

The Emergence of New Art Taiwan (1895 – 1945)

Mr. Chang Yi-Hsiung lived in a time of monumental change for China and Taiwan. As a result of Japan being the victor of the Sino-Japanese war, Taiwan was succeeded to them from China (1895 – 1945). Japan at this time was undergoing rapid modernization and industrialization by looking toward western civilization as a model. This exposed the Taiwan culture to the “modern age”. The Japanese were responsible for allowing a very different culture to develop in Taiwan than what occurred in mainland China.

The Japanese provided infrastructure for Taiwan by creating an education system that was available to all students. Infrastructure was also provided where roads, water supply and electricity was also made available. This stability allowed for the formation of a stable middle class with professional trades people being able to form a stable economy.

Japanese influence gave Taiwan access to Japan’s links with western art, giving birth to a “New Art Movement” in Taiwan. There were many factors behind this—the most important ones being the roll out of a new fine arts curriculum and the setting up of government-sponsored art exhibitions. Key in the promotion of New Art was its teaching in painting classes, which were part of Taiwan’s new education system. In addition, a number of Japanese painters came to Taiwan to invest in arts education, and worked to popularize fine arts. This led to many talented students becoming determined to pursue art, some going to Japan to study. The opening of the Taiwan Fine Art Exhibition in October 1927 can be regarded as marking Taiwanese art’s first steps on its march towards a professionalized system.

Although on the surface the study of New Art was the study of the concepts and techniques of western painting, the jurors of the newly set-up government-sponsored exhibition and Japanese art instructors strongly called on Taiwan’s artists to show Taiwan’s local character (namely its so-called “local color”) in their work. Portraying Taiwan’s natural scenery became the trend in painting. Nature, folk customs and the beauty of the human cultural landscape were all major subjects. These distinguishing features of Taiwan developed into a major part of this period’s aesthetic viewpoint. Through official initiatives, western art forms and Toyoga replaced the traditional ink painting passed on to Taiwan in the Ching Dynasty. In this context of modernization, a unique “local color” of art was born, and became the mainstream, with the birth of “made in Taiwan paintings”, “tropical colors” and “pan-impressionism” as proof of this.

The Western-style artists of this time who studied in Japan — (include Chen Cheng-bo, Chang Chou-hai, Wang Bai-yuan, Yen Shui-long, Chen Chih-chi, Liao Chi-chun, Li Mei-shu, Li Shih-chiao, Liao Te-cheng, Yang San-lang, Liu Chi-hsiang, Chang Chi-hua, Hong Ruei-lin, Chin Ruen-tzuo, Chen Te-wang and **Chang Yi-Hsiung**). Some of these artists (i.e. such as Chang Yi-Hsiung) spent part of their lives overseas in Europe to further refine their style of art incorporating the technique of European Masters with the “New Art of Taiwan”.