

# THE GHOST OF GHOST ISLAND

Welcome to our digital guidebook of Taiwan's art, history, and culture. Here, we present 07 places you must visit to dive deeper into the Formosa island.

For more information, please listen to our podcasts at [www.ghostisland.media](http://www.ghostisland.media)

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■ The National Palace Museum - 立故宮博物院

Heaven and Earth  
possess a beauty  
without words...



# ABOUT THE NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

The year was 1948, and the Communists were closing in on the Forbidden City of Beijing. The Kuomintang, surrounded within the imperial palace complex, were not alone. Trapped with them were the imperial vaults, full to the brim with jade carvings, bronze vessels, silk paintings, and ancient scrolls; artwork that has survived millennia of the rise and fall of mighty dynasties were to be destroyed under the new rule... unless.<sup>1</sup>

Chiang Kai-Shek ordered 600,000 of the Chinese treasures, with them 8,000 years of Chinese history, to be transported out of The Palace Museum of Beijing into a railway warehouse in Yangmei, smuggled through the Taiwan strait into a sugar-cane mill in southern Taichung where they were stored before being relocated into their final resting place, in the mountains of northern Taipei<sup>2</sup>.

There, they lay dormant for the next fifteen years... only to wake up in a new country, under a new government, in a new museum, The National Palace Museum of Taiwan<sup>3</sup>. Now they are caught in a new war between two nations, The Republic of China and The People's Republic of China, where the former states the plan was a necessary act of cultural preservation, while the latter claims the plot to be one of the most elaborate art heists in history.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the nations however, the arts themselves are far from new...

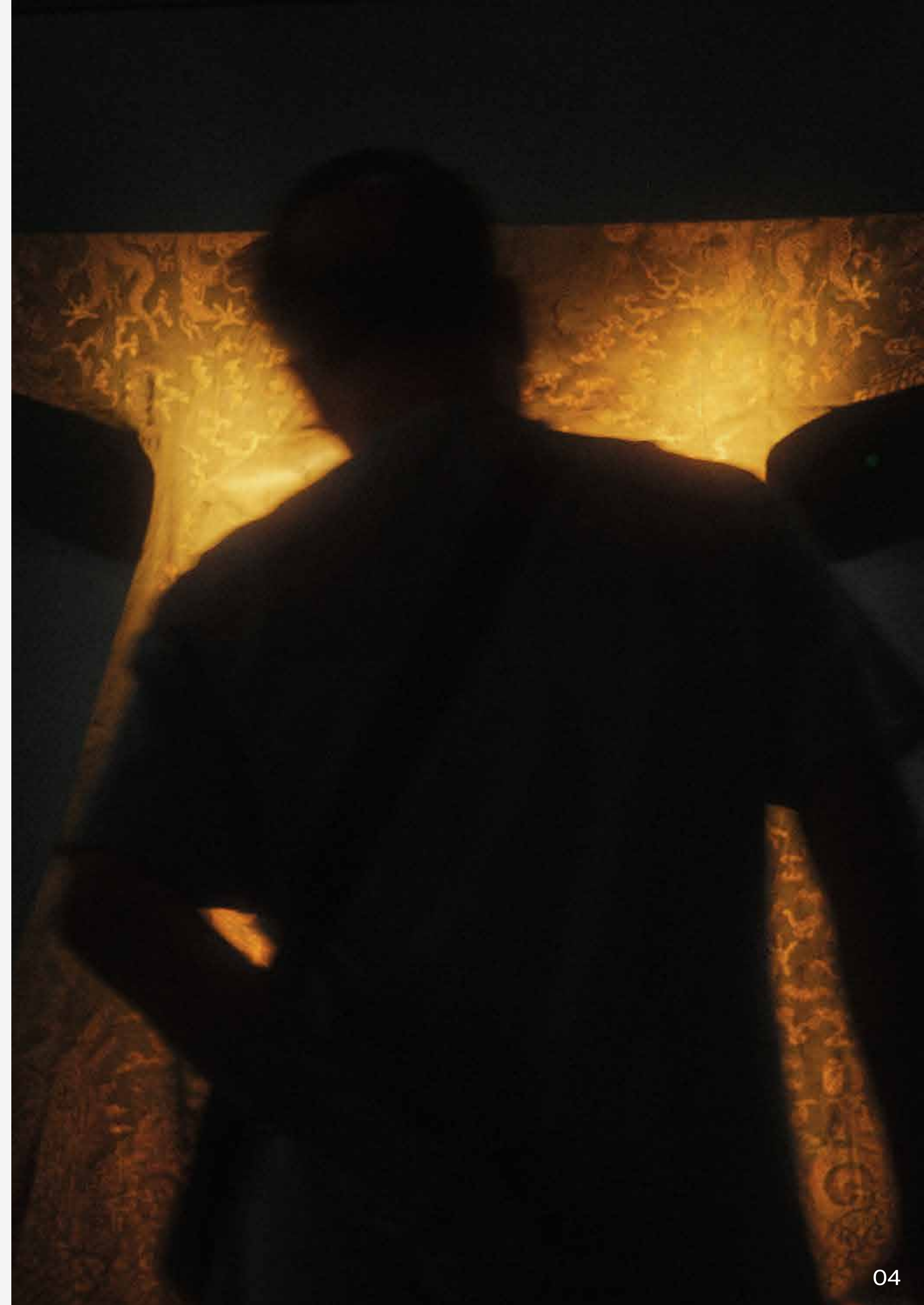


# THE XIA DYNASTY

2070 - 1600 BCE

From the mists of legend and lore emerged The Xia Dynasty riding the reign of its first ruler, Yu the Great. Under his rule, the land transformed from people into a society, with a governance of meritocracy being born<sup>5</sup>. The Xia's innovated in molding pottery, which may seem rudimentary compared to later periods, but its significance lies in the stories engraved into each piece.

The pottery of this era was often adorned with simple yet evocative patterns, speaks to the daily lives and beliefs of the Xia people. To become so, the soft clay is gathered, shaped, glazed, and fired until it becomes solid and enduring and, through many hands and countless changes, it transforms, gaining strength and permanence, much like the civilization they molded to be.







Civilization blossomed and bloomed into the Shang Dynasty, enshrined in complexity and spirituality. Here, the first bronzes were cast by hands who believed the world was strung together by invisible forces.

The pieces were conduits for worship, believing metal carried the prayers echoed through, acting as a bridge between the heavens and the earth<sup>7</sup>. Among these artifacts of the Shang, \*The Bronze Ding\* stands as an exemplar example of a ceremonial vessel adorned with detailed patterning and intricate engravings that tells stories of mythical masks and beasts, dragons, and phoenixes.

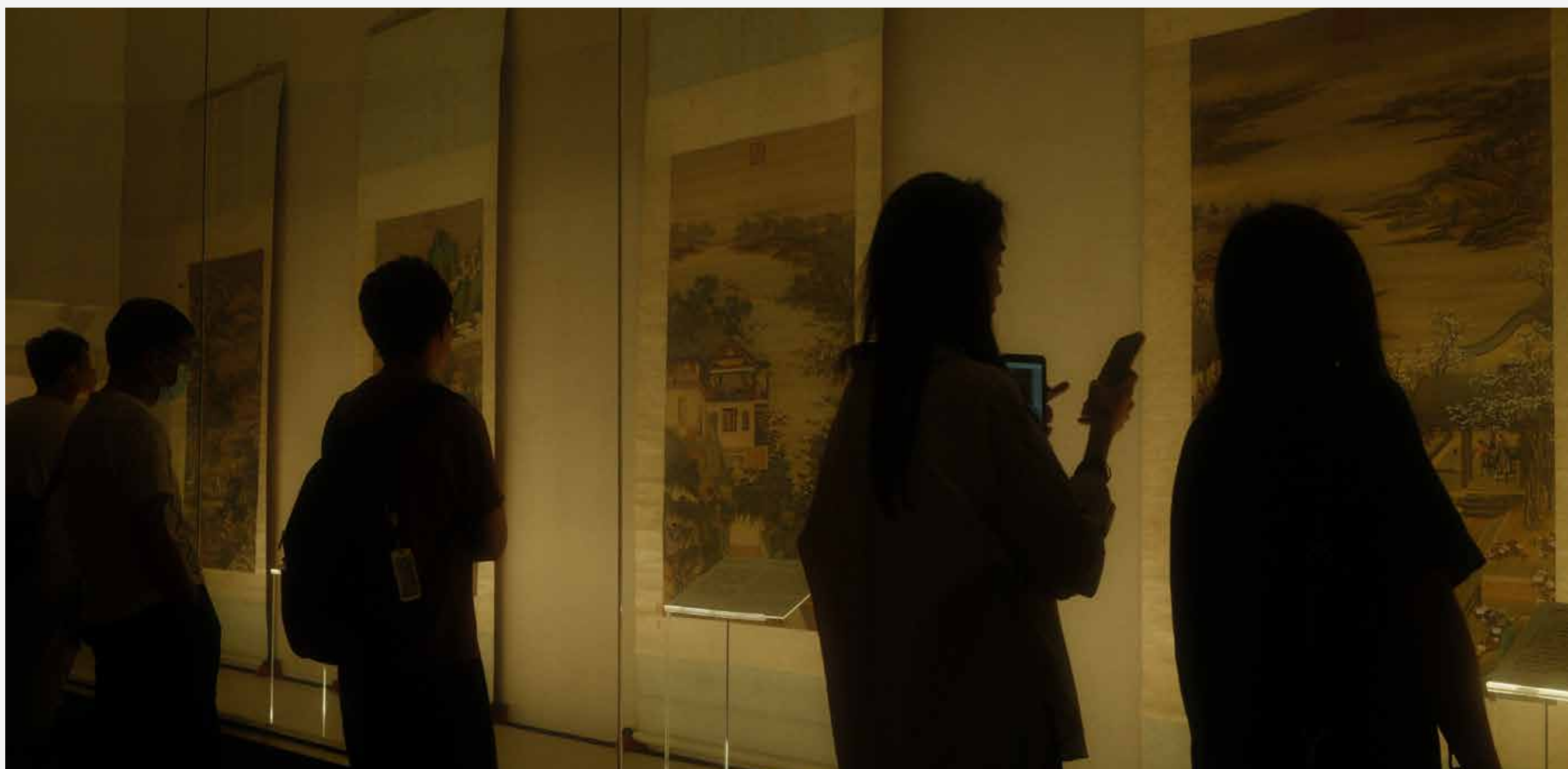
# SHANG DYNASTY

1600 - 1046 BCE



# ZHOU DYNASTY

1046 - 256 BCE



With the rise of the Zhou Dynasty, governance encompassed the favor of the divine as well as the favor of the people. Heaven, or the *Tian*, selected a monarch *Tianzi* to rule the *Tianxia*, defined by the doctrine, The Mandate of Heaven<sup>8</sup>. The Zhou sought oneness with heaven that was deeply enrooted within their artistic expressions.

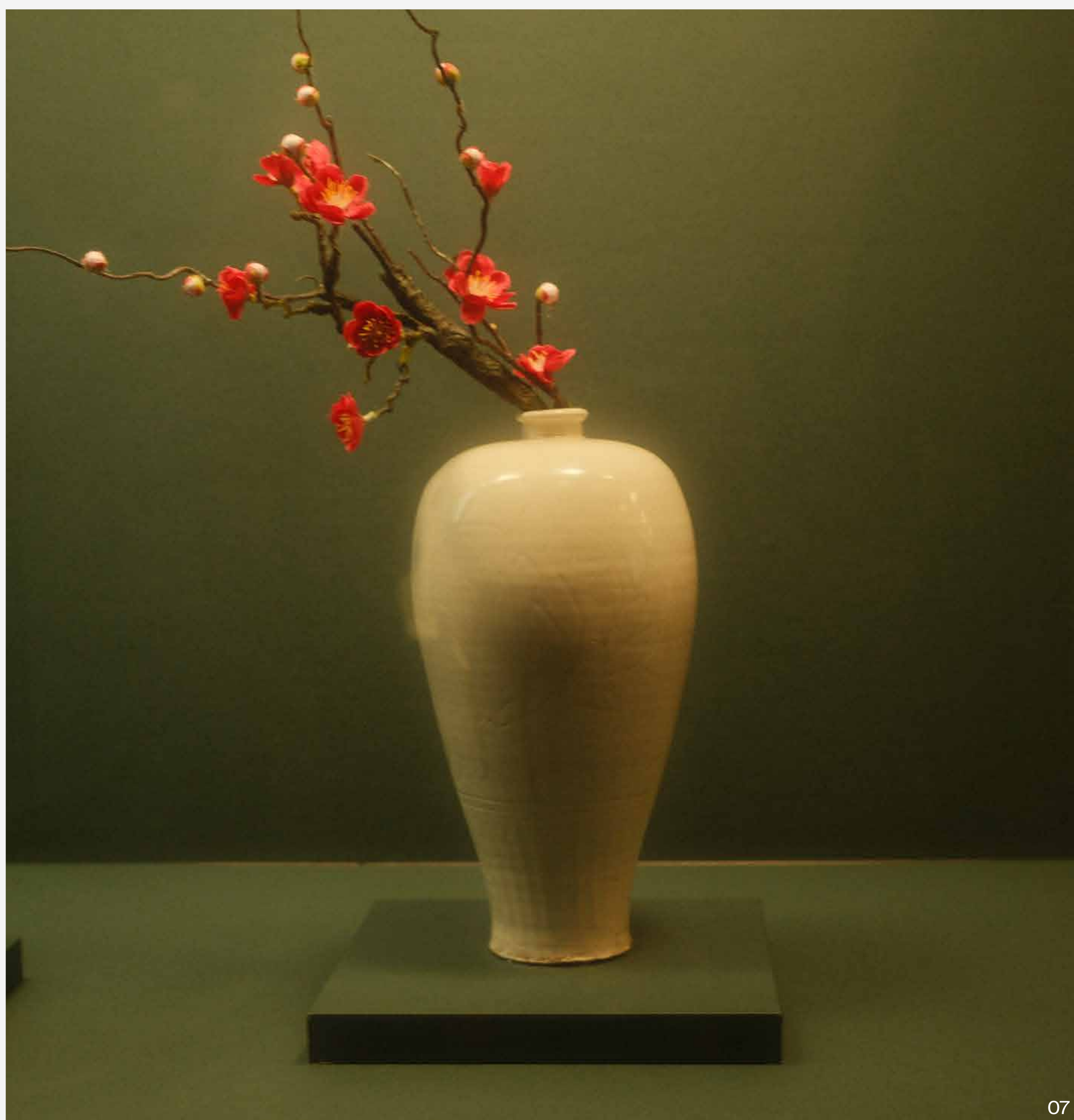
They built upon their ancestors' bronze by adding turquoise hues not only to preserve the bronze in immortality but give it an ethereal glow. Jade carvings represented purity, virtue, and connection to a higher being, with the *The Jade Bi* exemplifying their reverence for the cosmos. Each meticulously crafted piece is hued and imbued with meaning, serving as a decorative item and a spiritual talismans.

Under the ambitious leadership of Qin Shi Huang, China saw the consolidation of various states into a single empire, with significant developments in infrastructure and standardization, however, a ruthless approach to governance<sup>9</sup>. Art became a reflection of this new world order, serving to both inspire and intimidate.

A time of turmoil and troubles aplenty, \*the Terracotta Army\*, an empire of clay soldiers and stallions frozen in eternal vigilance, guarded the tomb of Qin Shi Huang on his quest for immortality<sup>10</sup>. Though their original colors have faded, their stoic faces remain, uniquely crafted, representing not just a soldier but the aspirations of a ruler who sought to extend his power beyond death.

# QIN DYNASTY

221 - 206 BCE





# THE HAN DYNASTY

1046 - 256 BCE



The Qin gave way to the Han who were notorious storytellers, and art was another medium for them to do so. They intertwined threads of history and mythology to create Silk Paintings, and with the recent establishment of the Silk Road, cultural exchanges enriched their repertoire by adding materials such as cotton, wool, ivory, metals... and silk.

Han silk paintings often depict intricate scenes of court life, material of which would shimmer with vibrancy as these stories told. \*The Eight Immortals\* tell the tale of Xian or immortals that are said to live on a group of five islands in the Bohai Sea; the immortals are revered by the Taoists and are considered signs of prosperity and longevity by secular Chinese cultures<sup>12</sup>. Tales like these transcend the silk and offer us a window into their world.



# THE THREE KINGDOMS

220 - 280 CE

In the rubble of the Han's ruin, China splintered into the kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu, stuck in a perpetual state of war<sup>13</sup>. This period of warring kingdoms brought about an almost elegant and yet aggressive side to the artistic scene at the time, with the beauty being as much of a weapon as the sword itself.

One such piece that speaks to the elegance of this era is the Bronze Swords with Jade Scabbards. The detailed carvings on the jade, depicting dragons and mythical creatures, tell stories of protection and power, symbolizing both the violent ambition of the era and the resilience of Chinese craftsmanship. In these swords, the line between art and history blurs in an age where beauty persisted, even as war threatened to tear everything apart.





# SUI DYNASTY

581 – 618 CE

However brief, the Sui reunified the fragmented China, fostering a sense of national identity by facilitating exuberant projects such as the Grand Canal<sup>14</sup>. It was said, “when the Grand Canal was navigable, the empires were prosperous,” with elements from Buddhism in India to Regality in Japan flooding into China, setting the stage for an early Eastern Renaissance.

Art during the Sui reflects this blend of influences, with a focus on sculpture and pottery that emphasizes both form and function. For example, \*The Sui Buddha\* statue radiates serenity and stands to showcase the cultural exchange between the Chinese and the Indians, inviting contemplation as in the artwork of the later Western Renaissance.







The Tang dynasty was a golden age for Chinese culture, emerging after the tumultuous Sui, marked by prosperity, cosmopolitanism, and advances in literature and art. China became an immense melting pot of influences, Persian, Indian, and Central Asian ideals blended with native traditions, which shaped a uniquely Tang identity<sup>15</sup>.

From the hands of artisans emerged the \*Tang Sancai,\* the Tri-Color Glazed Pottery, a vivid with greens, yellows, and blues swirling together in harmony. The colors mimic the soul of an empire that celebrated life's fleeting moments; horses, camels, and figurines adorned in brilliant shades capture the vibrancy of a dynasty ever in motion.

# TANG DYNASTY

618- 907 CE



# SONG DYNASTY

960 - 1279 CE

In the quiet contemplation brought about by the Song Dynasty, art transformed into a mirror of the mind, where the external world of war and people gave way to an inner universe of thought and emotion, with Confucian ideals guiding governance as well as the painters and calligraphers alike<sup>16</sup>.

Calligraphy flourished, with each stroke of the brush becoming a meditation in motion. Masters like Su Dongpo let their thoughts bleed out from their minds unto the pages, their emotion scratching characters out of the ink. The brush, in Song hands, was not just an instrument but an extension of the heart, suspending a moment between the heavens and the earth.





# YUAN DYNASTY

1271 - 1368 CE




The Mongol winds swept across China with the Yuan, and with it art became a bridge between worlds. The Mongol court welcomed Asian and European influences to create a remarkable artistic pluralism that would define the period, and the Yuan's nomadic roots and the grand expanse of the Chinese landscape created an art of beauty that was both raw and refined in tandem<sup>17</sup>.

Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains by Huang Gongwang stands as a testament to this union between the nature and soul, where mountains roll endlessly, dissolving into mist and thought. In these strokes, the Yuan's deep reverence for the land and its natural rhythms are laid bare; they are a journey through a tranquil mind, one that reflects the Yuan Dynasty's delicate balance between their Mongol heritage and the Chinese traditions.



The Ming Dynasty, built from the ruins of the Yuan, infused tradition with newfound vitality. The Ming sought to capture eternity in their creations, creating vases that were more than vessels—they were declarations of the Ming’s return to greatness<sup>18</sup>, each etch meticulously calculated, each curve making monumental waves.

*Blue-and-White Porcelain* became the Ming’s signature, its cobalt dragons swirling amongst the waning clouds telling tales of myth and majesty. The porcelain, smooth and flawless, reflected a civilization that sought to perfect not only their art but their world; every stroke and every detail was a reflection of the celestial and the terrestrial<sup>19</sup>.



# MING DYNASTY

1368 – 1644 CE

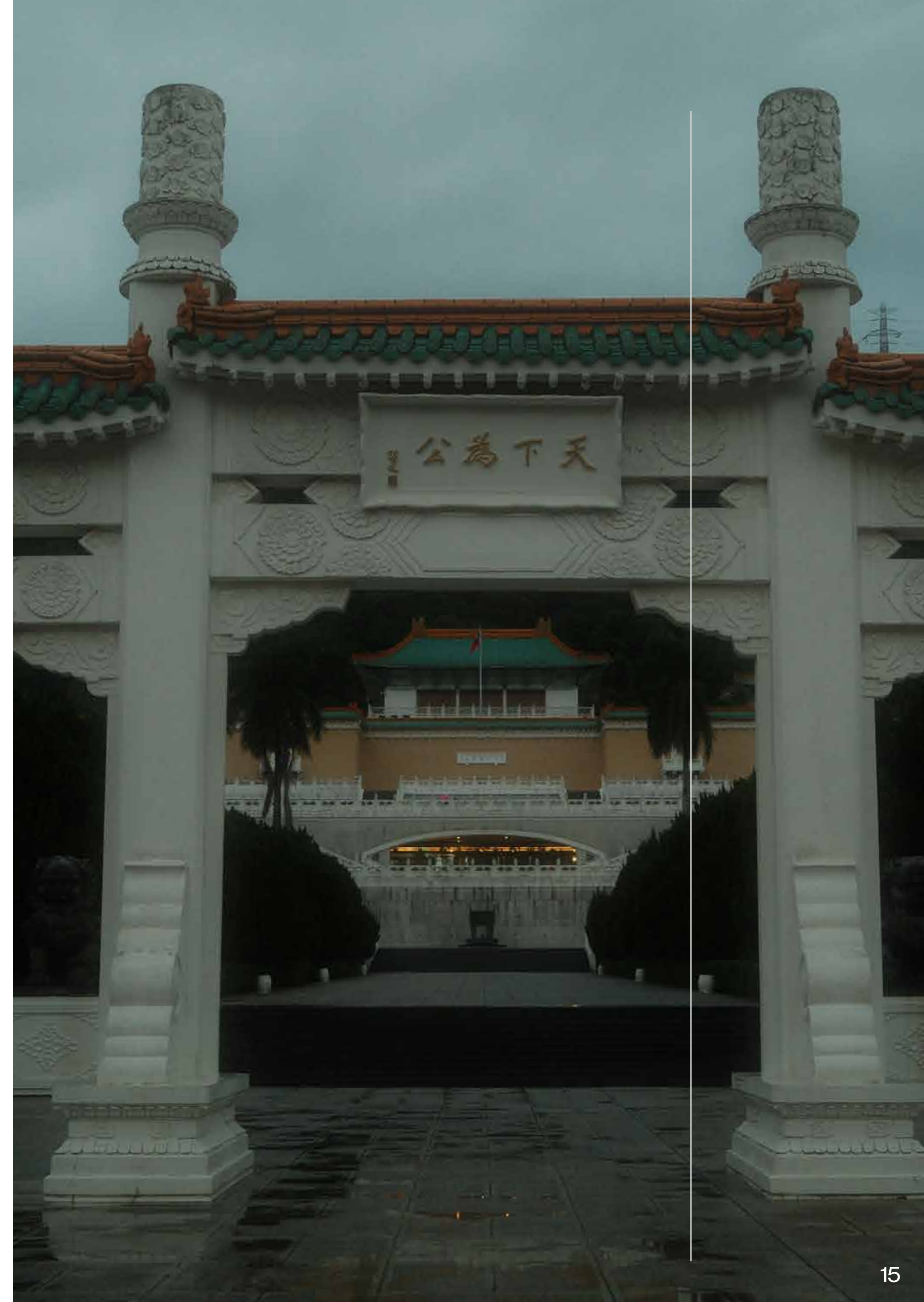


# THE QING DYNASTY

1644 - 1912 CE

The final imperial chapter of the scroll of Chinese history, the Qing Dynasty, unfurls. Their empire was one of contrasts—traditional and foreign, ornate and simple, all together into a celebration of life's most intricate details. The Manchu rulers of the Qing shared their practices of jade and with the porcelain of Chinese tradition, unify the land in a grand feat of artistic achievement<sup>20</sup>.

The height of this artistic achievement lies in the Jadeite Cabbage, a symbol of Qing finesse. The cabbage, a humble vegetable, is transformed into a breathtaking display of precision and craftsmanship, its leaves unfurling with lifelike detail, crowned by a pair of locusts perched as though ready to spring to life. While its meaning remains enshrouded in mystery, it remains a testament to the Qing's penchant for finding profundity in simplicity, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. The Jadeite Cabbage is one flawless piece that transcends time itself, and therefore it stands as a testament to the times that have passed, and the times yet to come.







# The reign of the White Terror

■ 白色恐怖景美紀念園區 - Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park



# JING MEI MEMORIAL

1945 - TODAY

“I didn’t do anything, and I didn’t commit any crimes. What do I have to run from?” — The last words of Juan Chao-Jih, a journalist arrested during the 228 crackdown.

In 1945, following Japan's defeat in World War II, Taiwan was liberated from its colonial rule. For many Taiwanese, this initially brought hope for a brighter future. Streets were filled with celebrations as people anticipated self-governance and freedom. However, this hope was short-lived.

Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang arrived with a different agenda. Chen Yi, appointed as governor-general, viewed the local Taiwanese population with deep suspicion. Having lived under Japanese rule for decades, many Taiwanese had embraced Japanese administrative systems and culture. To Chen, this made them inferior to mainland Chinese and potential Japanese collaborators.

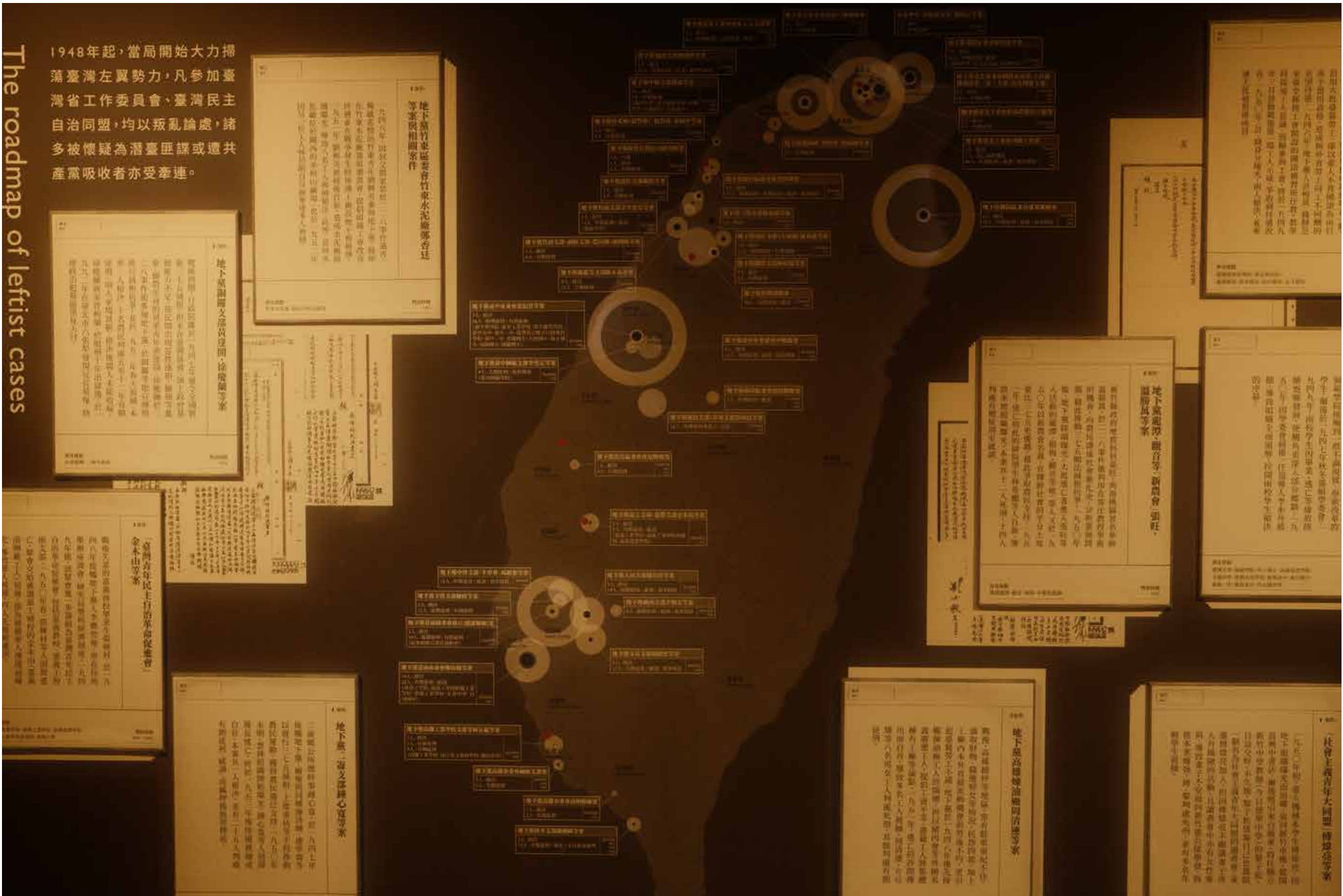
我們更相信，省內省外文化界的開誠合作，才得保持這片乾淨土，使臺灣建設上軌，成個樂園。因此，我們希望，不要再用武裝來刺激臺灣民心，造成威懼局面，把此比較安定乾淨土因戰亂而毀滅。

——臺灣省臺南縣新化，楊逵〈和平宣言〉，1949



# RISER FOR

1927-1949



Under Kuomintang, Taiwan descended into chaos. The transition was marked by poor administration, economic mismanagement, and widespread corruption. Everyday freedoms were stripped away. Popular forms of art, such as plays exploring class struggles, were banned under vague pretexts of violating state laws. This fostered resentment, especially among locals who had initially welcomed the Kuomintang.

The public narrative shifted toward the Kuomintang's ultimate goal: retaking mainland China from the Communists. This goal became the justification for harsh martial law and repression, ensuring absolute loyalty to the Kuomintang.



One of the most pivotal events in Taiwan's modern history, the 228 Incident, occurred on February 28, 1947. This began as a clash between government agents and a civilian selling contraband cigarettes but quickly escalated into widespread protests against KMT corruption and abuse.

In response, Chiang Kai-shek sent military reinforcements. Over the following weeks, soldiers carried out a brutal crackdown, executing thousands of civilians. Dumdum bullets, designed to inflict maximum internal damage, were reportedly used. News of this violent suppression reached as far as Australia, shocking the international community.

For decades, the KMT silenced any discussion of the 228 Incident. Schools avoided teaching it, and survivors lived in fear of speaking out. The incident became a taboo subject, leaving a conspicuous gap in Taiwan's historical narrative.

# 228 INCIDENT

FEBRUARY 28, 1947

反共壁報圖例集

林傳凱 提供



# MARTIAL LAW

MAY 20, 1949 - JULY 14, 1987

The KMT's harsh measures were driven by a mix of ideology, paranoia, and political pragmatism. After losing mainland China to the Communist Party in 1949, the KMT saw Taiwan as a temporary stronghold—a base from which they could “Retake the Mainland.” This vision required a tightly controlled society with absolute loyalty.

The Cold War further fueled their actions. The KMT's fear of Communist infiltration justified a policy of preemptive repression. Anyone advocating for Taiwanese independence or criticizing the government was labeled a Communist sympathizer—a traitor deserving punishment.

For the Taiwanese, the arrival of the KMT brought not just authoritarian rule but also a sense of cultural and political alienation. The Waishengren (mainlanders) who came with the KMT were given preferential treatment, while Benshengren (locals) were marginalized. This created a deep social divide that amplified tensions during the White Terror.





During the White Terror, the KMT didn't just detain people—they put on a grand, farcical performance of justice. \*Being labeled as communist spies or Taiwan Independence activists\* was the most convenient excuse to silence anyone who even slightly deviated from the regime's rigid narrative. It wasn't about uncovering actual threats; it was about using a thin veneer of legality to cloak a fundamentally dirty and immoral agenda.

Suspects were hauled in on flimsy or fabricated charges, their "trials" nothing more than a cruel charade. Not-guilty verdicts were almost nonexistent—not because everyone was guilty, but because the KMT needed to maintain the illusion of order while systematically crushing dissent. “In reality, however, not-guilty verdicts were rare. Instead, suspects often confessed to crimes they had not committed. Under torture, many of them even implicated family members and friends. There is, apparently, only so much pain a human can take.”

The KMT's strategy was painfully transparent: extract false confessions through brutal torture, parade them as evidence of guilt, and then pat themselves on the back for a job well done. It was state-sanctioned theater—clean and orderly on the surface, rotten and corrupt at its core.

# DETENTION CENTER

THE KMT WHITE TERROR





# MEMORIAL MUSEUM

THE MEMORIAL PARK

Walking through the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park brought these stories vividly to life. The museum's carefully preserved spaces offer a chilling glimpse into the prisoners' daily lives. As I stepped into the reconstructed interrogation rooms and peered into the claustrophobic cells, I could almost feel the weight of the oppressive atmosphere that once suffocated those walls. The darkness of the cells, the minimal space that left barely enough room to stretch, and the eerie silence were overwhelming.

One exhibit that left a lasting impression was the papaya story. At first glance, the exhibit seems unremarkable—a simple piece of fruit. But it symbolizes a powerful act of defiance. Families would send papayas to their imprisoned loved ones, smuggling in hidden messages to maintain a fragile connection despite the strict surveillance. Reading about this clandestine form of communication, I was struck by the resilience and ingenuity of those who refused to be entirely silenced.



# REMARKABLE SECTIONS

## THE TELEPHONE BOOTH

Another deeply moving part of the visit was sitting in the telephone booth, which replicates the conversations between prisoners and their families. Picking up the receiver, I listened to the voices of people who, even in their most desperate moments, sought to offer comfort and hope to their loved ones. The brief, often stilted exchanges were laden with coded language and unspoken fears. Hearing the restrained emotions in those conversations made the historical weight of the White Terror feel profoundly real.

The physical environment of the prison cells was equally impactful. Dark, oppressive, and impossibly small, the cells were a stark reminder of the inhumane conditions prisoners endured. In one of the cells, I noticed scratches on the walls—marks left by inmates as they counted days or perhaps etched out fragments of their stories. It's one thing to read about these conditions in history books; it's another to stand in the very space where people lived through such unimaginable suffering. The museum's attention to detail made it impossible to ignore the humanity of those who were imprisoned there.





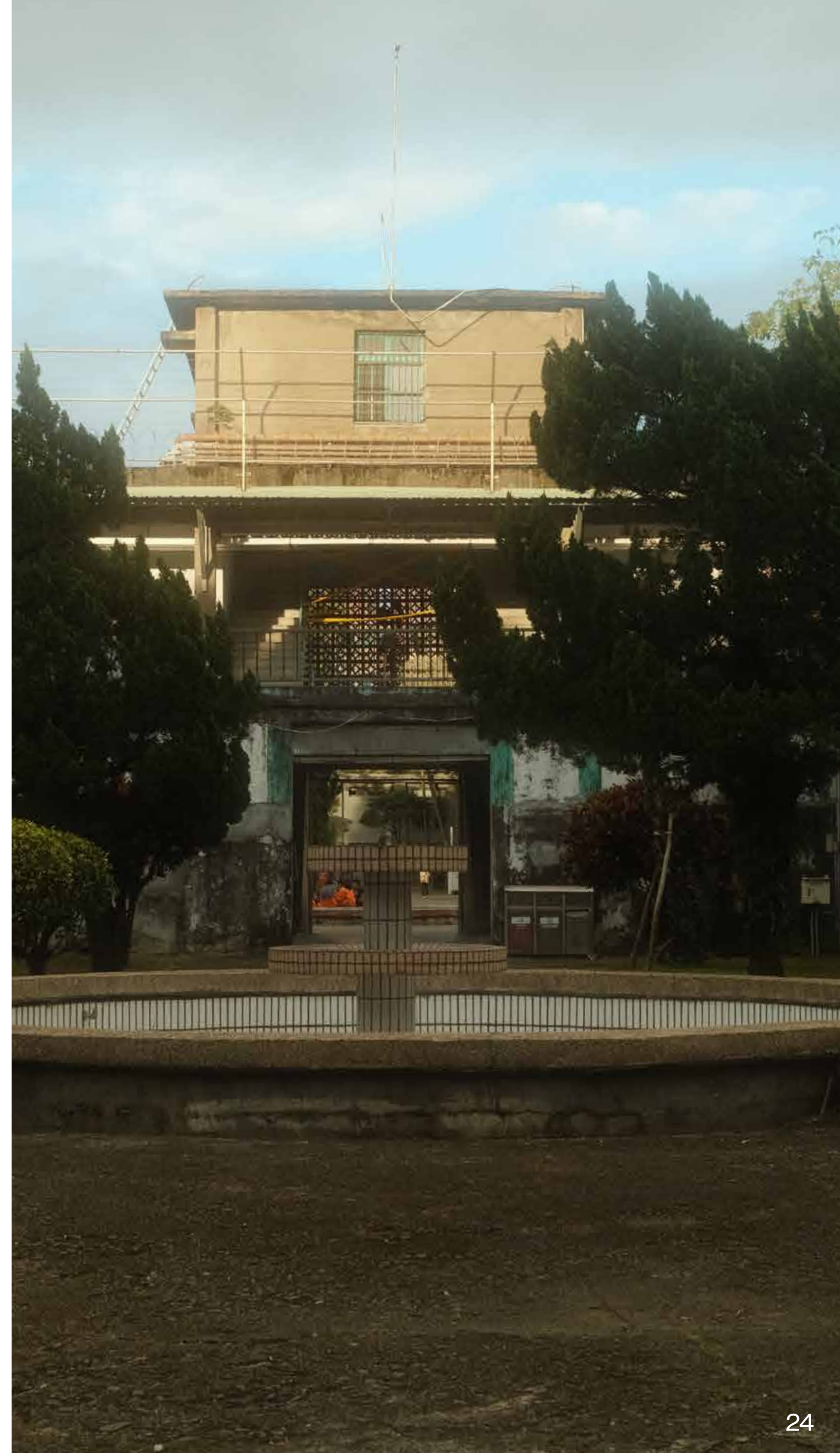
# A PATH TO DEMOCRACY

## THE END OF THE MARTIAL LAW IN 1987

Taiwan's path to democracy began with mounting public pressure in the 1980s. Martial law was lifted in 1987, and under President Lee Teng-hui, the government began acknowledging its past mistakes. By 1992, laws that had enabled arbitrary arrests were repealed, marking the official end of the White Terror. In 2017, President Tsai Ing-wen declassified millions of White Terror-era documents, uncovering long-hidden truths. These revelations allowed families to finally learn the fate of their loved ones, offering a measure of closure.

The Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park is more than a historical site; it is a space for reflection on the value of freedom and the cost of silence. While Taiwan today enjoys a vibrant, open society, the shadows of the White Terror remain a cautionary tale in its ongoing struggle for identity and autonomy.

For those who visit, the experience is both sobering and enlightening—a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the ongoing struggle for justice and democracy.







# The Shrine of the Senses

■ 艋舺龍山寺 - Lungshan Temple

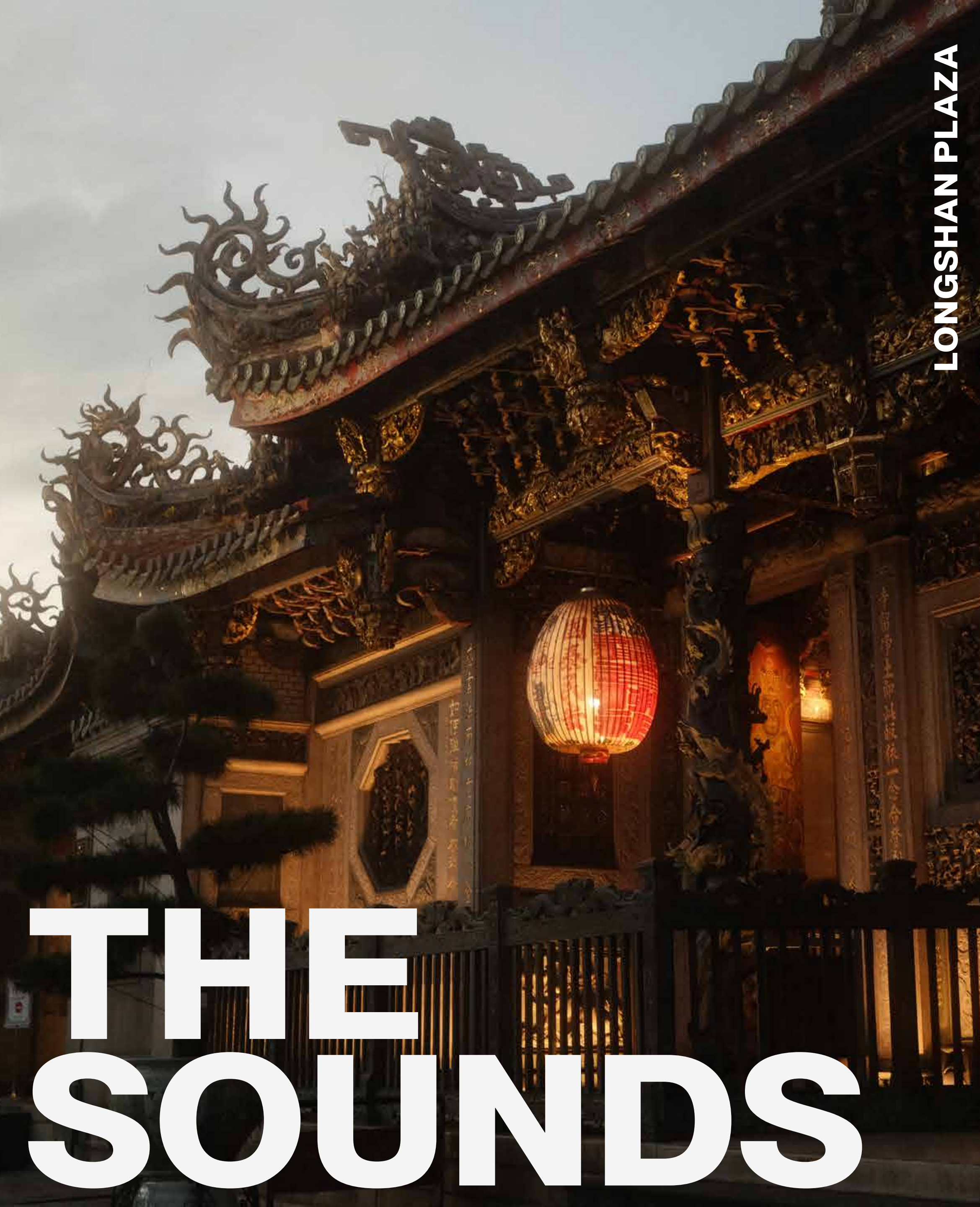




At the base of Dragon Mountain in Fujian, China lies a temple that concatenated worshippers of the revered Guanyin, Bodhisattva of Mercy. During the Qing dynasty, the Han settled into the Bangka district of Taiwan, now known as Wanhua, and in 1738, with piousness their lingering tie, built a temple in remembrance of the one that they left behind. They named it Dragon Mountain Temple... or Longshan.

Today, the temple stands tall, a talisman of Buddha, Confucian, Tao and Chinese Folk faiths. Locals and tourists alike come through the gates from around the world in worship, from seeking the knowledge of Wenchang Ding, god of literature and asking him for guidance to finding love from the Old Man Under The Moon, Yue Lao, who's red threads are said to connect true loves. Believer or non, Longshan leaves the soul in supplication, the heart in homage and the body in prayer. An aural, flavorful, textural, visual and aromatic prayer...





LONGSHAN PLAZA

# THE SOUNDS

The Longshan plaza greets you with the sound of rushing water and koi fish splashing in the pool. As you enter through the dragon's mouth, the clash of the cymbals starts to form a pattern, as hypnotic as the motions that create them, and the huddles hum in synchrony, providing sustenance to your steps. Crossing the temple threshold, the soft clattering of jiaobei divination blocks punctuates the murmured questions sent to the gods, and with every clatter on the sun-baked brick floor, it is as though the deities are attempting to answer their queries.

If you're lucky, you can catch the chanting ceremony in one of their thrice-daily acts, where voices emerge and enhance each other, becoming a beckoning symphony. The striking of the mallets upon the leather drum rattles the ground beneath but does not deter those in devotion, while the bells chime at the top of the hour, reminding them of rest and relieving those who hear it.





# SMELLS AND SIGHTS

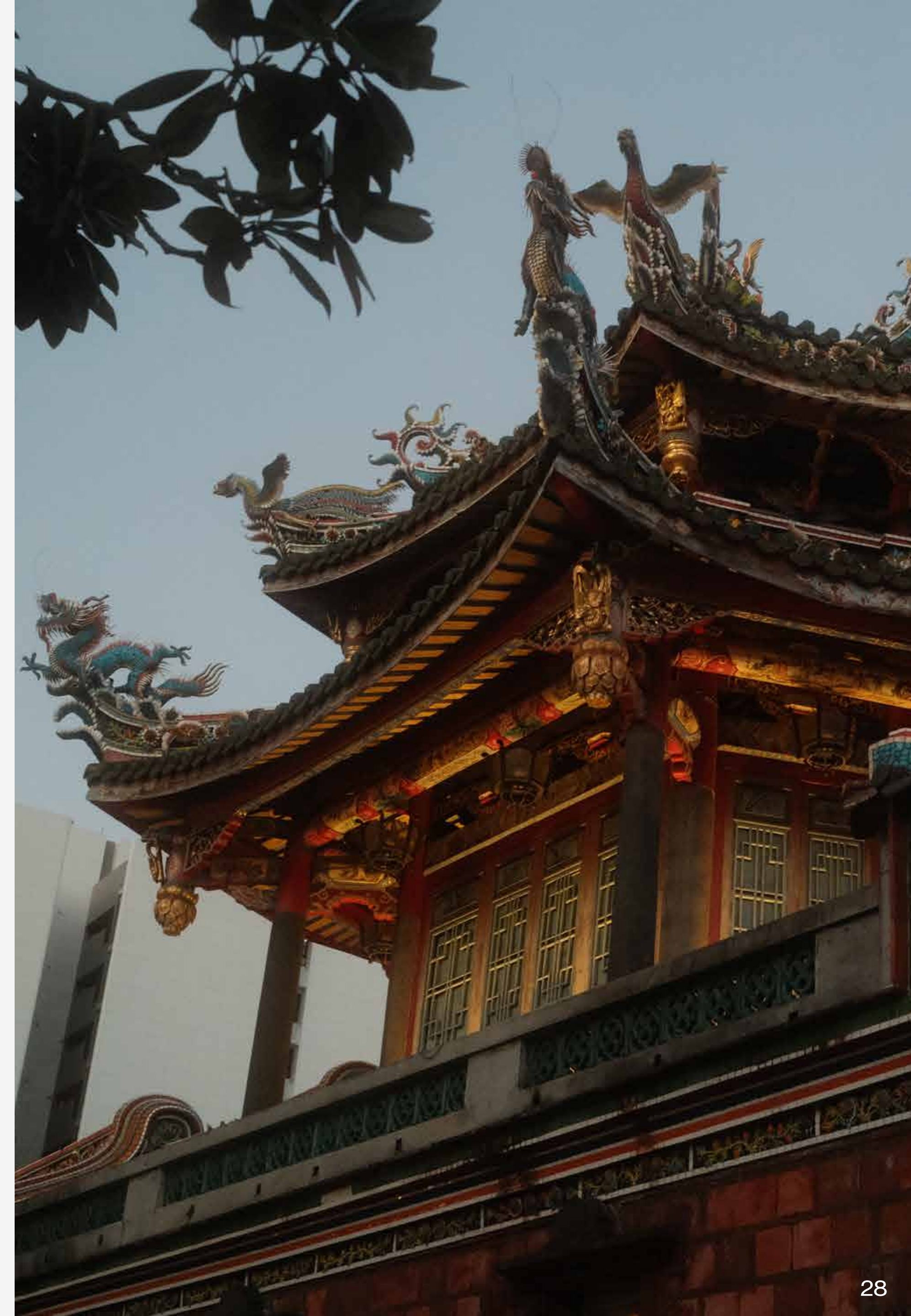
## A MULTISENSORIAL EXPERIENCE

The crisp tang of incense curls upward in spirals, mingling with the earthy sweetness of sandalwood and the faint metallic tang of the brass altars. It assaults the senses of visitors, replacing sound with a powerful aromatic experience. Nearby, the scent of aged wood rises from the temple's beams, infused with centuries of smoke and prayers.

Fresh flowers—lilies, chrysanthemums, and peonies—offer their fragrance in bursts of color, softening the sharper notes of the incense. These flowers are carefully chosen and arranged for each deity, their delicate fragrance symbolizing sincere prayers and original offerings of faith, belief, and peace. When the breeze drifts through, it carries a miraculous aroma, filling every corner of the temple with a serene sanctity that gently soothes the bustling anxiety of the city just beyond the walls.

The roof gleams with ceramic dragons, their scales shimmering in greens and gold, seeming to twist and turn as you move. The swallowtail ridge curves upwards more grandly, symbolizing the shape of a sharp crescent moon, a testament to the temple's sanctity as a place of worship and the reverence for the deities enshrined within. Moving inside, each altar is a masterpiece of detail, gilded figures of deities stand amidst intricate tapestries of red and gold, surrounded by offerings in every color. The courtyard is alive with movement: worshippers bowing with measured grace, monks tending to candles that flicker like stars in the dim.

The octagonal caisson ceiling, composed of 32 interlocking wooden brackets, or Taiwan's only pair of cast bronze dragon columns have stood tall through battles waged by both humans and nature, witnessing the resilience of this land and its people. All of this magics create the scene before us today into a doorway to the past—a vivid echo of life as it was over 270 years ago, timeless and untouched.







# THE PHOTO

1046 - 256 BCE

The cool, polished stone of the dragon gate welcomes you, its carvings smooth from generations of reverence. Inside, bronze statues stand as both guardians and guides, their surfaces warm to the touch, polished by a thousand hopeful palms. Prayer ribbons, tied tightly to altars, feel soft yet strong, a testament to the wishes they carry.

The wooden beams, intricately carved with dragons and phoenixes, feel coarse and alive under the fingers, telling tales of their creators. the sensation of one's knees meeting the prayer mat, the intertwining of hands in prayer—these are the touches of connection. They bridge the gap between yourself and your innermost petitions, between you and Guanyin Buddha in the central shrine, between you and the temple as a whole, nestled within the vibrant clamor of the surrounding city.



# THE TASTE

A BREEZE OF TANTALIZING AROMAS

After all those immersive moments, stepping outside brings a shift in the senses—a breeze carries the tantalizing aromas of traditional street food stalls nearby. It's impossible to pinpoint whether it's the scent of braised pork rice deep in sauces, steaming dumplings bursting with juices, or chilled fruit juices that tingle the tongue. But these fragrances seem to linger, drawing in hungry stomachs and curious souls alike, pulling them into the unique spirit of this neighborhood. And if you answer this call, another feast for the senses begins.







Longshan is a place where one can feel the weight of history in the carved stone and the lightness of hope in the rising smoke of incense. It is a place that speaks without words, where the senses are awakened to the unseen and the unheard, and where the soul, heart, and body are united in a collective prayer for something beyond the self.

The worshippers who come to Longshan may ask for many things—guidance, love, protection—but they are not merely asking for favors; they are participating in something far deeper. In their prayers, their offerings, and their rituals, they are entwining themselves with the pulse of this ancient place.

Longshan is not just a temple. It is a living, breathing embodiment of centuries of faith, an ever-present reminder of the sacred in the ordinary. And as you leave its gates, the memory of its embrace stays with you—prayer is an experience.







# The Girls of Alishan

■ 阿里山火車站 - Alishan Train Station



# ALISHAN TRAIN

THE RIDE TO THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

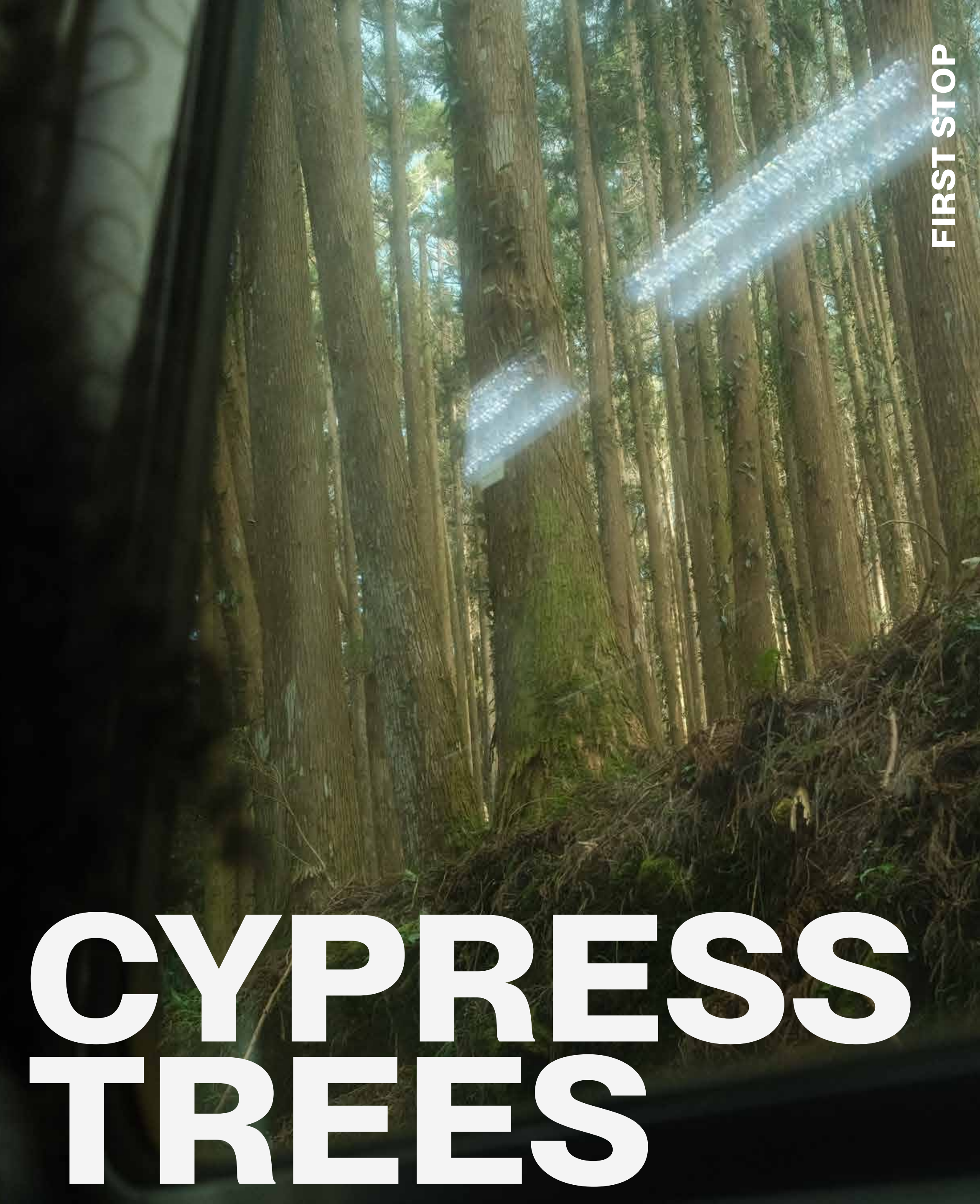
In the quiet shadow of Taiwan's central mountains, long before the hiss of steam and clang of rails broke the silence, the Tsou people lived as stewards of Alishan's forests. Their days began with the soft glow of dawn filtering through ancient cypress trees, and their evenings ended around fires where ancestral stories were passed down. Life was simple but deeply rooted: every stream provided water, every tree held a spirit, and every trail echoed with the footsteps of generations. The forest was not just their home but a living part of their identity, and in return, the Tsou treated it with reverence.

The arrival of the railway changed everything. Built by the Japanese to extract Alishan's prized timber, it cut like a scar across the sacred landscape. The rhythmic clatter of trains replaced birdsong, and the Tsou watched helplessly as their ancient trees fell. This was not progress they had chosen. The forest, once alive with their stories, became merely a resource for others. The local folklore song sung and performed by the Tsou, named \*"Alishan De Guniang"\* was appropriated to become a pop song by the name of \*"Alishan Girl"\* by Teresa Teng they missed the mountains' true meaning to the Tsou. The song, though popular, reduced their culture to a caricature, a romanticized version of indigenous life that ignored their struggles.

And so, as urban life took hold, indigenous life faded into the background, a lushly green and endlessly floral backdrop.







FIRST STOP

# CYPRESS TREES

The first leg of the Alishan journey is marked by dense forests that seem to envelop the travelers in a world of green. Towering cypress trees stretch toward the sky, their trunks thick with age, while ferns and moss cover the forest floor, creating a soft, lush carpet. The mist that often settles in the early morning adds an air of mystery, shrouding the landscape in an ethereal glow. The rustling of leaves is occasionally interrupted by the distant calls of birds, reminding travelers that this ecosystem is alive, vibrant, and ancient. The scent of fresh pine fills the air, and the quiet hum of the wind through the branches adds to the sense of serenity, almost as if the forest itself is whispering secrets to those who listen carefully.

For the indigenous Tsou people, this forest is not just a natural space, but a sacred land that holds deep cultural significance. The Tsou have lived in these mountains for centuries, and their connection to the land is woven into every part of their existence. They believe that the mountains are inhabited by spirits, or 'Apo,' who are guardians of the land. These spirits are honored in ceremonies, and the Tsou people's deep respect for nature is evident in their sustainable practices, where they take only what they need from the forest, ensuring its preservation for future generations. The journey through these trees is a walk through history and belief, a testament to the enduring connection between the Tsou people and the land they have called home for millennia.



# THE TEA PLANTATIONS

## SECOND STOP



As the journey continues toward the Alishan Railway Station, the landscape shifts to reveal expansive tea plantations that stretch across rolling hills, their manicured rows of tea bushes casting a vibrant green contrast against the backdrop of towering mountains. The cool mountain air mixes with the scent of tea leaves, and the faint sound of workers plucking leaves can occasionally be heard in the distance. The gentle slopes provide a panoramic view, where the clouds seem to rest on the mountaintops, adding a sense of tranquility to the otherwise bustling scene. The tea plantations create a calm, almost idyllic setting, inviting visitors to pause, reflect, and take in the natural beauty that surrounds them.

The indigenous significance of these tea plantations is deeply tied to the Tsou's agricultural practices. While tea itself may not have been a traditional crop for the Tsou, the broader relationship between the people and their land is reflected in their careful stewardship of nature. The Tsou people have long cultivated crops that are adapted to the mountainous terrain, such as millet and sweet potatoes, while using sustainable farming techniques passed down through generations. In recent years, the Tsou have also embraced tea cultivation as a way to continue their agricultural legacy, maintaining a balance between tradition and innovation. For them, farming is not just a way to produce food, but a practice that upholds the spiritual connection to the land and honors the ancestors who have cultivated it for centuries.



The final stretch of the Alishan journey takes travelers higher into the mountains, where they are greeted by spectacular views of the sea of clouds that often cover the landscape below. The rising sun casts a golden light over the peaks, and the air is crisp, thin, and exhilarating. The expansive vista gives a sense of being at the very edge of the world, with the valley below a patchwork of forests, fields, and villages. As the sun climbs higher, the sea of clouds begins to dissipate, revealing the full majesty of the mountain range. The sheer scale and beauty of the view evoke a sense of awe and wonder, as if nature itself is a work of art on a grand scale.

For the Tsou people, the high peaks of Alishan are not just majestic; they are sacred. These mountains hold spiritual significance and are regarded as the dwelling places of deities and ancestral spirits. The Tsou believe that the mountains are a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds, and the high-altitude areas of Alishan are often the site of important rituals and ceremonies. These practices are a testament to the Tsou's reverence for the natural world, where every tree, every rock, and every peak is imbued with a sense of the divine. As travelers reach the highest points of their journey, they are not just witnessing breathtaking views; they are stepping into a sacred realm where the connection between land, spirit, and people is profoundly felt.



# HIGH MOUNTAINS





To the Tsou people, Alishan is not merely a tourist attraction or an engineering marvel—it is a living entity with its own soul. The railway, which began as a tool of exploitation, now serves as a bridge for dialogue, creating opportunities for Indigenous voices to share their stories with the world.

In this way, “Alishan De Guniang” has evolved into more than just a melody; it represents a turning point, where the voices of the Tsou and other Indigenous communities can be heard, and their complex, vibrant culture can be honored, not as a relic, but as a living, breathing entity in the present day.

Those who journey on the Alishan Express experience more than scenic vistas—they traverse lands steeped in stories, traditions, and deep reverence for nature. Through Indigenous eyes, Alishan transcends being just a destination; it stands as a testament to the timeless bond between people and their ancestral lands.





APPENDIX

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**THANK YOU**