

The Evocative Imagery of an Art Giant: A Review of the Modern Art Development in Taiwan under the Influence of Li Chun-Shan

Curator | Tao Wen-Yuen

Introduction

In Taiwan, “modern art” tends to be dated from the 1950s and 1960s. It is noteworthy that the paradigm shift in the art world does not enjoy a straightforward linear development. Its causes have been diverse. Historical, cultural and environmental factors have all impacted upon it at different moments in the long run. Similarly, in occidental art history, the trendiest painting school or art movement has been changing in tandem with the macrocosm. There is no such thing as eternity. Just like what Li Chun-Shan said, “No painting school is permanent, yet its merit is immortal.”¹ All things merge with the tide of history, generating an unstoppable momentum that keeps times changing.

In terms of Taiwan’s art history, the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition dictated the art development in Taiwan throughout the early 20th century. Enlightened by Japanese education, senior Taiwanese artists engaged in painting or sculpture out of their burning passion for arts. Being an artist was a noble profession revered by the elite class. It is not surprising at all, because, at that time, the Japanese colonial regime had absolute control over Taiwan’s politics and education, leaving only a few professions (e.g. arts, medical science) available for Taiwanese people. The artistic creation in that period was relatively pure and simple, and therefore seemed to lack diversity along the course of its development. Generally speaking, senior Taiwanese painters followed the style of Japanese Impressionism (many prominent Japanese painters pursued advanced training in Paris, which was why Impressionism had a marked influence on them). Their paintings were mostly sketching from nature and realistic portrayal. Such a “quasi-Impressionist style” started to move into the mainstream in the 1930s, and remained so till the post-war period in Taiwan. Stellar examples include the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition (1927), the Tai Yang Art Exhibition (1934), and the Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition (1946).

In his article written for *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly*, famous art critic Lin Hsing-Yueh pointed out that “the creative ideas of senior Taiwanese painters who flourished in the pre-war period turned into canonical and dogmatized shackles on the younger generation in the post-war era.”² In his book *Forty Years of Taiwan’s Fine Arts*, Lin further mentioned that “the first generation of Taiwanese artists possessed prodigious talents and displayed great fighting spirit, but they lacked the experiences of the trials and tribulations of adversity and the mental sophistication developed from arduous, root-taking efforts in the bleakness of their homeland. Distinct from those in the literary world, their career paths and creative ethos foreordained their severe disorientation in the post-war era.”³ Another influential force was the group of Chinese painters who retreated to Taiwan together with the Nationalist government after the fall of Mainland in 1949. Their oeuvres embodied traditions and inherent conservatism. Posing as strict defenders of Chinese orthodoxy, they controlled Taiwan’s art world by means of politics and education. The early development of Taiwanese art ergo manifested itself in the legacies of senior Taiwanese painters and those migrated from China.

1 Liu Wen-Tan, “Discussing Avant-garde Art with Li Chun-Shan,” in *A Collection of Articles by Li Chun-Shan*, p. 70.

2 Lin Hsing-Yueh, *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly*, no. 256, June 1992, p. 41.

3 Lin Hsing-Yueh, *Forty Years of Taiwan’s Fine Arts*, p. 47.

Years of cultural or artistic stagnation always bring forth wise and farsighted pioneers. In an environment where conservative values triumph, however, loneliness is a natural concomitant of their original spirit, which puts their faith and perseverance to the test. Li Chun-Shan (1912-1984) who flourished in the 1950s and 1960s could be construed as one of the pioneers of Taiwan's modern art. The later generations hold Li in deep reverence as the "groundbreaker of Chinese modern painting" and the "mentor of Taiwanese modern painting," because he was not only an artist par excellence but also an influential educator, a legendary figure in Taiwan's art world. His abstract paintings, pedagogic strategy, as well as his social and cultural milieus have been eulogized by his disciples and other artists, which is why we can find great delight in studying his abstract art and teaching.

His oeuvre welded together surrealist ideas, Automatism, abstract painting, and Sigmund Freud's account of the unconscious mind, channeling his personal supra-consciousness to create engrossing compositions characterized by unpretentious lines and imbricated layers of colors. Li's mentorship was different from traditional academic training, distinguishing itself by his pedagogical approach of teaching in line with the disciple's ability, which was exemplified by his celebrated one-on-one teaching method. Based on the different stages of Li's artistic creation and teaching, this article proceeds in four parts: (1) an overview of Li's life, training and career; (2) the period of running an atelier on An-dong Street after 1951; (3) the years of teaching in Changhua after 1957; and (4) the post-Li Chun-Shan era.

Li was an artistic icon in Taiwan's art history. He devoted a lifetime to the promotion of Taiwanese modern art, based on which his disciples have not only evolved their respective creative styles, but also flourished with remarkable fruits. Against this background, the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts elaborately orchestrated *Pioneers of the Avant-Garde Movement in Taiwan: From Li Chun-Shan to His Disciples*, a grand exhibition that gives prominence to the works by a total of 35 artists, foremost Li Chun-Shan (1912-1984), the mentor of Taiwanese modern painting, together with his disciples, including Chu Wei-Bor (1926-2018), Oyan Wen-Yuen (1928-2007), Li Yuan-Chia (1929-1994), Chiao Shih-Tai (1929-), Wu Hao (1932-), Hsia Yang (1932-), Ho Kan (1932-), Tommy Chen (1931-2017), Hsiao Chin (1935-), Hsiao Ming-Hsien (1936-), Lee Shi-Chi (1936-), Syu Huei-Huang (1937-), Huang Run-Se (1937-2013), Chung Chun-Hsiung (1939-), Dennis Hwang (1941-), Jan Syue-Fu (1942-), Hsieh Tung-Shan (1946-), Hwang Buh-Ching (1948-), Cheng Chiung-Ming (1948-), Wang Ching-Cheng (1948-), Cheng Wu-Chang (1949-), Kuo Jen-Chang (1949-), Hsu Yu-Jen (1951-), Chen Hsing-Wan (1951-2004), Chu Teh-I (1952-), Li Jiin-Shiow (1953-2003), Yao Keh-Hong (1953-), Yang Mao-Lin (1953-), Chern Shen-Son (1954-), Chu Teh-Huah (1954-), Wu Mei-Song (1955-), Hwang Wey-Jeng (1955-), Lin Hung-Ming (1956-), and Chen Chu-Yin (1962-). The works displayed in this exhibition encompass a riotous profusion of forms ranging from drawing, watercolor, ink-wash and oil painting to ceramics, mixed-media, sculpture, installation and digital interaction. Embracing such a rich diversity of works by these admirable artists, we expect to address the perpetuation and development of Li Chun-Shan's spirit of art in a thorough, forward-looking, and extensive fashion.

1. Li's Coming-of-age Chronicle, Training and Career Highlights

1-1. An Early Bloomer of Art

Li Chun-Shan was born in Shaoguan, Guangdong province, China in 1912. His father Li Ru-Mei was a palace graduate (*jīnshì*) of the Qing Dynasty in Imperial China, who was not only well-versed in law but also skilled at ink-wash painting and calligraphy. His mother Li Jin-Wen was also capable of poetry and proficient at prose. Li Chun-

Shan had three siblings: two elder brothers and a younger sister. Being erudite through parental teaching and influence, he was an early bloomer of art. Enrolled in the SDB Li-Chun Elementary School at the age of eight and then the Li-Chun High School with an exemption from the entrance exam, his diligent practice at ink-wash painting and calligraphy after school laid an excellent foundation for his painting career.

1-2. Learning and Enlightened by Modern Art Event in Shanghai

After high school, Li Chun-Shan was enrolled in the Guangzhou Fine Arts School without a hitch. As a person craving innovation and revolution, however, he no longer felt satisfied with the traditional training offered by this school. Instead, he transferred to the Shanghai Fine Arts School at the suggestion of his cousin who was a businessman. The all-embracing, bustling Shanghai metropolitan area and the baptism of modern art at the Shanghai Fine Arts School collectively opened up new horizons for Li. In 1931, Li by sheer chance encountered Ōta Mitsugi and Tasaka Kenzaburō, two Japanese painters who visited and sketched from nature at the West Lake. The three hit it off immediately, which informed Li of Japan's congenial environment for modern art development, and prompted him to pursue advanced training in Japan later. Local artists highly valued Li's paintings created during the time when he was studying in Shanghai. In 1932, at the invitation of the Jue-Lan Society,⁴ the earliest avant-garde artist group in China, Li presented two of his "machine-style" oil paintings at the first painting exhibition hosted by the Shanghai Chinese Art Association.

1-3. Studying Abroad in Japan and Shining with Extraordinary Talent

In March 1933, Li passed the exam with flying colors and was hence enrolled in the Department of Fine Arts, Nihon University, Japan. Majoring in Western painting, he sat at the feet of eminent Japanese oil painter Nakamura Kenichi. In the winter of the same year, Li went to the exhibition titled *Original Avant-garde Paintings from Paris and Tokyo* organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, where he was enlightened by direct contact with masterpieces of Western modern art for the first time and was therefore extremely touched and profoundly influenced. Again, Li felt that there is a world of difference between the university's training and his aesthetic ideal. As a result, he undertook extracurricular activities at the Institute of Avant-garde Art in Tokyo, where he forged an indissoluble bond with acclaimed Japanese-French painter Fujita Tsuguharu, a pivotal figure who inspired Li's experimental teaching method he adopted in Taiwan.

Fujita was the first Asian painter who shot to fame in Paris and later became one of the iconic figures of the Paris school. He and conventional art professors were worlds apart in their aesthetic views and pedagogic strategies. Professors of academism tended to emphasize the integrity and skillfulness embodied in students' works, while Fujita contrarily set great store by flawed works, so that he could instruct and encourage students in due course

⁴ The Jue-Lan Society, the first artist group dedicated to modern art promotion in China, had held a total of four painting exhibitions. The first was hosted by the Shanghai Chinese Art Association on 10-17 October 1932, the second at the auditorium of the Shanghai World Society in 1933, the third at the Sino-German Association in October 1934, and the fourth back to the Shanghai Chinese Art Association again in October 1935. Li was invited to present his works at the first exhibition of the Jue-Lan Society.

since he discerned their genuine commitment to and sui generis potential for artistic creation. He was vigorously opposed to the works of mere imitation without any hint of creativity. Li learned from Fujita about what a free, open, and bold pedagogic strategy is, and the latter's spirit of anti-academism had exerted a profound and enduring influence on the former as well.

Li stayed in Japan from 1933 to 1937, during which his works had been nominated for the 21st, 22nd (exempted from review), 23rd and 24th Shunyo Art Exhibition. He also won a three-year scholarship offered by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, he was invited to join the Tokyo-based avant-garde artist group — Black Western Painting Society, and staged joint exhibitions in collaboration with the other members. At that time, Li had evolved a creative style that blends abstraction with Freud's theory, manifesting itself in a surrealist fashion with a conspicuous feature of subconscious mind. Apart from his illustrious career as a painter, Li was also a very prolific writer of dozens of important books such as *An Introduction to the Paintings of the 20th Century*. Japanese art critic Toyama Usaburō not only rhapsodized over Li's writings, but also frequently cited and recommended them.

1-4. The Second Sino-Japanese War and Li's Homecoming as a Teacher

Li returned from Japan to Guangdong in August 1937 owing to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. After his homecoming, he taught firstly at the Ren-Hua County High School, and then at the National Hangzhou School of Art (relocated to Chongqing in wartime) after 1943. During the war years, he continued to partake in prestigious art events held in Chongqing, such as the Modern Painting Exhibition and the Independent Art Exhibition. While the majority of the participating artists still confined their creative style to Fauvism, Li had stood out from the crowd as an avant-garde painter. Particularly in the Independent Art Exhibition when Zao Wou-Ki's painting style still lingered over Fauvism, Li had already incorporated Wassily Kandinsky's surrealist abstraction into his works, wandering in the spaces constructed with abstract lines of passion.

1-5. Dedicating to the Writing and Teaching of Modern Art in Taiwan

Moving to Taiwan with the Nationalist government in 1949, Li firstly taught fine arts at the Taipei Second Girls' High School, and was then recruited as an adjunct professor of fine arts at the Political Warfare Cadres Academy. In view of the paucity of modern art education in Taiwan, Li devoted himself to the teaching and writing of modern art on this island. Since 1950, Li had taught the course of "Introduction to Fine Arts" at the Academy of Fine Arts that he founded in collaboration with Huang Rong-Can, Liu Shih, Chu Teh-Chun, and Lin Sheng-Yang. Ho Tieh-Hua, chief-editor of *Art Nouveau* and a bellwether figure in advocating new art thoughts, had invited several painters including Li Chun-Shan, Max Liu, Shih Tsui-Feng, and Chuang Shih-Ho to introduce and promote modern art through this art journal. In his article "A Summary of the New Art Movement," Ho wrote that "a nationwide new art movement is a necessary commodity, if we, as modern actors in the 20th century, are going to create new art. This movement is undoubtedly aimed at weeding old patterns and existing models, and meanwhile introducing foreign works and theories of new art to our fellow countrymen through our critical lens, transforming them into the force that supports

our common cause.”⁵ At that time, *Art Nouveau* became a channel of communication through which the public were granted access to ideas and knowledge of Western art, e.g. Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Abstractionism, and Surrealism. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Li published the article titled “The Prospects of Traditional Chinese Paintings” in the inaugural issue of *Art Nouveau*, and authored many pieces of art criticism of Western modern painting and Japanese avant-garde painting for influential journals and newspapers such as the *Taiwan Shin Sheng Daily News*. Besides, the *Joint Exhibition on Modern Paintings* (1951) was held at the Zhongshan Hall by Li Chun-Shan, Max Liu, Lin Sheng-Yang, Chu Teh-Chun and Zhao Chun-Xiang, advocating the philosophies behind modern art creation. Li employed a two-pronged strategy (theory and creation) for his effort in promoting modern art education in Taiwan, because only such a comprehensive approach can revolutionize Taiwan’s art world ruled by principles of traditional conservatism. He was of the opinion that the active promotion and exploration of modern art will eventually induce a refreshing change in Taiwan’s art world. In sum, Li was the first mentor and advocate of modern art in Taiwan, if you will.

2. The Atelier on An-dong Street (1951-1955)

2-1. The Flourishing Atelier on An-dong Street

In 1951, Li found a brick bungalow with a garret located on An-dong Street in the Taipei Eastern District and established his atelier in a space of 26.5 m² there. Small, simple, dim and humid notwithstanding, it was a sacred place for modern art enlightenment as far as he was concerned, a holy temple for him to achieve his ideal of teaching avant-garde art. The first generation of Li’s disciples include Oyan Wen-Yuen, Ho Kan, Hsiao Chin, Li Yuan-Chia, Tommy Chen, Wu Hao, Hsia Yang, and Hsiao Ming-Hsien. Each of them has an impressive record of achievement in modern art that met Li’s expectation. (Hsiao Chin obtained the government scholarship for overseas study and went to Spain in July 1956, followed by Hsia Yang [Spain], Hsiao Ming-Hsien [Paris], Li Yuan-Chia [Italy], Ho Kan [Italy], and Oyan Wen-Yuen [Brazil]. They’d been corresponding with Li Chun-Shan, informing him of their respective works, lives and the latest art trends in foreign countries.)

They also founded the Tong Fang Painting Association in 1956. Having no direct link with the founding and exhibitions of the Tong Fang Painting Association though, Li has been enshrined as the spiritual mentor of modern art by the eight disciples. That Li’s avant-garde pedagogy was successful and well-known could be deemed as a consequence of the thriving of the Tong Fang Painting Association and the brilliant joint exhibitions staged by his disciples.

2-2. Tong Fang Painting Association: One of the Pioneering Avant-garde Painting Syndicates in Taiwan

The Tong Fang Painting Association and the Fifth Moon Group were equally famous as the earliest avant-garde artist

5 Lin Hsing-Yueh, *Forty Years of Taiwan's Fine Arts*, p. 81.

groups in Taiwan. The former was founded in November 1956. The term “Tong Fang” was adopted at the suggestion of Ho Kan, and the charter was drafted by Hsia Yang. According to Ho, “Tong Fang evokes the imagery of the rising sun, implying vitality and dynamism of new art. Coming of age in the Eastern world, the members’ tend to create their works by putting a premium on the oriental spirit.” They advocated a four-fold creative spirit: ushering in a brand new era, keeping abreast of global trends, internalizing and developing new ideas, as well as blazing a new trail in terms of their artistic style. As aforementioned, Li had been enshrined as their spiritual mentor because they had sat at his feet even though he was not a member of the association. In November 1957 on the second floor of the Taipei News Building (No. 109, Hengyang Rd., Zhongzheng Dist., Taipei City), the association’s members staged the First Tong Fang Painting Exhibition by Chinese and Spanish Modern Painters. Apart from the modern paintings by the eight founding members, this exhibition also featured the magnum opuses by a total of 14 Spanish painters introduced by Hsiao Chin, such as Juan José Tharrats (1918-2001), Will Faber (1901-1987), and Bouardo Alcoy (1930-1987).

Named by Li Fang-Zhi, the Fifth Moon Group was founded in May 1956, four months earlier than the Tong Fang Painting Association. The founding members of the group include Guo Dong-Rong, Liu Guo-Song, Li Fang-Zhi, Guo Yu-Lun, Chen Jing-Rong, and Zheng Qiong-Juan, with Liao Chi-Chun as their spiritual mentor. This group’s establishment owed its inspiration to the Paris-based Salon de Mai. Their objectives were three-fold: pursuing revolutionary and avant-garde art, responding to occidental art trends with China-centered approaches, and evolving new styles for Chinese modern painting. The members presented their first joint exhibition at the Zhongshan Hall in Taipei in May 1957.

All through the 1950s and 1960s, the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition had been the model for the artistic mainstream in Taiwan, characterized by a relatively conventional, conservative painting style. This was why Taiwan’s art world was stunned by the Tong Fang Painting Association’s first joint exhibition in that period. “Some visitors found the exhibits innovative and fascinating, while others criticized them for being absurd and ludicrous, and still others even tore the brochures to pieces and threw them onto the participating artists at the exhibition venue, and meanwhile bawled the artists out that “What the hell are you painting!” These highly polarized opinions naturally attracted massive media coverage of this exhibition. Ho Fan, a supplement columnist from the *United Daily News*, jokingly termed it “a painting exhibition by outlaws,” implying that the eight painters are a dead ringer for the plundering bandits in Northeast China, thenceforth the reputation of the “Eight Great Outlaws” got round Taiwan’s conservative art world rapidly and caused a great sensation.”⁶ Renowned art historian Hsiao Chong-Ray also mentioned that “the appeal of this ‘modern painting movement’ lies in its ‘abstract’ style, which not only subverted but also deconstructed the quasi-Impressionism that had dominated Taiwan’s art world since the Japanese colonial period.”⁷

This craze for modern art also swept other young artists, who regard establishing painting societies as the trendiest

6 Tao Wen-Yueh, “Abstraction · Avant-garde · Li Chun-Shan,” *Hsiung Shih Art Monthly*, p. 53.

7 Hsiao Chong-Ray, “Lee Shi-Chi and the Age of Art Gallery in Taiwan,” in Lee Shi-Chi, 70 · *Orientation · Lee Shi-Chi*, p. 172.

activity under the influence of modern thoughts, hence the founding of the Contemporary Painting Society, the Modern Printmaking Association, the Times Painting Society, the Imagery Painting Society, etc., displaying a myriad of creative styles and the sheer exuberance of modern art.⁸ The Tong Fang Painting Association and the Fifth Moon Group stood as equals as pioneering avant-garde painting syndicates in Taiwan. The development of Taiwan's modern art peaked in the 1960s due to their collective promotional effort.

3. The Years of Teaching in Changhua (1957-1983)

3-1. An Alternative Seed-sowing Approach to Modern Art

To alleviate the pain inflicted by rheumatism (also reportedly to flee from political persecution [the White Terror]), Li stopped running his atelier in Taipei and moved to Changhua, teaching fine arts at the Changhua Girls' Senior High School. Although Li moved to a relatively remote area, many students who admired him still came to ask for his advice about painting, as if he was a powerful magnet for them. This phenomenon was passed on by word of mouth among students who preferred independent thinking and were eager to shake off the shackles of traditional art education, which had a snowball effect that plenty of such people from around the country went to Changhua specifically for the purpose of learning from Li. Even some students of the National Taiwan Academy of Arts, the National Taiwan Normal University and the Chinese Culture University in Taipei were willing to spend time and money, travelling by local express to Changhua in order to learn modern painting from Li. They went to Changhua on a monthly basis, and returned home from a rewarding journey every time.

Categorized in the field of modern art, Li's mentorship distinguished itself by his pedagogical approach of "spirit perpetuation," exemplified by his celebrated "coffeehouse-based one-on-one teaching method." He encouraged his disciples to express their sentiments with lines as much as they can by blending Freud's account of the unconscious mind into Automatism, channeling their personal supra-consciousness to create engrossing compositions characterized by unpretentious brushstrokes. Li's open-minded, enlightening approach to arts education allowed modern art to put down roots in Taiwan. This was the main reason he obtained the honorific title of "the pioneer of avant-garde painting." Many junior disciples studied abroad following in the senior ones' footsteps. Chu Teh-I, Huang Buh-Ching and Li Jiin-Shiow went to France, while Chern Shen-Son to Italy. They'd been corresponding with Li Chun-Shan, keeping him informed of the latest art trends in foreign countries, just like the senior disciples did.

The 1970s was a decade of bitter blow and agonizing introspection for Taiwan. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 passed on 25 October 1971 was the most severe jolt, followed by many countries

⁸ In 1964 at the Taiwan Provincial Museum, the Free Art Association convened a special meeting of ten major painting societies, including the Fifth Moon Group, the Tong Fang Painting Association, the Modern Printmaking Association, the Chang-Feng Painting Society, the Contemporary Painting Society, the Southern Union Painting Society, the Times Painting Society, the Imagery Painting Society, the Free Art Association, and the Ji-Xiang Painting Society. It was an important landmark in the history of Chinese modern painting, which not only demonstrated a growing influence of these syndicates, but also stood as testimony to the fact that modern art has put down roots in China. See Guo Ji-Sheng, ed. *A Collection of Articles on Contemporary Taiwanese Painting*, p. 163.

refusing to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Apart from being removed from international governmental organizations on cultural, political and trade issues, Taiwan's interaction with foreign countries in terms of politics, commerce and culture was also severely undermined. Taiwan was suffering consecutive defeat in international affairs, and what made things worse was a concatenation of social and livelihood problems caused by industrialization and urbanization (e.g. the decline of traditional industries, household income, agriculture and fishery). The nativist literature movement emerged first out of concern for this precarious situation. Chen Ying-Zhen, Huang Chun-Ming, Wang Tuoh, Wang Zhen-He and Yang Ching-Chu were budding writers in that period as well as the iconic figures of the movement. The consequence had become apparent in the rise of Taiwanese nativist arts and the return of artistic conservatism, which prompted Taiwan's art world to focus on the Taiwanese society and seize the opportunity to launch new nativist cultural movements.

The Taiwanese nativist movement peaked with two landmark events. The first was the exhibition by Taiwanese naïve artist Hung Tung at the United States Information Service in Taipei on 13 March 1976. Given extensive press coverage, Hung was soon apotheosized and gained high visibility for the peculiar feature of his naïve paintings. Unfortunately, the absence of necessary nutrients and momentum for cultural and historical perpetuation impeded the development of nativist arts. As the popularity of nativist arts gradually waned, along with the general lack of public support and media hype, Hung's success was just a flash in the pan, a brilliant shooting star streaking through the night sky and then disappearing without trace.

"Li Chun-Shan once analyzed and commented on Taiwan's art environment in the 1970s. He thought that there is no such thing as a real system of art criticism, and pieces showing that amateurs exceed their place and meddle in connoisseurs' affairs were rife at that time. Hung Tung's exhibition was a classic instance. In Li's opinion, this naïve artist did nothing but expressed his innocence. It wasn't much authentic art as such, yet it received plenty of media hype. It could be an item of local news, but shall not be discussed as an art event. On top of that, writing art criticism is not as easy as it looks. It is far from enough to simply juggle with terms of art theories or formulate specious, empty arguments if one wants to be a qualified art critic. As a matter of fact, a competent art critic should be literate in art, philosophy, aesthetics, art criticism and creative skills."⁹

The second landmark event was the debut solo exhibition by Chu Ming, a Taiwanese deity-statue sculptor, at the National Museum of History in March 1976. The sensation it caused bore comparison with that by Hung's painting exhibition. Specializing in Taiwanese folk sculpture, Chu's oeuvre showed a perfect fusion of traditional wooden sculpture and modern spirit, radiating an aura of awe-inspiring vitality. He chiseled in a rough, uninhibited fashion without compromising the delicacy and aesthetics of his works, evoking all kinds of associations for the viewers, foremost the piece titled *In One Heart* featuring a water buffalo that took art critics and practitioners by storm. This piece was then enshrined as an icon of the Taiwanese nativist movement in the 1970s.

9 Chen Xiao-Ling, "An Interview with Li Chun-Shan—A Dictator in the World of Abstraction," in *A Collection of Articles by Li Chun-Shan*, p. 144.

4. The Post-Li Chun-Shan Era

4-1. The Eternal Pioneer of Taiwanese Art

No sooner did Li retire from the Changhua Girls' Senior High School at age 67 in 1979, than he staged his first solo exhibition at the Printmaker Art Gallery and the Lung Men Art Gallery in Taipei. These were also the only two painting exhibitions all through his life. In 1982, he was bestowed with the 19th Jinjue Award by the Calligraphy and Painting Association of China for his lifetime commitment to painting education. Much to our regret, Li died of liver cirrhosis and colorectal cancer in 1984. He was buried in the Lizishan public cemetery in Huatan Township, Changhua. As a maverick who devoted his lifetime to artistic creation and arts education, Li was addressed by his disciples distinctively as "the teacher of teachers and the artist of artists," and absolutely measured up to the legendary reputation as the "pioneer of Chinese modern art."

4-2. Li as the Inspiration that Keeps the Torch of Art Aflame

The Li Chun-Shan Cultural and Educational Foundation for Modern Painting

On 11 December 1985, the Li Chun-Shan Cultural and Educational Foundation for Modern Painting was formally established with Wu Hao as the chairman and Jan Syue-Fu as the secretary-general. To fulfill Li's final wish, the foundation is dedicated to promoting the development of Taiwan's modern art. The foundation set up its first modern painting award in 1989, conferring the award of lifetime achievement to famous expatriate artist Hsiao Chin, while the award of creation went to Chen Hsing-Wan. The foundation's board of directors was re-elected in July 2014, with Hwang Buh-Ching as the chairman and Jan Syue-Fu re-appointed as the secretary-general. Since its initiation in 1989, the foundation's modern painting award has entered its 15th year, committed to the cause of encouraging young Taiwanese artists on the one hand and supporting the development of Taiwan's modern art on the other. It has proved that each of the award-winning artists has spent his/her entire career in artistic creation.

Epilogue

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of great change in Taiwan's art environment. The Taiwan martial law order was lifted on 15 July 1987, three years after Li's demise. Taiwan's art world thus converted to pluralism after attaining liberation from suffocating political control and censorship. Such a congenial development ushered in an era in which numerous schools of art contend with one another. These historical factors and events collectively wrote a brilliant chapter in the history of Taiwanese art.

This period also witnessed the successive establishment of major art museums around Taiwan. The Taipei Fine Arts Museum was the first (1983), followed by the Taichung Fine Arts Museum (1988) (now the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts) and the Kaohsiung Fine Arts Museum (1994). They've served as the venues for many prestigious international exhibitions, and their reciprocal connections have become a driving force behind the professionalization of art. A multitude of commercial galleries, alternative spaces and revitalized urban spaces also emerged in rapid succession. For examples, the IT Park was founded in the autumn of 1988, and the Apartment No. 2 in 1989 (ceased functioning in 1994, now the SLY Art Space), known as the two earliest alternative spaces in Taiwan. Revitalized urban spaces include the Huashan 1914 Creative Park (1999), the Pier-2 Art Center (2006),

the Hualien Cultural and Creative Industries Park (2007), and the Songshan Cultural and Creative Park (2010). The establishment and development of these private and governmental artistic institutions collaboratively bring Taiwan's art world a fresh look and new energy in the 21st century.

Thanks to the convenient and fast services of technologies in the globalized world, the conditions for artistic development nowadays have been radically different from those in the past. In addition to the riotous profusion of forms in contemporary art, "tradition/modernity" and "conservatism/avant-garde" are no longer the subjects of debate. With a vision for the future of Taiwanese art, be it inclined to internationalization or localization, the key issues are perhaps how artists re-define their attitudes and ideas about creation, and how they re-position themselves in a greater historical context. By way of comparison, all the hardships that Li endured throughout his undertaking of promoting Taiwan's modern art proved to be an invaluable experience for the later generations. In this sense, the grand exhibition—*Pioneers of the Avant-Garde Movement in Taiwan: From Li Chun-Shan to His Disciples*—organized by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts not only offers a rare and precious opportunity to the visitors, but also bears testimony to the development of Taiwan's modern art.