

History, Identity, and the Politics of Taiwan's Museums

Reflections on the DPP-KMT Transition ⁽¹⁾

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Museums in Taiwan—as elsewhere—have always been embroiled in politicised debates over collective identity, both reflecting and helping to shape the contours of identity discourse. During the four decades of the Martial Law era, the Kuomintang (KMT) regime used museums as vehicles for its campaigns to nurture patriotic citizens of a “Republic of China” encompassing the entire Chinese mainland. However, with the onset of democratisation from the late 1980s, museums increasingly reflected and reinforced a strengthening consensus over Taiwan’s historical and cultural distinctiveness, while also mirroring the considerable pluralism of popular identity consciousness. This trend was accentuated under the regime of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) after 2000, but 2008 witnessed the return to power of a KMT determined to establish warmer ties with China. This paper examines the extent to which the new regime’s more accommodative approach to China has extended into the realm of museums, while considering whether developments within the sector, and within broader Taiwanese society, mean that museums are no longer quite the pliable tools of official cultural policy that they once were.

Taiwan’s identity struggles since the late 1980s have arisen out of a self-styled “nativist” reaction against the preceding decades of Chinese nationalist propaganda under the Kuomintang (KMT), whose ideology was promoted through various organs of state cultural policy. This reaction began under the rule of the KMT itself, gathering momentum during the presidency of Lee Teng-hui in the 1990s, when cultural “indigenisation” (*bentuhua*) became integral to a broader strategy for bolstering KMT legitimacy during Taiwan’s transition to democracy. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) regime between 2000 and 2008 sought to deploy many of the institutions inherited from the old KMT state—in both the educational and cultural sectors—for the promotion of strong messages concerning Taiwan’s historical and cultural distinctiveness from China. Museums were given a prominent role in the scheme for “building up the nation on the basis of culture” (*wenhua li guo*). As had Lee Teng-hui’s regime, the DPP administration of Chen Shui-bian saw the construction of a distinctive sense of Taiwanese identity—to be popularised at home and promoted abroad—as central to its cultural policy.⁽²⁾

This article builds on previous work on the portrayal of national identity in museums before and during the period of DPP rule,⁽³⁾ and asks what the return to power in 2008 of the KMT has meant for Taiwan’s museums. During October 2009, the author visited four of the major state-run museums most intimately

associated with the portrayal of the island’s cultural and historical identity, interviewed senior staff, and collected information on recent and current exhibitions. On the basis of the data collected then and during previous trips in 2004 and 2005,⁽⁴⁾ this paper

1. The author gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Taiwan’s Ministry of Education in the form of a Taiwan Studies Research Fellowship, which made possible his visit to Taiwan in October 2010. Gratitude is also due to the British Academy and to National Taiwan Normal University, who funded research trips undertaken in 2004–5. Particular thanks also go to Frank Muiard for extremely helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. Many thanks are also due to Meg Wang, Patricia Huang, Professor Hu Chia-yu, Professor Wu Mi-cha, and all of those who were kind enough to agree to be interviewed for this study.
2. While the KMT never sought to deny Taiwan’s cultural links with China, the DPP has been portrayed as pursuing a far more radical programme, amounting to “de-sinification.” (Chang, Bi-yu “Constructing the Motherland: Culture and the State since the 1990s,” in D. Fell, H. Kloter, and Chang B. (eds.), *What has Changed? Taiwan Before and After the Change In Ruling Parties*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006, p. 202.) For a slightly earlier consideration of the Lee Teng-hui period, see Stephane Corcuff, “The Symbolic Dimension of Democratization and the Transition of National Identity under Lee Teng-hui,” in S. Corcuff (ed.), *Memories of the Future: National Identity Issues and the Search for a New Taiwan*, Armonk (NY), M.E. Sharpe, 2002. The volume *Cultural, Ethnic and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan*, edited by John Makeham and A-Chin Hsiao (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), looks at various aspects of the trend towards “indigenisation” during and since the Lee Teng-hui period.
3. Edward Vickers, “Rewriting Museums in Taiwan,” in Shih F., P. Tremlett, and S. Thompson (eds.), *Rewriting Culture in Taiwan*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, pp. 69–101. See also Edward Vickers, “Frontiers of Memory,” in Rana Mitter and Sheila Miyoshi Jager (eds.), *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-cold War in Asia*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 209–232.
4. The interviews referred to in this paper are as follows: Chou Kung-shin (Director, NPM), 21 October 2009; Huang Yung-Ch’uan (Director, NMH), 20 October 2009; Lu Li-cheng (Director, NTMH), 21 October 2009; Tu Cheng-sheng (Director, NPM), 12 January 2004; Wei Chen Yu (Education and Exhibition Dept, NTM), 20 October 2009.

seeks to locate contemporary developments in the museums sector in the broader context of recent works on culture and identity on the island. It offers a necessarily tentative analysis of what the latest change in regime has meant for the representation of Taiwan's own identity and history, of its relationship with China, of aboriginal history and culture, and of ethnic pluralism more broadly. There is also some discussion of the recent revival of cross-Strait "museum diplomacy" and its implications for the portrayal of Taiwan to mainland Chinese, and of China to the people of Taiwan. The paper concludes by considering whether Taiwan is witnessing a return to what Chang has termed the "schizophrenia" of KMT cultural policy during the 1990s,⁽⁵⁾ and—to the extent that it is—what this may mean for Taiwanese society and for the all-important relationship with China.

History, ideology, and identity

Taiwan has been aptly termed a "laboratory of identities" by Stephane Corcuff,⁽⁶⁾ and scholars interested in the culture and politics of identity have duly flocked there to observe and research. Amongst the key issues that exercise observers of the island's identity politics are the relationship between elite attempts to mould identity, and popular receptiveness or resistance to such efforts. Museums in most societies (not just Taiwan) can be seen as institutionalising what Stevan Harrell terms "narratives of unfolding"—portrayals of national or ethnic identity as eternally fixed and clearly defined by selecting from available historical evidence to convey the sense of "an inevitable unfolding of [national/ethnic] destiny from the primordial past."⁽⁷⁾ These narratives thus "actively hide the fluidity and changeability of identity and group membership."⁽⁸⁾ However, though elites deploy such narratives in attempting to manipulate popular consciousness, this does not imply a view of identity formation as simply a top-down process. The readiness of a populace to internalise such narratives, Brown argues, depends on the extent to which they resonate with people's lived experience. Thus, where a "narrative of unfolding" conspicuously fails to tally with family lore, social memory, or individual experience, people may simply reject it. This seems to have been the case with the narrative of Taiwan's place in China relentlessly touted by the KMT prior to the 1990s, and still promoted by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to this day (though Beijing's Taiwan propaganda is directed primarily at a mainland constituency with whom it does resonate). However, if this portrayal of Taiwan as merely an island outpost of a mainland-centred Chinese state sank relatively shal-

low roots in popular consciousness, Brown argues that long-established assumptions concerning Han culture appear to have had a far deeper impact on the conceptualisation of history and identity. She notes that "although people in Taiwan distance themselves from Chinese national identity, they often do so from within a Han cultural perspective."⁽⁹⁾ This is revealed, she claims, in the way in which attempts to narrate a distinctive island story for Taiwan "accept the assumptions that borders to Han and Chinese identities are clearly defined and that these identities are inextricably linked to each other."⁽¹⁰⁾ Han identity is typically construed in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, myths associated with the Confucian civilising mission hold that Chinese identity can be acquired through the adoption of Chinese (i.e. Han) culture; but on the other hand, social practices reinforced by the highly patriarchal Confucian ethical code have deeply entrenched the assumption that Han identity is inextricably associated with Han ancestry (passed down the male line).⁽¹¹⁾

Previous research on cultural and educational policy has shown how attempts to construct a Taiwanese identity in such a way as to delegitimise Chinese sovereignty have often implicitly accepted a correspondence between "Han" ethnicity and political "Chineseness."⁽¹²⁾ This in part explains the emphasis that has been placed by many advocates of Taiwanese independence on the significance of the island's (non-Han) aboriginal heritage, and the extent to which many Taiwanese can claim mixed Han-aboriginal ancestry. It has also contributed to a heightened interest since the 1990s in the influence of Japanese, Dutch, and any other non-Chinese actors on the development of Taiwanese culture and identity.

Meanwhile, there have also been attempts to articulate a vision of Taiwan simply as a community of all the island's in-

5. Chang, "Constructing the Motherland," *op. cit.*, p. 199.
6. See S. Corcuff (ed.), *Memories of the Future*, *op. cit.*, "Introduction."
7. Melissa Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power and Migration on Changing Identities*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 6.
8. Stevan Harrell, "Introduction," in Melissa Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, Berkeley, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1996, pp. 1-18, p. 5—cited in Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
9. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
10. *Ibid.*
11. See, for example, Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, *op. cit.*, and David Faure and Tao Tao Liu, *Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1996.
12. See Vickers, "Rewriting Museums in Taiwan," and "Frontiers of Memory," *op. cit.* On education, see also Mei-Hui Liu, Li-Ching Hung and Edward Vickers, "Identity Issues in Taiwan's History Curriculum," in Edward Vickers and Alisa Jones (ed.), *History Education and National Identity in East Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 101-131.

habitants—as with Lee Teng-hui’s “New Taiwanese” discourse of the late 1990s. This view seeks to promulgate the idea that Taiwan, like the United States, can assert a right to determine its own separate destiny on the basis of shared principles and experiences. This vision competes with two more totalising ones: the old KMT (and current Chinese Communist Party (CCP)) view of Taiwan as culturally, ethnically, and historically inseparable from the Chinese “motherland”; and a mirror-image of the latter constructed by some advocates of Taiwanese independence, emphasising the primordial roots and manifest destiny of a “multicultural,” non-Han, but nonetheless essentialised “Taiwanese-ness.” As one senior figure in the cultural bureaucracy under the first Chen administration put it in 2005, referring to some of his erstwhile colleagues, “they take the word *Zhongguo* [from the old KMT narratives], and replace it with the word *Taiwan*.”⁽¹³⁾ However, this comment in itself stands as testament to a growing sophistication in public debate over the representation of Taiwanese identity; elsewhere in East Asia, such questioning of established pseudo-biological discourses of national identity is still systematically marginalised.⁽¹⁴⁾

Museums offer just one window onto the development of identity discourse in contemporary Taiwan and, given the way in which museums in the Republic of China (ROC) are run, this is primarily a window into the official or governmental landscape (at least in the case of the major museums considered here). However, no neat division between official and popular discourses can be posited, especially in a society as open and democratic as Taiwan has become. The very closeness of museums to government, their inescapable involvement in representing identities, and the extreme sensitivity of press and public to portrayals of identity all mean that those responsible for museums are compelled to engage with the politics of identity whether or not they see this as a legitimate aspect of their role. This does not mean that museum directors have no autonomy vis-à-vis the government, but it means that they must negotiate a path between the cultural agenda of their political masters and the various agendas of the media to whose scrutiny their every move may be subjected.

The official cultural agenda thus remains hugely important in conditioning the way in which museums operate and the kinds of messages about identity that they convey. This article will later consider the extent to which the KMT now offers its own coherent “narrative of unfolding” through museums and cultural policy in the way that it did during the Martial Law era, or as the DPP attempted to do prior to 2008. At the same time, consideration will also be given to the question of whether, as viewed through the island’s muse-

ums, identity discourse in Taiwan may be starting to transcend issues of ancestry and culture (conceived in rigid terms), and embracing more fully the significance of lived social experience and the diversity of narratives of the past for which this can form the basis. Linked to this issue is the question of the extent to which gains made during the post-Martial Law era in raising the professionalism and autonomy of the museums sector are rendering that sector less susceptible to political manipulation than it was in the past.

Museums and politics in contemporary Taiwan—an overview

Major publicly-funded museums in many countries are treated as organs of the state, and often attract intense political controversies—even when, as in many democracies, their administrative arrangements place them at one remove from direct governmental control. In Taiwan, however, the main national museums are not just publicly-funded institutions—they are also directly state-administered. There are no boards of trustees charged with overseeing their management while defending their autonomy against attempts at direct political interference; museum directors are appointed by and directly accountable to government ministries. This reflects the importance attached by the KMT, from its inception on the mainland, to cultural policy in general, and museums in particular, as instruments for imposing a state-centred vision of “Chineseness”—a mission that was fervently visited upon Taiwan’s recalcitrant population from the 1940s. The fact that this administrative structure has not been significantly altered since the advent of democratisation partly reflects the fact that elites critical of the old Chinese nationalist orthodoxy have found it expedient to re-deploy the highly centralised machinery of cultural policy for the purposes of promulgating a very different sort of identity discourse. Proposals to strengthen the formal autonomy of the directors of public museums—for example by instituting fixed-term appointments—have so far come to nothing.⁽¹⁵⁾ The hierarchical and centralised nature of the museums sector is illustrated by the details of a scheme introduced recently

13. Quoted in Vickers, “Rewriting Museums in Taiwan,” *op. cit.*, p. 96.

14. See Mitter and Jager (eds.), *Ruptured Histories*, *op. cit.*, and, on the origins and history of these identity discourses, Frank Dikotter (ed.), *The Construction of Racial Identity in China and Japan*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1997.

15. This proposal was made by Wu Mi-cha. See Wu Mi-cha, *Jianli yi zuo guojia lishi bowuguan* (“Constructing a Museum of National History”), in Frank Muyard, Liang-Kai Chou, and Serge Dreyer (eds.), *Objects, Heritage and Cultural Identity*, Nantou, Taiwan Historica, 2009, pp. 285-292.

by the new KMT regime (but already under discussion prior to 2008) to rank or grade the island's major museums. The main government-funded museums have been assigned levels in a four-tier hierarchy, the top grade of which is oddly vacant. The National Palace Museum (NPM) alone is designated "Grade Two," the National Museum of History (NMH—along with a handful of others) is "Grade Three," and all other national-level museums are "Grade Four." Other museums—such those administered at county level—do not even figure in this four-grade hierarchy. These "grades" are designed to help rationalise a long-established system of differentiated administrative arrangements:⁽¹⁶⁾ the NPM is responsible directly to the Executive Yuan (the President's cabinet), of which its Director is a member; the NMH answers to the Ministry of Education; and the National Taiwan Museum (NTM) and National Museum of Taiwan History (NMTH) are administered by the Council of Cultural Affairs (CCA), which also plays a role in overseeing "lower"-level institutions. Recruitment to the museums service, meanwhile, is governed by examinations that prioritise specialist academic knowledge (in anthropology, archaeology, history, or sub-disciplines thereof).⁽¹⁷⁾

This combination of a highly academic orientation with a long-established system of close state regulation has created a museums sector that is highly susceptible to political direction but run by a cadre of senior curators encouraged to see themselves as detached and disinterested academic specialists. At a 2006 symposium in Taipei, a paper delivered by the present author that highlighted the influence of politics on the running of state museums was greeted with a furious rebuttal by the recently-retired director of a "Grade Three" museum. Such emphatic denials of politicisation appear common, at least amongst those who began their careers in the sector during the Martial Law era. All three museum directors interviewed for this study asserted that politics had little or nothing to do with the running of their museums—insisting instead on a "professional" ethos, or emphasising that the cultural mission of museums rendered them apart from the grubby mundane world of politicians.⁽¹⁸⁾

Such a stance is perhaps hardly surprising: exalted scholarly status was the reward for service in the museum bureaucracy of the KMT era, and academic detachment a rationale for declining to challenge the reigning cultural orthodoxy, or even to recognise that there was any orthodoxy to challenge. At the same time, museum professionals in Taiwan have increasingly strong connections to their counterparts in Western countries, where museums often enjoy stronger autonomy vis-à-vis the state, and they are under-

standably sensitive to any perception that their relative lack of autonomy implies a lesser respect for their scholarly or professional credentials.

Such claims to "scientific" credentials, and a corresponding detachment from the world of "politics," can thus be seen as serving two functions, depending on the political or professional concerns of the person making the claim. For many, the paramount concern is no doubt a wish to be left alone to get on with the work of conservation, research, and display, and an irritation with the way in which politics complicates these tasks—as it inevitably does in museums everywhere, but more acutely in a society such as Taiwan emerging from decades during which cultural institutions were the ideological instruments of dictatorship. Allied to this is a perception that embroilment in political controversy may sully the reputation and lower the perceived status of museum professionals. However, the expression of such concerns sometimes also cloaks a desire to wrap an orthodox but nonetheless intensely ideological narrative of Taiwanese history and identity in the mantle of "scientific" respectability.

As we shall see, this tactic has been used since 2008 in attempts to discredit the policies previously pursued within the museums sector by the DPP. The attempt to roll back elements of the DPP's programme is justified with reference to a "back to basics" drive within key museums, especially the NPM, while earlier initiatives are portrayed as irresponsible, politically-inspired adventurism. Whether this tactic is persuasive is another matter—the political nature of the KMT's post-2008 cultural agenda is fairly plain. Current attempts to resurrect the old China-oriented orthodoxy under the banner of "scientific" objectivity also contrast tellingly with the approach of some of those associated most closely with the DPP's drive between 2000 and 2008 to "Taiwanise" cultural policy, who frequently made no bones about the politi-

16. According to Mr. Wei Chen Yu of the NTM, the introduction of this four-tier structure was widely seen as a preliminary step towards a rationalisation of the entire sector, which many felt had expanded too rapidly in recent years, to a point at which Taiwan simply has too many publicly-funded museums.

17. Leading the Director of the NPM to complain in 2008 that "current regulations do not allow us to hire all of the specialized staff that we need" (for example, those with information technology or advertising expertise). (Chou Kung-shin, *New Life, New Value: The Brand New National Palace Museum*, Taipei, National Palace Museum, 2008, p. 19)

18. Thus the Directors of the NMH and NPM both expressed faith in the viability of a depoliticised relationship with mainland cultural institutions. The latter in particular sought to distance herself from the "politicisation" of the work of the NPM under her DPP-appointed predecessors (that, amongst other things, had prevented collaboration with mainland museums). Director Lu of the NMTH stressed his identity as a museum professional, not a political person—though he acknowledged that the creation of his museum had been widely "politicised" in the media. He cited his stock response to media queries: "I am a museum person, I'm an anthropologist, and the complications that you refer to are all in your own heads. To me, this job is extremely simple. It's all about the history of the land of Taiwan and the people living here." (*Lishi shi Taiwan zhe pian tudi he renmin de lishi*.)

cal aims of their project.⁽¹⁹⁾ However, while the museums sector has thus become something of a battleground for rival political visions of Taiwan's history and identity, growing professionalisation within the sector, and increasingly intense and sophisticated public and media scrutiny outside it, make the blanket imposition, or re-imposition, of any orthodoxy a highly fraught enterprise.

Museums and identity politics before 2008

The National Palace Museum

Epitomising the DPP critique of the institutionalisation of Chinese nationalism on Taiwan under decades of KMT rule, Tu Cheng-sheng, Director of the NPM from 2000 to 2004 (and subsequently Education Minister), in a 2004 interview described that institution as a "political symbol" and as "China's thing" (*Zhongguo de dongxi*). Just like the Kuomintang, he commented, "it came from outside to rule Taiwan." He represented his reforms (which included a proposal, never implemented, to abolish the NPM Director's membership of the Executive Yuan) as an attempt to compel the NPM to draw closer to (*zouru*) Taiwanese society, rather than positioning itself simply as a shrine to the civilisation of the lost Chinese motherland. A centrepiece of the NPM's permanent exhibition, removed during the museum's latest refurbishment, was an account of the heroic efforts of the KMT, during the wars of the 1930s and 1940s, to save these treasures for the Chinese nation. In the early years following its reopening on Taiwanese soil in 1965, the NPM had also played a prominent role in the KMT's "Chinese Culture Restoration Movement" (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong*)—the Nationalist riposte to Mao's Cultural Revolution. Director Tu and his successor strove to reorient the NPM both towards Taiwan and towards "Asia" in general rather than China in particular.⁽²⁰⁾ Whereas the NPM had previously confined itself almost entirely to China-themed exhibitions, under Tu temporary exhibitions were staged focusing on the "multicultural" elements of Taiwan's early modern history. The controversial plans for a "Southern Branch" of the NPM (of which more below), to be devoted to exhibiting "Asian culture," were also central to this re-orientation strategy. Both the emphasis on the "multicultural" character of Taiwanese history and identity, and the positioning of Taiwan, culturally and geopolitically, within an "Asian" rather than exclusively "Chinese" sphere, were central planks of DPP cultural policy.

The National Museum of History

Although the NPM is by far the most prominent and prestigious museum in Taiwan, the first major museum established there by the KMT was the National Museum of History, whose collection was also largely derived from a mainland institution—the Henan Provincial Museum. Unlike the NPM, the NMH was designated a "comprehensive" (*zonghe*) museum in the tradition of Republican China's provincial museums, with a remit encompassing history, natural history, ethnography, anthropology, and fine art. However, its collection was far less dazzling and extensive than that of the NPM, as were its premises and exhibition space. In the 1960s, the museum's status as the Republic of China's national museum meant that it served as a principal platform for exhibitions related to the "Chinese Culture Restoration Movement."

The NMH later came to be eclipsed in status not just by the opening of the NPM, but also by the establishment during the 1980s and 1990s of a number of other national museums designed to celebrate Taiwan's modernisation and aspects of the island's heritage—among them, the National Museum of Natural History in Taichung and the National Museum of Prehistory in Taitung. The setting up of these new museums was part of broader efforts by the KMT regime to highlight its commitment to Taiwan's development, while responding to the Taiwanese cultural awakening that was gathering pace from the 1970s onwards. For its part, the NMH remained overwhelmingly China-focused until 1995, when it began to stage numerous exhibitions on various aspects of Taiwanese history, culture, and art.⁽²¹⁾ However, its efforts to expand—largely in order to compete with newer museums—were frustrated by lack of planning permission. The priorities of state cultural policy under both the Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian presidencies clearly lay elsewhere.

The NMH has nonetheless continued to present a very broad range of exhibitions consistent with its "comprehensive" remit—generally at the initiative of the museum's own staff, but sometimes clearly informed by the priorities of the Education Ministry. An example of the latter was a 2007 exhibition on "Treasures of SE Asia" staged in collaboration

19. Both Wu Mi-cha and Tu Cheng-sheng were quite open about the relationship between politics and cultural policy in interviews and conversations with the author. (Wu was interviewed in 2004, 2005, and—more informally—in 2009.) See Vickers, "Rewriting Museums in Taiwan," *op. cit.*

20. See Vickers, *ibid.*

21. See Vickers, *ibid.*, p. 80.

A hero for all seasons:
a recently-erected statue of Koxinga
(Zheng Chenggong) next to
the Koxinga Shrine in Tainan.

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with the unofficial embassies of the countries concerned. The exhibition catalogue featured a preface by Tu Cheng-sheng, since 2004 the Minister of Education. Despite his previously professed keenness to see the NPM distanced from direct political control, in practice Tu continued to exploit the scope offered by the existing system for using museums to promote the government's position on culture and identity. In his preface, he states that "Promoting New Immigrant Culture" was one of his "key policy objectives," which was why the NMH "was commissioned to organize a special exhibition on the theme of Southeast Asian folk artefacts."⁽²²⁾ He goes on to emphasise themes regarding Taiwan's geographical, historical, and cultural links to Southeast Asia that were by this time well-rehearsed tropes of DPP discourse:

Taiwan lies at the central axis of the chain of islands that extends along the rim of continental East Asia. Since antiquity, there have been extensive contacts [...] between Taiwan and the countries of Southeast Asia. [...] [There] is now more contact and exchange between Taiwan and Southeast Asia than ever before. There has been a steady increase in the number of people from Southeast Asia coming to Taiwan [...] This "new immigrant" community is now starting to produce a second generation: the "New Taiwanese." The communities and networks formed by the "new immigrants" from Southeast Asia can now be found throughout Taiwan, adding new pieces to Taiwan's rich cultural mosaic.⁽²³⁾

Although the NMH, like many of Taiwan's other major museums, has thus occasionally found itself used as a vehicle for the government's cultural agenda, this does not apply uniformly to all of its exhibitions. For example, another exhibition the museum helped to organise in 2007 was devoted to "Koxinga," or Zheng Chenggong—a mid-seventeenth-century half-Chinese, half-Japanese pirate and Ming dynasty loyalist celebrated as a hero for different reasons by nationalist Chinese, Taiwanese of various ideological stripes, and Japanese. This exhibition was held in Tainan (Zheng's former base) in collaboration with the city government as part of a "Tainan Culture and Tourism Festival." It also involved collaboration with the Zheng Chenggong Memorial Hall in Xiamen (in China's Fujian Province), as well as with a private foundation associated with the Koxinga Shrine in Hiroda, Japan—a highly unusual combination of partners given the fraught relations not only between China and Taiwan, but also between China and Japan. In his preface to the cat-

alogue for this exhibition, Tainan's mayor emphasises Koxinga's role in "opening up Taiwan" and in forging links between Japan, China, the Netherlands, and Taiwan.⁽²⁴⁾ This collaboration appears to have been made possible by a studied vagueness in the narrative of Zheng's career, and a relatively uncontroversial (for all save aboriginal groups) focus on his status as local hero, symbol of international collaboration (if one overlooks the piracy), and paragon of the Confucian virtue of loyalty.

The National Taiwan Museum

Among those institutions to have prospered most from the shift towards a "Taiwan-centric" orientation in cultural policy is the island's oldest museum, the National Taiwan Museum (NTM). Established in 1909 by the Japanese, the NTM's colonial origins did not endear it to the KMT after 1945, which designated it Taiwan's "Provincial" Museum—very much a second-tier status as compared with the NMH (although it shared the latter's "comprehensive" scope, encompassing natural history as well as history, ethnology, and art). Japanese anthropologists had left the museum an unrivalled collection of aboriginal artefacts, as well as objects relating to Qing Dynasty Taiwan. Whereas this collection rendered it at best peripheral to the China-centred cultural focus of the Martial Law era, its fortunes changed with the "Taiwanisation" of cultural policy, and in the mid-1990s it was subjected to a major restoration. Its reopening in 1998 was followed the next year by the abolition of the provincial tier of government, whereupon it became the "National Taiwan Museum." The NTM came under the authority of the Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), an agency of the Executive Yuan created in 1981 to protect Taiwan's heritage and promote cultural development.

22. Tu Cheng-sheng, "Preface," in NMH, *Treasures of Southeast Asia: Folk Artefacts of the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia*, Taipei, NMH, 2007, pp. 4-5.

23. *Ibid.*

24. NMH / Tainan City Government, *Exhibition of Koxinga (Guo Xing Ye: Zu ji wenwu tezhan)*, Taipei, NMH, 2007, p. 3.

As mayor of Taipei during the mid-1990s, Chen Shui-bian had the park adjacent to the NTM renamed the “228 Peace Park,” and had a memorial erected there to the victims of the massacre perpetrated by KMT forces on 28 February 1947. In February 1997, on the 50th anniversary of the 228 incident, a “228 Peace Memorial Museum” was also opened in the grounds of the park. The 228 incident and the “White Terror” that followed it were crucial in shaping a distinctively “Taiwanese” folk memory, and retain an iconic significance for many in the pro-independence “Green” camp. Public apologies issued by KMT leaders during the 1990s, and sympathetic gestures by figures including Ma Ying-jeou (Chen’s successor as Taipei Mayor), have gone some way towards defusing this as a partisan political issue. In broad terms, DPP cultural policy adhered closely to Lee Teng-hui’s vision of Taiwan as a “community of shared fate” (*shengming gongtongti*), embracing all Taiwan “belongers,” including those formerly designated as “mainlanders.”⁽²⁵⁾ However, the DPP has remained determined to preserve memories of the KMT’s oppressive record⁽²⁶⁾ as just one instance of the victimhood that it sees as a major theme of the Taiwan story.⁽²⁷⁾

Following Chen Shui-bian’s election to the presidency in 2000, the DPP’s cultural policy accentuated the portrayal of Taiwan as a diverse, multicultural community of varied historical and ethnic origins. This was a trope that had already entered official discourse during the Lee Teng-hui era,⁽²⁸⁾ but the DPP sought to drive a larger wedge between this Taiwanese identity and any overarching sense of “Chineseness.” One means of doing this was to popularise a historical narrative of Taiwanese triumph over externally-induced adversity. Another was to emphasise the primordially non-Chinese roots of Taiwanese culture and nationhood in the form of the island’s “Austronesian” aboriginal heritage.

Numerous initiatives in cultural policy, especially under the DPP, have contributed to a heightened recognition of Taiwan’s aboriginal heritage, which was largely ignored under the KMT before the 1990s. As recent research has shown, there are considerable grounds for claims of a mixed Chinese-aboriginal ancestry for many Taiwanese.⁽²⁹⁾ However, Han-aboriginal genealogical mingling, which took place in a context of Chinese colonisation and encroachment on aboriginal land, was by no means the outcome of some harmonious multicultural love-in. While themes of tension and conflict between aborigines and Han settlers have featured prominently in the work of some indigenous artists in the post-Martial Law era,⁽³⁰⁾ in museums aborigines have tended to be treated as anthropological rather than historical sub-

jects—obscuring the complex role of Taiwan’s Han population as “oppressors” as well as “oppressed.”⁽³¹⁾ DPP administrations at the local and national level have invested heavily in projects co-opting aboriginal culture and “prehistory” for the cause of promoting images of Taiwan’s distinctiveness from China. One example of such a project is Taipei County’s Shihshanhang Museum, opened in 2003, which was promoted by the DPP county magistrate (and later ROC premier) Su Tseng-chang. Here a somewhat thin collection of artefacts is housed in lavish architectural surroundings, and padded out with dioramas encouraging visitors (especially children) to identify with these prehistoric aborigines. Issues of Han-aboriginal conflict do not arise in relation to the Shihshanhang tribe, who abandoned the site hundreds of years before any Chinese settlement of Taiwan. However, the museum exhibition, and the publicity surrounding its opening, emphasised the probable “Malay-Polynesian” cultural links of the prehistoric inhabitants, and their likely ancestral ties to later groups of *Pingpu* (or “plains”) aborigines, who feature in the genealogies of many contemporary Taiwanese.⁽³²⁾

Given its comprehensive focus on “Taiwan,” exceptionally rich aboriginal collection, and Japanese institutional origins, the NTM has been ideally placed to serve the cause of raising “Taiwanese” consciousness. It is thus no surprise that while the NMH was frustrated in its expansion plans

25. Under President Lee, the Census Registration Law was also revised to record “birth-place” rather than the place of “ancestral origin” (See Chang, “Constructing the Motherland,” *op. cit.*, p. 189).

26. As observed by the author on a visit to Tainan during the election campaign of 2004.

27. For example, this discourse of victimhood is very much to the fore in the permanent exhibition of the National Museum of Taiwan Literature, opened in Tainan in 2007. A narrative of collective triumph in the face of persecution is strongly suggested by headings to sections of the permanent exhibition such as “Anti-colonisation and Identity,” “Wars and Trauma,” “Alienation and Transcendence” and “Imprisonment and Emancipation.”

28. For example, this “multiculturalism” was a prominent theme of the *Renshi Taiwan* course for junior high schools introduced in 1998, which included among its authors Tu Cheng-sheng. (See Stephane Corcuff, “History textbooks, identity politics and ethnic introspection in Taiwan,” in Edward Vickers and Alisa Jones (eds.), *History Education and National Identity in East Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 133–169).

29. See Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, *op. cit.*

30. See Stevan Harrell and Lin Yu-shih, “Aesthetics and Politics in Taiwan’s Aboriginal Contemporary Arts,” unpublished paper delivered at the North American Taiwan Studies Association Annual Conference, University of California, Santa Cruz, 3 July 2006. For an indication of the standard treatment of aboriginal culture in contemporary Taiwanese museums, see the volume published by the Shung Ye Museum to celebrate its 15th anniversary (the title says it all): *Dancing into 15th Years of Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines*, Taipei, N.W. Lin Foundation for Culture and Education, 2009.

31. See Vickers, “Rewriting Museums in Taiwan,” *op. cit.*

32. Chang, Yun-ping “The Shihshanhang Museum prepares for grand opening,” *Taipei Times*, 11 April 2003, p. 4. The scholarly consensus more recently has been that Taiwan’s aborigines are more accurately described as “Austronesian” than Malay-Polynesian, the latter being only a sub-group of the larger Austronesian cultural/linguistic family whose origins are traceable to Taiwan.



The National Taiwan Museum, central Taipei, established by the Japanese colonial administration in 1909.

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throughout the Chen presidency, the NTM—with CCA backing—managed to secure political endorsement and funding for a major programme of expansion involving the purchase and renovation of a pre-war bank headquarters opposite the museum's original edifice. Meanwhile, many temporary exhibitions have been staged on aspects of Taiwan's history, culture, and natural history—some of them involving CCA-brokered collaborations with overseas museums (see below).

A particularly popular feature of museum exhibitions since the 1990s has been pre-1945 maps of the island, which have also long been totemic symbols for the “Green” camp in Taiwanese politics.⁽³³⁾ A 2007 NTM exhibition, *Taiwan in Maps*, included very few maps from the KMT period, reflecting a widespread perception of this period as a “cartographic void” on the grounds that maps produced then were generally of “poor quality.”⁽³⁴⁾ However, since Martial Law-era cartographers made a particular point of emphasising Taiwan's status as a mere Chinese province, an emphasis on earlier maps has tended to highlight the island's links with regions beyond China. Among other exhibitions during the

period of DPP rule to prominently feature early maps of Taiwan was the NPM's 2003 *Ilha Formosa* exhibition. The cover of the catalogue for that exhibition displayed a seventeenth-century Dutch map showing Taiwan aligned horizontally along its north-south axis, facing away from the Chinese mainland and out into the Pacific Ocean.⁽³⁵⁾

The National Museum of Taiwan History

Many of the maps included in the NTM's 2007 exhibition were borrowed from the collection of the NMTH in Tainan—an institution that might be supposed to owe its origins to DPP efforts to promote Taiwanese consciousness. However, the NMTH project can trace its inception to an exhibition on Taiwan history staged in 1992 by the NTM, which was visited by President Lee Teng-hui and the then

33. See NTM, *Taiwan in Maps*, Taipei, NTM, 2007.

34. Chang Bi-yu, *Map-phobia: Three Decades of Cartographic Blankness in Post-war Taiwan*. Unpublished paper delivered at the British Academy / SOAS Conference on “Taiwan and the Asian Region,” London, 12–13 March 2010.

35. See Tu Cheng-sheng, *Ilha Formosa*, Taipei, National Palace Museum, 2002.

The National Museum of Taiwan Literature, Tainan. Housed in a former Japanese colonial government building, this museum arguably institutionalises a “Taiwan-centric” vision of the island’s past.

© Courtesy of the author



Governor of Taiwan Province, Lien Chan, although the formal decision to establish the museum was not taken until 1998.⁽³⁶⁾ The museum project thus grew out of the KMT’s early steps in the direction of “indigenisation” as it sought to bolster its democratic legitimacy in the early post-Martial-Law era, though the “active development” of the museum site and the design of the permanent exhibition began only in 2002. Despite this long gestation, as of 2009 the museum had yet to open its permanent exhibition to the public. The current director, Lu Li-cheng, insisted that although the length of the NMTH preparation process has been widely attributed to the political sensitivity of the project (and consequent wrangling amongst various ideologically-motivated stakeholders), it was in fact attributable more to financial problems and to bureaucratic or legal obstacles—for example relating to the purchase of the museum site.⁽³⁷⁾ The museum’s opening was originally scheduled for 2008, but now seems to have been postponed to 2011 or 2012.

Notwithstanding Director Lu’s insistence on the politically-neutral nature of the museum, his predecessor, the DPP-affiliated Wu Mi-cha, seems to have seen the NMTH very much as a political venture, and he resigned from his post when the KMT won the 2008 presidential election. With the exception of the directorship of the NPM (a ministerial appointment), the switches of regime from KMT to DPP and back again have not involved any wholesale changing of the guard across the museums sector. However, the system whereby national museums are subjected to departmental control gives ministers and officials the formal power to dismiss or replace museum directors and other staff seen as politically awkward.⁽³⁸⁾ The committee of advisors to the NMTH preparatory committee was entirely replaced not long after the unexpected DPP electoral victory of 2000, reflecting the acute political sensitivity of this project and the high stakes involved for the government in institutionalising an ideologically congenial vision of Taiwan’s history and identity. In this context, Lu seems to have been something of a compromise candidate for the directorship. He had first been appointed in 2002, before retiring to make way for Wu Mi-cha in 2006. His adherence to a depoliticised, “scientific” vision of the role of museums in portraying Taiwan’s history and culture meant that it was possible for the (now KMT-controlled) CCA to turn to him once again after Wu’s departure.

Under Wu, who had previously overseen efforts to establish the National Museum of Taiwan Literature (also in Tainan), the NMTH in 2007 published a plan for its permanent exhibition.⁽³⁹⁾ This was to be divided into six main sections: 1)

Taiwan in the world; 2) Early inhabitants; 3) The interaction of different cultures (sixteenth + seventeenth centuries); 4) Chinese immigration to Taiwan; 4) Pluralistic development in the regional societies; 5) The Great Transformation and the New Order; 5) Post-war; 6) Taiwan’s path into the future. Outlining his vision for the museum in a 2009 article, Wu explained that he saw the role of a “national museum” as, by definition, reflecting a “national point of view” (*guojia lichang*), which would involve avoiding undue pandering to sectional or party-political interests, but would reflect a consensus on the national past. Recognising that such a consensus was arguably hard to identify in the highly-charged political climate of contemporary Taiwan, he alluded to the roles played by both the KMT and DPP regimes in establishing the NMTH, describing it as a “blue-green” project (*lan lü tong chi*—“eating blue and green together”).⁽⁴⁰⁾ However, in elaborating his views on what a “national museum of history” could or should mean in the Taiwan context, Wu drew pointed comparisons with the cases of Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and America—noting that these societies, like Taiwan, are not the successor-states of ancient civilisations, but are the relatively recent products of colonialism and settlement.⁽⁴¹⁾

The plan outlined by Wu essentially follows the mainstream narrative of Taiwan’s history as this has emerged since the 1990s: there is an emphasis on the multicultural heritage of the island (diverse aboriginal tribes, Hakka and Hoklo elements amongst Chinese immigrants, and Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese influences). Stereotypically negative characterisations of Japanese “colonial” influence, or one-dimensional celebrations of post-1949 “reunification” with the Chinese motherland—staples of the old KMT narrative—are notice-

36. Lien Chan’s grandfather, Lien Heng, was the author of *Taiwan tongshi*, the first comprehensive history of Taiwan in Chinese.

37. Interview with Lu Li-cheng, NMTH, 2010.

38. As noted by Wu Mi-cha himself in his 2008 article, Wu (*op. cit.*). See note 15 above.

39. NMTH, *National Museum of Taiwan History* [Introductory brochure], Tainan, NMTH, 2007.

40. Wu, *Jianli yi zuo guojia lishi bowuguan*, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

41. *Ibid.*

ably absent. There is an effort throughout to adopt a “bottom-up” perspective on the island’s development. For example, the Japanese period is represented through a focus on the principal local link between ordinary people and the colonial authorities—the local Police Station—in the context of a reconstructed street of shops illustrating how state and society modernised under Japanese rule. At the same time, that this exhibition was envisioned very much as an ideologically-inspired “narrative of unfolding” is reflected in particular by the inclusion of a final section on “Taiwan’s path into the future.”

A note on museum diplomacy

Museums across the world constantly engage in exchanges of artefacts and exhibitions. However, for Taiwan such ventures assume particular importance, given its lack of access to many of the standard forums of international diplomacy. From its establishment in the early 1980s, the CCA’s remit has included the promotion overseas of the ROC’s culture, and the staging of exhibitions abroad has become one of the main ways in which the ROC state has sought to remind the world of its existence. Indeed, the CCA maintains offices overseas, a few of them with their own exhibition halls.⁽⁴²⁾

While prior to the 1990s the ROC’s projection of its culture abroad focused overwhelmingly on the mainstream Chinese tradition, from the 1990s the scale of cultural diplomacy was stepped up, and its content broadened to encompass a greater emphasis on distinctively Taiwanese themes. Under the DPP from 2000, the balance in exhibitions sent overseas shifted further in this direction, although the NPM continued to showcase its collection of Chinese artefacts in Europe and North America—thereby maintaining a tacit rivalry with the Beijing Palace Museum, which was expanding its own overseas activities. Meanwhile, whereas during the 1980s and 1990s publicly funded museums—particularly the NPM and NMH—had been quietly expanding their ties with museums in mainland China, under the DPP, central government encouragement of or funding for cultural exchange with the mainland was notably curtailed.⁽⁴³⁾

The provision of funding has been one factor in persuading museums to stage exhibitions that help to promote the government’s ideological agenda and/or its ties with particular foreign countries. The records of the NTM for the 1980s refer to exhibitions relating to small African or Latin American states with which the ROC maintained relations.⁽⁴⁴⁾ More recently, the CCA helped arrange exhibitions at the NTM on the Franco-Chinese War of the 1880s, and on the

Spanish presence in northern Taiwan during the seventeenth century, with funding for these also supplied by the CCA and its foreign partners (in France and Spain respectively).⁽⁴⁵⁾ Since 2008, the CCA has continued to involve the NTM and other museums in its cultural diplomacy, but the focus has shifted markedly towards China.

Museums up to 2008—a summary

Since the 1980s, museums under both KMT and DPP regimes have thus both promoted and reflected a rapid shift in the public consensus over Taiwan’s identity—away from unquestioning acceptance of the KMT’s “one-China” orthodoxy and towards widespread celebration of the island’s cultural and historical distinctiveness. Writing in 2006, Chang identified four key themes in DPP cultural policy: an emphasis on the economic value of culture (e.g. through tourism); a related effort to “brand” Taiwan, both raising the island’s international profile and distancing it from China; sponsorship for projects aimed at “theorising” Taiwan, for example through promoting Taiwan Studies, or permeating Taiwan-related themes in the school curriculum; and the deployment of maps to reinforce images of Taiwan as an Asian nation rather than an exclusively Chinese province.⁽⁴⁶⁾ As noted above, the content of the official vision of Taiwanese identity centred on themes of multiculturalism and a narrative presenting the Taiwanese past as a tale of triumph over adversity visited upon the local population from various external sources, not least China. It has also been observed that the urge to trace back to an immemorial past the origins of contemporary Taiwanese nationalism has lent a “somewhat teleological quality” to much recent writing on the island’s political and cultural history,⁽⁴⁷⁾ often reflected in the portrayal of that history in Taiwan’s museums.⁽⁴⁸⁾

There were broad continuities between the cultural policy of the DPP post-2000 and that pursued by the KMT under

42. New York and Paris have hosted particularly active Taipei Cultural Centres.

43. Although the KMT-controlled Taipei municipal government, under Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, did fund exchanges with the mainland.

44. For a commemorative history of the NTM, issued on the occasion of its centenary, see NTM, *The Story of Collection in a Century*, Taipei, NTM, 2009.

45. See for example, NTM, *Hermosa: Maritime Taiwan and Spain*, Taipei, NTM, 2006—which names the “directing institutions” (*zhidao danwei*) as the CCA and the Spanish Ministry of Culture.

46. Chang, “Constructing the Motherland,” *op. cit.*

47. Evan N. Dawley, “The Question of Identity in Recent Scholarship on the History of Taiwan,” *China Quarterly*, 198, June 2009, pp. 442–452, p. 450.

48. See Vickers, “Rewriting Museums in Taiwan,” *op. cit.*

Lee Teng-hui, and the KMT's electoral platform in 2004 showed little indication of any planned return to a more China-centred orientation in cultural policy. However, electoral defeat was followed in 2005 by KMT Chairman Lien Chan's much-publicised visit to mainland China, signalling the beginnings of an informal rapprochement between KMT and CCP. Since then, the continuing rapid growth of China's economy, Taiwan's increasing dependence on trade with the mainland, and a decisive shift—in China's favour—in the cross-Straits military balance have all added to the temptation or pressure to pursue this rapprochement further. Meanwhile, the prosperity of China's urban middle classes has made them a crucial new potential source of clients for the tourism industry in Taiwan. How then, following its 2008 election victory, has KMT policy for museums balanced the now openly declared goal of pursuing a rapprochement with China with pressures to uphold the new domestic consensus on Taiwan's cultural and historical distinctiveness?

Museums since 2008

The portrayal of Taiwan

Under the DPP, attempts were made to temper the association of the NPM with China in two principal ways: through using it to stage Taiwan-themed exhibitions, and through the scheme of creating a new "Southern Branch" focusing on "Asian" cultural artefacts. This plan was conceived both as a dilution of the NPM's China-centred institutional mission and as a means of distributing state investment in cultural projects outside Taipei. With the purchase of the site a *fait accompli* by 2008, the new Director of the NPM, Chou Kung-shin, was effectively compelled to proceed with the project, whatever she may privately have felt about its merits.⁽⁴⁹⁾

However, shortly after her appointment as Director, Chou released a booklet setting out her manifesto for the NPM. Drawing an implicit contrast with the approach of her immediate predecessors, she noted, "The collection is the heart of the museum.... When we veer away from this clear course, we encounter many difficulties."⁽⁵⁰⁾ This meant a reaffirmation of the Chinese-oriented mission of the NPM, since "this collection of artefacts... of Chinese civilisation is what makes the Museum unique."⁽⁵¹⁾ Again implicitly referring to what she portrayed as ideologically-motivated attempts to divert the museum from its legitimate mission, she went on:

Determining how best to introduce the public to our own culture is of utmost importance for our nation. Because the bonds between this culture and the people are strong, and cannot be riven by ideology, what matters is determining how to use these traditions as wellsprings for the creation of a new culture.⁽⁵²⁾

While the NPM thus seems to be reverting to its original ideological role as a custodian of Chinese civilisation on Taiwan, the NMH is apparently continuing its eclectic focus of recent years with exhibitions on the history, art, and culture of Taiwan as well as China and elsewhere. Amongst these was a mid-2009 exhibition entitled *1949: The Birth of New Taiwan (1949: Xin Taiwan de dansheng)*, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the KMT's retreat to the island. Director Huang explained the significance of this anniversary by pointing out that until 1949, Taiwan had always been on the periphery of a larger state—it was "always a colony, colony, colony" (*zhimindi, zhimindi, zhimindi*)—whereas after 1949, Taiwan was at the national centre, with its own Presidential Palace, foreign relations, and sense of autonomy (*daole 1949 cai you zongtongfu, cai neng gen guowai bangjiao, you zizhuxin*).⁽⁵³⁾ However, the NMH website puts a slightly different spin on this exhibition:

Having inherited Chinese traditional culture, the Republic of China government and its people consolidated their hold on the country [Taiwan] and strove hard against constant threats from the Chinese communist régime of the People's Republic of China. For the past half-century, the Republic of China has thrived calmly and peaceably in the western Pacific.⁽⁵⁴⁾

It seems unlikely that the NMH would have represented 1949 in these terms had the DPP been in power in 2009, given their emphasis on the 1940s as the decade that wit-

49. In interview, Director Chou was highly critical of alleged mismanagement of the project prior to 2008, but did not seek to distance herself from the Southern Branch plan as such. She herself had come in for a great deal of criticism for proposing that the Southern Branch be transformed into a sort of cultural theme park—with hotels, restaurants, and other attractions—moves she argued were necessary to make the project economically viable.

50. Chou, *New Life, New Value: The Brand New National Palace Museum*, op. cit., p. 16.

51. *ibid.*

52. *ibid.*, p. 17.

53. Interview, October 20, 2009.

54. For the museum's English-language introduction to this exhibition see NMH, *1949: The Birth of New Taiwan (1949: Xin Taiwan de dansheng)*. Website: <http://www.nmh.gov.tw/en-us/Exhibition/Content.aspx?Para=0%7C22%7C517&unkey=20>, accessed 28 April 2010.

nessed the 228 massacre and the onset of the KMT's White Terror—although the website goes on to point out that:

Our feelings and memories may change with time, and have been gradually diversified. Even the historians (sic.) hold different perspectives on and interpretations of this historic period. This discursive diversity can itself be seen as a form of progress.⁽⁵⁵⁾

In those museums with a Taiwan-specific remit, the change in regime appears to have involved some significant developments, for example in the focus of the NTM's overseas activities.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The NMTH has seen its opening delayed, for reasons that remain unclear. However, its latest brochures suggest that one consequence of the replacement of Wu Mi-chia as Director has been the scrapping of the final section of the permanent exhibition, entitled "Taiwan stepping into a new age" (*qiandan Taiwan de lu*).⁽⁵⁷⁾ The precise reasons for this are, once again, unclear—though any discussion of this "new age" for Taiwan would undoubtedly have involved addressing head-on the issue of the island's future relationship with China.

Museums and the China connection

President Ma Ying-jeou's policy of *liang an songbang* ("relaxing ties across the straits") has seen a dramatic warming of relations with mainland China in many fields. The museum at the centre of efforts to warm cultural ties with China has been the NPM.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Moreover, it is not just the KMT authorities that see the NPM as a sort of cross-Straits cultural bridge—even before the 2008 election (possibly in anticipation of a KMT victory), crews from China's state-owned Central Television (CCTV) were filming a documentary on the museum.⁽⁵⁹⁾ This film featured an interview with Chou Kung-shin (in her then capacity as an academic and former NPM employee), and was first aired shortly before her visit to Beijing in February 2009, the first by a serving Director of the Taipei NPM.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Chou's frequent visits to China over the previous 30 years, and her familiarity with many key personnel at the Beijing Palace Museum, appear to have rendered her a congenial interlocutor. On February 14, she met with her Beijing counterpart, and it was agreed that the two museums would for the first time collaborate in staging an exhibition—to be held at the Taipei NPM later in the year. The following month, the KMT authorities upped the number of direct flights from the mainland to Taiwan (begun in 2008), increasing the influx of Chinese tour groups.

This collaborative exhibition, *Harmony and Integrity: The Yongzheng Emperor and His Times*, opened in autumn 2009, just over six months following the Beijing trip. According to the Director's preface to the exhibition catalogue, the choice of theme was already under consideration before her Beijing visit, and was dictated by the particular expertise of NPM staff, the fact that they had not previously held an exhibition dedicated to Yongzheng (but had done so for Kangxi and Qianlong),⁽⁶¹⁾ and the richness of the NPM collection on this emperor. Chou places considerable emphasis on the nature of the exhibition as a collective endeavour on the part of NPM staff, for example stating that "By December of 2008, the object list for the exhibition was tentatively set, but my colleagues expressed a desire to explore the possibility of the Beijing Palace Museum loaning certain objects...."⁽⁶²⁾ She makes no mention of the obvious political significance of this collaboration, and seems keen to share the credit (or the blame) for the initiative as widely as possible. Director Chou's preface also highlights the Yongzheng Emperor's reputation as an exemplary ruler—but her remarks on this score are far less pointed than those of her Beijing counterpart, Zheng Xinmiao:

The Yongzheng Emperor [...] was one of the rulers in Chinese history most concerned about Ilha For-

55. *Ibid.* Unfortunately I was not able to view the exhibition for myself, and no exhibition catalogue was available at the time of writing. The perspective adopted by this exhibition may also to some extent reflect what some have seen as growing nostalgia in recent years on Taiwan for the "golden age of the developmental state" (Joe Wong, "From Recovering to Merely Surviving: Positioning Taiwan in the New Global Economy," unpublished paper delivered at British Academy / SOAS Conference on "Taiwan and the Asian Region," London, 12–13 March 2010).
56. The NTM in late 2009 staged a major exhibition on the *Pingpu*, or "Plains Aborigines"—see NTM, *Legacy of the Pingpu Group*, Taipei, NTM, 2009. This focused primarily on the cultural anthropology of these tribes, and featured displays illustrating the way in which some adopted elements of Han culture during the Qing period. The text lamented the loss of these distinctive indigenous cultures, while making some reference to tension or conflict with Han immigrants. However, it did not deal with the immigrant-indigenous interaction as an instance of settler colonisation (as some recent academic work has done—see Emma Jinhua Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2005).
57. See the 2007 NMTH's Introductory brochure (*op. cit.*, p. 33), and contrast with NMTH, *National Museum of Taiwan History, Tainan* [Introductory brochure], Tainan, NTMH, 2009, p. 30.
58. Chou (*New Life, New Value*, *op. cit.*, p. 17) reflects contemporary Taiwan discourse on the economic importance of culture in her manifesto for the NPM, writing (in a section on establishing a "Cultural and Creative Industries Educational Center") that "if our country wants to become a developed nation, we must transform ourselves from an industrial economy into one with the capacity to produce culture."
59. CCTV only filmed the outside of the building in the absence of any cooperation from the then management of the NPM.
60. Interview with Director Chou, NPM.
61. Although an exhibition devoted to Kangxi, again jointly organised with the Beijing Palace Museum, is planned for 2011.
62. Chou, Kung-shin, "Preface," in NPM, *Harmony and Integrity: The Yongzheng Emperor and His Times*. Taipei, NPM, pp. v–vii, p.v.

mosa–Taiwan. He personally and repeatedly exhorted his officials to make “amicability and sincerity” the principle for governing Taiwan. By using the classical phrase “amicability and sincerity,” he meant that they should maintain friendly relations and pursue a common purpose with the inhabitants of the island.⁽⁶³⁾

He goes on to declare that

The cultures of East and West should interact. The inheritors of Chinese culture share the same ancestors and hail from common origins, which means they should be able to interact at an even deeper level.⁽⁶⁴⁾

For Zheng, collaboration with the NPM thus supplies the opportunity to issue a thinly-disguised appeal to Taiwanese “compatriots” to awaken to the political implications of their Chinese ancestry and cultural inheritance. However, the significance of the NPM’s collaboration with the Beijing Palace Museum, in the context of Taiwan’s opening up to mainland tourism, perhaps lies principally in the shaping of perceptions of Taiwan amongst Chinese (from the People’s Republic), rather than in influencing perceptions of China amongst Taiwanese. There is nothing in the Yongzheng exhibition (or the NPM’s permanent exhibition) that would remotely challenge any of the standard preconceptions that Chinese from the Communist mainland harbour regarding Taiwan’s essential and immemorial “Chineseness.”

While the NPM has attracted much publicity, other museums have long been engaged in extensive collaboration and exchange with mainland institutions. The NMH has “sister” relations with three Chinese museums—in Wuhan, Liaoning, and Henan—and staged exhibitions loaned from China throughout the period of DPP rule, although an exhibition on the Silk Road, eight or nine years in preparation, went ahead only after the return to power of the KMT. The text for this exhibition adhered closely to the orthodox Chinese nationalist view of Xinjiang history (from which the DPP had distanced itself out of sympathy with the plight of Tibetan and Uyghur “minorities”).⁽⁶⁵⁾ Of the exhibitions staged by the NMH on the mainland, those with Taiwan-related themes have related exclusively to fine art, a bias that Director Huang explained by claiming that mainland museum-goers “are not interested in Taiwan history.”⁽⁶⁶⁾ This may largely be the case (reflecting an assumption that Taiwan has no history), but one thing that certainly has attracted exhibition visitors in China over recent years is “ethnic” culture. This possibly helps explain the interest evinced

by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Museum in Hohhot in borrowing an NTM exhibition devoted to the culture and customs of Taiwan’s aboriginal tribes, in a deal part-brokered by the ROC’s “Tibet and Mongolia Bureau” (*Meng Zang Wei yuanhui*).⁽⁶⁷⁾

The extent to which a China-oriented shift across the museums sector has been officially mandated became further apparent in early 2010, when it was revealed that Taiwan’s two major modern art museums had instituted an unannounced annual “quota” for exhibitions “featuring [mainland] Chinese artists.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ This move follows steps taken by Ma Ying-jeou as early as 2006, when he was Taipei Mayor, to encourage exchange between the city’s museums and Chinese institutions. However, the terms of such exchanges were criticised by one local artist as “colonialist,” since Taiwan’s openness to Chinese artists was not fully reciprocated by mainland museums, partly due to limitations on freedom of expression. Challenged to defend the new policy, Taipei’s (KMT) Deputy Mayor alluded to the global decline of previously dominant American cultural “standards” and the rise of a “Chinese standard,” which, she stated, Taiwanese should welcome “since we share the same heritage.”

Conclusion

One question raised by the shift in cultural diplomacy towards support for exchanges with mainland China, and the simultaneous opening up to Chinese tour groups, relates to

63. Zheng Xinmiao, “Preface,” in NPM, *ibid.*, pp. x–xi, p. x. Evidence for Yongzheng’s solicitude for Taiwan consists of a map of Taiwan and the Penghu islands (NPM, *ibid.*, pp. 102–3), and two Palace memorials (pp. 104–7), including one of 1725 “reporting the circumstances of naturalising aborigines in the mountain hinterland.” The latter features accompanying text explaining the extent of Han settlement and the divisions between aborigines (“raw,” “cooked” and “in-between”—*shengfan*, *shufan*, *huafan*). The document reports numerous instances of cannibalism perpetrated by “*shengfan*,” and Yongzheng responds by advising clemency and benevolence in order to win the hearts of the barbarians. The text tells us, “From this we can see Yongzheng’s cautious approach to dealing with aboriginal affairs” (*youci kejian yongzheng duiyu yuanzhumin shiwu de shenshen taidu*) (p. 107).

64. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

65. NMH, *Legends of the Silk Road—Treasures from Xinjiang*, Taipei, NMH, 2008. One section of this exhibition was entitled “The Amalgamation of Multi-cultural States and Cultures of the Western Territory,” with the text emphasising the diversity of peoples active in the “West,” the role of the region as a “bridge” between East and West, and the influence there “especially [of] Chinese traditional civilization with Confucianism (*rujia wenhua*) at its core.” The exhibition catalogue features essays by staff from Xinjiang museum and the Xinjiang Archaeological Bureau, as well as by scholars at Taiwan’s Academia Sinica, and reflects standard CCP orthodoxy on the history and culture of Xinjiang and its relations with China.

66. Interview with Director Huang, NMH.

67. Interview with Mr. Wei, NTM. Ironically, this exhibition is largely derived from one first staged in Prague in 2005 in the context of DPP efforts to promote awareness in Europe of Taiwan’s distinctive identity. See Vickers, “Rewriting Museums in Taiwan,” *op. cit.*, p. 81.

68. David Frazier, “Plight at the Museum,” *Taipei Times*, 17 January 2010, p. 13.



One stop that does feature on the itinerary of Chinese tour parties: the grounds of Chiang Kai-shek's former villa in Shilin, near the NPM. The villa itself is currently under restoration.
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the potential impact of this on Chinese perceptions of Taiwan. Exhibitions loaned to Chinese museums exclude content that might undermine the narrative of Taiwan's history endorsed by Beijing, nor will a visit to Taipei's NPM challenge standard mainland preconceptions regarding the island's "Chinese" culture and identity. But what of the other sights featured in the new Taiwan tours for Chinese? An unsystematic browsing of *Baidu.com* seemed to confirm that the NPM was the only museum on the itinerary of the standard eight-day all-island tour offered to mainland groups.⁽⁶⁹⁾ The new wave of tourism from China thus appears to be doing little to address what Brown terms the "vacuum of actual social experience of Taiwan" that contributes to the overwhelming acceptance within China of official narratives of the island's past.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Expanded cultural ties with China in fact give a platform (albeit a limited one) to mainland institutions to propagandise in Taiwan, while limiting traffic in the opposite direction to exhibitions posing no challenge to established views of Taiwan. This lack of equality or reciprocity is in one sense inevitable, since the open expression of all views on the cross-

Strait relationship, including those of the CCP, is only possible on the Taiwanese side of the water. However, the new KMT administration, unlike its allegedly "schizophrenic" predecessor before 2000, appears more than comfortable with a disequilibrium in cultural exchanges that favours "Chinese" themes and content. In the related arena of history curriculum development for schools, the KMT has meanwhile become embroiled in a row over the proportion of the syllabus devoted to Taiwan's history as compared with Chinese and world history—with pro-independence groups accusing the government of rigging appointments to a committee of academic experts to secure backing for expanding coverage of Chinese history.⁽⁷¹⁾

The KMT of President Ma thus seem to be hoping that a Taiwanese population fatigued by years of agitation over

69. Tongcheng luyou wangdian, *Zhengzhou dao Taiwan luyoutuan, luyouxianlu*, http://www.17u.net/lxtemplate/view_line_1141853_31369.html, accessed 28 April 2010. The rest of the itinerary consists of activities such as visits to famous scenic spots, hot springs, and aboriginal dancing shows.

70. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

71. See Vincent Y. Chao, "History Curriculum Plan Sparks School Controversy," *Taipei Times*, 29 March 2010, p. 3.

identity issues under both the DPP and Lee Teng-hui administrations (at least from the mid-1990s) will return thankfully to the comforting familiarity of a Chinese nationalist orthodoxy (vintage circa 1975)—at least in the realm of culture. Hence the attempts to brand the DPP's cultural programme as a "politicised" aberration, to be quietly forgotten as Taiwan's museums return to the straight and narrow path of "science" and professionalism. However, the very fact that advocates of the new "Chinese" orientation in cultural and museums policy appear compelled to ground their arguments on appeals to scientific rigour and sober professionalism speaks volumes about the changes in the cultural scene under the Lee and Chen regimes. Thirty years ago, the kind of Chinese nationalist comments made by the director of Beijing's Palace Museum in his preface to the *Yongzheng* exhibition could easily have come from a KMT cultural apparatchik. Nowadays, even if KMT politicians still sometimes make sweeping allusions to pan-Chinese cultural (and even biological) unity, in Taiwan's major museums such crude propagandising seems out of place.

The DPP engaged in cultural propagandising of its own—seeking to push further the movement of Taiwanese "indigenisation" (or *bentuhua*) to which the regime of Lee Teng-hui had already lent official sponsorship and political respectability. Whether DPP policies amounted to a full-blown scheme of "de-sinification" (*quzhongguohua*) is open to debate.⁷² Some pro-independence politicians undoubtedly aspired to imposing a simplistically "Green" historical narrative. A highly centralised cultural bureaucracy, and the high political stakes attached to identity issues, tempts politicians of whatever stripe to try to use museums as bases for identity propaganda. However, plural, democratic institutions, media scrutiny, and an increasingly sophisticated public discourse over issues of culture and identity complicate such efforts. Meanwhile, the effect of a quarter century of democratisation on the museums sector has been to institutionalise, in bricks and mortar, behind glass cases and in plastic dioramas, rival and sometimes contradictory visions of Taiwan's history and destiny. Museums today offer visitors a far more diverse and thus, taken in the round, a far more balanced and comprehensive picture of the island's history and culture than they have ever done in the past.

An open rivalry between different ideologically-driven "narratives of unfolding" has presented museum professionals with both threats and opportunities. Political interference from rival ideological quarters can disturb well-laid plans and complicate day-to-day administration, and offers opportunities (at least in the short term) to those inclined to promote

the politically-favoured narrative of the day. However, the public and media criticism that overly-crude politicisation attracts, and the tendency of political winds to shift direction in a democracy, create incentives over the longer term for a further entrenchment of professional standards. Appeals to "science" and "professionalism" can serve as disingenuous camouflage for the imposition of an unquestioned orthodoxy, but they can also serve to delineate an autonomous space within which rival ideological visions can be tested and debated. Despite the apparent hopes of some within the sector for a quiet life of scholarly retreat, museums are never going to be "depoliticised." However, they have the potential to serve as an important forum for the ongoing, and inevitably politicised, democratic debate over the history, culture, and identity of Taiwanese society. It is only unfortunate that expansion of cultural ties with China seems unlikely to involve any extension of such a debate across the Taiwan Strait—though it is crucial to the island's long-term future that this should happen. •

Glossary

bentuhua 本土化 Chou Kung-shin 周功鑫 *guojia lichang* 國家立場

Guoli gugong bowuyuan
(National Palace Museum, NPM) 國立故宮博物院

Guoli lishi bowuguan
(National Museum of History, NMH) 國立歷史博物館

Guoli Taiwan bowuguan
(National Taiwan Museum, NTM) 國立臺灣博物館

Guoli Taiwan lishi bowuguan (National Museum of Taiwan History, NMTH) 國立臺灣歷史博物館

Henan sheng bowuguan (Henan Provincial Museum) 河南省博物館

Huang Yung-Ch'uan 黃永川 *Hu Chia-yu* 胡家瑜

liang an songbang 兩岸鬆綁 *Lu Li-cheng* 呂理政

Meng Zang Weiyuanhui 蒙藏委員會

Neimenggu zizhiqu bowuguan (Museum of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) 內蒙古自治區博物館

qu zhongguohua 去中國化 *shengming gongtongti* 生命共同體

Shihsanhang bowuguan 十三行博物館

Taiwan tongshi 台灣通史 *Tu Cheng-sheng* 杜正勝

wenhua li guo 文化立國 *Wei Chen Yu* 魏振瑜

Wu Mi-cha 吳密察 *xin Taiwan de dansheng* 新台灣的誕生

Zheng Xinmiao 鄭欣淼

Zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong 中華文化復興運動

zonghe 綜合

72. Chang ("Constructing the Motherland", *op. cit.*) appears to argue this, and it was a standard criticism levelled at DPP cultural policy by KMT politicians.