

FINAL

**The Administrative Turn in Contemporary Art:  
The Figure of the Arts Administrator**  
— a case study of the Taipei Biennial (1996-2020)

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Doctor of Philosophy of University College London, Institute of Education.

I, Nana Yu-I Lee confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature

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## Abstract

This PhD uses “the Administrative Turn” to describe the specific, but also the more general, changing nature of the local and global administrative networks which support contemporary art. Through a case study of the figure of the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial (TB), this research examines these changes in three ways – on (1) changes in institutional principles of arts administration, (2) changes in administrative methodology, and (3) changes in function for arts administrators.

Taking a transdisciplinary approach drawing on Arts Management, Curatorial Studies, Museum Studies and Art History, this thesis engages critically with the value of “the administrative” as a necessary approach to catalyse a shift in focus away from the highly visible and spectacularised norm of the global contemporary art world, towards the infrastructural significance of the backstage. This change in perspective through the study of the TB arts administrators sets out to present a missing puzzle of what makes that art world function as it does and how in fact the support network of the contemporary art practices have transformed because of changes in the administrative capacity in terms of its institution, methodology and function.

Chapter 1 details the developmental history of the system of arts administration at TB, as an institution situated within a government-backed, museum-based, contemporary art exhibitionary ecosystem, and finds that the institution history and design principles of arts administration are not only a reflection but also an active author of Taiwanese national identity. Chapter 2 demonstrates how arts management and its methodology as a practice-centric tradecraft based on the narrative of professionalism and a stewardship process, is iterative and relies on a balance of control and care. With a close analysis of

the administrative capacity, Chapter 3 establishes the figure of the arts administrators as reflexive and its function pedagogical and consultative.

This research concludes that acting as critical infrastructure, arts administrators as ascending co-development stewards, possess the transformative agency to radically re-imagine their sphere of practice and re-conceptualise how the support network could better function for a fast-evolving and increasingly multi-stakeholder production reality, which underpins the culture of contemporary art biennials globally.

Keywords: arts administration, cultural management, museum studies, biennial studies, administrative turn, support infrastructure, contemporary art, exhibitionary system, Taiwan studies, East Asia visual culture studies.

# Impact Statement

This PhD thesis focuses on the under-researched field of the administrative turn in contemporary art, exploring the changing nature of the support network that underpins the exhibitionary system. Through a case study of the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial, this research draws on Cultural Management, Curatorial Studies, Museum Studies, Art History and Biennial Studies to shed new light on paradigm shifts in administrative practices.

This PhD research demonstrates a shift in focus from the “critique” (taking a position from outside of the institution) to “criticality” (enabling a reflexive examination to include perspective within the institution), while advocating a re-consideration of arts administration as an indispensable practice where its arts administrators increasingly take up the role of critical cultural infrastructure, through their co-development stewardship journey.

Using the Taipei Biennial as a case study, this research (1) creates new evidence base and theoretical proposition, (2) engages a much-side-lined community of practitioners, and (3) advocates for an updated view that reflects the true value of the arts administrative cohort within the exhibitionary system. These impacts are achieved with the following measures:

- By proposing a threefold framework that examines the institution, methodology and function of art administrators, this research not only emphasises the agency and voice of the administrative practitioners, but also establishes an epistemology of arts administration to enable more development and scholarship around its scope of practice. Capturing the people-dependent, experience-dependent and will-dependent tradecraft of the arts administrator, this research adds to the evidence base and theoretical proposition to re-imagine the administrative capacity as

reflexive, adaptive and responsive.

- The research canvases the knowledge and skills arts administration build on, by pinpointing paradigm shifts in the administrative practices in contemporary art, to establish a profile for the administrative voice of the Biennial organisers. This method releases the practice of arts administration from a 'black box' and enable a norm of healthy discussion around its scope of work.
- Through validating the agency of the administrator and acknowledging exhibition-making as a collective effort, this method recalibrates the understanding of the arts administrative cohort, from the current industry 'business-as-usual' which often left the administrative efforts to either remain unnamed or be credited as curatorial brilliance, artistic creation, technical precision or the calculated randomness by the audience participation.

With the above measures, this research benefits existing arts administrators and future practitioners by contributing to the languaging of how to understand what they do as impactful and infrastructural, by providing tools (evidence, theoretical framework and research) to speak on their own behalf. By doing so, this PhD also provides insights for others outside of the arts administrative cohort a way to understand what the administrators are and what their sphere of practice entails, in order to foster mutual respect and solidarity within the contemporary arts ecosystem.

In the long run, this PhD research encourages future scholarship in the increasingly transdisciplinary field of cultural studies to take a holistic approach when examining the contemporary exhibitionary system, with the recognition of the infrastructural value of "the administrative" at its core. Contributing to the knowledge base and theoretical proposition that documents the practice of the

backstage, this research becomes a building block in the on-going journey to rethink administrative function and its transformative potential as a critical infrastructure in contemporary art, by first unlocking the value and potential of the support network for the biennial exhibitionary system.

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*To my friend and most supportive partner, Bastien de Lestrang, who catalyses my path-finding, shares my joy, and walks by my side in my moments of occasional darkness...*

Labour and process are rarely glamorous. Administrative planning and protocols seldom take centre stage. When speaking of contemporary art biennials, for most, the institution of administration, the mundane back-and-forth of daily administrative works and the faceless mass of numerous administrators who keep the wheel of the exhibition rolling, are perhaps among the last that come to mind. The system, strategy, and function of the arts administrator as a support network linchpin is barely discussed – unless something goes wrong.

Arts biennials are by nature a collective and collaborative undertaking, similar to other projects in the creative economy that also depend on mass

mobilisation of resources. Compared to its counterparts in the film and performing arts sectors, visual arts as a field is slow to recognise the contribution of its support system that powers the machine of creative production.

I would like to dedicate my PhD research to my former and current colleagues in both in-house and agency capacities – who remain mostly in the background. Some are credited in the bookend – their inputs often pigeonholed and itemised in the form of a seemingly perfunctory laundry list as “the organiser” in the rolling credit of a documentary or on the final pages of a catalogue. For others, their efforts have little to no ways of being acknowledged – but an “invitation” to an opening party or press conference, in which they have to work the event and keep guard. Perhaps some others remained unnamed, or their contribution frequently being attributed to curatorial brilliance, artistic creation, technical precision or the calculated randomness by audience participation.

As a professional arts administrator and a practice-based researcher with over ten years of experience, I have seen talented, tenacious and passionate administrative staff and supportive members, critically articulating visions for their events, navigating protocols and acting as prime negotiators during discussions of complex artistic differences. They are indispensable in making sure the show can go on, people are fed and paid on time, artistic integrity is fully honoured, and no audience exposed to unexpected danger during the museum experience... The list of responsibilities understandably goes on and is never ending.

From a practice-centric perspective, this PhD research aims to not only provide a context-sensitive reading of arts administration as integral to an

institution of exhibition making, but also lend the people operating in the system a more visible and empowered, as well as nuanced interpretation tools that they can take up and deploy to all the better speak on their own behalf.

Contributing to the knowledge legacy in and about the system of arts administration – as a means and an end in itself – I viewed my thesis as a study by an administrator for administrators. I have done so by problematising our field of practice – so that we can become better initiators, listeners, and enablers.

In this self-reflexive spirit, this PhD research was crafted to be empowering yet confessional. I hope my thesis is a step to articulate and validate the ways in which support network operates, by adding to the knowledge that documents the practice belonging to the people behind-the-scenes, who mobilise the exhibitionary system and have the agency to radically re-imagine their sphere of practice.

Let us hope my PhD research can be a starting point for more conversations around the role and impact of the enabling network underpinned by the arts administrator as well as the significance of cultural infrastructure in the field of contemporary art.

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If we may permit ourselves to celebrate what has been achieved and what is yet to be fulfilled – we shall take this moment to pay tribute to the everyday process of forever trying, forever failing, and forever trying better.



# Introduction

## What Can the Study of Arts Administrators Reveal?

Who are the arts administrators and why study them? The passage below penned by Pei-Wei Huang, a Taiwanese freelance arts consultant and writer, documented an average day for an arts administrator<sup>1</sup> in the gig knowledge economy of the hyper-globalised contemporary art world. Juggling everything that could possibly go wrong while trying to meet an article deadline to make ends meet, Huang stated:

While I was trying to write this article, the arts administration works which occupy a good half of my life are facing tremendous hurdles. I am being constantly chased by a never-ending to-do list – you attempt to attend to one emergency; you end up dropping the ball for ten thousand other ones. The inundating number of folders and paperwork forever haunts. What seems to be a low-level mistake unfortunately can go wrong when you are least expected. Not to mention the pressure that mounts with those millisecond judgement call you must make at every turn, with absolute precision, which would result in consequences that would be miles different...No other role in the cultural production system can be so critical – the make or break factor [but at the same time] whose existence is not always palpable. (Huang, 2022)

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (2013) made a distinction in his *Keywords* between managers, administrators and civil servants (or bureaucrats). Whereas managers point to “a body of paid agents working on behalf of increasingly large business concerns”, administrators as “polite term for officials working in semipublic institutions” and civil servants (or bureaucrats) referencing the class of public officials (p. 157). To Williams, the three terminologies denote an increased awareness of the differences between public and private sectors while the actual activities being undertaken are identical. Administrators and managers will be used interchangeably in this research unless specified.

The passage above provides a vivid account of the daily scope of practice for an arts administrator: hectic, overwhelming but largely unnoticed unless something goes wrong. It also points to the fact that arts administrators are a “voiceless”<sup>2</sup> group whose function is often-times overlooked yet whose role so consequential – but rarely if ever a focus of major research.

Despite that the industry is slowly reckoning with the reality of exhibition production and knowledge making as a collective effort<sup>3</sup>, the faceless cohort of the arts administrator and the system of support remains an under-investigated field, falling through the cracks between various disciplines. In comparison to ongoing research and debates on art-making, curatorial practice, pedagogy and exhibition history as an evolving focal point of studies in contemporary art, the system and technique of arts administrator remains largely sidelined – or at best discussed as subsidiary in relation to other “more serious” discourses.

In spite of a call within the visual arts world in the last decade to shift its spotlight onto the “backstage”<sup>4</sup>, these discussions still privilege the perspectives

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<sup>2</sup> Art critic Sheng-Hung Wang (2017, p.29) quoted former TFAM director Ping Lin’s view on the previous role of biennial organiser as a “voiceless, behind-the-scenes operator”, with a gradual transition toward asserting its authorial function through parallel programmes. See later chapters for more ways on how the authorial voice of the administrators are consolidated through system design (Chapter 1), the narrative of professionalism (Chapter 2) and the pedagogical function (Chapter 3).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to curatorial practitioners’ reckoning of the value of the support network (see later part of this Introduction for more), arts administrators are also becoming more vocal to acknowledge the collective effort behind exhibition production. For instance, Anita Hsiang-Ning Huang, curator of the education department at the New Taipei City Art Museum, accentuated the collective effort of the support network in an interview, stating: “For an in-house produced show, I might get the credit of the curator [mostly because convention asks for it]. We all know very well it is a collective effort. Institutional labour and output involve numerous coordination across teams and members” (Artouch.com, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> On the significance of the backstage, curatorial discourses have shown a growing interest in

of art historians and curatorial scholars, where the voice and practice of the administrators continues to be absent from the conversation. This in turn subjects the figure of the arts administrator to a Weberian<sup>5</sup> tradition which devolves into an almost rigid or impersonal technocratic caricature; as an indirect result, I would suggest, of the early convention in Institutional Critique<sup>6</sup> in their effort to call out the often imperceptible power imbalance invested in the administrative function of the art world, as the problem with the art world.

The developmental history of Arts Management as a self-evolving, interdisciplinary field, borrowing heavily from the practice and theory of Management Studies did not help in setting the record straight. This leaves the current research (Evard and Colbert, 2000; Chong, 2002; Xia, et al, 2015; Paquette, 2019) and training skewed towards leadership studies, strategic management, financial planning, marketing and audience development.

As an applied discipline with a tendency to focus on the voices at the upper echelons, and a mastery over operational activities, current approach to Arts

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the contribution of the wider support network. For example, curator Terry Smith (2012) emphasised the role of “process shapers” and “program builders” as critical infrastructure; theorist Jean-Paul Martinon (2013) drew attention to the secondary events and activities as “para-curatorial”; curatorial practitioners Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (2010) identified “extra-exhibitionary” as critical space for the processual to take place.

<sup>5</sup> A Weberian ideal type of bureaucrats has painted an image of public servants within a hierarchically-structured administrative organisation, as professional, rule-abiding, impersonal, merit-based, disciplined, impartial and with a clear division of labour. See Sager & Rosser (n.d.). for more.

<sup>6</sup> According to the *Art Term* by art museum Tate (n.d.: Institutional Critique), institutional critique is an artistic movement starting in the late 1960s. The practice takes the form of critiquing an institution and the power imbalance which makes such institution a functioning reality – e.g. the *moda operandi* and implied power enshrined to an establishment, such as a museum or gallery. This school of thought morphed in the 1990s to become a method to engage with systematic solutions.

Management not only fall short of recording the practice of the frontline workers, but also becomes inadequate in capturing the full magnitude and potential of the administrative capacity, as a fulcrum of the exhibitionary system. This leaves the impact of the changes in art-making and knowledge production on the support network, accelerated over the course of the past two decades, undocumented. As a consequence, the shifts in the administrative capacity in contemporary art, in terms of administrative technology<sup>7</sup>, labour division and role understanding, continues to remain under-studied.

I argue that in order to fully grapple with the extent to which the support network of the exhibitionary system has changed over the past few decades and to better identify ways to rise up to the fast-evolving needs of art-making and knowledge production, it is necessary to unpack the shifts in administrative practices which have taken place primarily behind-the-scenes, so that the role of the administrative capacity can be comprehensively assessed through its system of organisation, methodology and function.

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<sup>7</sup> By administrative technology, I am referring to a Foucauldian approach to governmentality. According to historian Michael C. Behrent, the use of “technology” or “technique” by Michel Foucault “refer[s] not to tools, machines, or the application of science to industrial production, but rather to methods and procedures for governing human beings” (Behrent, 2013, p.55). Technology in this epistemological context has a wide implication to outline the various ways in which power relations operate, summarised in Foucault’s word: “Political power, before acting on ideology, on the consciousness of individuals, exerts itself in a much more physical way on their bodies. The way in which gestures, attitudes, usages, allotments in space, and modalities of housing are imposed – this physical, spatial distribution of people belongs, it seems to me, to a political technology of the body” (Foucault, 1974, p.523, translation by Behrent). In this research, the term *technology* is employed in two ways: 1) the more common reference to the applied knowledge in science, as in advanced technology; and 2) a Foucauldian use that refers to a knowledge tradition manifested in procedures which are meant to govern individuals and is interchangeable with *technique*.

## ***What Can Arts Administrators at Taipei Biennial Reveal?***

As I have established so far, studying the role of the arts administrator provides a missing link to thoroughly understand the changes in the exhibitionary system of contemporary art and begins to unravel the ways in which the support network has morphed in its functionality and organisation. Now, why select the Taipei Biennial as the focus of my PhD case study?

First of all, large-scale perennial international exhibitions in the format of biennials<sup>8</sup> have become a prominent site, where the evolution of the exhibitionary system is the most observable and its correlation with the paradigm shifts in the administration of contemporary art most pronounced. As a subcategory, this makes biennial administrators a deserving subject worthy of dedicated analysis for both contemporary art and arts management scholarship.

Secondly, Taipei Biennial is a telling case that provides a window into a largely East-Asian model in terms of resource planning, since it was among one of the first, founded in the Asia Pacific boom of perennial mega-exhibitions in the 1990s. Literature (Filipovic et al, 2010; Vogel, 2010; Gardner & Green, 2016) identified a shared hope among the Asia Pacific host countries, which aimed to leverage the biennial events to place itself on the global map, and how this fervour of “biennialisation”<sup>9</sup> demonstrated a collective cultural ambition of resorting to the organisation of cultural events as a means to showcase the host city’s cultural autonomy and rights of representation. Similar to what happened in Taipei, this wave or boom of perennial exhibitions was believed by scholars

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<sup>8</sup> Biennial is also spelled as biennale.

<sup>9</sup> The term *biennialisation* is widely used by biennial and exhibition history scholars (O’Neill, 2007; Filipovic et al, 2008; Gardner & Green, 2016) to describe the phenomenon where biennials and other large-scale perennial survey shows as an exhibition format, has proliferated in an unprecedented scale and speed across the globe since the 1980s.

(Ibid) to typify an urge for East Asian countries to proactively establish a cultural authority worthy of their economic prosperity.

This quest for cultural legitimacy was further underpinned by the establishment of contemporary art museums that mushroomed across Asia during the same period. Often like the case of Taipei, literature (Clarke, 2014) identified these new modern and contemporary art museums had become the main stage for their city's biennial showcases. As a socio-cultural product of the 1990s, scholars revealed that the Taipei Biennial has carried similar hopes and responsibilities from local stakeholders to advance Taiwanese contemporary arts as a cultural equal, worthy of international attention (Bartelik, 2014; Takamori, 2014; Schoeber, 2014; McIntyre, 2015). To sum up, the study of the administrative system of the Taipei Biennial would shed light on how the organisation of flagship cultural and major world events reflects the aspirations of the host country as a quest for nation building.

Finally, the Taipei Biennial, as a government-backed event, situated within a public administration system (also similar to the funding structure of the majority of its East Asian counterparts) provides a clear and accessible record published online. This data accessibility became a research necessity during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak from 2019 to 2022, which coincided with the initial three years of my PhD journey. In addition, as a government flagship programme, the Taipei Biennial has enjoyed an undisrupted track record of organisation since its inception in 1996. This provides a consistent point of reference to identify shifts in contemporary art, in terms of art-making and knowledge production, as well as changes in the administrative capacity.

What can the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial reveal? As a case that is representative of the East Asian perennial exhibition boom in the 1990s,

the Taipei Biennial is a testament to an “administrative turn in contemporary art”, reflecting and shaping paramount changes in art-making and knowledge production practices, seen across the biennial circuit over the past two decades. In order to encourage a rethink of arts administration as a means and an end in itself, my PhD research will examine the figure of the arts administrator as a critical enabling network and change agent through the shifts in its system of organisation, methodology and function at the Taipei Biennial (1996-2020).

### **Issue Scoping: Situating the Administrative Turn**

Before proposing my own research approach to investigating the administrative turn in contemporary art, I will first scope current scholarship and debates in 1) Arts Administration and Cultural Management; 2) contemporary art knowledge fields, including Curatorial Studies, Biennial Studies and Art History, and 3) the local and regional research on the Taipei Biennial, in the section below. This issue scoping exercise aims to identify ways to situate my PhD project on the figure of the arts administrator.

### ***Rise and Tension of Arts Administration and Cultural Management***

Arts Management as a self-evolving, interdisciplinary field is primarily based on the practice and theory of management studies. Its research frequently gives precedent to the know-how of applied activities from leadership studies, strategic management, financial planning, marketing to audience development. Since its modern genesis, literature in Arts Management has borrowed extensively from Cultural Policy, Sociology, Organisational Studies, Cultural Studies, Critical Theory and Museology; at the same time benefited from neighbouring fields such as creative economy, tourism, education and

communications.<sup>10</sup>

Arts administration as a professionalised<sup>11</sup> field has emerged since the late 1960s. Scholars (Palmer, 1998; Chong, 2000) considered the practice as a sister phenomenon paralleled to the emergence of managerialism in the public sphere across the United States and the United Kingdom at the end of the 20th Century. The emphasis placed on managerial credibility marked a transition from previous focus on civil servitude to favour a professionalised insight in administration. Such an attitudinal change subsequently gave way to the practice of management as a generic theory applicable to all forms of organisations, including that of the arts and culture.

Coupled with this change in attitude to privilege managerialism, cultural organisations also saw a fundamental shift in the operational logic to become more sensitive to external environments, as new responsibilities and social expectations started to be assigned to these artistic institutions. Cultural sociologist Paul DiMaggio (1987) argued that this expanded purview, alongside a ballooning operational scale, triggered a growing demand for administrators and managers within the arts. Specifically, two functions became pronounced – external relationship management; and business planning and control – due to a growing interest in public appeal and fiduciary discretion.

DiMaggio suggested these two indicators ultimately led to the formalisation

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of how Arts Management borrows from neighbouring fields, refer to general theory and introductions by Yves Evard and François Colbert (2000), Derrick Chong (2002), Xia Xue Lee (2015) and Jonathan Paquette (2019).

<sup>11</sup> I refer to professionalisation as “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.152). This professionalisation effort involves defining “the production of producers” (Larson, 1977, p.49-52) so that a shared, in-group foundation for comprehension can be established to valorise their occupational subjectivity.



and professionalisation of “departments like marketing, public relations, development, and government relations that concern themselves with the museum’s relationships with its environment; and museum directors today devote more time to administration and public relations and less time to scholarship than did their predecessors” (Ibid: viii).

Scholars (DiMaggio, 1987; Palmer, 1998; Byrne, 2014) also observed these emerging requirements on fiscal solvency brought in high-ranking management roles as controller within the administration, making formerly fluid functions of management – including responsibilities for planning, organising, leading and controlling which were vaguely distributed across public officials, artist managers, assistants or curators – now streamlined under the new roles of arts managers.

Researchers (Peterson, 1986; Chong, 2002) argued that such a transition away from the previous impresario organisational style reflected a now more formalised set of responsibilities and labour division for the arts administrators, further separating operational tasks from artistic function as a result.

As the cultural field<sup>12</sup> had matured and its external environment complicated, cultural sociologists (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) found that competition to gain legitimacy became a driving force that urged arts organisations to copy the success stories and best practices of their peers, when it came to the template of administrative structure and operational rationale. This peer competition, in turn, accelerated the pace and reach of

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<sup>12</sup> When it comes to the definition of a “field”, I refer to cultural sociologist Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell (1983). The pair defined an organisational field as where “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p.148).

professionalisation among staff members, especially that of the management class in the form of an increasingly standardised bureaucracy<sup>13</sup> and business-minded mentality as a preferred model. A homogenous shape of governance and administrative logic, as a result, were widely adopted and cultural institutions become increasingly similar over time.<sup>14</sup>

### **Reconciling the Management Function Within Cultural Organisations.**

Since its modern development, Arts Management as an evolving discipline has endeavoured to legitimise its existence – by first theorising the gradual separation of administrative and management tasks as independent functions within cultural organisations, while simultaneously trying to cope with the tensions that stemmed from such restructuring of functions and power.

In particular, practitioners in arts management strove to fend off criticism from its most vehement critics, including that of the followers of early Institutional Critique, who, as I have noted, accused the advent of professional art managers as inapt to deal with the knowledge-intensive work that was unique to cultural institutions, where fluency in expert subject matters had been a general requirement before managerialism declared its own set of expertise. Arts administration as a system of cultural governance has also been constantly in the line of fire where leadership aptitude and institutional equity/ethics have

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<sup>13</sup> I refer to cultural theorist Raymond Williams's definition of bureaucracy (2013) as business methods, office organisation and procedures.

<sup>14</sup> DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified the mechanisms under which the structure of organisations became more homogenised and bureaucratized since the 1950s. This process was referred to by the pair as "institutional isomorphism" and are underpinned by three forms of influences including: "1) *coercive* isomorphism that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; 2) *mimetic* isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and 3) *normative* isomorphism, associated with professionalization" (p.150).

been called into question.<sup>15</sup>

Revisionist scholars in Arts Administration since the 1990s have attempted to reconcile these tensions by treating the practice of cultural management as a tool to address organisational problems and thus an intrinsic partner to the overall success of operational smoothness and artistic excellence. Arts management scholar William J. Byrnes (2014) summarised that the basic function of arts managers is to “organize human and material resources to help the organization achieve its stated goals and objectives” (Ch.1). This effort casted arts administrators as enabler and facilitator, critical to the process of artistic production.

Arts and business author Derrick Chong (202) shared a similar belief and identified three commitments which underpin the ethics of arts management, which are a dedication to “excellence and artistic integrity; to accessibility and audience development; and to public accountability and cost effectiveness” (p.2). In Chong’s words: “Managerialism is a tool rather than an end. As such, aesthetic knowledge is essential and acts to filter out the worst excesses of management rhetoric” (p.292).

With the introduction of organisational theories, recent scholarship in Arts Management, such as by public administration scholar Jonathan Paquette (2019), propelled the field by inviting critical examinations to different types of organisational structures, so that more nuanced readings could be enabled to address challenges and identify opportunities cultural institutions of distinctive natures face. This line of inquiry opened up more research on a variety of

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<sup>15</sup> For criticism on the inaptitude of arts managers as cultural technocrats, see artist Hans Haacke (1987; Bourdieu and Haacke, 1995). Critique on the ethics of the system of governance for cultural organisation, see art critic Holland Cotter (2014) and artist Andrea Fraser (2018).

business models (public, for-profit, non-profit, social enterprise, mixed model, etc.), artistic disciplines (museum, theatre, film, design, etc.), organisational sizes and revenue streams.

To sum up, the developmental history and changes in arts administration presents an opportunity for my PhD research to re-examine the function of the administrative capacity within the unique organisational type of a perennial event. My practice-centric approach aids new understanding of the figure of the art administrator beyond the classic separation of roles between managerial and artistic capacities.

**Management Hegemony vs. Logistical Underclass.** Research in arts management has historically placed more emphasis on leadership study and strategic management, largely due to its legacy (and ambition) in seeking to construct a universally-applicable knowledge base to reflect the developmental needs of a diverse portfolio of arts organisations. As a byproduct of such a tendency, management viewpoint is often lauded and positioned as an opposite to the operational<sup>16</sup> and the logistical.

This inclination has, as a result, given the voice of the administrative discipline to the management and the rights to represent the administration to the strategic. The language of *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration* (1998) typified such mentality which favoured management theory over logistical experience. The Encyclopedia defined the practice of “arts administration (arts management)” as:

The application of the five traditional management functions – planning, organizing, staffing, supervision, and controlling – to the facilitation of the

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<sup>16</sup> Arts management academic William J. Byrne (2014, Ch 1) identified three levels of administrators: operational, managerial (middle) and strategic.

production of the performing or visual arts and the presentation of the artists' work to audience... (Martin, 1998, p.128)

In stark contrast to such an idealised language of the leadership when it came to the definition of arts administration, business and management scholar Henry Mintzberg (1973) delineated the reality that characterised the working conditions of operational and logistical staff, which differed from the classical proposition of a strategic planner. Even almost five decades ago, Mintzberg complained that these operational administrators were frequently subject to a relentless working pace, where they were oftentimes only capable of reactionary behaviours due to the limitation of their circumstances. He argued:

The pressure of the managerial environment [of logistical administrators] does not encourage the development of reflective planners, the classical literature notwithstanding. The job breeds adaptive information-manipulators who prefer the live, concrete situation. The manager works in an environment of stimulus-response, and he develops in his work a clear preference for live action. (p.38)

Professor of strategic management Stefano Harney (2012) referred to this competition as “a battle between the strategy and the logistics”. This vivid account described an entrenched intra-organisational struggle between the strategic and the operational capacities.

This ongoing tension within the organisation points to a power imbalance that continues to privilege knowledge/planning of the management leadership, where the practice-grounded, the logistical and the operational become sidelined as an indirect casualty. While the legacy of leadership and strategic studies in Arts Management provides a useful tool to identify planning rationale and solutions, it often creates an illusion as if the administration is a congruent

entity that operates with a coherent (and monolithic), management-driven, top-down viewpoint. Such a portrayal leaves the reality of the logistical practitioners underrepresented and personal experience within the administrative arm often brushed over. In view of this ongoing tension, my research aims to give the limelight to the experience and worldview of the arts administrator on the frontline, for my investigation of the administrative turn in contemporary art.

### **Creative Economy and Placemaking: Biennials as Cultural Policy**

**Vehicles.** As an interdisciplinary field, research and practice in Arts Administration continuously seeks to validate the discipline by addressing ongoing organisational needs in the arts, by constantly expanding its concern. Since the 1990s during the formative years where the creative economy emerged as a new concept, it became a popular approach to borrow the language of cultural policy and diplomacy to demonstrate a more plugged-in socio-economic potential of the arts.

The rise of knowledge-based workers, referred to as the “creative class” by sociologist Richard Florida (2022), attracted global-wide government attention to the socio-economic benefits that came with the enablement of the creative communities, such as in the case of the Silicon Valley in California. The publication of the first internationalised report on the potential of creative economy by the United Nations (UN, 2008) further elevated this emerging sector as the next hot-shot in an increasingly globalised and interconnected cultural climate, where the creative economy was perfectly placed at “the crossroads of arts, culture, business and technology and use[s] intellectual capital as their primary input” (p.iv).

These socio-economic potentials promised by the creative industries propelled local governments to join a fervour of sectoral mapping, where

countries in East Asia including Taiwan were among the earliest movers.<sup>17</sup>

Viewed as a panacea, these top-down government initiatives were quickly popularised among cultural policy makers and urban planners, who now placed their trust in arts and culture as a driver to rejuvenate economic activities with an added value of social lubrication through a (re)discovery of local identity and civic pride.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) of the United States released a white paper in 2010 (Markusen & Gadwa), defining this phenomenon which combined civic and governmental efforts in the cultural sector as “creative place-making” (p.3). The study identified these place-making projects as often predicating on a given geographical community with multifold policy objectives that involved the invigoration of local economy, improvement in public safety and construction of community cohesion with the creation of a collective identity.

Central to these place-making initiatives, cultural sites and recurring large-scale events such as biennials and festivals took up the role of ready-made platforms for government agencies to activate local partnerships. This had further absorbed the creative world through large-scale cultural events, into a critical aspect of policy planning, as the sector was pitched as a guarantee to bring in a broad interest from across the business world and government departments, by providing a big tent for collaborations from trade/investment,

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<sup>17</sup> The British Council has been active in propagating a global discourse of the creative industries, by co-commissioning sectoral mapping studies and providing toolkits for cultural policy makers across its strategic engagement zones / countries. For instance, a British Council commissioned research by BOP Consulting (2010) sought to give a potted history of the creative economy and provide a sample of best practices for aspiring cultural policy makers to adapt. Similar sector mapping exercises sought to not only provide evidence base for policy buy-in, but also contributed to legitimising the importance of the cultural and creative sector in governance.

tourism, export, education, to name a few. Consequently, policy-makers had increasingly looked to biennials as a subcategory of festivals and events, as a powerful engine of cultural tourism which contributed to the global prestige of the host city.

Such a policy preference gradually made the biennial platform a go-to strategy for a wide array of local governments. Large-scale perennial exhibitions as a result quickly spread across the globe. Among which, a wave of government-backed biennials, sweeping through the Asia Pacific in the 1990s, became a phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Scholars (Filipovic & Vanderlinden, 2005; Smith, 2012) attributed this rapid proliferation of biennials in Asia to a widely-shared hope to take ownership of identity-shaping through cultural participation. Researchers (Filipovic, 2010; Clarke, 2014; Gardner & Green, 2016) argued that this boom was, on the one hand, an ideological expansion of modernisation and neoliberalism, and, on the other hand, carried an aspiration to re-imagine geopolitical futures through cultural exchange and regional alliance in a post-Cold War era.

While the place-making approach highlighted the interconnectivity of creative economy and the potential of the exhibitionary system on a policy level, the top-down government language and the utilitarian rationale created an overly simplified image of the biennial organisers, as if they were merely an ideological extension of their public funders. Such a view when considered in isolation risks pigeonholing the figure of the administrator operating biennial

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<sup>18</sup> Contemporary art biennials such as the Taipei Biennial (whose predecessor started in 1992, officially changed its name to the current form in 1996 and adopted its present internationalised group survey show format in 1998), Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane (1993), Gwangju (1995), Shanghai (1996), Busan (1998), Fukuoka Triennale (1999) and numerous other successions are considered by scholars (Vogel, 2010; Gardner & Green, 2016) as the product of this era.



events as instrumentalised vessels without much agency. This preconception failed to reflect the complicated and often shifting dynamics between the biennial administration, its public funders and its constituents. Looking beyond a utilitarian policy language, I propose in this PhD research to examine the knowledge agency of arts administrators as the focus of my study.

***Where Does the Administrative Turn in Contemporary Sit Within Exhibitionary Knowledge Traditions?***

Scholars (O'Neill, 2007; Filipovic, 2010; Gardner & Green, 2016) agreed that biennials as a formalised institution have since the 1980s become a dominant vehicle of exhibition production and a prominent site where primary discourses in contemporary art are constructed. Developed in parallel, curatorial studies gradually matured into an independent field and established itself as a new profession in contemporary art. During the same period, the research of biennial history often dubbed as “biennialology”<sup>19</sup> developed into an elevated subdiscipline within the study of exhibition history, by featuring large-scale perennial international exhibitions as a distinguished genre.

To validate curatorial practice as an independent discipline, early accounts in curatorial studies sought to legitimise the then emerging curatorial practice in several notable ways, including:

- Creating and theorising distinctions of curatorial function from that of the artists and of the administrators,
- Consolidating their cultural authority by evacuating it of administrative tasks,

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<sup>19</sup> The term *biennialology* was coined by Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø (2010) to describe the spread of biennials and to analyse the socio-historical root and impact of such a phenomenon. This field is considered as part of a wider attempt to theorise the study of contemporary biennials as an independent genre.

- Proactively positioning curators as research-heavy, creative agents.

In his early essay which analysed this change where curatorial capacity morphed from a practice into a discourse, dubbed the “curatorial turn”<sup>20</sup>, curator and educator Paul O’Neill (2007) laid out how the discourse constructed its legitimacy by separating itself from artistic gestures through firming up its theoretical basis with first-person narratives and curatorial self-positioning during its nascent stage of development.

The advent of Curatorial Studies as a validated field caused quite a stir in the contemporary art scene, as authorial voice and symbolic power were forcefully redistributed to curators from previous holders such as artists and art critics. O’Neill observed that one side effect of “such a divisive attempt to detach the activity of curating from that of artistic production results in resistance to recognition of the interdependence of both practices within the field of cultural production. Moreover, the mediation of hybrid cultural agents through the means of the public exhibition is overlooked” (p.14). In agreement with O’Neill, I argue that this early curatorial self-crowning process led to the neglect of other functions within the exhibitionary system, including that of the administrative capacity. Such an ongoing self-differentiation of the curatorial properties in its quest for professionalisation, continues to engineer a distance from the administrative tasks.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul O’Neill (2007) coined the term “curatorial turn” to describe a gradual turning away since the 1960s from criticism and arrangement of artworks within the exhibitions to an increased emphasis on the discourse of the exhibition as a subject matter. This shift in focus from artworks to exhibitions has led to a gradual professionalisation of contemporary curating as an independent discourse that saw its heyday in the 1990s. Riding on the proliferating biennials as the main sites to exercise the curator’s newly-gained legitimacy, this then emerging cohort of cultural workers has successfully established themselves as a usurper of cultural authority (from previous gatekeepers such as art critics) in a globalising contemporary art scene (pp.13-14).

This phenomenon of curatorial self-distinguishment was also picked up by curator Kate Fowle (2012), who observed that the former life of curating was “behind the scenes, pragmatic, and ostensibly service oriented” but the role of contemporary curators “has been professionalised and given independence from bureaucratic mandates, with a ‘coming of age’ occurring in the 1990s” (pp. 8-9).

This increased distinction of artistic activities, and gradual abdication from administrative responsibilities developed in parallel to early efforts in the curatorial discourse to establish curators as research-heavy, creative agents. In one example, curator Lis Wells (2007) cited her personal experience and argued that the primary responsibilities of curators were in the project development phase of an exhibition. To Wells, the development phase was composed mainly of a host of research activities that encompassed the investigation, discovery and critical reflection of a research theme to ultimately create compelling narratives with enticing visual presentations. Depending on the shape and emphasis of the exhibition, Wells made the case that the curatorial remit<sup>21</sup> could also concern a degree of liaison with intra- and inter-organisational actors, primarily regarding projects in service of knowledge-production – e.g. catalogue publication or speaker invitation for programming, etc.

Wells’s attempt to identify curators’ scope of work (predominantly in the service of knowledge production) and their timeline of engagement (research and development) is helpful as a tool to interpret *what has been carved out* from

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<sup>21</sup> To Wells (2007), curatorial work was an exercise to comprehensively evaluate variants that have the potential to change the meaning and focus of the artworks, specifically in terms of the artworks’ relation with the space and the audience, putting factors such as venue, climate, light, safety, visitor flow, audience make-up, etc. into consideration.

the curatorial remit as the curatorial capacity established itself as a professionalised discipline. I argue that while direct literature on the administrative turn is thin, traces of administrative changes can be pieced together through these shadows of the morphing curatorial ambit.

Curator and educator Sophia Phoca (2007) provided another example of how the figure and voice of the administrator (or rather the spectre and voicelessness of the administrative) can be observed from the leftover of curators' job description during the maturation of curatorial practice. In her account of an experimental co-curating project in collaboration with Tate Modern in 2004, Phoca and her team encountered a dilemma where they struggled to articulate the distinction of their work from that of the museum administrators, especially as the project intended to decentralise curating authority from single-source authorial voice by dissipating such power to a collective network. The curatorial team scrambled over how best to maintain a critical distance from the administrative arm, even though their administrative counterparts had direct power to set the themes and geographical focus of the show, in addition to vetoing work selections. She asked an existential question: "Would our roles be designated to those of 'behind the scenes' managers, organisers or match-funding facilitators without any artistic or conceptual input?" (p.47).

The dilemma Phoca and the curatorial team identified points to the challenge and efforts of Curatorial Studies to continuously assert legitimacy within the exhibitionary system by creating a symbolic uniqueness (or rather supremacy) over the rest of the exhibitionary actors. In the cases of both Phoca and Wells, they had done so by not only clinging on to a knowledge-based curatorial agency, but also an active creation of further separation from the

administrative capacity. Such an emphasis continues to deepen a schism where administrators are discussed only in relational terms as the other; their role minimised and thus excluded from artistic and conceptual merits.

More recent research in Curatorial Studies attempted to square with a coming-to-term with the contribution of the enabling network that is essential to the success of exhibition making. Nonetheless still curatorial-centric, theorist Jean-Paul Martinon (2013) treated the system of administration as “para-curatorial” as they were considered secondary events and activities that accompany the exhibition. Late French philosopher Bruno Latour’s witty description (2007) animatedly captures this strife: “[t]echnology is epistemology’s poor relative” (p.138). Researcher Ines Moreira (2013) argued that such a curatorial-centric mentality continued to subjugate the “technical, pragmatic and non-discursive” activities as the “poor relative” of knowledge-production within the exhibitionary system (p.226).

While Curatorial Studies established itself as separate from its administrative sister, this has set the stage for a parallel development: scholars (Charlesworth, 2007; Hylton, 2007) observed that job opportunities for curators have increased and curatorial skillsets become highly sought after. The booming biennial scene since the 1980s provided an ideal platform for curators to exercise their newly-gained legitimacy. Credited as authors and creators of these perennial group shows, curators as a result has been increasingly elevated and their position secured within the contemporary art circuit. As cultural institutions dedicated to contemporary art burgeoned and international group exhibitions proliferated, the marketisation of curatorial expertise soon followed the boom of job opportunities in the footsteps of a globalised biennial economy. Researchers (O’Neill, 2007; Thea & Micchelli, 2009; Clarke, 2014;

Gardner & Green, 2016) argued that cultural intellectuals such as art critics formerly without official affiliation started to join contemporary art institutions, wearing the new hat of in-house curator<sup>22</sup>, while a network of independent curators began to work with organisations and biennials on a project basis as freelance actors<sup>23</sup>, offering their curatorial expertise and international network.

Researchers Anthony Gardner and Charles Green expressed their reservation to the mixed ramification of the freelance/outsourcing phenomenon of cultural programming that gradually takes hold of the global biennial circuit. The pair called out a structural imbalance that followed this reorganisation of labour/expertise, as a result of the rise of independent curators:

Behind the scenes, the new “world art” of contemporary art – inclusive of art and experimental practices from around the world but structured by the somehow still-idealistic curatorial class of biennial organisers on semi-permanent safari from day jobs in the world’s major art museums – was very obviously starting to replace the North Atlantic canon that still dominated art-historical discourse and art markets across the globe.

(Gardner and Green, 2016: 263)

While literature is rich in accounting for the vibrancy of experimental projects and a boom in alternative spaces as direct beneficiaries of this blossoming

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Tinari, now director of UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing, and Hanru Hou, now artistic director of MAXXI in Rome started their career from as art critics, before transitioning in-house to a curatorial capacity.

<sup>23</sup> It is a common practice to retain independent curators as freelance actors when appointing curatorial and artistic team, among major perennial showcases. For instance, independent curator Christina Li and the former Para-site Education and Public Programme curator Freya Chou were appointed as the guest curator of Hong Kong’s presentation at Venice Biennale in 2019 and 2022 respectively; or in the case of veteran curator Maria Lind for Gwangju Biennial 2016 to name just a few.

freelance curatorial capacity, documentations related to the footprint of curatorial professionalisation on the administrative apparatus remain short. I argue that further investigation on the reorganisation of works among the administrative arm is needed to fully understand the impact of the rise of independent curators and the professionalisation of the curatorial capacity, and go on to show what the benefits are of arguing this. This further study on the underrepresented administrative arm through the lens of the arts administrator is much needed to fully grapple with the changes in the exhibitionary system that took place over the past few decades, to comprehensively identify how knowledge production has shifted in the ways they are supported.

**Turning Towards the Infrastructural.** In recent years, Curatorial Studies as a maturing discipline has morphed into an ever-widening subject. Its emphasis has shifted from “curating” to “the curatorial” where socio-political frameworks such as institutional process, functions, structure and hierarchies have been subsumed into the legitimate concern of the curators. This expansion of focus aided the unveiling of the para-curatorial, by shedding light on the labour that falls into the grey areas which belong to a collaborative undertaking of exhibition making. Curator Maria Lind foregrounded such a transition from curating as an activity of exhibition-making, to the focus on “the curatorial” as an ontological politics of the practice. Lind stated:

“Curating” is “business as usual” in terms of putting together an exhibition, organising a commission, programming a screening series, et cetera. “The curatorial” goes further, implying a methodology that takes art as its starting point but then situates it in relation to specific contexts, times, and questions in order to challenge the status quo. And it does so from various positions, such as that of a curator, an editor, an educator, a

communications person, and so on. This means that the curatorial can be employed, or performed, by people in a number of different capacities within the ecosystem of art. (Hoffmann and Lind, Dec. 2011 – Jan. 2012)

Lind's positioning of "the curatorial" acknowledged the presence of curatorial faculty beyond those directly involved with the activities of curating. As a result, this curatorial consciousness can be manifested and performed in various capacities within the ecosystem of art, including that of the administrative.

Art historian Terry Smith (2012) echoed Lind's proposition on the curatorial consciousness and described a changing condition where curatorial practice is now performed. Smith argued that this expanding curatorial consciousness is now witnessed in "a number of activities that have been to date considered subsidiary, feeder, educational, or publicity – roles that may or may not be carried out by the curator, depending on time, inclination, and the availability of others to take them on" (p.48).

Taiwanese curator and educator Hongjohn Lin (May 2022) further posited this shift as an inclination to reveal and intervene in the metapolitics of institutional forces. To Lin, this change in attitude not only implied an intrinsic transdisciplinarity in the domain of "the curatorial" but signaled a gradual coming-to-term with the institutionalisation of the curatorial practice as a fixture of governmentality in contemporary art.

Recent scholarship in tandem with the broadened view on curatorial consciousness provided an alternative approach to re-examine the support mechanism of the exhibitionary system. Curatorial theorist Jean-Paul Martinon (2013) in his book *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* dedicated a section titled "Stages" to not only complicate the relationship of an art project with its contexts such as locality and duration, but also to introduce the idea of the



“backstage” in order to highlight the amount of works that took place before the curtain is raised.

Curator and architect Ines Moreira (2013) plotted a similar change in perspective that delineated a shift of gear from approaching exhibition-making as discursive and static, to processual and material. She gave poignant references to the exponential works in the support of an exhibition project and provides a framework to understand the role of the backstage in relation to the project. Albeit often overlooked, these labours cover the totality of the production phase in the form of “non-representational” works:

Exhibition-making is a technical, pragmatic and non-discursive extension of curatorial projects. Most of the time, it is understood as a ‘poor relative’ of research, and as its uncomfortable material and practical annexe.

Exhibition-making fundamentally resembles other production processes: planning, logistics, setting-up, installation and construction. Its processual condition recalls a backstage, both as a production space and as a non-representational practice.

A backstage supports the construction and realization of projects. It shares the same condition of building sites in architecture and engineering. They are spaces of profound processuality: building sites of ephemeral architectures. The notion of backstage (as in theatres or in music stages) refers to the technical and logistic support of a show. A backstage refers, as well, to a state of incompleteness, an unfinished place where ‘the making’ takes place. A backstage generates exhibitions, extends artist’s studios and creates exhibitionary structures, from spatial installation to scenographies.

(p.226)

The focus on processuality opened up the fabrication period as unstable and opaque – both in form and in meaning. These approaches moving toward a holistic understanding of what in actuality constitutes the ontological and operational sphere of exhibition-making, is helpful to situate the focus of my PhD study on the figure of the arts administrator, when it comes to how the administrative function operating behind-the-scenes can be conceptualised.

Recent research in biennial studies also demonstrated a similar tendency to expand its concern from the study of exhibitions to a focus beyond the “start-stop” period of biennial events, by examining the processual footprint and social impact of a biennial. This has enabled new discussions to embed biennials in their social context/ecosystem and look at the potential of the platform as agents that can facilitate systematic change. Specially the efficacy of a biennial to animate and contribute to the cultural infrastructure of the host city has become a spotlight for recent biennial scholarship, where an emphasis was given to transcend “the national or localised mandates of the traditional contemporary art museum and addresses the ‘stop-start’ problem of biennial structures that celebrate a kind of ‘urgently epic temporary scenario’” (Smith, 2012, p.292).

Researchers Antony Gardner and Charles Green (2013) argued that this revisionist view was of particular significance to understand the institutional role of biennials and the importance of their organisers in the global south, as the duo believed such a focus on long-term infrastructure building could help permeate a wider post-colonial paradigm shift in the discourse and methodology of knowledge production, stating:

[The] recurrence [of biennials] might also catalyse new cultural infrastructure within each biennial’s host city: infrastructure that was both

conceptual (through access to and the generation of new theories, practices and politics of art) and material (through new exhibition venues, audiences and sponsors), and which could stimulate new manifestations of 'locality' during the struggles for decolonisation throughout many of these regions of the South. (p. 453)

Art historian Terry Smith (2012) considered a similar change in attitude that orientated toward infrastructure enablement in the production and curating of biennials as an "infrastructural shift". Such an "infrastructural shift" included wide-ranging concerns over stewarding software-hardware readiness, to producing issue-based exhibitionary actions, which covers ways to sustain local-regional-international research networks.

To see infrastructure-enabling through, Smith called for a new kind of organiser (and, what I would propose, administrative mentality) who he dubbed "infrastructural activists". Such a change in perspective signified a gradual rebalancing of spotlight and legitimacy from "curatorial heroes" to "process shapers" and "program builders". Smith declared:

Whereas collection builders and exhibition makers were once the models of curatorial heroism, they have been joined by those...we might dub "process shapers" and "program builders". Those with the capacity to see large-scale pictures, local needs, and the complex connectivities between these scales, who can track art's movement and shape its potential as well as its potential effects through the creation of sustained programs that are committed to experimentality, to opening out possibilities for all participants in art-making. At times, probably often, these require an institutional location, at others they seek freedom from even the most permissive structure. These people we might dub 'infrastructural activists.' (p.293)

Smith went to the extent of declaring “the infrastructural” as the new focus of para-curatorial, following the shift where the previously separated practices of art-making, exhibition planning, criticism and management had become ever-more integrated and self-reflexive. This attitude change in the community of practitioners<sup>24</sup> paves the way for my PhD research to investigate and secure a more holistic role for the administrative capacity, as a significant aspect of the infrastructural.

Echoing a similar sentiment to Smith, the first volume of the *Future Art Ecosystem* report published by the Serpentine Galleries in July 2020 advanced the infrastructural argument by providing a broader scope of examination. The report drew attention to a chronic lack of investment in the research and development of infrastructure as a universal problem within the art industry. As the practice of art-making had gradually morphed from single authorship to a production-team model, closer to the film industry, the report asked for urgent scholarship that addresses the complexity and need of the backstage.

To better illustrate what constituted essential infrastructure in this new age, the Serpentine report offered its operational definition of the “art industry” in an attempt to pinpoint the comprehensive scope needed in infrastructural research and development, stating:

The term “art industry” is used here to designate that part of the art world in

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<sup>24</sup> A community of practice refers to a group of people that “share[s] a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p.1) It points to the motivations and activities within a domain, where members of the community engage in collective learning of a specific practice. These activities can be either formal or informal, physical or virtual and often with the intention to problem-solve, request information, seek experience, reuse assets, coordinate and synergise, build arguments, grow confidence, discuss developments, document projects, pay visitations, map knowledge and identity gaps (p.3).

which cultural projects are developed, produced and financialised, and their outputs distributed, stored and protected. The art industry thus comprises the 'backstage' elements of the existing contemporary art ecosystem.

Artists, curators and cultural institutions regularly transit between the public facing aspects of the art world – where art is presented and discussed – and the art industry, but the latter includes many practices that remain unseen by audiences, such as insurance practices, security arrangements and freight logistics. (Ch.2)

This operational definition is helpful to predicate the administrative implication and intellectual process that underpins every aspect of the technical, financial and operational infrastructure of cultural projects. The call to action by the report also served as a natural building block for my PhD research to anchor the administrative turn in contemporary art within the broader concern of *how artistic production can be better supported*.

**Changes in Art-Making: A Rethink of Institutional Practices.** As analysed by the *Future Art Ecosystem* report of the Serpentine Gallery, the technology and modes of art-making have gone through seismic changes in the past few decades, where the artistic practice has become increasingly tech-heavy, site-responsive, socially-engaged and performance-based. While these changes are often discussed in art history with a focus on medium, authorship, meanings of site and the role of audience, it leaves the impact of these shifts on the administrative apparatus undocumented.

Even though direct research on the system of administration is limited, traces of the administrative turn can be pieced together from recent literature in Art History and elsewhere, should the researcher start looking with and operating from an administrative wavelength. It can provide hints at trends

regarding how the support network has responded to the evolutions in art production and exhibition making.

Central to the paradigm shift in art-making has been a transition toward artworks which are not static and self-evolve over time, whose upkeep and stewardship became increasingly dependent on resource networks outside of the museum system. These changes of art-making towards self-evolving and non-static have sparked a wave of research and self-adjustment among practitioners to revise the current playbook to better accommodate these new creative practices. This movement was encapsulated in a coming-to-term with a classical institutional impulse towards ownership as a colonial endeavour, manifested in the museum's extractionist-oriented practice in archiving and collection. For instance, the focus of Tate Modern's international conference *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum* (2022) held the view that this colonial legacy "as processes, mindsets and tools which have been developed within museums...[have] bolster[ed] principles of ownership, knowledge-holding and fixity which are intrinsic to traditional museum collecting, whilst shifting power away from the artist and artwork, stifling evolution, emotion and multiplicity".

Tate Modern's proposition of the various ways new art-making practices challenged existing museum playbooks pointed to a larger question of how contemporary art practices have been fast-changing and the way the support ecosystem, epitomised by the arts administrator, needs to adapt in "process, mindset and tools" in response to such changes. This shift in mentality also paves the way for my PhD research to contribute to more research in the system, method, and function of the administrative capacity as the basis to further the discussion on better ways to support the fast-evolving art-making

practices in contemporary art, where the figure of the administrator is a vital and integral component.

***Situating the Administrative Turn in Taipei Biennial: A Publicly-Funded, Museum-Based, Contemporary Art Biennial***

Taiwan, the Republic of China (R.O.C.) is a country with a 23-million population and a functioning representative democracy. At the end of WWII, the island was handed over to the Nationalist party *Kuomintang*, the then governing authority of China after fifty years of Japanese colonisation and had subsequently served as the bastion for the Nationalist government during their retreat in 1949 in the Chinese civil war against the Communist Party.

The island welcomed a peaceful transition to a full representative democracy in 1996 with the first elected president, after ending one-party rule with the lifting of martial law in 1987. Although its international status remains contested by the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan has been a *de facto* self-governing state which has official diplomatic ties with fifteen countries of the United Nations (UN) member states and unofficial relations with more than fifty UN member states through representative offices and consulates (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROC., n.d.).

Similar to its counterparts in the biennial boom in Asia during the 1990s, Taipei Biennial is organised by the municipal Taipei Fine Arts Museum (hereafter TFAM) – the first modern and contemporary art museum in Taiwan. Located in the capital city, TFAM was founded in 1983 as a critical pillar of the national infrastructure plan to enhance the cultural life of Taiwanese citizens (TFAM, n.d., Mission & Vision). With an operating budget of NTD\$ 438 million

(approximately USD\$ 15 million)<sup>25</sup> TFAM receives direct municipal funding as a subsidiary agency under the City's Department of Cultural Affairs<sup>26</sup> and answers to legislative oversight from the Taipei City Council. It is an actively collecting museum with a dynamic in-house curating and production capacity and shoulders the organisation of flagship programmes including Taiwan's representation at the Venice Biennale of Art<sup>27</sup> and an annual juried award, titled Taipei Art Awards in acknowledgement of local excellence, on top of holding the Taipei Biennial every other year.

Scholars (Lai, 2008; Vickers, 2010; Schoeber, 2014; McIntyre, 2015) observed the vision of TFAM management and director appointment are often the results of cultural-political negotiation and civic compromises in a representative democracy. Since TFAM's founding, researchers (Lai, 2008; Chen, 2016) argued the museum has always concern with how modern (and later contemporary) culture shapes and reflects national identity. According to its official website, the Museum aims:

to promote the preservation, research, development and popularization of Taiwanese modern and contemporary art; to keep abreast of global trends and establish a variety of channels for exchange; to raise the general public's understanding of and participation in modern art; to help Taiwanese

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<sup>25</sup> Figures from the 2020 budget approved by the City Council (TFAM, 2020). Among the NTD\$ 438 million, NTD\$ 180 million was allocated to core activities including exhibition, education, research and publication, collection and marketing; NTD\$ 159 million to general management and NTD\$ 98 million to facilities and others.

<sup>26</sup> Taipei City's Department of Cultural Affairs (DoCA) is a new agency started in 1999 to streamline the capital's cultural initiatives. Researcher (Lai, 2008) argued this move signifies an expanding role cultural policy plays in the municipal governance. As a result, the supervisory responsibility to oversee TFAM was moved from the Department of Education to DoCA.

<sup>27</sup> The architectural showcase of Taiwan at the Venice Biennial is organised by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (NTMoFA) in Taichung.



modern and contemporary art to thrive; and to cultivate fuller artistic attainment in the people, in the hope of forming a contemporary society with aesthetic sense and cultural perception. (TFAM, n.d., Mission & Vision)

Headed by one director and a deputy director, the Museum is composed of five departments and three offices, including departments responsible for research, exhibition, collection and acquisition, education and public services, marketing and public relations, as well as offices that look after administrative services, accounting, government ethics and human resources.

Whereas the directors are appointed by the municipal government, museum staff belong to a centralised civil service bureaucracy with a dual-track hiring system. Considered as government workers under such double-channelled hiring practice, the museum staff consists of two groups of professionals: career civil officials via the Ministry of Civil Service and Ministry of Examination, and professional hires with comparable contracts to that of universities and other research/educational institutions. Official staff count totals 125 members (TFAM, n.d., Organization Structure). Other contingent workers, temporary personnel and technical team are hired on a project-by-project basis.

Taipei Biennial is a telling case that provides a window into a largely East-Asian model in terms of resource planning. Art historian John Clarke (2014) argued that biennials in Asia, often held by and in public museums, shouldered the tasks of educating the public on *what contemporary art is*, since contemporary art discourse as a self-evolving concept might be new to the local audience and the field as a whole at a nascent state of development.

Clarke pinpointed two traits that biennials in Asia shared: firstly, accountability to and conflict with their public funders – namely how much sway local government had in the programme direction and how cultural success was

evaluated in different forms of political governance. Secondly, the direct implication of Asian biennials had on the art market through public collecting practices, since these public cultural institutions often collected works commissioned and exhibited through their respective biennial platforms. The exhibitionary system and the gatekeeping process of curator and artwork selection were therefore intertwined with the ethics of public collecting. Clarke criticised:

It is often thought that biennials function as an international publicity site or sales point for those who otherwise would not have an advertising platform. On the one hand, biennials manifest the hidden hand of a local cultural bureaucracy and local taste. On the other hand, because biennials' entrepreneur-managers are drawn almost entirely from those who have become prominent in Euramerican curating, the advent of particular artists might suggest the hidden hand of the art market as it operates through the preferences of curators who, by the inclusion of an artwork, determine its cultural value and sometimes serve as the cultural capital acquisitions manager for the art objects bought by collectors and public museums.

(p.21)

Similar criticism towards the equity of a biennial event and how the local taste of the organiser became intertwined with the international art market, pointed to the paradox of publicly funded perennial events, in terms of balancing the expectation of different stakeholders and finding the best approach to uphold public (and local) interest in their event administration.

Scholar (Bryan-Wilson, 2003; Clarke, 2014; Gardner & Green, 2016) observed that these concerns primarily surrounded the equity of artist and curator selection, as perennial showcases offer enormous career potential for

newcomers to ascend to a global stage and became launching pads for curatorial and artistic stardom. Controversies over representation understandably occurred when it came to whether or not – and to what degree – the local art community benefited from the Biennial’s cultural-economic ripple effect.

Operating in a functioning democracy, critics (Solomon, 1998; Shan, 2001; Chang, 2014) suggested that the Taipei Biennial stood as the one place in the Chinese-speaking world as a significant forum of display and debate in Asia, where contemporary topics could be openly discussed, critiqued and developed without concerns of censorship or political prosecution. In this geo-political context, comparative analysis of the Taipei Biennial with its regional counterparts in Gwangju, Shanghai and Singapore have also been a popular approach to contextualise the development of the Biennial alongside its cultural and political peers.

As a flagship programme of nation-building where the city continues to (re)imagine and (re)engineer its identity, the Taipei Biennial and its evolution manifested the organiser’s responses to Taipei’s cultural standing among its global peers. Scholars (Schoeber, 2014; Gardner & Green, 2016) suggested that the organisation of the Biennial was a normalisation effort<sup>28</sup> to legitimise the political footing of the contested nation, while the internationalisation of its outlook was often a direct response to the island’s frustration with geo-political struggles.

As a part of its strategy, the Biennial’s curatorial model and programming

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<sup>28</sup> Researchers Antony Gardner and Charles Green (2016, p.245) compared the Taipei Biennial to large-scale international survey exhibitions in Palestine, speaking of both events as inevitable political symbols to normalise the existence and autonomy of the host nation.

content frequently adapted to the organiser's rationale. In 1996 under the exhibition title *The Quest for Identity*, Taipei Biennial was transformed from its predecessor of a salon-style survey show (1992), to having a clear mission to define the contour of the island's burgeoning cultural scene amidst a nativist movement that followed the lifting of martial law. Reaping the result of rapid modernisation and economic success, the Biennial in 1998 invited Japanese curator Fumio Nanjo as the guest curator of its first internationalised edition. The model then shifted to dual curatorship from 2000 to 2010, pairing an international curator with a Taiwanese counterpart, and readopted single curatorship from 2012 to 2016 and dual-curatorship in 2018 and 2020.

To the significance of the biennial operation to the development of Taiwanese contemporary art ecosystem, TFAM senior researcher and curator Fang-Wei Chang (2014) observed:

For the domestic ecosystem, Taipei Biennial not only provides Taiwan with the latest trends and information at the forefront of global contemporary art, but also acts as an incubator for arts administrators and art professionals, through the process of exhibition organisation...It is a critical event and field where the cultural identity of Taiwan is in constant (re)making. (p.103)

Chang's comment was corroborated by scholars (Lai, 2008; Chang, 2014; Schoeber, 2014) who agreed that under the TFAM resource umbrella, the Biennial had played an important role in enabling a career pipeline (both within and outside of the Museum) for the local community of practitioners.

Over the course of the Biennial's twenty years of development, scholarship in Art Criticism, Curatorial Studies, Museology and Art Education have been rich around each edition. However, despite a recognition of the Biennial as a significant incubator and cultural infrastructure, local and regional scholarships

are still largely restricted to an exhibition/curatorial-focused approach, often limited to the content of each iteration or concerns over curatorial selection mechanism and artist representation, leaving the discussions on the system, method and function of the administrative capacity under researched.

### **Research Approach**

By situating the administrative turn of contemporary art in the current knowledge and practice landscape, I researched and analysed debates in arts and cultural management, attitude shifts within the knowledge fields of contemporary arts, as well as ongoing research on the Taipei Biennial within a local and regional context. The following section will lay out my personal approach to this PhD thesis and delineate how I propose to unravel the study of the figure of the arts administrator, by way of the case of the Taipei Biennial.

### **Research Question**

This PhD research sets out to answer the following question: What can the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial reveal about the ways in which the support network of contemporary art has changed in its institution, methodology and function?

### **Methodology**

To pinpoint, document and analyse the “administrative turn in contemporary art” with the case study of the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial, this PhD research took a qualitative approach, including a systematic literature review, coupled with archival analysis, interviews and site visitations. With an aim to contribute to the evidence base and theoretic proposition about arts administrators, the focus of data collection was devoted to capture the experience and worldview of the marginalised frontline workers. As a practice-centric study, the analysis of this PhD emphasised individual agency and their

potentiality to catalyse change, to the ways in which the support network of contemporary art operates.

**Systematic Literature Review and Archival Analysis.** The first phase of my PhD research focused on a systematic review of previous literature on Arts Management, Cultural Policy, Curatorial Studies, Arts History, Exhibitions Studies, and Museology, to map out the knowledge legacy and stakeholders in the ecosystem that support the organisation of the Taipei Biennial. The process included a review of past research and ongoing debates in the knowledge fields in cultural management, contemporary arts and about the Taipei Biennial, as discussed in the Introduction so far. In addition to secondary materials, it also involved an examination of organiser-produced, first-hand materials, from resource and strategic plans (legal protocols, white papers, budget plan, annual report, personnel structure, committees and other decision-making processes) to modes of self-archiving (catalogue, official audio-visual documentation, digital footprint), as well as investigating the means of dissemination and mediation (channels and format of engagement).

The online archive of a retrospective show, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Biennial, titled *Declaration/Documentation, Taipei Biennial 1996-2014*, served as the foundation of this PhD research, as it diligently digitised publications crucial to the scope of this study. These include archival materials covering the span of twenty years since its genesis, such as exhibition press announcements, programme rundown, virtual tours and site plans, exhibition catalogues, print collaterals (e.g. exhibition brochures, key visuals, peripheral souvenirs), to name but a few.

This PhD research also drew on previous literature and exhibition reviews to map the system, methodology and function of the administrative capacity.

News reports and commentaries on organisational conflict and controversial projects served as a main resource to survey public responses toward the Biennial administration and the administrative rationale it imbued. I conducted a discourse analysis of news releases, public statements and annual report summaries that addressed these points of conflicts, in order to illustrate changes in the institutional principles, strategy and role of the administrative capacity.

**Interviews and Site Visits.** Adding narrative and texture to desk-based mapping and archival analysis, interviews with both current and former administrators at the Taipei Biennial were conducted as primary sources that provide first-hand evidence to the worldview of the administrator. This includes two written responses and eight online interview sessions, totaling approximately twelve hours of recorded conversations.

The interviewees selection involved a range of administrative functions and work experience levels, to provide a plethora of voices. Anonymised, the interviews were semi-structured and focused on questions to identify change in practice. (A list of interview questions can be found in the Appendix.)

These semi-structured interviews were supplemented by an ethnographic / observational approach with site visits and attendance of the 2020 Biennial programmes. Field notes were compiled for analysis and cross-checked against information collected from the interviews and desk-based review.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic which had put international travel and in-person engagement to a halt, the majority of my data collection, including desk-based review and interviews, was conducted online to mitigate the risk of research delay. This unforeseeable disruption to a degree affected the breadth and scale I initially set out to achieve with the interview data capture, but I

remain grateful to my informants who agreed on participating in my research despite these constraints.

As a former head of communications and digital services myself, this PhD research also drew from my personal experience and observations during my three-year stint with the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, organiser of the Taipei Biennial. Personal insights, knowledge and hunches guiding this PhD research were cross-referenced and substantiated with additional sources from the interviews, observations, and desk-based analysis.

### ***Chapters Overview***

This PhD thesis proposes to explore the ways in which the support network has changed in its system, strategy and function of the administrative capacity at the Taipei Biennial. To capture this administrative turn in contemporary art, this PhD research examines the shifts in three folds – Chapter 1 on the turns in the institutional principles of the administration, Chapter 2 on the shifts in administrative methodology, and Chapter 3 on the changing role and function of the administrators. Through these thematic strands, this research would frame, explain and seek to transform the discussions of the figure of the arts administrator.

Below is a breakdown of the issues covered in each chapter:

The **Introduction** chapter lays out the current debates and knowledge traditions to situate the administrative turn in contemporary art and offer a roadmap for the study of the figure of the arts administrator proposed by my PhD research.

To establish changes in the system of art administration, **Chapter 1 The Administration** traces the epistemological traditions underpinning the Taipei Biennial. It tracks the shifts in three sets of institutional logics, including that of



the logic of the nation state, the logic of the public museum and the logic of the biennial.

Pinpointing watershed moments of paradigm shifts in the epistemes which shape the system of the Biennial administration, Chapter 1 identifies how the target of administration has changed in terms of its subject matter. Through following the changes in *what is the purpose of culture when being publicly administered*, it investigates how the various goals of cultural planning as the target of Arts Management reveals about the institutional rationale underpinning the system of the Biennial administration.

In parallel to the investigation of how the purpose of managing culture has changed, the chapter maps the course of professionalisation for Arts Administration through the changes in institutional design, which underpins the systems of cultural administration, museum management and biennial management. It focuses on how Arts Administration as a profession establishes itself within the context of the Taipei Biennial. This approach aims to illustrate not only the ways in which the process of professional self-instituting for Arts Administration has become a part of the ongoing nation-building quest for Taiwan, but also how this process of institution development functions as an author to the national identity storytelling through administrating culture.

**Chapter 2 The Administrative** analyses the administrative strategy at play at the Taipei Biennial, by investigating the ways professionalism emerges as a public discourse to negotiate with diverging stakeholder expectations. With a close analysis of two works by artist Cai Guo-Qiang – *Golden Missile* and *Advertising Castle* – both commissioned by the inaugural international edition of the Taipei Biennial in 1998, the chapter establishes how the event organiser resorts to various manifestations of professionalism to enhance administrative

credibility and meet disagreeing stakeholder demands.

After establishing professionalism as an outward-facing administrative strategy, Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework of stewardship as the foundation to administrative decision making and management methodology. Based on primary interview data, the chapter introduces the characteristics of stewardship as an iterative and dynamic process underpinned by a simultaneous approach to boundary-setting and care-taking.

**Chapter 3 The Administrator** first looks at the function of the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial. It establishes a variety of functions the administrative capacity fulfils in support of art-making and knowledge production. The chapter then traces major shifts in the creative and curatorial practices in contemporary art, to illustrate the consequences these paradigm shifts create to the role of the administrative capacity.

With a close analysis of *Theatre of Negotiations* at Taipei Biennial 2020, Chapter 3 delineates how a pedagogical attribute emerges as an increasingly pronounced function of the administrative capacity, as a manifestation of the administrative turn in contemporary art.

This PhD research closes with a **Conclusion** chapter which examines how the strands covered in the above chapters can be brought together, to not only review the implication of the administrative turn in contemporary art, but also advance the rethinking of ways arts administrators are transformative catalysts for change.

### **Introduction's Conclusion**

The first half of this Introduction situated my PhD inquiry within the knowledge legacy and practice tradition of cultural management, contemporary art and local and regional research on the Taipei Biennial. The second half of

this Introduction broke down my personal approach to how this PhD will unpack the administrative turn in contemporary art.

Falling between the cracks of various disciplines, arts administrator and its system, method and function are a much under researched subject, but holds the key to shed different lights on how the exhibitionary system has changed over the past two decades. The study of the administrative turn in contemporary art encourages new ways to understand how art-making and knowledge production can be better enabled by the support network, where arts administrator occupies a central role as a linchpin.

Taipei Biennial, representative of the perennial exhibition boom in East Asia, lends itself as an appropriate case study to understand the system, strategy and role of the administrative capacity unique to a public funding structure within a museum-based contemporary art operation.

In the following chapters, I will investigate the figure of the arts administrator through my proposed three-pronged approach to unravel how the institutional principle of the administration, the administrative methodology and the role of the administrator have changed in contemporary art, with the case of the Taipei Biennial. This approach will lay the foundation for my argument that arts administrators and its administrative capacity, are reflexive, adaptive and responsive, and holds the transformative potential to re-conceptualise how the support network could better function for a fast-evolving exhibitionary production reality that is the culture of biennials globally.

# Chapter 1: The Administration

## Chapter Overview: What Is the System of Administration at TB?

For this Chapter, I aim to trace the developmental history of arts administration at the Taipei Biennial to identify shifts in epistemological tenets which influence the system of administration. This exercise following Foucauldian tradition will first embark on an “archeology of knowledge”<sup>29</sup> to unravel the ways in which the system of administration changes shape as an institution, and then examine how this process of evolution grounds the institutional principles for the arts administrators at the Taipei Biennial, by unpacking the knowledge traditions which constitutes the Biennial’s administration.

Each episteme<sup>30</sup> as a knowledge tradition has its own logic<sup>31</sup> – namely, a

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<sup>29</sup> French thinker Michel Foucault demonstrated an analytical approach to critically examine the histories of ideas and a system of thoughts. As a critique towards how power operates through the process of knowledge formation, his 1966 book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* and his 1972 book *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* focused on uncovering how propositions become accepted as knowledge and truth within a given discourse and historical context.

<sup>30</sup> Extrapolating from Foucault’s usage of *episteme*, the term can be understood as the “rules of formation” which shapes how a system of knowledge is formed within a historical period (2018, p.xiii).

<sup>31</sup> Cultural scholar William Ray’s analysis of the logic of culture in post-Enlightenment modern society investigated how culture functions as “a grammar” of subjectivity and operates as a source of authority which influences identity formation (2001). A set of cultural logic underpins the “systematicity of social practice to constitute a formidable reservoir of authority... *systematizing* [the] cognitive efforts of [the mechanisms of authority]” (p.16). Ray’s analysis of logic traced the systematic authority (and process of systemising) to examine the mechanisms in place that serve as the basis of legitimacy for social norm and the ways in which the logical system informs habits and custom. For this research, I subscribe to Ray’s use of logic to describe the “grammar” that formulates the ground rules for a system to be operative. Following Ray’s avenue, I use the concept to capture and describe the underlying principles that provide legitimacy for the administrative system at the Taipei Biennial.

unique combination of imperatives, rules and grammar at any given time. Every institutional logic morphs over time and, with each turn, it defines a new set of norms towards what is considered acceptable within its knowledge legacy.

Closing in on the Taipei Biennial as a government-backed, museum-organised, contemporary art event, the formation and changes in three groups of paramount logics have underpinned the value and practice of the Biennial administration. These include:

- the logic of the nation state<sup>32</sup> by way of the institutionalisation of cultural administration,
- the logic of the public museum via the system of museum management, and
- the logic of the biennial platform through the practice of biennial administration.

The negotiation and contest between these three epistemes and their respective logic, in turn, shape the way in which the Taipei Biennial is administered under a particular historical cross section.

To delineate the system of administration at the Biennial through an examination of the self-instituting process of arts administration as a profession in Taiwan, parallel throughlines below will guide the archeological investigation of the epistemes:

- What is the purpose of culture when being publicly administered?
- What does this journey of self-instituting through professionalisation and institution formation in cultural administration, museum management, and biennial management reveal about the changes in the system of

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<sup>32</sup> It refers to the principles of the modern nation state that has a defined territory, government, people, and sovereignty (Feinstein, 2020).

administration at the Taipei Biennial as a nation building process?

The chapter will close with an analysis on how these strands of discussions ultimately inform the figure of the arts administrator amidst the administrative turn in contemporary art.

### **Episteme of the Nation State in Cultural Administration**

Central to the logic of the state in the case of Taipei are the narratives of cultural citizenship, creative industries and sustainable development that function as knowledge frameworks to legitimise policy directives. These institutional principles can be summarised as the below:

**Cultural Citizenship and Cultural Rights.** Cultural citizenship has become a primary concern of policy makers as rapid globalisation in the 1990s heightened an identity crisis for the nation states around the world and within respective cultural groups. The notion was believed (Wang, 2013) to expand the boundary of citizenship to recognise an in-built right to culture, often in the policy form of minority cultural rights protection. Scholars (Meredyth & Mison, 2001; Miller, 2001; Mercer, 2002) argued that the concept of cultural citizenship considered cultural representation and empowerment as integral to actualising full socio-political participation. Researcher (Turner, 2001) observed that this development of cultural citizenship as a result saw the protection of multi-cultural membership and cultural representation as a form of socio-political empowerment.

**The Rise of the Cultural and Creative Industries as a Discourse and Policy Tool.** Since its emergence in the UK in the late 1990s in affirmative (rather than critical terms<sup>33</sup>), researcher (Kong, 2014) suggested the concept of

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<sup>33</sup> Critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947/2002) coined this term as a

cultural and creative industries<sup>34</sup> has borne the ambition of transforming a country into a post-industrial powerhouse for growth and investment. Scholars (Wang, 2004; Prince, 2010) argued this phenomenon reflected a collective calling for local governments and policy bodies to restructure socio-economic composition away from a reliance on manufacturing and heavy industries, in order to capture opportunities around the increasingly knowledge-based world economy.

As a widely-adopted policy tool amidst the neoliberal globalisation backdrop, this body of knowledge travelled and spread across the world since the late 1990s and early 2000s, influencing both the object of cultural governance and the instrument of its delivery. Within the creative industries knowledge framework, culture as a vehicle of soft power became the focal point to retain and advance post-industrial, global influence for utilitarian policy outcomes.

Its pervasiveness around the world followed the proliferation of transnational advocacy bodies and industry networks such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) created in 2004 which aims at shaping the global narrative and agenda through best practice policy research and

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criticism on how mass media gave rise to a form of mass culture which resembled a capital-driven industry.

<sup>34</sup> Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) refer to activities primarily associated with creativity. In 2009, UNESCO published a model, which became a widely-adopted definition of the CCIs as part of a wider creative economy, composed of 1) cultural domains (cultural and natural heritage, performance and celebration, visual arts and crafts, books and press, audio-visual and interactive media, and design and creative services), 2) related domain (tourism, and sports and recreation), and 3) connecting themes (intangible cultural heritage, education and training, archiving and preservation, equipment and supporting materials). Based on this model, each country has a different legal scope in terms of the type of businesses and activities that falls under the CCIs cluster.

exchange.<sup>35</sup> This approach has won particular favour by post-colonial Asian countries. Scholars in regional research (Ong, 2011; Oaks & Wang, 2016) identified that such a hope to refashion their home cities as creative had become a welcomed formula to not only project local desire for international reputation, but also a means to materialise world-class standing. As a result of these drives, public investment directed to enabling the support system and cultural infrastructure also burgeoned around the creative industries agenda.

**Transition Towards Sustainable Development in Governance.** The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) published by the United Nations in 2015, as a part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gave an urgency for the cultural sector to be a part of the social (and transformative) solutions that contribute to 17 SDGs, primarily focusing on building a sustainable, equitable and inclusive society. International research and annual concerted efforts, since then, has been devoted to laying out the ways in which culture can play a part in facilitating the SDGs, specifically in terms of translating local policy<sup>36</sup> to safeguard cultural access and representational rights.

This agenda gained wide traction and particularly resonated among the global policy community since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019.

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<sup>35</sup> Despite some (Kong & O'Conner, 2009) argued that the creative industries as a policy concept shares the characteristics of neoliberal apparatus that propagate a form of neocolonialism in pursuit of socio-economic influence over the receiving countries, it is also debated among scholars (Prince, 2010; Ong, 2011; Lin, 2016) that the global travel of policy practice also creates mutual / bilateral knowledge co-production and polycentric practice exchange that gives rise to new trans-local and sometimes reciprocal approaches.

<sup>36</sup> See reports by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG, 2018) for similar efforts to secure a transformative role for culture in contribution to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.



The UNESCO International Centre for Creativity and Sustainable Development (ICCSA, n.d.) released a series of reports, assessing the impact of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) and other adoption of creative cities worldwide. This framework placed a focus on the role the cultural and creative economy play in delivering SDG 8 (Decent employment and economic growth) and provided a roadmap for the cultural sector to step up for sustainable development. Such an approach based on shared value and themes rippled across cultural policy makers especially in their post-Covid recovery plans.<sup>37</sup> This global commitment to culture for sustainable development was affirmed by the UNESCO (2022) World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development held in Mondiacult, Mexico, which reframed the value of culture as a “global public good”.

### ***Logic of the State for TB***

The widely adopted narratives of cultural citizenship, creative industries and sustainable development had proved their efficacy and appeal as a governing technology that sought to shape a populace through an active policy involvement that (re)defined the relationship the citizen could have with cultural life. In the case of Taipei, four developmental stages illustrate how these sets of guiding principles behind cultural administration evolve. Centred around the development of Taipei’s Department of Cultural Affairs (DoCA) as Taiwan’s first municipal government agency dedicated to cultural affairs, the four phases loosely correspond to the evolution of the “logic of the state” for the Taipei Biennial and can be categorised as:

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<sup>37</sup> This inclusive growth approach propagated by the SDGs in post-Covid recovery plan can be seen across the policy frameworks across the governments in the UK, Malaysia and Taiwan among others.

- 1) Phase I. Pre-establishment,
- 2) Phase II. Nascent development,
- 3) Phase III. Articulation, and
- 4) Phase IV. Recalibration and (re)alignment.

**Phase I. Pre-Establishment: Practice-Driven, Top-Heavy Legacy in Citizen-Making.** Cultural policy efforts in Taiwan were predominantly practice-driven and ideology-heavy during its early stage of development. Researcher (Huang, 2010) suggested events and festivals played a defining role in shaping and realising the content and outlook of these policy initiatives.

This phase was marked by a pursuit of a unison value system, which sought to enhance cultural legitimacy by asserting a claim over Chineseness and its continuation. In 1967, the then cultural bureau under the Ministry of Education was founded<sup>38</sup> and was tasked to oversee nation-wide cultural affairs through education, research and promotion. Scholars (Su, 2001; Lin, 2001; Xia et al, 2015; Chen, 2016) found this institution became an anchor of the Chinese Culture Renaissance movement – an anti-communist campaign launched by the KMT government to legitimise Taiwan’s (R.O.C) claim over the lost territory in mainland China, through the revival and modernisation of traditional Chinese cultural heritage. Under this campaign, public investment and support was earmarked to construct new cultural infrastructure and deliver cultural education programmes to shape a collective identity that lay claim to (tangible and intangible) Chinese heritage, in order to create a continuity for political

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<sup>38</sup> The bureau was later abolished in 1973. Cultural infrastructure and cultural education were later allocated back under remit of the Social Education Division, following the abolishment of the Cultural Bureau – whose primary mission was to be responsible for “affairs related to ethnic culture revival and promotion” (Presidential Office Gazette, 1973) to enhance governing legitimacy through identity shaping.

legitimacy.

Despite the strong ideological mission of citizen-making, local scholars (Huang, 2010) suggested that the cultural bureau was the first attempt within the civil service bureaucracy to introduce a specialised unit to oversee policy and regulation that governed arts and culture. This demonstrated a step toward separating the expertise of cultural administration and policy-making from general education. Since then, cultural management in Taiwan continued to be professionalised with the establishment of a dedicated national agency, Council of Cultural Affairs in 1981 (later transformed into the Ministry of Culture in 2012), to oversee cultural development.

### **Phase II. Nascent Development: Community-Building and Civic**

**Participation as Democratisation.** In the post-martial law era of the 1990s, place-making through community participation, known as *Shequyingzao* (社區營造, literal translation: community building), was a pivotal movement which encouraged a model of bottom-up identity engineering through civic engagement as a form of political participation. Local scholars (Su, 2001; Xia et al, 2015; Lin, 2016) widely believed that Taiwan's *Shèqūyíngzào* (社區營造, literal translation: neighbourhood / community development) initiatives were heavily influenced by the Japanese *machizukuri* civic-engagement practices that aimed to catalyse social participation through grassroots, community-driven cultural programmes in neighbourhood planning.

These efforts that stimulated bottom-up cultural participation manifested a symbolic opening up of political membership to local communities and previously less represented minority groups under the rule of martial law. Taiwan's democratisation of cultural citizenship echoed a wider international trend adopted by neoliberal governments to inscribe cultural rights as integral to

realising full citizenship. As a result, multicultural membership representation and civic involvement became increasingly institutionalised as inseparable to natural citizenship and human rights in Taiwan.<sup>39</sup>

On a municipal level, multicultural representation and cultural rights were accelerated through city-wide cultural policy drives with the election of Taipei City mayor Shui-Bian Chen (1994-1998) from the pro-independence camp, the Democratic Progressive Party. Chen's mayorship was a political milestone as the first democratically elected city government official, marking the initial transfer of municipal administrative power from the ruling KMT party after the lift of martial law. This opened up a series of changes in administrative practices, making cultural representation a battlefield for pro-independence and pro-unification ideological camps.

Nativism, transitional justice and privatisation characterised the operational principles of the administrative arm throughout this phase. Emphasis was placed on crafting a de-sinonised Taiwanese consciousness that sought to revise mainstream narratives into a less China-centric version through wider local (Minnan culture) representation and expand grassroots engagement.<sup>40</sup> Democratisation efforts seen across this stage were translated into accessibility and approachability which aimed to safeguard citizen's access to information

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<sup>39</sup> This movement which viewed cultural citizenship as an extended realm of a new Taiwanese identity, fitting of a new democracy, echoed a wider two-pronged phenomena of Taiwan's contemporary socio-political history since the 1980s: 1) democratisation and 2) the development of a new national identity. See Taiwan studies scholar Frank Muryard (2018, pp.35-62) for the role democracy plays in the rise of Taiwanese new national identity.

<sup>40</sup> Since 1994, the Department of Education began a localisation campaign across municipal educational and cultural institutions and subsidiaries, including the launch of textbook materials that promoted an exploration and curiosity of the land (Taiwan) with down-to-earth language, featuring local Taiwanese Minnan dialect. This approach is antithetic to the previous era that romanticised the legacy of and claims to a motherland (mainland China).

(right to know) and access to cultural representation (right to be heard).

Reflecting the wider sentiment of governance, the style and tone of official language use was also deliberately made less rigid and informal with inclusion of Taiwanese dialects and everyday slang.<sup>41</sup>

The logic of the state continued to institute transparency and citizen-centric governance accountability by Chen's successor Ying-Jeou Ma. Ma introduced Mayor's Mailbox and other comparable call centre-like mechanism to usher in administrative practice underpinned by customer service with his creation of a direct line for citizen feedback.<sup>42</sup>

***Professionalising Cultural Governance.*** In addition to the gradual institution of civic participation as well as transparency and accountability in the municipal administration in Phase II, Taipei as the country's capital, had led the professionalisation of cultural governance with the establishment of the Department of Cultural Affairs (DoCA) in 1999. This made the DoCA in Taipei the first municipal-level body which specialised in cultural affairs in Taiwan. This move signified an expanded role cultural policy played in the municipal governance, through a gradual separation of functions between the increasingly specialised cultural team and the education department.

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<sup>41</sup> This change in language use can be observed in paralleled shifts in approach by the city's Information Office that campaigned to provide more transparency to government decision-making, including proactively initiating regular policy briefings to the press to ensure wider dissemination of information and public exposure to policy documentation. Such a strategy leverages the boom of the then emerging TV and broadcasting media technologies to create the sense of information synchronism, which has become synonymous with transparency. See the work report by the Information Office (1997) for more examples of policy measures.

<sup>42</sup> The 24-hour service-line was a successful rollout in Taipei and later modelled by peer local governments across Taiwan. A public townhall system was also implemented under Ma's mayorship to encourage early debates and intervention in policy direction. For more examples of policy measures, see Taipei City Council work report (2005).

DoCA's early approach indicated an existential crisis when it came to the government's hand in relation to culture. The topic of censorship was particularly sensitive for city council members, as it concerned with the function of the DoCA and how that would be different from the previous censorship enforcement authorities under the martial law era.<sup>43</sup> In order to finesse the remit for the newly founded DoCA, consultation and review were conducted across the Department of Education (cultural infrastructure and social education), Public Works Department (tree preservation), Department of Urban Development (tangible heritage), and Department of Civil Affairs (intangible heritage). This process reflected the need-driven nature of early cultural administration in Taipei and pointed to an ongoing dilemma for the practice of cultural management – where its realm of influence was defined mostly in relational terms when pitted against the remit of other agencies and its nominal existence only materialised through event happenings.

In order to address this lack of independent subjectivity, cultural resource mapping played a key role in the nascent stage of the DoCA development. The initial mapping projects commissioned by DoCA became a research exercise that helped to tabulate the cultural assets and facilities under municipal governance. This tabulation not only laid claim to *what constitutes art and*

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<sup>43</sup> To better pinpoint the remit of the DoCA in order to keep the government's hand away from censorship, early planning works were devoted to setting up mechanisms which could clarify the role of cultural administration within the municipal governing structure. These involved measures such as intensive consultation sessions with peer departments and subsidiary units, to identify what should be considered *culture* (and *what is not culture*) to better determine the scope of the new agency. This process of deliberating DoCA's remit also included a review of existing art and cultural programmes, which at the time were scattered across various agencies – each with its own delivery process and budget allocation. See the education committee meeting minutes at the Taipei City Council (1999) for similar discussions.

*culture* but also established the nominal content of *what is to be administered*.

Efforts were also devoted to establishing new benchmarks for personnel qualification and performance assessment at municipal cultural institutions. This proactive strategy sought to pinpoint new sets of expertise that constituted the emerging class of cultural administrators as a professionalising workforce, who were expected to deliver results different from their former managing agencies.

***Democratising Cultural Access: Forming a New Relationship for the Citizens With Culture.*** Local scholars (Huang, 2005; Wang, 2013; Lin, 2016) believed democratisation of cultural access trickled through the operational principle during the nascent development of the DoCA. These involved measures taken to relax and standardise application for venue use in government-owned spaces, including policies that opened up previously off-limit, government-owned areas for public use.

Public art played a critical role in this redefinition of citizen's relation to public space in the post-martial law era. The passing of *Taipei City Public Art Promotion Ordinance* and *Taipei City Public Art Fund Custody and Appropriation Regulations* in 2005 manifested early efforts to clarify the governance and management structure for public arts.<sup>44</sup> These efforts working in tandem with the launch of the Taiwan Public Arts Festival, organised by the DoCA in-house team in 2002 and 2005, had made culture more accessible within citizen's everyday life, by giving it a legitimised presence in public discourse which endorsed cultural access democratisation.

With these efforts, citizen's right to public space and to take part in public /

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<sup>44</sup> Coupled with regulations that govern the permission and qualification for street artists passed in 2005, relevant public arts laws also included instituting a legal ratio for public arts in public buildings as well as regulations to guide the commissioning process, preservation responsibility and the use of funds for public arts.

political life were therefore engineered through participation of cultural activities in public areas. These approaches effectively held both physical and metaphorical space for art in public life and deemed culture as an essential service, so that citizen's right to be represented could be guaranteed.

As a result, the municipal government working with city council members had gradually institutionalised a new relationship citizens had with culture. This process not only opened up space and loosened regulations to ensure rights to participation, but also normalised the government's role in citizen's cultural life. Alongside other efforts to essentialise the content of cultural administration such as asset mapping and workforce benchmark setting, this process of self-instituting effectively established a code of conduct to regulate its cultural managers, by asserting the realm of administration from relational to nominal.

### **Phase III. Articulation: Building Legitimacy for Cultural Administration by Localising the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) Discourse.**

Following the nascent stage, the scope of cultural administration in Taipei underwent a phase of rapid expansion. Policy priority between mid-2000s to mid-2010s focused on articulating the roles and responsibility for the DoCA. During this time, DoCA worked with academic researchers to introduce a knowledge framework, characterised by the cultural and creative industries, to build up the agency's legitimacy and advanced its remit. Acting as "policy translators"<sup>45</sup>, scholars were frequently appointed to DoCA commissionership or retained as consultants for research projects. This "policy translation" mechanism helped consolidate a narrative foundation for the emerging notion of the creative industries and the creative city that gradually forged a clear

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<sup>45</sup> See Cheng-Yi Lin's analysis (2016) on the facilitative role of the academics in propagating a localised cultural and creative industries discourse.



personality for the DoCA and secured a more pronounced presence of cultural administration in the wider municipal governance.

Building on previous tabulation of cultural assets and resources, DoCA in 2002 launched an annual Cultural Indicators Survey as the first mapping project of this kind in Taiwan. This Cultural Indicator Survey tracked the changes in cultural terrain and consumer attitude in Taipei, to serve as a basis for policy decisions. In this research, comparative policy studies of international benchmarks<sup>46</sup> were analysed to validate government policy choices and justify a cluster of emerging industries that was deemed reasonable to move to the DoCA remit under the new label of the cultural and creative industries. A localised version of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), stemmed out of international benchmarking, had since become the foundation knowledge framework for Taipei City's cultural policy.

The *2008 Taipei Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping Report* (DoCA, 2008) defined the scope of its CCIs to include visual arts, music and performing arts, handicrafts, cultural exhibition and performance venues, film, broadcast and TV, publishing, architecture and design, advertising, digital and entertainment businesses. With the passing of the nation-wide *Development of the Cultural and Creative Industries Act (DCCA)* in 2010 and the later establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2012, the boundary of cultural and creative industries was further extended as:

industries that originate from creativity or accumulation of culture which through the formation and application of intellectual properties, possess

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<sup>46</sup> These include international bodies such as the UNESCO and peer cultural agencies on local and national levels in the UK, Canada, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Japan and China (DoCA, 2012).

potential capacities to create wealth and job opportunities, enhance the citizens' capacity for arts, and elevate the citizens' living environment.

(DCCA, 2010, § 3)

The group of subsectors that were identified under the Act was also enlarged to include a catch-all category of “creative living” and a granular list of different design disciplines<sup>47</sup>.

During this stage of development in Phase III, the research community, working with policy makers, provided the basis of legitimacy to ground the suddenly expansive focus of DoCA which moved from art and culture in the previous era, into the now all-encompassing cultural and creative industries. Via mapping and law-making, DoCA was able to articulate its nominal essence by starting to assert a leadership role that mobilised municipal policy initiatives.

### ***Making Culture Useful: Re-Conceptualising the Role of Culture***

**Administration.** Amidst the global financial crisis starting 2007, the increasingly industry-facing and business-minded narrative of the cultural and creative industries provided a framework to formalise policy, bylaws and investments that re-conceptualised the relationship of culture in society. This rhetoric validated the contribution of the CCI sector as a driving force for economic growth. It also placed a strong emphasis on identity-building, place-making and urban regeneration functions when it came to the purpose of cultural programming.

This expanded realm of utilitarian influence for culture administration in municipal governance was characterised by a series of capital-intensive, culture-led projects via heritage revitalisation and new infrastructure building.

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<sup>47</sup> A granular list of pan-design disciplines is detailed in the Act, including product design, fashion and visual communications, to name a few (DCCA, 2010, § 3).

This included the city government's subsequent plunge into a string of heritage regeneration projects that transformed tired cityscape into creative hubs and cultural parks, making culture-led infrastructure programmes a critical impetus for urban revitalisation.<sup>48</sup>

This craze to pursue culture-led, regeneration-focused infrastructure commitments set in train the construction of a 2-hectare Taipei Performing Arts Centre (TPAC) – the project at its announcement in 2008 came with a “whopping price tag” (Lin, 2008) of NTD\$ 3.8 billion (USD\$ 136 million). Positioned as an architectural statement, the TPAC project was designed to make the rank of “top ten global cultural landmarks”<sup>49</sup>. On top of making an architectural statement that would put the city on the map, TPAC aimed to provide Taipei with an international-grade performing space that could accommodate large-scale repertory theatre productions, resembling “Broadway-like” (Ma, 2011) musicals as tourist entertainment offers. Building on this ambition to deliver public infrastructure that could drive cultural tourism, the city government was not shy to peg on additional benefits TPAC would bring to the neighbouring night market business community by highlighting the footfall

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<sup>48</sup> Similar examples include the establishment of Songyan Cultural Creative District that regenerated derelict factories in the city centre into consumption-oriented cultural spaces and Urban Regeneration Stations (URs) that highlight the importance of cultural intervention in urban redevelopment. In addition to heritage revitalisation, cultural policy is also geared towards commissioning new capital-intensive cultural infrastructures. Institutions such as the Cultural Facilities Development Fund were set up with relevant guidelines passed in 2008 to regulate the construction, preservation, operation and management of the city's cultural assets and future facilities.

<sup>49</sup> This has resulted in a flood of international architectural proposal submissions and an initial design budget of NTD\$ 570 million (USD\$ 20 million), making this the highest infrastructure design fee in the city's history (Liu, 2021). The project was later won by Pritzker Architecture Prize-winner Rem Koolhaas with the support of Taiwanese delivery team led by Kris Yao. The construction and delivery process protracted over years and was fully opened in 2021.

cultural events would bring to energise the night-time economy.

Echoing this utilitarian approach to culture, DoCA policy framework of Phase III aimed to evoke civic pride and cultural confidence, contributing to Taipei's position as the "leading city brand of the creative industries in Asia Pacific" (DoCA, 2008, p.62). Leveraging capital-intensive, culture-led urban regeneration infrastructure projects, policy emphasis showed a preference to valorise consumption-based programming that brought in employment, inward investment and foot traffic. It highlighted the function of art and culture within the wider cultural and creative industries that provided content and services for citizen consumption and cultural tourism. Following this rationale, Taipei Biennial and other DoCA-funded festivals under the remit of culture-led projects served a greater purpose of energising the cultural tourism sector.

In view of this prevailing approach, a series of bids were placed by the Taipei City government to win hosting rights for mega international events. For example, Taipei won the hosting right of the 21st Summer Deaflympics in 2009, making it the first Asian city to host the event. This successful application set in motion following bids (and awarding) for 2010 Taipei International Flora Exposition, 2016 World Design Capital and the 2016 Summer Universiade. Throughout the run of these mega international events, art and culture were placed at the centre of its programming to highlight the soft power<sup>50</sup> of Taipei as

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<sup>50</sup> The opening ceremony of 2009 Summer Deaflympics was a telling example of how culture functions as a political statement that engineered a collective identity for the country. Inaugurated after the extravaganza of 2008 Beijing Olympics, the opening ceremony of the Deaflympics was devised to match the quality and impact of the Beijing Olympics but with a much toned-down vibe. It managed to construct a cultural image of Taiwan that was sophisticated yet simplistic, utilising silence as a central theme in Deafolympic and drawing on the metaphor of the widely known Chinese proverb *silence triumphs loudness* (low key excels

a host city.

The pivotal role of culture in manufacturing collective identity and international image became hard to miss in these international mega events. Opening ceremony, collateral events and promotional efforts concentrated to highlight the vitality of home-grown cultural and creative brands and talents. For example, a well-received romantic comedy *Hear Me* (2009) was the result of a municipal co-investment project to promote the 2009 Summer Deafolympics and raise awareness around anti-discrimination. It was coupled with a city-wide optimisation campaign to update facilities and signage systems, to showcase Taipei as a disability-friendly environment. This campaign projected a cultural identity that prioritised the need of the community and a national image that was diverse, tolerant, and therefore forward-looking and competitive.

***Specialisation and Accountability in Cultural Administration.*** As the narrative of the cultural and creative industries fomented, the *de facto* intervention of arts and culture via DoCA in other municipal functions also became more pronounced. This led to growing inter-agency cooperation and joint delivery programmes during and after the mayorship of Lung-Pin Hau (2006-2014). These included DoCA's ongoing and close legacy ties with the Department of Education to deliver city-wide student and adult learning services, as well as regular collaborations with the Department of Information and Tourism to update city cultural tourism guides and develop heritage-based signage systems, routes and maps.

Under this new positionality, DoCA frequently provided consultation for peer municipal agencies such as the Parks and Street Lights Office on public arts as

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better than showmanship). See relevant reporting (Lin, 2009; CTS, 2009) for more detail on the role of culture in mega-events.

possible cultural intervention to beautify and regenerate urban spaces, as well as being actively involved with helping the Department of Civil Affairs to appeal to younger audiences, by developing cultural activation programmes with a more contemporary image around traditional rituals and intangible heritage like the Lantern Festival. As a result, DoCA and its cultural function – with a more articulated responsibilities and narrative framework – became progressively embedded in the wider municipal operations and overall delivery process.

The expanded scope of DoCA thanks to the popularisation of the CCIs narrative, accelerated by a significant presence of culture as the central instrument for municipal flagship projects, expectedly gave rise to an increasingly heavy workload for the DoCA. This created a need to restructure DoCA and shift agency workload to its arm's length body, Taipei Culture Foundation (TCF).<sup>51</sup> Taipei City Government in its 2008 policy address reiterated this shift that released DoCA from its earlier role, characterised by implementation and delivery, to supervisory, unpinned by planning and development. This change demonstrated the need for further specialisation in the cultural management structure, to enable a separation of delivery and

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<sup>51</sup> As a result, the Taipei Cultural Foundation (TCF) was transformed to carry the operational load for city-wide cultural facilities and arts festivals so that “the City’s organisational talents, experience and resources can accumulate and one day be on a par with internationally-renowned peers that have a longer operational legacy” (TCC, 2008b, pp.1016-1017). This move was positioned as a contingency approach, in the face of growing international competition in the festival economy, to build in flexibility for Taipei that allows cultural programmes to be more robust and the city more attractive to investors, talents and residents in the long run. Operational works shifted away from the DoCA to the TCF, included the management of municipal cultural facilities, such as The Red House, Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei and Puppetry Art Center of Taipei, as well as the organisation of city-wide festivals, such as the Taipei International Films Festival, Taipei Art Festival, Taipei Children Festival and Taipei Fringe Festival.

supervision within the municipal bureaucracy, in order to cope with an expanded remit under the CCIs notion.

In order to better transition to a supervisory role, DoCA instituted a series of updated benchmarks to evaluate subsidiary cultural institutions, reflecting a wider socio-political sentiment post the global recession. Governance accountability and transparency took an increasing turn to focus on performance evaluation. Corporate management metrics and expert consultancy mechanisms were introduced to enhance administrative credibility and responsiveness. Privatisation and public-private partnership were viewed as an effective tool to maximise taxpayer's money and policy effectiveness.<sup>52</sup> Related efforts were also made to reform the evaluation and training of municipal civil servants to enhance service quality and the city's competitiveness amidst increasing domestic and international competition for investment and talent in a rapidly globalising landscape.

These measures by the municipal government, coupled with a growing scrutiny from the city council, worked in tandem to encourage municipal cultural institutions to fundraise<sup>53</sup> and increase self-liquidating effectiveness and return-on-investment (ROI) ratio for public funding. As a result, these industry-facing narratives of the CCIs saw a marriage between culture and business. Coupled

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<sup>52</sup> Early signs can be seen from the campaign by KMT mayor Ying-Jeou Ma. With the slogan of "the government's resource is limited yet the power from civil society is boundless", a new evaluation system that advocates for planning, management, cost analysis and evaluation was gradually instituted to provide a rationale for decision-making, to legitimise policy outcome (TCC, 2005, p.1931).

<sup>53</sup> More aggressive fundraising and pursuit of self-generated income for cultural institutions and arts events received bi-partisan approval as a widely accepted goal for municipal subsidiaries. See meeting minutes and interpellation records from this period (TCC, 2004; 2005; 2006), such as KMT city councilmember's interpellation of DoCA and DPP councilmember's major's address questioning.

with the administrative and legislative call for financial self-sufficiency, it subsequently pushed cultural organisations to take a more proactive stance towards fundraising and self-generating income.

In addition to the propensity of market-oriented concern entering the realm of culture, a closer socio-economic tie with China also characterised the funding priority and policy direction of Phase III. During Lung-Pin Hau's KMT mayorship (2006-2014), Taiwan presidential election went through the second peaceful transfer of power to Ying-Jeou Ma (2008-2016) back to the pro-unification KMT camp. The supermajority of KMT in presidential office, central legislative body and Taipei city mayor office was a reaction to the previous era, marked by rapid localisation and pro-independence nativist movement, which had resulted in growing cross-strait political tension under former DPP presidential governance. As a result, cross-strait exchanges under China-friendly KMT governance rapidly expanded and asserted its importance in central and municipal programming. These included incentive schemes through government grants to prioritise and allocate programming slots and funding to cross-strait cultural exchange projects.

**Phase IV. Recalibration and (Re)Alignment: Reasserting Neutrality and Autonomy in Cultural Administration.** The heavy integration of culture into municipal governance normalised by CCIs rhetoric saw a rapid valorisation of consumption-led campaigning and policy focus that prioritised the contribution of the arts sector to business and growth. Such a commercialised approach became increasingly contentious, as festivals and mega events took up the role as drivers for international reputation, footfall and business opportunities.

The flamboyant device of capital-intensive, culture-led infrastructure projects and programming methods in the previous phase started to squeeze



out space for less business-facing content, resulting in growing industry backlash. Taipei City government's reliance on mega events, festivals and cultural infrastructure projects to invigorate cultural tourism and elevate international brand were under growing oppositional party scrutiny as "wasting taxpayer dollars" (TCC, 2012, p.3978).

City council criticisms were also directed to administrative effectiveness in terms of optimising the use and attendance of existing cultural facilities, expressing strong dismay toward the fervour of building the next newest and grandest landmark that systematically strained capacity for proper stewardship and governance in existing infrastructure. Special inquiries were opened to examine potential misconduct. Inquiries were directed to the massive investment around the 2010 Flora Exposition with a focus on the post-event legacy and management of these infrastructures – as well as a systematic review on venue rental and private partnership guidelines among subsidiary cultural institutions.

In addition to a recalibration of the dependency on market-facing, capital-intensive projects, cultural administration in the fourth phase underwent a change in direction, largely reflecting a discomfort toward the close cultural ties with China under the KMT governance. Such proximity was approved by some yet stirred up a deep anxiety especially among the younger generation that preferred strong Taiwanese cultural autonomy.

Backlashes were targeted against policy focus under the KMT municipal directives which aggressively expanded cross-strait cultural ties. Cultural exchange initiatives receiving priority funding, prime-time and prime-space at subsidiary cultural institutions, attracted widespread public criticism and city council scrutiny, on the fairness and justification for such use of public

resources.<sup>54</sup> The recalibration sentiment culminated around the potential signing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) in 2014, which sparked large-scale student-led demonstrations, the Sunflower Protest, to oppose increased socio-economic ties with China, and resulted in protesters and civic groups occupying the Legislative Yuan to block the Agreement's passing.

***Open Government as Inclusive Cultural Growth.*** The call for accountability and transparency continued to ripple in Phase IV with the election of non-party-affiliated<sup>55</sup> mayor Wen-Je Ko (2014-2021). Campaigning on the promise of open government and citizen participation<sup>56</sup>, Ko launched a series of bottom-up digital platforms, from online voting systems where citizens could feedback directly to bills and policy, to digital participatory budget development and tracking systems where citizens could initiate plans regarding how public money would be spent.

Under Ko's mayorship, Taipei City Government began to take part in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) voluntary Local Report in 2019 and followed through with annual self-reporting in 2020 and 2021.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See the following section on Logic of the Public Museum for the Taipei Biennial for more detail on the effect of these policy.

<sup>55</sup> Initially non-party affiliated, Ko created his own party Taiwan People's Party in 2019, campaigning on the promise of a trustworthy, third choice, free from ideological affiliation confined by the pro-independence DDP or pro-unification KMT camps.

<sup>56</sup> Other measures like the Major's Mailbox App allowed further instant feedback and direct engagement for citizen's voices to be expressed and incorporated.

<sup>57</sup> Overseen by the Department of Environmental Protection, the city had set up a dedicated web portal that streamlines Taipei's sustainable development efforts and promotes the alignment with the SDG goals. The 2021 voluntary self-monitor report was put on Taipei's civic engagement portal to "seek wider public feedback and build consensus" (TCG, n.d.) as a further gesture of open governance and invitation for public scrutiny.

Echoing the move towards inclusive development, on a national level, the passing of the *Cultural Foundation Act* in 2019 was a culmination of concerted efforts by the Ministry of Culture to enshrine the value of inclusivity in cultural expression through legislation.<sup>58</sup>

This valorisation of inclusive cultural growth and representational rights, working in tandem with the narrative of radical openness underpinned by a digital spirit of open-source and sharing economy, increasingly represented the basis of what I would characterise as administrative trustworthiness, as well as a pathway to innovation and social progress. Working alongside the UN sustainable development framework, city competitiveness increasingly laid in its liveability, approachability and resilience. Cultural rights and multicultural representation as a result became institutionalised as an imperative of the cultural and creative industries and its social obligation toward inclusive and sustainable growth.

In addition to the aggressive (and symbolic) opening-up enabled by digital technology, the municipal government also introduced a city-wide policy strategy map based on the concept of Organisation Performance Index (OPI) to streamline the delivery of its diverse administrative agencies. This strategy map anchored on eighth themes, making sustainable development, cultural diversity and organisational optimisation synonymous with responsible and quality governance.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> As an affirmative endorsement, the Act (2019) aimed to “protect the cultural rights of the people, expand cultural participation, realise multiculturalism...and set fundamental principles and a policy direction for national cultural development.”

<sup>59</sup> Under this OPI strategy map, each municipal department and their subsidiaries needed to design and submit an annual plan to explain the budget, performance forecast and delivery outcome based on these themes. Such a strong alignment streamlined the expectation,

## ***New Cultural Administration Talents and Benchmarks to Manage***

***Inclusive Ecosystem.*** Phase IV, underpinned by multiple stages of recalibration, became an opportunity to revisit the role and function of the DoCA after its founding more than a decade ago. Demand for specialised expertise became urgent in terms of securing talents capable of supervising longitudinal, large-scale, new-built cultural facilities from planning, construction, delivery, operation to preservation.<sup>60</sup>

In the fourth phase of development, the notion of CCIs gradually matured into a more inclusive yet impact-facing narrative for cultural administration through the introduction of sustainable growth. Aggressive push for private partnership and corporate sponsorship in view of these changes became relatively dialled back from the previous era in the third phase of DoCA development. On a micro level, establishing clearer intra-organisational bylaws by the request of the city council, which began to regulate the approval process for large-scale commercial cooperation in professional cultural organisations, had effectively worked as a recalibration mechanism that untied the proximity between art and business. In addition to the legislative grip that sought to ensure a realignment to the logic of the state, the adoption of municipal strategy

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approach and direction across fragmented municipal administrative structure. I would suggest that this approach, on the one hand, signaled a tightening grip stemming out of a social expectation and legislative overhaul, and on the other hand, placed further weight on government agencies to be transparent and accountable. See municipal announcement by the Media Affairs Section (2016) for the governing rationale of the strategy map.

<sup>60</sup> The rapid expansion of DoCA works, alongside the ever-more encompassing narrative of the cultural and creative industries, saw the need to restructure and stretch the department in 2014. This restructuring contributes to further professionalisation in cultural administration – city council leveraged this reorganisation opportunity to ask for an updated mechanism that can better evaluate accountability and transparency for DoCA's cultural subsidiaries and its arm's length delivery organisation.

map also signaled a continuously tightening municipal principle that incorporated the cultural and creative sector at the service of city-wide policy directives. This administrative realignment of cultural governance with the UN sustainable development agenda, continued to highlight and further valorise the social impact (thus utilitarian function) of the cultural and creative sectors – be it now toward more inclusive targets that prioritise sustainable and equitable growth.

Despite mayor Ko's claim to fiscal responsibility and his dislike of event-driven cultural policy, under his watch Taipei hosted the World Design Capital and Summer Universiade in 2016, and added Nuit Blanche as the latest addition to the municipal annual event fixture. With the appointment of top DoCA officials well-versed in impact and business<sup>61</sup>, cultural tourism and socio-economic impact became an expected and in-built delivery for art-centric events and festivals. This marked further subsumption of the role of culture as a part of the wider social services provided by municipal delivery.

On a national level, cultural administration also took a turn in terms of an increasingly impact-focused positionality. Civil service exam tracks, previously separating cultural administration, museum management and education

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<sup>61</sup> Mayor Ko's DoCA commissioner reshuffled at least five times since his election in 2014. One of his latest appointments Tsung-Hsiung Tsai was an architect by training, whose former posts included the Head of Office of Commerce and the directorship of tourist-driven municipal museums in New Taipei City. Mayor Ko also asked deputy directors at the DoCA and the Department of Information and Tourism to exchange posts. These personal choices led to city council scrutiny into mayor misconduct, the appropriateness of the change and implication on future direction in cultural policy. In Ko's defence, his decision complied with civil servant regulations, and he believed the move would benefit both departments. Ko's team argued this decision was to allow the DoCA to be more impact-minded, while the Department of Information and Tourism could become more content-aware in their programme development. See City Council (2019) interpellation record for Ko's defence on his personnel decision.

administration, were reduced into a blended “culture and education administration” track by the Ministry of Civil Service in 2019 – signifying a push to extricate cultural administration from a silo of specialisation within the civil servant bureaucracy. This insertion of cultural administration back into the wider educational functionality, on the one hand, indicated a readjustment from the previous era where the pursuit of an ever-more granular expertise specification was the dominant principle, and on the other hand, symbolised a move into a new ethos, which viewed inclusive impact of the cultural and creative industries as a necessity.

***Summary: Logic of the Nation State***

The development trajectory of cultural administration in Taiwan started from an event-based, practice-driven approach that was developed by doing. The knowledge frameworks of cultural citizenship, creative industries and sustainable development underpinning the logic of the state largely corresponded to the course of professionalisation in cultural administration in the country.

Characteristic of the cultural administration capacity in Taipei, the role of the DoCA office transitioned from an initial delivery and execution-oriented function, into a supervisory and policy-focused capacity. Such an evolution followed the changes in administrative rationale and governing techniques. Among which, cultural rights and cultural citizenship were the foundation that mediated the relationship between culture and the role of governance in the post-martial law era. Democratisation through civic participation was at the centre of the policy push in the Phase I pre-establishment and Phase II nascent stage of DoCA. Echoing a wider trend that engineered a new catch-all narrative to holistically capture emerging opportunities in an increasingly knowledge-

based global economy, the cultural and creative industries concept was systematically introduced and localised by scholars and policy makers to become a new dominant discourse. CCIs as a result, gradually taking root as a collective of sectors, became the content and target of cultural administration in Taipei after the third phase of DoCA development.

The propagation of CCIs rhetoric in turn legitimised the role of culture to receive public funding and orientated the hand of municipal administration and legislation to be increasingly industry-facing. This industry-nature of CCIs focalised an in-built economic sensitivity after Phase III which required cultural operations to be impact-facing. The system of culture administration was therefore gradually subsumed into the logic of the state as utilitarian – becoming a subservient vehicle to citizen-making, place-making, cultural tourism and urban regeneration.

The aggressive expansion of the DoCA remit in the third phase further embedded the role of culture in wider municipal policy drive. The incorporation of DoCA in city-wide policy delivery was manifested in capital-intensive, culture-led mega events and cultural infrastructure projects, where the identity of Taipei in the form of soft power was materialised and its civic texture re-imagined. Driving footfall, inward investments and international attention, these capital-intensive, event-based programmes were considered by policy makers during and after the third phase of DoCA development as critical vehicles to enhance the city's international reputation and competitiveness.

In recent years with the adoption of the SDGs, the concept of competitiveness and the push for development has taken a turn to focus on the delivery of sustainable, inclusive and equitable growth. Under this revisionist knowledge framework, cultural and creative sectors were positioned in Phase IV

as a contributing member and a solution to social problems facing humanity.

Through the lens of professionalising cultural administration, measures, such as streamlining personnel qualification and performance assessment at municipal cultural organisations, as well as initiatives throughout different phases to reorganise DoCA, manifested the strategies to pinpoint the changing expertise suitable for the emerging class of cultural administrators in Taipei as a professionalising workforce.

Based on the above development history of DoCA, whenever *the purpose of culture* subjected to municipal administration, became ambiguous or hard to define, there was a propensity for the agency to turn to mapping to help establish its nominal domain of influence. As an effective governing tool, mapping research essentialised the nominal existence of a loose affiliation of art, culture and creativity-based industries under the DoCA purview. In turn, through these acts of mapping, DoCA was able to give substance to a collective of activities, facilities and infrastructure that gradually expanded the reach of public administration in emerging cultural practices.

The continuous call for transparency, accountability and civic participation – driven by both legislative and administrative arms as signs of a functioning democracy – had become the basis for check-and-balance in cultural administration. Bylaws, guidelines, review benchmark and strategy maps were employed as governing technologies that anchored intra-institutional operation to ensure an increasingly close alignment with the logic of the state. At the same time, bottom-up citizen intervention and service-centric mechanisms multiplied across municipal structures to consolidate the source of legitimacy for credible governance and desirable administration.

As to the development of bylaws and accountability benchmarks, these



mechanisms saw the path-finding in terms of *what relation culture should have* with the municipal administration and the society as a whole throughout the four-phased development. The institutionalisation of comprehensive intra-organisational bylaws for municipal-funded units set in a system of control to not only ensure more legislative oversight and standardised approach toward the relationship of culture with business, but also regulate the ways in which public resources were allocated through cultural institutions. The device of city-wide strategy map, pegging on the UN sustainable development discourses in Phase IV, manifested the continuous push by both the administrative and legislative arms to incorporate cultural functions into the delivery system as utilitarian drivers of growth and impact that embodied the logic of the state.

### **Episteme of the Public Museum in Museum Management**

After looking at the logic of the nation state through the institutionalisation and professionalisation of cultural administration as a field in Taiwan, I will now move on to unpack the second of the three epistemological principles behind the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial – the logic of the public museum. The following section will first examine the constitution and evolution of public museum as a body of knowledge, before delving into the case study of Taipei to pinpoint the logic of this episteme through the self-instituting process of a museum management system at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), organiser of the Taipei Biennial. This proposed archeology of knowledge on the discourse of public museum will not only aid the analysis of how the system of administration has evolved at the Taipei Biennial as a museum-based event, but also contribute to the understanding of how the figure of the arts administrator and its course of self-instituting has become a critical vector for national identity building.

International Council of Museums (ICOM) provided a new definition of museums in 2022, stating:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.

Four propositions were central to ICOM's updated definition of a museum: 1) the concept of openness, accessibility and inclusivity embodied by the community (the public), whom museums serve; 2) the means (collection, conservation, research, interpretation and exhibition), content (tangible and intangible heritage) and purpose (education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing) integral to museum operation; 3) characteristics of perpetuity and independence enshrined in museum as an institution (by being a non-profit and a permanent entity); and 4) upholding a long-term goal of contributing to diversity and sustainability, through the principles of behaving ethically, professionally and being community-based.

In addition to the above concept cluster of accessibility and permanence advocated by ICOM, the Museums Association (MA) in its 1998 definition on the function of museums, pinpointed a mission of safeguarding through the measure of custodianship. MA delineated: "Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society".

Seen side by side, the ICOM and MA definitions, paint a consensus around

the fundamental principles for museums, with a guided operational focus on accessibility and perpetuity, and varied on its language in terms of approach (driven by ethics, professionalism and community participation versus custodianship).

**Museum as Site for Knowledge Production: Discursive Power and Citizen-Making.** In addition to these operational principles underpinning museum administration, art historians long discussed museums as a political institution, which has an ontological function and effect, closely related to the formation and perpetuation of discursive power on behalf of the state. According to theorist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992), a museum is “a site of the production of knowledge” (p.193) where knowledge is produced through a system of classification, ordering and framing of objects. Narratives, created under this system of knowledge-making and exhibition production, inform viewers of their relationship with the material world and thus formulating an ontological boundary and a set of rules that define *what is considered acceptable* between the individual and its socio-cultural context. Through the museum’s exhibitionary system, a power relation between the knowledge producer (the museum and its staff) and the knowledge consumer (the viewer) is established as a result.

Researchers (Duncan, 1995; Bennett, 1995) argued that this ability of museums to shape the understanding of relationships and define acceptability (that evokes a sense of us versus them) through knowledge-production makes their discursive system, instrumental to identity-building. Prolific literature (Huyssen, 1995; Duncan, 1995) discussed this function of modern museums as a resource to construct citizens for newly-established nation-states.

Art historian Carol Duncan (1995) suggested that the categorisation

template of modern and contemporary art<sup>62</sup> museums – based on the geography and chronology of modern-state civilisations – was considered a legacy of the French Revolution. As the previously excluded public sought control of the princely collection of Le Louvre, a visual and epistemological discourse that propagated a democratic and nationalistic ethos, fitting for the new republic, was created as a result. Duncan argued this change not only opened up cultural and symbolic political access to those previously excluded, but also gave rise to a new way of categorisation and exhibition, which aimed at evoking civic pride through a delineation and contrasting of cultural histories, based on the new order of European modern nation-states. The French employment of national museums as a new institution for civic education was quickly emulated by other state-owned national galleries across the colonial West. As a result, this emerging grouping principles based on nation-making and the use of exhibition to construct national narrative, were gradually popularised and became a blueprint of the modern taxonomy and presentational tenet for similar public museum institutions and their administration.

**New Museology: Museum as Responsive Organism.** Contrary to the views that treated museums as an extension of the nation-state, scholars in

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<sup>62</sup> Contemporary art can be understood with at least three folds of references according to art theorist and practitioner João Ribas (2013), including stylistic, temporal and art historical. Such understanding echoes Tate Museum's online glossary that defined *contemporary art* as "loosely used to refer to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovatory or avant-garde nature" (n.d., Contemporary Art). When used to describe an aesthetics or genre, it refers to a style marked by innovation and newness – a sense of contemporaneity. When in the context of time, it frequently refers to art made in the present day and most recent past – the art of now. When discussed in art historical terms, it also refers to the agglomeration of artworks produced after the 1980s.

new museology (Huysen, 1995; Witcomb, 2003; Karp, 2006) posited the exhibitionary system as a responsive social organism, whose role is not only a constant reflection of the changing socio-political condition, but also an embodiment of its constituents' shifting expectation. This change in perspective echoed a wider shift in education and knowledge-production paradigms: dubbed the "educational turn" emerged in the 1990s, this paradigm shift was said (Birchall, 2017; Pringle, 2019) to have influenced museum management and its practices into becoming more collaborative and process-based.

Such a proposition for museums to engage and enable a more emancipating relationship with its source communities<sup>63</sup> can be interpreted, I would argue, as a post-colonial trend of self-reflection and an attempt to respond to growing scrutiny, launched by the practitioners loosely associated with (and discourses around) Institutional Critique, concerning systematic power imbalance engendered by the museum institution and its administrative mechanisms. This shift encouraged a reflexive approach that problematised and exposed the power relations museum practices institutionalised.

With this 'new museological' view that was cognizant of the power dynamic yet optimistic of how practice could enable alternatives, the common metaphor of the museum, as a result, had transformed from the temple of knowledge to a town hall<sup>64</sup> where counter-hegemonic voices could be discussed and legitimised. Such expanded view decentralised the authorial power and taste-

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<sup>63</sup> According to curator Laura Peers (2003), source communities, also known as originating communities, "refer both to these groups in the past when artefacts were collected, as well as to their descendants today. These terms...apply to every cultural group from whom museums have collected: local people, diaspora and immigrant communities, religious groups, settlers, and indigenous peoples" (p.2).

<sup>64</sup> Or *agora* – public space in ancient Greek city-states.

making legitimacy previously attributed solely to museums, by welcoming external participants to contribute to the process of knowledge production, and ultimately, shape its outcome.

Following this change in root metaphor away from the temple of knowledge and a gradual push to a reciprocal power dynamic, the previous authority imbued in museum's exclusive authorship and its unwavering sense of permanence slowly crumbled (or was at least permanently reconfigured) as a result. The role of museums as stewards of material memory, now exercised not only an in-built cultural authority (or a civilising legitimacy) but also a duty to enable emancipation. As writer and gallerist Ivan Karp (2003) argued, museums thus were increasingly considered as "a means of claiming or appropriating a role in broader public spheres and of legitimating identity, history and presence" for the under-represented (p.11).

**Rethink of Power Dynamic Between Knowledge Producer and Knowledge Consumer.** As museum practitioners continued to challenge the ways new relationships were formed with their source communities and audience groups, the paradigm between traditional knowledge producer and knowledge consumer gradually became more complicated and reciprocal. This deliberate act was magnified more recently by the rise of digital technology and self-media, making interaction (on two sides of the knowledge production-consumption equation) increasingly mutual, open-sourced and bottom-up.

In the *Future of Ecosystem Vol. 2 Art X Metaverse* report published by the Serpentine Gallery in 2021, the possibility of a contemporary art museum was further radicalised to revamp the white cube model<sup>65</sup> into a "user experience

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<sup>65</sup> White cube often refers to a gallery aesthetic that has been popularised since the early 20th

interface” (an UX model), borrowing languaging from the game industry to provoke a different relationship between art institution and its community. As a response to an increasing hybrid museum reality that capitalised on a support mechanism inclusive of both online and offline engagement in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, this proposition has embedded the user experience for art at the centre of institutional practices, by re-imagining an experience-driven, user-specific engagement process. This attempt by the Serpentine not only re-defined the ways in which art is considered within an exhibitionary system (from an end result to facilitatory), but also transformed the projected role of the viewers (from static and monolithic into segmented and self-animating). These re-imaginings represented an alternative function for the museum institution within the exhibitionary ecosystem, which increasingly turned its focus from previous consumption-focused bricks and mortar, to a more research and production-centric incubative role.

The table below summarises the primary implications for museum management of the Serpentine report:

**Table 1**

*Concept Comparison Between the White-Cube Model and UX of Art (Source: Future of Art Ecosystems, Vol 2. Art X Metaverse, Serpentine Gallery, 2021)*

<b>White Cube Model</b>	<b>UX of Art</b>
<b>Presented objects as unique and finalised</b>	A focus on art experience rather than the artwork as a rare object
<b>These objects are presented to a general</b>	UX of art implies that any institution has a

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century to neutralise the site, where modernist artists “preferred to exhibit...against white walls in order to minimise distraction” (Tate, n.d., White Cube).

<b>anonymous viewership</b>	range of specifiable types of users rather than the 'general public'
<b>A specially configured physical space is the hosting environment of the presented objects ('artworks')</b>	UX of art allows cultural institutions to develop a deeper integration with artistic production process

These changes in perspective ultimately affected a shift in principle for museum administration, in terms of 1) how art should be administered; 2) the relative power relations museum practitioners should engage with their audience; and 3) the ways in which a public museum should be positioned within the exhibitionary ecosystem.

After looking at how the principle of museums as a classical institution shifted, it is worth thinking through the factors that differentiated the tenets of public museums from their private counterparts. What dictated the logic of the public museum, suggested Cultural Studies scholar Tony Bennett (1991), was two seemingly opposing demands engraved in the politics of being public: a duality, composed of symbolic universality (emancipation) versus citizen-making (nation-building). According to Bennett, this very dichotomy became the cause of a persistent dilemma, when it came to fulfilling an almost impossible obligation that could realise the politics of complete universal representation and comprehensive accessibility for each and every individual.

Bennett argued that this demand for both emancipation and nation-building, placed on public museums was quintessentially absent from the operation of private and other types of exhibitionary institutions, due to the difference in foundational principles. He suggested that this symbolic universality was by design impossible to translate in full into practice and became the root for an



ever-present paradox: public museum was on the one hand (in theory) a free, accessible-to-all and all-representing construct, yet on the other hand (in practice) was instrumentalised as a part of an effective governing apparatus that inevitably exercised the power of knowledge-production (identity-making) through the technology of exclusion, in order to produce a sense of us versus them. Bennett concluded:

It is the tension thus produced between what the [public] museum is in theory and what it is in practice that accounts for the emergence of a politics of access *vis-à-vis* the museum – that is, for the unending and... unendable demand that museum develop more democratic profiles of public use and access... For since no actual representation can be judged adequate in relation to this norm, every museum display can be held to be in need some form of supplementation or other, thus giving rise to an unstoppable representational politics... (pp.30-31)

This paradox, caused by the contradictory foundational drives characterised by universality versus nation-building, holds true to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), the organiser of the Taipei Biennial, as a municipal public museum. The section below provides a closer archeology of the logic behind the public museum at play in Taipei, through the self-instituting process of museum administration and its route to professionalisation.

### ***Logic of the Public Museum for TB***

As the first fine arts museum in Taiwan, the development of Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) since 1983 has evolved by way of debates over democratic access and representation as well as how its exhibitionary system interacted with identity formation and nation-making. A close reading of its museum practice and the manner in which relationships have been engaged, managed

and maintained, will provide a way into how the principles of administration have evolved over the years.

To best grapple with the institutional forces influencing public museums, Museum Studies scholar and practitioner Helen Graham (2012) suggested a case-by-case examination, mindful of contextual particularities, with a process-focused, relationship-based approach. This methodology placed attention on the way relationships were initiated and maintained. This line of inquiry, respectful of specificity, becomes useful when articulating administrative mechanisms that might seem similar in form, yet in practice are enabled by drastically different processes and thus creating a different relationship outcome.

To pinpoint the various relationships the museum has had with its community, my analysis concerns the institutionalisation and professionalisation process of the museum administration at TFAM on three levels:

- the changing target (content) of museum administration (*what is art* and who has a say in what art is);
- the means (practice) of museum management (how to represent); and
- the manner of the administrative mechanism, through which the museum has come into relation with its stakeholders (and the power dynamics inscribed in such administration).

In the case of the Taipei Biennial, the logic of the public museum can be loosely categorised into four stages:

- 1) Phase I. Institutional development and professionalisation,
- 2) Phase II. Articulation and internationalisation,
- 3) Phase III. Mainstreaming and expansion, and
- 4) Phase IV. Institutionalising reflexivity and knowledge agency.

**Phase I. Institutionalising and Professionalising a System of Modern Museum Management as Nation-Building.** Research on post-war cultural policy in Taiwan (Lee, 2003; Lai, 2008; Vickers, 2010; Chen, 2016) frequently examined the ambivalence in pinpointing Taiwanese cultural subjectivity<sup>66</sup> (namely, what is *Taiwanese* culture) and the ways in which cultural autonomy<sup>67</sup> could be achieved (how to autonomously represent Taiwanese cultural subjectivity). Cultural sociologist Man-Hua Chen (2016) argued that the founding of TFAM, as the first fine arts museum in the country, signified a starting point for the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of modern art in Taiwan.<sup>68</sup> Chen identified TFAM's early development, embroiled in

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<sup>66</sup> In view of Foucauldian influence (Foucault, 1982; Foucault, 2022), cultural studies take a post-constructionist view on cultural subjectivity – a belief that the understanding of self is socially constructed yet complex and fluid. This self-identification reflects how the subject comprehends the surrounding social world, informs the subject of *what is acceptable* as well as how to live and behave. On a national level, the quest to capture and define a national cultural subjectivity is characterised by a collective process of self-understanding and self-construction so that to define what constitutes the cultural self of a nation.

<sup>67</sup> Cultural autonomy is employed in the context of power imbalance between cultural groups. Canadian sociologist Edward T. Silva (1980, p.63) explained: “A culture is autonomous when it fully and authentically expresses the past, present, and future aspirations of its participants”. Researcher (Yupsanis, 2016) also linked the concept of cultural autonomy with the protection of cultural rights for minority groups and indigenous communities. The term was popularised in Taiwan in the 1990s after the lift of martial law and frequently associated with the nativist movement that seeks the liberty and legitimacy to narrate and represent the land with a form of culture, which to them, is de-sinonised and more authentic to reality.

<sup>68</sup> Chen's view echoed the viewpoint of curator Felix Schoeber. Schoeber (2014) treated the establishment of TFAM – as the first large-scale government-approved exhibitionary system for modern and contemporary art in Taiwan – a milestone that enabled the field to fully develop. Allowing for the first time a scene for industry stakeholders and practitioners to enact, he argued that the founding of TFAM consequently set in train a re-centering and realignment within the existing art world and created new power relations cross practitioners and support networks – from artist, arts administrator, handling, insurance, storage, art academy, criticism and journalism, to name a few.

controversies around administrative practices, interestingly for my purposes, as largely a reflection of disagreements over cultural identity and ways to represent.

I argue that this genesis story of TFAM, on the one hand, attested to how public museum institutions and the government-funded exhibitionary system in Taiwan had long been associated with a mission to construct collective cultural and political identities that paved the way for nation-making and citizen-formation. It, on the other hand, also reflected how TFAM's authorial legitimacy to narrate modern (and later contemporary) art had always been an arena of contesting identity politics since its founding.

Under the central government directive to increase public cultural infrastructures across the country, TFAM was conceptualised in 1976 as a part of the Twelve Major Construction Projects, shouldering the task of creating the first fine arts museum in Taiwan. The Chinese Cultural Renaissance Campaign launched in the late-1960s bore a waning yet residue influence on public policy of the time. During this period, the central government attempted to claim political legitimacy over the lost territories on mainland China. Public investments, as a result, were directed to fabricate a cultural ownership over rights to represent the authentic and true China by sponsoring research in Chinese heritage as well as public infrastructures that evoked Chineseness through an aesthetic affinity. Public funding in Phase I also devoted substantial resources to identify, validate and re-invent new forms of artistic expressions that were based on a continuation of Chinese heritage, in order to proactively manufacture a cultural legitimacy that equated the sovereignty of Taiwan (R.O.C) as the reincarnation of the authentic China – thus achieving a political claim over the lost territories on the mainland. Aesthetic sinonisation in view of

this push underpinned the architectural language of the era. This made the modernist style of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, designed by local architect Er-Pan Kao, a noticeable departure from an overt Chinese sensibility in public buildings and to be understood as an innovative expression to give new life to the “spirits of Chinese cultural”<sup>69</sup>.

TFAM’s mission to contribute to the country’s cultural might through citizen-making was laid bare in the inaugural statement in 1983, to enable a civilising function that educates Taipei citizens in cultivation of a taste for “high culture” (TCG, 1984). In the first issue of *Taipei Fine Arts Museum Quarterly*, the then Taipei City Mayor Jin-Tsung Yang (1984) expected:

...TFAM to become the greatest cultural infrastructure in Taipei and the grandest modern art museum in Asia. It should not only epitomise the fruit of modern art in Free China, but also further our country’s art education in order to elevate the quality of citizen’s spiritual life...We anticipate TFAM to one day become an internationally-acclaimed bastion for modern art. (p.3)

In addition to this foundational priority, in the absence of a dedicated national institution that oversaw the development of fine arts, TFAM was tasked to act as

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<sup>69</sup> Former Taipei City Mayor Chin-Tsung Yang mentioned in his foreword to the inaugural edition of *Taipei Fine Arts Museum Quarterly*, an open call was made to invite design proposals that can “express the spirit of Chinese culture with a unique feature that pursues innovation” (TFAM, 1984, p.3). Architect Er-Pan Kao deliberately circumvented an overt Chinese aesthetic that was widely in vogue for the architectural language of public buildings at the time. Kao responded to the policy focus on Chineseness with a transformative proposition, claiming his use of space in the courtyard is a modern iteration of the traditional Chinese concept inspired by the character *jǐng* (井, a well). By paying tribute to a modernist sensibility, typified by Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, the museum design embraced a clean and sleek exterior aesthetics. The architectural body of the museum thus is composed of gallery spaces in the structural formation that resembles two overlapping crosses when gazing from a bird-eye view. Read *TFAM Before 1983* (TFAM, 2014) for social-historical significance of the museum’s architectural design.

the specialised organisation to nurture cultural pipeline for national modern art, despite being under municipal supervision. The focus of art and the method of management was expected to reflect a progressive approach worthy of its mission. The leadership declared: TFAM's administration should be different from "a mega commercial gallery" or "an academic institution" but a "fine arts museum with a successfully modernised management" (Su, 1984, p.5).

***Administering the First Modern Art Museum: The What, the How, and the Whom?*** During this stage, the target (modern art) of TFAM's programming was defined in relational terms to its counterparts, denoted by the well-established disciplines composed of historical heritage and artefact under the relatively clear remits of the National Palace Museum and the National History Museum. This lack of definitive clarity to pinpoint what fell under the scope of fine art (modern art) and what should be understood as pan-cultural heritage continued to become a point of contention throughout Phase I.

The situation was exacerbated by a lack of supply in the professional workforce that could deliver a modern management structure for a modern art museum. The systematic shortage of administrative talents at its founding was apparent in the management team and staff composition of the Preparatory Office, which heavily relied on secondment<sup>70</sup> from the National Palace Museum – an institution that housed national artefacts relocated from mainland China to Taiwan with the retreat of the KMT government, whose institutional expertise

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<sup>70</sup> Rui-Ping Su was assigned as the inaugural interim director for TFAM from her previous post as Section Head of International Materials, the National Palace Museum. During her temporary stint, she failed to pass a national civil service examination (fine art track, education administration) designed as a talent hunt for the official leadership role. This widely reported scandal reflected a shortage of professionals that could manage a modern museum when the talent pipeline for modern art in the country was in a nascent state of development.

laid in the research and programming of traditional Chinese heritage.

This dilemma pointed to a conundrum – an inability to define what modern art is and a lack of a management foundation to deliver the promise of a modern, public art museum, despite TFAM's obvious ambition and mission. Researchers (Sun, 2002; Lai, 2006; Chen, 2016) argued this demand put on the management style and administrative structure bore witness to not only a post-martial law struggle to transition Taiwanese exhibitionary system from a state-endorsing official organ to a public museum system, but also the liminal difficulties in establishing its practice as an international-standard museum institution.

Early attempts to demarcate the professional boundary between TFAM as an art museum and other museum peers, resulted in TFAM turning in particular to research and publishing activities, in the hope of not only constructing a specialised narratives to legitimise TFAM's scope of work, but also establishing what professional knowledge and best practices should formulate the art museum's administrative backbone.

***Becoming a Public Art Museum: Instituting Committee Gatekeeping and Professional Credibility.*** With the lifting of martial law, the institutional logic of TFAM as a public museum gradually shifted away from the previous ideological alignment in pursuit of modern creativity of China through a propagation of unipolar value (claiming the true and the good), to move into an embrace of diverse schools of thoughts and increasingly acted as a “cultural resource reservoir”<sup>71</sup> that provided services to the public in an accessible and enjoyable manner. Making content and services more layman-friendly was

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<sup>71</sup> See the director's note for the 7th Anniversary of Taipei Fine Arts Museum on the metaphors of “cultural resource reservoir” as a shift to public accessibility (Huang, 1990, p.21).

considered a primary vehicle to achieve wider approachability, as a way to accentuate the institutional principle and responsibilities of a worthy public museum. Relevant approaches included the establishment of an on-campus art library for citizens to access, where the collection of knowledge became symbolically (as well as actually) opened to the public.

A similar symbol of opening up was also reflected, in the inclusion of previously under-represented cultural communities, coupled with an impetus to share knowledge authority with non-hegemonic voices. Under this institutional push, TFAM entered a rapid phase that sought to dissipate previously monopolised administrative (and authorial) power held exclusively by a career civil servant class. This decentralised approach saw the management and authorial legitimacy gradually being entrusted to not only a new breed of professional arts administrators, but also external professional groups formulated by a community of practitioners. This drive to professionalise the TFAM task force and institutionalise professional gatekeeping mechanisms reflected an attempt to mitigate early difficulties in articulating the remit and method of fine arts museum administration.

Such propensity was noticeable during the directorship of Kuang-Nan Huang (1986-1995). During Huang's time as Director, he spearheaded a series of initiatives to professionalise the TFAM workforce and build a community of practitioners as gatekeepers to consolidate the specialised legitimacy of TFAM as a nascent institution. Being a part of this professionalising drive, Huang tapped returning graduates from overseas studies with newly-minted degrees in Fine Art, Art History and Arts Administration, to take up managerial positions as contract employees, as a way to bridge the skill gap within the civil servant pool and make up for the technical knowledge, needed for art exhibition planning



and international coordination.<sup>72</sup>

This dual track hiring practice was eventually formalised to allow specialised talents to be recruited as educational researchers, comparable to professional hire in higher education institutions. This practice enabled specialised recruits to work alongside administrative peers, coming from the career civil servants hiring structure, and demonstrated a shift to de-monopolise administrative power through professionalising the operational team.

The focus of administrative development in this period saw TFAM's effort to transition from a community art centre into a professional art museum, by gradually reducing competition shows in its programming and an active expansion of international art movement-focused showcasing to present a set of cultural benchmarks that helped articulate *what modern art is*. The adjustment in programming direction, coupled with a professionalising workforce, worked in tandem with the institutionalisation of committee gatekeepers, which was formulated by artists, critics, and academic researchers who now sat as the juries of annual award shows to establish professional credibility for the emerging disciplines of modern and contemporary art. This effort built up institutional credibility through taste-making and adjudication of aesthetic

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<sup>72</sup> Museum Management scholar and former TFAM researcher Ying-Ying Lai (2006, pp.95-101) acknowledged Huang's courage to hire newly-minted degree holders, as specialised talent in the form of contractors. She argued Huang's personal decision was a seismic departure from the then conservative civil service bureaucracy, which depended primarily on career bureaucrats for senior management and leadership roles. In Lai's assessment, she believes career civil servants at the time were fluent in general administration yet lacked the capability to organise and execute modern and art exhibitions – and were specifically deficient in the knowledge for international coordination and dealing. It was an unprecedented move when Huang chose to hire these multilingual, young, newly-returned talent (aged under 40 on average, and often as first-time job seekers) to management positions or senior specialised roles.

differences between crafts by causal hobbyists (that belong to community art centres) versus fine arts by professional artists (legitimate at a professional art museum).

Proactive establishment of organisational bylaws to govern the procedure of venue hire, providing a framework for exhibition programming, were also instituted as a tool to establish social credibility and fend off ideological sway from non-professional actors.<sup>73</sup> This gatekeeping mechanism not only was employed to articulate *what modern art is* but also to institutionalise professional authority as effective firebreaks to resist non-professional intervention to administrative independence.

As a nascent democracy, Taipei City Council, especially the Education Committee that oversaw cultural and educational affairs, acted as a shaping force behind the museum administrative principles during its foundational years. From the *Taipei City Gazette*, the City Council was particularly concerned with the direction of programming in this liminal stage (regarding how TFAM differed in functionality in comparison to the then Taipei Cultural Centre), as well as the decision-making mechanism at TFAM in terms of how programming directions were decided and the type of art worthy of being displayed at the newly founded

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<sup>73</sup> In the post-martial law democratising fervour, city council members from the pro-independent camp lampooned TFAM's plaza rental guideline as a violation to freedom of expression. The advocacy campaign asked the museum administration to proactively promote Taiwanese nativist arts, rather than propagating, to pro-independentists, an alien Chineseness symbolised by Chinese art of the previous era. In response, the museum administration defended its bylaw as equitable. The museum argued its the bylaw dictated that artistic freedom was protected as long as now law was broken and since the martial law was lifted, there presented no concern towards freedom of expression. The museum also implied its bylaw made no mention of ideological servitude. Therefore, the administration would reframe from ideological intervention (or tilting to either side). See the museum's written response (TCC, 1993).

fine arts museum.<sup>74</sup> During TFAM director's rebuttal of legislative inquiry on these subjects, administrative decisions were frequently justified by resorting to the gatekeeping mechanisms of the professional jury committee which was established to enhance administrative credibility and the organisational bylaws as proof of impartiality and legitimacy.

### ***Democratisation and De-Sinonisation Through Decentralising***

**Authorial Power.** As a reverberance of the wider post-martial law socio-political pursuit to cut down administrative expense and reform a cumbersome civil service structure to improve administrative efficiency and quality, the Executive Yuan launched a small government campaign in 1996 to democratise access to government service provision, by proactively encouraging private sector participation in public infrastructural delivery projects. As a result, a system of outsourcing and commissioning, as the National Policy Foundation (2011) found, became increasingly baked into government administrative structure.

This reform led to a gradual downsizing in public museums across Taiwan, where museum posts were combined and vacancies left unfilled or cut. Scholar (Fu, 2005) observed that this outsourcing system also quickly opened up opportunities that allowed the private sector to be involved in the exhibition-making and knowledge-production value chain. Such method was embraced by TFAM as, I would argue, a symbolic move to turn away from in-house curated group shows that sought to establish state-endorsing authoritative narratives, by decentralising authorial power with invitations to local guest curators to

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<sup>74</sup> Council members sought to address whether cartoon works by American graphic artists should be allowed to display in TFAM lobby (a fine art museum) or be more suitable at the city's Cultural Centre; whether international shows were crowding out domestic content; and political pressure on allowing non-art events in less visible areas (e.g. basement) on the museum campus. See City Council (1986; 1990) interpellation records for more.

articulate counter or minority narratives.

Coupled with a nativism movement<sup>75</sup> following the lift of marital law, scholar (Lai, 2006) found that this Phase I development at TFAM witnessed a foundational shift from Chinese-centric validation to Taiwanese art history construction, seeing a take-over of “Taiwan” as an identity epithet in TFAM exhibition titles<sup>76</sup> – with a total abolishment of “China” as the sole label of national identification after 1995 and a substantial decrease in the use of the “Republic of China”.

The change of focus in museum collecting practices also reflected this repositioning that calibrated earlier attempts to seek cultural ownership of Chinese civilisation (and its modern iteration). This had resulted in a change in the historical window of time upon which the museum collection was based, moving from a starting point marked by the founding of the Republic of China in

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<sup>75</sup> Taiwanese curator Pei-Yi Lu (2010, pp.16-34) provided a detailed examination of the localisation, nativist (or *Taiwanisation* according to Lu) movement with a close examination on how the term was used in relation to internationalism.

<sup>76</sup> According to arts management scholar Ying-Ying Lai's tally (2006, pp.390-412), under Rui-Ping Su's leadership (1983-1986), exhibitions bearing the title of China totaled 10 shows, under the Republic of China 9 shows, and under Taiwan 6 shows. As to Kuan-Nan Huang's directorship (1986-1995), only 2 shows bore the name of China, 13 under the Republic of China, and 23 under Taiwan. Under director Cheng-Yu Chang (1995-1996), China as the sole exhibition title was no longer seen, 1 under the Republic of China, 7 under Taiwan. When it comes to Mun-Lee Lin (1996-2000), 3 under the Republic of China and 14 of Taiwan.

1911<sup>77</sup> to post-war art<sup>78</sup> that took place on the lands Taiwanese government exercised effective sovereignty.

In short, these changes seen across this first phase of development at TFAM witnessed the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the museum management system through decentralising administrative and authorial power, changing collecting practices, and publishing and programming efforts to assert a professional legitimacy worthy of a modern art museum as an ongoing nation-building effort for the post-dictatorial island.

### **Phase II. Articulation and Internationalisation: Institutionalising**

**Accessibility for a Democratised Taiwan.** What followed the liminal stage marked by the lifting of martial law was a period of rapid internationalisation.

This saw TFAM's presentation of group shows on the international stage<sup>79</sup>, with

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<sup>77</sup> Museum leadership declared TFAM to be devoted to “the modern creativity of China” that would focus on arts after the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, to “develop a sustainable fine art museum to elevate domestic artistic quality and win an international standing” (Su, 1984, p.5). This claim sought to establish a chronology that corresponds to the start of R.O.C as a nation state and the mission of leveraging TFAM as an instrument of nation-building. This claim, however, was confronted with a dilemma. As the directives attempted to pinpoint a nation-state identity rooted in R.O.C legitimacy over the lost territories in China, this developmental focus lacked a nominal essence that could articulate the specific details concerning the forms and disciplines that a new public art museum should specialise, and how this Chinese modern creativity could differentiate itself from the scope under the existing National History Museum, which also collected and showcased fine art that had an origin in China.

<sup>78</sup> The focal change was articulated by director Kuan-Nan Huang (1993), stating: “the collection timespan of Taipei Fine Arts Museum is positioned for art after the Retrocession of Taiwan post-war [from Japanese colonial government into the Nationalist KMT government], with a geographical focus on areas within Taiwan” (p.3).

<sup>79</sup> Similar attempts included a series of group shows featuring Taiwanese contemporary artists across major international institutions. For instance, TFAM-organised showcases at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 1995, Museum Ludwig in 1996, Art Gallery of

a growing focus on contemporary Taiwanese arts, as a reflection of a new Taiwan within a freshly democratised landscape and a booming economy. This effort worked in tandem with a proactive involvement in a global movement to construct the nascent narratives around non-Western arts (specifically that of Asia, Asia Pacific and the Global South), through recommendation of Taiwanese artists for inclusion in influential international showcases such as the Sao Paulo Biennale, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art and the Fukuoka Triennale. This institutional impetus to seek international presence bore the collective desire of the country's art scene to "enable Taiwanese art to enter the 'United Nations' of art", as remarked by local art critic (Shi, 1994).

With these international group showcases, deliberate efforts were made to present a more nuanced discussion around nativism –verbalising Taiwanese cultural complexities that could reflect the slew of changes following the post-martial law socio-political complications. This was coupled with a period of post-dictatorship transitional justice after the election of the first non-KMT mayor in Taipei who sought to leverage public channels to validate previously oppressed groups. Issues such as reckoning systematic violation of rights by previous government authorities became top of the municipal cultural agendas. It also manifested a transition of institutional principle to better embed the museum system into citizen's daily life and leverage such embeddedness to redirect institutional practices to be more responsive and welcoming of outside participation.

Reflecting this post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice, TFAM moved away from a "static, close-circuited and rigid" image of cultural resource

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Greater Victoria and Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto Canada in 2000 – to name a few. Refer to Taiwanese exhibition scholars (Lu, 2000; Lai, 2008; Nanjo et al, 2016) for more.

reservoir characterised by the previous era, and marched into becoming “an open, soft and active organism”, responding to the need and reality of society.<sup>80</sup> The metaphor of TFAM as a living organism was substantiated through its knowledge administration and production practices. Reflecting institutional responsiveness, a museum’s core activities were compared to a source of energy like a “heart” and public participation was considered “the soul” that infused life and meaning into institutional practices.<sup>81</sup> This inclination that started viewing museum operation as responsive and open, as a result, gradually shifted the focus of administration on knowledge accessibility and public involvement.

Under these drivers, private patronage and public attendance rate subsequently became a sign of social approval and source of legitimacy. Measures following the same principle also involved evening and night-time events to provide access to those unable (or that preferred not) to attend museum programmes during working hours; or that preferred to attend evening and night-time events. Acknowledgment of the needs of previously under-represented groups also included a growing recognition of the community with

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<sup>80</sup> In former TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin’s work report at the City Council, she declared: “As we take stride into the 21st century, we should pivot the art museum away from its long-established, object-centric practice and move into filling the growing and current need of the public. Its characteristics should grow away from a close-circuited, rigid, boxy structure into an open, soft and active organism. We aim to be more liberal and creative in seeking connection with the public, and to venture into the lives of our citizens. We want to synergise public resources with the private sector and be better at ways to think and practice on a human-scale...The priority of TFAM as we enter the next century will be on the optimisation and upgrade of software to respond to current trends” (TCC, 1999, p.5384).

<sup>81</sup> Former TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin (2000) noted: “If we compare museum practices in research, collection and exhibition as the heart of a person, we can say the interaction, exchange and communication with the public is the soul” (p.3).

disabilities, senior citizens and children, through age and need-specific educational services and programming methodology.<sup>82</sup>

As part of an affirmative action to protect equal access as an in-built cultural right, accessibility for school kids was further institutionalised by a city-wide project, titled “Education through Art: Art Appreciation Initiation”<sup>83</sup> rolled out across DoCA subsidiary art institutions (including TFAM, Taipei Symphony Orchestra and Taipei Chinese Orchestra) since 2005, to provide municipal third graders art education services through guided tours and site-visit school trips.

***Annunciating Specialised Credibility as a Public Art Museum.*** In addition to internationalisation that aimed to nation-build for a new Taiwanese identity and widening access for the under-represented, administrative articulation of the logic of art museums continues to be the primary focus of Phase II. Systematic efforts were made to enhance professional credibility in order to vocalise core principles of TFAM as a professional art museum. A shift from “the previous era marked by block party-like programmes similar to that of community cultural centres” (Huang, 2002, p.132) into a focus on collection research<sup>84</sup> and thematically-curated shows became an effective tool to

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<sup>82</sup> For example, group show *Lots o’LOTTO: Visible and Invisible* in 2005 commissioned touchable and multi-sensorial works to not only provide displays friendly to non-visual dominant groups, but also aim to advocate for barrier-free accessibility. This was developed in parallel to an expanded footprint of age-specific programming, in the form of children-centric exhibitions and activities, produced by in-house educational staff.

<sup>83</sup> The project was lauded by the City Government as “a collaboration between the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Education...and the first in the Greater Chinese world to incorporate site visit and guided tours into primary school curriculum to lower the participation barrier, protect individual cultural rights, realise cultural equality and expand cultural audience base for the development of the cultural creative industries” (TCC, 2007, p.1582).

<sup>84</sup> This includes institutionalising annual inspections for museum collection holdings as well as inter-departmental research efforts to identify gaps and strength within the collection. See the museum’s work report for more detail (TCC, 2001).



establish professional legitimacy and art museum-grade core practices that could differentiate TFAM from non-professional, non-art museum institutions.

To better materialise and articulate the institutional logic of an art museum, TFAM public programming was dedicated to building up literacy concerning how museum practice and its administrative principles affected outcome of artistic production and audience understanding of work. Systematic efforts were devoted to institutionalise mechanisms such as research, publishing and knowledge exchange, so that a three-dimensional understanding of art museums could be established, around subject matters spanning across theory of art, art history, art criticism, art education and art administration.

For example, multi-year inter-organisational partnerships with education departments of peer museums such as the Centre of Pompidou were introduced to enable the transfer of knowledge, including the know-how (curriculum) and know-what (pedagogy and curatorial capacity) to TFAM educational staff. It also involved proactive organisation of conferences to facilitate a space for dialogue that could establish shared agenda and best practices. Other efforts to affirm legitimacy as a professional art museum included the gradual institutionalisation of a specialised team that could oversee a widened scope of external relationships with the private sector – including regular events for donor groups and private sponsor liaison, as well as establishing a trust-based relationship with the public through media advocacy, so that to better convey professional openness and expand content accessibility.

**Phase III. Mainstreaming and Expansion: Mass Popularity as Sign of Community Approval.** The operational principle of TFAM as a public museum entered a phase of aggressive mainstreaming, with a growing emphasis on

institutional ability to appeal to popular taste as a sign of community approval. Building on a social embeddedness consolidated throughout the previous era, the third phase of TFAM development highlighted the role of public museums as recreational resources for domestic tourists and repeat visitors. Such recreational functions for general enjoyment positioned TFAM as the “best hang-out for family groups”, as its annual report (2008, p.4) described.

This change widened the purpose of public museums from learning-centric to enjoyment-enablement (experience-oriented). Coupled with a regularised free Saturday night-time opening hours, approachability and entertainment value became gradually imprinted onto the operational principle of TFAM as a public museum. This was further reflected in its programming that sought to expand the realm of art to cover wider design genres, ranging from architecture, fashion photography, furniture and industrial design, and costume design.

During this aggressive mainstreaming phase, the footprint of the museum also spilled over from being campus-rooted to having an increased community presence. Efforts to make public museum services more footloose culminated with the launch of city-wide DoCA project, titled “Culture in Alleys” with TFAM and other peer subsidiary cultural institutions offering programmes and workshops to seed and cultivate a wider audience base, by bringing museum programming across municipal boundaries with touring events to schools in different cities. These efforts were coupled with a push of digitisation as the frontier of realising mass accessibility and layman-friendly dissemination.

In preparation for the Flora Expo in 2010 and as a response toward an expanded focus on recreation, a campaign of facilities optimisation and upgrading were launched with a throughline that reinforced the function of public museums as enjoyment-providers. Facelifts to TFAM lobby reception

desk and art library emphasised its growing role as an audience service centre (rather than an educational portal from the previous era). Through the new designs, these points of contact prioritised the ease and comfort of the visitors (versus being intimidating or alienating). Reflecting a similar ethos, auxiliary facilities were also constructed with experience-driven functions enhanced, including the establishment of a museum restaurant for the first time, as well as a diversified souvenir portfolio at the museum shop.

The focus on enjoyment and popular appeal consequently inaugurated an era marked by international touring blockbuster shows at public museums that were co-hosted by private media companies. Similar programming received priority funding and prime-time exhibition slots such as summer school breaks or Chinese New Year holiday seasons – and enjoyed preferential designation to best-quality gallery space in a venue. These international touring blockbuster shows often featured populist themes and came with a much higher special-exhibition ticket price point. For example, TFAM within a short time span of three years had co-hosted *Pixar: 20 Years of Animation* and *Arcadie: Collection of Centre Pompidou* in 2009; and *Manet to Picasso: Masterpieces from the Philadelphia Museum of Art* and *Elsewhere: Paul Gauguin* in 2010; and *Monet Garden* in 2011.

***Instituting a Service-Oriented and Responsive Relationship With the Museum Stakeholders.*** In addition to mainstreaming, Phase III also saw an expansion of public museum interface, which positioned TFAM as a member within a wider industry of artistic network and economic relations. In view of this growing ecosystem mentality, public art museums were inserted into a web of mutual relationships – composed of different needs, expectations and delivery mechanisms. This change reflected the additional purposes TFAM were asked

to serve: on top of its core activities (related to research, collection, education and exhibition), growing demand was placed on the public art museum system to ensure a space, where artistic talents could not only practise the full cycle of exhibition production (from ideation, installation to audience engagement), but also have a nurturing platform that could cater to their needs at different stages of their career. As a result, the development of this ecosystem mentality created a temporal dimension to the relationship of TFAM with its community. As needs were understood to change (following different career stages and life experience of the constituents), it further required TFAM as a public art institution to be nimble and servient to rise to an ever-changing expectation and delivery mechanism.

This now multi-fold functionality of the public museum system, alongside an increasing service-oriented and responsive relationship with a host of stakeholders that constantly changed throughout their career and lived experience, had created exponential demand on the administration to respond and collaborate across the horizontal silos of departments and vertical decision-making strata. Instituted in 2008, a Museum Development Executive Group was formed, consisting of museum leadership, department heads and senior staff members that met regularly on a bi-weekly basis to discuss operational directions and “build consensus through collective discussion” (TFAM, 2008: 4).

***(Re)wielding Contemporary Art to Nation-Build: Public Art Museum for Soft Diplomacy.*** In terms of nation-making, TFAM continued to be an arena where different collective identities were enacted and for which voices (and bandwidth) were competed. With the museum under direct government subsidies, its identity politics during Phase III was a harbinger of the China-friendly KMT municipal and central government policy directions. The pursuit of

international recognition over this period was repositioned with a tilt towards seeking thought leadership within the Greater Chinese region<sup>85</sup>.

This resulted in a host of programming centred on contemporary artists of Chinese descent, despite their national origins. Simultaneously, cross-strait exchanges under China-friendly KMT governance rapidly expanded and asserted its importance in TFAM's programming. Corresponding reallocation of administrative resources included priority programme slots and funding for cross-strait cultural exchange projects.<sup>86</sup> For example, in 2009 to 2010, TFAM co-hosted with Taiwanese Eslite Gallery the first major retrospective show by Chinese contemporary artist Cai Guo-Qiang in Asia after his acclaimed Guggenheim showcase. Following the initial Cai's showcase, the museum organised large-scale summer lobby survey shows of other major Chinese contemporary artists, including Ai Wei Wei's *Absent* (2011-2012) and Xu Bing's *A Retrospective* (2014).

By way of research and exhibitions during this phase, TFAM aggressively laid cultural authority and representational authorship over Chinese contemporary art, during a time when the related government-run contemporary art infrastructure, administration, exhibition and knowledge-production system in

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<sup>85</sup> The geographical and cognitive boundary of the Greater Chinese region is by no means a fixed concept and is often context-specific, but frequently refers to the areas covering the sovereign territories of Taiwan and China (including Hong Kong and Macau) and disputed territories (and at times current or historical cultural influence zones through diaspora), where a shared ethnic identity and cultural affinity to Han Chinese is present.

<sup>86</sup> Art historian Sophie McIntyre (2015) claimed: "As further evidence of the government's political intervention into Taiwan's museums, a quota system has also been implemented stipulating that a certain number of exhibitions by Mainland artists must be presented annually by Taiwan's art museums. While this quota system has been widely reported in the media, its terms remain vague, and its existence has been refuted by some Taipei Fine Arts Museum staff, and it certainly seems that it is no longer being enforced on an annual basis" (p.63).

the People's Republic of China (PRC) was at its early stage of development. Such an approach effectively elevated the museum's international standing within the larger Asian contemporary art landscape, where TFAM not only secured a leadership role with this series of solo homecoming shows (to Asia) of Chinese contemporary masters after rising to fame on a global stage, but also posed itself as a benevolent (thus progressive and legitimate) haven for dissent artists (like Ai Weiwei). From these management approaches, the museum administration system at TFAM continued to operate as a vehicle to project and engineer a national identity.

#### **Phase IV. Institutionalising Reflexivity and Knowledge Agency:**

**Administering Conscientious Institutional Voice.** This Chinese-affiliate identity system, based on a claimed cultural affinity, posed a stark contrast to the post-martial law era marked by nativism, and to some an uncomfortable reminder of the policy directives under previous KMT dictatorship. The market-oriented programming that appealed to populist taste also led to a surge of scrutiny across the professional community, media and city council<sup>87</sup> which urged for an overhaul to roll back on the commercialised tilt of the public art museum. New organisation bylaws, such as *Taipei Fine Arts Museum Special*

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<sup>87</sup> The most vocal and representative of these criticisms was Taiwanese artist Chieh-Jen Chen. In 2010, he declared to sever his relationship with TFAM as a protest, stating in an interview: "the recent development of TFAM is completely dominated by ticket sales and commercialisation. Under such a trend, an art museum has lost its obligation and function – the enablement of knowledge and narratives rooted in a local experience...I do not believe in a single point of view for art history. All places can write their very own art histories. We need to be confident and be able to propose our knowledge production and perspective – be it clumsy or slow at first" (Wu, 2010). In defence against Chen's accusation of the museum's tardiness in knowledge production, DoCA commissioner and TFAM director argued the institutional approach reflects its position as a "comprehensive art museum aiming at cultivating a wider audience base" (Lin & Wu, 2010).

*Exhibition Application Guideline* in 2011 and *Taipei Fine Arts Museum Venue Usage Guideline* in 2014, were instituted through the city council. This institutional change not only ensured that a more stringent application deliberation and approval mechanism could be in place to orientate the type of commercial events deemed appropriate for public cultural institutions, but also legally prohibited non-art-and-culture-related events from being hosted within this public art museum premise.

Attesting to a period of institutional self-reflection, the museum administration pivoted away from an adversarial relationship (i.e. being on the defensive) with the professional community due to the difference over commercialised programming. This reconciliation came from an increasingly sincere and honest reckoning with the inevitability of an institutional power imbalance, espoused through museum practice and its administrative legacy. It also gradually turned to rhetoric that emphasised the role of the public art museum system as an ecosystem-player (versus an almighty solution-provider). Such a change in perspective worked in tandem with an epistemic turn that increasingly understood knowledges as situated<sup>88</sup>, context-specific and subjective. This shift in narrative – cognizant of the public museum system as an institution in itself which was confined and influenced by its institutional reality and legacy – gradually liberated TFAM from its previous era as being a public enemy of Institutional Critique.

In addition to these reconciliation efforts through a change in perspective following a wide-spread backlash, TFAM entered a phase in which they were

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<sup>88</sup> American feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1998) proposed the concept of “situated knowledges” to pivot away from Western, white, male-centric epistemology and advocate for the value of social-cultural subjectivity in knowledge producer.

increasingly attentive to segmented messaging and self-media (owned media), in order to construct an institutional narrative autonomy. The demand for museums to provide immediate response to public scrutiny saw the institutionalisation of a media spokesperson, who became the designated personnel dealing with media and public messaging. This new specialised capacity now occupied a differentiated speaking role to museum director or in-house representatives from knowledge production arms (e.g. curator, head of departments, programme leaders, etc.). Such spokesperson mechanism, working in tandem with the museum's proactive adoption of self-media, indicated a deliberate effort to construct a voice for the museum that was in control of its institutional subjectivity and had the ability to narrate its institutional reality and intention, so that it could arrive at a public voice which was not mediated through the lens of the media or other third-party.

To better articulate the museum's voice, TFAM placed increasing resources on organisation-centric messaging to build up an independent personality that was beyond the immediacy of its portfolio activities. Such expansion in institutional messaging sought to place the focus on museum's *plus* factor, alongside efforts to provide more access to behind-the-scenes museum-like day-to-day works (including collection management, relationship maintenance, strategic planning, consultation, etc.) that were not visible to public eyes.

***“Research Turn”: Re-Asserting Narrative Autonomy as In-house Knowledge Agency.*** In addition to establishing an institutional voice (subjectivity) through narrative autonomy, TFAM management also strengthened its dedication to build up its in-house knowledge autonomy during Phase IV. Administrative efforts to institutionalise knowledge agency and



professional legitimacy saw the establishment of a Research and Development Executive Group, to oversee museum-wide planning. This R&D focused group was composed of directors, senior staff in research positions and department heads to accentuate the role of collective brainpower in institutional decision-making. This focus on behind-the-scenes coupled with an articulation of institutional knowledge agency and narrative autonomy saw increased resource allocation, gearing toward research-led programming and international co-production.

This research-focused directionality was exemplified by a host of collection-based, curatorial-centric research exhibitions<sup>89</sup> that experimented with different narrative contexts, aiming at providing alternative viewpoints to how knowledges could be understood and histories narrated. Scholar (Lee, 2020) suggested the opening of a permanent art education centre in 2014 groomed a dedicated portfolio of in-house curated children-centric educational showcases, reflecting the result of knowledge transfer from previous partnerships with international education peers that had built up a pipeline of in-house talents who could curate and produce children-specific showcases.

In parallel to these developments, additional programming direction changes also included prioritising in-house produced exhibitions to take up prime ground-floor gallery spaces with preferential slots over the holiday seasons, placing the outcome of institutional knowledge production as a focal point to install the museum's knowledge agency. There had also been an increase in ownership and willingness towards laying claim to the curatorial

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<sup>89</sup> These included a first in-house initiated curatorial experiment, *Intersecting Vectors—Experimental Projects from the TFAM Collection* in 2013, curated by the then TFAM director Hai-Ming Huang who invited three young guest curators to work on this collection intervention/re-interpretation project.

capacity and knowledge production efforts of in-house teams across departments and projects, resulting in a trend to credit in-house research, curatorial and production staff as curator for TFAM-produced group shows in official announcements. This move, on the one hand, indicated a growing acceptance of the use of the title, curator, as an identity label by in-house staffers, on top of an increased individual ease in owning the curatorial and research labour. It, on the other hand, pointed to institutional efforts that sought to build up a curatorial voice for a previously behind-the-scenes team that had remained largely anonymous from non-art professionals.

Such ownership of voice and the claim over knowledge autonomy were also reflected in other administrative changes, including projects emphasising in-house curatorial experimentality and narrative intervention (and constant reinvention). These efforts ranged from serial research and exhibition programmes that contributed to non-Western-centric (and non-China-affirming) perspectives, exploring Taiwanese cultural relationships with Southeast Asian countries, to holding primary space for female artist solo presentations.

Other behind-the-scenes works pointing to efforts that sought to establish institutional reflexivity and knowledge agency included moving the management responsibilities of the art library from Education Department to the Research Department, and changing its operational principle from accessibility-focused to thematic-curation of knowledge. The development of a museum archive in the last decade also reflected this shift to view the administrative mechanism of TFAM's exhibitionary systems within a wider historical context of institution building. This had made the technology of self-archiving a process of reflexive introspection that not only aimed to auto-adjust future direction, but also allowed additional research in administrative mechanism and exhibitionary history to

happen – declaring an ease with its dirty laundry that was missing from the previous era.

**“Educational Turn”:** *Calibrating Knowledge Authority Entrusted to Public Art Museum.* During the past decade, seismic changes also happened to the ways in which the audience had been conceptualised and understood. Largely brought by the educational turn, an understanding of audiences by way of both discourse and museum / gallery curatorial / educational practices saw a change in perspective from outreach to engagement – which on the one hand defused the cultural authority of public art museums and on the other hand repositioned audiences as autonomous (or at least semi-autonomous) activators. As the role of audiences became more self-animating, public engagement programmes ascended to a new importance that embodied a new front for TFAM to articulate its in-house production / research brainpower. Projects designed to enable learning-autonomy worked in tandem with these articulations of knowledge agency through an expanded specialisation in public engagement programmes. These included deliberate carving out of dedicated gallery spaces for non-exhibition purposes to solely dedicate to projects that enabled visitors to reflect and engage in different relationalities with, for instance, the museum architecture, or to provide alternative context that enabled reflexive perspective which complicated (and at times challenged) the body of knowledge current museum exhibitions espoused. This development had resulted in an ascending prominence (and a growing curatorial gesture) among in-house public programmers and education project producers.

This change in institutional power dynamics vis-à-vis audiences consolidated a now *de facto* service-oriented mentality. For instance, the museum had updated its languaging to position the function of docent and

volunteer as enhancing visitor experience and providing customer service. This audience-centric proposition is further reflected in the term *biànmín* (便民) adopted in *TFAM 2018 Governance Plan*, with a literal translation into “making the service more convenient and accessible to the public”. This change in language illustrates a transition of docents and volunteers from being the provider of aesthetic appreciation services, into a clear audience-servicing front-of-house response team that caters to immediate customer needs.

Coupled with this audience-centric approach, social-cultural sentiment has also become more forgiving with public art museums being enjoyable and sociable, allowing TFAM to reposition as a “cultural living room” that was welcoming, and has the personality of a “comprehensive theatre”<sup>90</sup> where inter-disciplinary possibilities could be enacted. As a result, the museum’s reorganisation passed in 2019 attested to these changes in institutional drive to professionalise and meet the skill demand for 1) research capability and knowledge-creation agency, and 2) service-centric responsiveness and embeddedness.

**Table 2**

*TFAM Structure Comparison on Key Departments Name Change Before and After Reorganisation in 2019*

<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
Education Department	Education and Public Service Department
External Relationship and IT project group	Marketing and Public Relations Department
Research Department	Research and Development Department

<sup>90</sup> For the change in language on how TFAM was re-casted as welcoming and service-centric, read the interview with former director Ping Lin (Huang, 11. Sep. 2022).

Exhibition Department	Exhibition and Planning Department
Collection Department	Acquisition and Collection Management Department

***Summary: Logic of the Public Museum***

As a municipal-funded museum, TFAM was the first public art institution specialising in modern (and later contemporary) art in Taiwan. With an institutional legacy deeply rooted in citizen-making, this reality has made TFAM’s exhibitionary system inseparable from representational politics. This nation-building functionality aimed to task the public art museum system with the construction of the nation’s cultural autonomy and international might, with a goal to ultimately elevate the country’s global footing through quality research and museum-grade programming.

With the lifting of martial law, TFAM became a natural arena where under-represented communities looked to make their imprints on mainstream cultural narrative. Aggressive expansion of museum functionality following the course of democratisation, saw an ever-widening push to stretch the institutional scope of engagement in pursuit of symbolic universal approachability. It had placed demands on the public art museum system to become increasingly service-centric, and asked the institution to care for ever more diversified community needs, represented by segmented audience groups of different backgrounds in cultural origins, age, experience, gender, knowledge barrier as well as socio-economic, geographical, digital and physical-neurological need.

In view of these changes, TFAM continued to carry the ambition of nation building (now as a more democratic national self-expectation) – and transitioned to embrace a bottom-up driving force that activated the diverse realities and

identities from the grassroots art scene, with a host of administrative efforts that sought to decentralise knowledge authority. It also witnessed a gradual shift to validate under-represented voices, previously sidelined or oppressed – with a focus on cultural rights and accessibility.

In TFAM's ongoing striving to differentiate its core practice from a state-organ, a community centre or a non-art museum, the drive to professionalise its workforce, gatekeeping mechanism and knowledge agency attested to the museum's ongoing endeavour to articulate the operational principles that underpinned a public art museum institution. Its route to professionalisation illustrated how a public art museum built up its professional legitimacy as a relatively young institution. This effort worked in tandem with the institutionalisation of a set of administrative mechanisms, including shoring up the professional community of practitioners and inter-departmental executive groups to act as collective gatekeepers, as well as institutionalising bylaws as firebreaks. These efforts were done in parallel to changes in resource allocation and language use to better accentuate in-house knowledge agency and narrative autonomy.

In sum, the evolution in the logic of TFAM's administration was underpinned by changes in: 1) the content of museum production, and 2) the relationships with its audience and community of practitioners. The changes in content concerned the question *what is art?* (namely, what subject of TFAM as a professional art museum should focus on) – which has changed from its initial efforts to establish a voice for Chinese modern art, to post-martial law nativist art, and to later manifestations of Taiwanese contemporary art. The evolution in method of engagement reflected how TFAM as a knowledge producer understood its institutional relationship with its audience – which went from

single-directional and static, to mutual and self-powered.

As to changes in administrative practices, the four-phased developmental process echoed the museum's understanding of its publicness and the power dynamic in relation to its wider community of practitioners – which had undergone different cycles from taste-dictating, collaborative, adversarial at times, to ecosystem-enabling. A change in institutional logic at TFAM was also a reflection of how knowledge was understood – from unipolar, to multicultural, and later situated and subjective. This epistemic turn was manifested in the role TFAM played – from an authority figure that spoke of universal truth, to a cultural resource reservoir that documented and narrated multiple realities, or an organism that responded to social-cultural needs, and then on to a cultural living room that was welcoming and audience-centric.

### **The Episteme of the Biennial Platform in Biennial Administration**

After looking at the logic of the public museum through the prism of how museum management as an institution has evolved and professionalised in Taipei, the following section will examine the third of the three epistemes, the logic of the biennial platform, which constitutes the final component of the institutional principles for the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial. Again, I will first investigate the constitution and changes of the biennial genre as a body of knowledge, before entering into a granular analysis on the case study of Taipei, through the lens of biennial management. This final epistemic archeology aims to unravel the ways Biennial administration has been transformed, and will identify how these changes affect the foundational principles at work for event administrators.

According to the official website of the Biennial Foundation – an international research non-profit dedicated to perennial contemporary art

showcases – approximately 280 biennials and their equivalents (including triennials, quinquennials and other comparable perennial exhibitions) exist around the world. This portfolio of recurring global happenings reflects the pervasiveness of biennials as an exhibition genre.

Scholars of festival and exhibition studies (Filipovic & Vanderlinden, 2005; Vogel, 2010; Gardner & Green, 2016) had long identified prevalent forces underpinning the operational logic of the biennial as a globalising exhibitionary system. In terms of funding sources and administrative structures, biennial showcases are regularly bankrolled and organised directly by local and state governments or sponsored through a semi-public agencies or foundations. Researchers argued that the public funding source and organising structure had made biennials less commercialised (Basualdo, 2010) and more thematic (Tang, 2011) in nature, giving the exhibition genre a pronounced publicness in its operational logic.

This emphasis on publicness had distinguished the biennial format from its peers such as art fairs, despite sharing a similar exposition style as recurrent, extensive, international, time-limited events. The footprint of biennials in comparison to art fairs also moved beyond a single site to an often festival-like, city-wide presence, marked by high-intensity, serial programming during the run of the show.<sup>91</sup> This eventfulness was coupled with a propensity that favoured visual theatricality through newly-commissioned, site-specific, large-scale installations. These characteristics and programming methods have made biennials a recurring arena, prioritising the display of the latest developments in contemporary art, including trends that had an impact on art practices and the

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<sup>91</sup> This off-site spin-off phenomenon was dubbed by art critic Peter Schjeldahl (1999, p.85) as “festivalism”.



wider art world – be it stylistic, aesthetic, technological, theoretical, ontological, relational, environmental or socio-political.

**Performative Globality: Symbol of Cultural Authority.** Despite its modern-day heterogenous manifestations, the root of contemporary art biennials could be traced back to the mid-19th century. Researchers (Filipovic et al, 2010; Gardner & Green, 2016) in exhibition history commonly attributed the genesis of recurring, international, large-scale expositions to the Crystal Palace World Fair in 1851. Where the world (and cultural others), gathering at the doorstep of a nation state to be looked at, in the narrative of the host country, became the origin story of the biennial format.

This format spoke of a nationalistic and colonial (later neo-colonial) drive to instrumentalise (if not weaponise) knowledge curation, in order to construct and validate the cultural authority and technological supremacy of the host country, in the hope of translating such techno-cultural credibility into socio-political legitimacy. The ability to command an overflow of internationalism<sup>92</sup> (through a global presentational lineup) reinforced the symbolic capital of the host nation in terms of its influence. This gave the biennial format an underlying pursuit of performative globality as a symbol of legitimacy.

In addition to world fairs replicating the model of Crystal Palace and popping up elsewhere throughout the second half of the 19th century (from Paris in 1867 to Chicago in 1893), researchers (Vogel, 2010; Filipovic et al, 2010; Green and Gardner, 2016) identified that this model of performative

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<sup>92</sup> An overflow of internationalism, or perhaps radical internationalism, was discussed in various terms such as by research duo Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2016) as “globality” and curator Terry Smith (2017) as “transnational transitionality”. These various points of reference built on a conceptualisation of a multitude of artworlds elsewhere and an acknowledgement of difference in practice that might be engendered by these artworlds elsewhere.

globality through knowledge curation was re-purposed to establish the modern art perennial showcase which became established with the Venice Biennale in 1895 and the Carnegie International Annual series around the same time.

Fundamental to the biennial institution, Venice Biennale widely known as the art world's Olympics took the form of national pavilions, where each participating country was in charge of organising and presenting a national showcase for a jury to select the best national pavilion and best artist. This nation-based and contest-driven mechanism, as a result, further engrained national competitiveness to the logic of the biennial format.

**Identity Formation via Self-Display and In-Built Competitiveness.** Such foundational nation-building impetus by means of self-display and claim-making (for a discerning audience) carried through as a legacy of operational principle. Similar intentions were reflected in the founding of the Sao Paulo Biennial – the second oldest art biennial and the first in the global south – launched in 1951. Bearing the cultural aspiration of a then vibrant economic body to shape regional narrative from its perspective, the Sao Paulo Biennial aimed to elevate the standing of Brazilian modern and contemporary art. Through this newly-founded, local-owned exhibition platform, the city sought to develop thought leadership that could drive the regional cultural agenda.

Sao Paulo demonstrated the cravings of a non-capital city to resort to the biennial institution to lay claim to domestic clout and external influence. Such a proposition engendered later peripheral biennials a default city-to-city competitiveness in their logic. Scholars (Filipovic & Vanderlinden, 2005; Filipovic et al 2010; Vogel, 2010; Green & Gardner, 2016) also observed that similar propensity was echoed by post-war Europe, which saw the founding of perennial showcases such as the Kassel Documenta in 1955 and the footloose

Manifesta (European Biennial of Contemporary Art) established in early 1990s. This had set in train a model where perennial contemporary art showcases become a vehicle for emerging or post-conflict economies on the path of socio-cultural rebirth to (re)install competitiveness and cultural potency.

The default position of competition baked into the institution of the biennial could also be observed in the mobilisation of regional alliance and geo-political comradery as a form of cultural resistance against hegemonic powers. Such impetus was evident in the inaugural Havana Biennial, launched in 1984. Researchers (Gardner & Green, 2016) argued that the Havana platform made plain its ambition to assert the country as thought leader of the non-aligned nations during the height of the Cold War. Through art, it sought to offer a form of political resistance against the oppositional blocs led respectively by Capitalist America and the former Soviet Union.

These mixed logics of nation-(re)building manifested in cultural regionalism through transnational alliance formation, informed by an underlying desire to compete and own alternative agenda, was representative of the rise of biennials across Asia Pacific in the 1990s. In his snarky comment<sup>93</sup> on the reasoning behind the propagation of biennial platforms among newly emerged democracies and economic powers in Asia Pacific, Taiwanese curator Nobuo

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<sup>93</sup> Takamori (2019) critiqued in his op-ed that in the current over-supply of biennials, only “those that are able to harness the discursive technology and play up their developmental histories with a nose for global sensitivity, can attract international professional attention, leaving those ‘mediocre’ ones exiting the scene altogether.” He also laid plain the astronomical financial burden put on the hosts to bolster an internationalist programme line up. On top of these observations, Takamori lambasted biennial platforms for becoming reliant on bankrolling international opinion leaders and knowledge producers to create “global dialogue” and gradually becoming a piggy bank for the extravagant travels (and lifestyle) of globe-trotting, mega-star European curators.

Takamori (2019) revealed a deep-rooted anxiety behind such tactics for nation-building. He argued:

In fact, looking back at the history of most biennials and triennials...the genesis of these events was not far from a measure of expediency, rooted in a local realisation that there was a developmental gap between the domestic art world and the [discursive and power] centre of international art scene. Due to an anxiety towards its artistic development, a rising nation state as a prospective economic powerhouse or the second-tier (or third-tier) city of a given country, resorts to holding international extravaganzas to occupy [narrative] space and gain a voice within the international art world...To be blunt, in comparison to long-term investment in art museums or art education, biennial platforms epitomises a tactic of high cost-performance ratio, through which the weaker regional power can create a leverage in the global arena of artistic development. This anxiety lays bare the foundational strategy for young biennials to operate short-term, concentrated investment that can bring about a high-intensity of high-quality works through a fixed period of time, in order to quickly assemble a global-facing “show window” to its domestic audience, while luring international professional practitioners to visit and stay, with its presentation of highlight lineup.

Takamori illustrated a paradox of biennial edginess (innovation versus anxiety) as two sides of the same coin, pointing to a desire for influence through a demonstration of novelty, while simultaneously masquerading a deep uncertainty (if not unease) with the collective cultural self. In this vein, biennials function as a performative showroom featuring newness and quality (to both internal and external audiences), yet in reality amplifying a collective

apprehension towards cultural development. I would propose, Takamori's analysis of the confidence crisis holds true to an extent in identifying the compound sentiments behind biennial nation-making, but substantially under-emphasised the infrastructure-enabling mechanism and long-term ecosystem building legacy, intrinsic to biennial administration.

**Infrastructure Building Through Local / Transnational Dialogue.** The institutional intent to accumulate, grow and sustain knowledge networks, as well as research and production capacity as critical biennial infrastructure, received a more fair-handed examination by research duo Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2016). The pair, on the one hand acknowledged the globalising phenomenon of biennials as an extension of western-colonial neoliberalism, and on the other hand, viewed the globalising origin of the biennial system as a prerequisite for triggering a critique of the very western-colonial, neoliberal institutions.<sup>94</sup> They argued that the biennial system activates (what I referred to as) performative globality that compels benchmarks from across geo-cultural (and discursive) spaces to interact. This in turn materialises an in-built capacity for international dialogue, which in the long run aggregates and expands the host's cultural infrastructure and knowledge creation fluency.

This reading advocated by Gardner and Green not only empowered Asian

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<sup>94</sup> Green and Gardner (2016) signified a revisionist attitude towards pigeonholing biennial platforms in a dichotomy of the evil versus the good (namely the global, neocolonial, capitalist versus the resistive). This interpretation provides an alternative lens to examine the relationship between the exhibitionary system, globalisation and the role of contemporary art. Similar advocacy, sympathetic to institutional agency, can be understood as a reaction against art theorists of the previous era. Representative of the zeitgeist of the 2000s, scholar Thierry de Duve (2007) treated the instrumentality of localism as replicating the hegemonic (and homogenising) coercion by globalisation. In de Duve's criticism, "glocalization" as a *moda operandi* deliberately played up the creative and cultural particularities of the host cities as a demonstration of a neoliberal urbanity.

biennials founded during the 1990s with knowledge agency, but also highlighted the autonomy of the biennial administration to take ownership of the identity-shaping process. This sympathetic approach aided the understanding of administrative intent to develop and sustain local / regional research and production capacity beyond the dominant discourses (and away from western centres). With the case study of Taipei, I will delineate how such an ecosystem-building imperative was achieved with strategic engineering and administrative curation of knowledge creation networks by the biennial management team. I will also illustrate the ways in which institutional agency was consolidated by a careful assemblage of knowledge actors through the recurring format that sees to infrastructural longevity. Through this proposed line of inquiry, the institutional principles behind the Biennial administration can be revealed, as I will suggest analytical lenses that could identify the administrative voice behind similar perennial operations.

**Transition Towards Social Laboratory and Infrastructure Builder.** An in-built mechanism for recurrent dialogue and the propensity to infrastructure-build were coupled with a growing awareness<sup>95</sup> to go beyond the abrupt stop-start cycle of biennial structure, to better maintain the research momentum and resource network during non-event years. Such mindfulness to longevity and an impetus to break the arbitrary event time limit had joined force with an increasing turn to leverage biennial platforms for social activism, since the mid-2000s.

As the trend accelerated after the 2008 financial crisis, this change not only

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<sup>95</sup> This longevity / legacy mindset was advocated by curator Kate Fowle for biennials to transcend the default positionality that capitalises on “urgently epic temporary scenario” (Smith, 2012, p.251).

prioritised the valorisation of alternative worldviews (away from the north Atlantic), but also made biennials an experimental process to enable possible solutions to the problems exacerbated by hyper-globalisation. Such shift has reshaped biennials as “social laboratory” (Green & Gardner, 2016) and “infrastructural activist” (Smith, 2012), seeking to create “real impact of art in society” (Kompatsiaris, 2014). It also reflected a wider phenomenon where politics (and I would argue the problematisation of politics) alongside “the global issues concerning humanity, its past and its future” (Bartelik, 2014) had become an in-built logic of the biennial.

This “social turn”<sup>96</sup> in the biennial’s impetus to enable sustainable impacts beyond its showcasing lifespan and a growing institutional care which attempted to reach beyond the silo of the arts, points to a change in curatorial gesture and organisational / production methodology. This paradigm shift has compelled the biennial administration to prioritise year-round presence through community and civic engagement, alongside a step-up in stewardship responsibility for the interconnectedness of the platform with its local socio-cultural (and environmental) fabric. For example, Toronto Biennial of Art, founded in 2019 practising indigeneity with a conscientious connection to the land (and thus its community, surroundings and histories), highlighted the role of the biennial

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<sup>96</sup> Central to the paradigm shift in art-making was a transition toward socially-engaged practice, dubbed by art historian Claire Bishop (2006) as a “social turn” in contemporary art. She observed that the popularisation of socially-engaged works belonged to a “recent surge of artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies” (p.178). Bishop attributed the surge of these new types of social-facing works as the result of the unprecedented expansion of biennials among “countries until recently considered peripheral to the international art world” and is also a direct consequence of a growing inclination among these biennials to adopt a “new model of the commissioning agency dedicated to the production of experimental engaged art in the public realm” (Ibid).

platform as an infrastructural builder and a proactive member of the local socio-cultural landscape.

This reflexive approach reached a new height with the Covid-19 pandemic, giving rise to an urgency for biennials, such as the Helsinki Biennial launched in 2021, to pivot its value proposition to a post-pandemic reality. With a focus on the platform's contribution to sustainable development through a responsible exhibition-making approach, this has led to an emerging institutional mindfulness toward infrastructural equity. Often featuring a clear pan-organisational roadmap, this change in administrative principle reflects a growing necessity for biennial organisers to articulate its role in society. It also points to a growing acknowledgement of institutional responsibility toward a sustainable art ecosystem, which has been increasingly characterised by an expansive scope from sustainable environmental commitments to inclusive future-building, where the proactive imagination of alternatives is at the heart of their operation.

As the contemporary art biennial format evolved into an institution of itself, this community responsibility and interconnectedness through commitment and presence could be seen from the announcement made by the Venice Biennale in 2021 to inaugurate an international research centre for contemporary art. It demonstrated an effort for non-interrupted relationship-building by becoming an "academic hub" (Iman, 2021) by means of self-archiving and research collaboration, so that the platform could better contribute to the examination of its institutional impact on the system of contemporary art. This initiative<sup>97</sup> by the

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<sup>97</sup> Ironically, such intention was opposed by over 300 protesters, stating the initiative is an "invasion" (Iman, 2022) by the Biennial on the local landscape which reflects an ongoing contempt toward the needs of local residents.



Venice Biennale, I would suggest, reflects a wider “archival turn”<sup>98</sup> among the biennial and festival circuits, where the organisers increasingly depend on self-documentation, self-archiving and archive (re)interpretation as a means for intra-institutional reflexivity and an invite for extra-institutional re-narration.

### ***Logic of the Biennial Platform at TB***

As the contemporary art biennial genre has come of age, these shifts in operational principles on a global scale which became mindful of nation-making, performative globality, and knowledge agency and infrastructure enablement are useful as contextual references to identify administrative turns in the case of Taipei. To unpack the logic of the biennial for the TB administration, I will outline epistemic changes that influenced the understanding of:

- what the biennial is for (its purpose),
- with whom and to whom it interacts (its target stakeholders), and
- in what form and manner, it interacts (its methodology / gesture).

These questions (and evolutions of corresponding answers) in turn had informed the ways in which the Biennial was administered. As a government-funded, museum-based contemporary art biennial, TB’s evolution can be distinguished into three stages of development, which loosely correspond to paradigm shifts in the purpose, target and methodology related to the biennial administration:

- 1) Phase I. As subject formation and declaration;

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<sup>98</sup> This gradual shift of focus to documentation and archiving could be understood as a cumulative effort by researchers and archivists who had long urged for a systematic approach to preserve ephemeral and peripheral materials, as an essential process to enable scholarship in biennial institutions. For instance, art librarian Gustavo Grandal Montero (2012) alerted to a lack of systematic documentation among biennial circuits and proposed a scope of archival collectables for biennial’s consideration – from exhibition proposals to press cuttings – to better chronicle the exhibition footprint and institutional impact.

- 2) Phase II. As reflection, critique and institution; and
- 3) Phase III. As perspective, relation and ecosystem.

**Phase I. Biennial as Subject Formation and Declaration: Increased Fluency in Administering and Supporting Modern and Contemporary Art.**

Taiwan in the 1990s entered a phase of exponential socio-economic changes, ushered in by the lifting in 1987 of martial law. A slew of chain reactions soon followed the course of rapid democratisation and a booming economy, seeing the island harvesting the success as one of the Four Asian Tigers<sup>99</sup> (or more commonly known in Taiwan as the Four Little Dragons). Scholars of Taiwanese art history (Lai, 2008; Chen, 2016) argued that the freedom of speech now guaranteed after the end of martial law, alongside a wave of justice reconciliation, had escalated the ongoing nativist movement and given rise to a new breed of art that sought to reflect the contemporary living reality and identity of the reformed island.

These changes in art-making and identity shifts were coupled with the institutionalisation and professionalisation of modern and contemporary art administration. At the time of the late 1990s, TFAM as the first art museum in Taiwan had established a decade-long track record in the support and development of Taiwanese art scene. Defining of the “art museum-era”<sup>100</sup>, this belated international-grade museum venue had gradually built up its infrastructural capacity and secured stable municipal commitment (see the

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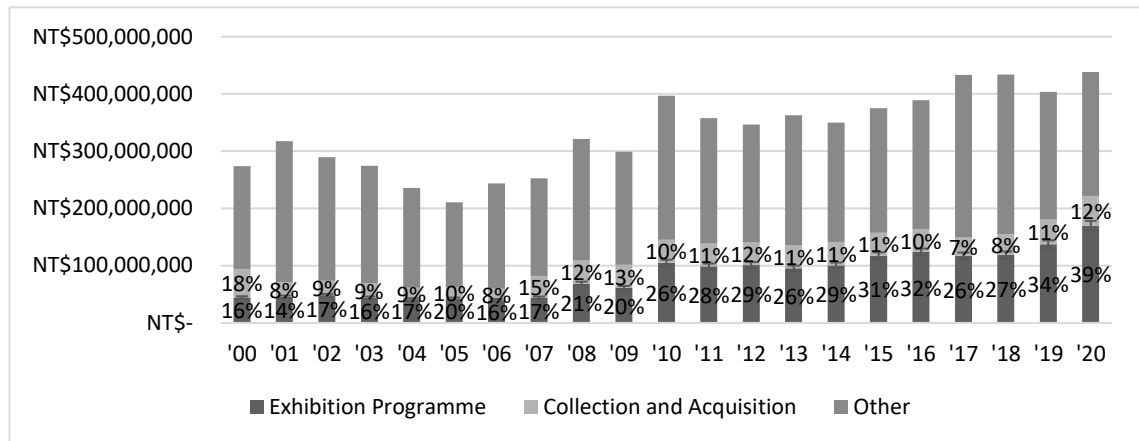
<sup>99</sup> Before the 1997 Asia financial crisis, the success of developing countries in East Asia which transformed the economies from post-war desolation to emerging global powerhouses, catapulting these young democracies into high-growth performers. This phenomenon was dubbed as the “Asian Miracle” by the World Bank 1993 report, which analysed the policy roadmaps of Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Singapore as coveted benchmarks.

<sup>100</sup> The landmark establishment of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum was dubbed as the inauguration of the first wave of the art museum era, by local media (Chien, 2021).

figure below on museum funding) for modern and contemporary art.

**Figure 1**

*TFAM Annual Budget 2000-2020*



Note: Figures from 1999 to 2017 are based on the 2017 TFAM Annual Report. Figures from 2018 to 2020 are based on respective Statutory Annual Budget Reports. Annual budget excludes income, grants or sponsorship. Exhibition Programme budget excludes personnel expenses.

Within a decade of development, TFAM had become more fluent in the administration and organisation of museum-based exhibitionary projects with its budding yet relatively well-endowed resource and expertise pipeline. This arsenal of support from planning, production, research, acquisition, education to promotion had supercharged Taiwan’s exhibitionary system and provided a solid ground for experimental artworks and practices, unseen before due to a lack of organisational software and venue hardware before TFAM’s founding, to be realised. Different from the previous gallery or studio-based era<sup>101</sup>, TFAM’s

<sup>101</sup> Former TFAM director Hai-Ming Huang (1993, p.91) and curator Felix Schoeber (2014) both pointed out how the founding of TFAM bore direct consequences to and accelerated a shift in

museum-level exhibitionary infrastructure, administrative bandwidth and its increased fluency in navigating the museum display environment, had enabled an optimised production process and set in train a host of new possibilities<sup>102</sup> to art-making.

In addition to the socio-political environment that embraced artistic freedom of expression and a much-expanded infrastructural support network enabled by TFAM, technological advancement and adoption, represented by the rise of multimedia and internet, formulated a vibrant testing ground for technology-savvy contemporary artworks. Now conducive to the production and realisation of larger-scale, site-specific, mixed-medium and media-based installation, these compound shifts in art practices accelerated by socio-economic, infrastructural and technological changes, subsequently drove TFAM to abandon its existing model for perennial exhibition from genre-based, competition-style juried series<sup>103</sup> and instead to turn to a mixed-medium and thematic approach, which

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art practices during the 1980s to 1990s for the country. The museum's architectural features, marked by spaciousness with elevated floor space, gave artists an unprecedented site to work in. This expansion in spatial capacity led to the creation of larger-scale art works and installation-based pieces. I would suggest that in addition to how the site set in new possibilities for art-making, the resourcefulness of TFAM and the support infrastructure brought by its administrative capacity as a public art museum enabled works of higher technical and resource demand to be commissioned, produced and displayed. This in turn challenged and pushed industry practitioners to up their game in terms of providing technical support.

<sup>102</sup> These new potentialities ranged from conditions such as climate control, high ceilings with weight bearing capacity, large windows allowing natural light, outdoor plaza public art space enabling works that catalyse new relationships and ways of viewing, stable technical support capability, to name a few.

<sup>103</sup> Perennial open-call, competition-style juried show held at TFAM since its founding has its legacy in the Imperial Art Exhibition, organised during the Japanese colonisation era as a policy of assimilation. For Taiwanese artists under colonial rule, cultural participation at the annual Exhibition was considered a way to gain social exposure and political recognition by the imperial

pivoted to a biennial genre which were gaining traction across Asia Pacific. This change in strategy led to an adoption of the term *Biennial* for its perennial exhibition series in 1992 and an introduction of the thematic survey show format with the official title of Taipei Biennial in 1996.

***Biennial: New Exhibition Format for Democratised Taiwan.***

Experimented for the first time to materialise this new non-juried, survey, biennial exhibition format, the inaugural 1996 Taipei Biennial invited a group of young practitioners as guest curators to develop a series of theme-based mini-shows and public programmes around four topics<sup>104</sup> which concerned with a new Taiwanese identity – a de-sinonised (or Taiwanised), oceanic (non-continental) identity affiliation in a post-dictatorial era. Attesting to this different methodology employed by the inaugural biennial, a special project titled “Citizen Aesthetics” was introduced to not only give weight to audience participation, but also articulate the ethos of the symbolic reform.

This newly adopted thematic biennial format sought to decentralise taste-making standard and representational right from the organiser (as an authorial figure in the juried show format) by redistributing such symbolic capital to

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power. This dynamic was explored in a group exhibition *Worldward: The Transformative Force of Art in Taiwan's New Cultural Movement* produced by TFAM in 2021. Taken place every other year, the perennial juried series titled *Contemporary Art Trend* (*Xin Zhan Wang* literal translation as “New Prospects”), was launched in 1984 – a year after TFAM’s opening – to mark the spirit of a new zeitgeist made possible by the museum-era. Genre-based and juried, this exhibition series, despite being held every other year and with the intention to showcase the latest development of contemporary art in Taiwan, lacked the thematic and curatorial capacity commonly known in the exhibition genre of contemporary art biennial. The biennial format, discussed in this thesis, was officially introduced in 1996, after the *Contemporary Art Trend* series adopted the title of Taipei Biennial, alongside a curatorial and thematic methodology.

<sup>104</sup> These included 1) Genealogy and Archives; Identity and Memories; 2) Environment and City Life; 3) Sexuality and Power; 4) Visual Dialogue.

audiences as discerning individuals. This design reflected a deliberate move on the part of the Biennial administration to dilute the gatekeeping authority previously monopolised by academic jury members on the panel of competition-styled perennial showcase and entrust this authorial power to the field actors<sup>105</sup> in the emerging discipline of curatorial practice.<sup>106</sup> This symbolic move not only echoed the democratisation (and privatisation) impetus of the 1990s that endeavoured to legitimise non-mainstream, non-institutional voices through representation and empowerment<sup>107</sup> but it also augmented a paradigm for

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<sup>105</sup> Cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) defined “fields” as social spaces constructed by socio-economic activities related to the production, circulation and exchange of goods, services, knowledge or status. The fields are underpinned by the competitive struggle of field actors (or agents) to accumulate symbolic capital as sources of legitimacy and influence.

<sup>106</sup> During a time when the professional legitimacy of curator and thematic showcase genre was underdeveloped in Taiwan, this move was met with criticism, as it disrupted the gatekeeping mechanism and storytelling dynamics of the previous era. On top of a redistribution of power from academic juries to emerging curatorial practitioners, thematic organisation as a new storytelling technique demanded a capacity for curators and production team to articulate the visual and narrative connection between artworks, so that inter-contextual relevance could be substantiated and understood. This format also presented a new way to engage with visual information that now asked the audience to follow a curatorial framework, which was different from the viewing experience and knowledge threshold for a juried show, where objects by nature were standalone as reference of excellence, bearing little to no inter-object connection. Representative of these mixed sentiments toward the change in methodology, the review of *The Lion Art Monthly* (Dai, 1996) on the one hand endorsed the showcase for reflecting the democratic spirit of the time, yet on the other hand voiced concern over the newly-introduced biennial showcase technique for being conceptually disorientating. In addition to being hard to follow in its thematic form, the article also posed doubt to a change in taste-making credibility, which might put the quality of the exhibition in question – since in the new thematic format, decision-making concerning artwork inclusion was solely based on themes and not excellence like in the previous juried show system.

<sup>107</sup> These attempts to redistribute resource and invite representation brought tremendous controversies to the directorship of Cheng-Yu Chang – a TFAM director appointed by the first democratically elected Taipei City mayor Shui-Bian Chen from the pro-independence party DPP

TFAM to work with this new group of knowledge makers (curators and critics) through a redistributed gatekeeping mechanism.<sup>108</sup>

***Internationalised Context to Administer and Vocalise New Taiwanese Identity.*** Under the exhibition title *The Quest for Identity*, the 1996 Taipei Biennial anchored its curatorial question as methodology, seeking to unravel the complexity of a new Taiwanese culture. This approach, featuring a decentralised authorial voice, coupled with an unequivocal address of Taiwanese art and the island's cultural subjectivity, was in general well-received by the art world<sup>109</sup> as a breath of fresh air that reflected a reformed attitude compared to the top-down

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(or known as the green party while the pro-unification KMT party is known as the blue party). Director Chang was accused of "green-washing" TFAM administration with programmes and personnel tilting toward the nativist movement. Embroiled by accusations of acquisition malpractices that allegedly favoured artists with a nativist agenda, director Chang resigned amidst wide-scale protest by the art world during an investigation led by the Taipei City Council. Among the waves of criticisms, Chang as a long-time artist was criticised for being incompetent and lacked administrative acumen. I would suggest concern over administrative sensibility and neutrality brought forth wider discussion around administrative proficiency, which resulted in an industry-wide urgency to professionalise the practice of arts administration. These discussions aided the nascent contemporary art administration landscape to be further differentiated from the artistic / creative capacity.

<sup>108</sup> Former TFAM researcher Ying-Ying Lai (2008, pp.146-147) expressed uncertainty concerning the long-term effect of such decentralisation. In her view, this change while diluting authorial voice from institutional monopoly, opened a flood gate where the institutional research capacity might be watered down. To Lai, if not balanced well, in-house research capacity could vaporise and the role of research staff re-casted in an administrative and assistive function. With a more optimistic view, I argue that this new paradigm denoted a shift in need where a multiplication of knowledge creators increasingly rested outside of the museum system. Rather than a brain-drain, such change was reflective of the ecosystem need of the time, where TFAM as a public museum grew away from knowledge production into project management and production enablement. As demonstrated in the previous section under the logic of public museum, when the ecosystem needs change shape again, the public museum system also responds in accordance to these changes to readjust and reassert knowledge agency.

<sup>109</sup> See exhibition reviews in the September issues of trade publications *Dragon: An Art Monthly* (1996) and *The Lion Art Monthly* (Dai, 1996).

and China-centric rhetoric before the lift of martial law. Representative of the biennial logic of the 1990s, the construction of national identity and collective future-finding underpinned the institutional drive of this first phase of development, as noted by Yuling Lee, the then head of the exhibition department at TFAM, who stated: “Taiwan was experiencing a journey of self-finding in the 1990s. Through contemporary art, we try to define the root of Taiwanese culture and the root of the country” (Nanjo et al, 2016).

Leveraging contemporary art and biennial platforms as a main vehicle of activation, researcher (Lu, 2013) observed that this inward identity (re)engineering work jointed efforts with an outward mission to elevate and secure the island’s influence and legitimacy on the global stage.<sup>110</sup> Such a collective ambition sought to win over political credibility for Taiwan as a sovereign nation by actively articulating its cultural capital. This nation-building initiative culminated<sup>111</sup> in the launch of the Taiwan Pavilion (under the name of the Republic of China, Taiwan) in 1995 as an official national pavilion at the Venice Biennale – a symbolic act of formally representing the nation to compete at the art world’s Olympics.

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<sup>110</sup> According to Taiwanese curator Pei-Yi Lu (2013), this phenomenon echoed the concept of the “New Taiwanese People” proposed by then president Teng-Hui Lee in 1995, which reflected a new rhetoric aiming to not only reconcile domestic ethnic divides, but also gain international recognition as a sovereign nation with a different identity from China. Shifting away from a contest for continental / mainland representation with the PRC, Lu argued this alternative discourse based on an oceanic affinity, was a strategy developed in accordance with the geopolitical dilemma, after being ostracised from the United Nations since early 1970s and confronted by the rising global influence of a reformed China.

<sup>111</sup> International recognition for the national status of Taiwan was the cornerstone of these efforts, as delineated by former TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin: “during the final stage of preparation for the launch of our national pavilion in Venice, I was constantly after our staff to make sure the national flag can be raised during the opening” (Nanjo et al, 2016).



Soon after the inaugural presentation of the Taiwan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, the drive for nation-building moved to a new height and saw the launch of the first international edition of the Taipei Biennial in 1998, out of a desire to create a “home-field advantage”<sup>112</sup> which was absent from “playing by the rules of the others”, according to former TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin (Nanjo et al, 2016). Such home-field advantage was considered critical to enable the island to take ownership in (re)inventing a cultural narrative that can be representative of its worldview and incubative to articulate its socio-political reality. In order to achieve this goal, internationalisation was deemed an essential facilitator to provide a transnational context for the island to tell its story. This desire for dialogue and need for an internationalised context (with a locally-rooted platform) to narrate Taiwanese art and local identity, resulted in a presentation that banded four East Asian countries (Taiwan, Japan, Korea and China) together with the 1998 biennial edition.

This geo-alliance re-examined the power dynamics created by the West in the wake of the Asia financial crisis. According to the catalogue essay by Japanese guest curator Fumio Nanjo (1998), the biennial highlighted a new Asian identity that investigated its developmental trajectory and attempted to reconcile with post-colonial realities:

Asia’s cities are seeking a new identity as they sculpt modernity. Its economies have grown, heated up and contracted. Its politics are in

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<sup>112</sup> Former TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin elaborated this rationality of creating a “home-field advantage” during a panel discussion, titled *Remapping Asia: 1998 Taipei Biennial*. She articulated the necessity for a locally-controllable yet globally-connected platform, so that the narrative authority could be free from “playing by the rules of the others” (Nanjo et al, 2016) which was encountered by the TFAM team throughout every step of the preparation and implementation at the Venice Biennale national showcase.

turmoil, and its democracies are beginning to take on unique shapes. All of these aspects are also a sign of Asia's dynamism. Tradition is being reexamined and reborn as well as being creatively transmitted. Western modernity is learned from, studied, copied, and denied. (p.17)

Strategically embedding the voice of Taipei within an alliance of non-Western, regional narratives, the 1998 biennial project demonstrated a drive to "insert Taiwan into the Asian-identity dialogue, and make the island a center for cultural innovation" as observed by a New York Times art critic (Solomon, 1998, p.A31).

This first internationalised attempt created a template for the biennial to adopt what I would refer to as performative regionalism (later projected globality) as a strategy to increase the island's competitiveness and international standing. It also engrained an impetus for the biennial to position itself as a contributing force to a transnational discourse, so that a local-grown voice and cultural representation could be acknowledged and disseminated.

***Administering Performative Globality for International Competition as Identity Consolidation.*** These paradigm shifts in operational principle for the Biennial pointed to a foundational change to the purpose and target of the platform's competitiveness in the first phase of its development, which had morphed from competing for (and awarding) domestic artistic excellence (in the previous juried format) from a position of authority, into a contest for international reputation as a rising democracy among a group of self-defined counterparts (as benchmarks or potential competitors).

Such a shift was identified also by art critic Andrew Solomon (1998). In his review for the *New York Times*, Solomon gave credit to Taiwan's democratic foundation and the artistic freedom it imbued as the root of the show's success. Within a comparative context with regional peers (of varying political systems

and tracks of post-war democratisation), the freedom that Taipei Biennial stood from was in stark contrast to counterpart authorities often holding a hesitant attitude toward contemporary art – as the art form was understood as critical of political realities, since it reflected everyday life (and unmasked or often dramatised discontent). Solomon stated:

Democracy and biennials arrived in Taiwan about the same time...Now internationalism has arrived. The current exhibition, the first North Asian Biennial, includes work by artists from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and mainland China...The work ranges from the formal to the didactic to the comical to the acutely political; such profound variety and the ostentatious display of total artistic freedom seem almost incredible in a country that held its first fully open elections little more than two years ago. (p.A31)

To Solomon, the 1998 Taipei Biennial served as a competitive (if not more compelling) proposition than the survey show – *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* – put on by the New York Guggenheim Museum, in addressing complex geo-political nuances in a post-Cold War, globalised era, and making the New York showcase an awkward stab in its attempt to canonise an increasingly fast-changing and multipolar terrain of contemporary art.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> In his review, Solomon (1998) praised the curation that introduced lesser-known artists and the successful execution of site-specific installations which created space-commanding, eye-catching new works. He called out the Guggenheim Museum for its “naivety” (p.A33) when it comes to the geo-political reality, underpinning the development of contemporary art in a post-Cold War, globalised geo-landscape. Vocal about his critique of the Guggenheim show as whitewashing, Solomon argued the show fell short of addressing political sensitivity, central to the development of early Chinese contemporary art. The guest curators of the Guggenheim show responded in an open letter, claiming Solomon’s attack “anachronistic and ethnocentric” (Andrews & Shen, 1998) and explained the show never intended to be an all-representing,

With a similar tone of cultural competition for international standing amidst volatile cross-strait geo-politics, the 2000 Taipei Biennial was pitted against the Shanghai Biennale by art writer Jonathan Napack (2001) from the *New York Times* online edition. Napack read the two biennial exhibitions in the context of inter-state contest, stating:

Biennial art festivals seem to be proliferating daily. Yet none are so fraught, given the fragile state of relations across the Taiwan Strait, than those now taking place in Taipei and Shanghai. Taipei's third stab at the biennial paradigm may lack Shanghai's sense of historic moment, but it draws on the dynamism of one of Asia's most liberal cities. Manray Hsu, an independent curator, and Jerome Sans of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris have assembled a show that, despite occasional missteps, represents a more vibrant vision of contemporary art, and a younger, more diverse group of artists, not just from China and the West, but also from Africa and Southeast Asia...The kind of buzz created by the Taipei show would be highly unlikely in Shanghai, despite its self-promoted image as the sophisticated face of Chinese Communism.

Napack's undertone is clear: Taipei Biennial is a testament to political openness in Taiwan, giving the island an edge in its international reputation when compared to its counterpart across the strait. This nation-making dedication was materialised with a doubled-down effort<sup>114</sup> by the Biennial administration that

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authorial voice. This debate reflected the zeitgeist of the post-Cold War period and exposed a rising tension between traditional and emerging gatekeepers (museums, academics, critics vs. curators). The disagreement especially concerns the gesture, tonality and power position institutional actors should take, when addressing polycentric art histories in a globalised era marked by complex geo-politics.

<sup>114</sup> Performative globality in the logic of the biennial platform was also echoed in Taiwan's

enacted performative globality. Through the biennial paradigm, such overflow of internationalism not only necessitated a mechanism where local-grown perspective could be spotlighted, but also carved in a commitment to transnational dialogue that became synonymous with openness (and thus desirability and competitiveness).

***Professionalising Local-Based Knowledge Production and Education Infrastructure.*** For this first phase of TB development, on top of nation-making and international competition through performative globality, the institutional logic of the Biennial administration also focused on cultivating a knowledge production infrastructure for both the museum as organiser and the country's art scene as a whole.

In terms of building up in-house capacity, the introduction of the biennial format in 1996 established a template that institutionalised a working model with external curators for large-scale TFAM self-produced exhibitions. The astronomical boom in production processes and administrative works<sup>115</sup>, stemming from the research-based, thematic survey show format, made the 1996 biennial the largest production for TFAM at the time of planning, presenting around 225 works, and since prepared the museum staff for

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presentation at the Venice Biennale during this period. Art historian Chu-Chiun Wei (2013) refers to this as a “globalist turn” seen in the 2001 and 2003 editions of the Taiwan Pavilion, which were different from the quest for “national art” from the previous era.

<sup>115</sup> To roll out the new biennial format, TFAM organised at least 13 preparational meetings to define resource priority and thematic focus. These workshops touched upon a range of topics from exhibition theme, structure, epistemology, installation design, display strategy to resource allocation. As the first non-juried perennial project, I would suggest the intensive discussion around artist selection was designed to install curatorial credibility. These substantial preparational works involved rigorous debates over invitation and inclusion criteria such as theoretical differences between contemporary art versus folk art, naive art and indigenous art. See the exhibition dialogue for detail on pre-event discussions (Liu, 1996, p.4).

comparable (and more ambitious production) in the future. These experiences gained involved intensive research (curatorial selection and issue finetuning) as well as technical and administrative support (exhibition fabrication to catalogue production).

Building on this expanded expertise, the 1998 showcase further internationalised planning practices and in-house production bandwidth by working with an international guest curator and a roster of regional artists. It was a production of unmatched complexity in scale and scope for TFAM at the time due to its ambitious programmes, characterised by complicated site-specific installations (from none in 1996 to about 25 percent<sup>116</sup> of the total works in 1998). To the Biennial administration, the unprecedented amount of site-specific new commissions was demanding of international manoeuvrability, technical command and site knowledge. As a result, this internationalised edition provided a testing ground for the Biennial administration to better command a production of similar complexity and scope from start to finish, with previously less encountered tasks (if ever at all) – for example, shadowing work development process for site-specific commissions, underpinned by back-and-forth discussion from concept development, suggestion, mock-up, approval, fabrication, installation and fine-tuning to post-production on-site management. In addition to production knowledge expansion and experience accumulation, the transnational network and social capital that came with a globally-connected curator also set in motion a priority change in resource allocation that shifted from inward to outward promotional campaign, aiming at setting an international reputation for the showcase.

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<sup>116</sup> Statistics on site-specific works in relation to total works presented from 1996 to 2014 can be found on the digital archive of *Declaration / Documentation: Taipei Biennial 1996-2014*.

As a reflection of such knowledge network building and ecosystem-enablement mindset, the 2000 iteration of Taipei Biennial initiated a dual-track co-curator model that paired a Taiwanese curator with an international counterpart. Similar to an incubator, in the hope of accelerating the career of local talents, the dual-track model aimed to provide institutional support that gave local curators an opportunity to complete the full developmental cycle of a mega-international showcase<sup>117</sup> and facilitate knowledge exchange (or transfer) that would eventually build up the knowledge network and organisational capacity of the nascent independent curatorial scene in the country.

Such a drive for infrastructure-enablement and ecosystem-building reflected a wider pursuit for publicness that was enshrined in the biennial logic and pushed the platform to shoulder more responsibilities when it came to educating the public about the development and appreciation of contemporary art. Representative of this expectation, local trade publication *The Lion Art Monthly* (Dai, 1996) in its feature review of the inaugural Taipei Biennial showcase in 1996 criticised the organiser for falling short of delivering the full programming capacity that should come with the museum infrastructure. Resonating a high hope for the full-suite treatment, the review asked of the biennial delivery to devote more resources in education and promotion to lower the knowledge threshold and enable the public to better understand the

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<sup>117</sup> In a panel hosted by TFAM concerning the curatorial mechanism of the Taipei Biennial, independent curator Amy Hui-Hua Cheng (Wang et al, 2016), speaking from experience, revealed that the systematically-underfunded contemporary art scene in Taiwan made the Taipei Biennial a well-endowed and much coveted platform which served as a significant career accelerator for local curators. The maximum grant available through the public agency National Culture and Arts Foundation allotted to a single curatorial project, to her estimate averaged at around NTD\$ 1.5 million. In comparison, the Biennial came at a resource level, averaging NTD\$ 30 to 40 million, during the 2000s.

showcase and context of contemporary art.

*The Lion Art Monthly* commentary typified a social expectation of an in-built educational function<sup>118</sup> for the Taipei Biennial from its early development, which consolidated a drive for infrastructure development through the pursuit of publicness. This institutional momentum worked in hand with an elevation of management manoeuvrability around a now more internationalised administration over a programme composition which increasingly featured performative globality.

### **Phase II. Biennial as Reflection, Critique and Institution:**

#### **Administering Through Change in Socio-Cultural and Geopolitical**

**Context.** In the face of a rising China and the PRC's proactive participation in the world's affairs, marked by its joining of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, the geo-political standing of Taiwan became increasingly marginalised.

After repeated protest by the PRC under the One-China policy, Taiwan was forced out in 2003 from the roster of national pavilions, as the Venice Biennale organisers yielded to pressure from China. TFAM, since then, had to present the country's showcase as a collateral event, comparable to the status of Hong Kong and Wales. Reflecting this changing socio-political landscape, the principle of Biennial administration during this period shifted from earlier embeddedness in regional comradery, to a turn to highlight Taiwan's marginalised geo-political existence. This ostracised reality had resulted in a

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<sup>118</sup> According to art historian John Clarke (2014), this educational function could be widely found across the Asia biennial circuit, established during the late 1990s. He observed that these Asian biennials, different from their western counterparts, shouldered a responsibility to educate the public what contemporary art is, since this new art form was at its early stage of development in Asia during the time. Concurring with Clarke's analysis, I would suggest that this educational legacy seeded an early root of publicness and an imperative for infrastructure building for the logic of the biennial platforms across Asia.



series of presentations at Venice Biennale from 2005 to 2009 that reflected the island's fraught ambition<sup>119</sup>, trapped in a forever statelessness where nationhood and sovereignty were denied.

Resonating such sentiment, Hong-John Lin (2010), curator of Taiwan's presentation at the Venice Biennale in 2009, stated:

Taiwan's status on the international stage is consistently expressed in other terms. Consider the countless appellations under which Taiwan has appeared over the past twenty years: Taiwan (ROC), China (Taiwan), China (Taipei), China/Taiwan, China/Taipei, Taipei, Chinese Taipei...[Taiwan is a] nation without nationality...[and]...a place at risk of losing its proper name...[or only appearing]...in-the-name-of-others. (p.282)

This statelessness and involuntary peripheralisation imprinted an eagerness for the island to assert its presence among international peers. In light of this change, I would suggest that performative globality demonstrated through the organisation of the Taipei Biennial became even more important, since this home-controlled, international platform represented a space where the island's cultural subjectivity could be expressed in its own term, as the squeeze from China became inescapable. As a result, such a change in geo-political environment had pushed the Biennial administration to double down on an overflow of internationalism in its showcase, seeking to create unofficial cultural dialogue (and thus recognition of existence and nationhood).<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Illustrative of the country's transient and unstable international standing amidst a precarious cross-strait climate, Chia-Chi Jason Wang (2010), curator of Taiwan's 2007 representation at the Venice Biennale, wrote in his exhibition essay: "Taiwanese facing the dangers of coercion from China find it hard not to feel the gloomy realisation that Taiwan is 'so far from God, and so close to China'" (p.258).

<sup>120</sup> Taiwanese art historian Chu-Chiun Wei (2013) identified this paradigm shift in biennial logic

***Pivoting to Critical Peripheralism: Counter-Globalisation and Anti-Governmentality.*** Moving away from an identity-building paradigm, the second phase of the Taipei Biennial pivoted to reflect the vortex of socio-cultural and technological changes brought by hyper-globalisation and encroaching governmentality by neoliberal nation states – a wide-spread (if not universal) phenomenon witnessed and experienced by countries and individuals across the world. Echoing this zeitgeist, biennial platforms were deemed as a medium to vocalise anti-globalisation sentiment and counter-globalisation cultural movements. This change demonstrated a difference in function, shifting the positionality of the Taipei Biennial from catalysing a new Taiwanese national identity, into a call for collective action. Such a shift in principle subsequently shaped the platform into not only a site for activism, but also a megaphone for cultural resistance that sought to speak on behalf of those forced into a “state of exception”<sup>121</sup> by neoliberal rationality in an advanced capitalist and hyper-global reality.

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as a “critical globalism” out of “peripheralised existence”. The statelessness and void of statehood were also discussed in various terms, such as a “country of exception” (Hsu & Richter, 2006); “the spiritual status belonging to the edge of the world” (Gong, 2007); or a state of critical “peripheralisation” within a “glocalised cultural politics” (Hsu, 2008).

<sup>121</sup> Philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998; 2005) elaborated “the state of exception” as an institutionalised condition evoked by an extraordinary official power, which banishes and excludes individuals or categories of individuals from rights protected by full citizenship. Due to the circumstance, the exceptional condition reduces individuals to “bare life” (or naked life), holding onto only a biological dimension of living, devoid of quality and protection of life. Agamben’s proposition gained traction among the biennial circuit during this period, in the wake of the 911 and the ensuing the war of terror. These series of incidents led to an exacerbated refugee crisis across the world since 2008. According to art critic Sheng-Hung Wang (2016), the double meaning of the “state of exception” was extended to “country of exception” in 2006 as a pun, by curator duo Manray Hsu and Maren Richter (2006), to describe the statehood of Taiwan as habitually under-recognised by the international society.

As social tension, inequality and sense of paralysis grew, these localised resistances reflected an erosion of social-political legitimacy for neoliberal institutions. Among the institutions being targeted, the biennial genre was increasingly deemed by the cultural sphere as a byproduct of neoliberal governmentality. Indicative of this paradox, the biennial genre was perceived during this period as both the target for reform and the potential for change at the same time. As a result of this intrinsic tension, the second phase of development saw bifurcated principles in the Biennial administration – namely, spectacularisation as consumption-oriented capitalist governmentality (an institutionalised coercion by neoliberal logic) versus institutional critique as resistance.

Typical of hyper-globalisation and similar to the phenomenon seen in the corporate spheres, scholars (Bydler, 2004; Harris, 2011; Buddensieg and Belting, 2013) argued that the proliferating biennial platforms and the exhibitionary system of contemporary art began to demonstrate symptoms of a biennial industrial complex, underpinned by a global economy of production, distribution and consumption which became increasingly tied to an institutionalised imbalance of power.

In terms of form and scale for the administration of perennial showcases worldwide, spectacularism<sup>122</sup> and festivalism took over the biennial circuit, seeing a zeal for sensational visual theatricality and superfluosity. This

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<sup>122</sup> Writer Steven Henry Madoff (2016) aptly described such spectacularisation as “visual elephantiasis”, typifying an unquenchable appetite towards the grand and the new. In his critique of the 2016 Istanbul Biennial which included more than 1,500 artworks across over fifty venues, Madoff mocked this drive to overcrowd, ultimately placed “the spectator under siege” and in a suffering from a “trauma of numerosness”. Information spectacularism and visual theatricalisation as a globalised phenomenon was the theme of the 2002 Taipei Biennial.

expansionist pursuit was coupled with growing instrumentalisation of biennial-like events as policy delivery vehicle by neoliberal governments. Such instrumentalisation was deemed by the cultural world as a coercion of the platform's criticality with an attempt to reign in resistance by taming discontent as a part of the official narrative to "art-wash"<sup>123</sup> its governance as benevolent and progressive.

In the case of Taipei, the municipal government doubled down on its commitment to lay claim on performative globality enshrined in biennial platforms, to drive a narrative of forward-looking internationalism and justify its free-market agenda. This desire to governmentalise through culture, resulted in a series of mega international events hosted in Taipei (from the Deaflympics to the Flora Expo) as well as an unprecedented co-promotional campaign launched in 2008 for the Taipei Biennial that saw a collaboration between the perennial platforms across Taipei, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

While the biennial / festival economy became gradually subsumed by neoliberal governmentality, Institutional Critique and Critical Theory also entered the lexicon of the exhibitionary circuit as a reflexive approach to unravel systematic power imbalance, espoused by the very globalised biennial economy. Two administrative avenues were pursued, with the wider support of the community of practitioners: 1) anti-governmentality through the megaphone of biennial programmes, and 2) anti-event by critiquing or boycotting the

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<sup>123</sup> According to the Financial Times, the term *art-washing* was coined by an anti-gentrification movement in California. It was first used to describe the arrival of galleries and art-related institutions which drove up property value and eventually priced out original residents. The term was later widely applied to refer to the tactics employed by neoliberal institutions to make undesirable behaviours more palatable through culture, as arts editor Jan Dalley (2018) stated: "artwashing...[is] using the veneer of cultural engagement to whitewash tyrannical behaviour, often towards the very cultural sector it makes use of".

biennial institution.

Leveraging perennial platforms to activate reflexive appraisal, 2010 Taipei Biennial experimented with Institutional Critique as theme and methodology. In defence of the programme of the 2010 events, local art world mobilised to resist the city government's plan<sup>124</sup> that would endanger TFAM curatorial independence and displace the biennial programme by popularist theme. Similar efforts to build the platform as a site of activism was echoed in the 2008 edition. The showcase went beyond the museum campus to city-wide presence, so that activism (and artistic intervention through activism) could be seen in situ, to better contextualise institutional inequality with issues such as displacement, over-urbanisation and climate crisis. Resistive gesture and activist momentum were pushed to a new height by the Occupy campaign after the financial crash in 2008, seeing a flourish of citizen movements<sup>125</sup> in Taiwan and across the globe. Such resistive mobilisation, rippling across every aspect of the society, increasingly banded the cultural sphere with the social network outside of the art world.

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<sup>124</sup> During the organisational phase of the Flora Expo, the municipal government pondered the possibility of requesting Taipei Biennial 2010 to seek alternative venue for the annual events, so that the designated biennial gallery space could be yielded to more commercially-viable and popularist programmes to drive footfall and better echo the Flora Expo thematic appeal. DPP city council member Chia-Ching Hsu criticised Hsiao-Yun Hsieh, then TFAM director on secondment from her post as Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei City Government, for strongarming TFAM to yield its museum space to pamper the municipal agenda around Flora Expo. See interpellation records for more detail (TCC, 2008a).

<sup>125</sup> This worldwide wave of citizen movements voiced a prevalent discontent against capitalist development at the expense of citizen rights, environmental sustainability and labour rights. Within the Taiwanese context, a wide-scale resistance against the neoliberal KMT governance culminated with the Sunflower movement, in protest of closer economic ties with China. This led to students and social activists temporarily overtook the Legislative and Executive Halls in 2014, to block the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA).

Propelled by *artivism* (activism through art or political art), the resistance movement called for a global overhaul<sup>126</sup> to the system of inequality imbued by the biennial logic. This paradigm shift saw early signs that indicated systematic power imbalance deepened by the biennial institution. In 2004, local curator Amy Hui-Hua Cheng withdrew her curatorial essay and boycotted the opening ceremony as a protest against her international counterpart Barbara Venderlinden's strong-arming of their supposedly dual-tracked, co-curating partnership. Cheng rallied the local art scene<sup>127</sup> to voice concern over the Biennial administration's over-dependency on a façade of internationalism. Protestors pointed out as a strategy, performative globality had soured from an effective principle for local-transnational dialogue, into an institution that

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<sup>126</sup> Art collective, Arts & Labour (2012), founded by the "underdogs" of the art world in conjunction with the New York Occupy Wall Street movement, launched a campaign in 2012 against the Whitney Biennial. The campaign called for an end to the perpetuation of the globalised biennial economy and the systematic exploitation (and indebtedness) of the underclass it built on.

<sup>127</sup> Questions were raised to urge: 1) scrutiny for the mechanism curators for the Taipei Biennial were selected, 2) overhaul of institutionalised power dynamic built on a seemingly exploitative relationship at the expense of the local art ecosystem, and 3) raising the funding for the Biennial to better compete with regional counterparts, well-endowed with a hard to match deep-pocket through state sponsorship, such as the Shanghai, Gwangju and Singapore biennials. I would suggest this call for reform reflected an anxiety of the local art world in the face of fierce competition and aggressive nation-building agenda by regional perennial shows during this period. As a point of reference, the astronomical price tag of the Singapore Biennale, led to an inaugural programme of over 100 artists, totalling NTD\$ 200 million in 2006, according to artist-curator and current TFAM director Jung-Jie Wang. In comparison, Taipei Biennial 2006 included 35 artists, with a budget under NTD\$ 30 million. Curator Amy Hui-Hua Cheng spoke of Gwangju Biennale's funding increase after the Asian financial crisis to a similar budgetary scale as that of the Singapore Biennale. Cheng attributed such ambition to a clear socio-cultural mission for the Gwangju platform to double as a vehicle to drive domestic reconstruction with a nationalist goal to reboot international reputation. See the panel discussion at the 20th anniversary of the Taipei Biennial for more (Wang et al, 2016).

replicated the power structure of globalisation. The Biennial organiser was accused of perpetuating this power dynamic that bred preferential treatment, tilting in favour of foreign knowledge actors, where the biennial framework became reliant on an expedient investment in star Western curators to generate international exposure by pulling together a biennial-calibre showcase within an unhealthily crunched<sup>128</sup> research window. It also exposed the approach of performative globality as alienating to local experience, causing a widening disconnect between the domestic reality and the Biennial outcome (filtered through a self-projected vision administered by the organiser).

***Institutionalising Deeper and More Public Relationship With Local Art Community.*** Despite the administrative drive that sought to create local-transnational dialogue, its inability to resonate with local community posed a dilemma<sup>129</sup>, which characterised this second phase of development, where the

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<sup>128</sup> During this period, the preparation timeline for a Taipei Biennial edition averaged under six months. From the public procurement record between 2006 to 2010, despite the curatorial fee on the part of Taiwanese curators more than doubled over the course of three editions, local curators still received about only one third of what their foreign counterparts were commissioned in curatorial fee.

<sup>129</sup> Concerning the disconnect between the biennial platform and the local community, Taiwanese curator Pei-Yi Lu (2016) argued this was the result of the deliberate choice of the biennial administration, to leverage the platform to introduce cutting-edge international trends and movements. This organisational principle by default aimed to propagate practices less dealt with by the local art communities. For the 2008 edition co-curated by Manray Hsu and Vasif Kortun, focusing on pan-cultural resistance against neoliberal governmentality and advanced capitalism, 4 artists/collectives from Taiwan were included, out of the total of 48 presented. This accounted to a mere 8 percent of Taiwanese representation – the lowest in the Biennial history. In response to this, Hsu (2008) argued the higher education system of fine arts in Taiwan over-emphasised the training in semiotics (relationships between form and meaning) yet lacked a pan-cultural curriculum of humanities and critical thinking. As a vicious cycle, Hsu argued internationally-relevant curatorial projects often encountered a difficulty in finding resonance in the local context, where “Taiwan has no corresponding artists with sometimes zero artistic

global-local dialogue (and a built-in mechanism for dialogue) was intended and administered, yet the local knowledge creation continued to be absent from its systematic outcome.

As an attempt to mitigate such disconnection, an expanded network of engagement was institutionalised to widen, deepen and unlock the knowledge and social capital represented by visiting curators and artists. Different from previous museum-rooted conference design, *Taipei Drift* partnership scheme in 2008 demonstrated an effort to enable a reciprocal interface, where interchange could happen outside of the museum campus among the artistic communities. This push for a biennial infrastructure to actualise exchange had resulted in regularised off-site collaborations with art universities and cultural hubs across the island, marked by curator talks, professional meet-and-greet and other exchange sessions.

Similar calls to re-examine institutional equity and infrastructural publicness subsequently made Biennial administration a target for reform. The opaqueness of TFAM bureaucracy brought the fairness of resource allocation into question and fomented allegations against the Biennial management for propagating an infrastructure design that consolidated the museum's monopoly over

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relation with the works created through fine art education system...This...in the long run severs emerging artists and their works from the biennial circuit, resulting in a lack of global connectivity and impossibility for [international-minded] curator to find suitable local artists trained through the local higher education system". The same phenomenon of knowledge barrier due to lack of access was also picked up by TFAM curator during my field interviews. In the case of the 2014 Taipei Biennial, the interviewee confided that it was difficult to identify suitable local academics or intellectual counterparts who were fluent in the concept of Anthropocene at the time, to be in conversation or moderate a panel with Nicolas Bourriaud, curator of the 2014 edition. I argue that the Biennial administration in phase III, mindful of this long-time reality, has become more equipped in managing such a disconnect, based on the principles of knowledge reciprocity and infrastructural publicness.



organisational knowledge, international network and administrative pipeline. Such a sentiment was reflected by a backlash by local art stakeholders over procedural justice concerning Taiwan's representation at the Venice Biennale in 2009 and 2013. On top of calling out a lack of administrative transparency, the petition in 2013 pushed infrastructural equity to the centre of the debate – asking: who should benefit from the biennial and its recurring, institutionalised happening? As an outcome of the 2013 protest, the biennial office was disbanded as a sign of goodwill to decentralise institutional knowledge and social capital from the hand and brain of a few in-house knowledge actors.

During this liminal period marked by tensions between organisational logics, there were not short of artist proposals<sup>130</sup> that targeted institutionalised power imbalance and the system of governance during Taipei Biennial showcases. For instance, in 2008, Mali Wu and her project *Taipei Tomorrow As A Lake Again* investigated how festival / biennial economy became an accomplice to over-urbanisation and proposed nullity as an anti-instrumentalisation campaign, which sought to advocate for the uselessness of urban peripheral spaces such as flood zones, where Taipei Fine Arts Museum (and the Flora Expo exhibition campus) were built on. Similar initiatives and programming direction<sup>131</sup> over the second phase of TB development subsequently shaped the Biennial into not only a site to activate resistance, but

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<sup>130</sup> In 2010, artist Chia-En Jao proposed *Nocturnal Biennial* – a failed-through project that attempted to close the biennial exhibition during the opening hours of the Flora Expo and to only allow access to the museum after the Flora Expo closed at nighttime, as a political boycott. Despite the project being aborted after rounds of discussion, it none-the-less epitomised the anti-event, anti-biennial and anti-governmentalisation logic during this phase.

<sup>131</sup> One example is that Hong-John Lin, co-curator of the 2010 Taipei Biennial, argued the exhibition shifted its focus from “political art” in the 2008 edition and moved into the realm of “the politics of art” in 2010 (Zilghadr & Lin, 2016).

also a recurring invitation for alternative version of publicness.

**Phase III. Biennial as Perspective, Relation and Ecosystem: Instituting Biennial Infrastructure Network as Public Goods, by De-Monopolising Institutional Knowledge.** In a serial conference in 2013 held to reform TFAM biennial administration, the publicness of biennial infrastructure was the centre of discussion. The serial conference composed of biennial organisers and professional practitioners focused on identifying organisational challenges and possible solutions to ensure institutional knowledge and infrastructure network could be preserved and shared as public goods. Among the suggestions put forth by conference attendees, enhancing administrative transparency and expanding consistent participation by local practitioners were deemed as priorities to guarantee the commons of biennial infrastructure through reforming its administration and re-calibrating its organisational principles. These included making the administrative planning process and its documentation available<sup>132</sup> to the public, so that institutional knowledge accumulated through biennial implementation could be accessed, benchmarked and scrutinised by the public.

On top of administrative transparency and de-monopolising institutional knowledge, the group also called for the biennial operation to institutionalise a

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<sup>132</sup> In her criticism of the TFAM biennial administration, Taiwanese critic and independent curator Yung-Fen Hu (Art Emperor, 2013) argued that the biennial operation had evolved into a privatised, monopolised, specialist knowledge, locked within the TFAM bureaucratic structure and thus became inaccessible to the wider public. To resolve this problem of privatised access to ensure knowledge publicness, Hu suggested TFAM should publish a manual to document organisational know-how and critically analyse the administrative legacy of its biennial operations. As a result, an instruction manual for the Taiwan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale was published in print and online by TFAM (2013) later that year to share insights on administrative procedures (timeline, budget sources, programme strategy, and site knowledge of the exhibition venue), alongside a show-and-tell of relevant application process to be qualified as an official collateral event.

more sustainable knowledge exchange mechanism based on reciprocity. The group urged the administration to leverage the recurrent exhibition to contribute to a full cycle of local knowledge creation (from knowledge commission, participation and resonance, to dissemination, consumption and network formation). This demand pushed the biennial to step up its role as an ecosystem-enabler with a focus on infrastructural equity, to warrant participation by new groups of practitioners and creative actors (never-yet-engaged by the Biennial) across a spectrum of career stages.

As a result of this systematic overhaul, institutional efforts became increasingly focused on a mindful curation and strategic assemblage of knowledge actors to create, what I would refer to as local knowledge resonance (see Chapter 2 on administrative stewardship responsibility and Chapter 3 on administrator's function for more on this) – where the local communities could be empowered to initiate knowledge reciprocity. In order to accomplish knowledge reciprocity, considerations were given to the design of participation interfaces, to better materialise a sustainable and self-renewing biennial infrastructure, through which local community of practitioners could enter the Biennial ecosystem to achieve upward, outward and inter-sectoral development.

***Articulating Institutional Knowledge Agency as New Gesture to Administer the Biennial.*** In addition to this drive for knowledge mutuality and infrastructural publicness, the Biennial administration in the third phase gave due care to assert institutional knowledge agency, as an operational principle to propitiate goodwill and support from the local art scene. This meta authorial voice was demonstrated in a variety of ways, including a more articulated organisational presence and advisory agency in thematic and artistic selection throughout the exhibition development process, as well as a stronger authorial

voice substantiated through the careful design of self-produced initiatives around the Biennial programmes.

Among these TFAM-produced initiatives, the Biennial administration increasingly looked to education, research and promotional projects to vocalise TFAM authorial agency, which became materialised through the museum's mediation and re-interpretation of exhibition themes. This institutional effort to mediate biennial content and engineer knowledge mutuality were noticeable across satellite programmes, public conference curation, journal commissioning and targeted publicity campaigns that aimed to activate knowledge networks and perspectives beyond the single viewpoint presented by the biennial exhibitions.

For example, in 2012, echoing the biennial theme of re-narrating modernity, TFAM's education department produced a public programme titled *My Mini-Museum Project* within the event venue that invited the audience to take up the role of a curator and reflect the ways in which histories were documented and (re)narrated. In 2020, a dedicated layman-friendly exhibition at the Children's Education Centre, titled *Planet Biota: Satellite 11*, served as an inter-contextual reference that dissected the biennial theme which focused on stakeholder negotiation and climate emergency. Seeking to make the main biennial showcase more accessible, this satellite in house-curated show broke down the dense concepts of sustainability and explained in approachable language the necessity for consensus development to drive collective action.

Another prominent example of increased institutional voice also included a retrospective archive show, developed in parallel to the main 2016 biennial showcase. Produced to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the TB exhibition series, this TFAM-curated retroactive show created a digital archive to

demonstrate the organiser's commitment to reflexive self-examination. In the spirit of archival re-interpretation, it invited past curators to revisit the Biennial's legacy through a series of public panels which encouraged a collective discussion to reflect on the future, possibilities and alternative purposes for the recurrent exhibition platform.

In addition to organising in-house curated satellite programmes, the growing institutional agency of TB was also voiced through a conscientious design of participation interfaces to enable wider local knowledge mutuality and equitable infrastructural footprint. For example, in the 2012 edition curated by Anselm Franke, the Biennial programmes reasserted a knowledge perspective rooted in an Asian context. The exhibition not only addressed institutional baggage as a construct of modernity head-on, but also decentralised curatorial authorship with a series of mini-museums where additional knowledge actors were invited to re-narrate histories and recount a different version of knowledge footprint from their personalised viewpoints.

Similar emphasis to institutionalise wider local participation was also present in the 2014 edition<sup>133</sup>, where the Biennial administration commissioned over 10 emerging knowledge producers from Taiwan to review and respond to projects and art works showcased in the exhibition. This effort, on the one hand aimed to build up publication portfolio for emerging professionals in art criticism through the Biennial network. It on the other hand attempted to mitigate a

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<sup>133</sup> Despite efforts to create knowledge mutuality and knowledge perspective rooted in a localised experience, art critic Sheng-Hung Wang (2016) critiqued that the 2014 showcase still lacked direct engagement with the socio-political immediacy of Taiwan. This became particularly jarring for the exhibition to fall short of addressing the aftermath of the Sunflower citizen movements that shook the island before show opening. Wang attributed this insufficiency to a chronic lack of local knowledge and inadequate sensitivity on the part of the guest curator.

chronic imbalance of exposure (where media buzz often surrounded a few mega-stars or centrepieces while sidelining emerging artists), by enabling a more equitable system of knowledge creation inclusive to lesser-known artists, in the hope of helping to create a trail of research and review footprint – critical to the career development of younger and often local artists.

In addition to enabling local knowledge reciprocity through equitable participation, what I would refer to as performative transdisciplinarity could be observed to increase its influence on the Biennial administration in the third phase of its development. A programme lineup that engaged with an overflow of transdisciplinary actors and practices became a means to create locally-embedded synergies. By making its content and knowledge-making outcome more accessible to the network outside of fine arts, such performative transdisciplinarity in turn legitimised the Biennial's publicness and materialised institutional responsibility towards its local socio-cultural contexts.

This change could be first seen at the 2010 edition and introduced at scale in the 2014 exhibition through the concept of Anthropocene. In 2016, the Biennial programme further expanded its artist selection outside of fine arts (dipping into what would be considered performing arts including theatre, music and dance). Civic engagement in 2018 pushed performative transdisciplinarity to a new height, seeing an unprecedented presence<sup>134</sup> of civic groups and non-governmental organisations in the main show, exhibiting alongside contemporary artists. As a culmination of these changes in operational principles, the 2020 edition of the Taipei Biennial manifested an ontological turn, which stretched the platform's positionality beyond event happenings, and

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<sup>134</sup> For the 2018 edition, over one third of the participating creative practitioners came from a non-art background. See the preface of the exhibition catalogue for more (Lin, 2019, pp.6-7).

morphed into a “practice-driven thought experiment” where TFAM as the organiser functioned as a “land” to connect local knowledge “rhizomes” (Tseng, 2021, pp.6-23).

On top of performative transdisciplinary, the Biennial administration in the third phase of development turned to a mechanism of co-governance and co-mediation to increase local knowledge connection and legitimacy. In order to enhance administrative transparency with an inclusive decision-making process, committees were frequently convened and consulted, with members composed of intra- and extra-institutional actors. Such committee co-governance was noticeable to both the Taipei Biennial and Taiwan’s presentation at the Venice Biennale since 2017. As a culmination of similar co-governance partnership, for the 2020 Taipei Biennial, an advisory committee group was set up to facilitate on-going group dialogue and to act as a knowledge exchange interface between the local knowledge systems and the guest curators Bruno Latour and Martin Guinand. This advisory committee worked with the Biennial administration to co-identify local practices and knowledge output which were (and could be) in conversation with Latour’s curatorial proposition and school of thoughts.<sup>135</sup>

By rethinking the social and infrastructural role of Biennial administration, a transition to performative transdisciplinarity had consolidated a new imperative which became a testament to the platform’s knowledge embeddedness and infrastructural publicness. Group governance and co-mediation became illustrative of an administrative turn in Biennial management methodology which strove to demonstrate its organisational authorial agency through the design of

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<sup>135</sup> For more on how this co-governance committee operated, see the case study of public programme *Theatre of Negotiations* in Chapter 3.

participation interfaces for local-transnational dialogue, based on the principles of knowledge reciprocity and infrastructural publicness.

***Summary: Logic of the Biennial Platform***

Through the case of the Taipei Biennial, a paradox engraved in the logic of Asian biennials is better revealed – globality is performed through peripheralism; agency is rehearsed and constantly remade through performative self-display. Competitive benchmarking aids pathfinding. Facilitated exchange and recurrent dialogue hold space for local-grown discourses and necessitates a network of (re)generation, critical to the global circulation of peripheral knowledge perspectives.

In the mid-1990s to early 2000s, nation-(re)making and identity formation were the underlying logic of the biennials, powering emerging economies and new democracies across Asia Pacific. Through the organisation and arrangement of culture and knowledge, host cities looked to the discursive technology of contemporary art perennial exhibitions, to legitimise their international clout and elevate competitiveness. To better weave local perspectives and home-grown artistic development into dominant international knowledge narratives, performative globality was relied upon as a primary approach. An overflow of internationalism employed by biennial administrations during this period demonstrated a desire of the peripheral powers to take ownership of knowledge authorship. To mobilise and engineer polycentric art histories, these biennial platforms often looked to the help of self-identified counterpart nations, to formulate non-western geo-alliances as counter-hegemonic worldviews.

The development of the Taipei Biennial echoed a similar trajectory. The Biennial administration introduced the thematic, survey, recurrent exhibition



genre as a symbolic gesture, to articulate a post-dictatorship, new Taiwanese identity. As a symbolic departure from the previous era, the inaugural 1996 Biennial, taking the new format of non-juried, thematic exhibition style aimed to decentralise taste-making authority from the former juried show panellists and entrust this knowledge legitimacy to the emerging field actors in curatorial practice. The Biennial platform during this first phase of development contributed to an expansion of infrastructural bandwidth for not only in-house TFAM production capacity, but also the nascent curatorial ecosystem and talent pools on the island. As a result, the recurrent organisation of Biennial showcases led to the professionalisation and internationalisation of administrative practices at TFAM and the wider exhibitionary system in Taiwan. It also institutionalised a global-local dialogue mechanism (or knowledge exchange interface) by engendering a regularised template for large-scale international cooperation.

Reflecting the changing political landscape, Taipei Biennial gradually grew away from a nation-making impetus since the 2000s. The marginalising international reality in TB's second phase of development forced the platform to turn its focus to the peripheral (and ambivalent) existence of the island. At the same time, the biennial institution became increasingly symptomatic of the power imbalance brought by hyper-globalisation and neoliberal governmentality, showing a widening disconnect with the local knowledge community. This resulted in growing tensions between the Biennial administration and the local art community, pushing disaffected actors to leverage the recurrent exhibition series as a site of activism to trial social alternatives.

Illustrative of this social turn with the case of Taipei, the biennial exhibitionary genre, on the one hand, became increasingly mobilised (or

weaponised) as a vehicle that had the potential to reveal (and shake up) the underlying power structure, perpetuated by neoliberal festival economy and contemporary art industrial complex. The platform, on the other hand, became a target of critique and reform as the very biennial institution had been a primary accomplice to these systematic imbalances. The discursive focus in the second phase of the Biennial development, therefore, shifted to feature how the intensifying phenomenon of cultural internationalisation was increasingly met by various forms of local resistance, calling for a re-examination of institutional publicness as a push-back to the coercive force of neoliberal institutions. The operational logic of the Biennial administration subsequently turned to highlight its capacity as a form of cultural resistance to these governmentalising coercions, to conjure solidarity with the pan-cultural community on the island and across the wider cultural sphere among (self-identified) international peers.

In the third phase of development, the ascending prominence of infrastructural publicness and ecosystem sustainability in public discourse had expanded the scope of infrastructural care and stewardship responsibility for the biennial platform. This in turn drove the operational logic of the TB administration to gradually move beyond a previous focus on knowledge showcase, into a conscientious and inclusive approach to infrastructure enablement. Demonstrating such reflexive gesture, the Biennial administration became increasingly articulative in its principle of infrastructural publicness through different avenues. Efforts such as knowledge reciprocity, underpinned its operational principles, were reflective of this new administrative zeitgeist. In the third phase of TB development, performative transdisciplinarity through civic engagement emerged as a driving force to legitimise the Biennial's social embeddedness and institutional publicness, and at the same time, materialising

a dialogue mechanism which could reach beyond the echo chamber of the arts.

Representative of these changes, the Biennial administration in the third phase increasingly doubled down on articulating an institutional voice to assert a pronounced authorial role through the design, curation and management of in-house produced interfaces, to better enable access and circulation of organisational knowledge and resources. These efforts included proactive self-curated programmes and an increasingly strategic assemblage of local knowledge actors, to better ensure knowledge reciprocity and demonstrate an administrative self-awareness of institutional agency.

### **Trilateral Dynamic Between Authorial Voices of the Three Logics**

After looking at the three institutional logics of the administration at the Taipei Biennial in their diachronic forms, in the final section of this Chapter, I propose to juxtapose the respective logics as distinctive epistemological discourses to further reveal the interactions between their authorial voices, so as to identify the various ways in which these logics as institutional principles affect the directionality of the Biennial management.

Reframing the concept of authorship from singular source to a diffuse function, one might turn to Michel Foucault's (2009/1969) response to Roland Barthes's proclamation of the "death of the author" (1977/1967), introduced the concept of author-function. Foucault argued that the idea of authorship should be re-conceptualised as a diffused set of functions, which wielded the power to shape the way a body of knowledge operated, rather than understanding authorship as a singular, attributable person or source.

Foucault's interpretation of the authorial function expanded the focus of authorship from personhood (and textual) to functionality (and system). His proposition is helpful for me in identifying the relationship between the logics of

the three epistemes at work for the Taipei Biennial. Building on this concept, the operational principles of the TB administration could be identified as being influenced by a trilateral dynamic between the authorial voices of the three epistemes – namely an interplay between the logics of the nation state, the public museum, and the biennial platform. In other words, the development of the Taipei Biennial administration could be interpreted as a process of negotiation between the authorial voices belonging to the author-function of the three institutions.

In the analysis so far in this Chapter, I have demonstrated the loudness of authorial voices between the three logics – which at times competed, negotiated, waned, or existed in parallel. Four distinct scenarios of relationships could be extrapolated, each pointing to a variation in the power dynamics and trilateral interaction between the three sets of authorial voice (and author-function). These include the following.

***Scenario 1) (Pre)Lifting of Martial Law: Monopoly of Authorial Voice by the Logic of the State***

Before the lifting of martial law, the author-function of the nation state monopolised the discursive landscape. As Taiwan's socio-political context underwent democratisation, the authorial voice of the public museum could be seen to gradually grow in influence by an increased authorial volume and functionality. The volume of the public museum and its institutional principles in turn took over from the authorial function of the state, in the production and steer of national identity, through a modernised, decentralised and professionalised system of administration, as a token of the democratising zeitgeist.

***Scenario 2) 1990s-2000s: Logic of the Biennial Platform Led the Quest for***

### ***Identity Shaping and International Competition for Cultural Influence***

During the liminal period after the lifting of martial law, contemporary art was relied upon as a new vehicle to shape the emerging post-dictatorship Taiwanese identity. The theme-based biennial genre was introduced to serve the purpose of this new age and spirit. Its clear ambition and scale of mobilisation quickly accumulated a momentum in authorial volume and outshined the institutional voices of public museum and the nation state. It took over the baton of author-function in the cultural landscape and provided a foundation for legitimacy to both the museum and the municipal government to advance emergent care for democratising cultural rights, which in turn bolstered international competitiveness for the city of Taipei. During this phase, the system of administration began to specialise and internationalise with the hosting and organisation of international biennials. This process in turn contributed to the new socio-cultural image of the country, amidst its global economic ascendance.

### ***Scenario 3) 2000s-2010s: Competition Between the Logics of the Nation State and the Biennial Platform***

Being a policy tool, Taipei Biennial as a government-backed, museum-based event was gradually subsumed into the apparatus of cultural governance. With the global expansion of Cultural and Creative Industries discourse, the exhibitionary system was absorbed into a municipal push for festival economy. Neoliberal ideology held by the nation state, which prioritised fiscal solvency, economic value and mass consumer appeal started to coerce the logic of the public museum during this time.

This resurgence of the state's authorial function pulled the operational principle of the public museum closer to its rationality, causing the imperative of

the biennial platform to seek out ways to articulate its voice and agency, in order to mark a distinction from the neoliberal governmentality espoused by the nation state and public museum systems at the time. This trilateral dynamic resulted in the Biennial being deployed as a strategic vector of resistance. Subsequently, the logic of the biennial platform exercised its push-back through either weaponising the recurring event to undermine neoliberal governmentality or boycotting the Biennial event as a sign of self-rejection to denounce the invasion of the nation state and its public museum ideologies.

The system of administration at the Taipei Biennial during this period was beset by substantial tension. Such a development was a reflection of the turmoil in socio-cultural identity crisis, experienced through this phase. The Biennial administration, on the one hand, benefited from the professionalisation progress from the previous era and became increasingly fluent in operating a festival-like playbook, engendered by neoliberal rationale, yet on the other hand struggled to deliver the principles of publicness intrinsic to the biennial platform. This dilemma resulted in a delicate handling by the museum management, through their attempt to insulate the self-critical and resistive intuitional principle of the biennial platform from seeping into the neoliberal operational realm which belonged to the public museum and the nation state.

***Scenario 4) 2010s-Ongoing: Logic of the Public Museum as Mediating Authorial Function Between the State and the Biennial***

In the most recent shift, the public museum system became more apt in triangulating its relationship with the logics of the state and the biennial, and thus slowly morphed into a mediating force between the two sets of logics. This could be attributed to a maturation of public museum administration (now with sufficient professional legitimacy), alongside its deliberate development of an

authorial voice, to act as a buffer that could negotiate a distance from the authorial attempts of the state on culture.

This authorial legitimacy was enhanced by the Biennial administration with its increasingly reflexive and ecosystem-enabling approach, to articulate institutional knowledge autonomy underpinned by knowledge reciprocity. On top of these efforts, the administration's conscientious design of a more equitable system to achieve local knowledge mutuality, became consequential in asserting the authorial power of the biennial platform. As contemporary art (and its methodology) exercised at the Biennial became a dominant force in the exhibitionary system, the logic of the public museum increasingly showed a symbiosis with the logic of the biennial platform. As a result, the two could be seen to develop complementary voices through strategic reverberance between the respective authorial functions. This development in turn provided a more stable distance with the logic of the nation state and authored a socio-cultural identity that now prioritised equitability and inclusivity.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This Chapter set out to understand the institutional principles at play for the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial – as a public-funded, museum-based, contemporary art event. By tracing the milestones which pinpointed shifts in the social ontological tenets with a close socio-historical analysis, I charted three sets of epistemes: the logics of the nation state, the logic of the public museum, and the logic of the biennial platform. The table below outlines the primary institutional drivers for the respective epistemes, which summarises the logic of the administration at the Taipei Biennial.

**Table 3**

*Logics of the Administration at the Taipei Biennial*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Logic of the nation state</b>	<b>Logic of the public museum</b>	<b>Logic of the biennial platform</b>
<b>Goal of the administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve and increase city competitiveness</li> <li>• Elevate domestic and international standing and attractiveness of Taipei</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote Taiwan modern and contemporary art</li> <li>• Cultivate appreciation of art and museum literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate Taiwan's international visibility</li> <li>• Consolidate the cultural standing of Taipei as a contributing member, site of happening, trend-setter of global / regional contemporary art community</li> </ul>
<b>Basis of legitimacy</b> Administration outcome and value proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase socio-economic vibrancy and build a resilient environment via policy-making</li> <li>• Create competitive, educated, employable workforce</li> <li>• Reinforce community identity with shared value</li> <li>• Increase quality of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure access and custodian of public cultural resources</li> <li>• Devise quality programme through preservation, research, exhibition, education and engagement</li> <li>• Foster a platform for talent development</li> <li>• Increase audience visiting experience and reach of programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect local and international communities via a recurring, thematic, flagship, contemporary art exhibition programme</li> <li>• Respond and drive industry and public discourses in contemporary art via a museum-based biennial exhibition model</li> <li>• Enable dialogue on biennial themes, programme and artwork among the local and international communities</li> </ul>
<b>Sources of legitimacy</b> Guiding principle of the administration about perceived primary audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislator support</li> <li>• Buy-in by interest group</li> <li>• Positive reception by mainstream media</li> <li>• Citizen approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition by the community of practitioners and gatekeepers in the art world</li> <li>• Positive reception by professional arts critic and trade media</li> <li>• Support by cultural producers</li> <li>• High attendance by art-cognizant audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition by participating artists, curators and collaborators</li> <li>• Positive and in-depth review by domestic, regional and international art critics and trade media</li> <li>• Positive reception by domestic community of practitioners</li> <li>• High reach and traction of biennial programme</li> </ul>
<b>Result and approach by the administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a utilitarian approach to culture via citizen-making, place-making, urban regeneration</li> <li>• Encourage civic participation</li> <li>• Promote government transparency and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to public cultural resources and services through equitable resource distribution, knowledge-production, knowledge-sharing and interpretation, acknowledgment and representation</li> <li>• Enable enjoyable cultural environment and experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalyse local-international dialogue with biennial programme</li> <li>• Lead conversations and set trends in contemporary art</li> </ul>



In this Chapter, I took a longitudinal view to examine the becoming and making of the Biennial administration by paring down the guiding operational principles that informed its value and practice. Prioritising the diachronic dimension of institutional changes, my examination of the three logics focused on the following prevailing concerns:

- What was the purpose of culture / art when being publicly administered?
- Who was the institution of art and culture for, and who should it serve?  
Who was involved in deciding the what, the whom and the how?
- What vehicles were instituted to administer the above considerations?

From the analysis in this Chapter, I offer answers to these discussions for each of the three logics across different watershed moments, and more importantly, demonstrated how the answers changed in parallel to the paradigm shifts seen across the exhibitionary system and the wider art-making ecosystem.

On the logic of the nation state, I identified changes in socio-economical context in Taiwan, focusing on how the trajectory of democratisation and the island's reflection on neoliberal governmentality affected the discourse of cultural governance and the ways in which culture was administered. Tracing the development and maturation of the discourse of cultural administration within Taipei's municipal bureaucracy, it provided a means to look at various knowledge frameworks being introduced, as different attempts to legitimise an appropriate role (and hand) of the government in culture, by defining the level of embeddedness culture should have in governance. Bolstering the municipal government's cultural policy and governing rationale, the concepts of cultural citizenship, the Cultural and Creative Industries, and sustainable development framework each verbalised a distinct point of departure for the operational impetus for the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial. These shifts in

discursive proposition shed light on the changing perception of what constituted publicness in public sector cultural services. These turns in administrative drives informed not only the debates on the utility of culture (via proxy discussion on the appropriate relation the cultural sector should have with other sectors outside of culture), but also the value proposition of the cultural sector, which functioned as a connecting thread for the state to articulate the role of culture in governance.

For the logic of the public museum, what dominated the operational principle was an ongoing drive to institute a professionalised, modernised, international structure, which could specialise in modern and contemporary art. The transition from a state organ into a public museum underpinned a process of re-configuring publicness across the museum administration. The efforts to move from a community art centre into an art museum recalibrated the scope of art a museum exhibitionary system should engage. This process of becoming an art museum also changed the manner in which the art should be administered, as well as the expected outcome of what constituted the full-spectrum of museum-grade programming. Moving away from embodying a static treasure trove (“cultural resource reservoir”) into a “living organism” and “cultural living room”, this process signified a gradual shift in the role of public art museum within the wider social context and a corresponding social embeddedness which came with an expanded ecosystem responsibility. These changes in organisational drive bore direct consequences not only to the relative power dynamic between the knowledge producer (the museum) and knowledge receiver (the audience), but also the level of knowledge autonomy considered necessary for a public art museum to assert.

As to the logic of the biennial, the defining shifts in impetus concerned the

ways in which local / transnational dialogue was administered. It manifested the relative power dynamic this method of administration employed, and the network of relationships such a mechanism catalysed within a knowledge production ecosystem. What emerged throughout different phases of the Biennial institutional logic was a constant awareness and (re)orientation around infrastructural publicness. Early emphasis on performative globality slowly gave way to performative transdisciplinarity. Widening interpretation of the ways publicness could be (and should be) legitimately articulated were consolidated by different approaches – from decentralising authorial voice and gatekeeping authority, to local / transnational knowledge reciprocity with a focus on institutional knowledge autonomy and transferability.

I conclude as follows: the logics of the nation state, public museums and the biennial platform as three contesting authorial voices have shaped the institutional principles of arts administration at the Taipei Biennial. The trilateral dynamic between the three sets of logics saw the diminished power of the state to author cultural discourses. This authorial function was subsequently shouldered by the Biennial, to write the history of the new Taiwanese art. With the co-option of the public museum system by neoliberal governmentality, the Biennial became a stage for resistance to counter state intervention. After the ebb of the state's intention to compete for authorial function, the public museum now acts as a matured mediator between the state and the biennial platform.

The figure of the arts administrator could thus be seen through a prism constituted by the logics of the three institutional pillars which underpins the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial. Through the lens of the logic of the nation state, the arts administrator over time evolved into a figure that is accountability-minded, impact-facing and inclusive in decision-making.

Reflected through the logic of the public museum, the administrator's profile could be seen to become a reflexive ecosystem player who is servant and audience-centric. By means of the logic of the biennial platform, the administrators are casted as skilled in international manoeuvring, sensitised to infrastructural publicness and knowledge equity, and increasingly well-rehearsed in the design and activation of participation platforms for local knowledge actors to realise knowledge reciprocity.

To sum up what has shifted for the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial, I conclude thus: the process of self-instituting and professionalisation for cultural management, museum administration and biennial management is the reflection of an ongoing nation-building exercise for post-dictatorship Taiwan. The system of arts administration, therefore, becomes an active shaper and contributor of a national identity fitting of the new Taiwanese society. Through an administrative turn, the institutional principles of the nation state have shifted to become more inclusive and sustainable in its approach, the public museum more articulated in knowledge autonomy and reciprocity, and the biennial platform increasingly mindful of lasting community impact to realise infrastructural publicness.

## Chapter 2: The Administrative

### Chapter Overview: How Is the Administrative a Methodology at TB?

In Chapter 1, I identified three sets of institutional logic which underpin the administration of the Taipei Biennial – the logic of the nation state, the logic of the public museum, and the logic of the biennial platform. I conducted a close socio-historical analysis to trace the course of professionalisation across the fields of cultural governance, museum management and biennial management, to pinpoint epistemological shifts in the Biennial administration. Through this close analysis, the self-instituting process of the arts administration system in Taiwan not only reflects a national building exercise, but also serves as an active contributor that authors the national identity of a new, democratic Taiwan.

Building on this discussion regarding the system of administration, Chapter 2 will ask: what is the administrative at play for the Taipei Biennial – namely, what is the overarching methodology of the administrators and what principles best articulate their approach for decision-making?

To answer this question, this Chapter will investigate the administrative strategy at work, by examining two themes, each delineating an aspect of the Biennial's administrative approach. They are:

- What is the administrative strategy TB administrator turns to in the face of diverging stakeholder expectations? How has professionalism evolved to become a dominant narrative to consolidate administrative credibility and function as a tactic of resistance?
- What is the administrative principle at work, in keeping with diverging stakeholder expectations? How is stewardship manifested as a foundational framework for the administrative methodology?

The Chapter will conclude with a reflection on how the above strands,

highlighting shifts in the Biennial's administrative methodology, inform the figure of the arts administrator amidst the administrative turn in contemporary art. This proposed plan aims to construct an epistemology for the administrator, to better articulate their decision-making process and shed new light on the ways the support network operates.

### **Discourse of Professionalism and Diverging Stakeholder Demands**

The administrative approach of the Taipei Biennial had been shaped by the expectations of three groups of stakeholders: 1) art producer / knowledge maker; 2) community of practitioners, and 3) lay interest group. Each of the stakeholder groups, driven by their individualised group values, was motivated to pursue actions that could legitimise their goals. These respective value systems formulated the basis of group expectations, which in turn was projected onto (and consequently influenced) the method the Biennial had been administered.

Concerning administrative methodology, the discourse of professionalism and its public articulation had emerged as a paramount principle the administrators turn to in the face of differing (and at times conflicting) stakeholder demands. As a public discourse, the concept constituted the foundation for administrative credibility and paved the way for administrative decision-making at the Biennial.

For the first half of this Chapter, I will use two controversial works (*Golden Missile* and *Advertising Castle* by Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang) at the first internationalised edition of exhibition in 1998, to delineate how the Biennial organiser looked to the discourse of professionalism as a primary administrative strategy and a tool for resistance. By analysing the narratives surrounding these two commissioned works, I will use historic media reports, museum statements

and official documents to identify the various ways in which the narrative of professionalism manifested and responded to conflicting stakeholder demands.

Before examining how the administration negotiated with the three sets of stakeholder values, I will provide a short summary of the socio-historical context regarding this first internationalised biennial event, with an overview of the two commissioned works by Cai as background information. After this initial background briefing, I will then delve into how the demands surrounding the controversies reflected diverging stakeholder values and investigate the ways in which professionalism had emerged as a dominant administrative approach when facing conflicting stakeholder demands.

### ***1998 Taipei Biennial: Project Overview for Golden Missile and Advertising Castle***

The first international edition of the Taipei Biennial was launched in 1998. Helmed by Japanese guest curator Fumio Nanjo, the exhibition titled *Site of Desire* presented an unprecedented project in the museum's history, covering 36 artists from four Northeast Asian countries. The showcase identified cities and urban development as a mirror which encapsulated the rapid rise and fall in the post-war socio-economic and political landscape across the region. With planning and production assistance provided by the Biennial team, seconded from the existing Taipei Fine Arts Museum structure, a series of ambitious programmes were realised. These productions were underpinned by political satire and site-specific new commissions with an aim to challenge a static relation between art, architecture and urban / political spaces.

Presented at a time of great socio-political changes, Taipei Biennial 1998 and many of its art works quickly became the focal point of media attention and political debates. The lived reality of looming threats from the People's Republic

of China (PRC) was still fresh from the 1996 third cross-strait crisis, when China conducted an avalanche of missile tests as warnings to reign in Taiwanese president Teng-Hui Lee from what Beijing perceived as drifting away from the One China Policy due to Lee's emerging narrative surrounding a new Taiwanese nativist identity and political agenda.

The first democratically elected mayor Shui-Bian Chen (1994-1998) from the pro-independence camp Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was up for re-election. Rising from an oppositional party, mayor Chen was resolute in reforming the political system by legitimising a nativist cultural identity with his new-gained power. Researcher (Lai, 2008) argued that the cultural system became a centrepiece to realise Chen's political reform. Under his mayorship, the inaugural Taipei Biennial in 1996 and the first international edition in 1998 were conceived to articulate a vision which sought alternative (non-sinonised) cultural affiliations through an expression of contemporary social identity for the now democratised Taiwan.

Under this socio-political backdrop, the first international edition of the Taipei Biennial was organised and quickly became a stage where different stakeholder groups contested for legitimacy, through their attempts to influence the manner in which the Biennial was administered. Controversies surrounding two commissioned works by Cai Guo-Qiang for the 1998 Biennial event soon followed and became the focal point where stakeholder groups tried to assert their values and demands on the administrative structure.

Contemporary artist Cai Guo-Qiang, a Chinese expatriate living and working in New York, specialising in gunpower installation and mega-scale firework-based performances, was invited to participate in the first international edition of the Taipei Biennial. Already an artist with worldwide acclaim, Cai's



participation was dubbed by the media as “no doubt one of the most highly anticipated star artists” (Lee, 14 Jun. 1998) in the line-up. Cai proposed two new works – a bamboo-structured installation with advertisement canvases, named *Advertising Castle* and a performance piece titled *Golden Missile*.

Scheduled for the opening ceremony, *Golden Missile* was conceived to take place on the public opening day, before the kickoff of an intense international conference, seeing participation by esteemed guests invited from across the world. The project was composed of 200 small paper-made missiles – each with a propeller attached – arranged in a formation that resembled the shape of an ancient Chinese coin<sup>136</sup>. The missiles were designed to rise to approximately 100-metre above ground level after launch within a minute, before descending as mini parachutes.

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<sup>136</sup> According to the exhibition catalogue (Nanjo, 1998, pp.50-53), the coin shape was a satire on the boom and bust of Asia’s economic development.

## Image 1

Cai Guo-Qiang, Golden Missile, 1998. Mixed media (Performance).

Photographic documentation of the performance at Taipei Biennial 1998 Site of Desire. Courtesy of the artist and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



For the project, the museum commissioned a local specialised firework company to produce and oversee safety assessment, including the development of weather-based contingency plan and the implementation of the performance on the opening day. According to local media reports (Lee, 14 Jun. 1998; Huang, 14 Jun. 1998), the production plan was made in consultation with the museum after an initial research trip by the artist.

During the production phase, due to the unprecedented nature and peculiarity of the work, Taipei Fine Arts Museum entered a protracted discussion with the Civil Aeronautics Administration at the Ministry of Transportations over concerns on public safety and flying regulations. These concerns were raised, out of the museum's locality under the main flight path of the capital's Songshan

Airport, where building height and activities were subject to restriction. Based on official records<sup>137</sup>, inter-agency negotiation dragged out till the last minute – two days before the performance was scheduled to be exact.

## Image 2

Cai Guo-Qiang, Golden Missile, 1998. Mixed media (Performance).

Photographic documentation of the performance at Taipei Biennial 1998 Site of Desire. Courtesy of the artist and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



*Advertising Castle* was inspired by Taipei's cityscape, which during the artist's visit was dominated by unruly bamboo-based scaffolding carrying unapproved advertisement materials – from posters of political campaigns, to adverts by property developers and promotional material boosting the effect of

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<sup>137</sup> Official document issued by the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA, 1988, pp.1-2) was not received by TFAM until 11 June and the performance was scheduled to take place in the early afternoon of 13 June.

sexual performance enhancement drugs. According to the exhibition catalogue (Nanjo, 1998), the expediency of scaffolding as a medium pointed to the mirage of social-political boom and bust. It also served as an allegory revealing the pervasive consumerism characteristic of the zeitgeist of the country, selling desire and dreams of all sorts.

With the main structure penetrating the lobby windows<sup>138</sup> from the plaza, *Advertising Castle* became an enormous spatial intervention that visually engulfed the museum. Most of the materials used were ready-made objects upcycled or gathered from retired ad campaigns. These ready-made assemblages were complemented by newer materials that were made as look-alike fictitious advertisements (including the key visuals of the biennial), creating a mixed sense of reality and fiction.

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<sup>138</sup> As the installation enveloped the façade of the museum, an opening was cut through the canvas panels to provide access into the museum lobby.

### Image 3

Cai Guo-Qiang, Advertising Castle, 1998. Banner, bamboo. Installation view at Taipei Biennial 1998, Site of Desire. Courtesy of the artist and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



A portion of the real ad space was sold to advertisers to sponsor the making of the project. This was a deliberate evocation of a commercial mechanism in response to the exhibition theme, *Site of Desire*, where the boundary between the real world and the make-believes was blurred.<sup>139</sup>

Production coordination and assistance was provided by the biennial organiser to source, fabricate, install and maintain the installation.

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<sup>139</sup> I would suggest that such a design could be interpreted as a satire to the market economy which was co-opted (and reclaimed) by the contemporary art system.

#### Image 4

Cai Guo-Qiang, *Advertising Castle*, 1998. Banner, bamboo. Installation view at Taipei Biennial 1998, *Site of Desire*. Courtesy of the artist and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



#### ***All-In Devotion as Sign of Professionalism***

Having outlined briefly the socio-political context and project specificities of the two works, the sections below will engage in a detailed examination of the controversies surrounding Cai's projects. This analysis will aid the understanding of how the discourse of professionalism evolved into a tactic of the Biennial administrative team to deal with diverging stakeholder demands.

My investigation will first track the group motivations belonging to the art producer / knowledge maker community, followed by the demands made by the lay, non-professional group, and closed with the claims from the community of practitioners. My analysis will focus on the ways in which different stakeholders

articulated their group values through their demands and how the Biennial organiser responded to these diverging values, by propagating a public discourse underpinned by the proposition of professionalism as their primary administrative strategy.

In terms of group motivation, the art producer / knowledge maker stakeholder group prioritised the production of high-quality and high-impact artistic projects, as their paramount goal. This pursuit highlighted great precision in honour of the creative vision, despite the presence of any underlying technical difficulties. This primary demand of the art producer / knowledge maker group in turn formulated the basis of the administrative methodology, through which the administrative team sought to perpetuate measures that would aid project realisation to a high standard, by overcoming production obstacles.

In the case of Taipei, these concerns and the ways the administration catered to the need of the creative actors were noticeable across the media reporting both before and after the 1998 Biennial show opened. For instance, in the build-up to the show's opening, media reports dwelled on the complexity of Cai's projects in their unprecedented scale and diversity as well as the challenges novel programming brought to the Biennial organiser. A sense of excitement with great uncertainty was underscored in the reporting, highlighting operational obstacles attributed to a limited budget and a lack of production experience of similar works.

Whether the museum could pull off the first international edition on time and execute professionally as planned became the focal point of pre-show media coverage. What was clear from this pre-show reporting was an administrative approach, characterised by an all-in'devotion and a rigour in

inter-governmental liaison, to meet the creative demands of the art producers and knowledge makers. *Liberty Times* reported: “For 1998 Taipei Biennial, in the count-down to the show’s opening, Taipei Fine Arts Museum can be described as ‘snowed under and weight down’ by the multitude of demands from the ambitious line-up of numerous participating artists” (Zheng, 1 Jun. 1998). *Ming Sheng Bao*, a major daily newspaper, delineated the scope and complexity of the artistic projects to be on view created enormous challenges to the organiser, stating: “Given the limited personnel and budget capacity, TFAM is stretched and kept constantly on the run by the highly challenging project demands proposed by quite a few participating artists” (Editorial, 11 Jun. 1998).

From these reportages, the professional credibility of the Biennial organiser lied in their willingness to stretch institutional resources to meet the technical challenge and administrative hurdles in realisation of ambitious projects. This administrative attitude reinforcing the narrative of professional handling was received as effective, since this approach corresponded to the value and demand of the creative actors. Cai’s response to the execution of his works testified to the efficacy of this organisational commitment, as a manifestation of administrative professionalism. Concerning the outcome<sup>140</sup> of the *Golden Missile* performance, Cai, “excited” and “content”, was reported to pad the production crew on their shoulders, expressing “a sense of satisfaction with his body language” (Huang, 14 Jun. 1998).

These expressions of approval by the artists pointed to the successful

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<sup>140</sup> According to local newspaper (Huang, 14 Jun. 1998), the crowd was animated and on tiptoe with high anticipation, galvanised by nervousness, applause, awe, gasp and thrill. As the parachutes descended, the crowd was eager to collect and had Cai sign as memorabilia. The weather was sunny but windy, blowing the missiles and parachutes slightly off course, and making the intended effect of a glittering shower less visible.



handling of the Biennial organiser based on an all-in assuring attitude which not only committed its institutional capacity to meet creative demands despite the odds, but also provided sufficient museum-wide backing for seemingly unorthodox creative proposals. Expressing the same level of endorsement by Cai to the final presentation of *Advertising Castle*, the artist conveyed his “immense satisfaction, thanks to TFAM’s dedicated willingness to meet [creative] demands” and said: “Anyone seeing this work will be jealous” (Huang, 14 Jun. 1998).

Alongside other works at the museum plaza<sup>141</sup>, the professional handling and presentational outcome, rooted in the museum’s commitment, won the Biennial organiser a string of media accolades, crediting the museum for providing artists with “ample space for creativity” (Lin, 13 Jun. 1998). The will and resource directed to pull off such an ambitious transformation of the museum exterior was interpreted by newspaper *Ming Sheng Bao* as “TFAM truly resorted every avenue and exhausted its ability to go all in to meet the artists’ needs for the exhibition” (Huang, 12 Jun. 1998). From this media coverage, the museum was depicted as fully dedicated to actualise artistic and curatorial ambitions, pulling financial, social and political resources, despite a then lack of production and coordination experience.

As an administrative tactic, such an all-in attitude as a token of professionalism, effectively played to the values of the art producer and

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<sup>141</sup> The mega installation of Cai’s *Advertising Castle* alongside the projects by other Taiwanese artists (such as Chun-Ming Hou’s *Erotic Paradise* series in large, garish yellow banners and panels, and Jun-Jieh Wang’s billboard promoting *HB-1750*, a fictional elixir to gain forever youth) transformed the museum’s façade and its white modernist exterior into a raw, visual ecstasy. This visual transformation was reported as “aesthetically subversive...youthful, energetic and dynamic” (Lin, 13 Jun. 1998, p.18).

knowledge maker stakeholder group. This administrative methodology in turn bolstered the professional credibility of the Biennial organiser and was positively received by the participating artists and the curatorial team.

### ***Safeguarding Creative Integrity as Professionalism vs. Professional Handling as Nation Building***

In addition to the all-in attitude as an expression of professionalism that catered to the need of creative stakeholders, a similar narrative of professional handling, characterised by administrative shrewdness, served as the main negotiation tactic throughout the liaison process with the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), when seeking approval for Cai's *Golden Missile* performance. In TFAM's official document requesting the support and clearance from the CAA, three dominant rhetoric underpinned the museum's argument – each articulating an aspect of administrative professionalism.

Firstly, administrative credibility was established through an emphasis on the professional credentials of the artist and production team. For instance, TFAM (4 Jun. 1998) stressed Cai's worldwide oeuvre and his reputation as an "internationally renowned contemporary artist" (pp. 1-4). Additional professional assurances were given by commissioning a local production and evaluation team, which was "the one-and-only company capable of providing the design and professional maintenance services [to the project of such complexity] in Taiwan" (Ibid). These statements, featuring the professional credential of the artist and production team, aimed to consolidate the administrative credibility of the Biennial organiser and sought to assert a professional authority over the CAA as a non-art lay group, so that the museum could demonstrate, when it came to the matter of art, a professional request by the Biennial should be respected and granted in full.

Secondly, to assert the Biennial organiser's professional authority, TFAM reinforced that Cai's work was a centrepiece of the 1998 exhibition. Failure to realise the performance would be detrimental to the wholeness of the overall exhibition showcase.<sup>142</sup> By positioning artistic integrity and curatorial vision as unwavering, this strategy gave administrative legitimacy towards the implementation plan being devised by the museum, as an integrally-conceived professional undertaking – a loss of any piece would mean a failure to the whole operation. Namely, no cherry picking was allowed, in terms of giving permission to one aspect of the *Golden Missile* project and not another. Only when the piece and the show could be carried out in its entirety, fully honouring the creative vision, could it be seen as a successful realisation.

Finally, in addition to affirming the centrality and integrity of creative vision as uncompromisable, the Biennial administration declared its professional authority, by calling upon the successful handling of the project, as critical to advance Taiwan's nation-building mission. Such statements equated administrative professionalism as instrumental to elevate the standing of the country in an increasingly competitive international scene. For instance, TFAM's rhetoric<sup>143</sup> repeatedly emphasised the significance of the event and how the successful (and professional) execution of this inaugural international edition

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<sup>142</sup> The centrality of artistic integrity was conveyed through the concept of wholeness. For instance, TFAM statements (4 Jun. 1998) to this effect included: "*Golden Missile* is a special commission central to the theme of the exhibition" and "[t]he successful launch is an essential aspect of the performance piece".

<sup>143</sup> Doubling down on the significance of the Biennial as a nation-building cornerstone, similar rhetorical tactic, highlighting international spotlight on the professional handling of the showcase, were also featured in TFAM statements (4 Jun. 1998) such as: "The performance is expected to draw an audience from around the world, including world-famous art historians, art museum directors and professional cultural practitioners" as well as "footage of the launch will be provided to international leading media such as the NHK and other broadcasting channels".

would be a major step forward for Taiwan's global reputation, stating:

*Site of Desire* is the first international biennial Taiwan organises. The event has already gained enormous traction among Asia, Europe and America. The success of the showcase will greatly benefit Taiwan's international standing, as contemporary art [and its professional administration] is an important indicator of national power with increased commitment seen across major countries around the world. (TFAM, 4 Jun. 1998, pp.1-4)

This line of argumentation reinforced professional handling of the artwork and the exhibition, as essential to a higher calling of nation-building. This layered messaging, which pegged on the symbolic significance of professionally administering the artwork, delivered a *we cannot fail because the world is watching us* message with a clear articulation of the creative vision, while declaring an uncompromisable stance on delivering artistic integrity.

According to this narrative, only by approving and honouring the plan proposed by the Biennial organiser in full could Taiwan advance its international prestige as a forward-looking, contemporary art embracing nation. From the green-light eventually received from the CAA, this approach appeared to be effective as the CAA as a non-art lay groups essentially bought into the professional credibility of the Biennial organiser.

### ***Homing in on Professionalism to Validate Administrative Approach***

Similar messages which highlighted professional authority of the Biennial organiser was also prominent in the negotiation with other non-art stakeholders throughout the controversies that soon followed *Advertising Castle* after its unveiling. In these subsequent arguments, safeguarding creative integrity, again, was considered as the basis of administrative legitimacy; professional handling which honoured and defended such integrity was also articulated as a

sign of democratic progress. A failure to deliver professionalism was in turn positioned as compromising to the international standing of the island.

Within a week of the show's opening, controversies surrounding Cai's *Advertising Castle* started to embroil the Biennial organiser. Concerns were raised by the members of the Public Works Committee at the Taipei City Council, which oversaw municipal affairs related to urban planning and other public infrastructure development works. Enquiries made by the city councilors grabbed national attention of the political beats across major daily news. Representative of the non-art lay value, disagreements centered on the ways the museum façade was transformed, alongside additional concerns over safety and procedural justice.

Typified by the councilors' motivation, the primary consideration of similar non-art lay groups aimed at gaining access and sway over cultural resources, by means of seeking recognition to their group social value. Three points of contention<sup>144</sup> were made, exemplifying attempts of the layman group to assert gatekeeping authority over the Biennial operation. These included concerns over procedural compliance (related to the definition of art versus advert), public safety and potential conflict of interest.

Firstly, contest for gatekeeping authority were evident in the claims councilors made that advertising materials could not be legally considered as a form of art. For instance, councilors argued that the content on display (concerning property development, life insurance packages, sexual performance enhancement drugs, mobile phones and fashion brands) particularly sparked unease. Some of the advertiser's contact details shown on

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<sup>144</sup> Based on these concerns, the Public Works Committee requested a full investigation and pledged to boycott budget review, unless a satisfactory resolution could be achieved.

the canvas were proven to be still in use by councilor investigation. The medium and format of *Advertising Castle*, involving large scaffolding and a cocktail of real and made-believe ad materials, also ignited debates over whether such presentational style fall under the category of commercial advertisement, and subsequently making the work subject to prior application and related regulations for adverts.

Secondly, councilors alleged that the use of ready-made advertisement constituted a conflict of interest, where potential inappropriate financial gains were made through municipal resources. This raised the alarming prospect of: TFAM as a “municipal museum and a government agency, consciously breaking the law” (Chen, 17 Jul. 1988). This allegation further stirred up a debate over enforcement justice. Councilors claimed enforcement measures should show no exceptionalism for the artistic community, stating: “How can this so-called ‘art’ defined by ‘artist’ alone enjoy extra privilege?” (Ibid) and “[*Advertising Castle*] is disguising as art, while serving the purpose of illegal commercial advertisement...This might become a loophole for copycats” (Ma, 21 Jul. 1998).

Finally, councilors highlighted that the role of the public sector should reside in staying clear from endorsing commercial interest and always prioritising safety first. This narrative propagated by the councilors emphasised procedural compliance and enforcement justice, which argued against creative liberty as a form of privilege for exceptionalism.

The councilors’ arguments tried to assert a gatekeeping authority onto the way the Biennial was handled, through attempts to define what did and did not constitute art. In response to these interventions by non-art groups to usurp gatekeeping authority on the definition of art, TFAM and the museum’s then governing authority, the Department of Education, fought back, by insisting

*Advertising Castle* was indeed a piece of artwork. In their rebuttal, the artistic intention was reiterated. A detailed explanation<sup>145</sup> was given to illustrate how the use of ready-mades had been a common approach in contemporary art, often incorporated to reflect social reality or to function as political satire. Based on this operational norm, the Biennial team clearly articulated their commitment to defend artistic integrity as a professional duty. Vowing to safeguard *Advertising Castle*, TFAM director insisted: “It is absolutely impossible” to decommission the work (Yan, 22 Jul. 1998), because “a professional art museum should respect artistic freedom and vision” (Huang, 22 Jul. 1998).

To affirm its administrative credibility, the museum invited professional groups to act as co-taste-making power, by valorising the community of practitioner’s specialised authority in the definition of art and on the matter of its operational norm. For example, TFAM director urged putting a stop to politicising artworks and returning to a professional judgement, stating: “External voices should return the creative space back to artists and to [TFAM as] a professional museum, so that the matter of art can be allowed to be restored as art [by the art world]” (Yan, 22 Jul. 1989). This narrative by the museum was an appeal to the community of practitioners by calling upon the artworld to support the norms of art-making, and thus legitimising the Biennial’s

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<sup>145</sup> In a press release, TFAM (21 Jul. 1998) delineated: “The author uses real objects belonging to contemporary life to express citizen desire. For the ads installed on the scaffolding, some are ‘genuine’ and some ‘fabricated’, some ‘old’ and some ‘newly made’. The selection aims to highlight how similar pervasive images, information, and advertisements have penetrated everyday reality...If *Advertising Castle* unintentionally created the effect of commercial adverts, it should be regarded as a natural and unavoidable outcome of the presentation. The museum is in no way deliberately providing space for commercial advertisement. The boundary between ‘art’ and ‘real life’ has been gradually blurred. This deliberate ambiguity is an ongoing trend witnessed in the contemporary art scene”.

non-compliance in the face of de-installation requests made by the non-art stakeholders at the city council. In this line of argument, an alignment with artworld norms was casted as a symbol of professional handling. This approach aimed to rally professional stakeholders, by siding with the expectation of the community of practitioners, in an attempt to retain the gatekeeping authority within the professional circle, in order to fend off intervention by the lay interest group.

To further propagate this discourse of professionalism as a source of gatekeeping legitimacy while appealing to the demands of the lay interest group, TFAM emphasised public interest as being at the heart of the operation of *Advertising Castle* since project inception. Appropriate safeguarding measures were in place to see to the delivery of such concern of publicness. For instance, TFAM tirelessly explained the work involved no intentional commercial interest or financial gain – all proceeds generated for selling the ad space were used in the production of the work. The museum articulated that this ad-selling was an intended evocation of a commercial mechanism by the artist, as a satire. It was also expounded that a customised contract was entered between the museum and the construction / fabrication company, which specified the work being produced would involve no commercial activity that would result in undue profit, and in the case that the non-profit clause was ever broken, the company would bear a civil liability. This approach responded to the concerns of the lay group in terms of safety and procedural justice, equating due diligence as professional handling and administrative credibility.

The press statement also demonstrated similar move to play to the group value of non-art stakeholders, which highlighted a well-conceived safety



procedure<sup>146</sup> to consolidate the Biennial organiser's administrative acumen to relieve public concern. These included contingency plans<sup>147</sup>, thoroughly stipulated with the artist's consent, to proportionally de-install the outdoor work in response to force majeure or major public incidence. These arguments reinforced the museum's professional credibility, by not only demonstrating a willingness to engage with the expectation of the non-art group, but also showcasing an administrative commitment to legitimate concerns over public safety, including complying<sup>148</sup> with non-art group's legal authority.

Finally, nation-building mission yet again legitimised the necessity for professional execution. Similar to the negotiation tactic with the CAA, in its argument in defence of *Advertising Castle*, the Biennial organiser maintained that successful and professional handling of disputed works would contribute to the international standing of the nation. TFAM stated: "In the case of forced demolition, this will certainly make the situation a colossal joke for the art world and become an international laughingstock" (Chen, 17 Jul. 1988). Seeking to

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<sup>146</sup> To further enhance professional credibility, TFAM stressed artist Cai Guo-Qiang, seasoned in the planning and implementation of similar large-scale installation projects, had a track record of safe delivery with no previous occurrence of public safety incidents. Structural engineers were also retained by the artist and the museum, to provide structural safety assessment and to oversee work production.

<sup>147</sup> In the case of a typhoon, contractors would proceed in accordance with the pre-stipulated plan to remove the canvases on site and undertake additional structural securing works. Routine site visit and maintenance by museum staff were scheduled on a regular basis to ensure prompt response to address public safety concerns. The scaffolding structure was also insured against both personal and group accidents or property damages.

<sup>148</sup> In addition to the pre-stipulated safety plans, TFAM pledged to supplement a comprehensive report by a certified structural engineer. The museum also hosted a site inspection for the Public Works Committee and committed to mitigate any problems based on the Committee's findings. On the request of the Construction Management Office, TFAM further established a crisis response unit to address remaining safety emergencies concerns.

create a common ground, this narrative called upon a higher mission which aimed at protecting the national image of Taiwan through professional management of artwork, viewing safeguarding artistic integrity as international norm (and a form of freedom of expression).

The analysis above identified the ways in which professionalism was employed as a strategy to build common ground with non-art lay stakeholders. The museum's rhetoric revealed an administrative approach that sought to reinforce specialist credibility through a defence of artistic integrity, featuring its organisational support of international (and professional) calibre. These included credible production plans and shrewdly-stipulated contingency alternatives, based on art world operational norm and international standards. This public discourse of professionalism on the one hand invited in the community of practitioners as co-taste-maker in an attempt to retain the gatekeeping power within the art world, while on the other hand responded to legitimate demands on public safety in full to cater to the value of non-art stakeholders. Professional handling of artwork became equivalent to advancing Taiwan's international status as a young democracy. Following the rationale of these argumentations, upholding these professional grounds was consequently viewed as a token of national image building.

These narratives centred on playing up the rhetoric of professionalism, by affirming and retaining professional gatekeeping authority, subsequently, saw the outcome of this administrative strategy to take effect. Lay groups without an expertise in art, represented by the Construction Management Office (CMO), soon acknowledged TFAM's professional authority and sided with the Biennial organiser in their handling. In CMO's updated response to the issue, the Office not only articulated a respect towards the professional opinion of TFAM as art

experts<sup>149</sup>, but also echoed the positionality articulated by the Biennial organiser in terms of common ground principles, including procedural compliance, appropriate role of the public sector and diligence to safeguard public safety.

As a sign of accepting TFAM's professional gatekeeping authority, the CMO changed its original position<sup>150</sup> about the *Advertising Castle* from it being an advert and needing removal, to accepting the museum's argument that the installation was a work of art, despite its presentational style and content, which might share essential characteristics of commercial advertisements. As the ultimate triumph of the museum's professional authority in adjudicating how art should be administered, the CMO later declared no action would be taken to the *Advertising Castle* unless the city council could source another "expert organisation which is more professional than TFAM, who is willing to give an assessment that would contradict the deliberation of the project as an advert rather than an artwork" (Wang, 28 Jul. 1988).

CMO's acceptance of TFAM's gatekeeping authority demonstrated how the discourse of professionalism became an effective basis to consolidate administrative credibility and useful in advancing the agenda of the Biennial organiser, when facing conflicting stakeholder demands. This methodology in turn gave legitimacy to the museum's handling of the disputed art works, not

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<sup>149</sup> The CMO's response aligned with TFAM's call for respect towards the museum's professional judgement, when it comes to the definition of art. This narrative was highlighted as a central principle in the Office's final deliberation (1998), stating: "Since defining 'art' is not the expertise of the Office, CMO will respect the opinion of the professional group [Taipei Fine Arts Museum]".

<sup>150</sup> In CMO's deliberation (1998), the Office stated *Site of Desire* had been approved as a special art exhibition by the mayor prior to its opening, and thus *Advertising Castle* as the centrepiece of the showcase should be considered a work of art, making the work not subject to advertisement related application or approval process.

only in accordance with the norm and expectations of its in-group (art producer / knowledge maker and community of practitioners), but also at the same time appealing to the value of the non-art stakeholders by resorting to common ground principles such as safety, procedural justice, publicness and national image building.

### ***Co-Authority of Community of Practitioner as Sources of Professional Legitimacy***

After looking at the non-art group's expectation and the ways in which the administrative strategy turned to the concept of professionalism to fend off their intervention, I will move on to look at how the voice of the community of practitioners could be profiled through the controversies surrounding Cai's work. This analysis will aid the understanding of the ways professionalism as an administrative tactic responded to the value of art world stakeholders.

The primary taste-making goal of the community of practitioners in alignment with the administration's rationale made the professional community an effective ally to the Biennial organiser. As co-gatekeepers, the community of practitioners validated the museum's decision-making, particularly during the struggle against non-art group's intervention on the manners the Biennial should be administered. The voice of the community of practitioners and the value they espoused increased in volume, as the strong-arming<sup>151</sup> of the lay

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<sup>151</sup> According to local newspaper (Huang, 28 Jul. 1988), despite the assessment delivered by a certified structural engineer, vouching for the safety of *Advertising Castle's* scaffolding structure, a handful of members on the Public Works Committee continued to request the piece to be demolished, claiming the work would risk a "copycat effect" for future offenders. These members made their intention to boycott the budget review process at the General Assembly known, if the work (or at least the parts that involved "real ad") was not removed. A few councilmembers on the Committee also vowed to mobilise a campaign to cut TFAM's budget as a retaliation. *United*

stakeholders escalated. The unreasonable insistence from a handful of city councilors caused an uproar among the art community in Taiwan. A petition campaign was mobilised in solidarity with TFAM. Joining in on the cultural circle's push back, media coverage by the cultural beat of major daily newspapers emerged around the same time, seeking to represent the voices of the artist<sup>152</sup> and the art community, by articulating what the group considered as an art world norm (regarding the use of ready-mades), and thus, what constituted professional management of artwork.

Members of the artistic community, standing behind the cause, voiced anger and made clear that the petition was not to support any specific artist but the principle of artistic freedom<sup>153</sup> in their fight against political intervention<sup>154</sup>. Echoing TFAM's ongoing claims which treated creative integrity as the basis of

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*Daily* (Niu & Liu, 30 Jul. 1998) reported NTD\$ 10million (roughly USD\$ 350,000) was slashed from TFAM budget during the negotiation period between three major political caucuses concerning the budget review, as a retaliation. An ensuing site-visit was arranged by the authorities, including representatives from the Public Works Department, Fire Department, Police Department, and the Department of Transportation, for the Committee to address any remaining safety concerns.

<sup>152</sup> A response from Cai, corroborating TFAM's statement surfaced as a balance report (Huang, 22 Jul. 1988) clarifying the intention of the art producer, stating all proceeds were used for the production of the work, and suggested: "It might be more appropriate to go back to the standpoint of conceptual art and contemporary art as the basis of discussion with the city councilors and the public in general...The [attention received] proves the work is interesting of itself".

<sup>153</sup> Professional art groups and trade associations such as the Gallery Association, Studio of Contemporary Art, artistic collective IT Park, professional trade magazines and individual artists, mustered behind the cause of protecting artistic freedom and rallied a petition in support of TFAM.

<sup>154</sup> Local daily (Lu, 28 Jul. 1988) reported that the art and culture professional community stood fast in their conviction to "fight back political intervention till the very end" in defence against "White Terror" and a "reversal of democratisation progress" – alluding to the wide-spread political prosecution of intellectuals and political oppositions under previous martial law.

its professional management, the community of practitioners equated artistic integrity as freedom of speech<sup>155</sup> and therefore an uncompromisable administrative principle.

This call typified an appeal to retain gatekeeping and taste-making authority within the art circle. Mobilisation by the community of practitioners to reject the authority of non-art stakeholders and their attempt to seize control as gatekeeper in art, in turn helped consolidate TFAM's professional credibility. Seeking to reclaim and retain the gatekeeping authority within the in-group of art specialists, in a press statement and the ensuing press conference, the professional community declared their commitment to defend TFAM and the museum's action, stating the concern by the elected representatives over public safety was commendable, but "the cultural circle will not sit back" if political members "attempt to decide the legitimacy of art and trample over artistic creation" (Huang, 29 Jul. 1988). The group further argued: "When it comes to art, it is acceptable to have a debate with diverging opinions or completely not getting the point [of art]. But respect is a must" (Ibid).

In addition to a rejection of lay intervention, the statements made by the art world protesters endorsed the Biennial organiser's handling as professional, since it honoured the norm of the art world, and thus was considered legitimate. This endorsement by the professional community further enhanced the credibility of the Biennial administration and its on-going management of the

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<sup>155</sup> For instance, members of the public in attendance of the petition press conference, chipping in on the debate, suggested replacing the contact detail on the real ads, as a mutual solution for TFAM and the Public Works Committee to build common ground. This suggestion was met with dismay by most participants, claiming the matter is of principle and not proportionality. The opposition stated such a change would "violate the original artistic intent, diminish the work, and break the [legal and moral] contract between the art museum and the artist" (Huang, 29 Jul. 1988).

disputed artworks. For instance, protesting a misunderstanding of art tradition and against confusing (conceptual) art with market profiteering, members joining the petition cited ready-mades as Euro-American art history norm since Marcel Duchamp, expressing: “people did question whether Duchamp’s urinal is art, but no one asks for the removal of the commercial logo”, and arguing: “Campbell Soup logos in Andy Warhol’s work don’t make it non-art (Chang, 29 Jul. 1988). This line of defence by the art circle proved how TFAM’s strategy to invite in the professional community as co-gatekeeper to valorise the norm of the art world, as effective, since the professional circle’s demand aligned with TFAM’s approach to retain the specialist gatekeeping and taste-making authority within the in-group composed of the art-making and professional stakeholders.

To wind down the fiasco and appease<sup>156</sup> the increasingly vocal public backlash, councilmembers of the Public Works Committee backed down on their initial resolution for total demolition and asked for additional structural enhancement (from iron wires into steel wire ropes) to ensure safety – with which TFAM promptly complied. *Advertising Castle* saw a natural retirement after the end of the exhibition, with a brief period of partial de-installation<sup>157</sup> due to a typhoon. This final resolution epitomised the success of the organiser’s

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<sup>156</sup> With the art world mobilising behind its defence, TFAM soon received directives from the Department of Education to communicate and dissuade the cultural and art community from rallying further. The museum director in response to this top-down management proposition with a neutral stance, stating, “how the members of the art circle react is their freedom” (Chang, 28 Jul. 1988).

<sup>157</sup> Aimed at mitigating public risk with a temporary removal of large canvas panels, this de-installation process followed the pre-stipulated contingency plan and was carried out with the full consent of the artist. The work was restored after the typhoon and was on view in full until the show came to a natural end.

administrative strategy, which leveraged the narrative of professionalism to negotiate with conflicting demands.

***Analysis: Professionalism as Tactic and Resistance***

In the controversies surrounding Cai's works, the discourse of professionalism and its different manifestations acted as a foundational administrative principle to the ways the Biennial organiser handled disputed projects. The narrative of professionalism became a management strategy, adopted to navigate diverging expectations, in keeping with the cacophony of stakeholder demands. The table below charts my findings on the respective management and communication approach the Biennial employed to appeal to various stakeholder value, through corresponding expression of professionalism.



**Table 4**

*Analysis of Stakeholder Expectation and Administrative Strategy (Through Expression of Professionalism) and Stakeholder Expectation*

<b>Dimension / Stakeholders</b>	<b>Art producer / knowledge maker</b>	<b>Community of practitioner</b>	<b>Lay interest group</b>
<b>Goal of the stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce quality and high-impact cultural production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence taste-making and knowledge production</li> <li>• Maintain and seek gatekeeping authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain access to cultural resources</li> <li>• Seek recognition of group social values and needs</li> </ul>
<b>Sources of legitimacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling recognition by professional community of practitioners and gatekeepers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring peer recognition throughout engagement</li> <li>• Solicit acknowledgement by art producer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create peer recognition</li> <li>• Mobilise public support and empathy</li> </ul>
Desire outcome of the administrative in response to stakeholder expectation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring high audience participation</li> </ul>		
<b>Basis of administrative legitimacy</b>	Deliver artistic integrity:	Valorise in-group gatekeeping authority:	Create common grounds:
Intended Administrative approach and outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable, create and promote quality and high-impact artwork, exhibition and programme within budget and time constraint</li> <li>• Accurately comprehend artistic value and creative vision within a (contemporary) art epistemology and art history tradition</li> <li>• Articulate, communicate and negotiate creative intention to the community of practitioners and non-art lay group to safeguard artistic integrity and ensure high impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legitimise the taste-making system of (contemporary) art – with statements such as “leave art out of politics” (aka “let art be art”) so that professional authority of the in-group (art museums and other community of practitioners) could be exercised</li> <li>• Enable participation in decision-making to set taste and authority</li> <li>• Provide avenues to allow stakeholder actions to drive and influence the direction, engagement method and outcome of cultural production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge stakeholder concern / group value on cultural production</li> <li>• Comply with non-art related / legal authority of the stakeholder group</li> <li>• Call onto a higher mission of national image building as a source for comradeship and common grounds</li> </ul>

From the close reading of the narratives surrounding *Golden Missile* and *Advertising Castle*, the discourse of professionalism emerged as a principle of the administrative, when responding to conflicting stakeholder demands and needs. What drove art producer / knowledge maker group was the successful production of quality and high-impact works. What motivated the community of practitioners was their sway over taste-making in knowledge production and a consolidation of in-group gatekeeping authority. As to non-art stakeholders, their primary goal laid in seeking recognition for the group's social values and needs, by gaining access to cultural resources.

To the creator community, the museum's administrative strategy aimed at delivering artistic integrity through organisational support and commitment, including social, financial and institutional backing. Professional management was asserted through an accurate comprehension of artistic value and creative vision within the art production epistemology and art history / theory tradition. For example, the way Cai Guo-Qiang suggested his work should be discussed within a tradition of conceptual art and contemporary art, echoed the organiser's statements and negotiation tactics. As a sign of professional handling, the primary approach of the administrative team was to articulate, communicate and negotiate such creative intention across the stakeholder landscape, to ensure artistic integrity could be achieved with high impact, while safeguarding the work to remain on view unaltered as intended until exhibition closure. In the case of Cai's two works, catering to the demands of the creative actors, the tenacity TFAM demonstrated to deliver artistic integrity and protect creative freedom, successfully consolidated the Biennial team's professional credibility and in turn won it the recognition of the art producer / knowledge making

community.<sup>158</sup>

Appealing to the values of the community of practitioners, TFAM's administrative strategy rested in sharing and retaining gatekeeping authority within the professional in-group. In the case of the *Advertising Castle*, TFAM did so by valorising the credentials of the production team to establish professional legitimacy. Such an approach aiming at consolidating the taste-making system, constituted by the (contemporary) art norm, echoed the demand of the art world protesters, which urged leaving art out of politics and letting art be art. Through this tactic, professional authority was kept within the loop of the art community, so that knowledge legitimacy of this in-group could be exercised. Consequently, the *art-ness* of the project could be continued to be defined by the museum according to knowledge norms of the art world and be properly insulated from the demands of the lay interest group (typified by the city councilors).

When facing non-art stakeholders who sought to influence established norms of art circles, the administrative principle tended to seek common ground by acknowledging the authority of the layman group – especially for issues that were outside of the art. In the case of the *Advertising Castle* and the *Golden Missile*, TFAM diligently responded to concerns over non-art-related issues, including legal compliance, procedural justice, public safety (pre-emptive or mitigative measures) and the role of public sector (to ensure no conflict of

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<sup>158</sup> TFAM director Mun-Lee Lin stood firm in her defence of artistic integrity and creative freedom. Similar principles can be observed during the project conception stage. In a group panel (Nanjo et al, 2016), director Lin revealed that, when first informed by guest curator Fumio Nanjo about the *Golden Missile* project, she said, “give me a few moments to think this through.” After some internal debates, the director quickly provided her full support for the project, stating, “we should allow artists to create, otherwise we'd be the same as China”. This respect towards artistic integrity made an impression on the guest curator, amounting to “immense respect for the director”, as Nanjo recalled in the same panel.

interest). TFAM's acknowledgement of the lay stakeholders' value system, in turn, etched a professional credibility into its administrative decision-making. This management approach, utilising professionalism as a source of administrative legitimacy, was effective as a tactic of resistance to fend off outsider intervention by non-art stakeholders.

The analysis in this Chapter so far affirms the findings in Chapter 1, validating that the course of professionalisation in the system of administration and its process of self-instituting not only acted as a nation-building exercise, but also took up the role of an active author that contributed to the new image of Taiwan as a democracy. Concerning the two commissioned works by Cai, the ways in which the discourse of professionalism was wielded by the administrators specifically played on nation-building to create consensus with non-art actors. Appeals to national identity and nation-building mission were particularly effective as a lingua franca to build common grounds when dealing with lay stakeholders with expertise outside of the art. In this context of negotiation, upholding professional standards was considered to contribute to a new image for Taiwan to bolster its prestige on the international stage. Failure to uphold such standards, in turn, would be detrimental to the country's international standing.

### **Theorising Stewardship as the Administrative Framework**

The above analysis of the museum's statements and media reports outlined a narrative where an assertion of professionalism was central to articulate administrative strategy and consolidate management credibility. The case studies of the *Golden Missile* and the *Advertising Castle* illustrated how such an argument around professionalism had evolved as a negotiation tactic and a form of resistance to layman intervention in gatekeeping authority held by

artworld in-group. The analysis also demonstrated the ways in which the Biennial administration leveraged different expressions of professionalism to address clashing stakeholder expectations and demands.

For the second part of this Chapter, I would like to shift gears from secondary materials and historical analysis to a close examination of the primary data gathered from my interviews with current and former informants (namely, arts administrators) at the Taipei Biennial. These conversations shed light on a stewardship model, which I argue, lies at the core of the Biennial administrative approach in practice. Using these primary data, I will provide a conceptual framework to communicate what such administrative stewardship is composed of and how this concept formulates the basis of decision-making and management methodology. I will then establish how stewardship as an administrative method complements the public discourse of professionalism and enhances management legitimacy. This line of inquiry aims to establish a theoretical proposition and evidence base for arts administrators through the case of Taipei and identifies the ways in which administrative approach had changed shape in keeping with a multi-stakeholder production environment.

### ***Defining Stewardship***

According to the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.), stewardship is commonly associated with the office of a steward. The term can be used figuratively to describe activities of a similar nature. A steward, according to etymology scholar Terry F. Hoad (1996), is a position historically held by a person as an appointed functionary to manage domestic affairs of a household or estate, supervising other staff members, and regulating household expenditure.

Steward, as a noun, also describes personnel in other settings comparable to a household – such as at a college or church. Often associated with rank and

an authority of supervision and management, a steward is understood as someone carrying a primary responsibility of catering – who serves at a dining table to wait on diners and arrange meals. This catering responsibility is expanded to a modern use which describes a person in a capacity as an officer or employee on a carriage, whose main responsibility is to serve passengers or attend to needs – such as in the case of its female derivation, stewardess, as air hostess.

As a verb, to steward is to manage, to administer or to carry out the duties of a steward. Being stewardly is to demonstrate the quality of being “skilled in household management” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d., Stewardly, adj.) or showing “the care of a steward” (Ibid, Stewardly, adv.).

In the Northern American context of non-profit organisation management, the concept of stewardship is frequently used to describe strategies<sup>159</sup> in organisational development. Such a notion denotes a duty of care to a donor or patron. It entails a relationship building process which strives to keep patrons constantly informed and continuously engaged, by catering to donor’s interest and honouring his or her intent after making a gift. In a long-term organisational development standpoint, this stewardship cycle aims to retain and cultivate stakeholders with an aim to advance them to the next level of commitment and up their engagement loyalty as a patron, so that the organisation as a whole can be collectively moved forward on a mission-oriented journey in its provision of public value.

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<sup>159</sup> Similar stewardship concepts are commonly observed in non-profit management literature. See publications such as *Nonprofit Stewardship: A Better Way to Lead Your Mission-Based Organisation* (2004) or *Stewardship Essentials: The Donor Relations Guide* (2013) for more.

### ***Expanding on Stewardship as Administrative Epistemology***

Central to the concept of stewardship is a trope interwoven with domesticity. It stems from a metaphor of the house and associated imageries related to management of home economics. This metaphor subscribes a corresponding duty of care which is entrusted in the hand of the steward (field actor) to serve in accordance with the principles of the house, while attending to needs and demands of the subjects placed under his or her care.

These tropes are informative in terms of understanding the connotation of stewardship. In a steward's capacity, there is a sense of authority that comes with the appointment to the role. As an office holder, a steward's function is two-fold: to control (or to supervise) and to care (or to serve), when it comes to subjects under the responsibility of his or her office. These tasks, merging the steward's control and care, are carried out in a domestic-like scenario for an outcome-oriented purpose. Such stewardship aims to honour the intent and interest of subjects under the office's care, while steering the course of development for a joint journey to a predetermined direction.

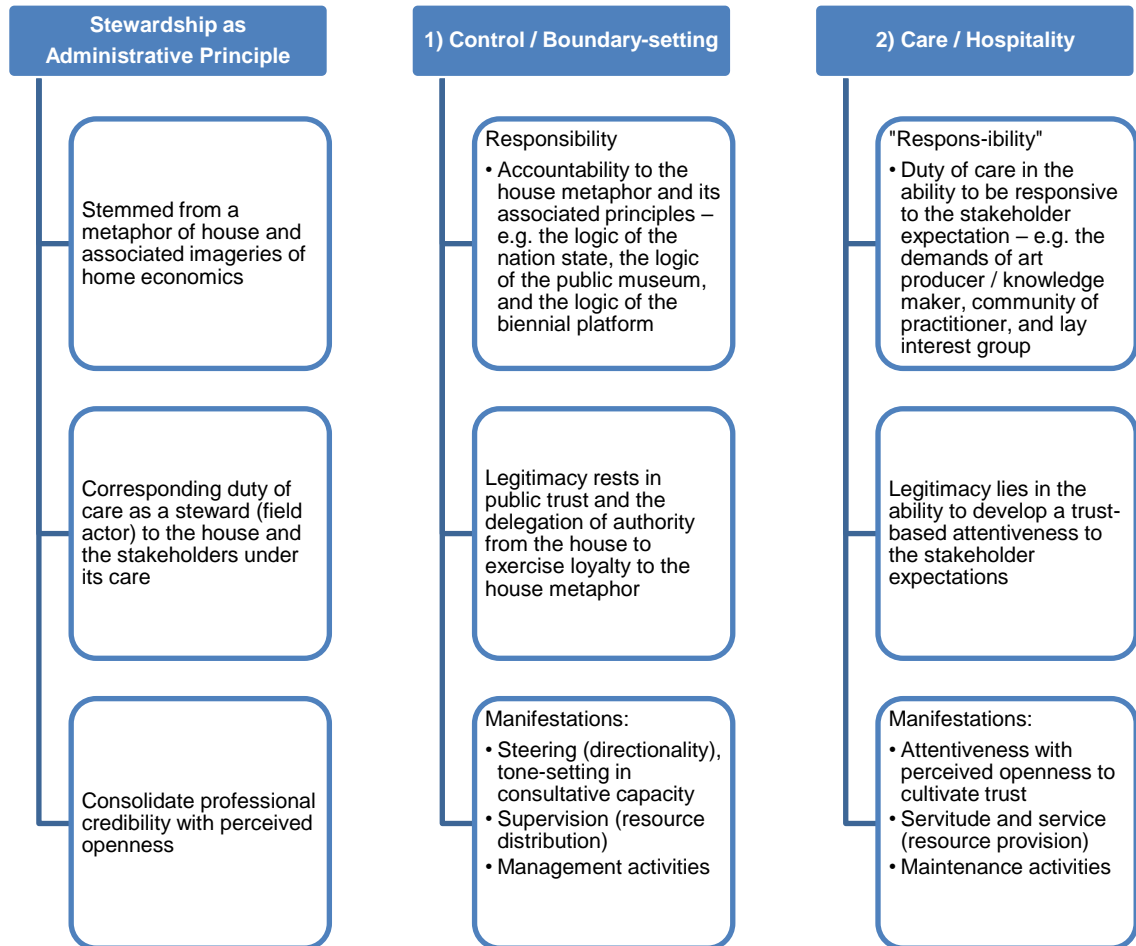
To be a good steward (and thus stewardly), the field actor is expected to be skilled in a double act of supervision and attentiveness. It requires a judgement for in-house resource allocation among the people in their care. It also demands tactful steering of just the right amount, to ensure the train and aircraft (or project development) stays on course without hazard throughout the journey. This balanced manoeuvring of care-taking and steering would hopefully make all of the passengers on board satisfied (and give the service a good rating after their departure) – or better, to return again with friends and family, and spreading the good words to increase the legitimacy of the operation.

Based on the above etymology and my expanded interpretation, the table

below locates the characteristics and manifestations of stewardship as a model which articulates the administrative framework at play for the Taipei Biennial.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptualising Stewardship as an Administrative Framework*



***Stewardship and Domesticity (Home Economics)***

From the interviews conducted with current and former biennial administrators, the image of a house and its associated principles were referenced to constantly. The term ‘house’ appeared in conversations most frequently in its common usage to describe an institutional perspective. For example, the phrase ‘in-house’ is designated to actors from within an organisation to entail a distinction in role, often in opposition to external parties. Since a steward is appointed to manage and care for the house, the officer’s



foremost responsibility lies in a duty of care to the principles which constitute the house. In the case of the Taipei Biennial, the steward (field actor) is primarily made up of the administrators (and the administrative team) at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum. As a government-backed, museum-based, contemporary art event, stewardship responsibility of the administrators thus is dedicated to the logics of the nation state, the public museum and the biennial platform, illustrated in Chapter 1, within which the house (the Biennial event) is situated.

In addition to this common phraseology of house, imageries related to home economics were regularly evoked when the Biennial staff described their role and corresponding administrative strategy. In particular, cooking and relevant metaphors related to food preparation and serving were recurring references. These examples evoked a steward's responsibility, including comparing in-house administrative functionary as a kitchen manager, the production system as a bread-making machine and the administrator's catering to stakeholder expectation as serving the right dish.

For instance, when asked about her role and approach, a TFAM assistant curator and project manager expanded upon these imageries of home economics, involving tasks related to house supervision and resource distribution, stating:

I am perhaps like a kitchen manager. The kitchen is hot and noisy. This ingredient needs to be turned to another side when ready; that aspect might be overcooked and burned if not careful. I make sure we serve when it's time, otherwise the customer might complain. We need a Michelin chef (artists). I make sure the chef gets all the help they need. (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

In addition to comparing the administrative approach to kitchen management,

another informant articulated similar collective mobilisation of internal (in-house / kitchen) and external resources, by referencing domesticity and a process of bread-making to explain the Biennial's administrative method for exhibition production. She suggested:

[My role in the production process] is similar to a bread-making machine. A variety of ingredients enters through the receptor of this machine. The mechanism of the machine is complicated and has many moving parts, formulated by not just me but a close-knit collaboration and feedback loop across in-house and external resource networks. This is how bread – the exhibition – is made. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

These domestic references draw up a comparison of the house (the Biennial) with a kitchen; the production process similar to food preparation – particularly one with an end purpose to serve and cater stakeholders based on in-house resource availability.

The analogy of home economics elucidated a primary supervisory capacity of an administrator as steward of the house, to oversee and manage house resource distribution. This management capacity is often manifested with a process of gauging what stakeholder wants, as a Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager explained: the process resembles “sourcing, assembling and relaying accurate and timely information [and resources] – similar to knowing what your customer wants and stir-frying with what you have to present the right dish” (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021).

Reinforcing steward's resource management and allocation functions, these combined food preparation and catering imageries pointed to an in-built duty of care that came with the steward's office. Such obligation was frequently

translated into an attentiveness towards in-house resource provision, across the diverse stakeholder spectrum under the steward's care. Images of home economics and domesticity underscored the steward's responsibility to the house and a loyalty to its principles, when it came to formulating administrative strategies. Examples for this duty of care from the interviews included ensuring the creator community can get what they need during the production cycle, or by presenting the "right dish" to the community of practitioners (such as in the case of visiting VIPs and international media), or a wider care towards the expectation of the audience as representative of non-art lay groups.

### ***Stewardship as Symbiosis Between Control and Care***

My interview data revealed a symbiosis of control and care, as a cornerstone for administrative stewardship. This fluid and symbiotic relationship between the care for Biennial stakeholders and an in-built accountability to the logics of the house is a throughline of the interview sources, across a variety of administrative functions and departments. Testifying to the level of responsiveness required to attend to changing dynamics between the control mechanism and the caring capacity, one informant explained: "I supposed it is to shower with all the love and care during the development phase and stick to your gun when it is time to deliver" (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021).

This delicate balance between control and care was echoed by another informant's vivid analogy, which articulated a seemingly paradoxical nature of such symbiosis, suggesting:

For the convenience of understanding, I sometimes feel it is a "both-friend-and-foe" relation or something even more delicate, regarding the interaction with artists and guest curators. It might sound odd to refer to this analogy,

but the oppositional aspect comes with understanding and standing firm when it comes to in-house perspective. And the “comradeship” aspect lies in the fact that very often you would want to go out of your way to help the artists and curators make what they envision happen. Of course, it’s a tango. You try to make the museum say yes and compromise, when there is reasonable ground. But there is also a push-and-pull, where you need to stand firm by the museum’s reasoning and deliver what is absolutely uncompromisable. Be conscious of what to stand firm by and what to give in to, while of course not tarnishing the relationship so that the project can progress. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

This complementary approach of control and care was articulated as being in a relationship which is simultaneously both “a friend and a foe”. This figure of speech communicated a fluid and delicate relationship between the care for the Biennial stakeholders and an in-built accountability to the logics of the house. This concurrent presence of the push and the pull factors could ultimately result in the relationship with a stakeholder to travel either direction – it could either deteriorate due to a metaphorical stick wielded to adhere to the control mechanism, or strengthen thanks to a carrot presented by the care function.

Informed by this nuanced symbiosis of control and care, the above example also demonstrated how administrative decisions were made in response to real-time sensing out of stakeholder needs, in relation to an overarching directionality (e.g. show opening schedule, administrative procedures, procurement legality, budget cap, etc.) set in motion by the logics of the house. Such stewardship dynamics translated into a responsive and changing dynamic, similar to a “tango”, between the control mechanism and the

caring capacity.

As an informant shared, this exercise of simultaneous control and care aimed at furthering the narrative of professionalism as a foundation for administrative legitimacy, stating: “[My priority is ensuring] the artists approve of the museum as a professional team, after going through the installation process and after the show opens” (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021). By gaining approval from stakeholders as the end goal of the engagement process, to solicit positive reviews of the administrative functionaries as “a professional team”, such stewardship tactic aids the actualisation of professionalism as a public discourse, which in turn consolidates the Biennial administrative credibility.

***Control and Boundary-Setting: Accountability to the House and Its Metaphor***

Serving an administrative function designated by the house, arts administrators as stewards are subservient to principles and institutions that constitute the house – in the case of Taipei, these are the logic of the state, the public museum and the biennial platform.

This alignment with the logics of the house is manifested as a control mechanism which aims to set boundaries as ground rules of engagement with its stakeholders. An affinity to publicness is a pronounced feature that governs these engagement rules for the control function. As an informant explained:

Because of my position, I care about media exposure (both domestic and international) and the level of public engagement throughout the exhibition period. I care on a personal level how much the curatorial thesis can take root and its effectiveness in terms of the ability to be in dialogue with our land [social context]. As for my duty, TFAM is a public museum that needs

to deliver the basic, quantifiable indicators of media exposure and visitor numbers as a metrics for public and social effectiveness, while maintaining the qualitative aspect (the actual penetration and quality of discussion) of an issue. The former becomes the basic deliverable of my office to the museum, and the museum to the municipal government and city councilors. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021)

In the case of Taipei, the house is situated within the context of a representative democracy, pointing to the museum's responsibilities as a public body. From the above example, the control mechanism is rooted in the standpoint of the Biennial as a public sector actor. Thus, good stewardship in this context would translate into a loyalty to the public office and its in-built accountability to the house logics (in a representative democracy, accountable to the logics of the state, the public museum and the biennial platform). These overarching responsibilities to the public office in turn create the directionality for the Biennial projects.

In addition to delivering publicness as a sign of responsible stewardship, in order to introduce the control mechanism to ensure public accountability, administrators actively provide consultation to better inform stakeholders of the house logics to steer along a predetermined project direction. As one informant suggested:

Each guest curator has their personal habits and mode of operation. This will never become clear (nor can it be shaped) until the working relation begins... This makes the "tone-setting" for this mutual relationship critical. The rules of the game need to be set from the start. To be blunt, the guest curator is hired through tax-payer money to work. This is often translated

into a tacit understanding from the guest curator and a corresponding respect towards the considerations expressed through our in-house chief curator and museum director. But each working relationship is very much dependent on the process of mutual expectation-setting and on-going communication. This involves discussion around budgeting (i.e. how past budgets were used), the type of projects realised, presentational outcome, etc. This [process of intel provision and consultation] is often helpful to aid the decision-making of the guest curator when interacting with invited artists. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

The example above illustrates how the organiser tried to institute the control system and achieve boundary-setting, as well as the ways in which the rule of the game was introduced through supervision and management of resource distribution, in accordance with the house logics (e.g. a concern over publicness for tax-payer money). Contrary to an authoritative judgement passing or a once-and-for-all drawing of a red line to demarcate realms of acceptability, the informant above revealed that the realisation of control mechanism through boundary-setting was in fact a dynamic process, stemming from mutuality and communication. Namely, the purpose of control is to successfully advance project development; the goal of boundary-setting is to foster reciprocity with stakeholders and establish professional credibility for the administrative team – again, pointing to the symbiosis of control and care in administrative stewardship.

On the iterative nature of the back-and-forth in boundary-drawing, stewardship journey is composed of an organic (and at times mercurial) expectation and tone-setting process, informed by a mutual sensing-out

between the administrative team and the stakeholders under their responsibility. Thus, the touch, feel and look of the control mechanism might vary widely in terms of the boundary drawn, rules of the game set, direction steered, and ways resources are allocated and managed.

This control mechanism of the stewardship framework places the administrative function in a consultative capacity. In the role of a critical friend through the stewardship process, the arts administrator aims to provide intel and context when it comes to the house logics. This intel and context in turn becomes the basis (boundary) for stakeholders to respond, develop, or challenge. Examples of consultative insight provided by the Biennial administrative team ranges from supplying:

- accurate reading to the logic of the state (and its implication within the current local cultural-political context), which becomes the backdrop of the Biennial production,
- seamless interpretation of the logic of the public museum in anchoring the Biennial production within the wider efforts of Taiwan's art history making and infrastructure building, and
- up-to-date knowledge on the logic of the biennial platform which is informed by transnational contemporary art trends to best position the Biennial happening to create effective knowledge mutuality among the local audience.

These directionalities set in motion by administrative steering vary in its presentation, as the process and outcome originating from different steward's individual experience, could differ based on the following factors:

- fluency with legal and procurement procedure (appertaining to project timescale and mobilisation speed to activate the productive capacity



across in-house and external teams),

- dexterity with the production system – e.g. ability (and will) rooted in a precise understanding of art-making conventions, as well as the history and discourse of art, so that to source timely and budgeted alternatives without compromising the creative vision,
- insight to audience behaviours (e.g. group size and programme design in relation to age appropriateness, participant responsiveness, scenario setting vs. knowledge receptiveness, etc.),
- knowledge in possible engagement tools, based on the desired effect proposed by the stakeholders – e.g. acumen in media and communications strategy to reach targeted audience and opinion leaders, or understanding of social media algorithm, etc.

***Care and Hospitality: Duty of Care as Responsiveness to Stakeholder Expectations***

As the data collected above has shown, despite different manifestations of the control function during administrative stewardship, the goal of boundary-setting is to foster mutuality, so that a project can be advanced and management credibility enhanced. This once again speaks of the symbiotic nature of the control and care principles simultaneously at work throughout the stewardship process.

After looking at the control features of stewardship, I would like to shift gear to investigate the care mechanism further. From the interview data, an administrative duty of care to stakeholders through a hospitable attitude (or a hospitality spirit), underpinned by openness, is an overarching feature of the care mechanism in administrative stewardship. According to the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.), hospitality is “[t]he act or practice of being hospitable; the

reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with liberality and goodwill". From the etymology of hospitality, the term is associated with the behaviour of a host in reception of a guest, characterised by generosity and compassion. Hospitality and its extended application<sup>160</sup> have been popularised in the field of contemporary art and curating, in an attempt to define and theorise the ethics, codes of conduct or social contract of a curator in his or her reception and / or treatment of an artist (or the community of practitioners involved in project development). Its use has gained particular traction among the Euro-American art circle in view of the Syrian migrant crisis since 2015.

Literature on hospitality in curatorial practices often traced the concept to Algerian French philosopher Jacques Derrida (2022). Radical generosity formulated the backbone of Derrida's version of hospitality: the host's actions was not governed by duty but rooted in unconditional graciousness. In this Derridean hospitality, radical generosity would ultimately result in a dissolution of the boundary between the host and the guest, leading to the host-guest positions being swapped in their relative authority.

Such an interchange in power dynamic and a reversal of vulnerability was explained by Derrida with a metaphor of a hostage situation:

So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the

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<sup>160</sup> Ralph Rugoff, director of Hayward Gallery (2006, p.51) identified his curator role as a "caretaker". Other notions of care are explored in essays such as *Take Care* by curator Anthony Huberman (2011, pp.9-11) and Taiwanese scholars Meng-Shi Chen's *Ethics of Curating* (2021) or publications such as *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (von Bismack & Meyer-Krahmer, 2016). Cultural organisation such as Frame Contemporary Art Finland (n.d.) is also at the forefront of exploring the scope of care (through the lens of "reciprocal hospitalities") through its serial *Rehearsing Hospitalities* public programme between 2019 to 2023.

master of the host. The guest becomes the host's host. The guest (hôte) becomes the host (hôte) of the host (hôte). (p.125)

Building on Derrida's notion of radical hospitality and a reversal of power relations between the host and the guest, critical theorist Judith Still (2010) wrote that Derrida's idea of hospitality resides in a core principle of deconstruction. Still argued:

Hospitality in theory and practice relates to crossing boundaries...or thresholds...including those between self and other, private and public, inside and outside, individual and collective, personal and political, emotional and rational, generous and economic – these couples that overlap each other's territory without any one exactly mapping another. (p.4)

Coming back to the discussion of the care mechanism in administrative stewardship, the Derridean notion of radical hospitality and its boundary-dissolving outcome between the host and the guest are informative to identify the power dynamic between in-house administrative team and the Biennial's stakeholders. However, this Derridean framing has its limitation when juxtaposed with the primary interview data collected for this research, as largely unrealisable within a day-to-day administrative reality.

Based on the interviewees' responses, the type of hospitality at work in practice, characteristic of the care capacity in administrative stewardship, departs drastically from a radically selfless and self-exposing Derridean proposition. The types of care and generosity in action at the Biennial are more similar to a purposeful, duty-bound, service-oriented responsiveness which aim to nurture trust through an investment of emotional labour.

Commenting on emotional labour invested to perform care, a senior

department administrator argued: “In my daily work, I try to understand and empathise with the situations of different colleagues and partners in different roles. I try to communicate and discuss to seek the greatest common divisor” (Written interview response, Taipei, May 2021). This empathy-based strategy is corroborated by another informant, stating:

To a huge degree, I am acting as someone that really wants to fight and bicker but can't. It is the daily reality of frontline personnel. You evaluate and give advice – continue to go back and forth between decision makers, while liaising with vendors or other external partners to evaluate feasibility...My strategy is to be a “people pleaser” [Literal translation: “speak human when they talk human, speak ghost when they talk ghost”]. (Former publicist, interview by author, Taipei/London, 8 May 2021)

To build common ground and trust, an administrative strategy through an investment of emotional labour and diligent communications were perceived as a token of care, including the practice of empathy, appeasement and people pleasing. The above examples also revealed how rapport building through care became a precursor to introduce the control mechanism through the consultative capacity by the administrative team. This, again, speaks of the symbiosis between control and care, being two sides of the same coin in the practice of administrative stewardship.

On top of the emotionally-taxing, service-oriented and stakeholder-centric manifestation of hospitality, my interviewees also indicated how the types of care exercised in administrative stewardship differs from the Derridean radical generosity in practice. One informant spoke of a duty-bound obligation as a throughline in her performance of care, so that a working relation could be preserved. She argued:

[The process] is service-oriented. Perhaps sometimes like servicing children – a form of babysitting...Not to be facetious, I sometimes feel like a “temple that answers to all and for all”. But of course, my “power” is less omnipresent or influential. After all, the process is very humble – prosaic, frivolous, petty and low. It often is invested in not raising your voice when clarifying what might seem fastidious, and actually doing the due diligence of communication. It’s mundane...

I feel like I have many “in-laws” behind me. Each of these “in-laws” care about different things. Some (perhaps a guest curator) might have a personalised perception of their own authority – what needs to run through and be signed off by them before it can proceed. Some others (e.g. in-house chief curator or colleagues at the museum procurement, accounting or legal teams) might worry about whether the overhead would be too expensive or the logistics of how items can be shipped. Some others might care whether the museum floor will be permanently damaged. Some preemptively worry about customer complaints. You name it! You need to try to consider and respond to it all. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

Underpinned by emotional labour (empathy, people pleasing or “not raising your voice”) out of a guardian-like responsibility (“babysitting”), the administrative duty of care is obligation-driven, servient and stakeholder-minded. It on the one hand, was done with an intent to nurture and aid relationship development with a stakeholder on an engagement journey, and on the other hand, resembled a familial dynamic of having different “in-laws”, inferring a level of respect out of duty to preserve a (at times involuntary and entangled) working relationship.

From the above statement, the function of administrative hospitality shares the characteristics of a wish-fulfilling Santa Claus, or perhaps a fixer in a relative power position, to other stakeholders. Under this stewardship model, arts administrators as host are overstretched and heavy-laden by diverging demands. The process of care is “humble – prosaic, frivolous, petty and low”. Duty-bound to respond and attend to stakeholder expectations, administrators invest emotional labour as a means to build trust and develop rapport with those under his or her care.

To summarise, what the interview data revealed is a responsibility-governed, emotionally-taxing administrative reality which is different from the radical generosity and boundary-dissolving hospitality of which Derridean curatorial notion speaks.

### ***Reciprocity: Perceived Openness for Trust-Based Relationship***

Navigating this mercurial yet quotidian process on the stewardship journey of stakeholder engagement, honest communications over the house’s concern (and its associated principles) with responsiveness towards stakeholder expectations seem to be an effective and desirable approach, in maintaining a positive relationship with the stakeholders under care. In an interview for the 2018 Taipei Biennial, when asked about the challenges encountered during show preparation, co-curator Mali Wu pointed to how the method the Biennial was administered, bounded by the house logics and its associated considerations had prevented a nimbler execution of the curatorial ambition, stating “the museum is situated within a system...[with a prescribed] way of working” (Yan, 2018).

In response to Wu’s comment and the reporter’s question on production challenges, co-curator Francesco Manacorda expressed a more sympathetic

view to the Biennial organiser's affinity to the house logics, stating:

...the most difficult thing to collaborate with an organisation of this scale is the cumbersome procedure and unwieldy administrative institutions. That said, I must confess: the organiser from museum director to staff members have been upfront and frank in explaining the type of scenarios which could be too much for the museum system to bear. For example, if we want to insert living creatures such as insects in the exhibition, this might place the museum under risk, since this could endanger the architectural structure, the works on view or the collection holdings. Therefore, it is not without reasons in terms of the many things the museum cannot work with. (Ibid)<sup>161</sup>

Manacorda's sympathetic response to the stewardship of the administrative team was largely due to a rapport cultivated through "upfront and frank...explaining". With mutuality stemming from a perceived openness and a trust-based relation, such stewardship rooted in an accountability to the house logics and its associated principles were met with reciprocal understanding from the guest curator.

This sympathy (or comradeship) from Biennial stakeholders did not come easy. In the 2010 edition of the Biennial, with much smaller budget and constrained staff capacity during a tumultuous museum restructuring period, a lack of direction from the museum leadership and opaqueness around administrative decision-making were complained in the curatorial essay by co-curator Tirdad Zolghadr (2010). In the catalogue, Zolghadr stated:

It bears mentioning that the museum was undergoing drastic restructuring during the planning stages of the Biennial and beyond, lacking even a

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<sup>161</sup> The article was written in Chinese. The response by co-curator Francesco Manacorda belongs to the author's translation.

director with clear-cut capacities, and both the technical team and administration were drastically understaffed. Hovering above this friction factory was a mysteriously sluggish bureaucracy which made every step feel like wading up the Dangshui river in the midst of a tropical rainfall. (p.202)

The same essay pointed to the frustration of one of the participating artists in their wrangling with “in-house conditions of production” (Ibid), who ended up swearing and shouting in vexation at the show’s grand opening day.

Close to a farcical mud-slinging contest<sup>162</sup>, the museum director and the then head of the now disbanded biennial and international project office offered their rebuttal by explaining the house logics in the Preface of the catalogue. This rebuttal put the organiser’s loyalty to the house and its associated principles front and centre, stating:

[I]t was asserted that the Biennial’s identity lies foremost in the fact that it was initiated by Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan (to endow the local character through the museum’s autonomous voice from Taiwan,) and that it has become Taiwan’s best-known international contemporary art biennial. The texts [of the founding manifesto] noted the Biennial’s ambitions for stimulating art production, imagination, and discussion to enliven local art development. Although the Taipei Biennial has not generally attracted extensive international critical notice over the years, this “human scale” biennial has certainly garnered attention and discussion in the international

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<sup>162</sup> In the Preface (Chang & Wu, 2010), the organiser in their rebuttal accused a certain international artist of having heads in the cloud and lack in organisational aptitude as participating collaborator, when it comes to navigating the time and process to successfully mobilise a bureaucratic production system of scale, stating: “after months of discussion, changes, discussion, changes, discussion, and more changes – finally came up with a brilliant proposal, only to run out of time to work out technical issues during installation, so that the work ended up beset by constant shutdowns over the course of the exhibition” (p.8).



art community, enjoying a degree of recognition today. (Chang & Wu, 2010, p.7)

In addition to asserting the centrality of the house logics (through claims of organisational autonomy), the Preface continued to identify, Taipei Biennial 2010, which employed Institutional Critique as a method, as one of the most conceptual (and conceptually challenging) shows in the museum's 30-year history. Given that the logic of the biennial was to connect and create dialogue with local audiences, the museum insisted the responsibility of the in-house team was to help bridge knowledge gaps between the concept-heavy show and its mass audiences, by increasing content receptivity, in the face of an exhibition showcase which was presented in an obscured format and developed for a niche professional group.

Rather than getting a sympathetic response similar to that of the curator in the 2018 edition, this administrative loyalty to local audiences, rooted in the steward's accountability to the house logics, became one of the many incidents which led to a deterioration of relationship between the Biennial organiser, curators and participating artists in 2010. The relationship breakdown during the production phase of the 2010 exhibition was a result of a stewardship process being plagued by a perceived lack of openness at the time. Namely, the administrators failed to solicit a positive rapport from the creative actors, despite an attempt to honour the house logics (the Biennial's function to create dialogue) and a duty of care responding to the demands of the general audience (as non-art lay people).

This dysfunctional relationship in 2010 became a stark contrast with the sympathy shown by the guest curator in 2018. Evidently, it would be remiss of me not to point out the apparent inadequacy in juxtaposing biennials of different

editions. On one level, this is not simply because the 2018 edition took a neutral to friendly attitude to examine the role of the museum as an ecosystem from a 'new museological' standpoint, while in 2010 the exhibition took a close to adversarial position, with the approach of Institutional Critique, aiming to intervene with the house logics<sup>163</sup> and associated principles which at the time were dominated by neoliberal rationality. On another level, it is also because being four editions apart, there was a development in administrative technique which came with accumulated production experience and a change in leadership – all leading to very different administrative capacity to find resources around budget, manpower and longer preparation lead time.

However, for argument's sake, this apples to oranges comparison is still useful to the degree of understanding the stakeholder perspective. As the 2010 Taipei Biennial preparation process demonstrated, a perceived equity in the distribution of administrative attentiveness across different groups became critical in the eye of the stakeholders – eg. the creative community wanted more fair-handed treatment when compared to non-art lay people represented by the general public. It also demonstrated how decision-making opaqueness was considered detrimental to stakeholder engagement, while perceived openness as an administrative tactic seemed to yield a relatively productive result in introducing the control mechanism through the administrator's consultative capacity.

From these examples, the constant balancing of control and care, coupled with a conscientious responsiveness to diverging stakeholder needs, can thus

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<sup>163</sup> These organisational challenges in realising programmes that intervened (and aimed to shake up) the production system was acknowledged in the catalogue Preface (Chang & Wu, 2010). The situation was exacerbated due to a lack of leadership, budget limitation, crunched preparation time frame and personnel shortage in technical and administrative support.

be understood as a reality of the stewardship process. Open communication and trust-based relations, aiming to cultivate reciprocal understanding from the stakeholders, in turn, aids an alignment with the house logics.

Based on an administrative tactic to foster perceived openness, this trust-based relation would subsequently contribute to professional credibility of the administrative team, as an informant argued:

Interactions with the artists need to be appropriate and courteous, at the same time, brief and clear [to look professional]...Don't react to what you might first think as a "no, no". Take the time to consider alternatives, when there is any slightest wiggle room for manoeuvring. This will make the artists perceive you (and the museum) as willing to take the time and energy to communicate, negotiate and make a case on their behalf. This becomes the foundation for trust. Once an artist believes you are a bureaucratic-minded person who holds up red tape everywhere, this will very likely cost you the rapport and willingness for the artist to continue to communicate and work with you. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

The same informant continued to suggest how perceived trust and reciprocity through open communications would reinforce administrative legitimacy when the control mechanism is introduced, stating:

The reality is that not all guest curator has the same experience or ability in budget and project management – e.g. unable to accurately estimate how much the total exhibition budget could be translated into shipping and insurance cost, commissioning fee, production fee, etc. and how long certain process would take to realise a project...It is also dependent on how the guest curator sees their own role [in relation to in-house team].

Some see their role only in developing a concept framework for the show. Some can be proactive in project development and skilled in translating their vision into exhibition designs. Some are willing to network. The museum needs to be adaptive with these individualities and uncertainties. All of these are dependent on building a trust-based relation, enabled by good communication. Otherwise, the exhibition is bound to be screwed, if you fight all the time. This is the only way a guest curator might be willing to listen to the perspective and consideration of the museum and want to seek more mutual compromise or consult past examples. (Ibid)

Two things are clear from the statements above. Firstly, fostering trust is the primary goal of the care mechanism, so that the consultative function of the control mechanism can be introduced. Secondly, the journey of stewardship is an iterative and individualised one, where administrative approaches to trust cultivation could vary greatly, based on the difference in stakeholder personality, experience and capability.

Ultimately, the care capacity is a response to stakeholder demands. Administrative legitimacy arises from the steward's ability to develop trust-based attentiveness to stakeholder expectations. By doing so, the administrative function can be perceived as open and upfront; their steering through consultation can therefore be exercised. With this perceived openness, the stewardship process in turn could nurture an accrual of professional credibility for the Biennial team.

### ***Analysis: Balancing Control and Care in Stewardship Process***

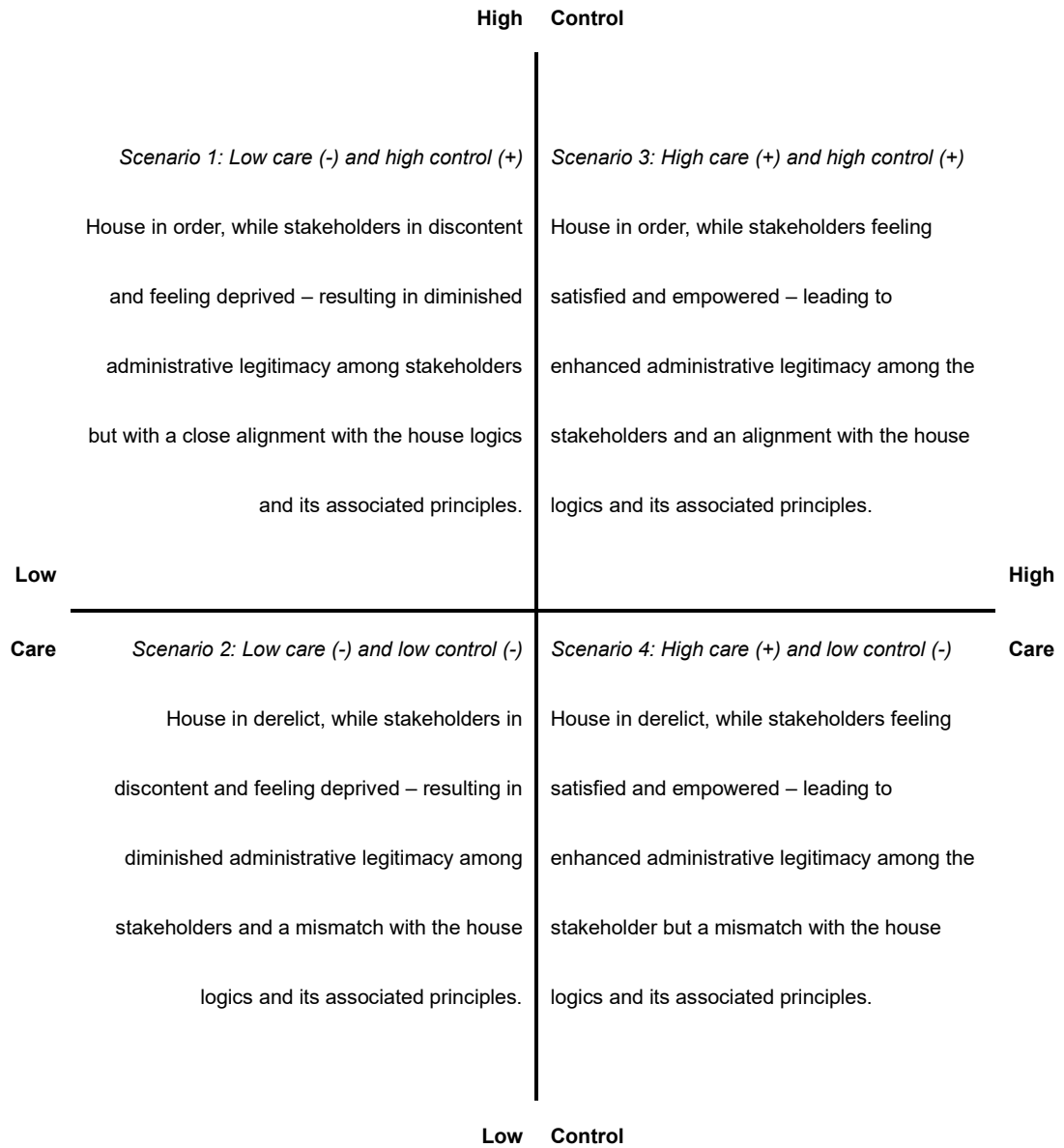
The analysis above has suggested the model of stewardship is the working reality of the Biennial team. Administrative stewardship is established as an extended metaphor of the house rooted in domesticity, which demarcates a

distinction of institutional roles and responsibilities between internal and external parties. Characteristic of this administrative methodology, stewardship speaks of an appointed capacity, through which the steward's office is entrusted with a dual concern, based on both a duty of care to the house and the stakeholders under their care.

In this Chapter so far, interviews with the Biennial administrators have given texture and detail to a symbiosis of control and care mechanisms, which underpin the stewardship model. On the one hand, administrative legitimacy stems from the delegation of authority from the house to exercise loyalty to the house logics through boundary-setting. This steering function, I have argued, is realised through a consultative capacity of the administrative team, to keep the stakeholder engagement process in alignment with the house logics and its associated principles. On the other hand, administrative credibility lies in the ability to attend to stakeholder expectations through an emotional investment, to nurture trust and perceived openness. Such a two-pronged mechanism, ultimately, formulates the foundation of the administrative stewardship process in the case of Taipei.

**Figure 3**

*Administrative Strategy Scenario Analysis – Control vs. Care*



The figure above provides a scenario analysis to how the interplay between the control and care mechanisms in administrative stewardship might lead to different outcomes. When the intensity of either control or care changes, stakeholder response also varies. In an ideal scenario, the outcome of the administrative approach would result in an enhanced administrative credibility due to satisfied and empowered stakeholders (across all three groups, including that of the art producer / knowledge maker, community of practitioner, and non-art lay interest group) and an alignment with the house logics (with that of the state, the public museum and of the biennial platform).

Based on my analysis presented in the figure above, stewardship is a dynamic process, underpinned by an ongoing materialisation of boundary-setting and care-taking. Just like the domestic tropes of food preparation, frequently employed by the interviewees to describe their role and decision-making process, administrative stewardship is a fluid journey comparable to the variables encountered in a kitchen setting, marked by the same level of mindfulness and meticulousness involved in cooking. Uncertainties and possibilities of failure resemble the excitement and nervousness in bread-making, while sharing a same level of unease toward uncontrollable externalities and variables which ultimately determine the final success of the project.

Also similar to food preparation, during the practice of stewardship, relationships with any given stakeholder are constantly on the move between different quadrants, shown in the figure above. It is an itinerant exercise to constantly seek a balance between the control and the care strategies. This stewardship process is thus undergirded by an ongoing mix of administrative boundary-setting and attentiveness, to not only navigate the states of liminality

between control and care, but also to journey through an incessant adjustment period in response to the protean outcome based on real-time stakeholder reactions.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

For this Chapter, I set out to explore the administrative methodology that the Taipei Biennial administrator relies on to traverse diverging stakeholder expectations. To capture the values for three different stakeholder groups (art producer / knowledge maker, community of practitioner, and the non-art lay interest group), a close analysis of the media coverage, official documents and museum statements was conducted to examine narratives surrounding two commissioned works by artist Cai Guo-Qiang for the first international iteration of the Biennial in 1998.

Through the case study of the controversies surrounding these two projects, I identified how professionalism was established as a public discourse to respond to contesting stakeholder voices and established the many ways professionalism were leveraged to cater to respective group values. The heterogeneous manifestations of professionalism employed by the administrative team served not only as a tactic to negotiate across conflicting demands, but also as a strategy to consolidate administrative legitimacy. As a result, this narrative of professionalism, as an overarching discourse underpinning the principle of the administrative, had provided management legitimacy for the way the Biennial was administered.

Relying on primary interview data with current and former Biennial administrators, I presented in the second half of the Chapter a model of stewardship to conceptualise administrative principles in practice and in working reality. Consisting of a symbiosis of control and care, stewardship, as the



foundational administrative framework, is rooted in the metaphor of a house and the associated roles and responsibilities entrusted by the house. Central to this stewardship role is an accountability to the house logics and a duty of care to the stakeholders placed under the steward's responsibility.

What underpins the control mechanism is a process of boundary-setting, involving an iterative approach to tone-set. As stewards of the house, administrative loyalty and accountability to the house logics become the basis of the control mechanism. This control system is exercised through a consultative capacity of the administrative function, to steer and resource-manage in accordance with the house and its associated principles.

The administrative care-taking strategy is characterised by a stewardly attentiveness and responsiveness to stakeholder demands, through intensive emotional investment. Aiming at cultivating trust and reciprocity from the stakeholders, this stewardship attentiveness is instrumental to not only carry out the administrators' duty of care entrusted to their office, but also a strategy to establish management credibility and perceived openness, so that the consultative capacity of the control function can be introduced.

Through the analysis laid out in this Chapter, I can conclude that administrative stewardship is a process in flux, aiming to balance the control and care functions at all times. The status of a relationship with any given stakeholder is malleable. It necessitates administrative decision-making based on real-time assessment of a relationship – similar to the experience of being in a cooking session – to simultaneously attend to the logics of the house (belonging to the state, the public museum and the biennial) and respond to stakeholder expectations (from that of the art producer / knowledge maker, community of practitioners, and non-art lay interest groups).

For what has evolved in the administrative turn concerning administrative methodology, I conclude: professionalism has emerged as a public discourse to articulate the Biennial's management strategy and enhance administrative legitimacy. This maturing discourse of administrative professionalism subsequently established not only as an effective resistance against outside intervention from non-art lay groups, but also as a tool to negotiate during stakeholder management and communications. Developed in parallel to this articulation of professionalism as a discourse is the framework of stewardship as a working reality of the front-line administrators. Such stewardship stemming from a dual approach of control and care, traversing stakeholder demands while maintaining alignment with the house principles, has consolidated itself as an inward methodology rooted in practice.

In sum, I established in this Chapter that the development of professionalism as a public discourse illustrates an administrative profile that is responsive and strategic in navigating an increasingly multi-stakeholder Biennial landscape. The figure of the administrator through the stewardship journey can be seen as skilled in exercising the dual mechanism of boundary-setting and care-taking. Contributing to the study of arts administrator, the control aspect of stewardship relies on an administrative consultative capacity to steer and tone-set, whereas the care mechanism of the stewardship process reflects a quality of the administrator as duty-bound and service-oriented, in the hope of nurturing trust and perceived openness through their investment of emotional labour.

The investigations in this Chapter presented a new lens to understand administrative tactics employed by the Biennial organiser and brought about new ways to articulate administrative methodology through the stewardship model. With the voices of front-line administrators, this line of inquiry added to

existing discussions in Curatorial Studies (which focus on Derridean radical hospitality), from a practice-grounded perspective to provide an alternative proposition to conceptualise the administrative as a dynamic stewardship process.

# CHAPTER 3 THE ADMINISTRATOR

## Chapter Overview: What Is the Role of the Arts Administrator at TB?

In the previous Chapter, I examined administrative principles in discourse (the public narrative of professionalism) and in practice (the stewardship model) as the Biennial's responses to the expectations and needs of a multi-stakeholder landscape, composed of art producer / knowledge maker, the community of practitioners, and non-art lay interest groups.

For the third chapter of my PhD thesis, I will focus on the following questions to better pinpoint the role, function and potentialities of the arts administrator, in the case of Taipei Biennial:

- What is the function of administrators at the Taipei Biennial?
- How has the administrative capacity changed, in response to shifts in artistic and curatorial practices in contemporary art?
- How does my interrogation and re-conceptualisation of the administration, the administrative, and the administrator at the Taipei Biennial change existing understanding of the value of arts administrators as a vital figure in contemporary art?

Based on the above, I will first establish two central functions of the administrator, which reside in 1) to actualise and 2) to land a creative project, before moving on to describe the ways in which the primary administrative role of bridging is enacted through connectivity, partnership development and code-switching. After laying out the administrative function, I will then take a closer look at how management capacity has increasingly adopted a pedagogical and co-producing role in response to changes in artistic and curatorial practices over the course of the past twenty years.

The Chapter will conclude with an analysis on how the above discussions

on shifts in administrative capacity informs a changing profile of the arts administrators in contemporary art. This proposed plan aims to open up new ways to articulate the much under-studied value of the support network and develop new frames of reference to identify how their sphere of practice contribute to the creative production process, holding the key for change as a critical infrastructure.

### **Conceptualising the Function of Arts Administrator at TB**

My research identifies two primary functions of the administrative team at work for the Taipei Biennial – firstly, actualisation and secondly, project landing. Drawing from the interview data, the following section will analyse what each of these functions constitute, by describing and documenting the tasks and administrator qualities involved to deliver these two capacities.

#### ***Actualisation: Mobilising Resource Networks***

The first function of the administrator is to actualise exhibition productions and contemporary art-making. It involves planning and coordination to produce, realise and deliver high-quality art works, creative projects and programmes, in a hope of honouring creative integrity to a high standard. From the data collected, administrative role fulfilling this function might be project-specific but with a universal feature which has an end goal to satisfy production needs and requirements.

What undergirds the function of project actualisation are the activities which seek to fill in the space between what is envisioned by the creative actors, and the end result in terms of final presentation from what has been conceptualised. This journey of actualisation, manifesting in a developmental process, can be best captured, as what one former exhibition coordinator called: “fleshing out” (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021). This metaphor of “fleshing

out” is central to make the often behind-the-scenes work of the support network more visible. It conveys a sense of time, involved in project development and articulates the huge space in between and the substantial amount of work that is involved, in order to go from project ideation to completion. This figure of speech also pinpoints the nature of exhibitionary production as a developmental process, where administrators play a pivotal part in stewarding the journey to ensure projects can go from zero to a hundred. Throughout this developmental journey to “flesh out” production details, administrators, filling the capacity of a solution provider, engage with activities that range from service sourcing, troubleshooting, to alternative improvisation, to best facilitate the conversion of concepts into outputs.

The ability to mobilise resources in and across exhibitionary networks is vital to successfully pulling off this administrative function of “fleshing out”. To perform such an actualising function, administrators are required to have a command over the knowledge and management of internal and external resource networks. Informants identified administrator’s shrewdness to draw up a resource plan and feasible timeline at the project’s infancy, when details are up in the air as critical to effectively mobilise the exhibitionary resource machine. In other words, it is necessary for the administrators, to be equipped with a fluency in administrative procedure and an ability to devise plans that would comply with government regulations and bylaws,<sup>164</sup> while allowing

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<sup>164</sup> My findings echo what scholars (Huang, 1991; Lai, 2008) remarked in the past that administrative success within a public administration system, such as the Taipei Biennial, was highly dependent on the ability of the administrators to put organisational goals and complex socio-cultural needs into consideration. Specifically, as a part of the civil service bureaucracy, fluency in legal procedures, government budgetary regulations, compliance to the law and shrewdness in external relations became a necessity.

sufficient flexibility and creative agency.

Such resilience and adaptability were articulated by an informant as the underpinning quality of the actualisation function:

The administrative capacity lies in the know-what to trigger and deliver the project in full compliance with government ethics and procedural accountability, while being cognizant of the fact that a project under development is always subject to change. It means having this know-what and the ability to design an interface and push the administrative machinery to maximise the speed to mobilise institutional resources, which would enable most flexibility and accommodate the most contingencies for change. The interface you enabled needs to be resilient and well-prepared for anything out of left field, so that you don't end up in a scenario where you need to confront the artists [or guest curator] for non-delivery or in breach of contract. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

Based on this keen familiarity with the “administrative machinery”, administrators are able to devise a resource plan that would be most appropriate for the project at hand. This would take into consideration unexpected volatilities to allow maximum margin for deviation throughout project development.

The role of arts administrators is, thus, enacted through this iterative journey throughout project development, in their devise and mobilisation of organisational resources in fulfillment of actualising a creative vision. This administrative role could become particularly palpable when a misalignment between the creative vision and the final output occurs during the production, as one informant testified:

The ability to visualise and spatialise an artistic proposal is essential, especially when it comes to converting a concept into a format that is concrete, presentable and experienceable. Perhaps an example of this would be: during one biennial edition, a co-curator proposed to have a series of engagement portals throughout the museum space to serve as a cluster of dispersed mini-labs that would increase interactivity [with the audience] and home in on a central ethos of that particular biennial edition as bottom-up, practice-driven and multi-sensorial. However, in the end, what supposedly should be interactive, bottom-up “mini-labs” turned out to look like quasi-exhibition spatial designs which the co-curator seemed to believe should be further improved [to come closer to the original creative vision] if production timeframe allows. This indicates the significant gap between what was first proposed and conceptualised, and what was later realised in the end as the outcome. When we are aiming to realise A, we have to be able to achieve A, and not so much because we have only produced B before, so the outcome ended up looking like B. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021).

This mismatch between what was conceptualised and what was produced not only speaks of the administrative function to actualise, but also testifies to how this actualisation capacity is dependent on administrator’s accuracy in capturing, delivering and staying true to abstract creative visions. This example of misalignment further points to how production experience of an administrator – namely, the know-what and know-how<sup>165</sup> of the support network – could often

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<sup>165</sup> Emily Pringle (2019), former Head of Learning Practice and Research, Tate Learning,



become a determinant for organisation-wide innovation, which influence whether the administrative capacity is (un)able to actualise an often experimental creative vision.

The way to mitigate this potential misalignment between a concept and its realisation relies on administrator's personal experience and knowledge of the organisation (or namely, the house), as suggested by an informant:

Responsiveness and adaptability to change is crucial in the administrative capacity. What the artist requests in the first place for whatever unexpected reasons might always change during the production process. In the face of an inquiry, you have to immediately come up with at least a few scenarios with feasibility assessment. You need to rehearse in your mind if option A gets rejected by the exhibition design team, what you can do with option B. This level of immediacy is highly dependent on your experience. This ability can only be possible if you know how to turn your networks into resources. This resource network includes both internal and external colleagues whom you might currently have a working relationship with, previously worked with, or might cross paths with in the future. You also need a lot of technical knowledge so that you can bring solutions and options to the technicians for further clarification and confirmation, and not always bringing over a problem for others to rescue you. This also depends a lot on your ability to project control. You need to know very clearly how much time production resource mobilisation would take, including the time to get sign-off, so that the institutional machine can start turning. You need to be aware and

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suggested practice-based co-research within museums relied on both the know-how (direct experience) and know-what (theoretical base), which differentiates their role from academics in terms of research.

clearly communicate this to your artists and project partners, so that the collaboration process can remain pleasant. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021).

The example above demonstrates that the essential ability to accurately actualise a project relies on the resource, knowledge and production network administrators cultivated and maintained, so that the “institutional machine” can be mobilised and project resilience best supported.

Examples above have evidenced how the totality of the amalgamated institutional memory, experience and resource networks represented by the support system, is activated by the administrative capacity as project linchpin. The examples have also illustrated an actualisation function, performed by the administrators, ultimately determines whether or not – or more critically, the way in which – a project is carried out.

### ***Landing and Reverberation***

The second function of administrative team rests in enabling and preparing a context (an ambience or social atmosphere) for a project to take root. This concerns a landing function of the administrative capacity to situate a project within its socio-economic specificity.

Based on descriptions by the informants, to land is to enable a platform between the audience and the exhibitionary project through the Biennial resource networks, so that a project can connect in a meaningful way with its socio-cultural context. The significance of landing was articulated by former TFAM director Ping Lin in an interview. When asked about her priority and role as the Biennial organiser, she stated: “The art museum is the ‘land’. The museum is a part of the ecosystem. We should be asking: has the museum landed?” (Tseng, 2021, p.10).

This landing function involves rolling out the thesis of a creative project across museum operations and throughout its integrated support network, as one informant summarised:

To deliver a biennial equates to a comprehensive operation of storytelling. This starts from artworks selection, exhibition presentation and delivery, public programme design, to media communications. How the concept is handled and delivered through the museum platform becomes the key to understand the effectiveness and potential of a biennial. This involves an ability to not only comprehend the curatorial thesis, but also find practical ways throughout every aspect of project rollout to unfold the thesis across the museum resource platforms. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

This omni-channel approach is a testament to a landing function of the administrative capacity when rolling out a creative project. The response of this informant points to how landing involves creating platforms for linkage and exchange, so that a project can take root within its socio-cultural environment. Therefore, designing ways to allow knowledge, practice and social network to be exchanged becomes the primary manifestation of the administrative landing capacity. Taking possible forms of residency, research trip or workshop, these landing activities are frequently accompanied by a mix of formal events alongside informal meet-and-greets, in partnership with peer contemporary art institutions, independent alternative cultural spaces or higher education partners. Casual and informal meet-ups for artists and curators become critical as a backdrop to foster relationships with knowledge brokers and ecosystem conveners within the local art scene, so that exchange and project cross-pollination, as a form of organic knowledge reciprocity, can happen beyond the

mediation of the Biennial art administrators.

Commenting on this aspect of linkage creation and administrating platforms for knowledge exchange to realise the organiser's landing function, former TFAM director Ping Lin emphasised the role of the museum administration to create mutuality, as a "responsibility...to mobilise and create synergy" (Tseng, 2021, p.10). As an essential pillar to deliver public value through knowledge reciprocity, Biennial administrators on the one hand endeavor to catalyse mutuality within the Taiwanese art community, to further embed a project within its social-cultural specificity. They on the other hand leverage the landing process to ensure programme design would accumulate the museum's knowledge-making footprint and enhance its knowledge autonomy in the long run.

The centrality of landing as a paramount administrative function is most apparent when the linkage enabled by the administrative team becomes inadequate, as observed by one informant:

A [disconnect] is particularly noticeable when it comes to the resource and network a production can be equipped with. For instance, one of the major figures in contemporary dance and choreography, who pioneered the movement of performing art in museum spaces was invited to the Biennial to stage one of his classical pieces at TFAM. There was to me a "distance" between our people and his people. The museum at the time was less equipped with providing a full arsenal of production and network support. I would say there seemed to be a lack of exchange with the local stakeholders beyond visual arts. I wanted to see more systematic networking and knowledge reciprocity, so I reached out to my network of performing arts contacts in experimental theatre and in the dance scene to

have a dinner exchange and invite them to see the showcase. This later leads to other collaborations and crossovers after the showcase, a bit down the line. This dilemma [of disconnect] would sometimes be very real. The support network [for landing] would need to make a judgement call on who to connect, how to create resonance, and sometimes when an idea is extremely new, you need to be thoughtful for identifying relevant stakeholders to make a project meaningful and effective, so that it can become a multilateral exchange opportunity. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

Testifying to the significance of the administrative capacity to perform a landing function, this process-dependent developmental role of the administrator highlights how the outcome of landing is dependent upon the reach (and limitation) of administrative knowledge and the museum's organisational network universe. The metaphorical "distance" existed between what was being offered versus the potential and legacy of what might have come out of a happening, is thus evident to the (mal)function of landing which needs to be in place to facilitate knowledge exchange.

This enablement of knowledge reciprocity not only requires a vertical view to create inter-organisational synergy by incorporating the repertoire of museum programmes to respond to the Biennial thesis, but also demands a horizontal approach to act as an agenda-setting convener for the local art ecosystem. Such an industry-shaping and agenda-setting thought-leadership, in turn, affirms the administrative capacity's ability to land an issue. Namely, the traction of a biennial happening would often testify to the tactfulness of the administrative team in their exercising of the landing function. This might be done through effectively retaining local and international media limelight or

industry resources, showered on the Biennial event, and considerably redistributing these attentions to topical socio-cultural affairs and industry debates within Taiwan.

Adding to the administrative role in creating knowledge mutuality as an overriding component of landing, an informant argued:

Creating resonance is critical to the success of the Taipei Biennial. This can be seen from theme setting, exhibition and programme presentation, to audience participation mechanism design. From a museum perspective, this not only involves an art historical importance from a legacy standpoint, but also the feedback and level of reverberation before, during and after the Biennial showcase. These high-level reverberations demonstrate a consideration towards intergenerational, transnational and recently interspecies and inter-system focus. (TFAM senior department administrator, written interview response, Taipei, May 2021)

The example above also suggests the design and enablement of long-term knowledge exchange interfaces is the foremost characteristic of the administrative landing function. The museum team aims to conceive programmes and devise platforms which would consolidate the Biennial's knowledge legacy, by catalysing sustained dialogues for long-term socio-cultural impact – in the hope that the chosen administrative approach could enable a lasting influence on multiple levels (including art-historical, museological, and often social-political). The example also points to how the maximisation of resource sharing to enable knowledge reciprocity through a ripple effect, is perceived as appropriate stewardship to honour public investment, so that knowledge legacy of the biennial production can radiate across and be retained within the Taiwanese art ecosystem.

This administrative function to seek inter-programme, omni-channel knowledge mutuality throughout the full cycle of project production, is perceived as a way to deliver the public value of the Biennial, as an informant testified:

Ensuring every bit of opportunity is leveraged is essential to the success of biennial organisation. A diverse portfolio of in-house parallel programmes often take place simultaneously alongside the Taipei Biennial showcase throughout its development stage and exhibition run. As a flagship TFAM project of national and regional importance, Taipei Biennial becomes an anchor where a plethora of events by external organisers happen around its milestones. Our role resides in finding ways to engage in inter-programme dialogue and meaningful activation across internal and external resource networks to create bilateral resonance... Social relevance and multilateral exchange are what makes a real difference. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021)

What is clear about the description is an increasingly reflexive role of the administrator, when performing the landing function. The statement also informs how large-scale museum-wide coordination and peer-to-peer collaboration becomes central to activate inter-generational, inter-sector and inter-institutional social impact. For instance, as part of the landing efforts in 2020, TFAM education team, based on the exhibition, launched a climate-awareness curriculum<sup>166</sup> for school trips, alongside a tailored teacher's tool kit, fit for wide scale classroom adoption. In order to maximise access, the team developed a

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<sup>166</sup> Details on the in-house produced programmes, running in parallel to the 2020 Taipei Biennial showcase, can be found in the interview (Tseng, Mar. 2021) with former TFAM director Ping Lin.

partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE), to acquire site visits support, including promotion and classroom rollout across MoE network during the run of the show.

### **Conceptualising the Administrative Role: Bridging Function**

In this Chapter so far, I have established actualisation and landing as two pillars of the administrative function for the Biennial team. Extrapolated from these two functionalities, arts administrators fulfill a bridging role, which aims at delivering interoperability among actors within, without, and in-between the exhibitionary system. Selected examples from the rich interview responses which referred to the bridging role of the administrative capacity include the following:

**Table 5**

*Selected Examples of the Bridge Metaphor*

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<b>No.</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
1	“Through better communication and coordination, I aim to become a bridge between the artists and the public sector.” (TFAM senior department administrator, written interview response, Taipei, May 2021)
2	“My role is a medium that connects the artist, curator, artwork and the audience. It might be similar to a translator and a bridge. At times, an artist has a brilliant idea but might not be able to deliver to their intended audience or group in an accurate manner. As a bridge, I try to assist to make the artist and the audience come closer to one another through the museum platform.” (Former TFAM educator and project administrator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021)

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3 “My role as a manager was to communicate on behalf of my team with colleagues across different department functions. I needed to be au fait with new projects they were developing, the status of each, purpose and goal, and the creative vision for each. I then ensured my team can provide timely support and can present these messages in a way our stakeholders and primary audience could understand...I saw us as a bridge between the inside and outside worlds.” (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

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Exemplified by the data above, administrators perform a function of “a bridge between the inside and outside worlds”. Under this bridge metaphor, the primary administrative purpose is to facilitate interoperability as a basis for co-working between subgroups members of the creative community. Efforts to bridge aims at facilitating collaboration between intra-organisational, extra-organisational and in-between subgroup members. Administrators work towards interoperability by enabling understanding among stakeholders with different professional culture and value system through the museum’s resource network.

In order to deliver this bridging role, administrators rely on their ability to gap-fill. This gap-filling capacity involves administrator’s nimbleness to smoothen obstacles throughout the production process and iron out barriers for the creative community, while juggling with demands and expectations of other external stakeholder groups, as explained by an informant:

Administrators would need to improvise and gap-fill a lot. For instance, if the procedure requires or for whatever reason the timeline is changed or compressed, but one party simply cannot deliver at the time in accordance

with the project plan, I will need to step in. I might either adapt or beef up the limited amount of information at hand or whatever material that is available to me and organise them into something that looks decent enough and can be procedurally compliant to satisfy the paperwork. It also requires helping all sides to understand each other in terms of progress, procedure and next steps. This means thinking ahead by asking preemptive information, thinking on your feet when it comes to follow ups, and helping the team and stakeholders prepare for (un)foreseeable tasks that might arise later down the line. (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

This example indicates that bridging requires not only an ability to gap-fill and reality-proof a project, but also the administrator's readiness to prepare actors entering the exhibitionary system with contextual foreknowledge, so that these external actors can be equally ready to engage with the system in which they are invited to operate. It also involves bridging the knowledge and resource gap between different actors, which might involve sharing institutional know-how (e.g. estimated approval process timeframe and workflow), or insights gained from personal experience such as stakeholder expectations.

This bridging capacity is similar to the role of a knowledge broker<sup>167</sup> and boundary spanner<sup>168</sup> in organisational theory and knowledge management

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<sup>167</sup> Organisational theory literature (Carnabuci, 2018) dedicated their focus on the concept of knowledge brokering in creating organisation innovation. With proper knowledge brokerage, ideas precipitate from one field to another and ultimately becoming the source for innovation. By facilitating the flow and exchange of knowledge, knowledge brokers are critical to the co-development of the innovative capacity.

<sup>168</sup> Literature in knowledge management (Nerkar & Miceli, 2016) identified innovation as rested in the process of boundary spanning, through an expansion of knowledge domain beyond its

literature. In this role, administrators are crucial to catalyse knowledge exchange and connect resources across organisational boundaries. Occupying this knowledge-brokering and boundary-spanning capacity, the administrative team becomes a co-developer to the museum's innovative capacity, by facilitating flows of knowledge and resources to expand the Biennial's reserve of ideas and networks.

In this capacity, administrators at the Taipei Biennial are found to employ three approaches to perform and deliver their bridging function. To be discussed in the following section, these include:

- 1) facilitating a smooth flow of information;
- 2) partnership development and relationship maintenance; and
- 3) performing and aiding code-switching across cultural values.

As to how the administrators induct and prepare external actors, this aspect of the bridging capacity will be analysed in more detail later in this Chapter, when examining their increasingly pronounced pedagogical function as co-developing partners.

### ***Knowledge and Resource Connectivity: Synchronicity as Equaliser***

As one of the three approaches to performing the bridging function, achieving connectiveness is underscored as a priority by Biennial administrators when preparing actors before they enter the exhibitionary system and during their engagement throughout. What can be extrapolated from the interview data is how the bridge trope is employed to describe an expectation for the administrative capacity to connect. This management function to achieve

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institutional boundaries and immediate organisational knowledge limit. Consequential to breaking out of organisational silos, individuals as boundary spanners hold the key to connects information and values within an institutional boundary with those that resides outside of the organisation, thus leading to knowledge exchange and innovation.

connectivity is often delivered by facilitating smooth communication channels as a basis for dialogue or devising information sync-up mechanisms to develop consensus for collaboration.

Imageries surrounding telecommunications in terms of “frequency” and “wavelength” were evoked repeatedly by the informants to illustrate the significance of connectivity and synchronicity, as a primary function of their office to facilitate interoperability between actors with different professional cultures and demands. For example, one informant explained:

Information synchronicity and clarity is key. I would often step up and weigh in on information coordination and help with clarifying project status so that all parties can feel at ease and can take heart in the project development...The utmost important function is to deliver a smooth channel for communication to ensure different rationale, value system, teams and stakeholders can work together, and to traverse differences and make sure all parties can be on the same frequency. I try to connect them through common ground so that the project can move forward. The administrative function lies in helping various actors with different logics to be able to communicate. (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

The imageries of connectivity (“same frequency”) is a reference to diverging stakeholder expectations, where assisting information synchronicity is viewed as a primary administrative function to strengthen inter-group collaboration. Smoothness in communication is perceived as central to building consensus. Lack of synchronicity is therefore considered damaging to a multi-stakeholder production process.

These examples indicate that the metaphor of bridging and associated

imageries of connectivity (e.g. sync-up, frequency and wavelength) imply a potential threat when there is a symbolic gap caused by information or resource delays between the parties that work together. The role of the administrator in bridging this gap is thus to identify where deficiency lies and deploy a plan to mitigate such a difference. This gap often concerns a difference in knowledge, information, experience, resource or social status. The potential lack of synchronicity creates an imbalanced power dynamic between co-working parties and requires administrator's facilitation to achieve equilibrium (in knowledge, information, experience, resource or social status). Advancing synchronicity in an administrative bridging process, thus becomes instrumental as an equaliser to provide a grounded connectedness for all actors involved, to develop co-working rapport and trust.

In this context, administrator's priority rest in delivering mechanisms (or interface) which can ensure an equitable and timely flow of knowledge (professional and procedural) and symbolic capital (resource, status or experience) from project ideation to completion. Management tactics implemented to enhance resource and knowledge synchronicity ranges from conducting formal updates (such as copying a colleague into a sign-off bundle to provide comments), designing inter-departmental catch-up, or convening project group discussion and museum-wide milestone meetings. Other approaches could take the form of more vicarious updates – for instance, through the release of curatorial or press statements which aims at providing a resource for both internal and external colleagues to be aware of an official line and the way in which a project should be referenced.

Expanding on the significance of assisting synchronicity, an informant suggested that clearing out hurdles underpins the administrative function to

prepare actors before they enter the exhibitionary system, stating:

I try to establish a mutual channel of collaboration with external partners.

This bridge is not only built for the media or special VIPs, but for all service providers and partners that come in contact with the museum system. I see myself as someone that helps them to overcome the “boss” (as if in a video game). I try my best to relate and get to the bottom of their needs so that I can clear all the internal hurdles and build necessary passages so that it can be a smooth sailing. (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

In this capacity of bridge-building, administrator’s dexterity in achieving connectivity, and ultimately interoperability across the exhibitionary system is dependent on their prowess to clear out a passage internally to ensure the stars are aligned, and resources and goodwill are in place to be mobilised. To achieve this goal, administrative tasks might include advanced notice or informal discussion as a courtesy to give colleagues a heads-up before major milestones, or more formal briefing (pre-briefing and debriefing works) to ensure parties involved – including the leadership team – are on board and fully satisfied with the project direction.

From the examples above, the bridging function of the administrator is enacted through realising connectivity to equalise knowledge and resource gaps, by means of devising mechanisms which would aid interoperability based on consensus. This process critically involves the judgement of an administrator deciding who to inform and involve, at what stage should these actors be involved, and in what format they should be involved. Therefore, the administrative role is performed through the ways in which relevant stakeholders are engaged and the interfaces administrators have enabled to

deliver such involvement.

### ***Partnership Development and Relationship Maintenance***

In addition to achieving connectivity to mitigate an imbalance of symbolic resources, the interview data indicates that the bridging function is also fulfilled through a process of partnership development. What underpins this stewardship journey is an administrator's ability to matchmake<sup>169</sup>. This involves identifying and pairing production needs with corresponding solutions within timescale and budget range – from technical, procedural, to departmental programme and personnel support. In order to matchmake to the right resource network, administrators first need to accurately understand, communicate and dovetail project vision with appropriate solution providers. Simultaneously, they need to identify and source the most suitable resources, expertise and talent from within and outside the exhibitionary system.

Such partnership cultivation process heavily relies on an administrator's organisational awareness, including his or her knowledge of where museum resource sits and the limit of this internal capacity. Interviewees revealed different strategies in use to perform their bridging capacity: they assess organisational bandwidth, scope demands and develop resource networks, before they can matchmake needs with solutions. As one informant testified:

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<sup>169</sup>Former director Mun-Lee Lin, who helmed the first international edition of the Taipei Biennial in 1998, described the process of curator selection as "matchmaking" in her interview with *Taipei Times* (Kendzulak, 2004). Despite the focus of public debate during the time were largely limited to the critique of the curator selection mechanism, the concept of matchmaking can be interpreted as an emerging awareness around the importance of relationship cultivation, which belongs to the partnership building function of the administrative capacity. Following this gradual focus on the role of the administrator in partnership facilitation, the metaphor of matchmaking (and its associated imagery of marriage) later became a recurring theme (Chang & Wu, 2010; Wang, 2017), when discussing compatibility and the amount of work that goes into making a partnership happen between the organiser, curators and artists.

I believe it would be necessary to have a holistic understanding of the museum's resources and capacity. This is particularly important in understanding the significance of a project in relation to the overall exhibition. For example, when a project is understood as a cornerstone to articulate the ethos of the exhibition, meaning without it, the exhibition would fall apart, the administrator would then need to find ways to shift resources around to release capacity and stretch institutional limit, or alternatively, to create new bandwidth through collaboration with external partners to enlarge capacity. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021)

The know-how to release and stretch museum bandwidth to support project development is among the top qualities of an administrator, in addition to an ability to identify external partners to expand organisational capacity. An acuteness in need scoping and skill gap identification is a must, so that tailored support can be mobilised to satisfy the creative vision. An ability to optimise and re-purpose internal resources is highlighted in the statement above as pivotal to partnership development. This re-tooling work makes internal partners and museum-affiliated service providers a primary target of engagement throughout the ongoing partnership building process.

Maintaining a positive working relation with this service providing network become particularly consequential, when it comes to a museum's technical capability to provide pre-production advice before a work is formally commissioned or budgeted. Administrator's shrewdness to secure pre-contract / pre-signed-off professional advice from internal team, technicians and museum-affiliated service providers therefore can often single handedly determine the feasibility, process and outcome of a project. Several interviewees underscored



the heft of these partner resources when performing their bridging function. As one informant suggested:

I cannot overstate how significant a good partnership with the technical team is to the success of art production. Equipment requested by an artist might be out of the budget, out of stock, or perhaps need further conversion and testing to achieve intended result. Or when artists are not tech experts or trying out new things, they will rely on the input of technical colleagues and partners to feedback and troubleshoot with them together. An experienced technical team as collaborator and co-production partner could feedback promptly once seeing the tech requirement from an artist and draft up options for selection – the ability to say: this equipment the museum does not have as a standalone thing but if combined this with that, it will create the same effect. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

Corroborating on the significance of partner resource network as a primary determinant of the museum's bandwidth for innovation, one informant argued:

Maintaining a positive relationship with museum-affiliated technical providers and collaboration partners is extremely helpful to project implementation. Going above and beyond for the upkeep of an amicable relation with these service providers is of comparable importance with the relationship maintenance with internal technical and production colleagues. Water cooler discussion could provide essential information, technical reminder or tip on know-what before formal contractual relation is entered for specific projects. However, this amity needs to be balanced within what is legally allowed and compliant to government ethics. This reciprocity can easily become the “make or break factor” which will dictate the smoothness

of a project into its ensuing production. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

The capability to “make or break” makes internal counterparts and museum-affiliated service collaborators an indispensable administrative resource and primary target of partnership cultivation.

Personal efforts devoted to developing collegial rapport, to gain buy-in from operational side of the internal team (including general affairs, procurement, legal and accounting staff members) can bring about goodwill to expedite paperwork and support for innovation. This routinely maintained personal rapport could translate into willingness to explore options within the grey areas of feasibility, especially when it comes to innovative projects without many precedents. This is particularly decisive, for instance, in cases such as a strict or broad interpretation of procurement law, tolerant or inflexible reading of the limitation in space use, or perhaps the boundary between inter-departmental work division.

This goodwill capacity of the operational team has grown in influence in the face of an increasingly uncertain and ambitious production scale, seen in commissioned or transdisciplinary projects that work with external partners and expertise, who now more often than not come from a background outside of the arts. Willingness of the administrative support structure to go the extra mile, therefore, becomes critical not only to project realisation, but also to organisational capacity for innovation. In other words, relationships sustained through routine maintenance with operational resource network, ultimately determines whether the support system is receptive and ready to test models outside established norms. This organisation-wide capacity to experiment, in turn, testifies to the significance of the Biennial administrators in their

performance of a partnership development and relationship upkeeping role, as a crucial aspect of their bridging function.

Maintaining relationships with partner network in between projects takes up a significant portion of this work. As a delicate act, maintaining partnership in between projects is highly demanding of an administrator's ability to manage the boundary of the relationship, to ensure procurement and bylaw compliance, while continuing to advance long-term relationship cultivation, on top of growing the museum's knowledge footprint and resource universe. This in-between-project relationship building is iterative, longitudinal and often conducted in a casual setting – the water cooler talks, after work drinks, in-between meetings and quick bites, at gallery openings or post-opening celebration gatherings. Cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen (2010; 2012) identified this phenomenon as a feature of a globalised, post-Fordian art world, where networking and a construction of a casual scene (or social occasions) became a “controlling mechanism” to take stock of whether the actors involved continued to be in possession of critical knowledge, ideas and know-how for current or future projects in the pipeline.

Gielen's analysis on informality pinpointed a significant feature of the administrative capacity throughout the process of partnership maintenance. These informal yet functional engagements, serve as a backdrop for intel collection, so that administrators can check-in and stay on top of technical tips, latest industry information, most advanced know-how, or where relevant network lies, without formal contractual obligations or before a project comes into being. These occasions are also important to cultivating relationship, maintaining rapport and sustaining goodwill in-between projects. Therefore, I would propose, functional informality becomes a strategy where the

administrative capacity can be enacted through an on-going process of partnership cultivation and relationship maintenance.

The examples above have established how partnership development realises the administrative function of bridging through matchmaking, which involves need-scoping and optimisation of the museum's capacity. I also identified the ways in which internal and museum-affiliated resource network are consequential to institutional innovation, as well as how functional informality serves as a central strategy in maintaining relationship in between projects.

### ***Code-Switching for Bridge-Building***

Code-switching is the third and final component to deliver administrative bridge-building. This code-switching capacity is performed through enabling compatibility so that actors entering the exhibitionary system can interact without barriers. Primarily used in linguistics, the term *code-switching* refers to an act of altering between spoken outputs from one language to another by multilingual speakers. Beyond the term's original use, the concept is also extended to Cultural and Social Studies as a metaphor to describe the awareness of a speaker who shifts between language uses or discourses in response to a change in social context.

This code-switching function is articulated by the interviewees as a priority of their practice, to create a sense of comradery. Administrators self-described to switch between communication styles, demeanours and tailored language use (for example with the adoption or avoidance of jargon) when interacting with different professional stakeholders who come with their distinctive subgroup

norms, expectations and professional cultures<sup>170</sup>. To perform their bridge-building role, Biennial administrators not only are equipped with this code-switching capability themselves, but also serve the function of enabling the same capacity among the actors, so that co-working barriers caused by a misalignment of expectations or cultural values can be removed and interoperability between these values can be achieved within, without and in-between the exhibitionary system.

Articulating the importance of readying external partners before they enter the exhibitionary system as a manifestation of code-switching, an informant suggested:

I believe in prepping a new partner – be it an artist, a service provider or any stakeholders – before they start working with the museum. It is critical to walk them through the ins and outs in terms of stages, procedures, paperwork, etc before project kick off. I like to ready them to be mentally tuned in and be physically prepared for everything that comes with a project within a government system. (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

From the example above, code-switching is perceived as foundational to mobilising the museum's resources and reconciling priority differences. It paints

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<sup>170</sup> Historian Peter Burke (2005, p.2) defined professional culture as the worldview, value system, attitude, norm, language and behaviour of a profession. Scholars (Reed & Horn, 2017, pp.2-11) identified professional culture as a socio-historical outcome, passed on through training, education and in-group socialisation. The boundary and overlap between two professions are by nature nebulous and hard to define. The differences and similarities emerge often through misunderstanding and conflict during interprofessional collaboration and communications. In addition to the professional cultural differences, each subgroup has its specialty, including specialised knowledge and know-how, access to resource network, and a self-defined scope of practice which at times overlaps.

a landscape where Biennial administrators need to operate within a constellation of professional subgroups whose culture values differ. These subgroups not only engage with the exhibitionary system with their unique set of expectations and values, but also come with different foreknowledge and social awareness.

The necessity for code-switching as an administrative function to bridge-building points to an increasingly multi-stakeholder and multi-value working reality for the Biennial administrators. Similar to what art critic Sheng-Hung Wang (Wang et al, 2016) observed as a trend<sup>171</sup> in the Taiwanese contemporary art scene, “production models are becoming more diverse, complicated and in turn require a higher sophistication in division of labour” and the art ecosystem increasingly “bureaucratized in its labour division”. As the result of this phenomenon, Wang argued that the role of the coordinator has ascended as a parallel development, where their value increasingly resides in “coordinating across resources and liaising with various points of contacts”.

In view of this progressively complicated art production reality, I draw up a worldview map in the table below based on the data collected for my PhD

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<sup>171</sup> A group conversation (Wang et al, 2016) moderated by independent curator Manray Hsu was a response to changes in art-making seen across the twenty-year of development at the Taipei Biennial. In the panel discussion, art critic Sheng-Hung Wang observed that art-making had become much more collective-driven and hub-affiliated. He believed the artist increasingly played the role of an enabler, such as within creative projects as communication liaison, following the development of field research becoming prominent to creative process and the purview of exhibition increasingly “hyper-ambitious” and transdisciplinary. As a result, Wang noted that division of labour became finer, with increased specialisation for art production. Directing their critique at how the art world had been slow in responding to this new labour division reality, the group called for an overhaul from “artist heroism” to best reflect the changing production norm and suggested learning from the credit sharing tradition of more group-lead cultural and creative industry peers such as film or theatre.

research, to demonstrate the varying professional values belonging to three distinct subgroup members of the creative community, alongside their respective expectations. These include cultural values belonging to the thinker / creator, doer / maker, and keeper / maintainer.

**Table 6**

*Professional Culture of the Art Producer / Knowledge Maker Subgroups*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Worldview of thinker / creator</b>	<b>Worldview of doer / maker</b>	<b>Worldview keeper / maintainer</b>
<b>Goal of the art producer / knowledge maker subgroup</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate innovative discourse, artwork and programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce, realise and deliver artworks, exhibitions and programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsist and maintain smooth running of showcase and participation</li> </ul>
<b>Basis of legitimacy</b> Pursued outcome and value proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguard concept integrity</li> <li>• Seek and maintain authorship authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devise safe, realisable, practicable solutions within budget and time constraints</li> <li>• Seek recognition of the subgroup's interpretation of art through the actualisation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable and enforce maintenance guideline to safekeep the exhibitionary environment and integrity of the artwork, exhibition and programme</li> <li>• Seek non-ambiguous rule for participation and maintenance, based on subgroup's understanding of art</li> </ul>
<b>Sources of legitimacy</b> Guiding principle of the art producer / knowledge maker subgroup about perceived primary audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer recognition</li> <li>• Positive reception by the community of practitioners, especially that of the professional gatekeepers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition by thinker / creator subgroup</li> <li>• Positive reception by the community of practitioners, especially that of the professional gatekeepers</li> <li>• Peer support and recognition by superiors, colleagues and partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive audience and participant reception</li> <li>• Acknowledgement by thinker / creator and doer / maker subgroups</li> <li>• Peer recognition and support by co-workers among the keeper / maintainer subgroup</li> </ul>



The expansion of project scale and production complexity alongside an increased specialisation of the contemporary art world has led to a more sophisticated division of labour within the exhibitionary system. The table above, establishing varying professional values for individual subgroup who holds different roles in the production cycle, points to the necessity and significance of code-switching as an administrative function, so that subgroup members can engage in inter-group collaboration without barriers.

Under this changing context, code-switching prowess becomes essential for administrators to help subgroup members convert their concept into an output that can be understood by the bureaucratic machine. As one informant suggested:

I had to learn to translate what I want to achieve into a government language so that the institution can understand. This often involves me explaining to my colleagues at accounting, procurement and government ethics to make them understand the value of the project I wanted to deliver and defend the ways in which our department chose to promote a project. This translation process is time-consuming and takes up plenty of my mental and physical power. (Former publicist, interview by author, Taipei/London, 8 May 2021)

Successful code-switching is dependent on gauging the foreknowledge of an actor on particular subject matter, to strategise in accordance with corresponding outputs in terms of administrative behaviour, language and knowledge density. Code-switching strategies employed involves alternating demeanour and tailored language use to create comradeship. The ability of talking the talk, as the same informant described as “speak human when they talk human, speak ghost when they talk ghost” demonstrates the practice of

code-switching in action. The administrative role of code-switching in fulfilment of a bridging function thus can be seen through this process of comprehending and responding to the viewpoints and reasoning of heterogenous actors coming from different professional subgroups.

## **Evolving Artistic and Curatorial Practice: Implication on the Arts**

### **Administrative Capacity**

I established so far in this Chapter that administrator's function at the Taipei Biennial lies in project actualisation and project landing. I also demonstrated how these two functions are underpinned by a bridging role of the administrators. By performing connectivity, partnership development and code-switching, administrators are able to fulfil their bridge-building capacity in an increasingly specialised multi-stakeholder and multi-value art ecosystem.

After establishing the function of the administrative capacity, the following section of this Chapter will analyse how administrators' profile and their sphere of practice have altered, in response to shifts in contemporary art-making and curatorial gestures. This phenomenon can be observed in administrative skills and competencies required, and how the support system has evolved in its process and positionality in relation to art-making and curatorial projects.

Changes in art-making practices and the institutional implications on the support ecosystem is typified by Tate Modern's international conference *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum* (2022). This conference aimed to provide an overarching view on how different emerging art forms pose new considerations (and challenges) for museum's collecting and exhibitionary practices. Originally intended to focus on genres of "time-based media, performative, live and digital art", the event later expanded its focal point to investigate "works that unfold over time and exist in multiple forms; works that

challenge the boundaries between artwork, record and archive, and rely on complex networks of people, skills and technologies outside of the museum” (Ibid).

This modification in research scope by Tate Modern from genre-specific to practice-based is indicative of an epistemic shift in contemporary art-making. It points to three significant differences, including:

- 1) how art practice is increasingly non-static and self-evolving;
- 2) how the system of care and administration becomes the thesis of art practice, making challenging institutional boundary and its system of operation a central medium for art-making; and
- 3) an increased tendency for artworks to be dependent upon resource networks which lay outside of the traditional realm of the exhibitionary system.

Tate Modern’s proposition reflects a larger question of how contemporary art practices have been changing the ways in which the support ecosystem operates. An investigation on how the capacity and function of arts administrators have evolved, can shed light on this under-researched subject area. Using the case study of Taipei, I will highlight paradigm shifts in the sphere of practice that not only bear an impact on but also transform the role and function of arts administrators, by focusing on how the support network proactively responds in kind to changes in contemporary art-making.

### ***Site-Sensitive, Tech-Driven Installations: Administrator as Comforter and Co-Producer***

Among the changes in art-making, technology-heavy multimedia art has gradually dominated contemporary art creation. Researcher (Kelly, 2010) observed that the prominence of this mix-medium genre, often grouped under

the term of installation, has quickly ascended as a favoured art form by curators of the proliferating large-scale exhibition circuits since the 1980s. Often site-responsive or site-sensitive, these works are likely to be commissioned to respond to a space or its social-economic context, regularly featuring an audience participation component with a visual output of spectacular form.

These site-responsive works and projects of non-traditional medium frequently involve new and advanced technologies that sit outside of the museum's usual resource network. This makes it crucial for the administrator to be resourceful and willing to explore technical and production expertise outside the traditional exhibitionary system. As noted by an informant:

Biennial programming and projects come with its challenges and place a greater pressure onto the museum to advance institutional expertise in the most cutting-edge practices. This becomes particularly true when it comes to recent works that often transcend beyond the traditional boundaries and technologies of a singular discipline or epistemology. It requires an ability to quickly assemble an appropriate team, based on the specificity of a proposed project. Under time and budgetary pressure, it often becomes demanding for the administrators to explore new resources and fights out an urge to always go back to rely on the same, and perhaps at times, not so suitable collaborators. Production credibility lies in the administrator's resourcefulness. This ranges from being au fait with the most up-to-date knowledge and tech trends and network within the art world as well as with the intel to variegated production vendors and collaborating partners that you might not have crossed paths with in the past. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021).

This increasingly (advanced) technology-driven component of artwork asks the administrator to be equipped with not only an excellent comprehension of the project thesis, but also a capability to quickly assemble a suitable production team from resource networks outside of the museum system. Such will into being, coupled with a fastidious precision in technical specificity and administrative communication clarity, were stressed repeatedly by the interviewees as a prerequisite for site-sensitive works to set off on the right track.

In addition to demands placed on enabling technical capacity and a precision in execution, industry practitioners, such as choreographer and producer Kate Lawrence (2007), remarked that the multiplication of tech-dependent, site-specific commissioned works have been met often with bloated volatilities during production cycle. The rise of these tech-heavy works, as researchers (Gardner & Green, 2016) observed, has also made the production process more dependent on infrastructure such as electricity, internet and other computer technology. These changes in art-making have given rise to increased production pressure, where project outcome is most of the time ambiguous until their complete realisation. Namely, for these new productions oftentimes a concrete form of success cannot be guaranteed at the time of commission until the project is fully materialised after the show opens.

As site-sensitive, tech-dependent works proliferate, logistical complexity also emerges, seeing new challenges that did not exist in more studio-based and object-centric art practices. Researchers (Yaneva, 2003; Moreira, 2013) argued that such a paradigm shift in art-making has presented the moment of installation much room for modification and instant feedback, specifically in terms of fine-tuning and last-minute changes, since meaning and presentation

remains largely unstable and unfinalised throughout the process of becoming art. Curator and architect Ines Moreira (2013) summed up these often forgotten labour and cycle of modifications before show opening, stating:

The period between vernissage and ending is the most stable, and most objectual period of an exhibition. The unstable definition of scenographies, installations and technical elements, and the confusing set-up processes, tend to be erased from the show, though its documentation may parallel other platforms. (Ibid, pp.230-231)

What Moreira pointed to is an implicit co-producing role of the administrative capacity throughout the production process and especially during the critical installation phase, which is marked by nuanced and prolonged on-site adjustments period. Such an increasingly pronounced co-producing role can be seen as a result of the changing art-making landscape which now favours tech-heavy and site-responsive new commissions.

During this highly stressed process of installation (compressed frequently into an intense period of no more than two to three weeks), in addition to performing a co-producing role, the administrator functions as a comforter, who is equipped with emotional and social capital, to coordinate across resource needs and make room for extra capacity often demanding of organisational flexibility. As one informant suggested:

Taipei Biennial or other survey shows predominantly feature contemporary art works, with varying medium and a large portion of installation and digital works. This would involve pre-communication with providers from equipment to work processes. Although an aspect of whether an artwork can be smoothly executed is dependent on pre-planning, for compound artwork that involves both a digital aspect and a component of installation,

the on-site installation stage is a critical moment that is characterised by an intense co-working and joint involvement of several different teams to complete the process. For instance, this could be woodwork, lighting, sound technician and perhaps audio-visual. This makes the installation process a complicated coordination task which needs to be finely balanced. The same provider might be still finetuning this work, but the artist and curator might have already started discussing the final positioning of that work, so you will need to shift the resources around to make them available to the right party. It is down to coordination and time arrangements. There is also a lot of emotional comforting work during the installation process. During this extremely tense stage, any tiniest change or delay would make the pressure cooker explode. This could be fights or bicker between the artist and the museum team, the artist and the curator, or the curator with the museum, or among the department heads and the leadership team, or the technical providers with each other, you name it. It is often like a candle burning on both sides, where you must simultaneously worry about the specificity of the work and the show, while having to deal with pacifying all parties. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

This example suggests that administrative capacity in on-site management during fabrication, installation (and post-production maintenance) would require not only the perseverance to handle last-minute changes and push the organisational resource bandwidth to provide leeway, but also superb coordination and emotional skills which could appeal to all parties involved, to see to the final actualisation of the work and the show. Therefore, administrators are asked to be increasingly skilled in on-site logistical responses, characterised

by thinking quickly on their feet and an intense emotional labour, as a vicarious result of a change in the modes of art-making.

On top of the capricious installation process and an ascending co-producing administrative role marked by emotional labour, the production of site-sensitive works increasingly requires a higher mobilisation intensity of localised resource network and knowledge actors, so that the production can meet an expanded consideration of site which has enlarged from a previous concern over the physical locale, to the socio-cultural context of the artwork and event.<sup>172</sup> Responding to this shift in understanding of site seen across art practices, the administrative team's capacity to provide a high-level of site knowledge becomes a necessity during conceptualisation and fabrication, in order to deliver this multi-level site responsiveness – from socio-cultural, environmental to situational context specificity.

Throughout this process, the administrative team fills in most production coordination roles, covering both intra- and extra-organisational liaison and management. Such an administrative role requires a command over socio-cultural sensitivity and an ability to access resources, so that site-responsiveness and context specificity can be delivered. As one informant suggested:

[P]recision is everything for site specific works and new commissions. In these events, arts administrators often become the artist's helper on the

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<sup>172</sup> See Niamh Ann Kelly's essay (2010) for an overview on how the concept of site has evolved in the tradition of installation. Art historian Miwon Kwon (2004) offered a comprehensive review of site-specific art through the lens of public art, while Claire Bishop (2018) provided a snapshot of how the meaning of site had changed within the performance art context. Curator Kristina Lee Podesva (2007) proposed that dematerialisation of medium had opened up artistic practices in their conception of site, from physical to "sociological frame" or "institutional context" within the Institutional Critique tradition.



ground. All of the production details by local goods and service providers are coordinated through the administrative team. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

While the administrative capacity can be interpreted as a “helper”, administrator’s prowess as co-producing local informant lies in the ability to incubate trust with field subject partners on behalf of the artists / curator. During liaison with resource partners, administrator’s dexterity is evident in not only project-control, but also holding a co-gatekeeping position to facilitate concept development and achieve an effective aesthetic standard to best align outputs with a proposed creative vision. Consequently, the result (and success) of this increasingly field-based production process predicates on a command over local knowledge and requires a competent support network, acting as what researchers (Gardner & Green, 2016, pp.111-114) described as “local informant” who supplies critical intel to guide invited parties such as what researchers described as “amateur biennial director”, “freelance exhibition curator” and, I would add, international artists who are looking to create context-responsive works.

This support network powered by the arts administrators with hyper-localised socio-cultural knowledges acts as a cultural mediator and as what curator Paul O’Neill (2007) describes as “interfaces between art and larger publics – publics which are at once local and global, resident and nomadic, non-specialist and art-worldly” (p.16). Serving as co-gatekeepers, scholars (Gardner & Green, 2016) observed this hyper-localised intelligence network<sup>173</sup> is often

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<sup>173</sup> Researchers Anthony Gardner and Charles Green (2016) identified that these members of the local intelligent network were often educated abroad, specialised in contemporary art, conversant in cross-cultural cooperation and holding access to domestic and regional resources.

composed of a clique of local intellectuals – who are often international in their outlook. With arts administrators as the initiator of these intelligent networks, such a hyper-localised clique becomes increasingly indispensable in helping the invited parties to navigate through the field research process and overcoming limitations brought by immediate language, cultural or knowledge barriers.

Among the sphere of administrative practice associated with this field-based production model in art-making, an ability to future-proof and devise contingency plans, based on site knowledge and socio-cultural context awareness was identified by the interviewees as one of the most decisive to the overall success of a project. Testifying to the significance of the administrative capacity to future-proof, one informant suggested:

A project will also change shape to accommodate the specificity of the museum-goers or current state of affairs. For example, an installation was made like a revolving door – In it, there was a movie theatre... [V]ariables included the hot and humid summer in Taiwan that required different interior fit-ins to allow an air conditioning system for safety. These were situations the artists did not have to factor in when the same project was produced in much milder climates. We had to brainstorm for the best way to hide all the pipelines and cables to bring the same work to similar aesthetics that could meet the artist's vision. These are the very details when it comes to site-sensitive works that cannot be left wishy washy or wait to be confirmed until the artist's visit. This tests the level of experience and ability of an art administrator to pinpoint specificity of what the artist is looking for in terms of touch and feel, so that no last-minute huge changes would need to happen. But then, you must understand and respect the boundary and the role of an artist as an aesthetic initiator – never argue in terms of which hue

of yellow the artist should go for. That is not what the administrative capacity is for. You should know to respect fully in that regard. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

The example above indicates an ability to prepare and pair resources ahead of need is considered a foundational component of the administrative capacity in delivering site-sensitive projects. This example points to the administrative capacity as taking up a co-producing role, resembling a local informant, who co-gatekeeps on behalf of the artist to ensure aesthetic alignment, in addition to navigating institutional limits of the site. These might include limitations in terms of what the physical locale (environmental surrounding and technical competence) can provide and the socio-cultural context (receptivity of the public based on social, cultural and political sentiment / atmosphere) can bear.

In short, due to changes in art-making that favour tech-heavy, site-sensitive new commissions, the administrative capacity has increasingly exercised an influential co-production role, marked by intense on-site mobilisation, emotional labour and hyper-local knowledge / resource matchmaking.

### ***Social Turn and Interdisciplinary Projects: Arts Administrator as Co-Developer***

In addition to the proliferation of site-sensitive, tech-driven installations, a transition toward socially-engaged practices has also reshaped the scope of work for the administrative capacity. Scholars (Gardner & Green, 2016) observed that the stable-funding and reliable support network of the biennials have enabled artists to try out new projects that are financially, logistically, technically and conceptually more ambitious. Bishop (2006) argued this has made biennials a haven for social-facing, experimental works (which have a

higher collectability and commercialisation threshold), compared to their conventional, object-based counterparts. The proliferating biennial circuits have thus become a primary site of commission and production for new socially-engaged works and performances. The expense and challenges of biennial production as a result skyrocket. Scholars (Smith, 2012; Gardner & Green, 2016) suggested, consequently, work selection has become more spectacularised and gamified; programming correspondingly shifted to be more festival-like, with increasingly packed event schedules and ancillary activities throughout the run of the show.

Dubbed as a “social turn” in contemporary art, art historian Claire Bishop (2006) argued that the popularisation of socially-engaged works belong to a “recent surge of artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies” (p.178). Bishop attributed the surge of these new types of social-facing works to the unprecedented expansion of biennials among “countries until recently considered peripheral to the international art world” and was a direct consequence of a growing inclination among these biennials to adopt a “new model of the commissioning agency dedicated to the production of experimental engaged art in the public realm” (Ibid).

Art historian Miwon Kwon (2002, p.51) described this phenomenon as a shift from “the aesthetics of administration” to “the administration of aesthetics” where institutional framework and the administrative apparatus have turned from a target of criticism, to being subsumed into an integral aspect of the artworks. As a result of this turn in art-making, Kwon argued that arts administrators started to play a bolstered part during production as they have

increasingly shared an authorial responsibility and agency, which has been intentionally dissipated from the artist. She explained:

Generally speaking, the artist used to be a maker of aesthetic objects; now he / she is a facilitator, educator, coordinator, and bureaucrat. Additionally, as artists have adopted managerial functions of art institutions (curatorial, educational, archival) as an integral part of their creative process, managers of art within art institutions (curators, educators, public program directors), who often take their cues from these artists, now see themselves as authorial figures in their own right. (Ibid)

In addition to this social turn where biennials have moved to favour new commissions as a tool of public engagement while the production process has become more collaborative, the sharing of authorial voice has been equally prominent in performance art in the form of labour delegation. Bishop (2012) summarised: performance art has morphed from predominantly taking place via the artist's body through live happenings, to its more contemporary format since the 1990s, where performance labour has become outsourced from the artist. Through this contemporary delegation mechanism, repeatability could be achieved and the format more suitable for pre-staged / scheduled occasions like biennials, aiming at wider circulation and consumption.

The expansion of contemporary art in terms of its context-sensitivity, social reach and repeatability also makes way for performing (and performance) arts to go beyond its conventional space of happening (black-box theatres or alternative spaces) and enter the domain of visual arts (white-cube galleries). This has opened up an interdisciplinary trend for site-specific performances to be produced in non-theatre environments at biennial and festival circuits. These cross-disciplinary, site-specific experiments have exponentially strengthened

the contribution of the support network, where the administrative team has evolved closer to the function of a producer or programmer, since logistics have become increasingly plugged-in with not only practical but artistic decisions, as observed by producer and choreographer Kate Lawrence (2007).

This change to the administrative capacity as a co-producing partner due to a shift in art-making was also echoed by curator and researcher Michael Birchall (2017). Pointing to a similar outcome where the museum infrastructure has now taken up a co-producing function, Birchall believed that the project-based model in contemporary art has obscured previously distinct epistemic boundaries between production roles, as art-making has moved into a post-studio model, while the focus of museology has been shifting from object-centric to production-oriented and process-driven. As a result, museums have been increasingly constructed as “a site of learning and co-production” (p.56).

This co-development role of the support network espoused by Lawrence and Birchall, I would suggest, are particularly active in live art<sup>174</sup> where the administrative capacity is enacted through its logistical consideration which seek to enable a grey zone<sup>175</sup> within a white-cube museum norm<sup>176</sup>. From ideation to post-production site management, complications often arise and the

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<sup>174</sup> The term “live art” used in this thesis subscribes to Claire Bishop’s usage in her 2018 article, referencing “the full spectrum of live performance in the museum: music, theatre, dance, and performance art” (p.23).

<sup>175</sup> Bishop (2018) coined the term “grey zone” to describe a fusion of space-time which characterised the introduction of an experimental theatre context within museum gallery settings. She provided a detailed analysis on the rise of this genre and how such a medium shed light on the changing nature of spectatorship.

<sup>176</sup> Bishop (2018, pp.29-35) called this process a “retemporalization...from *event time* to *exhibition time*”, indicating how the “grey zone” performance genre was distinct in time-space presentation from the black-box theatre tradition of event time, but also unlike the stillness and timelessness of the classical white-cube gallery norm.

co-developmental steer of the administrator is therefore called upon, as an informant explained:

Live works that involve daily or regular performances throughout the run of the show could have other complications. For instance, designing and dividing up rehearsal and warm up space within a clearly defined gallery norm, and the ways in which you communicate this museum space usage norm with performers. This could be tricky as the visual art production team might have different expectation to the need of the performers and performers from a non-contemporary art background might have an initial difficulty in understanding white cube norm – for instance, when the museum is open to the public, the door carved out on the gallery wall cannot be used as a catwalk for staff access. When the museum door opens, the gallery needs to be always ready and all work access shut, or the audience would try to enter the office space via the unclosed door. They will rightly perceive this “access” as an element of some interactive piece that invites them to use the passage, under a gallery norm. The difference in understanding could also be about cultural expectation. Say a warm-up and rehearsal space was set up among the office area, but the performers’ pre-show ritual involves intensive muscle work, which creates noise and sounds to the surrounding spaces that was “not expected” or incompatible for a museum office norm. This could also involve never previously encountered tasks such as the security of the performer’s personal belongings and wardrobe management. All sounds trivial but all makes a real difference. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

These logistical tasks typified by live art project, on the one hand, explicate a

co-development capacity of the Biennial administrator, while on the other hand, test the organisational limit and realm of acceptability of the support system.

Such an ability to gauge production need and negotiate project specificity within the museum norm was corroborated by an informant:

For live works, the support system and expertise differ substantially from a traditional sense of still work or even multimedia installation. It involves a great degree of “tolerance” to enable space and flexibility within what might seem to be the norm of an exhibitionary system. It also involves tasks less encountered, including the technicality and know-how and know-what in performer open call, audition, interview, scheduling, replacement, and so on. The space design also involves caring for the durational presence and use of the performers. It seems absolutely mundane – the difference lies in how thick the carpet should be to offer enough protection to performers. What is the best way to mitigate risk for the performers when they are asked to perform on museum marble floor? It also resides in how to fully relate to the reasoning behind these what might first appear to be perplexing insistence and see to the essence of the ask and empathise with the necessity for performer protection, since the body is the performer’s asset and any physical harm could be detrimental to their career. The thickness of the carpet matters... [A]rt administrator needs to duly shadow and care for the work development process. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

These examples reflect how a shift from object-centric to production-oriented and process-driven practices has impacted the ways in which the administrative capacity functions. This change in art-making witnesses how the administrative scope of practice and its co-development capacity are now enacted through the



process of actualisation and landing. The immaterial nature of similar projects demands administrators to be art conversant, and thus making administrative fluency in the knowledge of art and their acuteness to comprehend and translate such knowledge into technical requirements and organisational procedures a prerequisite.

Often described as trivial and mundane, such an administrative role is particularly recognisable in the post-production maintenance period and throughout the process of an increasingly festival-like and event-packed programming schedule. An informant spoke of this mounting logistical labour that goes into realising similar artworks:

Most of the work nowadays is transdisciplinary and diverse. After the show opens, performance-based piece or interactive work will often feature events as a part of its intended scope. For installation works especially those with an interactive element, the first month after show opens often involve intensive troubleshooting, including equipment stability, maintenance and substitution. Artists might not always be the most tech savvy. Their proposal could run afoul of heavy usage. The first month is considered a mutual adjustment period and often as the peak of maintenance. For performances or events, post-opening works might involve the cultivation and maintenance of a participatory mechanism...It might be performer scheduling or replacement, sometimes concerning staged participant recruitment, perhaps soliciting spontaneous walk-in participation or designing and delivering other reservation-only mechanism. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

The example above suggests that it is not uncommon for performance-based or

interactive works to be modified, based on live on the ground situation post-opening. The social element of these art projects has therefore resulted in an enhanced intel-gathering and sharing role of the administrative team and its frontline staffer. The information gathered becomes the basis to feedback and modify how the audience should and could interact with artworks. This leads, in turn, to a higher on-site management agency for frontline staff and the administrative team to interpret and act on what might or might not be an acceptable form of engagement for participants.

In order to facilitate this role, a feedback loop is strengthened, to ensure timely report of daily use and audience behaviour, so that the administrative team can better advise on the terms of engagement. Often in consultation with the artist and curator, the administrative team would propose modification and devise feasible alternatives, if difficulties emerge from pre-designed mechanism, which would best honour the way the work is conceptualised and stay true to how the audience's role is conceived by the artists. As a result, this maintenance-dependent, situational-responsive nature of these new types of artworks has ushered in a different power relation and agency for front of house staffer, compared to their previous, more static role for conventional, object-centric pieces.

In short, the rise of interactive, socially-engaged, site-responsive works and an increasingly festival-like post-opening event schedule have seen an ascending role of the administrative team as co-development partner for the creators, where their stewardship and consultative insights become consequential to the success of a project. Their growing agency is manifested in advice from pre-fabrication and installation alternative provision, to post-production maintenance suggestion, based on their experience and knowledge

in the site (including both physical and social cultural).

### ***Educational Turn: Arts Administrator as Collaborator***

In addition to changes in art-making mentioned so far, a shift dubbed “the educational turn”, encapsulates another consequential shift in knowledge production and curatorial epistemology. This change also bears significant implication to the sphere of practice for arts administrators. Curatorial researchers Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (2010) suggested that the educational turn refers to how process has not only become increasingly dominant but also the core outcome and purpose of artistic practice and curatorial intervention. The duo observed that as a common thread of this trend, discursive events have proliferated as an ascending artistic medium. Often homing in on the co-production of issue awareness with participants, these programmes have become dialectical in form and heuristic in approach. With this turn towards the educational, the duo argued that curatorial scope of practice has become “extra-exhibitionary” and “processual” which has gone beyond the care, display and production of collection, exhibition and programme (pp.11-22). Consequently, the educational turn has consolidated the curatorial turn from task-oriented (e.g. object arrangement and exhibition production) towards discursive (knowledge mediation).

Outside of the curatorial practice, this transition towards the educational can also be seen in recent studies in New Museology and Art Education (Birchall, 2017; Pringle, 2019) that considered cultural spaces as responsive organisms that interact with its changing social contexts and constituents. As a result of becoming more social-facing, the administrative landscape has further complicated with this increasingly decentralised paradigm in knowledge production, since this now expanded view of the Biennial’s role welcomes

external participants (e.g. community of practitioners, members of the public or other stakeholder groups) to contribute to the process of knowledge production and to ultimately shape its outcome.

Scholars (Karp, 2006; Pringle, 2019) observed this new paradigm encouraging external participation has aimed to decentralise cultural authority from the previous top-down model, to an inquiry-practice-led, co-produced and democratic approach. Out of this educational shift, researchers (O'Neill & Mick, 2010; Birchall, 2017) believed that museums have now become a process-heavy site of active collaboration, different from a classic position as a site of execution.

As detailed by Emily Pringle (2019), former Head of Research at Tate, this participatory and often open-ended process has introduced risk and uncertainties into a production journey and complicated its result. Pringle stated that under such increasingly volatile circumstances, practitioners have been constantly confronted with dilemmas, where they have to weigh conflicting priorities alongside ramifications of their actions. What underlies their abilities to complete an increasingly multi-faceted job is a stringent grasp of the subject matter and agility to mediate and communicate. These abilities combining practice (that of doers and know-how) and theory (thinkers and know-what), Pringle argued, have become essential to deal with open-ended uncertainties in a decentralised knowledge-production new normality.

Developed in parallel to a decentralised cultural authority that celebrates bottom-up participation, creative projects, characteristics of art practices in a post-community art era has also recasted the role of the administrative capacity.

These post-community art<sup>177</sup> aims to “not only promote art, but become a mediator that connect local cultures, industries and communities, for social impact” (Hsu & Wu, 2016). As a central feature of these projects, researchers (Hung & Chang, 2018) argued that the target of intervention has evolved from the space-time context of a locale, into the resource mechanisms underpinning the institutional context. This shift in art-making practices can also find a parallel in changes in curatorial concerns when it comes to transdisciplinary projects which increasingly mind for a larger ecological future, advocated by founding director of Art Catalyst, Nicola Triscott (2017) as a “co-inquiry” approach which aimed at “developing a community of practices, participants and constituency” (p.33).

As a result of these shifts, the administrative function now resides in a process of co-partnership, which includes roles related to participant / stakeholder identification as well as managing engagement processes and sustaining the momentum with participants / communities (e.g. to ensure participation rate, readiness to engage, etc). The target of administrative stewardship now rests beyond the brick and mortar where a project takes place. Rather, the subject of maintenance<sup>178</sup> and development as the bulk of the

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<sup>177</sup> The practice of Taiwanese artist Mali Wu typifies such a change away from being object-focused, into system intervention. As her practice increasingly anchored on community intervention, she realised that “the question is now beyond a conversion of concept into an artistic language or representational form. In order to create a social impact in a public domain, ability to mobilise and organise community and the public becomes the key. If a place has existing organisational synergy, I will assume the role of a facilitator. But in most cases, there is not. We then start conceptualising ways to grow and sustain these community-based organisational power” (Hsu & Wu, 2016).

<sup>178</sup> Independent curator Manray Hsu (Wang et al, 2016) pointed to the growing awareness among the contemporary art world towards the importance of maintenance and its criticality to

administrative work in similar post-community art projects are now enacted through how networks and knowledges are sustained and brokered – for instance, from the ways in which agents (often from non-art groups) are identified and engaged for community access.

Influenced by these changes, the role of the arts administrator has evolved into a critical interface which develops, liaises, maintains and mobilises the mechanism between art / resource / stakeholders. The administrator's function, therefore, becomes an essential collaborator for these educational, transdisciplinary, post-community art projects, to deliver a readiness and calculated randomness, which underpin the everydayness<sup>179</sup> of a project. As part of the co-development process, the administrative capacity is performed not only through inducing a discursive environment for artistic and curatorial premise to come into existence, but also by means of enabling external actors coming into contact with the exhibitionary system to contribute with autonomy and knowledge agency.

This role of the administrator in facilitating an environment for participants to act autonomously and contribute productively shares similarities with what curator Michael Birchall (2017) attributed to the curatorial and programming function. Birchall noted:

Facilitating community involvement... is of course no given thing. It is dependent on the willingness of the participants and their desire to learn

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project success. Referencing a growing coordination capacity of artists in large-scale production, he argued that this maintenance role included tasks, ranging from the upkeep of a quality working relation between a production team, sustaining a smooth work process, stepping in to keep the project on track despite members' dropping out, to name a few.

<sup>179</sup> Taiwanese art historian and curator Pei-Yi Lu (2014) argued that post-community art in the form of activism art is composed of three basic elements: everydayness, participants and events / process.

and acquire new skills. The role of the curator [and programmer], then, in this “new community” socially engaged art, is about first and foremost constructing and enabling a free space of engagement for participants. That is, in mediating between the artist and the community group, the curator seeks to secure the condition for participant autonomy. (p.67)

Echoing this enabling role of curators and programmers, administrators now co-produce and co-develop artwork / project contexts, which could be inductive to autonomous participation.

Such an administrative function in context construction resembles what sociologist Michel Callon (2015) referred to as “*agencement*” – a term he coined to illustrate the enabling network which are put in place for an economic agent to act. With the educational turn in contemporary art-making and knowledge production, the administrative capacity has been increasingly instrumental to co-development and co-production, as it now functions through the construction of an enabling network to empower external actors to act autonomously.

### **Pedagogical Co-Development Through Administrative Mentorship**

From the changes in art practices and curatorial epistemology described above, I have established how the administrative role has evolved into a co-producing, co-development collaborator. A pronounced feature of the administrative capacity, developed in parallel to these shifts can be summarised as a pedagogical function. From the data collected from the interviews, the process of what I observe as administrative mentorship are noticeable in operation on both extra-organisational and intra-organisational levels.

In the following section, I will draw on case studies, including the recent public programme *Theatre of Negotiations* at Taipei Biennial 2020, to illustrate this pedagogical function and mentorship capacity of the administrators. This

line of investigation not only aims to give texture to the ways administrative capacity has evolved in response to new forms of art-making and knowledge production, but also provides an updated frame of reference to understand such increasingly critical role the support network now plays, by articulating the ways in which this co-developing, co-producing stewardship manifests in what I propose as a pedagogical mentorship.

### ***Theatre of Negotiations***

As a prototype project, *Theatre of Negotiations: Make it Work*<sup>180</sup> was first staged at Les Amandiers theatre in Nanterre as a performative simulatory negotiation before the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (or more commonly known as COP 21) in Paris. Inspired by political scientist and philosopher Bruno Latour's practice of re-enactment and large-scale simulation, the mock conference was performed in front of an audience for five days (26 to 31 May 2015) as an experimental project, positioned at the intersection of political science and the arts.

The initiative problematised issues of delegation at comparable international political negotiation, by asking: Which community is being represented? As an alternative proposition, *Theatre of Negotiations* aimed to shift the territorial focus of nation states in similar conventions, by giving voice to cross-cutting, issue-based representation (such as diaspora, immigration or the influence of the media). It also encouraged a non-anthropocentric approach by giving representational rights to the inanimate, for example, forests, rocks, and marine life, etc.

The event, enacted in front of a public, followed the scenario set out by

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<sup>180</sup> For more details on the initial *Theatre of Negotiations*, see its post-event brochure (Hallé & Milon, 2015, pp.12-18) and Latour's opening presentation for the conference (Latour, 2015).



stage director and dramaturg Philippe Quesne and Frédérique Ait-Touat. It saw the participation of 40 delegations, composed of 20 nation states and 20 cross-cutting entities. Post-graduate students from SPEAP, specialising in experimentation in arts and politics from research university Sciences Po, as well as student body from other universities and partner organisations were the main enactors and performers of the event.

Taipei Biennial 2020 was co-curated by Bruno Latour and Martin Guinand, alongside Evia Lin as public programme curator. *Theatre of Negotiations (ToN)*, as an anchor of the 2020 Biennial public programme, was restaged and localised under one of the six exhibition thematics<sup>181</sup>. The role of public programming for the 2020 Taipei Biennial was considered on an equal footing to the main showcase. It was the first time in the Biennial's history that public programmes were given the same weight as the rest of the sub-themes of the exhibition. In other words, for the 2020 edition, public programme series were not positioned as subservient to or a spin-off from the main showcase, but a project with its own knowledge agency and authorial power. As a linchpin to the Biennial's public programme, the *ToN* projects were co-developed by the TFAM education department in close collaboration with the Taiwanese guest curator Eva Lin.

Under this ethos, *ToN* was regarded as “the engine” of the public programme series which mediated Latour's theory and curatorial proposition into “localised and palpable action” (Tseng, 2021, pp.13-14) in the form of

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<sup>181</sup> Titled *You and I don't live on the same planet*, the Taipei Biennial 2020 proposed six metaphorical themes (or “planets”) as the backdrop of the exhibition thesis, including planet Globalisation, planet Security, planet escape, planet terrestrial and “new diplomatic encounters” (Yu, 2020). *Theatre of Negotiations* fell under the series of public programme under the theme of new diplomatic encounters.

experientable social impacts. By enacting a practice-centric performance, based on “political and diplomatic tactics”, the 2020 *ToN* aimed to enable a “pedagogical format” (TFAM, n.d., *ToN*) which would create a scenario where people who might disagree could be brought together for dialogue and negotiation.

### ***Empowering Co-Producing Partner and Participants***

Witnessing a turn towards a co-development role for the administrative function, the production of *Theatre of Negotiations* involved over a semester-long planning to realise a multi-day public debate. From the planning stage, the pedagogical function of the administrative capacity started to manifest in its enablement of an expert-led, peer-to-peer, co-learning consortium. This was designed to institute an exchange mechanism<sup>182</sup> with the co-curators, to collectively devise a plan which could best land the 2020 biennial thesis.

Through the facilitation by TFAM staff, a mini study group among the transdisciplinary consortium worked together to identify core elements of the *ToN* project and mediums through which the project should unfold. As a result, Taiwan STS Association (STS) – a network of academics and researchers working at the intersection of science, technology and society – was identified as a partner to co-develop *ToN* for the 2020 biennial. With the network of STS, classes from five universities were selected to be the primary participants and

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<sup>182</sup> As one informant recalled: “In order to effectively involve the consortium, a dialogue mechanism was established for pre-planning and pre-meetings. To enable dialogue to happen, it requires a higher knowledge threshold with additional foreknowledge to engage the consortium members that come from a diverse background, with highly-specialised understanding of how Latour’s concept has been applied or can ripple within their respective research fields. Such a conversation mechanism gives a certain three-dimensionality to the overall project” (Former TFAM educator and project administrator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021).

enactors of the project. Over the course of a semester, students learned about a subject matter in class and prepared for a public debate at TFAM as their final presentation.

### ***Prepping the Space: Setting the Stage***

Before the *ToN* events could take place, the administrative team in the exhibition department spearheaded a tailored venue, as the site for *ToN* happenings. This project space development process typified the co-production role of the administrative capacity, which was realised through deliberations around how spatial design would guide the use of the venue and shape participant experience. In partial consultation with the co-curators, decisions for the final spatial presentation were developed primarily between the museum design team and a Hong Kong architectural collective, based on the group's understanding and interpretation of how *ToN* should be rolled out.

As a result of this collective production work, the space was turned into a large, orange, circular seating area that filled the atrium of TFAM's basement. In addition to being used for *ToN* events, this atrium provided a space for visitors to hang out during non-event time. The colour choice of the architectural construct in bright orange enhanced the visual presence of this spatial intervention and pointed to a functionality beyond museum furnishing, by implying a non-regular / event use, when compared to the more neutral furnishing (e.g. tone-downed, ordinary-looking bench or bean bags in black or oak colour) often encountered on museum campus. The open-endedness of the seating area also allowed members of the public to flow in and out as per *ToN* vision, without the burden of full-session participation, which might be expected in a more traditional theatre or performance setting.

This design process exemplified the administrator's educational function in

pre-grounding audience participation and the ensuing event discussion format. In the shape of a snail, the deliberately de-centralised formation aimed to provide a non-hierarchical power structure during happenings. Such a spatial arrangement gave users and participants a cue to the ethos of the project as a metaphor of representative democracy (and how constituents were expected to negotiate in the same political system as equals).

### **Image 5**

*Theater of Negotiations Offshore Wind Power in Progress. Public Program of Taipei Biennial 2020 You and I Don't Live on the Same Planet. Courtesy of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.*



### ***Preparing the Teachers of the Enactors***

Developed in parallel to the spatial design, the administrative team from the education department alongside guest curator Eva Lin co-developed and

stewarded a process to identify, recruit, and prepare the faculty members and student participants selected for *ToN* happenings. The educational role of the administrative capacity were materialised on two levels: firstly, in training the trainers to be ready to incorporate *ToN* as a pedagogy in the teacher's existing module, and secondly, helping the trainers to prepare their student participants to be ready for public debate.

This pedagogical function to empower co-producing partner and student participants was articulated in terms of its educational goal by former TFAM educator and project administrator:

In our estimation, Taiwanese stakeholders [without a background in public debate] found it hard to arrive at this status [of public debate without prepping]. It was a fundamental behavioural and cultural difference [from participants from former happenings]. We very quickly realised a process of development to prepare participants became essential, so that they could arrive at a state of readiness for participation. This included thinking through mechanisms of how we co-worked with the professors, what were the subject areas that would be incubated after the professors entered their classrooms, how and based on what criteria should we select further from all the proposed topic areas [for debate], how to develop and present issue complexity, what additional materials the students might need to understand project thesis, etc. This in-depth development process made the Taipei edition [of *ToN*] unique to its predecessors. (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021)

As the interviewee suggested, the preparatory process was designed to increase knowledge co-agency among participants and project partners. To achieve this goal, the administrative team worked closely with the guest curator

to help the professors, teaching the courses comprehend project thesis, in terms of how *ToN* should be understood within the Biennial framework and how the element of student participation should be construed as critical co-contributors to the outcome of the happenings. The administrative team, alongside the guest curator, also collaborated with the faculty to devise corresponding pedagogy to incorporate the project into existing lesson plans and shadowed the roll out of preparation works throughout the semester to help set expectations.

This mentor-like stewardship proved to be instrumental in retaining the willingness in participation by co-producing partners – especially given the discursive format and high knowledge threshold of *ToN* had more than once dissuaded co-partners from continuing their participation, as confessed by the aforementioned project administrator. A troubleshooting function, rested in the joint mentorship capacity enabled by the public programme guest curator and the museum educational team, became particularly useful in holding participation enthusiasm, by guiding new entrants through the seemingly abstract curatorial proposition and anchoring expectations regarding the project's outcome, including details on the roll out process and the possible presentational styles.

### ***Preparing the Enactors***

Based on the development process described above, a series of issues considered not only controversial to the island, but also of high public interest was selected by the joint production team. This included current debates on offshore wind power, reproductive rights and nuclear wastes, among others. To enact the representational rights of various voices, the museum administrative team worked with project guest curator and co-producing universities to identify

and invite a number of relevant constituents to participate in the public debates alongside the students. These constituents, serving as co-enactors, ranged from elected officials, activist non-profits, research groups, journalists, to members of the public and residents affected by nuclear waste disposal.

While the professors were mainly responsible for in-class knowledge production / acquisition of the selected, specialised subject areas, the joint museum team worked with course leaders to deploy tailored plans to help student participants be ready for public debates. These included efforts to construct context awareness, from social-behavioural literacy, project context, to museum site knowledge. Need-based advice involved making recommendations to extra-curriculum training courses<sup>183</sup> to help the students home in on socio-behavioural familiarity in use in public presentation.

Regarding enabling project literacy for student enactors, the administrative team also worked with the teachers and students to navigate and fine-tune their final presentation in terms of performativity. In debate rehearsals, student participants assigned with opposing viewpoints and interest areas practised the delivery they intended to make in public. Throughout this rehearsal process, students behaved in ways that reflected what they believed performing in public should look like. As former TFAM educator and project administrator described:

[M]any students as co-producing participants would imagine themselves as “actors” and deliver their participation with a dramatic tone or exaggerated gesticulation. In response to this, the project guest curator and the museum team would come up with a strategy to politely ask for this level of

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<sup>183</sup> After hearing one professor's concern of their students' uneasiness in public speaking, the joint museum team suggested training sessions which involved non-verbal body development and presentation, speech coaching and voice projection training, among others.

deliberate performativity to be toned down a notch. We would do so by explaining the thesis of the project and emphasising the performativity *ToN* lies not in a traditional sense of performing per se or in assuming a role. Participation in a public debate as an issue representative and surrogate of the stakeholders, already in itself, is the essence of the performance. The process of participation and representation in a public debate has already realised performativity. (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021)

This mentor role of the administrators in guiding participants to de-act was critical to achieve project-fitting performativity. Such function resembled direction provision by a choreographer or performance artist<sup>184</sup> in delegated performance works. This administrative role amounted to the weight of an assistant director, if not co-director. The level of directiveness was conducted through stewardship which saw to knowledge sharing and coaching, so that final delivery could be grounded in its intended creative proposition. By doing so, participants could not only stay true to the project's vision, but also be empowered to engage with chance social encounter, alongside other walk-in stakeholders and respond to spontaneous debates sparked by a designed randomness, representative of the process of negotiation in a civic society.

In addition to the above-mentioned consultative roles, a pedagogical function of the administrative capacity was most noticeable when introducing site rules, by sharing foreknowledge on museological norms and audience expectations within a white cube tradition. To fulfill this mentor capacity, administrators relied on their fluency in communicating seemingly processual

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<sup>184</sup> Performance artist Marina Abramović discussed a process of de-training and de-skilling the dancers for her durational works, to come closer to her vision. Abramović viewed this as a process to “de-dance” and “de-act” the dancers (Abramović & Bruguera, 2009, p.181).



elements through an art-historical and museological lens to non-art actors in order to uphold site integrity. As the project informant suggested:

[T]he co-producing participants, including teachers and students all came with a very different and individualised perception towards “what it should be like to ‘perform’ in a museum space”. For example...a few teachers and students wanted to plaster a self-produced poster and a photoshopped declaration on the gallery walls and alongside hallways leading to the event site. To an art museum, gallery walls as white cube has its art historical context, purpose and reasons. These context specificities also restrict the possibility to freely plaster any materials within any given space within an art museum. When this particular situation arose, we had a lot of communication to facilitate an understanding of this site context, in terms of how artworks might be influenced by these self-produced posters on the same white wall, what intertextual relations would this produce, what might the exhibitionary context of a museum bring to these self-produced posters when they were juxtaposed with artworks, and how would audiences and event participants perceive the poster when they had been pre-exposed to the site knowledge and art historical background, etc, etc...What needed to be handled subtly...was that it was often difficult in event scenarios to clearly declare or define that arts administrators knew more about art or aesthetics than a co-producing participant, since no one would like to believe they might not know enough or was less aesthetically attuned. On a practical level, administrators would exercise an authority similar to a manager that was mostly informed by an audience awareness, including experiences regarding participation norm and public expectation. The focus of our discussions would refrain from commenting on the aesthetics of their

self-produced posters, but with an emphasis on what normally went on the gallery white walls in other exhibitionary contexts as a point of comparison. (Former TFAM educator and project administrator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021)

This administrative counsel and careful stewardship demonstrates a responsibility of the administrators to enhance the command of foreknowledge and facilitate context awareness for external actors entering the exhibitionary system. Participant co-agency was achieved by enabling site knowledge and context familiarity to guide behavioural outcomes, while attending to a trust-based developmental process. This *ToN* example testifies to the dual mechanism of control and care in action in administrative stewardship, discussed in Chapter 2.

Administrator's consultative acumen thus lies in the management of stakeholder expectations and their negotiation across professional cultural differences through code-switching and an enablement of the same code-switching capacity, as proposed in the first section of this Chapter. The skills and strategy of delivery, especially regarding explaining seemingly mundane administrative procedures in an approachable manner, thus became instrumental to administrative success, so that the presentational outcome could adhere to what was considered appropriate to the art museum context and its site scenario.

### ***Preparing the Audience***

On top of the administrative pedagogical function expressed through preparing the space, the trainer and the participants, an educational capacity of the administrator was also noticeable in audience preparation. This was done with an aim to prepare the members of the publics, so that audiences arriving at

the events could become equally-ready participants with basic knowledge agency.

This educational role was particularly significant when members of the public came to the events expecting the *ToN* project to deliver a traditional programme comparable to performances seen in conventional theatre settings. Through handling public (and media) questions (such as: What is the duration of the show? Is it ticketed? What is the performance about?), the administrative team was in charge to quickly set expectations and help inquiring audiences understand the concept of theatre and performativity underpinning the project. An elevator version of the art-historical tradition of dialectic works would be provided to explain how performativity lied not in performing a show, but as in enabling a space for dialogue. As the project administrator shared:

Our role was multi-fold. On one level, it was about facilitating *ToN* to smoothly take place within the context of an art museum. On the second level, the administrative team representing TFAM had a more direct and primary responsibility when it came to the general audiences, if compared to the project guest curator, our co-production partners or even the participating students. We were in the frontline facing inquiries to address all of the questions about the project. People often phoned in and asked questions, given the project was not something in a traditional sense that could be intuitively understood or easily imagined. Based on our experience in handling public inquiries, we would advise the project guest curator and professors to address these common questions... This was designed to facilitate the members of the public to be prepped to enter the discussion as a fellow participant. Based on our advice, corresponding material or plan to help prepare audiences were developed and installed at

the event. (Former TFAM educator and project administrator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 14 May 2021)

This example suggests that an administrative mentor role was based on not only providing pre-engagement background context for the audience, but also an intel gathering function, rooted in a feedback loop to finetune production process and steer presentational outcome.

If the *ToN* event was comparable to a classroom scenario, as I believe it is, then the educational works by the administrators to prepare the audiences (co-learners and co-enactors) as equal and able participants to be ready for engagement (co-learning) began well before they entered into the classroom. This co-learner preparation process might involve designing and distributing audience-friendly printed materials during events as a background recap on the legal and social state of affairs in regards to topics in discussion, or providing informal hints as to the type of event that was being held through props (e.g. podiums and cameras for a press conference on nuclear waste disposal, or procedural aids fitting for a public hearing on reproductive technology, etc.). This could also involve scene-setting works that would take the form of devising and hosting appropriate rsvp systems (or on-site recruitment for walk-in members), so that a representative sample of stakeholder voices and diverse expertise could be present, to look and feel like the type of public debate scenarios that were being simulated.

### ***Preparing the Support Infrastructure***

In addition to direct audience preparation works, training was also necessary to ensure the support infrastructure could be ready to handle new types of projects like the *ToN* events. This involved preparing the administrative system and retraining frontline staffers and docents to mediate in accordance

with intended project outcome. For *ToN*, such retraining work included a thorough discussion of the level of encouragement a docent should provide on-site and to what extent a member of the Biennial organisers should recruit walk-in audiences for participation.

A similar intra-organisational educational role can be observed from another biennial-related education initiative *My Mini-Museum Project* in 2012. Commenting on the retraining work tailored to meet the goal of the 2012 initiative, TFAM education project programmer Hsuan-Chun Lin (2019) stated: *My Mini-Museum Project* in terms of its public engagement methodology, was the first in TFAM history to invite the audience to “linger in the project space for a long duration of time” (pp.73-74). Lin explained that, in order to deliver this unprecedented programme, careful consideration<sup>185</sup> was given to how best to introduce the nature of the project to walk-in audiences, while not disrupting the continuity of their visiting experience within the Biennial venue itself, so that the environment could invite audience reflection on alternative perspectives to interpret the content of the show.

This new type of engagement methodology created (and creates) different demands on the administrative and support infrastructure. Encouraging learning autonomy, the project has transformed the role and expected approach of TFAM docents, warranting a different system of pre-work training. Lin stated:

For adult audience who demonstrates higher degree of self-initiative and comfortability with self-learning, the docents now need to adjust their engagement tonality – warm and courteous, yet appropriately balancing the [physical and metaphorical] distance between the audience, without being

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<sup>185</sup> In terms of the display and viewing environment, the project took into consideration various age groups, group size and level of prior knowledge across the audience spectrum.

over-imposing or offering unsolicited, guiding or personal interpretation.

This change in etiquette calls for a different set of training and on-the-job adjustment for not only security-based docents (who are not familiar with audience engagement), but also guided-tour docents [who are not used to providing non-leading engagement to encourage self-learning]. (Ibid)

This intra-organisational educational function of the administrative team is typical of management works devoted to ensuring the readiness of the support infrastructure. Such an intra-organisational coaching capacity echoed a wider shift in contemporary art and curatorial discourses, where what was previously considered peripheral or derivative departments have been gaining an increased knowledge autonomy through a now dispersed educational capacity.

Using the example of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, curator and writer Maria Lind (2013, p.104) observed that a mediation capacity and its “narrative technique” had been decentralised from core personnels in charge of the “craft of curating” (e.g. exhibition and curating departments) to a wider team previously deemed as “tagged-on” to curatorial projects (e.g. education, communications and marketing). Lind believed this is a result of specialisation in mediation, which has further resulted in the segmentation of target audiences and purposes of communication. Lind noted:

Marketing and PR departments have gradually taken over responsibilities that used to be shared between curators and educators. In many art institutions, marketing and PR take the lead on any added narrative.

(p.105)

This expansion of discursive and mediative capacity among non-curating administrative staff, as Lind observed, was corroborated by a wider transition from the activities of curating as a task, into being a discursive capacity, as the

curatorial literature (O'Neill, 2007; Martinon, 2013) described.

In the case of the Taipei Biennial, the communications campaign on owned and organic media, including its social media channels, websites and audio guides, highlighted this change in technique of mediation from didactic to heuristic with an aim to encourage self-learning and participation. For instance, previous Biennial promotional materials, often penned by the curatorial team, were often replicas or abstract from the text-heavy curatorial or artist statements. With involvement of a specialised communications team since the 2010s, a difference in output in terms of tone, visual presentation and purpose of engagement could be observed. As a former head of public relations and digital services remarked:

I tried to introduce an integrated brand concept into our social media management, from layout design, language and tone, visual identity, etc. which all now required our planning... We worked out a visual style and language use which were closer to social media norm. This included a younger and more casual sensibility for our copies and image use which could encourage [online and offline] engagement. We also worked with our in-house photographer colleagues to workshop more social-media-friendly assets which transitioned the purpose of photo-archiving from previous focus as exhibition / installation documentation primarily used in catalogue and brochure publication. (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

A growth in curatorial gesture and mediation capacity among non-curating staff was developed in parallel with the consolidation of a mentorship function among administrative support departments. From the example above, these changes have been reflected in how the communications department now responsible for

respective production gatekeeping and intra-organisational coaching, planned for the delivery of public engagement material. A process of soft re-training was initiated to re-anchor in-house staff and the museum-affiliated resource network (including photographers and designers), to be acquainted with social media user preference, so that visual assets produced could be better suited for the browsing habits and consumption norm of the online community.

As a part of this process to retrain the support infrastructure, instructions were given (in the form of intended purpose, cues and composition styles) to in-house colleagues by the communications team. As a result of this peer-to-peer mentorship process, visual language produced for social media use and public engagement for the Biennial have expanded from a former object-centric stylisation, into compositions which aimed to create a sense of intrigue to encourage online and offline interactions.

As a result of this dissipated mediative and curatorial capacity among the support network, the communications team has been increasingly brought into the research and development cycle of a project. Its role has slowly grown out of its previous form of promoting end products (after a show or project was completed), into a co-developing and co-producing partner in the stewardship process. This capacity has become particularly influential (as explained in the second half of this Chapter), where the administrative function increasingly lies in the development and maintenance of participating mechanism, making communications and engagement critical to fulfilling this production capacity, now expected of the support network. Such expansion of function away from distribution and dissemination, to being an integral part of the research and developmental process encapsulates the change in capacity of the administrative infrastructure and its ascending consultative function.



### ***Mentor Capacity in Transdisciplinary Projects***

The analysis of the *ToN* project shows how the educational function of the administrative capacity is particularly pronounced when a project is transdisciplinary and involves creators, co-production partners and other contributors from backgrounds outside of the traditional visual art field. Process-driven and often non-object focused, this increasingly popular art form of transdisciplinary practice is often marked by an intense process of administrative induction, represented by facilitating new entrants to ease into the exhibitionary system (namely, a mutual getting-to-know-each-other journey). Throughout this induction process, the administrative function, performs a pedagogical role not only by means of direct (didactic and explicative) method to share knowledge, resource and intel, but also through an indirect and more heuristic approach to enable the discovery of creative autonomy and knowledge co-agency for new entrants to the exhibitionary system.

Administrative team's educational function in coaching these new parties relies on their individual comprehension of where the art lies, how this art-ness should be realised, and what contributing role each participant plays in the art-becoming process. It is also based on an administrative grasp of how a museum as a white cube tends to implicate behavioural patterns for the audience. Through administrative mediation and counsel, these understandings in turn shape the realm of acceptability in the final presentation of a project. Like in the examples seen in the *Theatre of Negotiations*, such mentor capacity involved a co-producing stewarding process, underpinned by organisational tolerance and ability to negotiate across stakeholders to find common ground as a basis to progress project development, without compromising artistic integrity,

while also empowering the actors to contribute with co-agency<sup>186</sup>.

An informant highlighted the code-switching role of administrators in transdisciplinary project, stating:

The challenge of transdisciplinary projects lies in the difference in perspective based on partners' core training. This is particularly obvious when it comes to communications over project direction or technical details. Without a thorough and solid process of achieving consensus and making sure all are on the same page, the final presentation would become a disaster. It needs to be just right – no more and no less. What fascinates me is sometimes working with partners outside of contemporary art, there will be certain non-spoken in-group trade norms that would be completely foreign for us but cannot be spoken openly due to specific industry reasons and these might become the very factor that would make or break a project. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

The necessity to exercise code-switching to enable inter-group collaboration, on top of helping build consensus and co-agency, undergirds the mentor function of administrators in transdisciplinary projects. Expanding on this ascending role, the same informant continued sharing thus:

[C]hallenges that could affect visual presentation the most might arise, when there is no artist in the picture to round up all the NGOs or community partners. For instance...an environmental writer was included. However, after contacting this said writer, the team found that as a writer by trade, the

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<sup>186</sup> This administrative function to enable co-agency echoes what cultural theorist Tony Bennett (1995) ascribed to how the role of a curator transitioned from knowledge authorship to become a “possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its recourses to make authored statements within it” (p.104).

creative practitioner, had limited know-how to deliver a showcase. The administrative team then proposed an artist-designer to collaborate with the writer to help with concept development, exhibition design, installation and display. Technicality and creative solutions such as what paper to use, how to frame, how storytelling could be visually presented, whether the storyline should be presented on top or underneath, and so on, eventually all went through the regurgitation, induction and transference of the artist-designer partner and the production team. (Ibid)

This example paints an intriguing dynamic where what would traditionally be considered as the role of the artist is transferred to the administrative capacity (consisted of the production / administrative team and the artist-designer being matchmade with the writer). Arts administrator, guiding project development, tapped relevant resources and collaborated on the process of work creation. Administrators thus, play a co-producing role by contributing (to what I see as a high degree<sup>187</sup>) to not only the final presentation of the project, but also in coaching the creative process as a whole. This administrative contribution, I would propose, is comparable to a co-creator / co-designer in terms of converting storytelling into spatial-visual outputs.

Such an ascending role of the management capacity increasingly demands not only an administrative acumen in inducting new entrants to the Biennial's institutional norms and value systems (as in the context and tradition of an

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<sup>187</sup> It would be important for me to stress that the informant was particularly firm on her role as facilitative and not intervening. Consultation, to her, was there to scope need, and not to dictate result. I would propose, this dynamic and self-description again points to the symbiosis of control and care, characteristic of administrative stewardship. It also reflects how this administrator saw her primary function as project actualisation, as discussed in the first half of this Chapter.

exhibitionary ecosystem) but also administrative suaveness in catalysing and stewarding the process of becoming art. This change in function is materialised by bridging knowledge and experience gaps through enabling code-switching capacity across the growingly fragmented subgroups of the creator community, which now more often than not come from a background outside of the arts. This development is significant, as it confirms a change in role for arts administrators to grow in their consultative and coaching significance in a now increasingly multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder production reality.

### **Arts Administrator as Change Agent**

After investigating the function of arts administrator and looking at how the administrative capacity has evolved closer to a co-development mentor in response to changes in art-making and knowledge production, I propose to summarise my view of the administrative as the foundation of the infrastructural in the final part of this Chapter, by focusing on qualities that make the cohort of arts administrator unique in a changing exhibitionary system. As an effort to give a new language to articulate the value of the support network, this proposition aims to bring together discussions in this PhD thesis by examining the catalytic potential of arts administrators as change agent and institutional performer.

### ***Nature of Arts Administration as Practice***

Before a dedicated discussion can be made of the value and potential of the support network, a review of the arts administrator's profile and how they identify with their practice will be necessary. This line of inquiry will first pinpoint the essence of arts administration as a practice, before moving on to analyse the distinct professional identity characteristics of arts administrators as a unique cohort of field actors in contemporary art.

I have established in previous chapters that the way administrator's scope of work as purpose-oriented and task-focused have remained a throughline in the development of arts administration as a practice. This sphere of practice is corroborated by an informant thus:

For anyone who wishes to become an arts administrator but lives in a dreamy bubble, that bubble needs to be popped. Administration sits in the centre of arts administration. You need to first acknowledge you have what it takes to pull off the administration bit of the work before thinking about a job or career in arts administration. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

Such an emphasis on administrative drudgery as the primary remit of an in-house role is echoed by TFAM senior curator, Jo Hsiao. In a podcast interview, Hsiao (Artouch.com, 2021) commented on the difference between an in-house curator and an independent counterpart, stating the former has a higher level of responsibility towards institutional accountability as a default and therefore, must interact with the system of public administration and the associated workload that comes as a safeguarding mechanism for accountability. Hsiao argued:

I still identify myself as a project officer. When you are not in an in-house role, it is almost impossible to imagine the load of these minute and cumbersome administrative works. All the official works that cannot be carried out by people outside of the museum system.

Within this system of production built upon public accountability, an ability to navigate a webbed, multi-stakeholder working reality becomes a prerequisite. Hsiao continued to divulge her tradecraft: "Humility and sensibility (literal translation: your body needs to be soft) is a must".

Hsiao's commentary reflects a repeating theme from the interviewees: the practice of arts administration can be summarised as "a way of doing things". As testified by a former exhibition coordinator, "learning the ropes around 'the way of doing things' might involve how to timeline control, how to communicate with the artist and curator, how to fill in all the details to realise a showcase" (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021).

The interviewees of this research have painted a picture of arts administration as a practice which is people-dependent, will-dependent and experience-dependent, in addition to identifying coordination as the backbone of the administrative capacity. The aforementioned coordinator, remarking on the tradecraft of being an arts administrator, suggested: "Not running away? Joking aside, perhaps it is the can-do and will-do attitude?" (Ibid).

As I have proposed in Chapters 2 and 3 so far, a primary part of "the way of doing things" for arts administrators is seeing the value of a project at hand and making it happen. This means not only possessing an ability to see the bigger picture but also having the persistence to dot the i's and cross the t's. To this cumbersome nature of administration and value-based tenacity, a former educator suggested:

Not being daunted by "hassles" or worn out by the nitty-gritty makes a big difference. Something so small and mundane as to why a service provider in a remote area cannot comply with electronic invoicing format would require prior sign off. You need to explain the reasoning and ask for approval. Once you sincerely identified with the value of a project, no matter how much of a hassle or difficulty, you jump through the hoops to make it happen. (Interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

What seems to sit at the heart of arts administration as a practice (a way of

doing things) and the administrators as a cohort of actors are their value-driven perseverance and humility to navigate a bureaucratic machine. In order to successfully traverse the exhibitionary system, the working reality demands arts administrators of a visioneering ability – namely, skillfulness to comprehend creative vision at concept infancy, including conjuring up spatial-visual presentation based on early-stage abstract ideas, coupled with the willpower and nimbleness to convert these ideas into language and procedure that can be understood by the public administrative system, in order to mobilise the resource machine.

This process not only involves a stewardly responsiveness to stakeholder expectations, but also is dependent on administrator's experience and knowledge of the site (including physical, procedural and socio-cultural insights), while being poised at boundary-setting in terms of budget, deadline and compliance. Demanding of administrative communicability and resourcefulness to realise the code-switching function of bridging, the practice also requires dexterity to navigate a multi-stakeholder context, by knowing where resources and knowledge sit, and an ability to cultivate the willingness for these resource-holders to work together when in need.

### ***Arts Administrator vs. Bureaucratic Technocrat***

The personal qualities and practice-centric tradecraft articulated by research interviewees points to a self-awareness of what being an arts administrator stands for. When asked about “the way of doing things”, the image of a bureaucratic technocrat came as a jarring antithesis to what the interviewees believed as appropriate for an arts administrator. Far from the almost rigid and impersonal ideal type bureaucrat in the Weberian tradition, the interview data have revealed so far that the difference of what constitutes an

appropriate arts administrator lies in their reflexive capacity to provide advice and feedback, based on the administrator's knowledge and experience as I detailed in Chapter 2 and 3. As an informant argued:

A show produced by technocrats might still have a high level of visual excitement, but many details might not be just right. For example, in a space that was squashed, did the administrator inform the guest curator that the viewing experience would definitely be compromised by a sense of compression, if the space was to go ahead with a plan which would fill the room with moving images or a low-hanging plane? If you lose the ability to communicate on this level and only care about budget like a technocratic bureaucrat, the details that make a difference will be lost and the presentation a mile different. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

What sets apart an arts administrator from a technocratic bureaucrat is this preparedness to engage in knowledge conversation on an equal footing<sup>188</sup> with their community of practitioners. Such knowledge autonomy grounded in subject familiarity provides administrative legitimacy and the credibility of their consultative mentorship.

As stewards and co-developing partners, arts administrators exercise their knowledge agency to provide counsel and cultivate trust as a basis for constructive working partnership. This co-development process involves the

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<sup>188</sup> Emily Pringle (2019), former Head of Learning Practice and Research, Tate Learning argued that museum practitioners (she referenced museum educators, and I would suggest it is applicable to arts administrators in general) operated within a multi-faceted environment, where practitioners constantly negotiate between diverging priorities from different stakeholders. She proposed that "knowledge, autonomy, trust and responsibility" (p.48) have become the operational throughline with the perceived stakeholders in mind.



command over both the know-how and know-what of the practice, as the same informant revealed:

The production team needs knowledge subjectivity so that you can engage in a conversation with artists and curators. This involves not only production sensibility and technical capacity but also professional discursive command. The administrative team cannot simply follow instructions and be a yes man. If so, this will no doubt run into huge trouble sooner or later. You need to be not just professional but also just right. It is difficult I must say – everyone is so dragged down by the administrative works. (Ibid)

This consultative function based on knowledge agency and an ability to find creative solutions within the reality of bureaucracy seems to be what distinguishes an arts administrator from a technocratic paper-pusher.

Such attitude and ability to make legally compliant room between the red tape was articulated in the catalogue of the 2010 Taipei Biennial by the then TFAM director and head of the Biennial office:

The bureaucratic procedure that exhibition production sets in motion is both complex and inevitable, but just like the law, it can be applied with an appropriate degree of flexibility. Interpretation, solutions, strategy, and efficiency can all vary with the intelligence and approach of the individual handling a given issue, bringing into play their unique bureaucratic creativity. Bureaucratic procedures have a major and long-overlooked impact on arts development around the world, a fact affecting whether a job is done well or carried out poorly. (Chang & Wu, 2010, p.7)

In line with this emphasis on administrative creativity, a useful analogy might be that the scenario an arts administrator faces is like solving a “word problem” in

math (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021) – having a set of requirements and expectations set forth by the creative actors and stakeholders, while juggling with capacity limits set by the organisation’s conditions, so that in the end administrators can formulate a reasoning of their own and present a solution.

What is evident in the administrative turn for an arts administrator is this tenacity and dexterity to navigate an administrative machine and the knowledge reflexivity to provide counsel throughout their stewardship and co-development process. This practice-based reality for arts administrators can be seen as contrary to the rigidity of an impersonal and almost interchangeable (thus instrumental) bureaucrat painted by a Weberian tradition.

### ***“Just Right”: Role Understanding and Situational Awareness in Multi-Stakeholder Reality***

On top of the administrative dexterity to negotiate with bureaucratic machinery, the interview data have also revealed a solid situational awareness, which characterises administrator’s self-understanding. This self-awareness was stressed as critical, so that an administrator can navigate the often-shifting goalposts within a multi-stakeholder context. In order to achieve this, a strong role understanding based on issue centrality to deliver *just right* (到位 *dào-wèi*) becomes key.

This frame of reference for just-right in literal translation from Mandarin Chinese would evoke an image of someone always arriving suavely, just in time for any occasion, knowing their role perfectly, delivering not just what is expected but doing it in such a way that is appropriate and just right – nothing more, nothing less. As a figure of speech, just right, points to an idealism and professional self-expectation of the arts administrator.

Delivering just-right is dependent upon a high degree of role awareness throughout the stewardship process. Knowing the role and its associated scope of work for the host is paramount to effectively support a project, as an informant corroborated:

The key lies in a fine balance of the boundary between the positionality of host-guest relation. Too much or too little are both tricky. It cannot be that the host is too strong and the guest too weak. It is also not ideal when the guest and the host are forced to swap places. The guest will be confused if decision makers of the host cannot be pinned for conversations in a loss of leadership. Stemming from a clear understanding of your role, front-line, firsthand administrative experience and know-how is essential to effective leadership and appropriate support to make it just right. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

In addition to an ability to articulate a clear host-guest responsibility to deliver effective role play, comprehension and issue conscientiousness comes as a priority to being just right, as an informant argued:

What is core to me is to understand the curatorial and artistic ethos and always incorporate this into your operation and remain constantly conscious of such a central theme. You can deliver perfunctory tasks with or without being conscientious. But the ability to fully grasp and incorporate the ethos – and remain conscious throughout planning and implementation – makes a substantial difference. This is perhaps even more so for the Education Department and the Marketing and Public Relations Department to carry through. This issue centrality is fundamental to identify appropriate target audiences and devise corresponding and meaningful ways of engagement. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by

author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021)

This ability to be conscientious about issue centrality throughout the stewardship process underpins the administrative role awareness, so that appropriate and fitting strategies can be devised as “just right”.

What my research has established as a throughline against the backdrop of the administrative turn in contemporary art is an ability of the arts administrators to navigate multi-stakeholder working reality, in addition to maintaining administrative conscientiousness as a basis for effective role delivery. Demanding of a strong situational awareness, this ability establishes itself as central to the development of administrative role understanding. Informants presented this situational awareness, manifested in knowing one’s role and delivering such a role in a constantly changing scenario, as an indicator for effective and appropriate administration. As one informant explained:

You need to ease into the capacity of communicating with stakeholders coming from very different perspectives. You also need to learn the exact role you should play in any given scenario, and how you can better at your function so that you can simultaneously handle seemingly diverging requests and projects at different stages of production or involving various authorities. You also need to be able to find resources within the system and between red tapes. The ability to match resources ahead of need is only possible when you have a thorough understanding of the creative process, meaning you would need the full knowledge of at what stage the artists and curators might need what and have the foresight to plan in advance. You will also need to understand what is reasonable in terms of delivery at each stage, so that the creative team can always deliver and look good. Of course, you will need to be the devil’s advocate if the

schedule is really behind and think of how you can cover the artists and ease out their stretched capacity when there is a curve ball from the left field. Your administrative support is key to the satisfaction of all parties.

These won't be possible if you don't know your role or cannot respond to what is required of your role. (Former head of public relations and digital services, interview by author, Taipei/London, 13 May 2021)

This situational awareness, characteristic of a multi-stakeholder exhibitionary system, can be seen as a feature of the administrative turn. It is informed by the administrator's role of understanding and formulating the anchor of their decision-making in the often-mercurial production cycle.

Such a multi-stakeholder reality is also not missed by the city councilor. Commenting on the dual role of a Biennial administrator and their official accountability, a city councilor stated: public sector cultural administrators occupy "a double role that simultaneously serves as a cultural practitioner and a city government official" (Taipei City Council, 2012, pp. 3343-3344). This duality illustrates an in-built stewardship responsibility for the administrators at the Taipei Biennial and how their role understanding and delivery is inseparable from a consideration of public interest.

What can be observed throughout the administrative turn is the personal qualities of tenaciousness and a high demand of experience, based on superb site knowledge (including physical, procedural and socio-cultural insights), complemented with nimbleness to navigate an increasingly multi-stakeholder working reality and the skillsets to mobilise the exhibitionary resource network within a public administration system. Dependent on knowledge reflexivity and issue conscientiousness, a strong role understanding and situational awareness to deliver "just right" sets the arts administrator apart from its technocratic and

bureaucratic counterparts.

### ***Performing and Instituting Arts Administration***

The critical developments emerged from the administrative turn in contemporary art summarised above – (1) concerning the nature of arts administration as a practice (a way of doing things), (2) the qualities of arts administrators as a cohort of actors, and (3) their professional identity expressed through (a) a strong situational awareness, (b) role understanding and (c) issue conscientiousness – have pinpointed their distinctive sphere of practice and captured the unique role they occupy in the exhibitionary system. This analysis offers a foundation to advance the study of arts administrator by seeing the support network as critical infrastructure and holding the key to catalyse institutional change.

In line with prompts by the infrastructural shift which has turned the research limelight away from “curatorial heroism” towards “programme and process shapers” (Smith, 2012) laid out in the Introduction, my research has focused on articulating how administrators demonstrate their agency through their practice and the ways in which their sphere of work has been enacted through a process-driven co-development journey – for example, seen in the stewardship framework in Chapter 2 and performed through the mentor capacity examined in Chapter 3 so far. Testament of the new light this study of arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial reveals, such an active role of the administrative capacity in shaping exhibitionary process and outcome, can be understood as wielding a transformative power for change, as I would suggest and have established in previous Chapters.

In his essay, philosopher, political scientist and initiator of the *Theatre of Negotiations*, Bruno Latour (2005) emphasised a difference between

transformative and non-transformative mediatory capacity. He argued for intermediaries as non-transformative mediums, whose output could be predicted by its input, while “[m]ediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (p.39). Latour’s apt description of mediatory property points to arts administrator’s capacity as a transformative agent. This value-adding faculty rings true as a self-expectation by arts administrator, as one informant, who was keen to highlight the catalytic function of her role, stated:

As a project officer, I would never want to be someone that simply passes on the message. It is about understanding what each party is truly saying, between the curator, artist, visual designer, spatial designers and so on. I would rely on my site knowledge and experience to make sense, before bringing a proposal forward. This starts with establishing an understanding of what they meant and envisioned, then building later communications related to visual presentation on this understanding. You can then cross-reference whether the proposals [and solutions] are just right. I see it as a triangulated process, not a linear process of relaying information. (Former TFAM exhibition coordinator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 21 May 2021)

Fundamental to fulfil value-adding potentiality throughout the mediatory process is the ability of sense-making to catalyse transformative change. Renouncing a non-transformative “translator” role, another informant illustrated an imperative to contribute to work development as the anchor of her practice:

A full grasp and an evolving understanding of the proposed project are prerequisite to any dialogue. Artists do not need a translator. There would be no ground for conversation, if arts administrator fails to shadow and

contribute to the development process of a project. (TFAM senior curator, interview by author, Taipei/London, 12 May 2021)

Here, the transformative faculty of an administrator is again informed by knowledge reciprocity (and more importantly mediated through the knowledge autonomy / subjectivity of the administrator) and serves as a foundation for co-development stewardship.

This administrative capacity as production linchpin has the power to either “make or break”, as I argued so far. Such notion echoes what museum educator Emily Pringle (2019) outlined as an intrinsically collaborative nature of museum practices, where co-working and cross-disciplinary collaboration has become the norm and knowledge generation has increasingly taken place through dialogue. This collaboration-embracing, collective knowledge-making model further points to a consequential role of the arts administrators, who through their stewardship and counsel have become an active contributor to knowledge shaping.

In addition to value-adding, the catalytic potential of administrators in the practice of “cultural mediation” are critical to navigate across expectation differences and power hierarchy, as scholar and educator of comparative literature Mary Louise Pratt (1991, p.40) argued. This mediatory role is particularly important in a multi-community context similar to a “contact zone”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Highlighting an imbalance of power in terms of representation, Pratt’s “contact zone” (1991) was proposed to juxtapose against a more utopian, homogenous, horizontal and sovereign framework, propagated by political theorist Benedict Anderson (1984). Anderson’s conceptualisation of “imagined communities” speaks of citizens of modern states, exercising collective imagination in unison to construct a sense of solidarity in the process of nation-building. In comparison to “imagined communities”, “contact zones” described a process that is dynamic and performative, where the role of a mediator (often administrators) is critical to navigate across differences and hierarchy.



where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p.34). This cacophonous social space painted by Pratt resembles the increasingly multi-stakeholder reality arts administrators face at the Taipei Biennial, where different professional cultures, constituent expectations and institutional logics are constantly at play. Administrator’s significance as cultural mediator further affirms their capacity to travel between professional cultures, stakeholder demands and intuitional logics to facilitate change in situations of power imbalance.

Administrators broker the flow of ideas and proactively contribute to the process of expanding the Biennial’s resource networks, occupying a consequential position at the crossroads of organisational knowledge and resource boundaries. As articulated in Chapter 3 so far, this transformative power of the administrators in their expansion of the museum’s innovative capacity is manifested through the role of a bridge, including their exercise of gap-filling, facilitation of (information, knowledge, skills and experience) synchronicity, relationship maintenance, and code-switching between cultural values across actors.

Therefore, as a double-edged sword, such transformative power wielded by the administrative capacity can also be used for output that might have negative effects, when it is dysfunctional. This power to change the course of development is accentuated by independent curator Manray Hsu (Wang, 2019) in an interview. Hsu stressed the pivotal role of in-house staffer, stating “how in-house curator [and administrator] interacts with the [exhibitionary] ecosystem can be seen through [the immense power vested in] their action or lack of action”.

This power for change or (unchanged) vested in an individual within a

system is also evoked by social anthropologist Athena Athanasiou (2016), when thinking about how subjects like arts administrators “who are produced by and within... instituted regimes of subjectification... [can] engage in acts and art of resistance” (p.679). On the ability to affect institutional change from within a system as potential pathway to conceptualise individual agency for field actors like the arts administrator, Athanasiou argued:

[I]t is about defending, imagining, and performing not only what already exists but also what is yet to come; what is to be reclaimed from existing civic practices and institutions and what is to be instituted anew. In this sense, performing the institution in a counter-institutional way means, first of all, resisting its closure. (p.684)

Also highlighting individual agency and associated responsibility when performing an institution, researcher of curating Simon Sheikh (2017) urged his readers to rethink the process of instituting as “an act of the imagination” (p.127) which comes with real-world impact, “as it is through institutions of society that our reality is both produced and reproduced” (p.127) and “thus in terms of the possibility for the radical imagination of difference” (Ibid).

In line with these views that spotlight individual agency as a vector for institutional change, this research have established the various ways in which arts administration, as a practice, functions as a driving force for the institution of the support network: how it operates through the logics of the nation state, the public museum and the biennial platform, while the people – the administrators and their worldview – become a vehicle that can either (re)produce the establishment or hold the key to transform their institutional practice.

This catalytic power of arts administrators on a personal level is evident in

accounts offered by informants. Testifying to the ways in which administrators and their bodies become effective vectors through which the way of doing things is passed on as an institutional legacy, one assistant curator and project manager explained:

The [administrative] knowledge and experience is hard to quantify. But it does accumulate based on the time passed. For example, our colleague at the design team, almost in any given scenario, she can immediately tell you in what year in which show we used which supplier to produce what effect and result. These almost instantaneous responses are invaluable internal resources and peer insight when producing a show or work. The reasons why she can respond in such a way rest in how the knowledge stays in her body. Experience stays with the people, not the position. For a museum or exhibition to thrive, it is the people that make it happen. No matter how big your brand is, the people is what really makes a difference. (TFAM assistant curator and project manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 31 May 2021)

Echoing this observation, my study has illustrated that as a practice-driven discipline, administrative staff – as mentors – become key bearers of institutional memory in terms of accessing know-how, precedents, inter-departmental knowledge, trans-institutional networks and other softer skill sets (such as ways to negotiate with artists, curators and suppliers). These faculties again attest to the transformative potentiality of arts administrators as change agents.

On the flip side of the same coin, as a people-dependent practice, the boundary of individual micro-experience and the macro-operation of an organisation tends to be blurred. While acknowledging an institution legacy-

shaping role of individual administrators, an informant cautioned the risk of being complacent, stating:

Senior colleagues passing on their experience and insight are great resources for new entrants. The circulation of experience and legacy comes in many forms and through various mediums. These might range from small tips of where to buy nails when you are in Venice. It is hardly possible for someone to write down all they know in a handbook or for a newbie to become a master after memorising this guideline 101. Despite organisational memory being hard to standardise (or even institutionalise), it has a real value as an accumulative knowledge base. But this can also become a double-edged sword, given all knowledge has its shelf life and might risk entering the realm of subjective interpretation. (Former TFAM publicist and VIP manager, interview by author, Taipei/London, 15 May 2021)

This knowledge and experience “shelf life” reminds the significance for the administrators to stay reflexive and adaptive in their way of doing things as an institution<sup>190</sup> in itself, since the transformative capacity vested in the administrative function as a mediatory medium to affect institutional change can be used to catalyse a radical and potentially positive re-imagination or reproduce an established and likely negative one.

### **Chapter Conclusion: Arts Administrator’s Function as Developmental**

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<sup>190</sup> Philosopher and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis (1987) argued that “institution” in its broadest sense refer to: “norms, values, language, tools, procedures and methods of dealing with things and doing things, and of course, the individual itself both in general and in particular type and form (and their differentiations: e.g. man/woman) given to it by the society considered” (p.6).

## Process

This Chapter focused on the role and profile of the administrators, with an emphasis on how the administrative function and capacity has shaped and been (re)shaped by changes in contemporary art exhibitionary system. As the engine of the support network for artistic production, I have suggested that the primary role of art administrators is to bridge the internal and external resource network by facilitating co-working interoperability among actors within, without and in-between the exhibitionary system.

To fulfill this role, this Chapter have established how actualisation and landing as two pillars of the administrative function are manifested to ensure creative projects can be realised, while knowledge mutuality within the local context can be achieved. In the first half of the Chapter, I articulated how the function of the administrator acts as an equaliser to mitigate knowledge and resource gaps within the exhibitionary system to create connectiveness. I also described the ways in which the administrative capacity utilises functional informality to expand organisational resource bandwidth and sustain in-between project synergy, by maintaining relationship with partners from internal and museum affiliated resource networks, as a key element of partnership development. The function of art administrators is enacted through enabling interoperability across worldviews of creative subgroups in the form of facilitating inter-group collaboration through code-switching facilitation.

How has the administrative capacity changed in response to shifts in artistic and curatorial practices in contemporary art? The affordance (and the potential utility) of the administrative capacity has evolved to take up the role of a pedagogical mentor as a co-developmental partner. As contemporary art becomes tech-heavy, site-responsive, social and educational, arts

administrators increasingly act as essential local informants and co-gatekeepers on behalf of artists and curators. In response to this change, the administrative team now serves as a co-producing partner which is not only critical to mediate work development with hyper-localised service and knowledge networks, but also instrumental to the stewardship of aesthetics process and outcome. Consequently, this pedagogical capacity has emerged as a dominant feature of arts administrators, where such administrative mentorship increasingly concerns inducting new entrants to reduce obstacles and acquire creative co-agency within the museum system. This increasingly consequential role of the administrative capacity as a mentor, underpins the figure of the arts administrator, as not only perceptive towards needs, but also skilled in empowering actors to gain knowledge co-agency. In the example of the Taipei Biennial, I have illustrated how this educational function of the administrators happens on both extra and intra-organisational levels, in many forms – from co-learning mechanism design, peer-to-peer workshop / coaching as direct didactic knowledge transfer, or more heuristic encouragement of self-learning and knowledge autonomy.

These ascending administrative functions reflect a profile of administrators as dexterous in navigating bureaucratic machinery with a fluency in code-switching to streamline potential gaps in expectations brought by an increasingly multi-stakeholder and multi-value production reality. In sum, the figure of the arts administrator varies from a classical imagery of an impersonal or almost rigid portrayal of a technocratic bureaucrat by way of the Weberian tradition. Arts administrators, equipped with solid role understanding, high situational awareness and strong issue conscientiousness, become institutional

shapers and change agents, as their voice, presence and identity as co-developing steward amplifies.

# Conclusion

## *Rethinking and Reframing the Arts Administrator*

At the beginning of this PhD project, I set out to answer the following question: What can the arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial reveal about the ways in which the support network for contemporary art has changed in its institution, methodology, and function? Calling for a rethink of the figure of the arts administrator, I have tried to hold space for the role of the support network, currently occupied primarily by discourses in Curatorial Studies, Art History, Museum Studies and Cultural Policy, on top of the training in practical technicality of arts management.

From a practice-centric perspective, I have provided a context-sensitive reading of arts administration as integral to an institution of exhibition making, by giving the people operating in this system a more visible and empowered (as well as nuanced) interpretation, breaking from the saviour-devil complex reflected in current literature. This effort aims to engender a critical review, as Cultural Studies theorist Tony Bennett (1998) put it more generally, which would fill in a “fuller and richer cartography of the spaces between total compliance and resistance” (p.69), to more comprehensively understand how power operates within, in my case, the institution of exhibition making.

Conscious of an existing institutional structural imbalance in the support ecosystem, I have surfaced the often marginalised voices of the frontline administrators, with a dedicated primary field research process. Unfolding under this context of rethinking, my research has foregrounded knowledge perspectives embodied through the experience, worldview and practice of the oft-time voiceless administrator.



Contributing to the knowledge legacy in and about the system of arts administration – as a means, and as an end in itself – I view my thesis as a study by an administrator for administrators. I have done so by problematising our field of practice – so that we can become better initiators, listeners and enablers. In this self-reflexive spirit, the research has been crafted to be empowering yet confessional. My thesis is a step to articulate and affirm the ways in which the support network operates, by adding to the knowledge that documents the practice belonging to the people behind-the-scenes, who mobilise the exhibitionary system and have the agency to radically re-imagine their sphere of practice.

In Chapter 1, I established the various influences which have shaped the institutional legacy of biennial administration and how these institutional principles have evolved at a government-backed, museum-based, contemporary art biennial through the case of Taipei. In Chapter 2, I examined the ways in which administrative strategies have consolidated around a public narrative of professionalism and how the framework of stewardship opens up space to re-conceptualise administrative methodology. Finally in Chapter 3, I analysed the function of arts administrators and the ways their role has evolved in relation to paradigm shifts in art-making and knowledge productions, as well as laying out how the administrative, as critical infrastructure, ascends in its influence as co-developing stewards and institutional shapers.

Below, I detail how the strands of these three chapters can be brought together, in order to present the distinctive ways in which arts administrators wield the much-under-acknowledged and under-estimated potential as change agents within the exhibition-making system.

## ***Why Look at Turning?***

To frame my research inquiry, the notion of turning – as problematic and arbitrarily abrupt as it might be – became a useful tool to highlight transition and identify change in *moda operandi* on the administrative practice continuum. To offer a critical view to conclude my thesis, I would like to go one step further by problematising this very framing and ask: what in fact is turning, when I refer to an administrative turn in contemporary art – what are its drivers and its consequences, and is this the right language to use to characterise the transitions / changes I have described and analysed?

To answer this question, it might help to first unpack the following, related questions:

- 1) What constitutes a turn?
- 2) What exactly is turning in the context of the “administrative turn”? Are contemporary art practices taking a turn towards the administrative? Or can the practice of administration in contemporary art be observed as changing in itself? Or perhaps are the two institutions – namely, the institution of administration and the institution of contemporary art through the biennial system – becoming more intertwined with one and another?

## **What Is a Turn?**

A turn<sup>191</sup> indicates a motion that alters the course of a trajectory. As cultural theorist Julia Kristeva (2000) indicated, turning could imply a revolt against the establishment or a renunciation of a course of action. The notion of turning also points to a change in attitude. This shift in perspective by the viewer (namely,

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<sup>191</sup> On the etymology and use of “turning”, see the introduction of the curatorial theorist duo Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (2010).

the positionality when making an argument) was examined by curatorial theorist and educator Irit Rogoff (2010). She proposed: “In a turn, we turn *away* from something or *towards* or *around* something and it is *we* who are in movement, rather than *it*. Something in us is activated, perhaps even actualised, as we turn” (p.42).

Such a shift in perspective, articulated by Rogoff, can be observed in the administrative turn not only in terms of the ways in which the community of practitioners within the exhibitionary system view the support network, but also in how the support system increasingly views and values itself. This dual-track change in attitude from the community of practitioners and within the administrative body, in turn, enables a clearer articulation of the rationale, strategy and function of the administrator on its own behalf.

The expediency of turning as a trope has its benefits, while its limitations are also worth noting. On the one hand, as a figure of speech, it is useful to reveal change and highlight watershed moments or paradigm shifts. On the other hand, it might risk sacrificing nuance when articulating how system, method, and function remain in a continuum, thereby formulating a dynamic process of the practice’s ongoing becoming.

Conscious of this potential bias in an emphasis on change and the possibility of forgoing the significance of continuity, this frame of reference which predicates on change is a deliberate choice of this research to highlight the contribution of arts administrators, who have mostly remained anonymous, their value brushed over and under-investigated in contemporary art scholarship, yet with an ascending influence so palpable and consequential. Only, as I would suggest, by accentuating how their role has evolved through the differences this cohort of field actors have made within the exhibitionary

system can the significance of the behind-the-scenes be properly documented, understood, and self-improved.

### **What Exactly is Turning?**

Titled *The Administrative Turn in Contemporary Art: The Figure of the Arts Administrator – a case study of the Taipei Biennial (1996-2020)*, this dissertation reflects my interest in how arts administration as the support system has evolved in the contemporary art's exhibitionary context. Arts administrator, as a linchpin of the support network, is the focus of my investigation. The biennial system, as a dominant exhibitionary genre which has shaped the development of contemporary art, becomes the backdrop and ideal vehicle to highlight changes in art-making and knowledge production.

Using the Taipei Biennial as an example, I have established how the system, methodology and scope of administrative practice have evolved over time. As it relates to the idea of the administrative turn, below is a summary of what has been covered in previous chapters.

### **Turns in System of Arts Administration**

In Chapter 1, I gave a close analysis of the epistemes through which the system of arts administration had instituted itself into an established practice at the Taipei Biennial. This approach identified changes in the purpose of culture as a target of public administration, in parallel to how biennial administration, museum management, and cultural administration as a profession had established itself within the context of the Biennial. The Chapter then asked: What does this process of professional self-instituting and institution formation reveal about changes in the system of administration at the Taipei Biennial as a nation building process?

To examine the ideological pillars that underpin this becoming process, I

conducted a close contextual analysis to identify the institutional principles underlying the system of administration at the Biennial. These driving forces was categorised into three sets of institutional logics: the logic of the nation state, the logic of the public museum, and the logic of the biennial platform.

By tracing the milestones which pinpointed shifts in social ontological tenets, I suggested that the logic of the state, seen through the lens of cultural governance, loosely echoes the route of professionalisation in cultural administration in Taiwan. The epistemology underpinning the logic of the state travelled through three periods: firstly, cultural citizenship as a form of political participation to democratise the post-martial law country; secondly, the utilitarian rationale of Cultural and Creative Industries instrumentalising culture as a vehicle for cultural tourism and urban regeneration; and finally, a turn towards inclusive and equitable growth under the knowledge banner of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), valorising culture as a driver of social change beyond its economic value.

The institutional logic of public museums, seen through the lens of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, had shifted from a tool of nation-building and projection of cultural might, towards an ongoing developmental process of becoming a professional arts museum. This change in governing principles at TFAM saw a push towards approachability as an opening up towards diversified community needs, followed by a decentralisation of knowledge authority away from single authorial viewpoint. The change was reflected in a knowledge conception from unipolar and objective, towards multipolar and subjective, thus aiding an emerging pedagogical objective which has moved from instructional, towards an enablement of self-learning autonomy.

Biennials, functioning as a prominent vehicle of the exhibitionary system as

introduced in the late 1990s, has accelerated the internationalisation of arts administration practices in Taiwan. The logic of the biennial as a constantly self-inventing platform has witnessed various relationships with its wider contemporary art ecosystem. It has served as a vehicle of nation building or, at times, as a stage for cultural resistance against neoliberal governmentality, or as an arena to reckon with the symbiotic interdependency among an increasingly multi-stakeholder exhibitionary ecosystem. It has transitioned from a hegemonic role in modern and contemporary art through performative globality, towards an inclination to become an ecosystem builder which positions knowledge reciprocity and institutional knowledge autonomy at the centre of its consideration, by employing performative transdisciplinarity through civic engagement to legitimise the Biennial's social embeddedness and institutional publicness.

I concluded, in Chapter 1, that the logics of the nation state, public museums, and the biennial platform as three contesting authorial voices have shaped the institutional principles of arts administration at the Taipei Biennial. The trilateral dynamic between the three sets of logics saw the wane of the state function to author cultural narratives. This authorial function was subsequently tasked to the Biennial, to write the history of the new Taiwan art. With a growth in neoliberal governmentality co-opting public museum systems, the Biennial became a stage for resistance to counter state intervention. After the regression of the state's intention to compete for authorial function, TFAM as a public arts museum can be seen as mature enough to play a mediatory role between the state and the biennial platform.

The figure of the arts administrator is reflected through prisms constituted by the logics of these three institutional pillars that underpin the system of

administration at the Biennial. Through the lens of the logic of the nation state, arts administrators over time have evolved into figures that are accountability-minded, impact-facing, and inclusive in decision-making. Reflected through the logics of the public museum, administrator's profile have transitioned into a reflexive ecosystem player who is servant and audience-centric. Developed in parallel, by means of the logic of the biennial platform, administrators have become skilled in international manoeuvring, sensitised to infrastructural publicness and knowledge equity, and increasingly well-rehearsed in the design and activation of participation platforms for local knowledge actors to realise knowledge reciprocity.

As to what is turning, Chapter 1 outlined the self-becoming journey of institution development, seen through the professionalisation process of the arts administration system in Taiwan. This development reflected an exercise of nation building, first through performative globality, then with a turn towards knowledge mutuality. In other words, on the one hand, the ways the system of cultural management, museum administration and biennial organisation have evolved, have been shaped by how the society imagines its own national identity and democratic characteristics. On the other hand, the system formation and evolution of arts administration as an institution have also become an active contributing force to author new national narratives – be it performative globality or knowledge inclusivity – befitting a contemporary Taiwanese identity.

### **Turns in Methodology of the Administrative**

In Chapter 2, I looked at how the narrative of professionalism had emerged as an outward administrative strategy which have enhanced administrative legitimacy and functioned as a resistance to negotiate with diverging stakeholder expectations. For the second half of Chapter 2, a theoretical

framework that I called the stewardship model was proposed to articulate the administrative approach at the Biennial. This emerging stewardship framework has complemented the public discourse of professionalism to strengthen administrative legitimacy in decision-making as a management methodology. Administrative stewardship as the foundation of administrative strategies at the Taipei Biennial, is composed of the metaphor of a house. Its associated imagery of domesticity points to a separation of institutional roles and responsibilities between the internal and external actors. Featuring a symbiosis of control and care, the notion of stewardship informs a responsibility to the house through a capacity of management and control, and at the same time, a duty of care to stakeholders placed under the office's stewardship.

As detailed in Chapter 2, this symbiosis of control and care sees, on the one hand, the control mechanism exhibiting a boundary-setting authority, which stems from the power delegated by the house in a hope to steer the stakeholder engagement process into an alignment with the house principles. On the other hand, stewardship's care mechanism asks for an administrative attentiveness to stakeholder expectations, which requires administrators of their emotional investment to attend to needs and demands, so that trust and perceived openness can be cultivated as a basis of administrative credibility.

This two-pronged model of stewardship is a dynamic process, manifested in an iterative journey of boundary-setting and care-taking. Following the domestic metaphor of food preparation referenced extensively by interviewees, the process of administrative stewardship is marked by constant uncertainties like in cooking and calls for management responsiveness which resembles the kitchen scenario. Throughout the stewardship process, administrators not only require the rigour to respond to externality (stakeholder expectations and



demands) by striking a balance between control and care, but also feature a constant (re)calibration in approach based on real-time stakeholder reactions.

In terms of what is turning, Chapter 2 illustrated how the administrative strategy has become more articulated through the public discourse of professionalism. This maturing discourse of administrative professionalism has acted as an effective resistance against non-art / outside intervention and a tool to negotiate with diverging stakeholder expectations. Developed in parallel to the consolidation of professionalism as a dominant narrative, the framework of stewardship, emerging as a methodology rooted in practice, have cultivated a dual approach of control and care to traverse stakeholder demands, while maintaining alignment with the house principles.

In short, I established in Chapter 2 that the development of professionalism as a public discourse demonstrated an administrative profile that has been responsive and strategic in navigating the Biennial's multi-stakeholder landscape. The figure of arts administrators through the stewardship journey can be seen as fluent in exercising the dual mechanism of boundary-setting and care-taking. The control aspect of stewardship relies on an administrative consultative capacity to steer and tone-set, whereas the care mechanism of the stewardship process reflects a quality of the administrators as duty-bound and service-oriented, in the hope of nurturing trust and perceived openness through their investment of emotional labour.

### **Turns in Function and Role of the Administrator**

Chapter 3 examined how the affordance (and the potential utility) of the administrative capacity has evolved in response to changes in art-making and knowledge production, and how the administrative role has ascended in influence as a co-producing and co-development mentor.

I first set out in Chapter 3 how the core function of the administrators lies in bridging resources within, without and in between the exhibitionary system. This bridging function has been achieved through actualising artistic ambition and landing creative projects in a meaningful manner into the Biennial context, to achieve knowledge reciprocity. Through partnership development, this bridging capacity serves a code-switching function between subgroups among the creative communities, so that members entering the exhibitionary system can co-work without barriers.

Administrative bridging capacity is solution-oriented, where administrators identify and pair production needs with corresponding solutions within timescale and budget range – from technical, procedural to tasks which are related to department functions. I examined in Chapter 3 how the administrative role often manifests through the malfunction of its capacity – for instance, only when there is discord or when things go haywire can it show the administrative function in facilitating synchronicity. From this function-through-dysfunctionality proposition, the role of arts administrators is performed and realised through an ongoing developmental process of partnership building and code-switching enablement.

I also argued in Chapter 3 that as contemporary art has become increasingly social, site-specific, technological, transdisciplinary and reliant on expertise outside of traditional resource network of the exhibitionary system, the administrative function now requires knowledge over sourcing and matchmaking resources, expertise and talents beyond a classical realm of the museum production universe.

Based on these changes in art-making and knowledge production norms, a pedagogical function and consultative capacity of arts administrators is becoming more pronounced, following the educational turn in curatorial and

creative practices. With this transition towards the educational, the curatorial is now extra-exhibitionary, in going beyond tasks of display and production, with outcome increasingly manifest itself in the processual. As a result, the capacity of arts administrators has also ascended as a pivotal linchpin to activate the extra-exhibitionary components. In the second part of Chapter 3, I outlined how this capacity has been enacted through the preparation of co-production partners, setting out (physical, discursive and social) space for engagement, preparing audiences and readying the support infrastructure.

With this change, the mentor capacity of the administrator as co-developer has been increasingly instrumental, as projects are becoming dialectical and heuristic in form and often homing in on a methodology which focuses on co-production of issue awareness with participants. Among the educational roles of the administrative capacity, a peer-to-peer coaching feature, underpinning those previously deemed derivative departments such as the communications team, have been elevated as they become increasingly specialised, with a consolidated knowledge autonomy alongside a decentralised educational and curatorial capacity.

In the final part of Chapter 3, I brought together discussions across this PhD research and identified how arts administration as a way of doing things set its practitioners apart from bureaucratic technocrats through their strong situational awareness, role understanding and issue conscientiousness. As transformative cultural mediators, arts administrators have become institutional shapers and change agents through their ascending influence as co-producing stewards.

So, what is turning for the role of arts administrators? Administrators as co-producing, co-development mentors have increasingly contributed to direct and

indirect transfer of knowledge and skills. This capacity is evident in stewarding aesthetic process and outcomes to stay true to creative vision and ensure public value can be delivered. Such pedagogical role also involves administrative counselling which aims at facilitating foreknowledge and context awareness (including the Biennial's institutional norms, value systems, and project context) to enable creative autonomy and knowledge co-agency for new entrants.

### ***The Administrative Turn in Contemporary Art***

My PhD research, through practice-led thinking, literature review, archival analysis, interviews and theorisation, has proposed a new way to conceptualise the support network of contemporary art, by tracing changes in the system of arts administration, the administrative strategy, and the profile of the figure of the administrator. The administrator's role, as a result, has become increasingly distinct, with an enhanced consultative feature, as a response to changes in contemporary art practices and a growing recognition of their professional identity. Administrators as change agents, have the ability to travel between micro / individual experience and the macro-operation of the institution.

To sum up the overall changes discussed in my PhD in terms of turning, through the case of Taipei, the support network has been shown to change shape in terms of its administrative system, method, and function. At the same time, contemporary art-making and knowledge production practices have turned towards being processual and arguably more closely interlinked<sup>192</sup> with the

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<sup>192</sup> Despite these shifts that turn to acknowledge the interconnectivity between the curatorial capacity and the administrative function, a dominant discourse has still persisted in seeking a separation between that of the curatorial from the administrative. Curatorial theorist duo Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (2010) vehemently made the distinction between the curatorial

administrative capacity. This shift in contemporary art practices have consequently witnessed a change in administrative function, where the production process has become more intertwined with the ways the support network operates and the administrative capacity more ingrained in a co-development process of art and knowledge production. Such two-pronged changes with the self-evolution of the arts administrative capacity within the support network on the one hand, and the shifts in art-making and knowledge production on the other, have ultimately resulted in the administrative function coming to occupy an increasingly recognised role as consultative stewards.

So, what have arts administrator at the Taipei Biennial revealed about how the support network for contemporary art has changed in its institution, methodology and function? The administrative turn ultimately unveils paradigm shifts which see a strengthening of an administrative voice manifested through the practitioners' ability to articulate their sphere of practice, including their positionality by means of the discourse of professionalism, and its approach through the stewardship framework as well as an emerging function in providing co-development mentorship.

What has been the driver of this administrative turn and what are its consequences? As I concluded in this final Chapter, contemporary art-making and knowledge production practices have turned towards being processual and arguably more closely intertwined with the administrative capacity. Such a

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(discursive and processual) and the administrative (the instrumental and procedural), stating "curating may not be reduced merely to the administrative, the managerial, the exhibitionary, the spectacular or the thematic co-ordination of disparate or convergent works. Curating, in this sense, is 'processual' rather than 'procedural' or instrumental." (p.19) This propensity pointed to an emphasis on the discursive function (and an authorial authority) as curatorial practitioners continued to specialise and differentiate its capacity from the logistical arm of the exhibitionary system.

change ultimately enables the administrative function with a heightened co-developing role as co-production stewards. The administrative turn, consequently, has been brought about by a reckoning with the value of the administrative as the result of a transition away from curatorial heroism towards the infrastructural significance of the backstage as a collective movement within the contemporary art community. Simultaneously, a much-enhanced administrative sensibility is made possible by a consolidated role awareness and knowledge subjectivity within the practice of arts management, which in turn further secured an increasingly pivotal consultative function for the administrative capacity.

Through the lens of an administrative turn in contemporary art, my research has re-casted the administrative as critical infrastructure of the exhibitionary system and affirmed, ultimately, the figure of the arts administrator as reflexive and consultative (rather than what classically perceived as either impresario or bureaucratic technocrats). As a practice-centric tradecraft characterised by a way of doing things, its capacity and function non-interchangeable yet people- and experience-dependent. While administrative drudgery which comes with the system of public accountability is a reality, arts administration at the Taipei Biennial as an institution, is both a reflection and an active author of Taiwanese nation identity. In sum, the transformative power of the administrative capacity as change agent, holds the key to radically re-imagine the ways the support network institutes, mobilises, and functions.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questionnaires**

Below is a list of questions provided as an outline prior to the semi-structured interview sessions. Based on the flow of the discussion, additional questions were asked as follow-ups to identify change in administrative practices.

### ***On the Profile and Voice of the Administrator***



- Please introduce yourself. How long have you been in your role? How has the role evolved?
- What is your role and involvement in the Taipei Biennial? What do you care for and about?
- Who are the people you interact with as an administrator – both internally and externally?
- What relationship is important to do your work well as a biennial administrator? How have these changed?
- What are the core abilities as a biennial administrator to excel at your job? Have these changed, in your view?
- What are the additional capacities that you'd like to gain to help do your job better?

### ***On Administrative Strategy***

- In your view, what are the main trends in contemporary art-making that change the way Taipei Biennial is organised?
- How have you and other administrators responded to these changes?
- How have these changes in contemporary affect the ways you carry out your job?
- What challenges and opportunities have this pose?
- Please share a positive approach from your experience – that was effective in addressing the change.
- In your opinion, any such an attempt that didn't work out so well? Why not? What were the reasons? If you could change on thing in the process, what will you do?
- Please provide an example of a recent incident where opinion differed – how was that resolved? Whose voice was involved? If these voices differ

from yours, how did you deal with these differences?

- What was your role in facilitating the process?
- What would be your demand / suggestions to the museum so that you can be more effective in your role?

***On the Logic of Administration***

- In your opinion, who are the Taipei Biennial for? Have the stakeholders changed over the course of 20 years and how?
- How is success defined at the Taipei Biennial?
- How do you define success? How does the museum define its success? How do other stakeholders define success?
- In your view, what is the role of the Taipei Biennial for the wider contemporary art ecosystem? How has this evolved? What is the function of art administrator in mediating such a role?