

# An Exploration of National Metal Crafts Competition from the Development of Metalsmith in Taiwan

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## Abstract

To promote the beauty of metal crafts and provide a platform designated for metalsmith, the Gold Museum has been hosting the biannual National Metal Crafts Competition in New Taipei City since 2007, which has embraced its 4th rounds of competition in 2013 and has generated fruitful results. Over the past eight years, the Gold Museum has consistently adjusted the theme and direction of the competition each time with reference to its accumulated experience and the trend of metalsmith, invited judges from overseas in the name of the competition, included exhibitions of international artworks, and promoted exceptional Taiwanese artworks in the global platform through this opportunity.

As there is no award designated to the metalsmith in either domestic or foreign metal crafts completions, the metal crafts competition organized by the Gold Museum serves as an important index and plays a pioneering role for the development of metalsmith in Taiwan. Therefore, this article attempts to have a glimpse and retrieve the development of metalsmith in Taiwan from each metal crafts competition over the years, and compare with rules and award-winning artworks that in international crafts competitions in other countries, in a hope to bring forth suggestions for advancing the metal crafts competition to an international level in the future.

Keywords: metal craft, metalsmith, metal crafts competition

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of art of metalsmithing is vigorous, and it is demonstrated in school education. More and more departments have courses related to metalsmithing. The Gold Museum of New Taipei City Government is devoted to the promotion of metal crafts in order to extend and renew mining image in Jinguashih area.

This study first explores the definition metal crafts, generally reorganizes development of metal crafts in Taiwan, and collects the system and limitation of foreign and domestic crafts competitions to compare them with national metal crafts competition held by the Gold Museum. The limitations show the definitions of different museums on crafts or metal crafts. However, in modern time, the most significant characteristic of art is diversity. Scope of art becomes ambiguous and there are no fixed patterns and range. For the concern of fairness, the competitions should define the subjects as the base of the rule. In metal crafts competition, it is important to define metal crafts or art of metalsmithing and it will influence the submission of works, judges' rating and the result of awarded works. National metal crafts competition in New Taipei City is the only competition of metal crafts in Taiwan and it is the grand event in metalsmithing of Taiwan. The result of the competition will relatively influence the development of art of metalsmithing. Hence, this study reorganizes the definitions of metal crafts and art of metalsmithing in literatures, probes into development of metal crafts in Taiwan from different dimensions of society, and compares different competitions as reference for future metalsmithing competition.

## 2. "Metal crafts" and "art of metalsmithing"

Yen Shui-long, the father of crafts (1952), suggested that "crafts" in narrow sense means "technical performance to fabricate objects for decoration". "Crafts", in broad sense, means "various living objects based on "aesthetical skills". Based on previous definitions, Yen suggested that crafts means to manufacture objects with "purpose of use" and in the fabrication, "aesthetics" should be included. It is not the objects manufactured by industrialization or mass production. Hence, we treat metal as the material and manufacture the objects with purpose of use by various techniques and design. It is called "metal crafts". Chen (2005) reorganized literatures on "metal crafts" and "art of metalsmithing" by creation, history, technique or design from 1985 and demonstrated the definitions on "metal crafts" and "art of metalsmithing". Traditionally speaking, "metal crafts" meant manufacturing method or technique of metal. In recent years, it refers to aesthetics and modeling and is different from traditional metal crafts. It is called "art of metalsmithing".

In tradition, metal crafts mean manufacturing and design with "propose of use". "Modeling" of "objects" is significantly associated with "functions". However, in contemporary art, objects are usually unrelated to their original image. For instance, fountain of Duchamp is the deconstruction of form and meaning of object. Likewise, in development of art of metalsmithing, image of object manufacturing not only refers to usage of object, but also indicate the "concept" expressed by metalsmithing creators. It is the carrier of creators' thoughts, and is slightly related to the original function of object. We

cannot comprehend them by the form or function of objects in daily lives as they are very different from traditional use or comprehension of craftwork. (Li, 2006)

With the change from practicability to form of objects, the literatures show the common points between metal crafts and art of metalsmithing, 1) metals are main materials; 2) they follow the technique of traditional metal crafts and objects are fabricated by hands; 3) they are decorations for bodies or environment<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Development of metal crafts in Taiwan

About 8000 years ago, human beings have started using metals. In our food, clothing, housing and transportation of daily lives, metal goods are everywhere (Liu et al., 2006). In human civilization and history, use of metals is one of the important criteria. With the appearance of copper wares and bronze wares, output of agriculture and handmade industry increased. Resources became rich and living level was enhanced. It was thus different from the Stone Age. Subsequently, in the Iron Age, since iron is harder than copper and the melting point is high, it means human beings could produce iron by complicated metal manufacturing technique. Besides, iron mine has high content. In comparison to bronze, iron is cheaper and the scope of use is broader. Hence, the demand and prevalence soon were more than copper wares and bronze wares.

In comparison to metal output of other countries, with the concern of economic effectiveness, metals in Taiwan mostly rely on import. In early times, metal crafts referred to production of daily articles. In the Japanese Colonial Period, although output of gold mine

in Jinguashih was regarded as number one in Asia, at the time, Japan strictly controlled industrial development in Taiwan. Afterwards, with industrial expansion, metal crafts did not result in villages of crafts with local features, as other kinds of crafts, such as ceramic art, glass or woodcarving. (Tseng, 2012)

Before 1950s, Taiwan mainly developed agriculture since labor cost was low. The government realized that it was easier to obtain and develop techniques of labor-intensive light industry. The cost was low and it was fast to acquire the profits. Therefore, it actively provided guidance of export of craftworks of Taiwan. From 1970s to 1980s, it was the period of prosperity of exported crafts industry in Taiwan. Export trade of craft goods were 167.5 billion NTD. Items, numbers and trade volumes of products considerably grew year by year, such as bamboo container, furniture, glass, manufacturing of semi-precious stone, etc. As to metal crafts, copper flower vase, candlestick and lead & tin ornaments became the main exports of metal crafts in Taiwan. At the time, Taiwan was well-known as country of Cloisonne in the world. However, after industrialization, because of revaluation of NTD, rapidly increasing labor cost and other environmental and economic factors, export of craft goods slowed down. Industry of crafts gradually declined. (Tsai, 2001; Tseng, 2012)

In 1979, Taiwan started the implementation of cultural construction and tried to restore declined traditional crafts by cultural policy. The promotion of craft industry became part of cultural policy. Hence, traditional craft industry was supported or the trend was indirectly guided by cultural activities. Until present, the development of crafts is still vigorous. In 1987, in order

to fully demonstrate the functions of cultural centers in different counties and cities, Ministry of Culture (Currently the Ministry of Culture) invited scholars and experts to set the subjects according to history, traditional crafts and industrial development of different places. Local featured relics were exhibited under the authorization of cultural centers in the cities and counties. Most of these museums were planned by crafts as local features, as shown in the table 1.

According to the table below, in 1980s, no museums of local features set by counties and cities were directly related to metal crafts. It shows that when traditional crafts were promoted by policies, in comparison to other industries, metal craft was more insignificant.

After 1985, many talents learning art of metalsmithing in foreign countries returned to Taiwan and taught in the courses related to metal crafts techniques or art of metalsmithing in art related departments in universities and colleges in Taiwan. Art of metalsmithing

of Taiwan thus moved to the new milestone (Chen, 2005). Traditional metal crafts were based on apprenticeship and the techniques and styles were passed by reproduction and imitation. It lacked personal styles. By the courses related to metal crafts in educational system, more people can learn the techniques of metal crafts. In manufacturing, they have personal aesthetics instead of simply reproducing and imitating the masters' skills. More importantly, talents of art of metalsmithing can be systematically cultivated by school education (Chen, 2005; Tseng, 2012). Universities and colleges have related courses and hence, traditional metal crafts techniques can be broadly introduced. In school education, creators are not limited to style, conventional techniques and objects manufactured of masters as traditional apprenticeship. They can freely apply the techniques, have personal aesthetics or even try to include other materials in metals. Objects become the expression of creators' thoughts or emotion.

Regarding development of metal crafts in Taiwan, there are four main factors: economy, policy, culture and

【Table 1】 Local featured crafts developed by cultural centers in different counties and cities

Counties and cities	Names	Subjects
Taipei County Cultural Center	New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum	Ceramics crafts
Hsinchu City Cultural Center	Glass Museum	Glass crafts
Taoyuan County Cultural Center	Chinese Furniture Museum	Traditional wood furniture
Miaoli County Cultural Center	Sanyi Wood Sculpture Museum	Woodcarving crafts
Taichung County Cultural Center	Weave Craft Museum	Weaving crafts
Yunlin County Cultural Center	Taiwan Temple & Shrine Art Museum	Temple art
Nantou County Cultural Center	The Museum of Bamboo Art	Bamboo crafts
Chiayi city Cultural Center	Koji Potter Exhibition Room	Ceramics crafts
Tainan city Cultural Center	Taiwan Traditional Folk Crafts Museum	Folk traditional crafts
Pingtung County Cultural Center	Taiwan Paiwan Carving Gallery	Paiwan carving crafts
Taitung County Cultural Center	Aboriginal Relics Museum	Aboriginal relics

(Source: Tsai, 2001: pp.61)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Tsai (2001) reorganized characteristics of subjects, names of museums, foundation time and planners of cultural centers in counties and cities in the table. This study only adopts the museums related to crafts and uses the names at the time instead of official names of nowadays.

<sup>1</sup> They might not be the decorations with original functions

education, which are related to and influence each other (Chen, 2005). Taiwan lacks metal resources and it relies on import. Besides, in modern life, metal objects are produced by mass production of industrial machines. It hinders the development of metal crafts in Taiwan. As to cultural and educational implementation, since 1957, universities and colleges have had courses related to ceramic art, which were earlier than school education of metal crafts by nearly 30 years. As to culture, from 1966, in order to enhance international exchange, National Museum of History introduced works of ceramic art in Taiwan to the world. Thus, many local cultural institutions held activities of ceramic art (Tsai, 2001).

In early times, development and promotion of crafts such as pottery, wood and bamboo in Taiwan was popular. Due to the limitation of different factors, although metal goods were indispensable, in comparison to other kinds of crafts, metal crafts were not strongly associated with daily lives. There were the products of mass production by mechanization (Lu, 2011). Based on the above, from-top-to-bottom implementation of policies will be thoroughly influential. The Gold Museum of New Taipei City Government is a governmental institution and the metal crafts competition held will influence art of metalsmithing in Taiwan.

#### 4. Importance of metal crafts competitions

Regarding the promotion of any kinds of art or culture, besides the accumulation of historic background, government plays critical role in the culture which is developing. According to development of metal crafts in Taiwan in the previous section, by competitions, exhibitions and media communication, development of art of metalsmithing was relatively constructed in the

period when Taiwan paid attention to crafts (Chen, 2005). Official competitions can demonstrate their importance the most for a country or government. The rules of the competitions also show the official definitions on the topics of the competitions. Results of competitions indicate contemporary development. According to rules of domestic and foreign competitions, from central to local governments, they hold many competitions on “crafts” in a year (Shen, 2002). Local art exhibitions in counties and cities of Taiwan are numerous. However, crafts are always marginalized. There are some competitions which aim to promote local features and traditional crafts, such as Gold Ceramic Awards in Yingge and woodcarving of Sanyi (Tsai, 2001). However, art of metalsmithing is still the minority and is merely one of the items in certain large-scale competitions. Except for the Gold Museum, there are no institutions holding the competitions of art of metalsmithing. In the following, the researcher tries to compare different definitions on metal crafts by the rules in foreign and domestic competitions.

Since there are few competitions of metal crafts, the researcher selects general crafts competitions or those related to metal crafts to compare different rules and their definitions on metal crafts.

In international competitions, this study first introduces “World Skills Competition” which is occupational competition held by WorldSkills in every two years. It has been the 42th round at present. It is based on membership of countries or regions. The participants should be under 22 years old. It is held in Leipzig of Germany in 2013. In every year, the competition includes more than 40 items of skills. The main purpose is technical exchange.

Kanazawa City is the area in Japan with the most developed traditional crafts. In order to pass and promote traditional crafts, “World Crafts Competition of Kanazawa”<sup>3</sup> is held. It is an international general crafts competition. The nationalities and materials of creations are not limited. However, there are different topics every year. For instance, in this year (2013), it is the 90th anniversary of Crafts Association of Kanazawa City and “time of tea” is the topic of competition which regulates the size of the works that should be unpublished. Creators can be individuals or groups. Registration fees are received by works as units<sup>4</sup>. Awarded works can be sold in the exhibition.

Concours Ateliers d’ Art de France<sup>5</sup> is a general crafts competition and thus the materials of works are not limited. However, the works must be created in France. Thus, the awarded works are not categorized by materials. The winners are selected in each area. The participants can be one to two people. The works can be published or unpublished. Besides, there are the competitions particularly for young craftsmen who should be less than 35 years. The works should be unpublished. Creators are 1 to 2 people.

Besides the previous international general crafts competitions, the ones which are associated with metal crafts regulate the materials or forms of creation. For instance, “Silver Triennial International Competition”<sup>6</sup> of Germany is held by Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst since 1965 in every three years. The material is limited to silver. There are competitions for young creators<sup>7</sup> and registration fees<sup>8</sup> are charged. Besides, International NAWCC Craft Competition<sup>9</sup> of U.S. regulates watches and clocks as the topics.

As to competitions in Taiwan, in order to improve

craft development, since 1993, National Taiwan Craft Research and Development Institute has held “Taiwan Crafts Design Competition” to preserve sophisticated craft techniques, discover excellent young generations and include beauty of crafts in lives to enhance life quality (Shen, 2002). The competition is divided into groups of “traditional crafts” and “innovative design”. The competition does not limit materials of creations and ages. Creators can be individuals or groups. Group of traditional crafts is not based on specific subjects. However, group of innovative design should follow the subjects regulated by competition of the year. They present the topics by forms of works and craft techniques. For instance, in 2013, “artistic waiting space” is the topic.

In 2002, the government started the promotion of cultural and creative industry. The Gold Museum was founded to preserve unique human landscape, mining ruins and history in Jinguashih. It is operated as Ecomuseum to preserve mining culture, extend mining image, enhance mining imagery and promote cultural and creative industry. Hence, in 2007, it held “National Metal Craft Competition”. The first round was divided into groups of “jewelries” and “objects”; in 2009, in order to combine metal crafts with image of the museum, it was divided into groups of “creation” and “nine images of Suijinjiu”; in 2011, the division was the same as the last year. However, since judges suggested that they realized the infinity of metalsmithing development in Taiwan in the first two rounds, they set “infinity” as the topic. In 2013, the division returns to “jewelries” and “objects”. The works should be based on nine images of Suijinjiu. National Metal Craft Competitions held by the Gold Museum, limit the materials as metals, supported by mixed media. Ages are not regulated and creators should be individuals.

<sup>3</sup> General regulations of the competition

<sup>4</sup> Registration fee of each piece is 5,000 Yen

<sup>5</sup> Official webpage of Concours Ateliers d’ Art de France

<sup>6</sup> Official webpage of Silver Triennial International Competition of Germany

<sup>7</sup> In 2013, young creators are regulated as those who were born after 1978

<sup>8</sup> 45 Euros should be paid to participate in main competition; 25 Euros should be paid for participating in the sector of young artists

<sup>9</sup> Official webpage of International NAWCC Craft Competition of U.S.

The major competitions around the world are summarized as follows:

【 Table 2 】 Comparison of the competitions held by different countries

Competition Name Item	World Skills Competition	World Crafts Competition of Kanazawa	Concours Ateliers d' Art de France	Silver Triennial International Competition	International NAWCC Craft Competition	Taiwan Crafts Design Competition	National Metal Crafts Competition in New Taipei City
Country	Each country holds the competition by turns.	Japan	France	Germany	The U.S.	Taiwan	Taiwan
Categorization	By skills.	--	--	--	--	"Traditional craftsmanship" vs. "innovative design"	"Jewelry" vs. "utensils"
Timetable	Biennial	Once a year	Once a year	Triennial	Once a year	Biennial	Biennial
Theme	--	Yes	--	--	Watch and clock	Different themes are required for "innovative design".	--
Material	--	--	--	Silver	--	--	Metal is the main material, with complex materials being minor materials.
Team or individual	Individual	Individual or team	1~2 persons	--	--	Individual	Individual
Entry fee	--	Depends on the amount of submitted artwork	--	Yes	--	--	--
Other	1. Membership 2. Age limit of under 22.	--	Another Competition for artists aged below 35.	--	--	--	--

Note: "--" means lacking information or having no such regulations.

## 5. Conclusion

Definition on contemporary art cannot rely on forms, materials and techniques, as traditional art, such as watercolor painting, oil painting and sculpture. Many contemporary artists try to express personal emotion in one piece by various materials or techniques. Applied art is the same. Therefore, in the previous craft competitions, groups are not divided by materials. Because of time, contemporary art of metalsmithing in Taiwan follows art of metalsmithing and contemporary art in Europe and

America. Currently, in Taiwan, most of metalsmithing works are abstract, in terms of patterns or modeling, to express personal beliefs. The works are the carriers of creators' thoughts (Li, 2011). Hsu (2002) suggested that development of art of metalsmithing cannot be simply divided into "practicability" or "decoration"; otherwise, art of metalsmithing will be limited. However, according to investigation of Shen (2002), the participants expected proper classification in craft competitions.

Art of metalsmithing is part of applied art and it is one of the rare contemporary artistic creations which are produced by hands to extend traditional craft techniques (Li, 2011). The Gold Museum holds the National Metal Craft Competition and provides the platform for performance of art of metalsmithing. In the rule, in order to match the trend of contemporary art, the material is regulated as metals. However, mixed media can be added as the support. The competition of the next year will be international. Hence, art of metalsmithing of Taiwan will be more competitive and catch up with the world.

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#### Webpages

General regulations of World Crafts Competition of Kanazawa in Japan

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