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### **Taiwanese Ink Painting: Lin Yu-Shan's Sino-Japanese Reconciliation**

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## Taiwanese Ink Painting: Lin Yu-shan's Sino-Japanese Reconciliation

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During the fifty years of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), the Taiwanese art world underwent great transformation.<sup>1</sup> New styles, techniques, and institutions sprang up. Ink paintings inherited from the Qing dynasty were gradually replaced by boldly-colored oil and gouache works in conformity with Japan's visions of modernity. But the tables turned with Japan's defeat in World War II; the ensuing de-colonization and the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's KMT Nationalist Party government (the Kuomintang 國民黨) engendered a new hierarchy. A resurgence of Chinese-style ink painting gained official endorsement.<sup>2</sup> However, Japanized aesthetic leanings never completely disappeared; they were only re-contextualized to survive under the dominant culture. A representative artist who deftly amalgamated Japanese and Chinese characteristics, while forging a Taiwanese identity through his incorporation of local subjects, was Lin Yu-shan 林玉山 (1907–2004) (fig. 1). He navigated the thickets of political and cultural turnovers of the entire 20th century. Although largely unknown outside of Taiwan, he commanded great respect on the island as someone who adroitly changed with the times.

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<sup>1</sup> See Hsieh Shih-ying 謝世英, *Riben zhimin zhuyi xia de Taiwan meishu, 1895–1945* 日本殖民主義下的臺灣美術 1895–1945 (Taiwanese art under Japanese colonial rule 1895–1945, Artifacts and History series 69 (Taipei: National Museum of History, 2014). For discussions in English, see Yuko Kikuchi, ed., *Refracted Modernity: Visual Culture and Identity in Colonial Taiwan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the postwar relationship between art and politics, see Jason C. Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, dist. By University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2000).

Born into a family that owned a picture mounting shop in Chia-yi 嘉義, Lin had early exposure to traditional Chinese paintings. Although he later sought training in Japan, he was more sympathetic to Chinese ink-and-brush manners than many other Taiwanese practitioners of Japanese-style painting (*nihonga* 日本画). Unlike most native-born Taiwanese of his generation who could speak only Japanese and the Min'an dialect 閩南語, he mingled with the Chinese literary types and acquired a good command of Mandarin.<sup>3</sup> This facilitated his integration after the war into the Mandarin-speaking elite of the Taiwanese art world comprising leading ink painters such as Huang Chun-pi 黃君璧 (1898–1991) and Fu Chuan-fu 傅狷夫 (1910–2007).

In the 1960s, the KMT launched a “Zhonghua Wenhua Fuxing Yundong” 中華文化復興運動 (Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement) to promote traditions that were under assault in the hands of the Communists in the era of China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Ink painting constituted a key part of this campaign, along with the propagation of Confucian family values, the sponsorship of calligraphy exhibitions, and the preservation of cultural relics. The KMT’s goal was to legitimize Taiwan as the “real China” that valued its patrimony.

Besides perpetuating the “long war” with the Communists, the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement implicitly worked against Japanese allegiances. The famous “zhengtong guohua” 正統國畫 (orthodox national-style painting) debate in the 1950s

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<sup>3</sup> See Kao I-Hsuan 高以璇, *Lin Yu-shan: Shifa ziran* 林玉山：師法自然 (Lin Yu-shan: learning from nature) (Taipei: National Museum of History, 2006), 84.

epitomized this tension.<sup>4</sup> Despite his prewar reputation as a Japanese-style artist, Lin Yu-shan emerged unscathed at the center of Taiwanese art education, holding a teaching position for forty years at the Taiwan Provincial Teachers' College (renamed National Taiwan Normal University 國立臺灣師範大學 in 1967). For a long time, this was the only college on the island with a Fine Arts Department. As a member of the faculty, Lin influenced at least two generations of leading Taiwanese artists. By all accounts, he was popular even among members of the young vanguard such as Liu Kuo-sung 劉國松 (1932–) who revolted against the pedagogy of the émigré *guohua* teachers, such as Huang Chun-pi and Pu Hsin-yu 溥心畬 (1896–1963), who considered copying their model works or *huagao* 畫稿 as the most effective instruction.

The hallmark of Lin Yu-shan's art was an emphasis on sketching from life, and often, in combination with a bright polychromy. His early works, between the 1920s and the early 1930s, appealed to the Japanese colonial taste for "local color," with the double meaning of a warm palette reflective of the tropical climate and the inclusion of Taiwanese people and scenery as subjects.<sup>5</sup> Chia-yi, located halfway between Taichung and Tainan, was the birthplace of many important artists, including Lin's friend Ch'en

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<sup>4</sup> This *guohua* debate took place in the 1950s with the early post-war dominance of Japanese-style Taiwanese painting as "guohua" at the official exhibitions. This was eventually resolved in 1960 by separating *guohua* into two categories: *dongyanghaihua* 東洋畫 (Japanese-looking "Oriental painting" in the gouache medium) and more Chinese-style painting. However, proponents of Oriental painting always maintained that their techniques had Chinese origins, therefore "national" in essence. In 1974, the category of "Oriental painting" was abolished entirely, as gouache painting no longer occupied a competitive position vis-à-vis Chinese-style *guohua*. See Chuan-ying (Juanying) Yen, "The Demise of Oriental-style Painting in Taiwan," in Kikuchi, ed., 83–110.

<sup>5</sup> On the discourse on "local color," see Shelley Drake Hawks, "The Colorists of Taiwan," *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (issue 21) (June 2014): 199–245.

Ch'eng-po 陳澄波 (1895–1947).<sup>6</sup> From Ch'en, he learned watercolor while trying his hands at religious and temple paintings (the so-called “folk” painting), as well as Chinese-style ink painting. One of his teachers was a Japanese. In 1926, Lin journeyed to Tokyo to enroll in the Kawabata Painting School 川端画学校 for more basic training. A year later, he entered the inaugural Taiwanese competitive salon modeled after Japan's official exhibitions.<sup>7</sup> It was called the Taiwan Meishu Zhanlanhui 臺灣美術展覽會 (Taiwan Art Exhibition, “Taizhan” 台展, 1927–1936).

Of the ninety-two contestants in the category of Japanese *nihonga*-style (called Tōyōga 東洋畫 or “Oriental Painting” in Taiwan) at the 1927 Taizhan, everyone was Japanese except for three young Taiwanese, eighteen and nineteen years of age: Lin Yu-shan, Ch'en Chin 陳進 (1907–1998) and Kuo Hsueh-hu 郭雪湖 (1908–2012). They became known as the “Taizhan san shaonian” 臺展三少年 (Three Youths of the Taiwan Art Exhibition). All three were adept at richly pigmented compositions. Lin continued in this manner on and off throughout his life, such as a painting of ducks from 1955, titled “Spring River and Warm Water” (fig. 2).

In 1930 and 1933, Lin's paintings “Lotus Pond” (fig. 3) and “Twilight” won first prize at the Taiwan Art Exhibitions. The former, executed in gouache on silk, is based on an actual scene up on a hill in the suburb of Chia-yi in mid-summer. Lin Yu-shan and his artist-friend Lin Tung-ling 林東令 camped out near the pond over several days. They

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<sup>6</sup> On the Chia-yi art world, see Lin Po-t'ing 林柏亭, *Chia-yi (Jiayi) diqu huihua zhi yanjiu* 嘉義地區繪畫之研究 (The history of painting in Chia-yi), Artifacts and History Series 5 (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Japan's official exhibitions were the Monbushō Bijutsu Tenrankai 文部省美術展覽會 (Ministry of Education Art Exhibitions, “Bunten” 文展, 1907–1918) and the Teikoku Bijutsu Tenrankai 帝國美術展覽會 (Imperial Art Exhibitions, “Teiten” 帝展, 1919–34).

remembered the mosquito bites, but more, the faint popping sounds of the lotus petals opening up each morning. Dewdrops on the painted leaves announce dawn, but Lin observed the plants at all hours to capture their varied movements. He collected visual data like a scientist, and used it selectively in the final painting.

This is a peaceful scene at first glance, but upon close inspection, rich movements and exciting details start to emerge: a white egret, a Song dynasty touch, peers down into the water to watch some fish—its potential prey—swim by;<sup>8</sup> the ruffled lotus leaves appear to be swaying symphonically, bobbing in the wind. The background is painted with gold to represent the luminosity of early morning. The generous use of gold is the most impressive aspect of the painting—not just one tone of gold, but three tones: one silvery, one bluish, and one reddish. The soil in that region is red, therefore Lin Yushan took care to render the shallower part of the pond with reddish (pure) gold, with the deeper part predominantly in silvery “water-color” gold. Even the sophisticated Japanese audience at the time was astonished by this fastidiousness.<sup>9</sup>

Lin poured his heart into this painting, upping the color and luxury quotients above the standard fare of Taiwanese *nihonga* in the early Taizhan era. It is also quite a large painting, measuring 146.4 x 215.2 cm. No one he knew had a home with enough space for him to paint in, so he borrowed a temple’s front court on non-worshipping days. He was determined to win top prize, and succeeded. The painting was then sold for 150 Japanese yen to a poet-friend, Chang Chao-yang 張昭楊, in whose family it remained for

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<sup>8</sup> See Huang Tung-fu 黃冬富, “Tuojiang weilai xiesheng qin—xitan Lin Yu-shan de ‘sanzhi’ xiesheng linian jiqi shijian” 脫韁惟賴寫生勤—析探林玉山的「三知」寫生理念及其實踐 (The Unbounded life painting—an exploration [of] the concept and practice of Lin Yu-shan’s “tripartite epistemology” in natural life painting), *Taiwan meishu* 台灣美術 (Journal of National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts), 104 (April 2016): 23–24.

<sup>9</sup> On the “Lotus Pond,” see Kao, 47–49.

another generation. In 2015, “Lotus Pond,” now in the collection of the National Museum in Taichung, was named a “National Treasure” of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the first two-dimensional work created in the twentieth century to receive this honor. But this painting actually almost left Taiwan for good, a story I will come back to later.

As his reputation solidified, Lin cruised through the official salon as a “selection exempt” artist, and over the years built an orbit of admirers and students in Chia-yi. He taught art classes at local high schools, but more importantly organized artist groups in the south for exchanges and mutual advancement, the most renowned being the Ch’un-meng Huahui 春萌畫會 (Budding Spring Painting Society, est. 1928). In a 1978 interview, Lin confessed that from the sixth Taizhan in 1932 onwards, he was stuck in a creative bottle neck. So between 1935 and 1936, with sponsorship from friends in Chia-yi, he returned to Japan, this time joining the workshop of the Kyoto master Dōmoto Inshō 堂本印象 (1891–1975) called the Tōkyūsha 東丘社 (Eastern Mount Society). Members were encouraged to draw from life, refine their colors, and cultivate individual styles. It should be noted that around the same time, Yang Shan-shen 楊善深 (1913–2004) of the Lingnan School also studied at Inshō’s atelier.

Another inspiration for Lin Yu-shan was the Kyoto artist Takeuchi Seihō 竹内栖鳳 (1864–1942) and his free interpretation of life sketches;<sup>10</sup> rather than striving to describe details as meticulously as possible, the free sketch should come to life through expressive brushwork and convey the artist’s subjectivity. Lin called this “Jishi xiesheng” 即事寫生 (drawing from life according to the event at present), which is not the same as “duiwu xiesheng” 對物寫生 (objective sketching from life). For this reason, he never

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<sup>10</sup> See Huang, 22.

saw the need to use photography as an aid to his realism. His sketchbooks would pile up to taller than a person over the decades. However, he did not simply use the sketches directly and literally to make a complete painting, but always thought of ways to reorganize the motifs to achieve his desired effects. Pictures look natural, but are by and large staged.<sup>11</sup>

While under Inshō's tutelage, Lin assiduously learned from Chinese bird-and-flower paintings of the Song-Yuan tradition in Japanese museums and books, as did many *nihonga* artists in Japan at the time. "Two Quails" (1935), painted in gouache on silk, is a superb outcome of this practice (fig. 4). The birds are viewed from an intimate low angle, resting among an assortment of grasses—a type of knotweed, China pink, and balloonflower root. We could almost hear the rushing breeze that bends the plants towards the left. The quails, one placed higher than the other and turning to opposite directions, are in asymmetrical balance. While the colors and textures unmistakably hark back to classical Chinese painting, the soft shading is quite Japanese in feeling, reminiscent of the lyrical naturalism of the Kyoto School.<sup>12</sup> The arced grasses on the left also recall certain Rimpa 琳派 compositions. In addition, Lin benefitted from art publications purchased from China by Ch'en Ch'eng-bo who was active in the Shanghai art scene.

In 1938, Taizhan was re-named Fuzhan 府展, short for Taiwan Zongtongfu Meishu Zhanlanhui 臺灣總統府美術展覽會 (Taiwan Governor General's Art

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<sup>11</sup> A good source on Lin Yu-shan's sketches is Guoli Lishi Bowuguan 國立歷史博物館 National Museum of History, *Lin Yu-shan jiaoshou chuanguo zhan* 林玉山教授創作展 (Art of Lin Yu-shan) (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> See Huang, 25.

Exhibitions), which were held six times until 1943. Resources grew scarce as the war went on; pigments and large sheets of paper, not to mention the silk that gouache artists favored, were difficult to come by. For his work, “Two Water Buffaloes” (1941), he had to make do with crushed bricks in lieu of commercial red pigments, and the painting surface was constructed with small squares of toilet paper pasted together.<sup>13</sup> For a time, it became impossible to paint at all. To support his wife and children he had to take a job as a magazine and book illustrator. A two-fold screen (now remounted in frame), titled “Eternal Spring in Formosa” 寶島長春 (1940), was completed before the situation became dire (fig. 5). It features local fauna and flora with flowering branches in layered recession. Two black bulbul birds placed at the center stand out against a blue sky that fills almost the entire background. The white, red, and orange Kapok blossoms (*mumianhua* 木棉花) are portrayed from a variety of angles, yet remain essentially controlled patterns.<sup>14</sup> The flatness is alleviated with an element of Western light-and-shadow modeling for the tree trunks and atmospheric perspective. This cheerful painting belies its somber context, that is, Japan being embroiled in an increasingly difficult war and the artist’s hope for peace in the colony.

The 1940s was a turning point in Lin’s stylistic evolution. “Returning Home” 歸途 (1944), now in the collection of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, is representative of this phase (fig. 6). The subject is a barefoot female farmhand with her water buffalo at the end of a hard day’s work. She is covered from the sun from head to ankle. The buffalo carries

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lin Yu-shan’s son, Lin Po-t’ing, painter, scholar, and former Deputy Head of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, 21 June 2016.

<sup>14</sup> On “Eternal Spring in Formosa,” see Kao, 70.

a large bundle of sugarcanes. The rough harvest is suggested by the farmhand's hemp apron and woven armguards. The leafy sections of the sugarcane could be fed to the buffalo. During the colonial period, official exhibitions encouraged vernacular themes, and this painting by Lin Yu-shan was a conscious response to that directive. Water buffalo was a particular favorite. One of his two submissions to the first Taizhan in 1927 had been a mother buffalo and her calf.

“Returning Home” was created towards the end of the war when art exhibitions in Taiwan virtually ground to a halt due to the systematic raids by the Allied air forces. But with this painting, Lin Yu-shan reached a new artistic height. Compared to “Quails” and “Lotus Pond,” the ink quality is more sophisticated; he uses a complex layering of light and dark tones to convey corporeal substance. The head, horns, back, legs, and hindquarters are all sensitively rendered with gouache and graded ink.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the painting synthesizes *nihonga* colors and Chinese-style ink elements—a stylistic and cultural cross-between that in time best describes “Taiwanese” aesthetic. This aesthetic is heightened by the incorporation of local people and their environment.

In his spare time Lin also wrote poetry in classical Chinese. After the KMT took power, despite being a product of Japanese art education, he was temperamentally closer to the *guohua* orthodoxy than others of the *nihonga* lineage who found themselves ostracized as not “Chinese enough.”<sup>16</sup> At least for the first three decades of post-colonial Taiwanese art, Japanese styles receded in importance, and gouache was largely left out of academic training. Since the late 1980s with the liberalization of Taiwanese art and politics, gouache (re-named *jiaocaihua* 膠彩畫, lit. glue-color painting) has been

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<sup>15</sup> See Huang, 26–27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

enjoying something of a revival. Today, a center for learning this medium is Tunghai University 東海大學 in Taichung, and several other Fine Arts Departments around the country also have teachers with this specialization.

In 2016, the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts staged a comprehensive retrospective of a diverse body of works by Lin Chih-chu 林之助 (1917–2008), the most renowned leader of *jiaocaihua* in Taiwanese history and a former Tunghai professor. Curated by Pai Shih-ming 白適銘, this exhibition assembled over one hundred paintings from public and private collections, some never before exhibited. This was all the more remarkable given that Lin Chih-chu, who spent many years in Japan, was even more closely aligned with Japanese art and colonial ideology than Lin Yu-shan.<sup>17</sup>

To be expected, Lin Yu-shan had to tone down his “Japanese” flavor after 1949, and largely refrained from using gouache. However, he did not abandon colors, which he re-introduced with water-based mineral pigments so that his works would be more “Chinese.” “Tall Mountain Gentle Breeze” (1987) depicting two pheasants (fig. 7) is a good example, but his colorism is by no means limited to the birds-and-flowers genre (fig. 8). In 1951, he was recruited by Huang Chun-p’i to teach at the Teachers’ College in Taipei, and moved north. He taught there for the rest of his life, going into semi-retirement in 1977, and maintaining a part-time schedule until 1992. His tenure cast a long shadow on Taiwanese art education.

In terms of subjects matter, Lin Yushan exhibited a broad repertoire: human figures, birds and flowers, fur and feather, and landscapes. His favorite animals were

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<sup>17</sup> See Aida Yuen Wong, “Art of Non-Resistance: Elitism, Fascist Aesthetics, and Taiwanese Painter Lin Chih-chu,” in Asato Ikeda, Aya Louisa McDonald, and Ming Tiampo, eds., *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire 1931–1960* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 304–323.

sparrows and tigers. Sparrows are birds that are seen every day in both country and city. He recalled being captivated by these animated creatures as a child in the fields behind his grandmother's home at harvest time. He used to "build a small haystack and hide inside to see how they feed, fight, fly, jump and chirp, and so forth. So transfixed that he imagined himself skipping and flying with them."<sup>18</sup> "Fair Autumn in the Village" (1951) depicts a host of sparrows flittering about a bamboo-and-wood frame to which straw bundles are tied (fig. 9). Different angles and movements are rendered with light wash and color. The little pools of ink that form the textured tree bark are reminiscent of the *tarashikomi* 溜込 or "dripping in" technique of Japan's Rimpa school, but the lightness of touch throughout the picture departs from the Rimpa convention. The inscription says, "Xinmao qiujiao jixing" 辛卯秋郊即興 —meaning "spontaneous pleasures in the Autumn of 1951"— we can see through the brushwork that the artist is thrilled at the sight of these birds.

Spontaneous though it seems, "Fair Autumn in the Village" communicates years of first-hand observation and sketching of the birds' anatomy, not the same as copying set formulae from old paintings. Lin Yu-shan was eager to pass on his knowledge to posterity, publishing illustrated manuals such as *Lin Yu-shan hualun huafa* 林玉山畫論 畫法 (Lin Yu-shan's painting theory and techniques) and compiling a detailed "Birds and Flowers Diary" to register his studies of animals' habitats, the life cycles of living things, such as when the birds molt and when certain flowers grow bulbs and seeds.<sup>19</sup> We can see Lin Yu-shan's impact on his students' works, such as those of Huang Kuang-nan 黃

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<sup>18</sup> See Huang, 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

光男 (b. 1944), Li Chen-ming 李振明 (b. 1954), and Liu Yung 劉墉 (b. 1949), etc.—all esteemed artists or art administrators today. Huang Kuang-nan, for example, served as the former director of the National Museum of History and of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum; and Li Chen-ming, a frequent painter of birds and ecological themes, is Professor and former Dean at the National Taiwan Normal University.<sup>20</sup>

Paradoxically, tigers were urban subjects (fig. 10). One of Lin's favorite activities was to take his students to the zoo, as well as to the scenic Bitan 碧潭, and other outdoor sites to sketch from life. He recorded his insights in a book, *Ruminations on Painting Tigers*. Lin's tiger paintings, a sustained theme through the postwar decades, in part reflected his awareness of Takeuchi Seihō and possibly other Kyoto painters the likes of Itō Jakuchū 伊藤若冲 (1716–1800) and Maruyama Ōkyo 円山応挙 (1733–1795), who also dealt with the subject. *Xiesheng* was relatively uncharacteristic of Chinese ink painting in the early KMT period. Huang Chun-bi claimed to value it, but according to students at the Teachers' College from the 1950s and 1960s, the only *guohua* teacher who preached as well as practiced this method was Lin Yu-shan.

Moreover, Lin Yu-shan bridged the chasm between the so-called Taiwanese-born *bensheng* 本省 artists and the Chinese émigré *waisheng* 外省 artists. There was a prominent artists' group called the “Pap'eng Huahui” 八朋畫會 (Eight Friends Painting Society, est. 1960). All its members except Lin Yu-shan were *waisheng-ren* 外省人, best known among them being Fu Chuan-fu and the Singaporean-born Cheng Yue-bo (Cheng

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<sup>20</sup> On Lin's students's works and memories of their teacher, see Lin Yu-shan, *Lin Yu-shan de chuangzuo yu chuancheng : huixie ziran shengyun* 林玉山的創作與傳承: 繪寫自然神韻 (Lin Yu-shan's creations and legacy: depicting nature's spirit resonance) (Taipei: General Association of Chinese Culture, 2016), 138–179.



sales of posters and reproductions of the work finally made up the difference.<sup>24</sup> Li Yu-shan's reputation has grown over the years, as the Taiwanese have come to respect not only his personal achievements as a painter and teacher, but also his historical significance. As Pai Shih-ming eloquently puts it in a catalogue essay for a 2016 retrospective held at the General Association of Chinese Culture in Taipei, "during a time when Japan, China, and Taiwan diverged in political lineages and relations, Lin was one of the very few artists of clout who unified by crossing the boundaries of power, class, and native-born-versus-émigré identity."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kao, 147–48.

<sup>25</sup> Pai Shih-ming, "Zuowei wenhua zhuti de 'difang': Lin Yu-shan zhanqian huishi lichen jiqi wenhua zhiye zhi zhankai" 作為文化主體的「地方」：林玉山戰前繪事歷程及其文化志業之展開 ("Local" as a cultural subject: Lin Yushan's prewar painting evolution and the beginning of his cultural achievement), in Lin, *Lin Yu-shan de chuanguo yu chuancheng*, 188.