

# Taiwan's Museums: Exploring the Process of Taiwanization



Lee Moore

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## Introduction

Until the 1990s, scholarly discussions of Taiwanese identity were rare. Today, the topic is one of the most important topics in Taiwan studies.<sup>1</sup> The following paper attempts to examine the question of Taiwanese identity through the framework of museums. As museologists have long argued, museums function to create identities: “museums can be powerful identity-defining machines. To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and some of its highest, most authoritative truths. It also means the power to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community’s common heritage—in its very identity.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the past four decades, Taiwan’s museums have undergone a process of Taiwaneseization (台灣化). Before 1987, most museums viewed China as their main subject and Taiwan was rarely—if ever—discussed in the exhibition space. However, after 1987, there was a blossoming of Taiwanese consciousness throughout the island and museums were no different.

In 2015, when I last visited Taipei’s National Museum of History (NHM, 國立歷史博物館), the museum had little to say about the country in which it resided. There was an exhibit on Buddhism in pre-modern China, but little—if anything—on Taiwan, despite the museum’s name. Though the NHM was located in Taipei, the “na-

tion” that it spoke of in its title was China. The NHM was the first new museum established by the KMT in Taiwan, and its architecture and content spoke of the mission it saw for itself: to keep the glories of China safe on this island redoubt until they could return to China. The museum’s architecture evoked Ming and Qing Palace buildings, and its exhibitions largely focused on China. Whether or not the NHM will also be affected by Taiwaneseization is currently difficult to tell—when I visited in 2023, the NHM was closed for remodeling and it is yet to be seen what nation the NHM will represent after the renovations.

Different museums have experienced this process of Taiwaneseization to varying degrees. Some exhibit little to no Taiwaneseization, while others have never undergone Taiwaneseization because they were created after 1987 and thus were already “born” Taiwanese. The National Taiwan Museum (NTM, 國立台灣博物館) has largely evolved from being focused on China

to focused on Taiwan. When it comes to the prestigious National Palace Museum (NPM, 國立故宮博物院), the main branch still does not cover Taiwan in its exhibits. But the NPM now has a sister museum, the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (NPM-MSB, 國立故宮博物院南部院區).<sup>3</sup> The two

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I will refer to the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum as the “Southern Branch.” I will refer to the original branch as the “main branch.” I have decided to capitalize the former but not the latter because, when discussing the museums with colleagues, the former was frequently referred to as a proper noun while the later was always simply referred to as the “National Palace Museum.” In Chinese, most people I had discussions with referred to the Chiayi museums as the “Southern Branch” (南院) or as the “Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum” (故宮南院). No one ever called the main branch the “Taipei Branch” or the “Main Branch.” Instead, they just called it the “National

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<sup>1</sup> Alan M. Wachman, “Competing Identities in Taiwan,” in *The Other Taiwan, 1945-92*, ed. Murray Rubinstein, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 101.

National Palace Museums share a collection, but the Southern Branch was “born” Taiwanese, having only been built in 2015. In this way, all museums in Taiwan have felt the tug of Taiwanization.

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Palace Museum” (故宮).

## A Brief History of Taiwanese Museums

In 1895, the Qing empire traded Taiwan to the Japanese empire after having lost a war. When China lost Taiwan, only a handful of museums had been established on Chinese land, though all of them had been established by non-Chinese individuals, often missionaries. In 1908, little more than a decade after taking control of the island, the Japanese colonial government established the first Taiwanese museum, the Taiwan Governor Museum—today’s National Taiwan Museum—located in 228 Park in the center of Taipei.<sup>4</sup> In this and other exhibition spaces, the perspective of the Japanese colonialist prevailed. These institutions served as a means for Japanese colonialists to justify their exploitation of their Taiwanese colony. They also provided a platform for the articulation of an incipient Taiwanese identity. They both framed the island as a part of the Japanese empire while also giving Taiwan an embryo of a distinct Taiwanese identity.

During the period of the *doka* (or “assimilation”) policy (1915-1937), the Japanese colonial museums in Taiwan framed Taiwan as a part of the Japanese empire, but the emphasis on the Japanese element was less pronounced in comparison to later periods. There was room for the discussion of an independent Taiwanese identity, for Taiwan to exist as an autonomous subject within the exhibition space. During the *Kominka* period (1937-1945), the Japanese element of Taiwan’s colonial identity was stressed, both in Taiwanese society in general, and also in Taiwan’s museums. Museums became one of many social institutions that promoted the Japanese state’s rising nationalism as it drove towards war.

Following the collapse of the Japanese empire, the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) assumed control of Taiwan, sending officials from China to take over control of the island from the Japanese. This transition led to a reorientation of museums. The KMT sought to use these institutions to inculcate a framework of totalizing Chineseness. Essentially, all museums were constructed or reconstructed to make the Taiwanese people reconceptualize themselves as members of

<sup>4</sup> Noriko Aso, *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan*, (Durham: Duke U.P., 2014), 5.

the Chinese nation. Discussions of whether or not Taiwan had an independent history, distinct from China, was forbidden. Narratives were constructed with the intention of evoking in the visitor a Chinese identity. With artifacts like the Ding cauldron of Duke Mao, also known as the Mao Gong Ding (毛公鼎), the National Palace Museum traced the history of the Chinese nation back to the Shang and Zhou Dynasties. But it said almost nothing about Taiwan. Its architecture was designed “to present a pure Chinese style museum to store those national treasures from Mainland China,” according to the building’s architect, Huang Baoyu (黃寶瑜).<sup>5</sup> Like the National History Museum which I visited in 2015, most museums established in Taiwan during the period of 1945-1987 said nothing about Taiwan. Instead, narratives were written with China as the subject and artifacts that were framed as being Chinese were used in museum exhibits. A suggestion that Taiwan was a valid subject for an exhibition could land one in prison or they could be accused of advocating for Taiwanese independence.

As Prasenjit Duara has written, history is a mode of being and the nation-state is the subject of that mode. When discussing the nation in the nineteenth century, most theorists believed that nations have the right to erase and subsume non-nations. “It is only nations in the fullness of (their) History that realize freedom. Those without History, those non-nations such as tribal polities, empires and others have no claims or rights; even more, nations have the right to destroy non-nations and bring Enlightenment to them. Thus do nations become empires.”<sup>6</sup> The process that we see at work in Taiwanese museums under the KMT dictatorship can be understood in this Duaraian sense. The means through which the KMT framed the national history was that China was a great nation, and Taiwan

<sup>5</sup> Yi-chih Huang, “National Glory and Traumatism: National/Cultural Identity Construction of National Palace Museum in Taiwan,” *National Identities* 14, no. 3 (2012): 214.

<sup>6</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 20.

was not a nation. Taiwanese history, Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese-ness were to be consumed, digested and distributed into the body of Chineseness. The intention of KMT elites and the exhibition spaces that they built was to have the Taiwanese conceive of themselves primarily as Chinese, and their Taiwanese identity would be a local identity. Taiwan should be perceived as a locality under the Chinese nation—just like Sichuan or Tibet.

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwan experienced a surge in museum construction. One of the goals of these museum builders was to foster a Taiwanese identity that was distinct from the Chinese identity that had been imposed during the KMT's dictatorship. According to Taiwan's Chinese Museum Association (中華民國博物館學會), the number of these museums grew from 131 in 1995 to 748 in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

This growing number of museums became an important platform for articulating a new Taiwanese identity in the post-1987 era. With the advent of democracy, the KMT was no longer able to impose its understanding of the Chinese nation onto Taiwanese voters. Instead, the old Chinese nationalistic identity had to compete in a new marketplace of ideas. That older ideology has largely lost, failing to convince the Taiwanese. The proportion of those who identify as Chinese has continually dropped since the onset of democracy, with 62.8 percent of the island's residents identifying only as Taiwanese.<sup>8</sup> The political success of the Pan-Green Movement,

a loose coalition of parties that broadly favor Taiwan's independence from China, has shown how Taiwanese-ization is changing the island's politics as well.

Museums have played a role in this Taiwanese-ization. Notable additions to Taiwanese museums built since democratization include the National Taiwanese History Museum and the National Taiwanese Literature Museum, both of which take Taiwan as their main subject and largely ignore any discussion of China. These changes reflect the broader shift towards a solely Taiwanese identity that the country has witnessed since the early 1990s.

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<sup>7</sup> Xinyuan Liu, "The Situation and Problems of My Country's Museums," May 27, 2019, <https://www.npf.org.tw/2/20782>.

<sup>8</sup> National Chengchi University, "Taiwanese/Chinese Identity Survey," n.d. <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?-fid=7800&id=6961>.



## The Museums

The core of my research focused on traveling to Taiwan to document and analyze museums in Taiwan. In May 2023, I visited fourteen museums in Taiwan, taking approximately 3,700 photos of these museums. Though each of the fourteen offers a window into this process of the Taiwaneseization of the island's museums, I will below present a detailed analysis of three museums: the National Palace Museum (main branch), the National Palace Museum (Southern Branch), and the National Taiwan Museum.

I have selected these three museums because they represent the arc of Taiwaneseization. The first museum is the main branch of the National Palace Museum. It epitomizes what many museums looked like before the process of Taiwaneseization began—with a focus on China and a near exclusion of any discussion of Taiwan.

The second museum is the sister museum of the first, the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum. This museum shares a collection with its northerly sister, but it is located in Chiayi, the heartland of Taiwanese independence. One scholar called Chiayi “rabidly Hokkien [Taiwanese-speaking] chauvinist.”<sup>9</sup> Although the language that this scholar used is too strong, but her broader point, that Chiayi is dedicated to Taiwanese independence, hints at how different the Southern Branch is from the main branch. If the main branch represents the standard, pre-democratic narrative centered on China, the Southern Branch represents the Taiwaneseization of that narrative.

The final museum, the National Taiwan Museum, embodies both extremes. As this last museum is Taiwan's oldest museum—being established under Japan's colonial rule in 1908—it has also undergone the Taiwaneseization process. In the space of the museum itself, I will analyze how this process has oc-

9 Linda Gail Arrigo, “From Democratic Movement to Bourgeois Democracy: The Internal Politics of the Taiwan Democratic Progressive Party in 1991,” in *The Other Taiwan, 1945-92*, ed. Murray Rubinstein, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 165.

curred at different points in the museum's history, and will point out how different parts of the museum represent those different parts of the arc of Taiwaneseization.

### *National Palace Museum (Main Branch)*

Taipei's National Palace Museum (NPM) is the most famous museum in the country. In fact, it is the most famous in the Chinese-speaking world. It is also the museum which, to date, has undergone the least amount of Taiwaneseization. As one recent news article on the NPM put it: “In Taipei's NPM, when will it become an NPM that Taiwanese People love and identify with?”<sup>10</sup> When I was conducting my research, I finished visiting all the exhibitions and did not see a single thing concerning Taiwan. When I asked one of the docents at the entrance if there was anything about Taiwan, he succinctly replied, “沒有.” (“[It] does not have [anything].”)

The museum has political power unlike almost any other in the world, which is perhaps one of the reasons it has been able to resist the tide of Taiwaneseization. The head of the NPM is a cabinet-level position appointed directly by and reporting directly to the president (though there is suggestion that this may change).<sup>11</sup> The collection has over 700,000 objects. However, it is not the size of the collection that makes it so important. In fact, when the collection was transported from China to Taiwan in the late 1940s, only the best 20 percent of the original artifacts from the Qing Palace's imperial collection were transported across the Taiwan Straits—3,824 cases of the 19,557 cases that were originally shipped out of Beijing in 1933 were brought to Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Herein

10 Baigu Chen, “Cultural Policy - Controversy over the Restructuring of the Palace Museum - From the Controversy over Restructuring, We Can See a Palace Museum That Is Larger than a Museum,” *Artouch*, December 25, 2020, <https://artouch.com/art-views/content-304028.html>.

11 Wanqian Chen, “Huang Junxiong, Wu Jingji and Li Shude Win the Zhengyuan Culture Award (黃俊雄、吳靜吉、李淑德獲政院文化獎),” *World News Network*, June 1, 2023, <https://www.worldjournal.com/wj/story/121223/7205181>.

12 Jeannette Shambaugh Elliott, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 95; Joseph Allen, *Taipei: City of Displacements*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 113.

lies the real power of the NPM—the fact that it is the finest rather than the largest collection of classical Chinese art and artifacts.

The NPM is in an awkward position ideologically. From its inception, its collection has been a Chinese collection. China is the source of its vast majority of artifacts. Its exhibitions have long been oriented towards China. For decades, museum curators were not even allowed to discuss Taiwan in its exhibits. Yet, the museum is not in China, but in Taiwan.

The museum was built or rebuilt (depending on one's understanding of what is a museum) in the 1960s, reopening on November 12, 1965, Sun Yatsen's (孫中山) birthday.<sup>13</sup> Immediately after the KMT escaped to Taiwan with the finest Chinese art, they stored the treasure in various places, including the Taichung Sugar Warehouse and in nearby caves.<sup>14</sup> It was not until sixteen years after the KMT retreated from China (in 1949), that the museum was opened/reopened. This was during a period in which the KMT was redefining its mission. With the onset of the Cold War and China being walled off behind the Bamboo Curtain, the KMT's new mission and the logic underpinning its regime was to protect Chinese culture until communism collapsed. The NPM became the linchpin of this ideological program.

The museum is closely linked to Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and is situated in a suburb of Taipei close to where Chiang's main residence was. In addition to the closeness of the two sites geographically, Chiang also took a strong interest in the museum's design and underlying message. Initially, an architect named Wang Dahong (王大閎) was invited to design the NPM after winning an architectural competition, but Chiang Kai-shek forced the design committee to ditch Wang. Instead, Chiang personally chose Huang Baoyu, based on a design of Huang's that was more closely connected with Chinese nationalism and other desirable factors. Chiang's intention for the project to be closely connected to the KMT's China-focused ideology was underlined by the name that he chose for it. Initially, it was not called the

NPM, but rather was named after Chiang's political patron and called the Sun Yat-sen Museum (中山博物館).

The NPM's architecture was formulated to evoke Chiang's Chinese-nationalistic ideology, with buildings designed to quote classical northern Chinese architecture and the traditional Chinese centers of power. The design imitates the monumentality of the Chinese imperial palace, with a long axis beginning with an arch and a mountain at the end of that axis.<sup>15</sup> To that end, the museum was modeled on some aspects of the Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City Palace.<sup>16</sup> The floor plan, with four rooms surrounding a central lobby, was designed to mimic the Mingtang (明堂), supposedly the ideal model of the highest levels of the polity in ancient China and the origin of the design of China's imperial buildings.<sup>17</sup> Architecturally, the museum was Chiang's project to link his rule in Taiwan to his semi-imperial claim as the legitimate ruler of all of China, even if he had lost control of that country. As Joseph Allen put it, "The logic was that the 'palace' of the National Palace Museum may have been lost, but its treasury was still largely in the 'nation,' the Republic of China."<sup>18</sup>

After Chiang Kai-shek died, Taiwan slowly moved towards democratic rule. The Taiwanese Localization Movement (台灣本土化運動) blossomed among Taiwanese voters. Even as museums such as the NTM reoriented towards Taiwan as its subject, the National Palace Museum's main branch struggled to do the same. The main branch is too closely tied to the long history of China for it to completely jettison its link to China.

A close read of a single representative exhibit is sufficient to demonstrate how the museum con-

13 Jung-jen Tsai, "The Construction of Chinese National Identity and the Designs of National Museums During the Early Post-War Period in Taiwan," 2018, 454.

14 Elliott, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures*, 97.

15 Tsai, "The Construction of Chinese National Identity," 458.

16 Huang, *National Glory*, 214.

17 Tsai, "The Construction of Chinese National Identity," 459-460.

18 Allen, *Taipei*, 115.



Image: This exhibit in the NPM's main branch highlights the narrative in museums which used to be ubiquitous in Taiwan, a China-centered narrative. (Image source: Author's own photo.)

structs its narrative around a Chinese identity rooted in the deep history of China. Below is the text from the exhibit pictured above, located at the entrance of the exhibition of the collection of bronzes:

*The Bronze Civilization, extolled with the “Rites and Music” of bells and cauldrons [鼎], in the “Worship and Warfare” honoring ancestors, and by Zhou’s “Newly endowed Mandate” and “Elaborate Textual Repertoire”, continued on through the renewed splendors during the Eastern Zhou, all the way to the ultimate unification under Qin and Han. Bronzes gradually yielded its central role in the ritual system but transformed into a cultural archetype, deeply imbued into and manifesting the essence of Chinese [華夏] thought and culture: extensive and elaborate, profound yet moderate.*

The text frames these ancient artifacts as the essence of Chinese civilization. The text mobilizes rhetoric common in narratives that link the ancient history of the Zhou dynasty to the construction of

an imagined Chineseness. Bronze artifacts represent the material culture of an original Chinese civilization, its ancestors, and Confucian texts such as the *Book of Rites* and the *Classic of Music*. The Zhou Dynasty—Confucius’ ideal polity—is linked to the Qin and the Han, the first operative polities that can be pointed to as Chinese states. The text clearly gestures towards this construction of a continuity from the Zhou to the Qin to the Han all the way to the Ming and Qing. This line of dynasties came to constitute the essence of Chineseness, an unbroken series of linked dynasties.

In linking this collection of bronzes to this dynastic continuity, the collection today is articulating an argument that is still grounded in Chiang Kai-shek’s logic: that the NPM represents today’s link in a chain that stretches back to the point at which the essentials of Chineseness were formed, and that the museum is the preserver of the material manifestation of that identity. The reason that this museum has resisted the Taiwaneseization that other Taiwanese museums have undergone is because the museum is so intimately connected to a Chinese, rather than a Taiwanese past. With its collection drawing so deeply off of China’s ancient history, it would be difficult to make the main branch of the National Palace Museum into a museum that did not center China; but the next museum will show that it is not an impossibility.

### National Palace Museum (Southern Branch)

The main branch of the National Palace Museum still represents itself as the preserver of Chinese identity represented through objects. But, since 2015, another National Palace Museum has also existed. Confusingly, this other museum, located in Chiayi and 130 miles south of the main branch, is officially referred to only as the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (I will refer to it as “the National Palace Museum (Southern Branch),” or just the “Southern Branch”). This is largely a fiction concocted for political reasons related to the process of the NPM’s Taiwaneseization; the museum is, *de facto*, a separate museum, even though the two museums do share a single collection and the Southern Branch shares some administration with its

sister branch in Taipei

The Jadeite Cabbage, long one of the most popular artifacts in the main branch of the NPM, was on display in the Southern Branch when I was conducting my research. Though it is impressionistic, my observations suggest that the Jadeite Cabbage was brought to the Southern Branch only as a way to encourage visitors to see the museum. When I was at the main branch of the NPM, I asked about the Jadeite Cabbage and the docent's resigned sigh was audible. It was clear that many in Taipei resented their loss of one of the most important works of art in Chinese history.



*Image: The NPM Southern Branch is surrounded by a lake and a large pedestrian bridge. (Image source: Author's own photo.)*

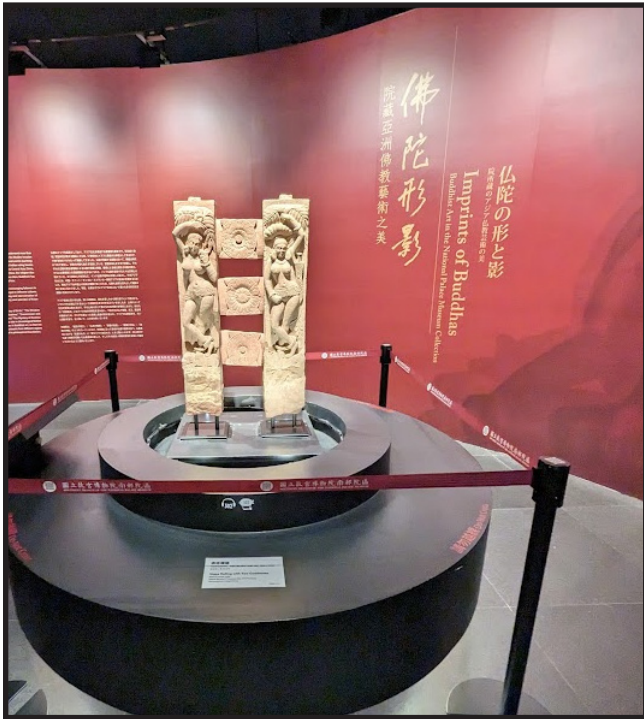
The architecture of the Southern Branch is remarkably distinct from the NPM, to the point that it seems to architecturally reject its sister museum. The structure is a massive modernist building that resembles craggy rocks. It is set off in a large park, newly built, along with a lake and a bridge. The museum and the park are frequently said to be in Chiayi, but this is only partially true. They are located in Chiayi County, but they are still ten miles from Chiayi's city center. Between Chiayi city and the Southern Branch lies a great deal of thinly populated land.

This site was chosen because of the politics of Taiwaneseization. The reason this branch was founded in Chiayi was in order to spread the wealth of the NPM's rich cultural heritage. "In January of the 92<sup>nd</sup>

year (2003), the Executive Yuan approved the establishment of the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum in Taibao City, Chiayi County," the office of the Taiwanese president commented in a press release. "The purpose [of the founding the Southern Branch in Chiayi] was to balance the cultural resource gap between the north and south and allow the people in the southern region to enjoy the cultural assets of the National Palace Museum."<sup>19</sup> This move to the south was likely not only intended to spread cultural resources but also political and even financial resources. The south is perceived by many as more intrinsically Taiwanese. It is the heartland of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民進黨), the political party most closely associated with nativist Taiwanese sentiment. There is every indication that locating this second branch in the south was meant to attract tourists and drive wealth creation in this region that is important to many DPP voters.

The political significance of the museum goes well beyond where it is sited. If the main branch of the NPM articulates a Chinese identity both architecturally and through its collection, the Southern Branch abandons China as its core subject matter. Instead, the core focus of the Southern Branch in its exhibitions is Asia and Taiwan's place in Asia. China remains present and discussed within the exhibits, but it is not foregrounded like in the main branch. The exhibitions in the Southern Branch frame artifacts within a broader Asian identity rather than situating it within a more narrow Chinese identity. While the elite under the KMT dictatorship previously forced all museums to link Taiwan to a single Chinese identity, the Southern Branch today links Taiwan to a broader number of identities. A brief examination of some of the exhibitions will demonstrate how this museum focuses on Asianness.

19 92年1月，行政院核定了國立故宮博物院在嘉義縣太保市成立南部院區，目的是希望能平衡南北的文化資源差距，讓南部的民眾，也能享受故宮的文化資產。Office of the President of the ROC. "The President Attends the Ground-breaking Ceremony of the Southern Campus of the Palace Museum," November 19, 2005, <https://www.president.gov.tw/NEWS/10010>.



*Image: This image shows the opening of an exhibit that frames the NPM's Buddhist collection in terms of its Asianness. (Image source: Author's own photo.)*

One exhibition that highlights a Pan-Asian identity is the “Tea Culture in East Asia” exhibition. The exhibition manages not only to take Asia as its subject (thus linking Taiwan to an Asian identity) but it is also successful at naturalizing the distinction between Taiwan and China. In the introduction to this exhibition, the text states “Immigrants from China to Taiwan during the late Ming and the early Qing dynasties brought this culture with them.” Following this, the visitor is taken through exhibits discussing the way tea culture manifested itself in different regions. As the visitor circumnavigates the exhibition, the narrative begins by explaining how tea culture first emerged in China. From there, the visitor moves through exhibits explaining how tea culture moved from China to Japan, Mongolia, Tibet, and finally to Taiwan.

This exhibition does several things. First, it separates China from Taiwan. If the visitor begins at the origins of tea in China, the last exhibit they will read through is the one on Taiwan. Within the ex-

hibition space, Taiwan is framed as different from China. In fact, they are, within the exhibition's narrative progression, as far from each as they can be, with China starting the exhibition and Taiwan concluding it. This separation may seem obvious, but that is only if one ignores the fact that, to this day, Taiwan's constitution proclaims that Taiwan is a part of China. This exhibition frames Taiwan as distinct from China in a move that is radical even today—at least compared to the official positions of Taipei, Beijing, Tokyo, and Washington.

Second, this exhibition frames Taiwan as participating in the flow of ideas and culture throughout Asia. It shows Taiwan as being on the receiving end of cultural transmissions not just from China but also from Japan and other polities on the Asian mainland. Within this framework, Taiwanese identity is constructed as a dialogue not between two partners, but rather between many. Taiwan is understood to be a part of a circulation of ideas throughout Asia. In other words, the message implied within this exhibition is that Taiwan's identity is not simply transmitted directly from China.

Other exhibitions in the Southern Branch construct a similar framework. In the second exhibition that the visitor encounters moving from the ticket gate is titled “Imprints of the Buddha - Buddhist Art in the National Palace Museum Collection.” The Chinese name of the exhibit (as translated by me into English) is “Imprints of the Buddha - The Beauty of the Asian Buddhist Art in the National Palace Museum Collection” (佛陀形影 – 院藏亞洲佛教藝術之美), highlights the Asianness of the exhibition. It is unclear why the word “Asia” was not translated from Chinese to English. It may just be accidental; the Japanese language translation of the title contains the word “Asia” (アジア) and essentially corresponds to the Chinese language title.

This exhibition features artifacts drawn from many parts of Asia, highlighting an Asian rather than a strictly Chinese identity. Of course, this exhibition does not exclude Chinese artifacts. In fact, many of the artifacts are drawn from China. But, in framing the artwork as “Asian” rather than using some other framework, the curators highlight the fact that these artifacts arrived in Taiwan via a circulation throughout Asia. In the era



Image: Another exhibit at the NPM Southern Branch highlighting Asia rather than China. (Image source: Author's own photo.)

before Taiwaneseization, curators in museums like the National History Museum (國立歷史博物館) foregrounded the Chinese aspects of Buddhism and situate artifacts in a Chinese identity by emphasizing the fact that they arrived in Taiwan via China.

The exhibition that follows “Imprints of the Buddha - Buddhist Art in the National Palace Museum Collection” is titled “Asian Textiles” and similarly constructs the exhibition around an Asian framework. Again, this exhibition draws from the NPM’s collection of cloth and clothing from all over Asia, including Japan, Vietnam, Java, Taiwan and China—articulating a Pan-Asian identity. By juxtaposing clothes from these different polities, it creates a category of “Asia.” Implied in the construction of this exhibit is the understanding that for these textiles to be placed in the same exhibition there must be some sort of inherent similarity: an Asian identity. As the visitor moves through this space, it is expected that they will understand and internalize these frameworks into their own thinking.

Not all exhibitions in the Southern Branch escape the pull of the old narrative of Chineseness. After all, the Southern Branch’s collection is that of the NPM’s and the artifacts are therefore drawn from the collection of the Qing imperial houses. The first room that visitors enter after the ticket gate is a room that is similar in content to the main branch of the NPM. Discussions of Taiwan and Asia more broadly are absent from this exhibition room. The narrative in this first room, titled



Image: The NPM Southern Branch’s most popular exhibit contains the Jadeite Cabbage and other artifacts. (Image source: Author’s own photo.)

“Our Beloved Treasures,” (a more accurate translation of the Chinese would be “Popular National Treasures” (人氣國寶)) underlines that old equation of the nation and China.

This is the exhibition featuring the Jadeite Cabbage. This piece is connected directly to the Qing imperial house and links the museum to the imperial Chinese tradition. Other artifacts in this exhibition were much older. There were writing utensils connected to Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE), and even an inscription carved into a roof tile that might have been connected to the Chinese general Cao Cao (曹操, 155-220 CE). The signage in the exhibition situates these objects within the long history of imperial China, a narrative that is redolent of the main branch and the narratives common to Taiwanese museums in the period from 1945 to the 1990s.

If the “Popular National Treasures” exhibition takes China as its subject and shows no signs of Taiwaneseization, another exhibition focuses solely on Taiwan as its subject. At the end of the ticketed portion of the museum, there is another exhibition titled “Images of Taiwan.”<sup>20</sup> The English subtitle of this exhibition is “An Out-

20 臺灣意象, the text translates this as “Imaginary Taiwan,” but this is an inaccurate translation.



*Image: The famous Jadeite Cabbage. When I visited this exhibit in 2013, it was held in the main branch and was crowded with people. Today it has been moved to the Southern Branch, partially in order to incentivize people to make the trip to the Southern Branch. (Image source: Author's own photo.)*

siders Gaze at Taiwan's Landscape and Products," while the Chinese subtitle is the more provocative "Taiwan's scenery in the eyes of the Imperialists Countries" (帝國眼中的台灣風物).<sup>21</sup> The exhibition shows how Dutch, Qing and Japanese imperialists depicted Taiwan.

This framing is controversial because the narrative juxtaposes the Qing regime with the Japanese and Dutch regimes as imperialists outsiders. Unlike the main branch of the NPM, which has largely preserved the pre-1987 perspective, this branch contains exhibitions clearly oriented towards a Taiwanese perspective that frames

<sup>21</sup> Here, I am calling the title a mistranslation, because I believe that it reflects a mistaken understanding. On the other hand, the subtitle is just a different meaning and is likely intentional. To a certain degree, this is inevitably impressionistic, and without an interview with the curator, it is hard to be more confident, but I feel fairly certain that these are the correct ways to understand the title and subtitle.

the island's history as many in the Pan-Green political camps understand it. Even amongst scholars today, calling China's actions in Taiwan colonialism is highly controversial, despite the fact that it is self-evident that they are, by definition, colonial.<sup>22</sup>

If the Southern Branch still retains this older narrative, it is also the site where a new narrative is beginning to form. Beyond the exhibitions that distance Taiwan from China by discussing it in the context of Asianness, there are other exhibitions that take Taiwan as the singular subject of history. The written introduction to the exhibition "Images of Taiwan" is the best example of the latter:

*By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, various imperial powers started to investigate and discover Taiwan. This exhibition aims, through how maps, landscape paintings, goods produced in different stages, to convey Taiwan's history from two aspects [sic]. The first is revisiting the historical documents made from an "outsider's gazes that reflected how the Dutch East India Company, the Qing Dynasty and the Empire of Japan explored Taiwan's geography and social customs. The second is focusing on the "local agency", which indicated how people living in Taiwan after being ruled by different empires gradually formed a collective consciousness, acquired knowledge and skills and developed their own discourse.*

In this exhibition, Taiwan becomes the subject of history. It is a rather passive subject, one that is viewed, rather than viewing, yet it is still a subject. Note how the narrative situates Taiwan in relation to the Qing state. The Qing dynasty is not, as the pre-1987 discourse would have framed the matter, the rightful ruler of this Chinese island. Rather, the Qing empire is an outsider, just like the Dutch and the Japanese. This perspective is discordant with the view of Taiwanese history as subsumed with-

<sup>22</sup> Emma Teng, *Taiwan's Imagined Geography: Chinese Colonial Travel Writing and Pictures, 1683-1895*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.



*Image: This sign does something that would have never happened in the earlier narrative. It highlights Japanese colonialism in a positive light. It argues that Japanese colonialists helped create a Taiwanese identity by linking up the island's transportation network. (Image source: Author's own photo.)*

in Chinese history, common in the pre-1987 discourse (and still common today in China).<sup>23</sup>

The rest of the exhibition largely follows the pattern set forth in the introduction. The Dutch, the Qing and the Japanese are all shown as imperial powers exploiting Taiwan's resources, but also contributing to Taiwan. The different perspectives that each of the three imperial powers had regarding Taiwan are displayed and analyzed. There is an exhibit on how the Dutch mapped Taiwan and another on "The Eight Views of Taiwan" (台灣八景), a poem about the eight different scenes that a Qing traveler would be expected to visit while traveling to Taiwan. The Japanese are generally portrayed in a positive light, again breaking with the older narrative that tended to malign Japanese rule as excessively harsh. Here is an example of one of the exhibits speaking positively about Japanese infrastructure contributing to Taiwanese consciousness:

*Before the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan's sea and land transportation were quite inconvenient, and the residents did not have a*

23 *Xinhua*, "The Opening in Beijing of an Exhibition Whose Theme Is Commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Taiwan's Recovery," October 25, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-10/25/c\\_1126655460.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-10/25/c_1126655460.htm).

*concept of group consciousness. After the transportation construction was completed, the people between various places were frequently connected. Thus, the concept of "Taiwan as a whole island" started to take shape.*

Taiwan is the subject of this exhibition, but this exhibition also notes how Taiwan and Taiwanese-ness were not something that the residents of the island of several centuries before would have identified themselves with. As Benedict Anderson has noted, identity is an imagined community produced by having people participate in shared processes like reading the same literature and conducting the same journeys.<sup>24</sup> What this text alludes to is that the Japanese created an infrastructure, such as railroads and roads, that connected the Taiwanese to each other and contributed to the production of the imagined community that is Taiwan. By portraying the Japanese colonialists in a positive light, this exhibition departs significantly from the pre-1987 narratives which denigrated the Japanese as interfering with China's internal affairs by stealing Taiwan from its rightful Chinese home.

A final point: this narrative frames three different groups, the Dutch, the Qing and the Japanese, as representing imperialist outsiders. This narrative is the product of choices made by the curators, which in turn are choices formed by ideologies (as with all museums). Earlier Taiwanese curators would not have chosen to frame the Qing as outsiders. Yet, the Southern Branch's curators have chosen to do so, in fitting with the conceptualization of the island today as a historical subject distinct from China. In short, those who the curators chose to frame as outsiders indicate the ideological orientation of the museum, and the curators themselves are affected by the changing views and ideologies of Taiwan's Taiwanese-ization.

The Southern Branch of the NPM is a manifestation of the Taiwanese-ization of the island nation's museums. Though the museum was built in the last decade, it preserves three separate narratives within its exhibits. The first, consisting of the Jadeite Cabbage and other artifacts from the Qing imperial collection, articulates an identity that is little

24 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991).



changed from that of the NPM main branch and the older narrative concordant with the pre-1987 dictatorship. The last exhibition articulates an identity that is clearly Taiwanese, taking Taiwan as its sole subject in line with Pan-Green understandings of the island's history. In between these two extremes are those exhibitions that frame Taiwanese history not as a part of Chinese history nor as the history of a Taiwanese nation, but instead as part of a pan-Asian circulation of identities.

## *National Taiwan Museum*

Established in 1908, the National Taiwan Museum (NTM, 國立台灣博物館) is the oldest in Taiwan. Initially, it was named the Taiwan Governor's Museum and largely showcased objects collected by Japanese colonialists from their colony. These artifacts included taxidermied animals, pressed plants and artifacts from the aboriginal populations. The building in which it is housed, built in 1915, is a work of neoclassical architecture that looks like it belongs more in Athens, Greece or Athens, Georgia, not the Japanese-controlled colonial Taihoku. In fact, neoclassical architecture was, at the time, common throughout the Japanese empire. This form of architecture was a means of signaling Japan's modernizing mission.<sup>25</sup>

Originally, the museum was built to do several things. First, it was meant to demonstrate that Japan had control over the territory of Taiwan. By displaying these objects, Japanese colonial officials established that they were in control of the island. During the period, this was a common method for colonial powers to demonstrate their control of a specific region.

Like similar spaces such as the Osaka Expo in 1903 and the Taiwan Expo of 1935, the museum was built

<sup>25</sup> Aso, *Public Properties*, 40.

in order to exoticize and otherize Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> It framed Taiwan as an exotic, non-normative space, encumbered by an ahistorical Asianness/Chineseness, an identity that weighed down the island's people with a history that they would not be able to overcome without the help of the Japanese colonizers.<sup>27</sup> However, with the help of the Japanese colonizer, it was imagined that the Taiwanese would be able to overcome their Asian/Chinese identity and enter modernity. This allowed Japan to become the norm against which the modernity of Taiwan and other colonies were measured.

In 1945, the Japanese lost their empire, and Taiwan's museums were quickly rid of their signifiers of Japanese imperialism. The orientation of these institutions shifted abruptly, though not in a way that allowed for Taiwan to become their subject. This museum's name was changed from the Taiwan Governor's Museum to the Provincial Taiwan Museum. The orientation of the narrative shifted. Before, Taiwanese objects were allowed to exist in the exhibition space so long as they hailed the visitor as a part of the Japanese empire, or, at the very least, did nothing to interfere with the identity of Taiwan as a colony in the Japanese empire. After the changes in the political leadership, anything related to Taiwan was deemphasized. It became difficult to discuss, within the museum, anything related to the island.

Instead, exhibition spaces came to celebrate narratives that centered China. The artifacts featured were often ones that glorified the autocratic leadership of

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>27</sup> During this period, the Japanese, following the writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi, saw themselves as not Asians. See Fukuzawa's essay "On Abandoning Asia" (脱亞).

In short, those who the curators chose to frame as outsiders indicate the ideological orientation of the museum, and the curators themselves are affected by the changing views and ideologies of Taiwan's Taiwanization.

the new regime. The artifacts which dominated museums in the 1960s are now largely absent from the NTM (and most other museums). However, I encountered one while doing my research, and this following vignette demonstrates several ways in which the NTM has changed.

On the second floor of the western stairwell, just at the exit of the main exhibit, there stands a wooden statue of a deer, approximately four meters tall. The deer had the Chinese character 壽 (longevity) carved onto it. The deer itself is a symbol of longevity in Chinese culture, but little explanatory signage is given for the exhibit. The small sign says only that the deer was given to Chiang Kai-shek in 1965 as a birthday present and that it entered the collection in 1970.

Pondering this exhibit, I had trouble understanding why it was here. With the symbolism of the deer, it is apparent why the deer was given to Chi-



*Image: Deer statue that was a birthday present to Chiang Kai-Shek. (Image source: Author's own photo.)*

ang as a birthday present. But it was unclear to me as to why the curators would have located an exhibit here, in a stairwell. The exhibit, with its little signage and its odd location, had the air of being left behind, a relic of an earlier era.

Struggling to find out more about the exhibit, I asked the docent if she knew the history of the artifact. I described what the object is and where it is located. At first, she denied that there was any such object in the building. Then, she obligingly followed me up to the second floor stairwell where she was surprised by the deer. She told me she had not noticed the exhibit and had no idea what it was there for nor what its history was.

As we were talking, a second docent joined us. He was also unfamiliar with the artifact. The three of us discussed the artifact for fifteen minutes, with the two docents consulting their phones to try to learn more about the origin of the artifact.<sup>28</sup> Despite their willingness to help me, they were not able to offer me much more information.

A few days later, during an interview with Li Zining (李子寧), the head of the museum and the curator of that exhibition, I mentioned my experience with the deer. He told me that, indeed, the deer was the kind of exhibit that was popular with audiences during the 1960s and 1970s. These exhibits were artifacts that celebrated Chiang Kai-shek. The NTM had many more of these types of artifacts in its storage sites, but Li stated that modern audiences are no longer interested in them. When I asked him why they did not move the deer into storage, he laughed and stated that “It was too big.” Because the deer is so tall, it did not fit into the elevator and would have been difficult to move downstairs. They simply decided to leave it there. In other words, the answer to my curiosity was simple: the museum had left the deer exhibit there out of convenience.

The deer is an example of the ideological orientation of museums that dominated the NTM from 1945 to approximately the end of the twentieth century, an orientation that centered the Chiang regime. Many of the

<sup>28</sup> I was not able to find out whether they were using public websites or a special website available only to museum workers.

other artifacts that were popular in this era focused on articulating aspects of Chinese culture, and thus strengthening the ideology of the dictatorship. Although the state's ideology at the time insisted that Taiwan was a part of China, this ideology manifested itself in a way that silenced Taiwan—as discussed earlier. It is the ideology that the authoritarian KMT promoted that is sidelined within Taiwan's museums.

Today, the museum has changed to focus on articulating a Taiwanese perspective. The featured exhibition (the one that adjoins the stairwell with the deer) was described by Director Li Zining as adopting a Taiwanese perspective, stating that he wanted to “use our own perspective to see Taiwan's story. This is the task of this [exhibition].”<sup>29</sup> Later during our interview, he added that the exhibit proposes to answer the question: “What are the Taiwanese people?”<sup>30</sup> His answer was that the Taiwanese people were a blend of many different groups. The word he kept repeating throughout the interview was “mixture/blend” (混合).<sup>31</sup> It was clear from the interview that Director Li was attempting to construct a multicultural narrative. If Taiwanese museums were previously focused on constructing a unicultural sense of Chineseness, the new generation of Taiwanese museums aims to distance themselves from that, constructing a narrative that is more multicultural and postmodern, allowing for multiple perspectives and voices within a single exhibition.

The main exhibition is on the NTM's second floor. Visitors first must climb the neoclassical staircase in the entrance atrium. When they turn the corner, there is a small sign at the entrance that gives the title of the exhibit: “Exploring Taiwan” (博物台灣) with the exhibit divided into sections such as the “People of Taiwan,” “The Dutch Golden Age in Taiwan” and “Legitimate and Classical.” The first section within this exhibition states a clear purpose, and it sounds like Director Li may have written it

29 自己的觀點來看台灣的故事。就是它[this exhibit]基本的任務。以台灣為主要。

30 台灣人是什麼

31 混合

himself: “This is the story of Taiwan and her people told by the NTM through its collections from the last 100 years.” Functioning as the exhibition's introduction, the exhibit offers a Taiwanese perspective on Director Li's question, “What are the Taiwanese people?”



Image: Exhibit highlighting the history of Dutch colonization of Taiwan (Image source: Author's own photo.)

Beginning with the history of Taiwan, this first exhibit discusses Taiwan's history in terms of the Dutch colonial experience. Unlike the subsequent sign (discussed below), this exhibit does not explicitly state whether Dutch rule of the island was legitimate or not. Yet, by highlighting the Dutch colonial control over Taiwan, the curators are implicitly rejecting the narrative—commonly articulated both in China by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) and in Taiwan by groups affiliated with the KMT—that Taiwan has always been a Chinese island and that non-Chinese control of the island was nothing more than an aberration. Prior to the country's democratization, museums and other narratives relayed that narrative that Taiwan was a Chinese island that was stolen by the Dutch. In situating the exhibit on “Taiwan's story” as beginning not with Chinese historical actors but rather with the Dutch, this exhibit undercuts this sino-centric narrative. Instead, the exhibit posits the more historically-accurate notion that the first state to unite much of the island of Taiwan into a single political unit was the Dutch colonists. This kind of framing has the effect of de-sinicizing the story of Taiwan and undercuts claims that it always has and always will be a

part of China.

The exhibit also effectively ignores Taiwan's indigenous population. Before ethnic Han Chinese began colonizing the island, control of Taiwan was in the hands of a large number of different tribes. Though there was no island-wide polity, Taiwan had been occupied for thousands of years by large numbers of Austronesian speakers. By framing the Dutch as the first unifying authority in the history of Taiwan, this exhibit effectively silences Taiwan's indigenous groups from the progression of history (though there is another section of the exhibition, outside of the linear narrative, where the curators provided several exhibits on Taiwan's indigenous population).



Image: Exhibit on Koxinga in the NTM. (Image source: Author's own photo.)

After the section on the Dutch, the exhibit that follows is a painting of Koxinga (國姓爺/鄭成功). Koxinga is the historical figure who led the fight to eject the Dutch colonists. He was a Ming Dynasty loyalist who fled China and captured Taiwan, pushing the Dutch out of the island and establishing the first Chinese polity on Taiwan. The English title of this exhibit is "Legitimate and Classical," and the Chinese title is "正統與古典". The Chinese title of the exhibit suggests not only legitimacy (something clear from the English title) but also something akin to "legitimate succession." The painting in the exhibit was once located in the Koxinga's family shrine and purchased by the curators approximately a century before. Each regime that controlled Taiwan deployed this historical figure for different purposes. Those aligned with the KMT's perspective on history have imagined him to be a predecessor of Chiang Kai-shek, a loyal servant of the older Chinese regime who wanted to unify Taiwan with China. Taiwanese independence advocates have frequently imagined Koxinga to be the forerunner of an independent Taiwanese polity, a man who established a Han Chinese regime on Taiwan, independent of the Chinese state in mainland Asia.

This exhibit does not align Koxinga's regime with either political ideology. As the exhibit states, "In 1662, his troops defeated the Dutch and established the first Chinese regime in Taiwan." In conjunction with the previous exhibit, this text could be read as highlighting the fact that Taiwan existed as an independent polity outside of the Qing empire widely accepted (both today and in the past) as the legitimate ruler of China. But the KMT reading could just as easily be applied to this text on Koxinga. This text could be interpreted as focusing on how Koxinga ejected European colonialists from the island and transformed it into a Chinese space. As a result, this exhibit is ambiguous, providing space for a multiplicity of readings.

The following section of the exhibit is the first in which an indigenous figure plays a role in Taiwan's history, as represented by the narrative. In this exhibit is a painting of an Anli chief, Dunzi (敦子). The signage describes the chief who established and maintained relationships



Image: Exhibit on Dunzi, an indigenous Taiwanese chief.  
Image source: Author's own photo.)

with the various powers who governed Taiwan during the early modern period. The Anli chiefs enhanced their power by frequently helping the colonial regimes (whether Qing or Dutch) control other indigenous groups. Unlike the two previous exhibits, the exhibit on the Anli chief does not offer any significant ideological points on Taiwan's relationship with China. However, the exhibit's description of the Anli chief traffics in some of the stereotypes associated with Taiwanese indigenous people. At the end of this exhibit's signage, the text reads:

*While lacking the tasteful elegance often seen in traditional Chinese leisure painting, this work nevertheless delicately conveys the bold and unrestrained nature of Dunzi as the leading prime headman of central Taiwan during the Qing Dynasty.*

Implicit in this statement is that the indigenous people represent a less civilized, more natural mode of being,

while the Chinese represent the opposite. It is possible to interpret this statement as being focused just on the painting and thus not a commentary on the difference between the Han Chinese and the indigenous groups. However, the comment so closely echoes the differing ways that Chinese and non-Chinese “barbarian” subjects are referenced that it is hard not to see this as a commentary on the indigeneity of the Anli chiefs. The word used in the Chinese text is 豪放. In the dictionaries I referenced, it is defined as “bold and unconstrained,” “uninhibited” and “powerful and free.” These descriptions evoke common tropes of indigenous groups not only in both Taiwan and China, but throughout the world. Indigenous groups are often understood as lacking the effects of “civilizing” factors and being somehow beyond the control of civilization. This text seems to evoke a similar rhetoric, situating Taiwan's indigenous groups within this stereotypical framework. While the thesis of this article is that Taiwan's museums have undergone a “Taiwanization,” this discussion of Dunzi and how indigenous groups are characterized complicates that thesis by noting that the process that Director Li spoke of—of constructing a multi-cultural Taiwan—is an ongoing rather than a complete process.

The rest of this portion of the exhibition (*as seen in photos on the next page*) mainly focuses on the history of Qing control of China and the tenuousness of that control. The Qing regime controlled Taiwan from 1683 to 1895. During that time, the Qing made important contributions to Taiwan and maintained control over much (though not all) of the island. The above photograph of the Kangxi Taiwan map displays one of the artifacts of that control. For many years, this was the best cartographical representation of Taiwan. It was a device that both signaled that the Qing controlled Taiwan and was a means for that control. By displaying the Kangxi map as part of the exhibit, the exhibition underscores that for more than two centuries, the Qing controlled Taiwan—a choice that highlights a China-centric narrative.

However, there are many other exhibits that under-

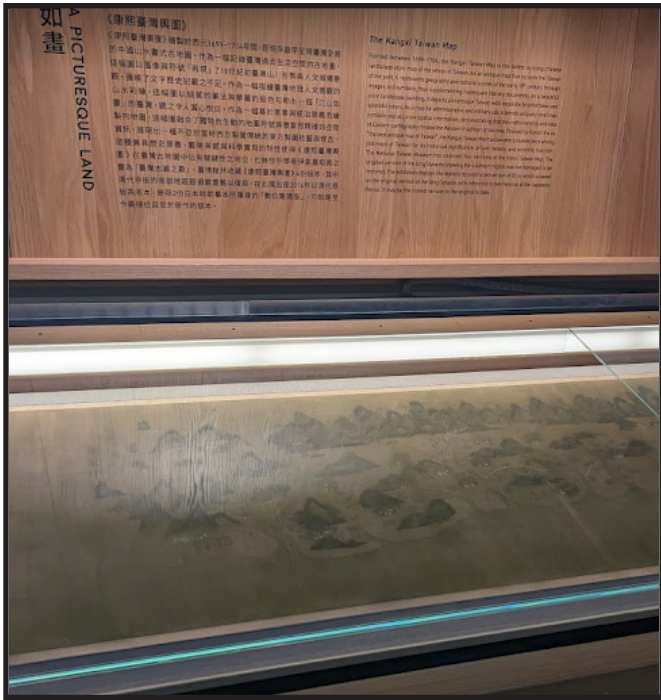


Image: Exhibit highlighting the history of Qing colonization of Taiwan. (Image source: Author's own photo.)

cut the Qing claim of control over Taiwan, instead highlighting how tenuous that control was. Pictured in the photo to the left is one of the flags from the 1874 Japanese invasion of Taiwan. The Japanese flags were left in indigenous villages in the southeast corner of the island. Because these flags were a means of demonstrating loyalty to Japan (and thus avoiding Japanese imperial reprisals in their war), they call into question the extent of control that the Qing empire had over Taiwan and the Qing regime's ability to protect Taiwanese people. Obviously, if villages were flying Japanese flags in order to avoid Japanese retribution, the Qing did not exercise complete sovereignty over the island.

This example is not the only exhibit that highlights how fragile Qing control was over the island. Overall, there are several, including an exhibit on the French invasion of Taiwan in 1884. Even though there are exhibits which highlight both Qing control over the island and the tenuousness of that control, it was the characterization of the fragility of the Qing's control that tended to win out in the exhibition's representation of this period. This overarching characterization may result from curators' intentions to highlight how tenuous Qing control of Taiwan was, underlining the narrative—common among activists in the Democratic Progressive Party and others in favor of Taiwanese independence—that Taiwan is distinct from China. Thus, this exhibit, despite demonstrating the Qing empire's control of Taiwan, ultimately narrated the history of Taiwan in a way that accentuated Taiwan's independent nature and minimized the linkages between Taiwan and China.



Image: Exhibit highlighting the history of Japanese colonization of Taiwan. Image source: Author's own photo.)

The National Taiwan Museum contains all the main stages of Taiwanese museum history within its building and exhibits. The architecture telegraphs the early Japanese colonial mission of modernizing what it considered its benighted and exotic colony. Chiang Kai-shek's birthday deer is an example of the kinds of artifacts displayed during the period of the KMT dictatorship. The new, "Exploring Taiwan" exhibition is an example of the turn towards Taiwan seen in most contemporary Taiwanese museums, where the narrative common during the 1945 to 2000 period—stressing Taiwan's linkages

es with China and a Chinese identity—has been muted. The fact that the National Taiwan Museum contains different and discordant narratives shows how this institution embodies the transition that Taiwanese museums underwent. Additionally, as the oldest museum in Taiwan and one at the heart of the political and economic capital of the country, the National Taiwan Museum has a claim to primacy, which gives legitimacy to its representations of “what the Taiwanese people are.”

The fact that the National Taiwan Museum contains different and discordant narratives shows how this institution embodies the transition that Taiwanese museums underwent.

## Conclusion

These three institutions adumbrate the basic shift that occurred as the island's museums underwent the process of Taiwaneseization. The National Palace Museum's main branch represents an older narrative promoted by the KMT that centered China as the subject of the museum and did not discuss Taiwan. Under the KMT dictatorship, discussion of Taiwan and its culture was not allowed. Due to the fact that the museum was an official space intended to inculcate visitors with an ideological narrative, this was more true in the museum space than in other spaces. Taiwanese visitors were to leave the museum identifying as Chinese. Because of the prestige of the National Palace Museum, the main branch's ideological orientation has largely remained the same as it was four decades earlier.

Beyond its prestige, the main branch has been able to resist the process of Taiwaneseization because those forces who did want the museum to Taiwaneseize were able to build a separate museum in the Taiwanese heartland. By constructing the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum, politicians on the island favoring the Taiwaneseization process were able to have their own, Taiwaneseized version of the NPM. The Southern Branch represents the opposite end of the spectrum, moving away from the old narrative that centers on China and towards a narrative that centers on Taiwan and abandons most claims to an identity linked to China. In the Southern Branch, the process of Taiwaneseization achieves its mature form. The museum links the island less to China and instead tries to frame Taiwan as part of a broader Asian-Pacific region. China, and Taiwan's links to it, are still represented, but they are

deemphasized.

The National Taiwan Museum embodied both ends of this arc from an orientation towards China to one towards Taiwan. The National Taiwan Museum retains elements of the pre-democratic narrative, like the deer given to Chiang Kai-shek for his birthday. However, the main narrative in the National Taiwan Museum has shifted. Now, the subject of the museum is not China, or Chiang Kai-shek, but Taiwan.

The fact that these two elements can sit so close to one another, with the Chiang birthday deer situated right outside the main exhibit, is a reminder that this process of Taiwaneseization within Taiwanese museums (as well as Taiwanese society) is still ongoing, and that these two narratives can sit uncomfortably side by side, sometimes literally. The two branches of the National Palace Museums are part of the same institution, but they broadcast remarkably different narratives. The effect can sometimes be jarring, but it is one of the unique contributions that Taiwanese democracy has given to the world: Taiwan demonstrates that two opposing worldviews can exist within one country, and that institutions represent those differing worldviews can coexist alongside one another, even if there is significant tension in these relationships.

Taiwan demonstrates that two opposing worldviews can exist within one country, and that institutions represent those differing worldviews can coexist alongside one another, even if there is significant tension in these relationships.