden, he could hear the sound of rushing water and feel the cool shade of nearby mountains. Since the 1960s, the painter had enjoyed good relations with President Chiang Kai-shek, who extended to him every courtesy in hopes that the renown master would eventually make Taiwan his home.<sup>17</sup> Chang was happy to endorse Chiang Kai-shek's regime by choosing to settle there rather than the mainland. He was angry about what had happened to fellow artists and his own relatives in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In his final painting, *The Panorama of Mount Lu*, he not only created an immense and beautiful painting; but also sent a defiant message to the regime which had uprooted him decades before.

As its title suggests, *Panorama of Mount Lu* features the landscape of one of China's five sacred mountains, Mount Lu, a site celebrated for its beauty by poets and painters throughout Chinese history. Mount Lu is known for its waterfalls and sense of mystery. According to a famous poem by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), the vapor around its peaks, and its vast size, prevent one from seeing its full range. Chang's portrayal conjures up Mount Lu in all its majesty. A rushing waterfall occupies its center. Some sections of the mountain glow in sunlight, while others are blanketed in light mist or thick fog. The obscured parts of the mountain are turquoise-blue and jade-green. These gem-like mineral colors seem to pop out from the scenery. They are representative of Chang's "splashed-color" technique. To achieve this lush effect, the artist patiently added mineral pigment in multiple layers, sometimes more than ten, on top of the ink. When he worked on *Panorama of Mount Lu*, eighty-year-old Chang exerted himself as if he were still a young man, leaning over the paper to apply the pigment in sweeping strokes with a large brush, despite his fragile health and venerable age.

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17 Lin Shiang-chin 林香琴, "1949 zhi 1987 nian 'xiangchou tuxiang'—zhengzhi yu wenhua yunzuo xia zhi Taiwan shuimohua 1949至1987年「鄉愁圖像」——政治與文化運作下之臺灣水墨畫," *Taiwan Meishu* 臺灣美術, No. 87 (Jan., 2012), pp. 73-74.

Chang made this work without ever having been to Mount Lu. As a young man, he had climbed other sacred mountains of China as a prelude to painting them, but not Mount Lu. Why did he choose to paint this particular mountain? Possibly, he wanted to dramatize Mount Lu's status as a symbol of Chinese culture. It did not matter that he could not actually see the mountain range. He was painting its essence not its literal topography. That he could still capture the Mount Lu "of his heart," and paint it so magnificently, showed that he could surmount his physical disconnection from China, and his failing eyesight, to join the many great masters who had painted Mount Lu before him. His version both recalls and transcends earlier masterpieces by Shih-tao 石濤 (1642-1707) and Shen Chou 沈周 (1427-1509). It pays homage to the illustrious poets and painters of China's past, and offers evidence that Chang Dai-chien himself is worthy to be remembered as part of that eminent lineage.

The mountains express his desire for a restoration of respect for ancient culture on China's mainland and internationally. According to the inscription on the painting, the artist still hoped to "cross the creek" and go to Mount Lu someday, "once the noxious mist and evil fogs have washed away."<sup>18</sup> He reinforced this pointed critique with another gesture. A friend who witnessed him working on *Panorama of Mount Lu* took a photograph of two small figures that the artist initially painted on the mountain. Later, Chang decided to cover over these figures, leaving the landscape entirely people-less. He told his friend that he decided to leave Mount Lu vacated of human presence to suggest his disdain for the Cultural Revolution's persecution of scholars.<sup>19</sup> He lamented that political repression had been so dire that he feared no artists of stature remained there to carry on tradition.

In *Panorama of Mount Lu*, Chang demonstrated that Chinese tradition still had within it the potential for revitalization. The blue-and-green splashes are

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18 Shen C.Y. Fu, *Challenging the Past: The Paintings of Chang Dai-chien*, p. 298.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

rooted in antiquity, and yet they convey the dynamism and cross-fertilization of the global contemporary era. While exposure to Euro-American Impressionism, Fauvism, and Abstract Expressionism must have deepened his interest in color and abstraction, he refused to acknowledge those borrowings. His painting projects a proud Chinese identity at a time when Chinese civilization was undergoing a profound crisis. His experimental application of blue and green pigment could not have been attempted, or at least shown publicly, had he stayed in China. Before the relaxation of political controls during the 1980s, China's painters were obliged to paint almost exclusively in bright red, the color symbolizing enthusiasm for Maoist-style revolution.

### **Liang Dan-fong: "With Every Step, the Feeling Deepens"**

When the China-born artist Liang Dan-fong 梁丹丰 (1935-) was five years old, her family walked thirty miles per day to flee Japanese bombings. They were part of the mass exodus of families uprooted from their homes during Japan's invasion of China during World War II. Sometimes they had access to a crowded train or a boat, but mostly the Liang family just walked, ultimately traveling to eighteen different provinces to escape advancing troops. "We used to fear the moonlight, because on such evenings, the Japanese flew bombing missions."<sup>20</sup> The alarm signaling approaching planes sometimes sounded as many as seven times per day. At seven years old, Liang Dan-fong's duty was to cook for the family. When the coast was clear, she hurried out of the bomb shelter to carry water, gather rocks to spark a flame, and cook rice, all before the next alarm sounded. She could use an ax, too, to cut trees for firewood. Liang Dan-fong grew up under these life-threatening conditions. Her father's reliance on her to cook for the family toughened her into becoming a brave and diligent problem-

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20 Author's interview with Liang Dan-fong, July 2012.

solver. In an era in which women were expected to let men take charge, she grew up as her father's surrogate "son."

Her father, Liang Ting-ming 梁鼎銘 (1898-1959), was a well-respected oil painter who studied in Europe in 1929-1930. Witness to the bayoneting and rape of Chinese civilians by Japanese soldiers in 1937-1938, he created dramatic oil paintings recording what he had seen. He intended to have them exhibited in the United States to raise awareness. However, the advancing Japanese troops moved too quickly, and Liang Ting-ming realized that the frank horrors depicted in the paintings, if discovered by Japanese troops, would put his family in danger. He destroyed almost all of them, except for his favorite entitled *The Bloody Bayonet* 血刃圖, which he rolled up and hid in the floor of a church in Hong Kong. After the war, he went back to retrieve it, and then carried it with him to Taiwan in 1947. The painting now belongs to the collection of the Tai-chung Provincial Museum of Art. In this masterly work, the nude woman's body retains its beauty, despite being strewn out on a pile of corpses. She remains luminous white like a marble statue, signaling her unjust treatment at the hands of marauding Japanese soldiers.

After she arrived in Taiwan as a young woman of twelve, Liang Dan-fong enjoyed a stable existence for the first time. She learned English at the YWCA. Already in China, she had briefly attended art classes at the Hangzhou Academy of Art. Practicing diligently on her own, she hoped to become a professional painter like her father. She married in 1955 and raised a family. Then in 1974, at 38 years old, Liang Dan-fong took a brave step, accepting an invitation to study abroad at St. John's University in New York. It was a dangerous time in Taiwan-China relations, making it difficult to obtain permission to travel. Few people in Taiwan could afford the cost of international travel, but Liang Dan-fong was determined to go abroad. She took out a mortgage on her home to buy an airplane ticket including stopovers in both the United States and Europe.



During the 1970s, Chinese painters who could speak fluent English, like her, were a rarity in the West. She was already a mature artist by then, able to paint skillfully in ink, watercolor, or oil. She was largely self-taught in each of the various media. She dressed elegantly in a silk qipao or cheongsam and conducted herself with decorum and grace. Her ability to explain the characteristics of ink painting, and then give a rapid and dramatic demonstration before live audiences, made her a popular guest speaker. Soon she became an unofficial ambassador for Chinese culture. Over time, she received sponsorship from newspapers such as *United Daily* and government sources to publish watercolor sketches and commentary about her travels for audiences back in Taiwan. Representing "Free China" (as Taiwan was called during the Cold War), Liang Dan-fong visited Jordan, Bhutan, Japan, West Germany, Turkey, Paraguay, and the Arctic Circle. She traveled as an advocate for peace, using her painting as a kind of international language for fostering positive relations and enhancing Taiwan's stature on the world stage. She inscribed her watercolor paintings at length in both Chinese and English, perhaps the first Chinese painter to do so.

In 1987, Liang Dan-fong received a special invitation from *United Daily* newspaper to travel to Mainland China. China had just been opened to Taiwanese tourists for the first time since 1949, and the newspaper wanted her to create watercolor sketches of China for Taiwan audiences. She knew that it would be a disquieting emotional journey for her to go back after so many years. Actually, she longed to go there. Part of the reason why she had felt compelled to travel to so many distant places during her adult life was out of homesickness for the place of her childhood. As she explained it, the feeling of attachment to her homeland never waned; rather, it deepened and made her restless the more she travelled to other places. Seeing the Colorado River in America, for example, made her immediately think of the Yellow River in China. So, she was thrilled to return in 1987. She wanted to represent the geography and people of China, so that Chinese culture would be more deeply appreciated by the outside world.

After travelling anonymously and alone throughout China for six months in 1987, Liang Dan-fong produced an award-winning book of sketches and essays entitled *Walking Across My Homeland* 走過中國大陸 and another book of essays entitled *With Every Step, The Feeling Deepens* 一往情深. She began her journey by travelling to the origins of the Yellow River. For her, one way to pay homage to Chinese culture was to paint the Yellow River, long considered the lifeblood of Chinese civilization and the source of what defined the land as Chinese. Upon actually travelling there, she discovered that the river is clear and green at its source, contradicting the often-heard exasperation, "Must one wait until the Yellow River becomes clear?" The water changes to its characteristic yellow, only after it mixes with the *loess* soil of China's heartland.

She returned to parts of China where she travelled as a child. She was saddened to discover how little remained of the China of her memories. Whenever she came upon a remnant of traditional architecture, for example, she



Figure 2: Liang Dan-fong, "Somebody's Home!, Chengdu, Sichuan," watercolor sketch for *My Beloved Homeland*, 1988.

felt compelled to make a picture of it. (Figure 2) Those old structures felt like familiar faces in a landscape greatly changed. Her watercolor sketches immortalize these graceful buildings; nearly emptied of people, at dawn or in the twilight of an evening. Traditional architectural elements are invested with a spiritual aura. They become emblems of China's ancestry, stately and elegant, amidst the fury of modern construction.

According to art critic Ellen J. Laing, Liang Dan-fong's father, Liang Ting-ming, was the most brilliant colorist of the Chinese painters who created calendar posters during the period from 1921-1925:

The color in Liang Ting-ming's calendars is exceptionally rich, because he painted the originals in oil. [He] favored a palette of saturated colors: deep crimson, emerald green, harvest yellow, ultramarine blue, and violet.<sup>21</sup>

The same opulence of color characterizes his daughter's travel sketches. Liang Dan-fong credits Chinese tradition as the primary influence on her sense of color. Her painting supplies include antique mineral-based paint sticks in vivid hues soluble in water. Her father purchased them from antique dealers in China and handed them down to her. Although her father's career was cut short by the vagaries of war, Liang Dan-fong has painted prolifically over four decades and travelled to some eighty countries. She recently donated the majority of her watercolor paintings to the National Central Library archives in Taipei. At seventy-eight, she still keeps a demanding schedule of teaching, painting and writing essays. She hopes that her stories of wartime China will endure as testament to the horror of civil war.

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21 Ellen Johnston Laing, "The British American Tobacco Company Advertising Department and Four of Its Calendar Poster Artists," <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/institutions/laing/laing.htm>, 2002.

## **Ishikawa to his Students: "Paint Taiwan's Local Colors!"**

The origins of modern art on Taiwan can be traced to a single school and a single teacher. In 1895 when Taiwan became a Japanese colony, the National Language School (later renamed Taipei Normal School and currently called Taipei Municipal University) was founded to educate Taiwanese in the Japanese language. During the early years of colonial rule, this school was one of the only places where a Taiwanese could gain a degree in higher education. Most Taiwanese went there to become elementary school teachers.<sup>22</sup> Ishikawa Kinichiro 石川欽一郎 (1871-1945), the art teacher who inspired so many Taiwanese youth to become painters as well as teachers, was a part-time art instructor whose class met only once a week. How did he have such a profound impact? Ishikawa was not just a talented watercolor painter but also a devoted educator. He was the first Western-style painter of considerable fame to come to Taiwan. He became a father figure to many Taiwanese students. He had a missionary-like zeal for teaching Western-style art and often led students on outdoor sketching fieldtrips outside of class. Ishikawa gave his students fundamental training in sketching techniques and great encouragement to paint Taiwan's local scenery. His knowledge of European culture from training under Alfred East (1844-1913), a British watercolorist, and his ethical and refined manner made students admire him as a role model. Their respect for him made them think of art as a noble profession.

Ishikawa was a perceptive evaluator of artistic talent. He did not encourage every student to become a professional artist. For example, one of his earliest students, Ni Chiang-huai 倪蔣懷 (1894-1943), hoped to follow Ishikawa back to Japan and study art at the Tokyo Fine Art School. However, Ni was the only son of well-to-do parents. Ishikawa advised Ni to fulfill his family

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22 Lee Su-san 李淑珍, "Taipei shili jiaoyu daxue xiaoshi dashiji 臺北市立教育大學校史大事紀," [http://activity.utaipei.edu.tw/ezfiles/24/1024/attach/86/pta\\_9651\\_3698375\\_49092.pdf](http://activity.utaipei.edu.tw/ezfiles/24/1024/attach/86/pta_9651_3698375_49092.pdf), December 24, 2006.

responsibilities and remain in Taiwan. Ni bowed to his teacher's suggestion. He founded a profitable coal mining business and became one of Taiwan's premier art patrons while continuing to paint in his spare time. He purchased and assembled a collection of his teacher's paintings, now the most important cluster of Ishikawa's paintings in Taiwan. Ni's financial support for budding artists, especially Ishikawa's students, was critical for Taiwan's developing art community.<sup>23</sup> For example, Ni aided a very talented oil painter named Hung Jui-lin 洪瑞麟 (1912-1996) by giving him a job at his coal mining company. Hung Jui-lin later became famous for painting moving depictions of coal miners working in the shafts underground.<sup>24</sup>

During two teaching stints in Taiwan, 1907-1916 and 1924-1932, Ishikawa ensured that talented art students who had the drive to excel could continue studying art even if they came from a poor family. On one of his sketch tours, for example, Ishikawa met the young Lan Yin-ting 藍蔭鼎 (1903-1979), a precocious talent whose family could not afford to buy art supplies or send him to school. Ishikawa arranged for Lan to audit his class at the National Language School and helped him to obtain a job as a teacher at a nearby school. Lan went on to become one of Taiwan's preeminent watercolor painters.<sup>25</sup> Ishikawa also gave crucial help to a Taiwanese student who was kicked out of the school for organizing a political protest against the Japanese authorities. In 1925, Chen Chih-chi 陳植棋 (1906-1931) led a demonstration against discriminatory school policies giving precedence to Japanese students over the local Taiwanese. Ishikawa intervened and convinced Chen's family to send their son to Japan for advanced study. Ishikawa's support put Chen back on track. He graduated from

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23 Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英, *Shuicai, Zilan: Ishikawa Kinichiro* 水彩·紫瀾：石川欽一郎, (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd. 雄獅圖書公司, 2005), p. 140.

24 Jiang Yan-chou 江衍疇, *Kuanggong, Taiyang: Hung Jui-lin* 礦工·太陽：洪瑞麟 (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 1998).

25 Yen Chuan-ying 顏娟英, *Shuicai, Zilan: Ishikawa Kinichiro*, p. 146.

the Tokyo School of Fine Arts and produced many fine oil paintings. However, Chen's brilliant career was cut short, when he died suddenly of illness in 1931.<sup>26</sup>

Ishikawa encouraged his students to take nature as their true teacher and to strive hard to develop their own personal style. He described Taiwan as the place in the Japanese empire with the most intense colors. He admired the clear and powerful line of Taiwan's mountains visible against the horizon. Ishikawa taught his Taiwanese students that color, even more than shape, was the strongest factor in conveying beauty in painting. He urged students to take their inspiration directly from Taiwan's local scenery and village life.

Ishikawa loved Taiwan, but he was also a loyal Japanese patriot. His way of thinking was not free of the self-aggrandizement of a colonizing nation. At that time, the Japanese believed that the mark of a superior nation was an appreciation for exotica. The Japanese appreciated "nativeness" in Taiwanese painting, because they thought of Taiwanese culture as untamed and primitive compared to their own. Another motive for nurturing Taiwan's local character in art was to eradicate nostalgia for Chinese culture on the island. However, these politically-charged motives would not have affected Ishikawa much, for he was a devoted educator rather than a propagandist. He had learned from his mentor, the British watercolorist Alfred East, to paint on-site and to represent the scene with exacting precision. This insistence on close observation by Ishikawa and other influential Japanese teachers such as Shiotsuki Toho 鹽月桃甫 (1886-1954) and Okada Saburosuke 岡田三郎助 (1869-1939) established a solid foundation for Taiwanese self-expression.<sup>27</sup> Another reason why the impact of Ishikawa's teaching was far-reaching was that he spent an unusual amount of time in

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26 Ibid., p. 145.

27 Hsieh Li-fa 謝里法, "Lun zaoqi Taiwan meishu zhong de haiyang xingge yu zhimin xingge 論早期臺灣美術中的海洋性格與殖民性格," in *Dongya youhua de dansheng yu kaizhan [Oil Painting in East Asia: Its Awakening and Development]* 東亞油畫的誕生與開展 (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum), p. 19.

Taiwan—eighteen years in total. He cultivated close bonds with his Taiwanese students, corresponding with them for his whole life.

Ishikawa himself was a watercolor painter, but most of his students went on to study oil painting. One exception was his student, Lee Tze-fan 李澤藩 (1907-1989), who continued to devote himself to watercolor.<sup>28</sup> Lee began painting in a manner similar to his teacher but soon developed his own style. Whereas Ishikawa used pale, translucent color, Lee sought a bolder, more substantial feeling. Lee's palette included opaque, very bright, blues, pinks, and yellows.<sup>29</sup> (Figure 3) His brushstrokes are heavier and more forceful than his teacher's. He experimented with various techniques to give his watercolor paintings depth and thickness. He is most well-known for the "washing" technique that he developed to

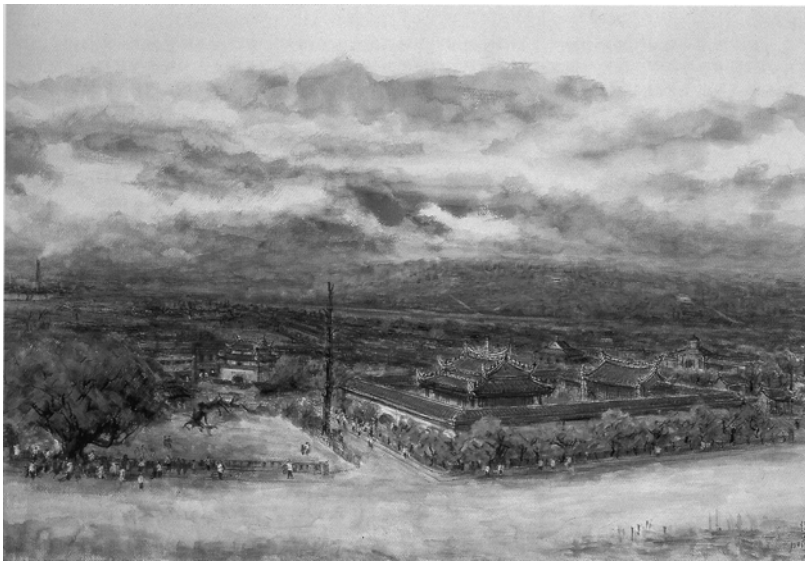


Figure 3: Lee Tze-fan, *A Confucian Temple*, watercolor on paper, 1986, Lee Family Collection.

28 Lee Tze-fan is known in another context as the father of the Nobel-prize winning chemist, Lee Yuan-tseh 李遠哲 (1936-).

29 Su Chi-ming 蘇啟明 (ed.) *Yi xiang qing zhen: Lee Tze-fan shishi shizhounian jinian huaji* 藝鄉情真：李澤藩逝世十週年紀念畫集 (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1999).

add haziness to his landscape paintings.<sup>30</sup> Actually, he invented the "washing" method out of necessity. The paper he used was very expensive, and on a teacher's salary, he needed to be frugal. Once when he wanted to make a correction, instead of discarding the paper, he tried to wash it. Afterwards, he liked the effect. It gave the watercolors a layered look and the thickness of a humid, evening atmosphere. He used this technique to represent mountain mist or steam rising above water.

The most famous Ishikawa student of all is the oil painter, Chen Cheng-po 陳澄波 (1895-1947). Chen's life story has recently been made into a musical entitled "I am the Embodiment of Oil Painting."<sup>31</sup> The title refers to an article that Chen once wrote imagining himself as the pigment spread on his own canvases. Chen's visceral identification with paint itself attests to his dedication to his craft. In another revealing gesture, Chen once painted himself as Van Gogh, a tribute to the painter whose passion for art he admired and shared. Chen lost his parents when he was very young and was raised by his grandmother. He was fortunate to meet Ishikawa at the National Language School, who recognized his talent and remained a close advisor to him for the rest of his life.

In contrast to the soft palette used by his teacher, Chen chose bold rustic colors such as coffee browns, olive greens, and turquoise blues. Chen painted trees very expressively. His tree branches seem to lean and sway in the wind. His treetops are thick and circular like clouds. A native of Chia-yi 嘉義 in southern Taiwan, where the sunshine is very piercing, Chen developed techniques for conveying the humidity and tropical heat of his native place. He added white paint over yellow ground to depict road surfaces. The roads shimmer in the sun and form a contrast to the dark shade of trees and foliage.<sup>32</sup> Ishikawa taught Chen

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30 Chen Hui-yu 陳惠玉, *Xiangyuan, Caibi: Lee Tze-fan 鄉園·彩筆*: 李澤藩 (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 1994), pp. 65-66.

31 Wang You-hui 王友輝 (ed.), *Wo shi youcai de huashen 我是油彩的化身*, DVD of play of same name (Chiayi: Chiayi City Government, 2012).

32 David Wu, "The Colors of a Blazing Life," in Taiwan Soka Association 臺灣創價學會 (ed.),



to focus his compositions around historical landmarks, such as schools or temples, and to add human interest by depicting small figures dotting the scenery. In Chen's paintings, the figures seem to be in motion. Some hold parasols to shield themselves from the sun; others wash dishes or carry loads on poles. They often appear with their backs towards the viewer going about their daily business. Chen invests these small figures with lively authenticity. (Figure 4)



Figure 4: Chen Cheng-po, *Soochow*, oil painting, 1929.

In 1926, Chen became the first Taiwanese oil painter to have his work selected for the Imperial Art Exhibition, (the "Teiten"), Japan's top art competition.<sup>33</sup> Winning such recognition in Japan was a victory not only for himself, but also for his fellow Taiwanese. Taiwanese people still faced many

p. 52, Yan yang xia de Chen Cheng-po [*Under the Searing Sun: A Solo Exhibition by Chen Cheng-po*] 艷陽下的陳澄波 (Taipei: Chin-Shuan Cultural & Educational Foundation 勤宣文教基金會, 2012), p. 48.

33 Lin Yu-chun 林育淳, *You cai, Re qing: Chen Cheng-po 油彩·熱情：陳澄波* (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 1998), pp. 34-36.

discriminatory policies under the Japanese system, but art proved to be a professional field in which true talent could rise.

After graduating from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Chen wanted to study art in Paris, but Ishikawa counseled him to go to China or India instead. Ishikawa thought that studying the essence of East Asian art, especially traditional Chinese painting, would be better for Chen's development than studying French painting. Ishikawa admired Western art very much, but he challenged Chen to do something beyond studying the Western models. The ultimate dream for Asians of that era was to develop a modern Asian painting style distinct from Europe. Another reason why it was preferable for Chen to go to Shanghai rather than Paris was that Chen's wife was practically exhausted from supporting her husband's studies in Japan. Going to Shanghai in the 1920s was more affordable than going to Paris, and Chen could bring his whole family with him.

Even before Ishikawa recommended China as a destination, Chen felt some longing to go to China to learn more about Chinese culture. His father had been a degree-holder under the Qing dynasty when Taiwan was still a part of the Qing empire. In 1929, Chen found a teaching job in Shanghai. Shanghai proved to be a lively atmosphere for studying both modern and traditional Chinese art. He began experimenting with techniques from traditional Chinese landscape painting.<sup>34</sup> For example, his famous painting, *Stream* presents to the viewer a multi-point perspective, such as is often seen in traditional Chinese painting.<sup>35</sup> (Figure 5) The boat in the foreground, the bridge in the middle, and the telephone poles behind the bridge all seem to operate on different planes. Each segment of the painting

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34 On Chen Cheng-po's motives for going to Shanghai to paint, see Chiu Han-ni 邱函妮, "Reappraising Chen Cheng-po's 'Shanghai Period' 陳澄波「上海時期」之再檢討," in Lin Yu-chun and Lee Wei-fen 李瑋芬 (eds.), *Journey through Jiangnan: A Pivotal Moment in Chen Cheng-po's Artistic Quest* 行過江南——陳澄波藝術探索歷程 (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2012), pp. 35-39.

35 Jessica Tsaiji Lyu-Hada, "A Pivotal Moment in Taiwanese Modern Art: Chen Cheng-po's Shanghai Period in Historical Perspective 終始於臺灣——試探陳澄波上海期之意義," in *ibid.*, p. 25.

calls upon the viewer to see it separately, and yet the overall visual look of the composition remains satisfying. The subject matter of *Stream* was also rooted in tradition. Painting West Lake in Hangzhou situated Chen's modern oil painting within a long legacy of Chinese and Japanese poets and painters who had praised West Lake for its spectacular beauty.

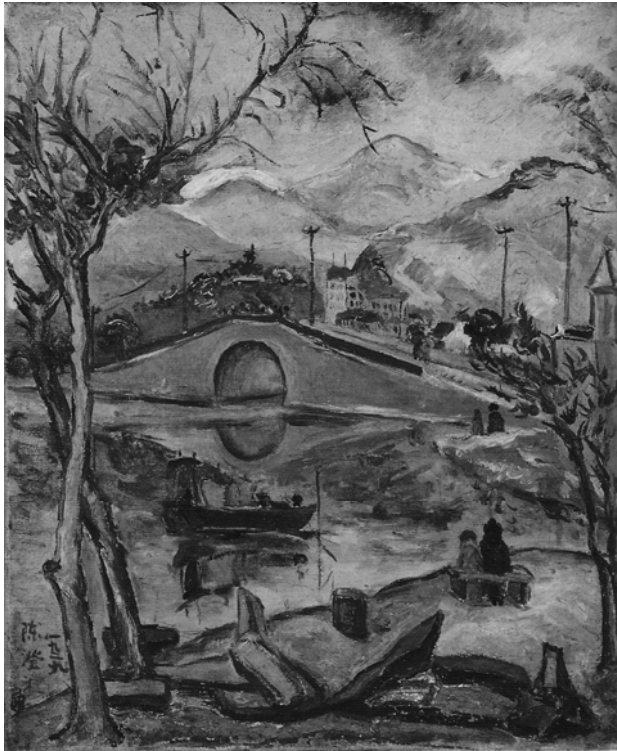


Figure 5: Chen Cheng-po, *Stream*, oil painting, 1929.

Chen and his family returned to Taiwan in 1933 to escape the escalating war between Japan and China. Over the next decade, he worked as a professional painter, completing many of his finest works. With eight other painters, he founded the Tai-yang Art Association 臺陽美術協會 in 1934, a private group dedicated to expanding opportunities for exhibiting paintings in Taiwan. In 1947, at age 53, Chen Cheng-po died at the hands of Nationalist troops during the crackdown following the 2/28 Incident. As city council representative of his

hometown of Chiayi, he tried to negotiate with the entering troops. He spoke fluent Mandarin, and he thought that he could reason with military authorities. However, the soldiers regarded him with suspicion. They were under orders to restore order by any means necessary.

The 2/28 disorder originally broke out in Taipei, when a policeman rough-handed a Taiwanese woman in the marketplace. The local crowd responded in anger. Festering grievances caused the chaos to spread quickly. Some two hundred people were killed or wounded in the early phase of the violence. Once the crackdown began, the number of victims mounted significantly to an estimated 20,000. Despite his role as representative of the local government and peacemaker, Chen Cheng-po was arrested, bound in ropes overnight and publically executed by gunfire in the morning of March 8, 1947. His corpse was laid out for several days as a public warning against other attempts by the local people to come forward. Despite the fact that he was not a dissident, he was suspect to the Nationalist regime as a member of the local cultural elites and owners of his paintings were under threat of arrest or worse. For this reason, many of his masterpieces were destroyed by their owners in the effort to avoid punishment. After his corpse was returned to his family, his wife took a photograph, so that she could have a record of the unjust actions taking the life of her husband. Today, that photograph of a deceased Chen Cheng-po is on display at the 2/28 Memorial Museum in Taipei's Memorial Peace Park. As a testament to Chen's eminence as a painter, his paintings command a higher price on world and regional art markets than the paintings of any other Taiwan-based artist. His works are world class and deserve to be exhibited along with the best art of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Li Mei-shu: Exemplar of "Taiwan Consciousness"

The historian Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑 likens the repeated and radical transformations that Taiwan has been forced to endure—first by the handover to the Japanese in 1895, and then, by the arrival of the Nationalists (Kuomintang/KMT) in 1949—to the making of a palimpsest, a manuscript page containing several layers of text. In medieval times, texts were scraped off and written over to save valuable paper. The buried text was incompletely erased and still legible. Like a palimpsest, Taiwan's culture still holds within it vestiges of each era even as incoming regimes roll out a new way of life. The unjust purging of the native Taiwanese elite in 1947 exemplifies this kind of "scraping off" and "writing over." The irreparable loss of Taiwan's star painter, Chen Cheng-po, at the height of his powers during the transition to Nationalist rule still evokes anger. But Chun-chieh Huang cautions that local sentiment must grow into something more than outrage about past injustices. To continue developing a cultural identity full of depth and substance, Huang argues, the Taiwanese people must create original ideas in the realms of arts, philosophy and religion.<sup>36</sup> They need to gain wisdom from reflecting on these tragic events and continue to develop an open, democratic polity and a humane, tolerant society. Above all, they must take care to protect the gentle, sensitive "*ren qing wei*" (human touch 人情味) that distinguishes their culture and way of life.

One Taiwanese painter who adjusted well to the transition to Nationalist rule was Li Mei-shu 李梅樹 (1902-1983). He was one of the original members of the Tai-yang Art Association founded in 1934 with Chen Cheng-po, among others. Li was a man of principle who tried to heal the rift between the mainlanders (as the migrant evacuees were called) and the native Taiwanese. Li Mei-shu had a dual career as both a politician and an artist. Under the Japanese,

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36 Chun-chieh Huang, *Taiwan in Transformation, 1895-2005, The Challenge of a New Democracy to an Old Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 186-187. The metaphor of the palimpsest is from a private conversation with Professor Huang on June 18, 2012.

he served as the village leader of San-hsia, his hometown. After WWII ended and Taiwan returned to Chinese control, Li Mei-shu became a member of the Nationalist Party (KMT). During the events of 2/28, he urged restraint, and his leadership helped to spare San-hsia from violence. Starting in 1950, he was elected Taipei county commissioner for three consecutive terms. In 1962, he decided to retire from politics and pursue art full time. He devoted himself to art education, serving as teacher and chairman of the painting and sculpture departments at National Taiwan Art College (Banqiao).<sup>37</sup>

As a young man, Li Mei-shu sent his artwork to be evaluated by Ishikawa. The esteemed teacher congratulated Li on his painting of a sunrise, but challenged him "to paint the air at dawn, not just the color."<sup>38</sup> From an early age, Li had wanted to study painting, but his father did not encourage it. His father owned a prosperous rice business, and his brother, seventeen years older, was a well-regarded doctor. Li Mei-shu's intention to study art finally prevailed in 1928, after his father passed away and his elder brother consented to support him financially. He thrived at the Tokyo Fine Arts School, achieving near perfect marks for one of his nude studies. After he returned to Taiwan in 1934, he frequently asked his wife and other female relatives to serve as models for his paintings.

A 1959 painting of his student's sister called *Immersed in Thought* is a beautiful example of Li's mature portrait style. (Figure 6) He artfully arranged her pose, so that we see only the top two-thirds of her body and her face, slightly in profile. Her eyes remain vibrant, though her thoughts drift elsewhere. She leans on one wrist, while the other arm, slender and elegant, touches a color reproduction of Van Gogh's painting, *Sunflowers*. A similar looking vase full of sunflowers on the table mirrors the one in the picture, while a carved wooden Chinese screen frames her face. Li's technical mastery is demonstrated by the

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37 Interview with Li Mei-shu's son, Li Ching-kuang, July 2012.

38 Ibid.

skill with which he has painted her skin tones. Her fingers, too, are gracefully rendered and natural-looking.

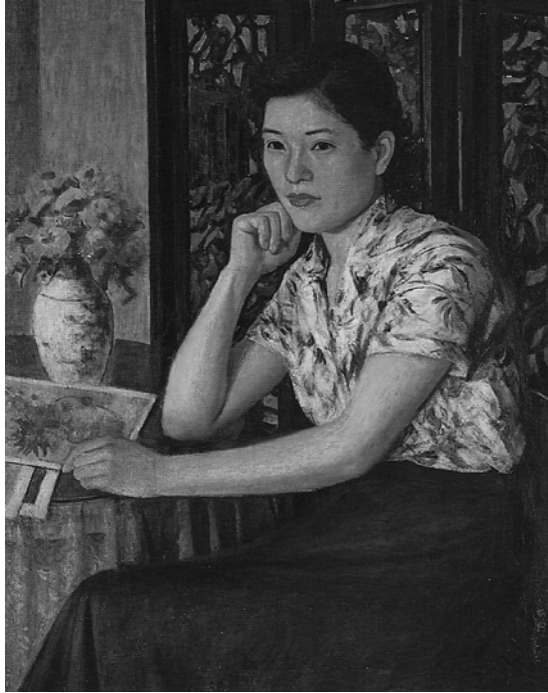


Figure 6: Li Mei-shu, *Immersed in Thought*, oil painting, 1959.

As the reference to Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* implies, Li Mei-shu greatly admired the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters of Europe. However, the most profound influence on his painting was academic salon-style painting from the era prior to the Impressionists. Li never had the opportunity to study in Europe, but he had the means to purchase a catalogue published in London featuring high-quality color reproductions of famous Western masterpieces in European museums. During the period from 1946-1948, he drew inspiration for two of his important paintings, *Outing*, and *Sunset*, from poses found in that catalogue, specifically from a painting by Jules Breton (1827-1906) called *The Recall of the Gleaners*, and one by Marcus Stone (1840-1921) called *On the*

*Road from Waterloo to Paris*.<sup>39</sup> Li studied these two Western paintings of peasant women for ideas as he created his own epic tableau of rural women in Taiwan with his wife, daughters, and other female relatives posing as models. Despite the carefree mood suggested by their titles, *Sunset* and *Outing* were painted at a time of great hardship in Taiwan's history. During the immediate years after World War II, in rural areas, especially, Taiwan suffered from severe food shortages. The noble bearing and sober mood of the women in these paintings expresses the artist's praise for the resilience of the Taiwanese people.

For the last three and half decades of his life, Li Mei-shu led the restoration of the Sanxia Zushi Temple 三峽祖師廟.<sup>40</sup> This design project exemplifies Huang Chun-chieh's concept of inspired Taiwanese consciousness. Li Mei-shu did not simply restore the temple as it was built in 1769; he made it better. He not only worked to preserve local folk art traditions, he insisted on adding modern elements from his fine art training. In 1947, the Zushi ("Great Ancestor") temple was in desperate need of repair and the village elders asked Li Mei-shu to lend his expertise. He accepted the challenge, but he set his goals higher. He dreamed of transforming the temple into a place so outstanding that tourists would come to Sanxia to see it and thus, help the local economy. He not only personally made designs for the temple's stone carvings, but also called upon other famous painters to do the same. He decided on a theme of one hundred birds, a symbol suggesting unity and happiness. He wanted the designs to be based on actual species rather than mythical birds and to include both foreign and local bird species. In total, there are approximately one thousand bird carvings on columns throughout the temple. It is estimated that each stone column required 1,000

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39 Liao Chin-yuan 廖瑾瑗, "Li Mei-shu zhanhou chuqi de qunxiang biaoqian 李梅樹戰後初期的群像表現," in Hsieh Ming-hui 謝鳴輝, Hsu Yung-hsien 徐永賢 (eds.), *Li Mei-shu: Taiwan qinghuai—bainian jinian zhuanji* 李梅樹：臺灣情懷——百年紀念專輯 (Taipei: Taipei County Cultural Foundation, 2005), pp. 140-159.

40 See Kikuchi Yuko, "Li Mei-shu and the *Sanxia Zushi Temple*: Taiwanese Vernacular 'Modernity' in Comparative Perspectives," in *Li Mei-shu jiaoshou bainian jinian xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 李梅樹教授百年紀念學術研討會論文集 (Taipei: College of Humanities, National Taipei University, 2001), pp. 190-204.



working days. Li insisted that the carving be done entirely by hand, because one of his goals for the construction project was to make the temple a showcase for local Taiwan handicrafts.<sup>41</sup>

### **Taiwan's Bold Colorists: Chen Hui-kun, Yen Shui-lung, and Liao Chi-chun**

As an art student in Japan, Chen Hui-kun 陳慧坤 (1907-2011) loved French Impressionism and wanted to be trained in its methods. He attempted to test into the highly coveted oil painting department at Tokyo College of Arts, but was turned down. After being admitted to an art teacher training course at the same institution in 1928, Chen inquired of his Japanese teacher how to paint like an Impressionist. His teacher told him to simply copy Impressionist paintings from reproductions and then practice sketching outdoors.<sup>42</sup> Frustrated with this unsatisfactory answer, Chen decided to set aside his interest in Impressionism and concentrate on learning the predominant technique then offered in Japan: gouache 膠彩 on paper.

Gouache is a type of glue made from deer or cow. It is mixed with mineral powder and water and is typically applied to paper in meticulous detail. The technique was originally developed in China then transferred to Japan; but it has come to be identified as "Japanese," because it eventually died out in China but continued to be practiced in Japan.<sup>43</sup> After Taiwan was handed back to China, the incoming Nationalist regime sought to expunge the influence of Japanese culture. Artists who had learned to paint with gouache prior to 1945 faced pressure to switch to Chinese ink painting, or at least adopt some Chinese painting

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41 Lin Sen-shou, "A God's Request: Tsushih Temple," *Tzu Chi Quarterly*, 1, 5 (Spring, 1998), p. 21.

42 Chen Shu-hua 陳淑華, *Juanyong, Ziran: Chen Hui-kun 雋永·自然：陳慧坤* (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 2001), pp. 24-25.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

techniques, because gouache was so identified with Japan. Some critics in the 1970s wanted to abandon the practice altogether. However, a compromise was reached to simply change the name of the practice from *tung-yang hua* (which reminded people of Japan) to *jiao cai hua* 膠彩畫, (literally, glue or gouache painting).<sup>44</sup>

Chen Hui-kun was one of the artists who wanted to continue painting in gouache, although he still harbored a dream to learn the techniques of the Impressionists. At age 54, he finally had the opportunity to go to Paris during a sabbatical from his teaching. Once in Paris, he went to the museums each day, bringing the color reproductions that he had studied for years to compare them with original paintings. He took note of which colors were different from what he saw in the book. After studying Monet's paintings firsthand, Chen discovered that Monet used bright yellows and blues to represent shimmering light.<sup>45</sup> This stimulated him to start painting with oils in an Impressionist style. Actually, he still liked painting with gouache; only he wanted to discover a way to invest gouache with oil painting's thickness and strength.

During the 1950s, Chen had also studied Chinese ink painting. His colleague at Taiwan Provincial Teachers' College was none other than the esteemed Chinese painting master, Pu Hsin-yu 浦心畬 (1896-1963), the cousin of the last emperor of the Qing dynasty and a devout traditionalist. Chen admired Pu's elegant and refined painting. They became friends, and Chen began to learn from his colleague in his spare time. This exposure to Chinese painting practice led Chen to begin using the long vertical format of Chinese painting for his gouache painting. He also tried to import the "peaceful aspect" of Chinese painting into his gouache painting.<sup>46</sup> Whereas some modern painters rejected

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44 Another famous Taiwanese master of gouache is Lin Chih-chu 林之助 (1917-2008). On gouache controversies in Taiwan, see Liao Chin-yuan, *Jiaocai, Yayun: Lin Chih-chu 膠彩·雅韻*: 林之助 (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 2003), pp. 127-129.

45 Chen Shu-hua, *Juanyong, Ziran: Chen Hui-kun 雋永·自然*: 陳慧坤, p. 72.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

Chinese ink painting as an empty relic with no life in it, Chen saw it as a gateway offering new paths.

By the 1970s, Chen had synthesized these diverse elements—including Monet's impressionism and Pu Hsin-yu's Chinese ink painting—into a mature style of landscape painting, all his own. Sometimes he used oils, but more often gouache, because he enjoyed gouache's vividness of color. In his paintings of waterfalls, coastlines, mountainsides, or temple architecture, the color is so brilliant as to look almost surreal. (Figure 7) His paintings seem to be dreamscapes emanating from the imagination; however, each one is the product of his meticulous observation.

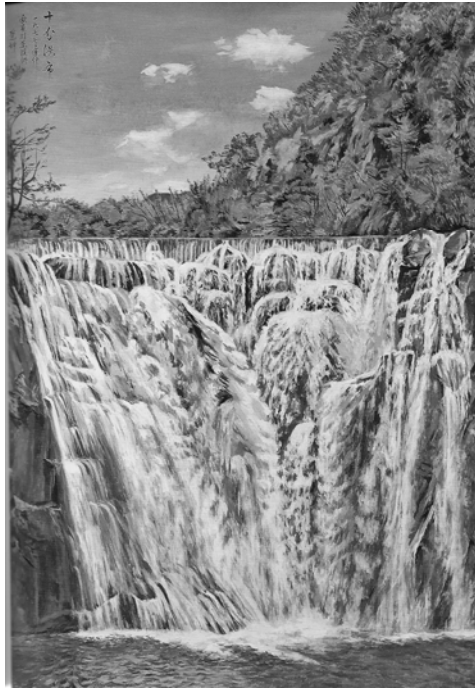


Figure 7: Chen Hui-kun, *Waterfall*, 1977, gouache on paper.

Another Taiwanese painter, Yen Shui-lung 顏水龍 (1903-1997), walked a different road to become a brilliant colorist. He also received his art education at the Tokyo Fine Arts School, but he studied oil painting with Takeji Fujishima 藤

島武二 (1867-1943), a painter who had trained in France and was well-versed in Impressionism. After graduating in 1929, Yen tried to find a job as an art teacher in Taiwan, but did not succeed, because most of the teaching positions in Taiwan were held by Japanese. Yen's parents died when he was very young, and his financial position was insecure. In 1930, friends and relatives gave him great encouragement by raising money for him to travel to Paris, a rare opportunity at that time. At the Academie Art Moderne, Yen studied with Fernand Léger (1881-1955) and Jean-Baptiste Marchand (1863-1934). Perhaps the most consequential event for Yen personally, while he was in Paris, was the grand Paris International Colonial Exhibition in 1931. There, he was introduced to primitive art from around the world. He went to the exhibition repeatedly and became interested in merging modern design principles with traditional handicrafts. When he later returned to Taiwan, he began his lifelong quest to study the aboriginal people's culture as a resource for developing Taiwan's modern art.

Inspired by Gauguin's trip to paint the natives of Tahiti, Yen went to Orchid Island along Taiwan's Eastern coast in 1935 to study the customs of the Tao people 達悟族. One of his first paintings about Orchid Island copied a pose from Gauguin's masterpiece, "Where Do We Come from? What are We? Where are We Going?" as an expression of homage to Gauguin.<sup>47</sup> On subsequent trips, Yen established strong ties with the Tao people, and studied their traditional clothing and life customs. He created vivid paintings representing their dignified way of life living close to the sea under sunlit skies. The Tao people's canoes, with upturned tips and decorated with totems of the sun, became a common theme in Yen's oil paintings. (Figure 8) By painting the Tao people's spirit in brilliant oranges, yellows and reds, he hoped to inspire more respect for the wisdom of aboriginal peoples living in accord with nature.

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47 Yen Chuan-ying, "The Human Spirit of the Taiwanese Landscape—The Oil Paintings of Shui-Long Yen 臺灣風景的人文精神——顏水龍油畫創作," in Lei Yi-ting 雷逸婷 (ed.), *Zoujin gongzhong, Meihua Taiwan: Yan Shuilong [The Public Spirit, Beauty in the Making: Shui-Long Yen] 走進公眾·美化臺灣：顏水龍* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2011), p. 289.



Figure 8: Yen Shui-long, *Seen on Orchid Island*, oil painting, 1982.

Whereas Yen Shui-lung's concept of beauty was centered on the aboriginal culture of Orchid Island, another painter of his generation, Liao Chi-chun 廖繼春 (1902-1976), focused on traditional Chinese architecture as a resource for his development. Liao Chi-chun was an oil painter, and a close friend of Chen Cheng-po. They had been classmates together at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts during the 1920s. From early on, Liao focused on color as the most important element in painting. He drew inspiration from both the bright red interiors of Chinese temples and the blues and greens of Qing dynasty ceramics. In art school, Liao was captivated by the bold colors of the Fauvist School of France, particularly Matisse's and Derain's paintings.

However, the seminal influence on Liao's painting came from a Japanese painter who frequently visited Taiwan named Umehara Ryūzaburō 梅原龍三郎 (1888-1986). On three occasions from 1933 to 1935, Liao had the opportunity to accompany Umehara on sketch tours to the southern city of Tainan, the earliest developed city in Taiwan and the site of many examples of traditional

architecture. Upon taking Umehara to the Confucian Temple in Tainan, Liao was surprised to observe how speedily and freely Umehara painted the temple's architecture. On the first day, Umehara used pencil to do a draft. On the second day, he used watercolor to paint over the draft; and on the third day, he made the final version using oils. The primary colors that Umehara used, and the free and rapid manner in which he painted, gave Liao inspiration to paint his own work with a more liberated feeling. However, Liao was immersed in a very conservative environment. It would take him several decades to absorb and accept these freeing impulses.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout his career, Liao was a well-regarded teacher at Taiwan Provincial Teachers' College. He was rare among his generation for getting along well with both students and the older generation of artists. During the 1960s, controversies over modern art in Taiwan became very divisive.<sup>49</sup> Liao favored the new ideas. Some of his students formed the modern art group, Fifth Moon Group 五月畫會. Beginning around 1957, Liao himself experimented with abstract art.

In 1962, Liao was selected to participate in an art exchange visit sponsored by America's State Department.<sup>50</sup> He took full advantage of this opportunity to visit art museums in both the US and Europe. He later told a friend that Jackson Pollock's Abstract Expressionist paintings moved him deeply when he saw them in person. This visit gave him the courage and encouragement to grow bolder in

48 Wang Su-feng 王素峰, *Zhongguo Jujiang Meishu Zhoukan: Liao Chi-chun [Masters of Chinese Painting: Liao Chi-chun]* 中國巨匠美術週刊：廖繼春, No. 023 (Taipei: Fairview Press 錦鏞出版社, 1995), p. 16.

49 Lee Su-san, "Xu Fuguan lun xiandai yishu—yishu, zhengzhi yu renxing [Xu Fuguan on Modern Art: Art, Politics and Humanity]", in *Anshen li ming: Xiandai huaren gongsi lingyu de tansuo yu chongjian [Soul in Peace: The Intellectual Re-orientation of Private and Public Spheres in Republic China]* (Taipei: Linking Books, 2013), pp. 311-359.

〈徐復觀論現代藝術——藝術、政治與人性〉，收於《安身立命：現代華人公私領域的探索與重建》（台北：聯經出版社，2013年），頁311-359。

50 On Liao Chi-chun's trip to USA and Europe, see Lee Chin-hsien 廖欽賢, *Secai, Hexie: Liao Chi-Chun 色彩・和諧：廖繼春* (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 1997), pp. 104-122.

following his feelings when he painted. He continued to go out sketching, but he concerned himself more with expressing the spirit of what he saw.

While in Spain, Liao sketched the city of Toledo, the subject of a famous landscape by the painter, El Greco (1540/41-1614). Perhaps Liao felt a connection with El Greco, whose supernatural visions inspired many modernists. Certainly, Liao admired the picturesque setting of Toledo, especially its cathedral perched on a hill.<sup>51</sup> As the ancient capital of Spain, Toledo's historic city possibly reminded him of Tainan's architecture, the site which had inspired him as a young man. In a masterful semi-abstract painting of Toledo completed in 1975, Liao portrayed a vast space as rich in color as a stained glass window or a "five-color" enamel porcelain. The buildings look red and yellow where sunlight hits and turquoise and green, where sunlight is absent. (Figure 9) Most of what we see is a winding road spiraling up to the city. Our eyes follow the ramp, first right then left then back again, like a conductor's waving baton, marking time to music. The white tower at the top draws our eye up and fixes our attention at the center of the picture. The spire points upward still—towards a soft pink sky. This painting does not simply portray Toledo, but an aspiration, to climb to a high place and live in spirituality and hope. Liao's landscape transcends his Taiwanese roots: it creates a sense of the sacred, timeless and universal. The artist himself viewed this as his masterpiece. He hung it prominently in his living room. After his death, Liao's son, Liao Chu-wen 廖述文, donated the painting to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.<sup>52</sup>

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51 According to the author's interviews with his family, Liao was a Christian.

52 Wang Su-feng, *Zhongguo Jujiang Meishu Zhoukan: Liao Chi-chuna*, pp. 26-27.



Figure 9: Liao Chi-chun, *Toledo, Spain*, oil painting, 1975.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that Taiwan's painters were leading contributors to a revolution in color which forever changed East Asian art. Their world-class achievements have been underappreciated. During the early twentieth century, Asian artists responded to Modernist trends in Europe and America and began painting more colorfully. New techniques of on-site sketching and the introduction of oil paint shook the foundations of Chinese and Japanese ink painting as it had been practiced for centuries. The painters featured here reacted creatively to this challenge. They did not accept international trends wholesale, but assimilated them through the lens of existing Asian traditions. Influences from ink painting, local geography, temple architecture, porcelain, and aborigine customs shaped their approaches. The Japanese colonization of Taiwan, a period when educators such as Ishikawa systematically introduced European painting



methods, produced a cohort of painters, professionally trained, sophisticated in outlook, and committed to watercolor and oil painting. Painters who moved from China to Taiwan after 1949, like Chang Dai-chien and Liang Dan-fong, remained committed to ink painting but expanded its boundaries. Grateful for the sanctuary Taiwan offered, they considered themselves ambassadors of a resilient art form centered on brushwork practice. Their ability to travel internationally gave them the perspective to consider Chinese tradition open to revision. Though most Chinese painters of recent centuries used color sparingly and regarded it as secondary to ink, these two saw ample precedent in China's tradition for a more serious engagement with color. Liang Dan-fong employed color poetically in her travel-sketching. Chang Dai-chien, an unmatched master colorist, created his final masterpiece in Taiwan.♦

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