

Enlightenments and Development in Modern Taiwanese Visual Design from the Japanese Colonial Period to the Present (1895-2015)

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1. Foreword

Early in its history, Taiwan was an immigration destination for pirates and fisherman from Fukien and Canton provinces in China, while indigenous peoples already resided there. After the various stages of settlement, including the period from 1624 to 1662 in which the island was briefly occupied by Holland and Spain, and Zheng Chenggong's rule from 1662 to 1683, the number of Mainland Chinese immigrants gradually increased. The Qing dynasty ruled the island for 212 years (1683-1895) and, while its government did not proactively develop the island, Chinese culture was largely disseminated to Taiwan as a result of increases in immigration and the trading of goods, which influenced the development of the island's mainstream culture¹. Following the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ceded Taiwan to Japan, was signed. This was the beginning of 50 years of colonial Japanese rule. Not only did Japanese rule transform traditional Taiwanese culture, but also lead the Taiwanese public to clash with and be influenced by foreign culture in their daily lives. These unique colonial environments bring about a transformation in Taiwanese social structure, and also spurred economic development. During this period Taiwanese started receiving Japanese colonial education, and foreign goods were introduced as well. This led its citizens to adopt Japanese lifestyles and culture. In addition, through dissemination by the Japanese colonial government, modern western civilization was indirectly promoted, and Taiwan was transformed into a society in which various cultures coexisted and developed mutually.

In 1945 World War II came to an end. Japan was defeated and the rule of Taiwan was returned to China. However, not long after this the civil war between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) commenced once again. Following their defeat at the hands of the CCP in 1949, the KMT controlled Republic of China was relocated to Taiwan under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek. This began the nearly 70 year history of the Republic of China in Taiwan which continues today. After the war, changes in the political and social environment brought about the development of a unique and diverse culture. This period witnessed a revival of traditional Chinese culture, the introduction of American and western mainstream culture, and the awakening of Taiwanese nativist culture. Democratization and indigenization also occurred after the lifting of martial law in 1987, as well as the informationalization of society brought about by the rise of computer media. Taiwanese culture, which was formed under the influence of this diverse social environment over the past 120 years, not only influenced the manner in which visual design manifested itself in these various periods, but also became a visual culture which was, itself, designed.

2. Enlightenment of Visual Design in the Japanese Colonial Period (1895-1945)

As a result of transformations in the colonial social environment, the adoption of Japanese ways of life, the shock created by foreign philosophies, and the influence of popular trends, visual design during this phase was rich and varied in its style and expression.

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While being situated in a social environment under the control of a colonial government during this period, the people of Taiwan were also impacted by foreign cultures and influenced by their lifestyles. At the same time, the traditional cultural thought and concepts, which were brought over from the mainland, continued to be a part of people's everyday lives and formed the visual preferences of Taiwan's folk traditions.

Decorative patterns, colors, and various forms with traditional auspicious symbols were part of everyday life. What is more, in order to rule without incident, the colonial government implemented policies designed to placate the Taiwanese people during the early colonial period. With the exception of those which would impede their rule, the Japanese colonial government allowed the Taiwanese to keep their original customs and habits. Traditional Chinese customs were thus preserved among the people in this colonial environmentⁱⁱ. Therefore, traditional Chinese design was stylistically critical to colonial period visual design. The traditional patterns, which the public was accustomed to, or auspicious and festive visual styles, were utilized in the advertising and packaging design of many traditional local products or everyday consumer goods (Figure1). Within the social environment created by colonial rule, Japanese culture, which was introduced in large volumes, not only influenced everyday life in Taiwan, but gradually became the mainstream culture of that period. In addition, many Japanese people immigrated to Taiwan during this period, and Japanese lifestyles and culture were introduced. As a result, Japanese products flooded into Taiwan due to demand from the Japanese inhabitants. Taiwanese products would often copy the designs for the advertising and packaging of these new and original products in this colonial environment influenced by Japanese products, which presented brand new visual styles varying from those of the past, the packaging and advertisements for everyday products commonly copied Japanese design styles (Figure 2). In addition, the marketing for colonial government industries, as well as colonial policy propaganda, all primarily utilized Japanese styles in their visual designⁱⁱⁱ (Figure 3).

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868 Japan proactively sought to learn from western civilization in order to attain the goal of a strong and prosperous country and allow Japan take its place among modern nations. Colonial Taiwan naturally became a laboratory for the Japanese imitation of western culture. The modern civilization, as well as contemporary art and cultural philosophy Japan had learned from the west were introduced to Taiwan. However, Taiwan was influenced a result of the indirect contact with western culture, contemporary art, and design concepts and techniques, and western style became popular in Taiwanese visual design. For example, Cubist concepts had an influence, and Taiwanese visual designers utilized collage art during this period^{iv}. The layout for a 1929 article in the magazine *Taiwanese Education* on the present state of education utilized photograph collage (Figure4). The curved, tender and pliant border pattern with romantic colors in this *Jing Shang Can Sheng Tang* Pharmacy advertisement is typical of Art Nouveau style (Figure5). The style of this 1931 Kaohsiung Harbor Exhibition Poster clearly displays the influence of Art Deco style (Figure6). After war between Japan and China broke out in 1937, visual design became a central propaganda tool of Japanese imperialism for the purposes of conveying government decrees, and encouraging patriotic morale, in response to the demands of a war time environment. This propaganda not only included posters and advertisements (Figure7), product packaging was also designed to advocate acceptance of national policies and encourage morale (Figure 8), and the later colonial period wartime design style was created. In summation, Taiwanese visual design during this period included the continuation of traditional Chinese styles, the expression of Japanese styles influenced by Japanese culture, the influence of modern popular western styles, and the war propaganda style created in the wartime environment.



Figure 1: Honey-preserved Foods Label 1930s Figure2: Soy Sauce Label 1930s



Figure 3: Taiwanese Tea Poster 1918 Figure 4: Collage Style Layout 1932 Figure 5: Art Nouveau Advertisement 1918



Figure 6: Art Deco Poster 1931 Figure 7: War Time Propaganda 1942 Figure 8: War Time Packaging 1940

3. Visual Design in the Post-War Totalitarian Period (1945-1970s)

After Japan surrendered in August of 1945, the Taiwanese people were filled with elation at reuniting with the motherland (China), and designs for advertisements welcoming the Chinese government could be seen everywhere. However, the Taiwanese people, who had been filled with home and enthusiastically celebrated their liberation from Japanese rule gradually cooled to the new government, and their enthusiasm was replaced with disappointment and anger. After the war, Taiwan faced political and economic instability. In addition, the corruption of the KMT government which had assumed leadership of the island was soon exposed, and Taiwanese people began to complain bitterly. Hard times were incurred by shortages in goods and rising commodity prices. What is more, the long period of separation between Taiwan and the Mainland had created cultural differences which divided the people from Mainland soldiers and civilians^v. These factors caused the people of Taiwan to feel alienated from the government and lead to the tragedy of the 1947 "228 Incident". The year 1949 was a determinant one in Taiwanese history as, after being defeated by the CCP, the KMT retreated to Taiwan and declared the island the place from which they would retake the Mainland. The United States became involved in the military affairs and defense of Taiwan across the strait after the eruption of the Korean War in June of 1950. Military cooperation with the United States, as well as the economic aid it provided, served as the foundation for security and social progress^{vi}. This was a time in which anti-communist sentiment, and a fear of communism, were promoted, and themes in visual design often revolved around "liberating the Mainland," "secrecy and anti-espionage," and "cultural renaissance" (Figure 9). In particular, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing between 1966 and 1976. In response to the communist destruction of traditional Chinese culture, the Taiwanese government of the time created the Council of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance and proactively undertook a cultural revival movement, and poster designs with traditional Chinese themes became commonplace (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Early Post-War Period Visual Design 1950 Figure 10: Traditional Chinese style Poster 1964



Figure 11: Modern Style Book Cover Design 1932 Figure 12: Hand-painted style Movie Poster 1963

Economic and military assistance had a critical impact on Taiwan, as it allowed for social reconstruction and economic stability of the island, which was dealing with poverty and social unrest after the war in the 1950s. With United States' assistance, the Taiwanese government first formed the Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction to promote agricultural and economic recovery in post-war Taiwan. During the 1960s American economic assistance further promoted import substitution industries centering on small and middle-sized enterprises in order to allow for industrial restructuring and lay the foundation for modern Taiwan's economic development^{vii}. What is more, the American military presence in Taiwan, as well as economic aid, led to the adoption of American-style culture and modern design concepts. For example, in 1955 United States Agency for International Cooperation consulting industrial designer Russell Wright, handcraft expert Ramy Alexander, and apparel designer Josette Walker came to gain an understanding of Taiwanese design. American designer Alfred Girardy came to Taiwan in 1961 to give lectures and introduced Bauhaus design concepts^{viii}. This was a period in which modern American design was disseminated to Taiwan, and American products were being imported. As a result, the succinct design expression of America's international style, which was representative of modern western civilization, became prevalent, and was often copied (Figure 11). In addition, Taiwanese language cinema, with female pathos as its theme, became a primary form of leisure entertainment which expressed social and public sentiment during the period of totalitarian rule. This was the golden era of Taiwanese language cinema's popularity. The posters for these movies were hand-painted by local artists who had learned from Japanese cinema billboards painters. The images of aggrieved main characters, which were composed with detailed and exaggerated expressions in dynamic strokes, created a unique visual style within the history of Taiwanese poster design^{ix} (Figure 12). In summation, Taiwanese visual design in the post-war period of totalitarian rule was influenced by cross-strait antithesis and the large scale introduction of foreign American culture, and its style was used primarily for expression in the revival of traditional Chinese culture, in anti-communist and patriotic sentiment, and in American-style modernism.

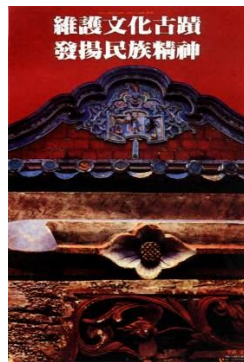


Figure 13: Nativist Movement Style Poster 1985 Figure 14: Nativist Movement Style Poster 1983

4. Nativist Movement and the Localized Visual Design ((1970s-1980s)

During the 1970s Taiwan met with a series of setbacks in its foreign relations. In addition to losing its seat in the United Nations, the United States halted aid, and political allies America and Japan broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan, thus isolating it in the world community. Taiwanese society was also faced with the problem of intense agricultural labor movement into the industrial and commercial sectors. At the same time, the disappointment and opposition produced by the KMT's long time totalitarian rule of the island led to the rise of "Outside the party movement" (non-KMT party) with its distinct political ideas. Within this atmosphere, the artistic community started to reconsider and show concern for the local culture it had neglected during its long period of dependency on foreign and western culture, as well as its conceptual emphasis on traditional Chinese culture. In an effort to gain a perspective on the land in which they had grown up, artists launched what is known as the "nativist movement."^x This in turn set in motion the culturally introspective "nativist artistic movement" in art, music, dance, and other genres. From this emerged the grand scene of 1970s Taiwan with its new and unprecedented cultural values. Painting which expressed nativist sentiment had a visible impact on the visual design of the time, and it is possible to discover this wave, along with nativist elements related to traditional culture, were themes often expressed by artists in posters. Traditional architecture, decorative patterns, folk drama, and other mediums which possessed visual elements with particularly Taiwanese characteristics, were often visible in poster design during this period (Figure 13).

In addition, popular art, with its local realism, had an impact on cinema. A small group of young directors moved away from the Taiwanese language films, as well as martial arts and war themes, which were common during this period, to create new styles. The poster design for these movies, which took as their theme the realistic description of Taiwanese life and culture, echoed the wave of concern for the local, and presented a fresh and unique appearance (Figure 14). During this phase Taiwanese society gradually settled, and industrial and commercial development boomed. As a result, the demand for industrial artistic design grew increasingly larger and advertising agencies, as well as design agencies, were established one after another in large cities. In addition, vocational and technical schools established departments and programs related to commercial design in order to train design experts, and community organizations promoting the development of the design profession, were established one after another. Design expositions became commonplace and Taiwanese visual design, with its commercial service orientation, thrived. In sum, in the nativism in art which extended from culture to the artistic atmosphere during this period we find the first wave of an awakening of local Taiwanese culture. Its style certainly impacted this period's visual design, as many designers welcomed this trend and successively utilized concern for the local or traditional Taiwanese culture, as design elements in their works. This which led to the gradual creation of a unique Taiwanese visual style all its own. The design creations which came out of local culture during this period also influenced the "Taiwan impression" poster theme movement undertaken by local artists in the early 1990s.

5. Visual Design in the Period of Democratization, Taiwanization, Informationalization, and Diversification Following the Lifting of Martial Law (1987-2000)

After the lifting of martial law in 1987, travel to the Mainland was once again allowed. In addition, multiple political parties were allowed for the first time, and the previous restrictions on the news media were lifted as well. The entire social environment was moving toward democracy and diversity. The lifting of martial law on Taiwanese political society allowed for the complete release of repressed social energy as calls for freedom and democracy from various voices cried out at the same time and grew ever louder.

The focus of the political ideology debate gradually shifted from a struggle between left and right to the question of whether or not Taiwan should unify with Mainland China. Taiwanese consciousness started to rear its head, as local culture became that of the mainstream. In particular, after restrictions on news media were lifted Taiwanese social opinion moved toward a new period of diversity, individualized democracy, and a free international society. Within this period, the opening up of travel to Mainland China to visit family allowed for contact between the people on both sides of the strait who had been separated for close to 40 years, as well as the beginning of exchanges with the Mainland's new Chinese culture^{xi}. Not only were artistic movements and visual design styles diverse and vivacious after the lifting of martial law, they also showed concern for a multiplicity of topics, and it seemed a time of free creativity without taboos. For example, movies produced during this period, including "A City of Sadness," which dealt with the highly sensitive "228 Incident" as its topic, and "The Wedding Banquet," with its theme of homosexuality, were able to win awards and garner recognition (Figure 15). Visual expression in this prevailing mainstream Taiwanese culture, which took nostalgia for Taiwan's past history and local life as its theme, became one of the diverse styles of this time (Figure 16). After the commencement of cross-strait exchanges various visual styles from the Mainland were introduced to and made an appearance in Taiwanese visual design (Figure 17). Design during this period was diverse and lively in its appearance. Both government activity propaganda and nongovernmental commercial posters took on a variety of forms, and the period saw the coexistence of traditional, modern, local, and international in its design styles. In particular, during the late 1990s advancements in computer technology made them a tool commonly utilized in design. The speed of computers in imaging processing design brought about broad Chinese in traditional ways of thinking about design and hand-painting methods. This ushered in a new era in Taiwanese visual design^{xii}.

How Taiwanese design would develop in the future in response to the internationalization and informationalization of design was certainly an important issue faced by designers at this phase. In addition, another urgent priority for these designers was finding an orientation for Taiwanese design and creating a unique style. As such, many young Taiwanese designers, who were concerned about its design culture during the 1990's, began to search for Taiwanese impressions, color, culture and spirit through poster design and creation. These designers cleared a path for modern contemporary Taiwanese poster design and opened up a new style with its attention to cultural concerns (Figure 18). During this phase, the rich style of Taiwanese visual design reflected changes in the political environment, in addition to representing a style in which diverse cultures were integrated, and the modern and traditional coexisted. Interests in hand-painting design, and the spirit of Taiwanese culture, both of which were forgotten as a result of the convenience of computer design, were reconsidered as well.



Figure 15: Movie Poster 1989 Figure 16: Record Jacket 1990 Figure 17: Apparel Advertisement 1997

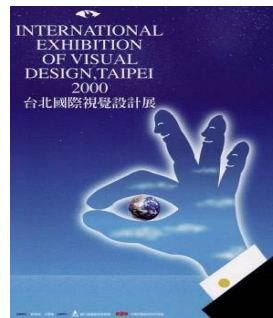
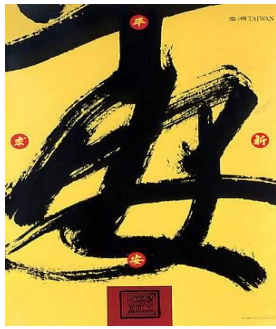


Figure 18: Taiwanese Impression Poster 1918 Figure 19: Taipei International Visual Design Exhibition Poster 2000



Figure 20: Taipei World Design Expo 2011 Figure 21: Grammy Awards Packaging Design 2007



Figure 22: Eastern Cultural Spirit Design 2006 Figure 23: Nostalgic Taiwanese Poster 2006 Figure 24: Ecological Protection Advertisement Design 2009

6. The Mutual Development of Internationalization and Localization in Visual Design (2000 to present)

In 2000 a political party other than the KMT came to power for the first time, as the Democratic Progressive Party's Chen Shui-bian was elected president and began an new era in the island's political history. Local Taiwanese culture became mainstream social values, and the "culturally creative industries" promoted by the government provided the Taiwanese visual design industry with a new direction, as the value of culturally creative design provided competitiveness to Taiwanese industries. The visual design atmosphere in Taiwan became even more liberated. This was a time of intense cultural and economic exchanges with Mainland China, and many Taiwanese designers traveled to the Mainland to seek career opportunities. In addition, as interaction with the international design community became more commonplace, Taiwan became a market for multinational corporation and design activities. Participation in international design, as well as exchanges, became frequent. National education had already started to focus on the direction of creative design. High level training programs were set up in departments and colleges from the undergraduate to doctoral levels, and the implementation of comprehensive design education raised the quality of professional designers in Taiwan. The relevant departments in government saw design as essential to national competitiveness. Therefore, in order to improve the level of Taiwanese visual design, the government hosted various design activities and competitions.

Examples include the Taipei International Visual Design Exhibition in 2000 (Figure 19), the Asian Advertising Conference in 2001, the First Annual International Taiwan Design Competition in 2002, the First Taiwan Design Expo in 2003, the First Gold Butterfly Award-Visual Publication Design Grand Prize in 2004, the First National Design Award in 2005, and the First Taiwan Design Education and Industrial Studies Summit in 2007. Taiwan also hosted the Taipei World Design Expo 2011 (Figure 20), which was the first international design summit held after the three international design organizations Icofrada, Icsid, and IFI were integrated to form the International Design Alliance (IDA). The hosting of these events ultimately confirmed Taiwan's place in the international design community. What is more, Taiwanese designers gradually came to participate in and win various international design competitions more frequently. Examples include International Poster Salon, International Poster Biennale in Warsaw, The International Biennale of Poster in Mexico, International Poster Triennial in Toyama, Bologna Children's Book Fair – Illustrators Exhibition, Grammy Awards (Figure 21), red dot award, IF, and others. The coexistence of internationalization and localization, and diversity of style, is displayed in present day Taiwanese visual design, which possesses an international mainstream style, is eastern in cultural expression (Figure 22), and displays local Taiwanese color and nostalgic creativity (Figure 23). From its traditional functions as a commercial service and a means of disseminating information, visual design has developed into a creative vehicle for expression for cultural communication. It is also utilized with respect to issues of public good, as well as ecological and environmental protection, and other not-for-profit activities.

7. Conclusion

This study divides the development of modern Taiwanese visual design into the following stages: the Japanese colonial period, in which foreign culture was introduced to Taiwan, and which was a period of visual design enlightenment; the early post-war period of totalitarian rule, with the themes of retaking the mainland, cultural revival, and American popular culture; the 1970s, which featured the nativist movement and the indigenization of design thinking; the period following the lifting of martial law, in which design reflected democratization, local Taiwanese culture, informationalization, and diversification; and the present period, in which internationalization and localization coexist in design development. This overview of these 120 years of visual design development provides the reader with an initial understanding concerning the history of Taiwan's modern design culture. These records of design history, as well as the appearance of their visual style, provide a portrait of the transformation of Taiwanese society, as well as a specific reflection of the life and culture of Taiwan's people.

Notes

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