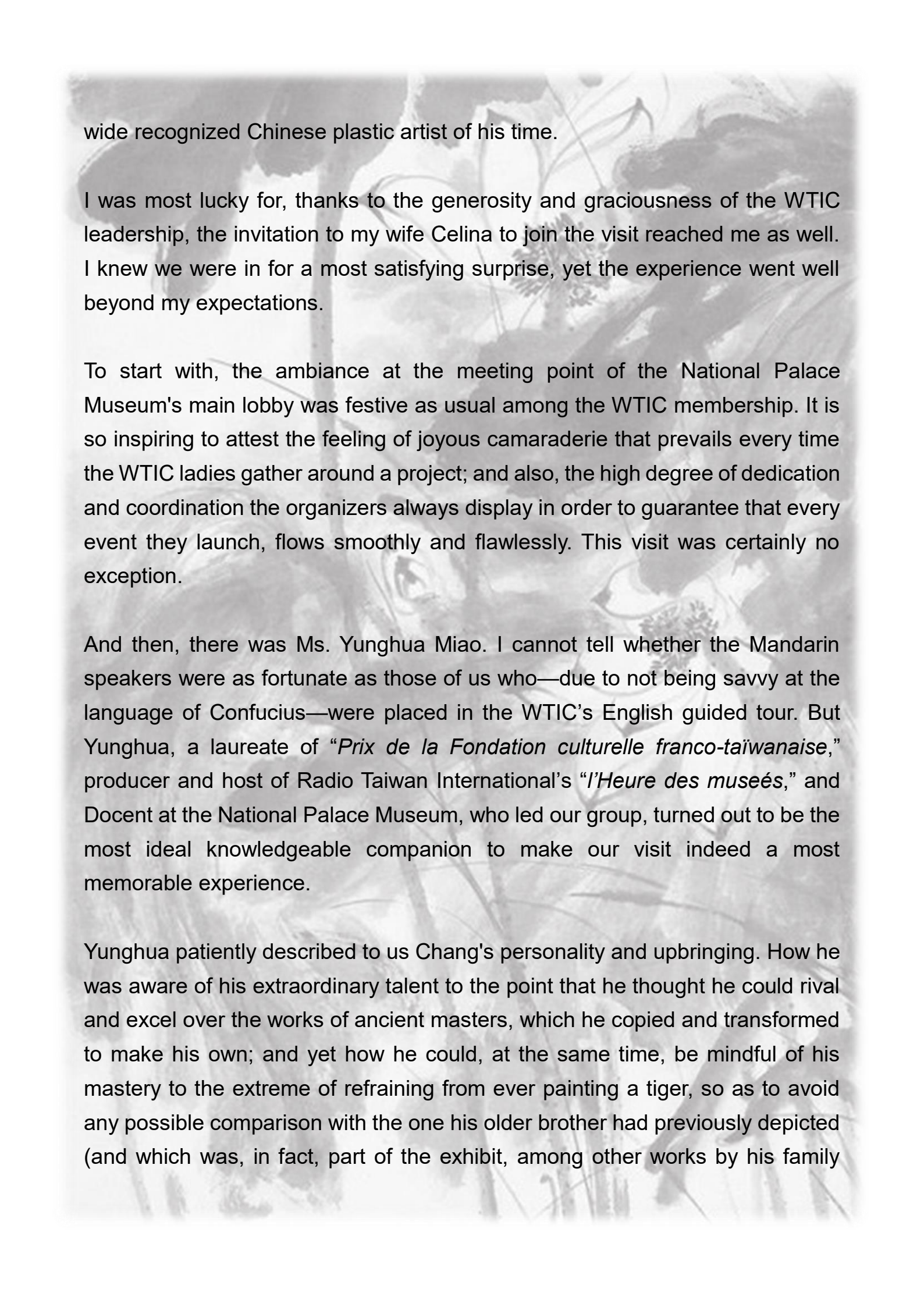


IMPRESSIONS FROM A VISIT ORGANIZED BY WTIC TO AN EXHIBIT AT THE NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

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There is but one way of getting the most out of a visit to a museum: a knowledgeable companion. Shall you decide to wonder around at your own pace and pleasure—and according to your particular tastes and interests—that companion should be a written guide, and you should not have to worry about time spent. And given the fact that even the audio-guides have previously been curated, if you stick to the curator's audio selection, that would mean you have decided to entrust their judgement on the most representative—and valuable?—pieces in the hall or exhibit. Under any of these two choices, the feedback is totally unilateral: you cannot question the written or the audio guides, should any doubt arise about the piece itself, the historical moment when it was crafted, its artistic and political influences, or the author's misgivings or successes at the point of creation. Thus, either you do a full research before or after your visit, or your perspective will be incomplete if you go only with your book or earphones.

The Welcome to Taipei International Club's Art and Culture Group, always on the look for high quality events for its members to enjoy, organized on Monday 17 June—just eight days before its closing—a guided tour to the unique exhibition set up at the National Palace Museum: “*Silhouette of a Great Master: A Retrospective of Chang Dai-chien's Art on the 120th Anniversary of His Birth.*” This exhibit, coming from the National Palace Museum’s own collection—of works donated to the institution by the author himself—as well as from the National Museum of History—which is undergoing a major renovation and will remain shut down for at least one and a half more years—featured paintings, inks, calligraphy, seals and photographs encompassing Chang's artistic 60-year evolution, from the beginning of his illustrious and productive career, to his latest works as the accomplished master he was; in fact, the best known and world-



wide recognized Chinese plastic artist of his time.

I was most lucky for, thanks to the generosity and graciousness of the WTIC leadership, the invitation to my wife Celina to join the visit reached me as well. I knew we were in for a most satisfying surprise, yet the experience went well beyond my expectations.

To start with, the ambiance at the meeting point of the National Palace Museum's main lobby was festive as usual among the WTIC membership. It is so inspiring to attest the feeling of joyous camaraderie that prevails every time the WTIC ladies gather around a project; and also, the high degree of dedication and coordination the organizers always display in order to guarantee that every event they launch, flows smoothly and flawlessly. This visit was certainly no exception.

And then, there was Ms. Yunghua Miao. I cannot tell whether the Mandarin speakers were as fortunate as those of us who—due to not being savvy at the language of Confucius—were placed in the WTIC's English guided tour. But Yunghua, a laureate of "*Prix de la Fondation culturelle franco-taiwanaise*," producer and host of Radio Taiwan International's "*l'Heure des musées*," and Docent at the National Palace Museum, who led our group, turned out to be the most ideal knowledgeable companion to make our visit indeed a most memorable experience.

Yunghua patiently described to us Chang's personality and upbringing. How he was aware of his extraordinary talent to the point that he thought he could rival and excel over the works of ancient masters, which he copied and transformed to make his own; and yet how he could, at the same time, be mindful of his mastery to the extreme of refraining from ever painting a tiger, so as to avoid any possible comparison with the one his older brother had previously depicted (and which was, in fact, part of the exhibit, among other works by his family

members). We learned about his numerous self-portraits, his fascination and identification with certain animal forms, his joy for calligraphy and his accomplished mastership of the discipline. His travels around the world, including Latin America, and the influences and techniques he collected as a result. His meeting with Picasso and the high regard he expressed about Chang, and the great value his pieces acquired internationally, even while still producing. Yunghua dissected several of Chang's paintings, highlighting details that a quick eye passing by would have never observed; she adequately placed every analyzed work in time and space, and made sure we understood the uniqueness of his style, the quality of his stroke and the complexity and contrast of his compositions. And she made her presentation pretty interactive, encouraging us to think and imagine. At the end, we had been fully introduced to Chang Dai-chien, one of the greatest Chinese painters of all time.

By the time we thought everything was over, Yunghua had yet another surprise in store. Since she considered we might have some additional time to spare, she offered us an *encore* and proposed to guide a visit to the hall of our choice in the Museum's permanent collection. We then entered into the Ceramics world, or, shall I say, dimension? This was for me another shot of energizing enlightenment. Not only did I learn to appreciate and differentiate the uniqueness of the Ceramics of the various periods so that I may now, for example, fully comprehend the value of a Ju Ware from the Song dynasty or the more "democratic" characteristic of the Ming's, but as a result of Yunghua's shared knowledge I ended up taking what I would consider a major leap forward from my up to then baby steps in Chinese dynasty history.

That is how we rounded up a fascinating afternoon of learning and admiring art. I am so grateful to WTIC for having opened up to us this shining door into these highly representative treasures of ancient and contemporary expressions of Chinese culture, and for facilitating such a knowledgeable companion to fully appreciate them.