

Message of the National Museum of Taiwan History

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Throughout history, environmental challenges have pushed human civilization to advance. They inspired our ancestors to develop new and innovative ways to overcome changes in the environment and to assert greater control over the future. In January of this year, as the COVID-19 pandemic was still just starting to gain traction and while much of the world remained unaware of its potential impact, Taiwan began taking action on a national scale. Taiwan's prior experience with the SARS coronavirus pandemic in 2003 had not only left the public with a lingering fear of new coronavirus outbreaks but also kept the national healthcare system regularly trained and prepared to respond quickly to similar healthcare emergencies. Taiwan's quick and decisive response gave the nation very low numbers of COVID-positive cases and COVID-related deaths.

For Taiwan, danger and uncertainty are woven into the fabric of life, while disease, typhoons, earthquakes, drought, flash floods, devastating crop infestations, and the ever-present threat of conflict with a much larger and belligerent neighbor across the Taiwan Strait are all part of the 'Taiwan equation'. In addition, Taiwanese share the same concerns about health, family, marriage, and employment that most people in the world have. Thus, confronting challenges is part and parcel of everyday life in Taiwan.

Human society has advanced alongside an endless stream of challenges and disasters. Although scientific advances in recent centuries have indeed given humankind greater control over its environment, the fundamental capriciousness of life remains. Even in the most scientifically advanced nations, not only does religion continue to thrive,

but techniques for divining fate and the future maintain a tenacious foothold. Taiwan society has always had a rich toolbox of methods for interpreting the past, dealing with challenges and uncertainty, and predicting the future. These include fortune sticks, *ziweidou* numerology, the eight characters (*bazi*) horoscope, *Yijing* divination, glyphomancy, the planchette, palmistry, physiognomy, bone-structure analysis, onomancy, feng shui (geomancy), astrology, blood-type fortune-telling, *liu-nian* fortune-telling, zodiac divination, and *taisui* pacification. Many Taiwanese today still turn to soothsayers for advice on major life events such as choosing a life partner, setting dates for weddings and funerals, giving birth, and making other, important decisions. Even the largest of high-tech companies consult a divination almanac to set the day and time they officially open for business. Although fortune telling pervades the everyday in Taiwan, it is more a reflection of a deep-seated desire for peace of mind than of willful superstition.

Founded and curated as a 'museum for everyone', the National Museum of Taiwan History maintains a permanent archive of items and artifacts that 'articulate' everyday life and culture in Taiwan. Items related to folk culture and religion represent a large part of this archive. In July 2018, sinologist Professor Dr Michael Lackner contacted National Museum of Taiwan History to discuss his research findings and thoughts about developing an exhibition that could be co-curated by museums in Germany and Taiwan. As envisioned, this exhibition would examine Western and Eastern cultural perspectives on 'fate' and their respective knowledge constructions. These discussions brought the Germanisches

Nationalmuseum, the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Academia Sinica together to collaborate on exhibition planning. The Germanisches Nationalmuseum then hosted a workshop in December 2018 to share and discuss initial ideas on the exhibition framework and content. A cooperation agreement was signed in July 2019 between the Germanisches Nationalmuseum and National Museum of Taiwan History, with both parties agreeing to develop an exhibition tailored to the interests and temperaments of museum visitors in their respective countries. This launched the current effort to develop a systematized introduction to the knowledge systems used respectively in the East and West to predict and prognosticate on the future.

This exhibition marks an important milestone in collaborative scholarship between Europe and Taiwan in the realm of cultural history. It is also an unprecedented opportunity to present items reflecting the Taiwanese cultural experience to museum-goers in Germany and for Taiwanese to experience their lived cultural heritage through the eyes of others. On the eve of its opening at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, we hope that this exhibition both helps visitors better appreciate and understand Taiwan's history and folk culture and opens the door to further opportunities for German-Taiwan cooperation and transnational/cross-disciplinary cultural research. Finally, we express our deep gratitude to all of those who participated in making this special exhibition a reality.