Critical Commentary

Fragment of Identity:
A Collecting Strategy for Taiwan House

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Abstract

This paper explores the formation of Taiwanese cultural identity through the lens of democracy and cultural institutions. It examines Taiwan's complex history, from colonial rule to its emergence as a young democracy, and analyses how this history has shaped modern Taiwanese identity. The research investigates Taiwan's presence in the international art scene, particularly through its participation in the Venice Biennale, and discusses the role of cultural institutions in promoting national identity. The paper proposes the establishment of a 'Taiwan House' as a cultural institute with a permanent collection, arguing that such an institution could serve as both a soft power tool and a means of reinforcing Taiwanese cultural identity. By examining the intersection of history, politics, art, and culture, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue about Taiwan's place in the global community and its unique cultural heritage.

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Introduction

After experiencing one of the world's longest periods of martial law, lasting 40 years (1947-1987), Taiwan has only been reborn as a democratic country for 28 years (calculated from the first presidential election in 1996). Compared to other well-developed nations, it is a relatively young democracy. Before it transitioned to democracy, Taiwan endured multiple waves of colonial regimes and immigration, resulting in a modern composition that is both diverse and extremely complex. This diversity reflects the influence of various cultures, while the complexity stems from the current political situation with its neighbour, China.

This paper expands upon my previous research (Liu, 2024), which focused on the role of Taiwanese cuisine in shaping cultural narratives. Throughout history, Taiwan has been a melting pot of culinary influences, with each period contributing to the tapestry of its unique flavour spectrum. Culinary arts have become another parallel battlefield for modern cultural expression, where Taiwanese cuisine acts as a symbol of national pride and independence. Through ‘gastro-diplomacy', Taiwan can engage with the global community and assert its identity without being hindered by current geopolitical issues.

Since Taiwan embarked on its path towards democracy, accompanied by the rise of nationalism, establishing a distinct modern Taiwanese identity has become a collective mission among new generations. This effort is not limited to the culinary field but is especially evident in the cultural scene. In this paper, I will examine Taiwan's complex history using democracy as a narrative thread, which is undoubtedly the core value of modern Taiwanese people. I will also explore Taiwan's presence in the international art and cultural scene, analysing the impact of political pressures on Taiwan's representation.

Accompanying this paper is a collecting strategy for an envisioned Taiwanese cultural institute. I observed that many countries have cultural institutes in London dedicated to promoting their culture and language, whether government-sponsored or not. These institutes serve as a form of soft power diplomacy, and I believe this approach could be a significant breakthrough for Taiwan, as there is currently no 'Taiwan House' anywhere in the world. I also noticed that most museums have permanent collections that act as the core and value of the institution, which cultural institutes often lack. This is an effective way to establish cultural identity, leading to my research question: "Why does Taiwan House need a permanent collection?"

This essay asserts the importance of establishing a distinct Taiwanese cultural identity through democratic values and cultural institutions. Through research, analysis, and literature review, this project will propose a collection that reflects and establishes Taiwanese identity. Although I had intended to conduct interviews, I was unfortunately unable to secure any with my planned interviewees. My proposed questions included 'Why does your cultural institution not maintain a permanent collection?' and 'How do political considerations influence the programming at your cultural institution?' By examining the intersection of history, politics, art, and culture, I aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about Taiwan's place in the global community and its unique cultural heritage.

Furthermore, this research will explore how a permanent collection can serve as a tangible representation of Taiwan's complex history and vibrant present. It will investigate how such a collection can navigate the delicate balance between celebrating Taiwan's

distinct identity and acknowledging its multicultural influences. The project will also consider how a Taiwan House could function as a platform for cultural exchange, fostering understanding and dialogue on an international stage, while simultaneously strengthening Taiwan's soft power and cultural diplomacy efforts.

Chapter 1. General Historical Context of Taiwan

Taiwan is not a country.

Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC), is an island with a complex political status. Historically referred to as Formosa during the Age of Discovery, Taiwan has been home to Austronesian peoples for millennia. Its recorded history spans approximately 400 years, marked by various colonial influences and political changes.

In the early 17th century, Dutch and Spanish settlers established bases on the island. The Qing dynasty incorporated Taiwan as a prefecture in 1684 and later declared it a province in 1885. Following the First Sino-Japanese War, Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895 and remained under Japanese rule until 1945. After World War II, the Republic of China (ROC) government, which had been established in mainland China in 1912, began administering Taiwan.

In 1949, amidst a civil war in China, the ROC government relocated to Taiwan along with approximately 1.2 million people. Since then, Taiwan and mainland China have been governed separately. Taiwan has developed its democratic system, holding its first direct presidential election in 1996 and experiencing multiple peaceful transfers of power between political parties.

Chapter 2. The Challenge of Taiwanese Cultural Identity

The number of people identifying as Taiwanese has been steadily increasing, while those identifying as Chinese have become increasingly rare (Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, 2024). Taiwan has focused on developing industrial construction, production, and most notably, technology. For instance, the semiconductor chips in many smartphones, including iPhones, are produced in Taiwan (Davidson, 2024). Despite Taiwan's significant success in the technology sector, many Taiwanese people still grapple with their cultural identity. Due to historical influences from various countries, Taiwanese society has become remarkably open-minded towards different cultures, as evidenced by the wide variety of international cuisines available throughout the island. However, from my observations, Taiwan still lacks a distinct cultural narrative. While many artists and designers have attempted to establish such a narrative, there remains a gap between their efforts and the understanding of the general public. This is where I believe curators could play a crucial role in bridging this divide, helping to shape and communicate a more cohesive Taiwanese cultural identity.

2.1. Fragments of Identity

The interpretation of history is fundamental to historical research, significantly influencing how history is perceived and shaping academic discourse. Different historians present varied perspectives under different regimes. For many Taiwanese, their understanding of their history stems largely from Su Beng's "Taiwan's 400 Years History", published in 1962. This work traces Taiwan's history back to the earliest written records of the island. In the preface, Su Beng explains that his motivation for writing the book was the stark contrast between oral history and existing literature written from a "coloniser perspective". He aimed to present history from the perspective of the Taiwanese people, describing it as "The Taiwanese History that's written by a Taiwanese that's been colonised, exploited, repressed, and massacred."

Su Beng's approach is evident in his chapter titles, which emphasise colonial rule, such as "Dutch Imperial Mercantilism and Autocratic Colonialist Rule" and "The Colonialist Rule of Japanese Imperialism". While critics have argued that the book does not qualify as proper historiography and serves more as political propaganda (Lin, 1992), its influence as the first history book from a Taiwanese perspective remains significant. This structure, using foreign powers and their control over Taiwan to delineate historical periods, was widely used in education until 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2018), albeit with more neutral terminology in textbooks.

Wu Rwei-Ren, in his book "Prometheus Unbound: When Formosa Reclaims the World", characterises Taiwan as a 'fragment of empires'. He emphasises that Taiwan's history comprises multiple colonisations and varying degrees of indigenisation experienced by different groups. This fragmented history, Wu argues, complicates the application of a uniform 'post-colonial' lens to Taiwan's experience. As an associate research fellow at the Institute of Taiwan History, Academia Sinica, with a PhD in politics, Wu's background provides him with a unique perspective on the interplay between history and politics in Taiwan. He posits that these two disciplines are often researched separately, leading to a fragmented understanding of Taiwan's past.

In a recent speech (Academia Historica, 2024), Wu contended that Taiwanese people did not inherently identify as Taiwanese from the outset. He traces the origins of Taiwanese identity to the Japanese Empire era when many elites and intellectuals studied in Japan and were exposed to contemporary ideologies. This period, Wu argues, marked the beginning of political ideology's flourishing among Taiwanese people. They assimilated modern and liberal ideas from the West, which led them to critique Japan's governance in Taiwan, particularly its neo-conservative aspects. Wu suggests that these Taiwanese thinkers recognised that embracing Western ideals of freedom, democracy, and human rights was crucial for their advancement. This realisation, according to Wu, distinguishes Taiwan's decolonisation process from that of other countries in the Global South.

Su Beng's work, while intentionally promoting nationalist thinking, emerged from a specific historical context where Taiwanese people, after experiencing colonisation and exploitation, began to question their identity (Lan, 2019). This highlights the need for a decolonised Taiwanese history that embraces the island's complex past, fosters an inclusive national identity, and positions Taiwan as an active participant in shaping its narrative on the world stage. The role of curators in this context is crucial. They have the responsibility to fill the gaps that official records and written histories cannot, bridging the

divide between artworks and the general public with narratives that resonate with all aspects of Taiwanese identity, including the often overlooked aboriginal heritage.

2.2. Democracy as a Defining Feature of Modern Taiwanese Identity

Japan was the first colonial regime to systematically organise Taiwan, aiming to showcase its ability as a proper colonial power. This extended beyond governmental systems and laws to include the spread of Japanese art and culture. While it's crucial to remain critical of these efforts as colonial tools, their influence on Taiwan cannot be overlooked. During this period, many Taiwanese elites pursued education in Japan, including Su Beng, the author of "Taiwan's 400 Years of History". This era also saw the accumulation of community power to resist the regime, as elites returned with new knowledge and began to educate others in Taiwan. It was during this time that the concept of a distinct 'Taiwanese' identity, separate from Japanese or Chinese identities, began to emerge.

The February 28 Incident of 1947 was a pivotal event that catalysed the Taiwanese independence movement, occurring in the context of Taiwan's transition from Japanese colonial rule to governance by the Republic of China (ROC), also known as the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP), after Japan's defeat in World War II. The incident began on February 27, when agents of the State Monopoly Bureau confronted a Taiwanese widow suspected of selling contraband cigarettes; an officer's gunfire into a crowd killed one man, igniting widespread protests. The following day, soldiers fired on demonstrators, and protesters seized a radio station to broadcast news of the uprising across the island. In response, the CNP government implemented a brutal crackdown, resulting in the arrest and execution of numerous Taiwanese elites and intellectuals, including artist Tan Teng-Pho and journalist Ng Tiau-Jit (Li, 2004). This tragic event, known as the February 28 Incident or '228 Incident', marked a significant loss in Taiwanese history and played a crucial role in shaping Taiwan's political landscape and national identity.

In 1949, following their defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC government retreated to Taiwan. They immediately imposed Martial Law, restricting freedom of expression and promoting the idea that they would eventually retake mainland China from the Communists. This period, known as the White Terror, was characterised by political repression and government censorship (Li, 2004). The CNP regime's authoritarian rule led to increased corruption and exploitation of legal systems. During this time, many Taiwanese elites and intellectuals fled to Japan, the United States, and Europe. Inspired by global student movements of the 1960s, such as the anti-Vietnam War protests, these overseas Taiwanese formed the World United Formosans for Independence in 1970. This organisation significantly influenced the subsequent Tangwai Movement within Taiwan (Hsu, 2007), which advocated for democratisation and Taiwanese independence.

The Formosa Incident, also known as the Kaohsiung Incident, was a pivotal event in Taiwan's Tangwai (meaning "outside the party") movement during the White Terror period. It centred around Formosa Magazine, founded in 1979 by Huang Hsin-Chieh and other prominent Tangwai members. On 10 December 1979, International Human Rights Day, the magazine's members organised a protest demanding the lifting of martial law and advocating for freedom and democracy. The police responded with tear gas, and following the protest, the Taiwan Garrison Command arrested eight core members of Formosa Magazine, including Huang Hsin-Chieh, Shih Ming-Teh, Lin Yi-Hsiung, and Annette Lu. Initially sentenced to death by court-martial, the defendants' plight garnered

international attention. Pressure from Taiwanese lobbyists in the United States led to public trials, resulting in reduced sentences, with protest leader Shih Ming-Teh receiving life imprisonment. The public nature of the trials revealed to many that the defendants were not insurgents, but ordinary citizens fighting for their rights (Lu, 2019). These eight core members, along with their defence lawyers, later formed the nucleus of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's first opposition party.

On July 14, 1987, President Chiang Ching-kuo of the Republic of China (ROC) announced the end of Martial Law, officially concluding the White Terror era. This led to a proliferation of newspapers and publications (National Archives Administration National Development Council, 2008), allowing diverse opinions to be published and heard. However, democratic reforms were not yet complete. On March 13, 1990, the National Assembly representatives, who had not faced re-election since 1947, passed an amendment extending their terms by 9 years and significantly increasing their attendance fees. This self-serving action by the so-called "ten-thousand-year parliament" sparked widespread public outrage.

In response, on March 16, 1990, the Wild Lily student movement began with a sit-in protest. The movement, named after an indigenous Taiwanese flower symbolising resilience, quickly spread nationwide. Protesters advocated for dissolving the National Assembly, abolishing the Temporary Provisions, convening a National Affairs Conference, and setting a timetable for political and economic reforms. This peaceful demonstration, the first major student movement since the ROC government's relocation to Taiwan (Wu, 2024), marked a significant milestone in the island's democratic journey. President Lee Teng-hui met with student representatives and pledged to implement their demanded changes. The six-day movement is now considered a pivotal moment in Taiwan's democratisation process, sowing the seeds of free speech and democratic thinking among the Taiwanese people.

The Taiwanese people have experienced repression under various regimes throughout their history. Although Taiwan's democracy is relatively young compared to more established democratic nations, it has become a core value that Taiwanese citizens cherish deeply. This appreciation stems from the recent nature of Taiwan's democratic transition, with many people's parents and grandparents having lived through the White Terror era. The path to democracy was indeed paved with tears and blood. The government has been working towards transitional justice, particularly regarding the February 28 Incident. While there is still much progress to be made in Taiwan's democratic journey, the Taiwanese people remain optimistic. They believe that with democracy as their foundation, they can overcome future challenges and continue to develop their nation.

Figure 01. Wild Lily Movement

2.3. External Pressures and Cultural Identity

The Taiwanese passport bears both "Republic of China" and "Taiwan", reflecting the complex international status of the island. This dual nomenclature highlights the awkward position Taiwan faces internationally, where its official name is the Republic of China (ROC), but it must also include "Taiwan" to distinguish itself from the People's Republic of China (PRC).

According to surveys conducted by the Election Study Center of National Chengchi University (Figure 02), there has been a significant shift in self-identification among Taiwanese people over the past three decades. In 1992, only 17.6% of respondents identified solely as Taiwanese, while 25.5% identified as Chinese, and 46.4% identified as both Taiwanese and Chinese. However, the latest survey in 2024 shows a dramatic change: 64.3% now identify as Taiwanese, 30.4% as both Taiwanese and Chinese, and only 3% as Chinese. This trend towards a stronger Taiwanese identity has implications for cross-strait relations. The Chinese government views this shift as a challenge to its claim over Taiwan, potentially contributing to increased tensions. Some analysts suggest that this has led to more aggressive posturing by China, including increased military activities near the Taiwan Strait (Ou and Chuang, 2023).

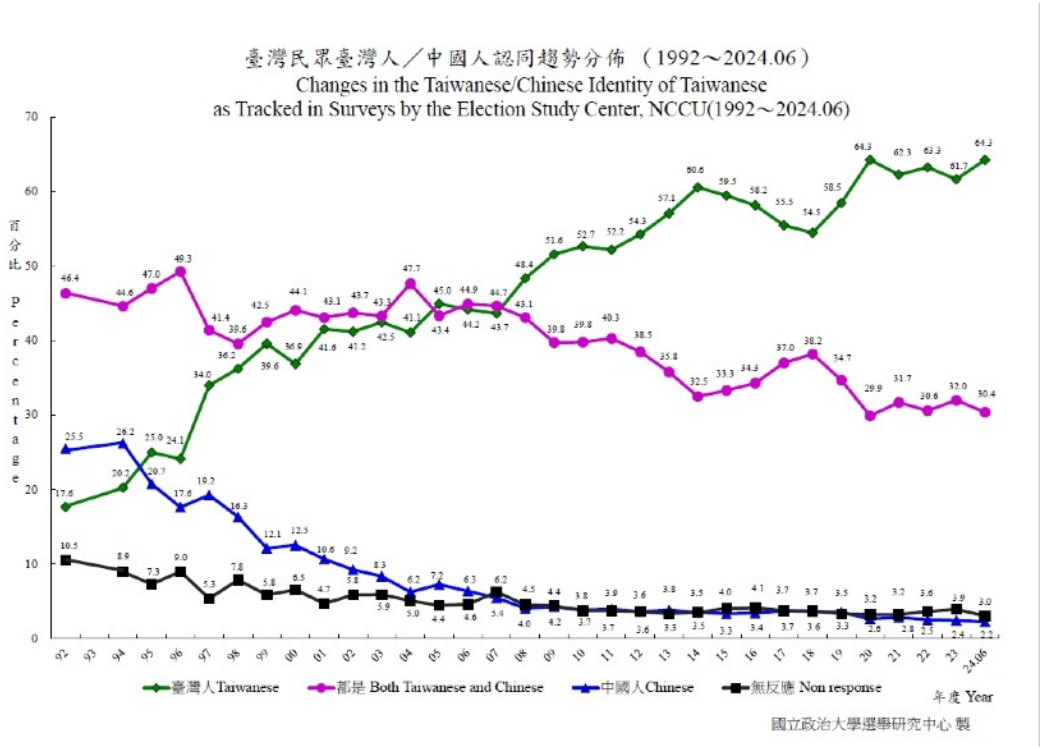

Figure 02.

In his speech at the 40th anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised the concept of a shared Chinese identity. He stated, "All our compatriots in Taiwan are members of the Chinese nation and should be proud of their Chinese identity, fully consider the position and role of Taiwan in national rejuvenation and pursue both the complete reunification and rejuvenation of China as an honourable cause." Xi further added, "We people on both sides should together pass on the fine traditional Chinese culture and promote its evolution and growth in new and creative ways" (Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, 2019). Xi's

speech clearly articulated China's desire for reunification, using the argument of shared cultural roots as justification. However, this perspective fails to acknowledge Taiwan's complex historical and cultural composition. Taiwan's population includes not only those of Chinese descent but also descendants of Spanish, Dutch, and Japanese settlers. Moreover, the island has been home to indigenous peoples for millennia, long predating Chinese influence. This diverse heritage challenges the notion of a singular Chinese identity for all Taiwanese people and complicates the reunification narrative presented by Beijing.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan) states on its website: "The ROC government relocated to Taiwan in 1949 while fighting a civil war with the Chinese Communist Party. Since then, the ROC has continued to exercise effective jurisdiction over the main island of Taiwan and a number of outlying islands, leaving Taiwan and China each under the rule of a different government. The authorities in Beijing have never exercised sovereignty over Taiwan or other islands administered by the ROC." This statement asserts Taiwan's de facto independence and separate governance from mainland China. For over four decades, Taiwan has navigated complex geopolitical tensions with its larger neighbour. Recognising the military and economic disparities between the two entities, Taiwan has generally pursued a cautious approach to avoid direct conflict. Simultaneously, China's significant role in global production and economics has contributed to Taiwan's relative diplomatic isolation on the international stage. In response to these historical circumstances and external pressures, the Taiwanese people have increasingly explored and developed their distinct cultural identity. This process serves a dual purpose: it reinforces a sense of internal cohesion and identity, while also highlighting Taiwan's cultural distinctiveness from mainland China on the global stage.

In recent years, the Taiwanese government has recognised the potential of cultural identity as a form of soft power diplomacy. Since 2016, coinciding with the election of Taiwan's first female president, there has been a notable shift in the visual representation of national identity, particularly in National Day celebrations. The government has begun collaborating with young artists and designers to create contemporary visual designs for these events. These new designs move beyond the traditional aesthetics that incorporate elements of the ROC flag (red, white, and blue), exploring new possibilities for expressing Taiwanese identity through culture and design.

Figure 03.
Taiwan National Day visual design from 2010 - 2023

Chapter 3. Building Modern Taiwanese Cultural Identity

3.1. Taiwan in the International Art Scene

Performing artist Hsieh Tehching aptly described the Venice Biennale as the "Olympics" of the art world when he was invited to represent the Taiwan Pavilion in 2017 (Wang, 2017b). This analogy accurately captures the essence of the Biennale as a global platform where nations showcase their artistic talent and, by extension, their cultural identity. In this context, the Venice Biennale serves not only as an artistic showcase but also as an arena for subtle political expression and cultural diplomacy. The Taiwan Pavilion, in particular, can be viewed as a microcosm of Taiwanese politics and identity, reflecting the complex interplay between art, culture, and national representation on the international stage.

The Venice Biennale comprises three main programmes: the Central Pavilion, National Pavilions, and Collateral Events. Since 1995, the Taiwan Pavilion has been organised by the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), initially participating in the National Pavilions programme. However, in 2003, due to pressure from China on the Venice Biennale organisers, the Taiwan Pavilion was removed from the National Pavilions and relegated to the Collateral Events programme. This change presented significant challenges for TFAM, as one of Taiwan's foremost cultural institutions and a pioneer in its fine art scene, particularly in managing the selection process for artworks and adapting to new curatorial approaches.

Figure 04.
Wu Tien-Chang
Beloved
Single Channel Video 3’11”
2013

From 1995 to 2015, the Taiwan Pavilion featured group exhibitions. However, this approach was criticised for presenting a fragmented interpretation of 'Taiwan', with each topic expressed independently (Kao, 2010). In response, TFAM shifted to solo exhibitions in 2015. This change has resulted in a clearer and more focused representation of Taiwan at the Biennale. Artists are now selected based on their international strategy and significance in Taiwanese art history (Chang, 2019a), allowing for a more cohesive and impactful presentation of Taiwanese contemporary art on the global stage.

The 2015 Taiwan Pavilion featured Wu Tien-Chang's "Never Say Goodbye," responding to the theme of "Goodbye." Through vibrant visuals, Wu explored Taiwan's complex history of regime changes and post-war Westernisation. Using characters in artificial skin membranes and gaudy costumes, he revealed the hybrid nature of Taiwanese identity and portrayed the experiences of the lower classes.

The 2017 Taiwan Pavilion featured "Tehching Hsieh: Doing Time," showcasing the pioneering Taiwanese performance artist's work. Hsieh's art explores existential themes, time, and survival through his One Year Performances. These works, created while Hsieh was an illegal immigrant in New York City, present a profound discourse on life's constraints and the human struggle for survival. Hsieh's art consistently portrays him as a desperate outlaw, reflecting the challenges faced by those with limited resources.

The 2019 Taiwan Pavilion featured Shu Lea Cheang's "3x3x6" at the Palazzo delle Prigioni, a former 16th-century prison. The title refers to a standard prison cell (3x3 meters) monitored by 6 cameras. Cheang transformed the venue into a high-tech surveillance system, exploring how such technologies shape contemporary identities. The work was inspired by ten historical and contemporary figures imprisoned for reasons related to gender, sexual orientation, or race.

Figure 05.
Hsieh Tehching,
One Year Performance 1980-1981, Time Clock Piece

Figure 06. Cheang Shulea, 3x3x6, Sade X, 4k video, 10’00”, 2019

For the 2022 Venice Biennale, the Taiwan Pavilion presented "Impossible Dreams." Due to allegations against the originally selected artist, the program was changed to an "archival display" reviewing the previous 13 editions of Taiwan's exhibitions at the Biennale, complemented by interactive public events. The title "Impossible Dreams" reflects both current global challenges and hope for the future, suggesting a forward-looking approach despite present difficulties.

The 2024 Taiwan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale features "Yuan Goang-Ming: Everyday War," showcasing the artist's work from 2014 to the present. This presentation explores themes of home, conflict, and fragility in contemporary society, posing profound questions about survival, peace, safety, freedom, and the poetic amidst ongoing uncertainty. Through video installations and kinetic sculptures, Yuan reflects on the anxieties of everyday life while responding to the Biennale's theme, "Stranieri Ovunque - Foreigners Everywhere."

Figure 07.
Yuan Goang-Ming, Everyday War, single-channel video, video still, 10’33”, 2024

Since transitioning to solo artist exhibitions, the Taiwan Pavilion has presented a more focused narrative. Each edition showcases contemporary Taiwanese aesthetics and values, engaging in global dialogues through art. The artists often incorporate political themes into their work, reflecting the pervasive nature of politics in Taiwanese daily life. This approach is exemplified by Yuan Goang-Ming, who in an interview (VernissageTV, 2024) stated: "Most of my works come from my personal experiences... You can see some works look very political, but I don't usually seek out such very political works. On the contrary, such political events come into my life and force me to address them." This statement underscores how Taiwanese artists often find themselves compelled to engage with political issues through their art, even when not explicitly seeking to do so.

3.2. Cultural Institutions and Identity Formation

Cultural institutions worldwide serve as vehicles for promoting a country's culture, encompassing language, literature, art, design, and public programmes. These institutions often function as instruments of soft power diplomacy. While many are government-funded and represent a curated national image, this is not always the case. This chapter analyses how cultural institutes shape cultural identity and how non-governmental cultural institutions approach political topics.

Japan House, located in London's Kensington High Street, exemplifies a government-funded cultural institute. It offers regular exhibitions on various aspects of Japanese culture, from indigenous peoples to contemporary design and gastronomy. The space also features a matcha bar, gift shop, and gourmet Japanese restaurant, complemented by talks and workshops on traditional practices like ikebana. This comprehensive approach not only showcases Japan's rich culture but also reinforces the Japanese origin of certain cultural elements in London's diverse environment, effectively demonstrating soft power diplomacy.

In contrast, non-governmental cultural institutes, such as Pushkin House, operate with more flexibility in their programming and themes. Pushkin House describes itself as an arts, cultural, and social space exploring Russian culture and identity, while also engaging with other regions and addressing contested legacies in Eastern European and post-Soviet spaces. Since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War in February 2022, Pushkin House has adapted its programme to raise awareness about Russian imperialism and promote anti-war voices. They have organised solidarity events to support Ukrainian creatives and charities aiding those affected by the war, demonstrating a commitment to addressing complex political issues.

Cultural institutes serve as manifestos for the countries they represent. While government-funded institutions often act as soft power diplomacy tools, non-governmental institutions play a crucial role in addressing sensitive issues. Despite operating on a smaller scale and facing funding challenges, these independent spaces offer unique perspectives. The ability to address both positive and negative aspects of a culture, maintaining transparency, is essential for decolonisation efforts and transitional justice. This approach allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced representation of cultural identities in the global context.

Chapter 4. Introduction to Creative Project: A Collecting Strategy for Taiwan House

The Ministry of Culture and the Taipei Representative Office in the UK are the primary institutions organising Taiwanese cultural events overseas. These bodies have worked to introduce Taiwanese culture to UK audiences, support Taiwanese artists in presenting their works internationally, and facilitate Taiwan-UK cultural collaboration and understanding. Since 2014, Taiwanese performers and artists have been regular participants in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and these institutions have supported numerous collaborative programmes between Taiwan and the UK. However, there is

currently no permanent space dedicated to a Taiwanese cultural institute that is open to the public.

Based on the research and analysis presented, establishing a Taiwanese cultural institute appears to be a strategic move to promote Taiwanese culture beyond popular elements like bubble tea. Such an institute would not only serve as a form of soft power diplomacy, particularly important given the current geopolitical situation but also play a crucial role in establishing and reinforcing Taiwanese cultural identity.

For the creative project component, I propose developing a collecting strategy for an envisioned 'Taiwan House'. The approach centres on establishing a permanent collection, recognising that understanding one's past is fundamental to identity formation. This collection would aim to present a decolonised Taiwanese history that embraces the island's complex past, fosters an inclusive national identity, and positions Taiwan as an active participant in shaping its global narrative. The collection would encompass historical archival pieces as well as works by modern Taiwanese artists and designers who have shaped contemporary Taiwanese aesthetics.

Conclusion

The journey of Taiwanese cultural identity formation is a complex and ongoing process, deeply rooted in the island's tumultuous history and shaped by its relatively recent transition to democracy. This study has demonstrated that Taiwan's cultural identity is not a monolithic construct but rather a dynamic, multifaceted entity that continues to evolve in response to both internal developments and external pressures. The research has highlighted the crucial role of democracy as a defining feature of modern Taiwanese identity. The struggle for democratic rights, from the White Terror period to the Wild Lily student movement, has become a shared narrative that binds the Taiwanese people together. This democratic ethos not only distinguishes Taiwan from its authoritarian neighbour but also serves as a source of national pride and a framework for addressing historical injustices.

Taiwan's participation in international cultural events, particularly the Venice Biennale, has emerged as a significant platform for asserting its distinct cultural identity on the global stage. The evolution of the Taiwan Pavilion from group exhibitions to focused solo presentations reflects a growing confidence in presenting a coherent narrative of Taiwanese art and culture. These artistic expressions often intertwine with political themes, mirroring the inextricable link between art and politics in Taiwan's daily life. The proposed establishment of a 'Taiwan House' with a permanent collection represents a strategic step towards solidifying and promoting Taiwanese cultural identity. Such an institution would serve multiple purposes: as a tool for cultural diplomacy, a space for exploring and presenting Taiwan's complex history, and a platform for showcasing contemporary Taiwanese creativity. The permanent collection, in particular, would play a crucial role in narrating Taiwan's story, from its indigenous roots through various colonial periods to its current status as a vibrant democracy.

Looking forward, the future of Taiwanese cultural identity in the global context remains both challenging and promising. While geopolitical pressures persist, Taiwan's commitment to democracy, its vibrant artistic scene, and its increasingly distinct sense of

self provide a strong foundation for cultural development. The proposed Taiwan House and similar initiatives could play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between Taiwan's rich cultural heritage and its contemporary expressions, fostering a more nuanced understanding of Taiwanese identity both at home and abroad. The formation of Taiwanese cultural identity is an ongoing process that requires continued engagement with history, active participation in global cultural dialogues, and innovative approaches to cultural institution-building. By embracing its complex past and dynamic present, Taiwan can continue to forge a unique cultural identity that resonates on the world stage.

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