

## **How does Taiwan participate in costume international exchange and exhibit at the "Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung"?**

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### **Abstract:**

Although there have been many exhibitions in Taiwan dealing with issues revolving around the "fiber crafts" and "fashion", however a museum didn't exist that dealt with these related topics until, that is, the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFIA) was established. This article has chosen the 2019 "Asia-Pacific Fiber Craft Exhibition - Slow Fashion Elegancy" to be its case study. This exhibition curated artwork and weaving techniques from the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, and India.

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### **What is Taiwan's fashion industry like now?**

Collaborations between museum institutions and the fashion world have been gradually warming up globally in recent years. There are many kinds of cooperation between the two, such as fashion exhibitions, solo exhibitions of fashion designers, and various cooperation events with the fashion industry, e.g. fundraising parties, the shooting of musical videos, and new series' presentation venues. These different models are located in several different types of museum: some being fashion or craft museums, while others include large-scale museums, because of their experience dealing with vast collections and their independent departments. These museums all around the world have been creating exhibitions for many years together with doing extensive research. But up to now this has still been unusual in Taiwan. Therefore, the case study being presented in this article is the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOIFA); the first museum in Taiwan to focus exclusively on fiber technology and fashion.

Consequently, we would like to further explore the relation between fashion and clothing in Taiwan. Nowadays, what is the atmosphere regarding fashion in Taiwan? 2018 could be called the start of a new era in Taiwanese fashion. First, Taichung City established MOIFA, Taiwan's first museum with the theme concerning fiber craft and fashion. Second, the first Taipei Fashion Week was held due to the cooperation of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Hakka Affairs Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei City Government. Thus, 2018 was an important year for the Taiwanese fashion industry.

What are the key elements of the Taiwanese fashion and clothing scene? The theme of Taiwan Fashion Week in 2018 was "Seeing yourself. Unique look." The opening ceremony invited 40 costume designers and also exhibited a fashion exhibition showing 60 designers' works at the

Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center. The fashion week included 8 brand shows, 4 theme shows - which highlighted indigenous peoples' fashion, Hakka fashion, traditional crafts, and different material crafts as well as 6 international forums.



**Figure 1:** Taiwan Fashion Week held at the Taiwan Traditional Theatre Center. Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.

Taiwan is comprised of many different ethnic groups, so there are many traditional techniques and technologies that have been preserved and are still being innovated upon. Taiwan's fabric and textile industry is now internationally renowned. For example, of the 32 countries at the 2018 World Cup, there were 16 national teams' kits made in Taiwan using recycled PET bottles.[1] In fact, Taiwan is also known as the "kingdom of shoe manufacturing", so of course their football boots or cleats were also made in Taiwan. Furthermore, many top activewear brands have outsourced their products to Taiwanese-owned original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Therefore, many traditional techniques need to be passed down so that new technologies can be developed. To sum up, Taiwan still has lots of space to develop its fashion industry and fashion museums.

### **The relationship between Taiwanese museums and fashion**

Fashion museums have long built up their own brands all around the world, including the Victoria and Albert and the Bath Fashion Museums in the UK, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Palais Galliera in Paris, the Mode Museum (MoMu) in Belgium and the Kyoto Costume Institute in Japan.

In Taiwan, there have also been exhibitions on topics related to craft and fashion. For example, the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum in Chiayi County launched the "Weaving Road Embroidery Trail - Heavy Mountain - Taiwan Aboriginal National Costumes Exhibition" in 2018 and "Innumerable Efforts on The Art of Clot - A Joint Exhibition Of Taiwan Indesign Textiles" in January 2019, as well as "Wearing Asia - The exchange and creation of textiles". In 1993, the Department of Clothing and Fabrication of Fu Jen Catholic University, founded the "China Fashion Culture Center". It has a rich collection of tens of thousands of pieces. It is often the host and co-organizer of many domestic apparel exhibitions, but it mainly exhibits on issues related to clothing. In recent years, most fashion exhibitions in Taiwan have been held in cultural and creative parks and not in museums, such as the 2019 "The Future Is ..." (Marie Claire's 26th anniversary exhibition), the 2018 "Reading Clothes" exhibition - which was initiated by the Taiwanese contemporary artist Dong Yang-zi and combined calligraphy art with fashion - and the 2017 "Hello, My Name is Paul Smith" exhibition.

Museums in Taiwan rarely hold exhibitions on fashion topics or solo designer exhibitions. However, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, (MOCA), which exhibited "The Charismatic rebirth of yore" in 2018, is a museum curating numerous exhibitions on fashion issues.

In addition, the National Museum of History, Taiwan (NMH Taiwan) has a strong connection with fashion, including "East Oriental Thoughts: Tradition and Contemporary Fashion" and "Insights-Seven Senses Experience Fashion Features" which were both exhibited at the same time in 2017. The latter exhibition was a collaboration with the La Cite de la Dentelle et de la Mode (the museum for lace and fashion in Calais, France), while in return, it held "Mode in Taiwan: Apu Jan, Chen Shao-yen, and Liu Mei-hui". This exhibition was the first time that a museum in Europe had an exhibition with its main topic being about a Taiwanese costume designer. Subsequently, the designer's work became part of the museum's collection.

Furthermore, the NMH Taiwan along with the designer Justin Chou, the founder of the fashion brand Just in XX, have used the former's collection of San Yu's artworks to develop fashion clothing collections in a dual-brand strategy, and it was featured on the New York Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2018 Runway. Moreover, Justin Chou has not only cooperated with the NMH Taiwan but also the National Palace Museum. Just in XX worked with craftsmen in fields such as blue dye, weaving, and color embroidery to transform some of the treasures of the National Palace Museum, which made it into New York Fashion Week Autumn/Winter 2018. From the above examples, we can see that museums in Taiwan are changing track. Along with exhibition discussions and exchanges about fashion, art works are also being presented worldwide in a creative way through cooperation between designers and craftsmen in the effort to induce everybody to take note of Taiwanese fashion and art.

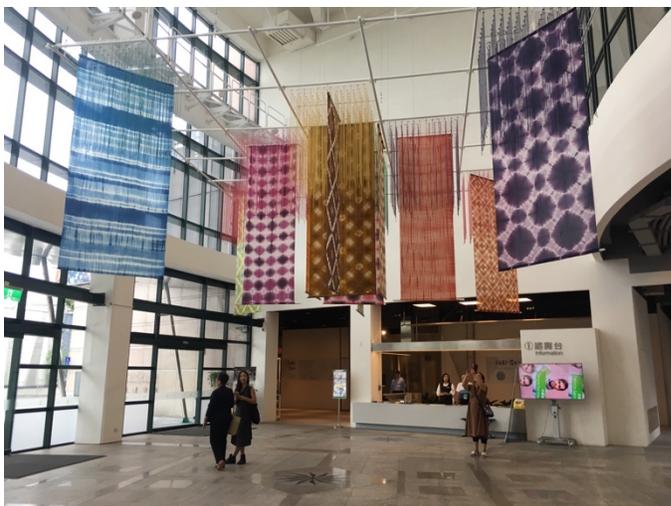
In spite of the many exhibitions on the themes of clothing and fashion in Taiwan, there w still no museum in Taiwan that focus solely on these topics. Therefore, it has always been curious to think about the government's attitude on how to handle the relationship between fashion exhibitions and museums Finally, on October 17, 2018, the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFIA ) opened, with "Fiber, Fashion, and Green Crafts" as the motto for its future direction. After the rebuilding of the Children's Art Museum originally located in Dali, Taichung City, the former Taichung Huludun Cultural center in Feng Yuan was expanded and they combined to form a dedicated unit. It became the first municipal museum in Taichung and the first museum which focused on topics to do with the green crafts, fashion and fibers in Taiwan.



**Figure 2:** The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung. Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.

### The establishment of the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung

The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung is located in Dali District, Taichung City, near the soon-to-be-built sports center. It is about a 15-minute drive from Taichung City Railway Station, while the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts and Dali Art Square (Taichung Software Park, Ministry of Economic Affairs) are also nearby, so the location is convenient. The museum space used to be the Children's Art Museum, which was built by the Taichung County Government at the Dali District Sports Park in 2004. After mismanagement to do with outsourcing responsibilities, the government had to its management. Unfortunately, the number of visitors still did not meet standards, and it was even called a white elephant. After the merger of Taichung county and city in 2010, the Cultural Affairs Bureau at Taichung City Government took over and began planning the possibility of its transformation. In 2014, the newly outsourced company withdrew. Therefore, they had the chance to renovate and reorganize the existing cultural space. Then, on August 4, 2015, the Preparation Office of Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung, was established.



**Figure 3:** The lobby of The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung. Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.



**Figure 4:** Section 7: "Taiwan". Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.

Taichung's Dajia District's sedge grass products have been well-known for a long time, and are a speciality of the Atayal people, the largest aboriginal group in the area. Consequently, has many local craft features such as "rush woven", "Atayal woven", and "Tai-ping blue dyeing", with sales of the "Dajia Hat" abroad, including to Japan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and the United States, once the outstanding achievement of being one of Taiwan's top five export products.[2]

Therefore, Taiwan received the reputation of being the "Kingdom of Straw Hats" The artistic and technical levels of Atayal traditional fabrics are second-to-none. Moreover, Taichung is moving towards further plans to promote this industry and technology, including the planned incorporation of the Taichung Huludun Cultural Center. The latter has specialized academically in this field for many years, and will form the blueprint for future development.

### **The exhibition: "Slow Fashion Elegancy-ASIA-Pacific Fiber Crafts"**

The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung is still new and developing so it took nearly eight months for it to reach the landmark of 280,000 visitors from its opening in October 2018 to June 2019. On average, there were almost 35,000 people a month, or more than 1,000 people visiting the museum a day. These are quite good figures for a new museum in Taiwan.

The "Slow Fashion Elegancy-ASIA-Pacific Fiber Crafts" exhibition in 2019 was co-organized by the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung and the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute. The curators were Lu Shu-ying and You Hui-jun. It had more than 50 works from 7 countries namely India, Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. The exhibition tried to convey the concept of slow fashion through the use of unique, oriental colors and rich, natural, fiber resources in the Asia-Pacific region. It combined the integration of diverse ethnic groups, supplemented by traditional culture, and the ingenuity of its creators. The exhibition had both an ideological and a communicative function. However, the most important message of this exhibition was to convey the possibility of sustainable fashion and design from the perspective of Asia-Pacific countries.

The curatorial concept behind the exhibition was "Our wants are many, our needs are few". Endless desire is typical of fast fashion. The concept of slow fashion was first proposed by the European fashion consultant Kate Fletcher in 2007 and was based on the "slow food" theory. Slow is not the opposite of fast – there is no dualism – but a different approach in which designers, buyers, retailers and consumers are more aware of the impacts of products on workers, communities and ecosystems.[3]

The exhibition discusses slow fashion and Asia-Pacific fiber and textile crafts from the three aspects of locality, sustainability, and their relationship. After the industrial revolution, many

cheap garments were produced with man-made fibers and chemical dyeing, which crowded out the original traditional fiber and textile crafts. This meant not only the loss of ancient craft but also caused environmental pollution. At the same time, the fiber and textile crafts in Taiwan were also being discussed. Because Taiwan is located in a transport hub of the Asia-Pacific region, there has been lots of cultural interaction between and influences from the Austronesian languages. Thus, the traditional methods of the Taiwanese aborigines and the natural dyeing techniques of the Han immigrants, were raised and revalued again. They could learn not only from each other but also from the different cultures and skills of other Asia-Pacific countries. The following table shows the artists participating in this exhibition.

### Exhibition Designers

Country	Designer/ Material
Malaysia	Bernard Chandran/ Songket
Japan Philippines	Fair Plus & San Ramon Abaca Handicraft Association (SRAHA) / Musa textilis
India	Rahul Mishra/
Myanmar	Inle Lake South Workshop/ Lotus stalk silk
Korea	ISAE/ Nature Light Fashion Poolvit workshop/ Ceramics and Natural Dyes
Taiwan	The Link Between Memories Butterfly Metaphor

The exhibition area was divided into seven parts, the first area was "Fiber Path", the second "Skill / Material", the third "Korea", the fourth "Malaysia, India", while "Slow Fashion Master" was in section 5, "Japan, Philippines, Myanmar, Korea" was located in the sixth section and last but not the least was "Taiwan".



**Figure 5:** Section 6: "Japan, Philippines, Myanmar, Korea". Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.

This exhibition invited different designers and associations from many countries to discuss the topic of slow fashion. The overall style was mainly simple but with light wood grain and white display cabinets interspersed with clothing display racks. The method of displaying was mainly based on the "object narrative." The large printed illustrations and some situational displays were supplemented by explanations. There were no interactive devices or use of technological display methods. The exhibition space was not large. Therefore, the narrative method was direct. As you entered, there were explanations about the cost of fashion, the concepts that promote slow fashion, and the local natural materials on display at this time. Later, the works of various countries were introduced linearly, and the viewing arrangement was also very simple and clear. The exhibits of apparel in total consisted of a total of 8 units from 7 countries discussing the concept of "slow fashion", and 2 of the 8 units were international fashion brands, showing a more aesthetic, fashionable sense. In addition, the display methods at the exhibition were more about craftsmanship. That is, the way the exhibition was presented, instead of emphasizing fashion, included almost no aesthetically pleasing furnishings or stylish atmospheric designs. The main goal was that viewers could understand the concept of the exhibition through various other factors, such as through the different designers, techniques and materials. Through the objects and linear narrative methods, visitors could understand the impact of differing and intertwined geographical locations, cultures and technologies on each other.



**Figure 6:** Section 5: " Slow Fashion Master ".  
Photo: Nai-Yu Chang.

## Conclusion

An analysis of the current social situation and article reports, it can be found that fashion exhibitions go viral in the museum world. In addition, there are many museums breaking new records for the number of visitors. But the difference between clothes, fashion and each museum's own brand positioning is also based on their collections, exhibition themes and research. Therefore, the cooperation between museums and the fashion industry around the world can be divided into many different types.

Taiwan was lacking this kind of museum in the past. In 2018, Taiwan finally established its first museum, the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung, with the motto of "fiber, fashion, green crafts". Furthermore, the first official fashion week in Taiwan, Taipei Fashion Week, was also first officially held in 2018. It has definitely helped the Taiwanese fashion industry and museums to become more mature.

Although the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung was established in 2018, it is not a new museum as it was based on the research and collective energy of the previous Taichung Huludun cultural center while its architecture used to be the Children's Art Museum originally located in Dali, Taichung City. The Ministry of Culture and the Taichung City Government invested NT\$180 million to build it.[4] The most important thing regarding its organizational structure is that, unlike many current public museums in Taiwan that are maintained by part-time workers, it instead employed regular full-time museum staff.

In cooperation with the National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute and relying on their research resources, there have been multiple exhibitions since the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung opened in 2018. The research case for this article, "Slow Fashion Elegancy-ASIA-Pacific Fiber Crafts" was used to understand the curatorial direction and exhibition narrative at the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung. This case can show how the method of displaying now has more emphasis on the presentation of craft exhibitions and less on aesthetic, fashionable atmosphere and hardware design. Meanwhile, most of these new exhibitions use text descriptions, educational promotions and lectures to present the links with fashion and the fashion industry.

The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung has been continuously readjusting itself from its beginning to the present day. It has maintained good communication with the international community while also cooperating with local industry and academic institutes.

The most important question is how to display and curate a collection to make people interested in it. In future, the passing down of fiber craftsmanship will be the remit of the craft team stationed on the third floor of the building. They will handle the experience of crafts such as knitting, knotting, weaving, dyeing, and embroidering. The museum also will welcome the incorporation of technology and functional fibers in the future and will not limit the development of any possibilities. In addition, there are already collections and exhibitions by Taiwan's indigenous people and local craftsmen, and frequent cooperation with foreign institutions, such as the Korea Natural Dyeing Museum, Fair Plus (Japan) and the San Ramon Banana Handicraft Association (Philippines) amongst others. Through these international exchanges, it is hoped that there will be further creative sparks. We look forward to this museum becoming a fashion exchange hub both in Taiwan and internationally in the future.

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