

Off-site Art Exhibitions as a Practice of “Taiwanization” in the 1990s

The lifting of martial law in 1987, a milestone on the road to democracy in Taiwan, led to the emergence of “Taiwanization” in every aspect of life in the 1990s. Two main features of this political change contributed to the emergence of off-site art exhibitions¹ in the early 1990s and a subsequent boom in the appearance of these exhibitions in the late 1990s. One was the shift from the Kuomintang (KMT) single-party centralized political system towards democracy; this provided the political freedom necessary to generate the possibility of the appearance of a public realm and of the use of public spaces as venues for art. The other was the move from a predominantly Chinese ideology to a more specifically Taiwanese identity that came into being as a collective movement in the 1990s and was known as “localism fever.” Throughout this article, I propose that the emergence of and boom in off-site art in the 1990s could be seen as a complex and peculiar phenomenon that reflects Taiwanization and that also became part of the process of Taiwanization.

The Emergence of Off-site Art Exhibitions in the Early 1990s:

Site-Specificity

Two exhibitions, Environmental Art (1994) and Resurgence on the Tanshui River: Taipei Kites Festival (1995), played significant roles in the emergence of off-site art exhibitions in Taiwan. These exhibitions took place along the bank of the Tanshui River, which is one of the principal rivers running through Taipei County and it was seriously polluted at that time. This river not only served as an exhibition venue but also furnished the concept for Environmental Art as shown in the following statement by the curator, Ni Tsai-Chin:

My belief is that “local affairs belong to the locality.” . . . A local exhibition should have the “locality” at its centre, which is why I limited the scope of this exhibition to environmental art. . . . This means that participants are obliged to get to know something about the complex issues relating to the local history, the changing culture, and the natural environment of the Tanshui River area. Then they have to rethink these issues and only then can they transform their ideas into art forms. I think that “to be rooted at the local level” and to “return to the locality” are the most direct and effective approaches.²

It is apparent that the idea that “local affairs belong to the locality” was at the core of the Community Comprehensive Construction³ cultural

policy that was being put into effect in the 1990s and that encouraged the residents to pay more attention to their living environment and local culture, particularly after long-term neglect of the land during the period of martial law and under the concept of “Great China Idealism.”⁴ The idea of being “rooted at the local level” and “returning to the locality” was not only directly connected with the mainstream trend of Taiwanization, but was also related to a crucial debate in art circles about whether Taiwanese art should go down the road of localism or internationalism.

The two main figures involved in this series of exhibitions—Ni Tsai-Chin, the curator of the 1994 exhibition, and Lin Hsing-Yueh, the curator of the 1995 exhibition—had led this critical debate for nearly two years between 1991 and 1993, and both of them backed the localism road to a certain extent. An article entitled “Western Art: Made in Taiwan,” written by Ni in 1991, was the starting point for this debate and was followed by over twenty-five essays by other writers arguing either for or against his nativist position. In this article, as the title suggests, Ni criticized the enormous impact of the modernist movement on Taiwanese art history from the 1950s to the 1980s, suggesting that it was time to rethink this issue. The statements focused on Taiwan in terms of geographic location; for instance, “It is only natural and right for people who live in Taiwan to identify with the land they live in, and to know its history,” and “Only artworks that identify with Taiwan can be called Taiwan art.”⁵ The article that ended the debate was Lin’s “On Questions Concerning the Localization of Art,” in which he expressed a similar view to that of Ni’s idea; for example, he stated that “Today, the localization of art is no longer a question of whether we want it or not, nor a question of whether it is possible or not . . . The question now is how to facilitate it and help it move along the grand path.”⁶ In short, the statements of Ni and Lin revealed the focus of the discursive mode of the 1990s, and the two exhibitions curated by them could be considered as attempts to put into practice this notion of localism.

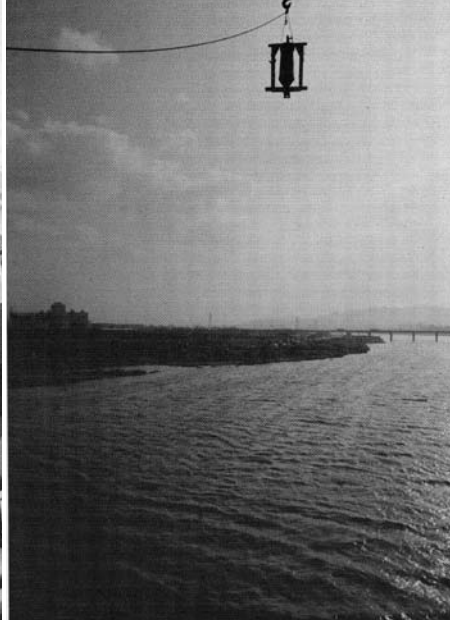
On the basis of these views of localism, Ni summarized the characteristics of the artworks in the 1994 exhibition as follows:

All the works are excellent environmental artworks which have grown out of the local context of the Tanshui River, and which have nothing whatever to do with Western environmental art.⁷

This statement is problematic, but it reveals Ni’s view that the significance of the relationship between artworks and their locality must be emphasized. Two aspects of this statement should be considered: one is that art should not be separated from either reality or the locality; the other is that only by utilizing local elements can a distinctive artwork be created in which the influence of Western art styles will be limited, merely providing a form. The former related to Ni’s idea that he wished to ensure that art, unlike modern art isolated and enclosed inside a gallery, should come back to the land like the ancient art that played a part in everyday life, such as cave drawings, murals outside churches, and sculptures in village squares. To articulate the idea that art should perform a more active function in society rather than simply having aesthetic value and making a purely visual impact, he cited an old Chinese phrase: “to foster education and culture, and to facilitate social relationships.”



Hou Yi-Ren, *Drop It in the River*, 1994, site-specific installation. Photo: Hsu Po-Hsin. Courtesy of the artist.



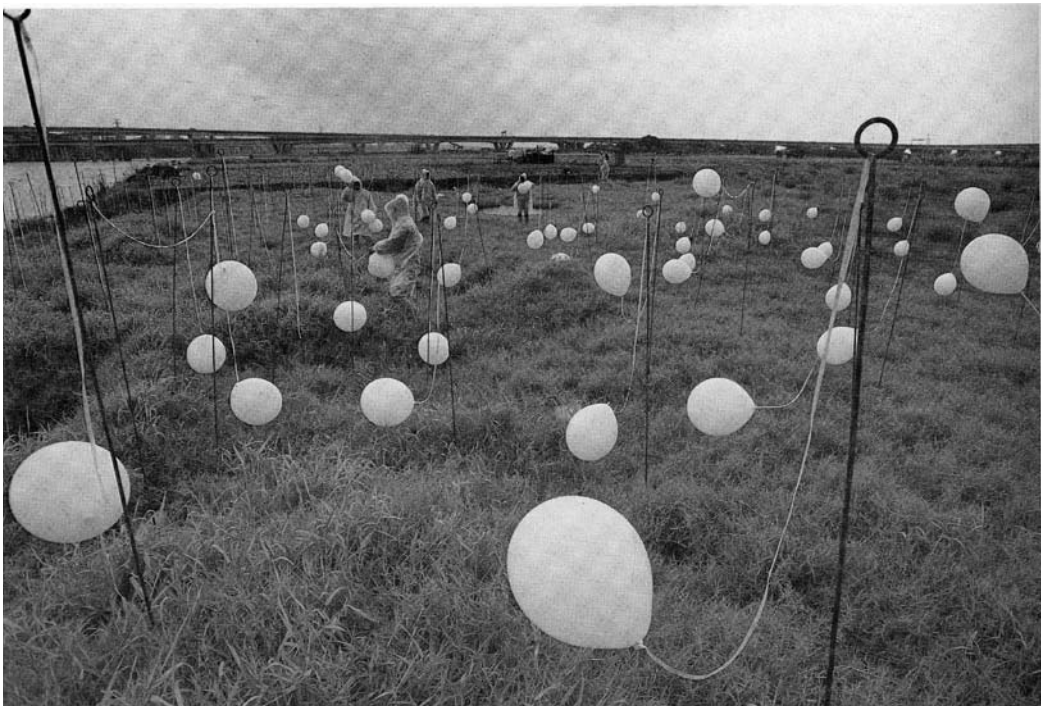
The artwork *Drop It in the River* can be cited as an example of this new approach in making connections between art and society. This piece was presented by the artist Hou Yi-Ren as an event performed at 2:30 p.m. on March 12, 1994. A giant bullet-shaped object weighing three hundred kilograms, on which was carved 1,056 characters giving geographical and historical details about the Tanshui River, was suddenly dropped into the river. With such a radical and aggressive gesture, the intention was to shock viewers and passers-by in order to generate their moral consciousness toward the environment in the hope that the problem of river pollution would never again be invisible or ignored. This artwork served as a manifesto in an effort to reframe art in a social context.

Hou Yi-Ren, sketch for *Drop It in the River*, 1994, site-specific installation. Photo: Hsu Po-Hsin. Courtesy of the artist.



Ni also commented on the development of Western modern art and criticized the first generation of Western environmental artists, including artists such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Jaracheff Christo, who had an interventionist attitude and marked the land by digging, sinking, stuffing, shaping, and moving; by contrast, artists whose work was based on the concept of ecology, such as Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy, and Hamish Fulton, respected nature and employed natural materials to create artworks that could be integrated with nature. Ni argued that neither of these two approaches—one too exaggerated, the other too humble—was suitable for an Asian person, and he believed that an attitude of having a “dialogue” with nature would be preferable for Taiwanese artists.⁸

The artwork *Tide*, collectively made by four artists, may be used here to exemplify what Ni meant by dialogue. The artists installed thousands of white balloons along the river bank; floating in the air and moving with the tide, these white balloons contrasted with the green weeds and the dusky polluted water, forming a fantastic scene in the daytime, while at night the balloons, painted with luminous colours, were like gleaming stars in the dark. This poetic scene changed according to the unpredictable weather, whether it was sunny, pouring with rain, blowing a gale, or just a light breeze, and as time passed, the balloons gradually deflated. While these continual changes were an illustration of Ni's idea of a "dialogue with nature" and of "the reflection of the environment," the work can also be seen to have more critical meaning in its reference to the life of the river as well as to the lives of human beings.



The idea of the so-called oriental mode of a "dialogue with nature" was further developed in Lin's 1995 exhibition, *Resurgence on the Tanshui River: Taipei Kites Festival*. While the previous exhibition had covered a wide geographic area, for this exhibition the size of the venue was narrowed down to an area of sky above the river and river bank between two bridges and used the time-honoured symbol of folk art, the kite, to enable the exhibition to achieve the greatest visibility and to present the most dramatic spectacle. Utilizing the idea of the kite, this exhibition emphasized the interactive relationship between human beings (the kite is made by a human being) and the environment (the kite needs wind in order to ascend). Tsai Shu-Hui's work, *Auspicious Cloud*, can be seen as an example of this kind of interaction. Having surveyed the weather reports for the area during the previous two years, Tsai created a soft sculpture consisting of a giant balloon in the shape of cloud. This piece had parallels with *Tide* in that it mirrored the climate, but it also had a more direct and intensive interaction with the weather conditions as well as becoming a part of the scenery in the sky.

Chen Yan-Ming, Lin Meng-Ling, Chiang Ying-Ting, and Su Yu-Hua, *Tide*, 1994, site-specific installation. Photo: Hsu Po-Hsin. Courtesy of the artists and Taipei County Art Centre.

Tsai Shu-Hui, *Auspicious Cloud*, 1995, site-specific installation. Courtesy of the artist.



The curatorial strategy mentioned above created a clear relationship between the artworks and their environment. The next question that arises is: What about the relationship between the viewers and the artworks? Both Ni and Lin believed that there was a big gap between contemporary art and the public. In these circumstances, for them, strengthening art education was one solution and holding off-site art exhibitions was another. For example, Ni asked, “Is the off-site art exhibition not a good way of making art available for everyone?”⁹ Lin thought that the outdoor exhibition was a way to extend the space for art, since “There is no exhibition space that can correspond to the population of Taipei County,”¹⁰ and also because:

If art moves out, away from galleries and museums, not only can it provide a social education, but it also can have a direct, face-to-face encounter with audiences and it can further respond directly to nature.¹¹

However, the notion of “art available for everyone” merely referred to the outdoor location. In order to visit some of the artworks exhibited along the riverbank in Environmental Art, viewers had to walk a long way into the wild natural habitat. In this case, accessibility for everyone remained an issue. The notion of having a “face-to-face encounter with audiences” in the Tanshui River exhibition remained at the level of attracting attention and increasing attendance as expressed by the art critic Shih Jui-Je: “The kite as a type of folk art had given the exhibition the atmosphere of a local festival which had attracted audiences; however, there had been insufficient opportunity for any interaction with local residents.”¹² Whether a local resident or a visitor, one could only see the artworks from a distance—merely viewing them,

rather than having active “participation.”¹³ Therefore, it is fair to say that the relationship between artworks and viewers still awaited improvement.

A further question arises: Why was it that the idea of “art available for everyone” or “face-to-face encounter with audiences” turned into a situation of merely attracting attention and increasing attendance? Apart from the lack of experience in this initial stage of off-site art exhibitions in Taiwan, another possible reason was related to political concerns. The Taipei County Cultural Centre was governed by Taipei County, which was run by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).¹⁴ At that time, the DPP had devised a political strategy with the slogan “local surrounds centre” or “local approaches centre,” in the hope of giving themselves a better chance of winning the presidential election. The main organizer of the Cultural Centre, Ji Ming-Huai, commented that “it’s easy for this type of project to gain the support of an opposition party, because it can break through bans which have been imposed in the past, throw off the yoke of political ideology and espouse principles of justice and fairness.”¹⁵ He also insisted that “art does not necessarily have to be with or for the people but it must relate to the people.”¹⁶ In this sense, “the people” are the main concern in both art and politics, in particular, the task for the DPP was to find a way of attracting the attention of voters. These off-site art exhibitions were not only presented as artistic events but also corresponded to the political needs of the DPP as a means of publicizing their political manifesto—the quest for a Taiwanese identity.

The above analysis suggests that there was a connection between the exhibitions themselves and the quest for a Taiwanese identity; by exhibiting artworks in the natural environment, visible environmental pollution was first highlighted, then a wider-ranging environmental concern, including local culture, history, and people, came into being. At the same time, emphasis shifted from a people–land relationship to an elevated, abstract, and comprehensive notion of localism that might lead directly to the creation of Taiwanese identity. For the curator, off-site art curating may have represented an opportunity to put into practice his ideas about what Taiwanese art should be, while for the local DPP government, this kind of art event was able to attract attention and to demonstrate the mission of the party. The emergence of off-site art exhibitions therefore not only responded to the sociopolitical changes resulting from the lifting of martial law, but was also associated with the process of Taiwanization, even becoming part of this collective trend.

The Boom in Off-site Art Exhibitions after 1997: An Instrumental Perspective on Art

Following the success of the off-site art exhibitions in the early 1990s, a boom of other such exhibitions occurred around 1997. Politically, Taiwanization reached a climax in 1996 when Lee Teng-Hui was successfully elected in the first direct presidential election; from his position as President, Lee speeded up the Taiwanization progress. The event that was most influential in promoting the boom in off-site art exhibitions in the late 1990s was the streamlining of the Taiwan Provincial Government. Accompanying this political power shift, the power of the Council for

Cultural Affairs (CCA), Taiwan Province, was considerably reduced. Before the power shift, the Taiwan Province CCA decided to free up its budget to support a large number of off-site art exhibitions as its last significant action in this field and as its contribution to the Community Comprehensive Construction cultural policy. It is evident that without the funding released from the Taiwan Province CCA, the boom in off-site art exhibitions in the late 1990s would never have occurred.

Another direct cause of the boom was that in the late 1990s, local governments under both the DPP and the KMT welcomed the off-site art exhibitions taking place in their cities and gave this artistic genre great responsibility in carrying out promotion for the city, supporting social movements, helping to revitalize disused areas, and marketing business reputations. However, the questions that arise are: Should art be expected to operate pragmatically, to solve problems? Was it appropriate to treat art as an instrument to serve political, social, or business interests? Two exhibitions, *Landscape, City and Symphony: Installation Art in Taiwan* (1997), which had the aim of rebranding the city by means of art, and *The Heart of History: Outdoor Installation Art Exhibition* (1999), which was given the responsibility for the salvaging of heritage under the community cultural policy, are symptomatic of these questions. These exhibitions were curated by the same person, Huang Hai-Ming, but the effects were vastly different: the first one not only offered a model of off-site art curating for later exhibitions, but was also positively appreciated by local residents and government; the second exhibition, however, gave rise to an irreconcilable conflict between art and the public.

Symphony

Landscape, City, and Symphony: Installation Art in Taiwan took place in public spaces in Chiayi City, a medium-sized city located in the mid-south of Taiwan. As suggested by the title, this exhibition addressed the issue of how installation art could intervene in city space to interact positively with the surrounding environment—in other words, how the exhibition as a whole could be like a symphony in which each artwork responded to and resonated with the other artworks that were included, with the surrounding spaces, and with the environmental context of the entire city.

Art *in situ*—the idea of the necessity to see art in a site-specific place—was the most significant curatorial strategy represented in this exhibition, with its aim of establishing a direct relationship with the urban space of Chiayi City. Local artists took local issues as their subjects—childhood memories, resident histories, and everyday lifestyles—using at-hand materials to create their artworks, which were then installed directly in the city’s public space. Another strategy utilized was that of “soft intervention”—that is, a subtle intrusion into an existing chaotic urban environment and designed to transform the city into “a poetic space” and “a space for thought” as described by Huang, rather than merely a space for consumption. This approach encouraged artists to use various existing urban elements such as community parks, small statues, ancient houses, and monuments as meaningful “connections” to the city space; by highlighting, regenerating, transforming, or reorganizing those elements, creative artworks were

conceived. Huang further articulated the function of off-site art (or as Huang called it, on-site installation) as a third strategy:

On-site installation in an urban space is not meant to provide a “works-object”; instead, it creates a “production network for meaning” in that particular “area.” Here, area is enclosed in quotation marks because it covers the “extendibility” and “penetrability” of “time” and “space.” It extends, in various overlapping forms, from “now” into the “past” and “future” . . . It allows an invisible, indefinite power to become “visible” through the intervention of an “artwork that plays as a power-relationship-highlighting-machinery”; that is, it has the function of unmasking problems.¹⁷



However, one question that arises concerns how an art intervention along city streets can produce critical meaning. Lo Sen-hao’s work, *Mirage*, is an excellent example to demonstrate this idea. Lo used plywood to make a temporary billboard, colourfully painted on it the presidential office building in Taipei, and erected it in front of the Chiayi railway station covering up the actual station facade. In so doing, he temporarily transformed the railway station into the mirage of the presidential office. Here, a three-fold meaning can be read into this artwork. The first meaning is that the real presidential office building, erected by the Japanese colonial government and architect-designed in the Japanese style, has stood as a symbol of political power until now. Lo’s work reminded us of the fact that the KMT government purposely had veiled this previous colonial history of the island.¹⁸ The second is that the KMT government relocated

Lo Sen-Hao, *Mirage*, 1997, site-specific installation. Photo: Yao Jui-Chung. Courtesy of the artist and Yao Jui-Chung.

to Taiwan and used this building as a temporary presidential office where they were waiting to regain one day the political power of China; however, this dream, or it could be said, this mirage, has never come true. Thus, this building continues to be in use to the present day. Thirdly, the artist created a real mirage; a low-cost plywood billboard that gave the appearance of the presidential office building covering up the real railway station façade. This work, on the one hand, was about creating a sense of humour by temporarily transforming something familiar to the citizens of Chiayi, while, on the other hand, it criticized the absurd political ideology of the past through providing a sense of great irony. In this way the artwork first exposed problems and then produced specific meaning.

The artworks in *Landscape*, *City*, and *Symphony* provided different perspectives on the familiar spaces city dwellers encounter on a daily basis, exposing problems or functioning as a joke, a reminder, a critique. It may therefore be concluded that this exhibition accomplished its mission of rebranding the city through art. Moreover, it brought differing elements within the city into harmony and received a positive response from local citizens, such as “many people coming over and over again to see the exhibition” and “the presence of elders, housewives, street vendors, and taxi drivers, not usually seen in the museum.”¹⁹

Conflict

Unlike the previous exhibition, *The Heart of History* (1999), held in Lugang, a traditional town in the middle of Taiwan, gave rise to conflict among artists, local intellectuals, and governments. The aim of this exhibition was to save a piece of Taiwan’s local heritage—the Rimauheng Building, built three hundred years ago, and a representative piece of architecture of the Lugang district during its golden era. In 1982, a new urban planning proposal was announced, and in order to make way for the widening of a nearby main road, the Rimauheng Building was scheduled for demolition. Several local intellectuals got together to appeal for the conservation of this pivotal piece of local heritage. Sixteen years later, in May 1998, there were further developments: the County government asked for the Rimauheng Building to be officially given heritage status; meanwhile, the township had started the road construction, so part of the Rimauheng Building had already been damaged. This attracted serious criticism, since at that time the Community Comprehensive Construction cultural policy was being strongly promoted by the central government; thus, salvaging local heritage was associated with the politically expedient.

Holding simultaneously the status of outsider and expert, the architectural and urban design team Rimauheng Studio considered the situation in Lugang to be the result of a too-rapid process of modernization that was damaging traditional culture and public space. They concluded that contemporary art with an avant-garde spirit could inject fresh energy into this semi-derelict area and that it was necessary to trigger “disturbances” to awaken the local residents to the plight of the Rimauheng Building.²⁰ The *Heart of History* exhibition was designed to publicize these heritage issues and raise residents’ awareness. However, it is unclear whether or not this exhibition succeeded in realizing these aims or simply became embroiled in



an existing turbulent situation, and whether or not the strategy of creating “disturbances” was suitable in this context. Further, what is the meaning of “disturbance” and in what way would it be appropriate to create one?

Two artworks in particular were the focus of this conflict. The first work, entitled *A Prosperous Country with People Living in Peace: Tracing the Path of History*, was created by Lien Pao-Tsai, who pasted thousand TWD currency notes all over a sculpture of the Mother God—Mazu—Goddess of the Sea. The Mother God was placed in the middle of a seesaw made by the artist, with her two guardians at each end of the seesaw, and a large number of ceramic human footprints were scattered on the ground around it. The

Top: Lien Pao-Tsai, *A Prosperous Country with People Living in Peace: Tracing the Path of History*, 1999, site-specific installation. Photo: Huang Hai-Ming. Courtesy of the artist and Taiwan Provincial Cultural Affairs.

Bottom: Lien Pao-Tsai, *A Prosperous Country with People Living in Peace: Tracing the Path of History*, 1999, site-specific installation after interventions by local residents. Photo: Huang Hai-Ming. Courtesy of the artist and Taiwan Provincial Cultural Affairs.

intention of this work was to expose serious problems of corruption and to criticize the avarice of the god's agents; however, the fact that the artist directly appropriated ready-made materials for this piece and exhibited it in the square immediately in front of the Mother God Temple confused the local residents. The residents protested vehemently against the way their religion had been dishonoured; one resident covered the faces of the sculptures with red cloth so that no one could recognize them, other local intellectuals even went so far as to cut the protective red rope surrounding the artwork and hung some ironic statements such as "I am an artist. Please respect me and the work from a distance."

The other artwork, *Wake Up, Lugang*, by Chuang Ming-Chi, consisted of various images of eyes drawn on the walls of old houses and aimed at refreshing the ambiance of this old town. In the beginning, some local residents were supportive of this project and allowed the artist to draw eye patterns on their houses, but in the end the residents rejected this work when they saw Chuang's artist statement in a flyer, in which he launched an all-out attack on Lugang and its residents. Among the artist's statements were: "as an outsider, I would like to comment that those corrupt shops and the useless Township Office are the arch-criminals, like cancer cells and malignant tumours eroding the heritage of Lugang"²¹ and "... the local youth have all left; the old houses are almost demolished; the elders have died so no one pays any attention to the native musical heritage ... the children play around all day like orphans no one cares about."²² Since these statements were direct personal attacks, the attitude of the artist was seen as disrespectful of the local people. A number of young intellectuals were angry about Chuang's rudeness, and in reaction, some even sprayed a dollar sign in the middle of the eyes.

Shih Wei-Chuan, who was among those who took part in this action against these artworks, and who was accused of vandalism, stated:

The artist [Chuang] never got our permission to paint eyes on the front of my house; they said it was "art." Therefore, we used the form of action art to cut the rope and spray an image of money in the eyes they drew; however, they said this was "destruction." What is art? When the artists pasted money onto the sculptures of the Mother God, they said it was irony. When we also employed this ironic method of expressing our view of installation art, they said it was vandalism. In the end, what is [on-site] installation art?²³

Shih insisted that this kind of art should be close to everyday life by tackling social issues and being exhibited in people's living space; thus, only by cutting the rope could the nature of off-site art be revealed. Here, the rope symbolized the boundaries of the museum, where an artwork inside its territory is given a sense of sanctity. His action of cutting the rope in one sense broke down this boundary and "released" the artwork from the



Opposite page, top: Chuang Ming-Chi, *Wake Up, Lugang*, 1999, site-specific installation. Photo: Chin Weng-Chang. Courtesy of the artist and Taiwan Provincial Cultural Affairs.

Opposite page, bottom: Chuang Ming-Chi, *Wake Up, Lugang*, 1999, site-specific installation after intervention by local residents. Photo: Chin Weng-Chang. Courtesy of the artist and Taiwan Provincial Cultural Affairs.

restrictions of the museum and, in another sense, raised another interesting issue: that of how in performing a similar action, one person can be identified as an artist while another can be accused of being a vandal.

Another related issue appeared in local intellectual Chen Wen-Pin's articles, "A Heart Transplant by an Outsider or Artistic Violence"²⁴ and "Wake up, Artists,"²⁵ in which he argued that the artists, surrounded by the aura of professionalism, had tried to "educate" the Lugang residents; this seemed to assume that artists had a higher status than the residents. Such attitudes on the part of the artists were described as possessing "cultural hegemony,"²⁶ which was the main cause of the conflict. His argument raised the question of who had the right to speak for Lugang: the artists or the local residents, and further questioned what kind of attitude an artist should have.

The struggle between artists and local intellectuals continued for a few months. The climax of the conflict arrived when the curator and the artists held a press conference in Taipei one month after the end of the exhibition to complain that the artworks had been destroyed. The artists described their situation as being a "new white terror"²⁷ in the postmodern age," and their appeal was to "let art return to art" in order that some of the dignity and autonomy of art could be preserved.²⁸ The curator, Huang, spoke from another point of view, and indicated that in this case art was being utilized as an instrument to serve the Community Comprehensive Construction policy. He suggested that "if art must be seen as a 'tool' by the government, please consider art as a 'super tool'; that is, art should be exhibited on an appropriate occasion within a specific space, and that artworks should serve as mechanisms of decoration, presentation, unmasking, and observation."²⁹ However, this concept seemed to have failed in this case.

This conflict might be the result of employing a problematic curatorial approach to deal with specific political and economic problems. I wonder why the curator, Huang, did not utilize his "soft intervention" strategy of the Landscape, City, and Symphony exhibition, since it might have been a more effective way of dealing with the complex relationships between the artists and the public. On the contrary, he responded to the demand of the organizer Rimauheng Studio to use a "disruptive" approach. Because of this approach, art as a "super tool" had turned into a weapon used to attack and stir up trouble. Art, in my view, should not be expected to serve as a panacea for the problems caused by a long-term imbalance in political or economic development. Although art might well have the capability of changing society or changing people's perspectives, curators should perhaps adopt a more respectful strategy that encompasses all who might be impacted by it.

The failure of this exhibition raised two fundamental questions: Who has the right to speak in public space or for the public—the artists or the residents? And what should be emphasized in this kind of exhibition—the interests of art or those of the public? This event reflected a shift in the focus of off-site art exhibitions: from aesthetic value, artworks, and artists,

to the needs of the public. It also highlighted what would become the central issue of the next phase of off-site art exhibitions in the 2000s: what ways artists should work with the public in this kind of art practice.

In this text, I have shown that the emergence of and boom in off-site art exhibitions in the 1990s was closely connected to socio-political circumstances, in particular the off-site art exhibitions based on the characteristics of site-specificity. In both the early 1990s, when it was presented as a form of environmental art, and the late 1990s, when it was considered to be a useful instrument, off-site art served as an index of a locality, functioning as a trace or indicator of certain external conditions of a work's context; through this index, local characteristics were revealed. This was often further connected to the people-land relationship and with the search for a Taiwanese identity. Off-site art exhibitions in the 1990s, therefore, were not only associated with the socio-political changes that occurred after the lifting of martial law, but were also directly influenced by the process of Taiwanization during that period, while at the same time, off-site art exhibitions themselves also participated in and became part of the Taiwanization process.

Notes

¹ I define off-site art exhibitions as those taking place outside of gallery spaces, and involving various curatorial strategies that are based on specific concepts related to artistic, environmental, or social issues.

² Wang Ting Mei, "Let Art Come Back to the Land: An Interview with the Curator of the Art Exhibition of Taipei County: Environmental Art, Ni Tsai-Chin," *Artist Magazine*, 228, no. 5 (1994), 215.

³ This is a literal translation from Chinese 社區總體營造. Various terms have been used to translate the name of this movement, such as "Integrated Community Construction," "Community Building," "Community Infrastructure Establishment," "Community Renaissance," or "Community Empowerment and Development." The reason I use this literal translation rather than others is that the understanding of this policy normally comes from the literal meaning, and this meaning actually resulted in confusion and misunderstanding. For example, the central spirit of this policy is empowerment; however, no relationship with the people or between the government and the people is referred to. In addition, in the initial stage, this policy focused on construction, such as community-based cultural activities, the completion of exhibition facilities, assistance in building local museums, architectural renovations, and the strengthening of local cultural industries. Although as a result of this policy, numerous local history and culture studios, organizations, and local museums were set up, and were characterized by local natural features, products, and historical background, this policy became associated with construction in the 1990s, and that association remained.

- ⁴ During the martial law period, with the aim of recovering the mainland, the KMT government treated Taiwan as merely a temporary military site, and the basis of all official thinking about national culture was the “Chinese Concept,” based on “Greater China Idealism.” This idea was manifested, for example, in the strictly controlled language system—standard Mandarin was the national language, while native languages, such as Minnan and Hakka, were banned in schools and at some official occasions. Another examples of the efforts made to show that Taiwan represented Chinese culture was the “Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement” of the 1970s, which began in opposition to the Cultural Revolution in China and which promoted Chinese culture in official education and in the cultural field in Taiwan; for instance, the government launched a program that promoted Chinese calligraphy, traditional Chinese ink painting, and Chinese opera.
- ⁵ Ni Tsai-Chin, “Western Art: Made in Taiwan,” in *The Taiwanese Consciousness in Taiwan Art: A Collection of Debates in the Early Nineties on Taiwan Art*, ed. Ye Yu-Jin (Taipei: Lion Art Books, 1994), 183.
- ⁶ Lin Hsing-Yueh, “On Questions Concerning the Localization of Art” in *ibid.*, 325.
- ⁷ Ni Tsai-Chin, “Dialogue of Art and Environment” *Artist Magazine*, 228, no. 5 (1994), 222.
- ⁸ Ni Tsai-Chin, “Towards a Limitless World,” in *Environmental Art: The 6th Art Exhibition of Taipei County*, ed. Ji Ming-Huai (Taipei County: Taipei County Art Centre, 1994), 15–19.
- ⁹ Wang Ting Mei, “Let Art Come Back to the Land: An Interview with the Curator of the Art Exhibition of Taipei County: Environmental Art, Ni Tsai-Chin,” *Artist Magazine*, 228, no. 5 (1994), 214.
- ¹⁰ Yan Pei-Ling, “Art Exhibition of Taipei County in the sky,” *Artist Magazine*, 240, no. 5 (1995), 190–193.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Ji Ming-Huai, “Invisible Kites—Report of Conference of The 7th Art Exhibition of Taipei County,” in *Resurgence on the Tanshui River: Taipei Kites Festival: The 7th Art Exhibition of Taipei County*, ed. Ji Ming-Huai (Taipei County: Taipei County Art Centre, 1994), 175.
- ¹³ In contemporary art discourses, the concept of “participation” has become much more visible since the 1990s, for example, in discussions of relational aesthetics by French critic Nicolas Bourriaud, antagonism and relational aesthetics by British art critic Claire Bishop, and dialogical aesthetics by American art critic Grant Kester.
- ¹⁴ Taipei County was the largest territory governed by the DPP between December 1989 and 2005.
- ¹⁵ Wu Ma-Li. “I Would Do Something Different: An Interview with the Organizer of the Cultural Centre of Taipei County, Ji Ming-Huai,” *Artist Magazine* 253 (1996), 237.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Huang Hai-Ming, “Aesthetic Considerations behind the exhibition of ‘Installation Art in Taiwan’: The Dialectics of ‘Fast-Food Consumption’ and ‘Production Economics,’” in *Landscape, City and Symphony: Installation Art in Taiwan*, ed. Tsai Mai-Wen (Chiayi: Chiayi City Government, 1997), 11.
- ¹⁸ The KMT government under the martial law never looked at this history in an objective way and merely emphasized a negative colonial experience. It tended to ignore any positive contributions during that period such as the introduction of modernization, as well as improvements to the school system, urban planning, and sanitation.
- ¹⁹ Tsai Mai-Wen, “Artistic City Rhapsody” in *Landscape, City and Symphony: Installation Art in Taiwan*, ed. Tsai Mai-Wen (Chiayi: Chiayi City Government, 1997), 103–104.
- ²⁰ Huang Hai-Ming, “Art Machinery of Connection and Power Production” in *The Heart of History: Outdoor Installation Art Exhibition* (Nantou County: Taiwan Province CCA, 1999), 9.
- ²¹ Chuang Ming-Chi, Artistic statement, in *The Heart of History*, 120.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Shih Wei-Chuan, “Three Reasons of Destroying Installation Artworks,” *China Time*, February 10, 1999. This article also was published on the Lugang News Web site, <http://lknews.taiwanese.com.tw/>. See Chen Bi-Ling, “A Study of Taiwan Art in 1990,” M.A. thesis, Nanhua University, 2001, 140.
- ²⁴ Chen Web-Pin, “A Heart Transplant by an Outsider or Artistic Violence,” *Pots Weekly*, February 7, 1999.
- ²⁵ Chen Web-Pin, “Wake up, Artists,” *Taiwan Daily*, January 30, 1999.
- ²⁶ This term was used by Chen Bi-Ling in his essay. See Chen Bi-Ling, “The Relationship between Cultural Hegemony and Public Art: The Heart of History Exhibition in Lugang as a Case Study,” in *Deoa Art Criticism Award 1999* (Taipei: DEOA, 1999), 38–45.
- ²⁷ The “White Terror” is rooted in the February 28 Incident which took place in Taiwan in 1947, and describes the suppression of political dissent and of any public discussion of the massacre under martial law, which continued from May 19, 1949, to July 15, 1987. During the White Terror, around 140,000 Taiwanese were imprisoned or executed for their real or perceived opposition to the KMT government. The White Terror left many native Taiwanese with a deep-seated bitterness towards the KMT government and, at times, the mainlanders. Fear of discussing the February 28 Incident and the White Terror gradually decreased with the lifting of martial law in 1987, and culminated in the establishment of an official public memorial and an apology by President Lee Teng-hui in 1995.
- ²⁸ Huang Hai-Ming, “Press Release: New White Terror in the Postmodern Age/Let Art Return to Art,” in *The Heart of History*, 142.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*