FA 172B: Ink Painting in Taiwan  
Spring 2019

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Course Description:
Taiwan as China’s “periphery” tends to receive inadequate art historical attention. Since the lifting of Martial Law in 1987 (ending the notorious “White Terror”), there has been a boom in contemporary art in Taiwan that reflects the latest global trends. At the same time, a revival of some of the repressed rebelliousness of the post-war period, encompassing abstraction and nativism, has engendered new “Chinese” expressions of which ink painting (shuimo-hua) provides the richest exemplars. By consolidating inherited aesthetics and introducing novel techniques, proponents of this art form between the 1950s and 1990s carried further the unfinished guohua or national-style painting reform of the May Fourth era (1910s-1930s) and anticipated the experimental shuimo of mainland China today. This course focuses on the groundbreaking precursors to this experimentalism that occurred in Taiwan.

The artists include émigrés who were born in the mainland and native Taiwanese, as well as those of mixed backgrounds. Some of their works embody a nostalgia for the “motherland,” while others convey tensions from colonial (under Japanese rule) and postcolonial experiences. Among the subjects examined are cultural orthodoxy, post-war modernism and the rise of American hegemony, nativism, diaspora, self-orientalism, and the limits of national history.

This course elucidates the history, culture, and politics of Taiwan through art and presents the major debates surrounding painting in these regions. Discourses of center vs. peripheries, tradition vs. modern will be examined critically. Besides historical contextualization, much attention will be given to analyzing the artworks themselves, including styles and techniques that are informed by interviews with artists. Students will receive intimate knowledge of how the works are created.

Requirements and Grading
In addition to weekly lectures, there will be two mid-term examinations (no final exam), regular reading responses, and a final paper. The examinations will count for 50% of the grade (late-comers will not be given extra time; this condition is non-negotiable), reading responses 20%, paper 20% (8-10 pages, double-spacing, 12 font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins throughout, no spacing in between paragraphs, page numbering, spell check, footnotes, illustrations with captions), and attendance (including mental presence)10%.
Success in this course requires nine hours of work for every three hours of in class time.

Exam dates: February 15 and April 2

Paper due date: April 30

Topics Calendar will be adjusted according to the pace of instruction. Check LATTE regularly for updates.

Introduction: Problem of Taiwan, “One China” Policy,” and Ink Art
1: Taiwanese Art under Japanese Occupation: “Local Color,” Figures, and Landscapes
2: KMT (Nationalist Party) and Guohua (National-style Painting)
3: Alternatives to the Copyist Tradition: Life Sketching; Abstraction and the Cold War
4: Convergences with Hong Kong Postwar Modernism
5: Native Ink Painting in Hong Kong’s Urban/Cosmopolitan Environment
6: End of Martial Law and the Native-Land Movement in Taiwan
7: Contemporary Re-engagements with the Ink Canon and the Mainland

Select Bibliography (This list may change; for updates, follow weekly LATTE postings)


Harrison, Mark. “Art, Violence and Memory: Retelling the Story of the Beautiful Island.” Taiwan: The View from the South Conference Keynote (9 January 2015). (www.Academia.edu)


Kuo, Jason C. Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).
Laughlin, Charles A. “From ‘Nativism’ in Fiction to ‘Indigenization’ in Documentary: The Evolution of Cultural Expression as Class-Based Critique under Globalization.” (www.Academia.edu)

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If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please provide the relevant documentation immediately.

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential Sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.