

# The Tiger Flag - surrogate, replica or 'real thing'?

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The Flag of the Formosa Republic in the National Taiwan Museum is a national icon; a powerful representation of the short-lived 1895 republic. After the Chinese Qing dynasty ceded Formosa, modern Taiwan, to Japan in 1895, a group of Taiwanese gentry established independent Formosa and raised the Tiger Flag as a symbol of the new republic.



Imagined depiction of the flag by Yi-Rong Xie, 2004

But after only five months the Japanese occupied Taiwan and sent the flag to Japan. The flag below is a replica, made in Japan for the new museum in Taiwan in 1909. In 2009 an international conservation project was launched to find out more about the flag and to conserve it for exhibition.

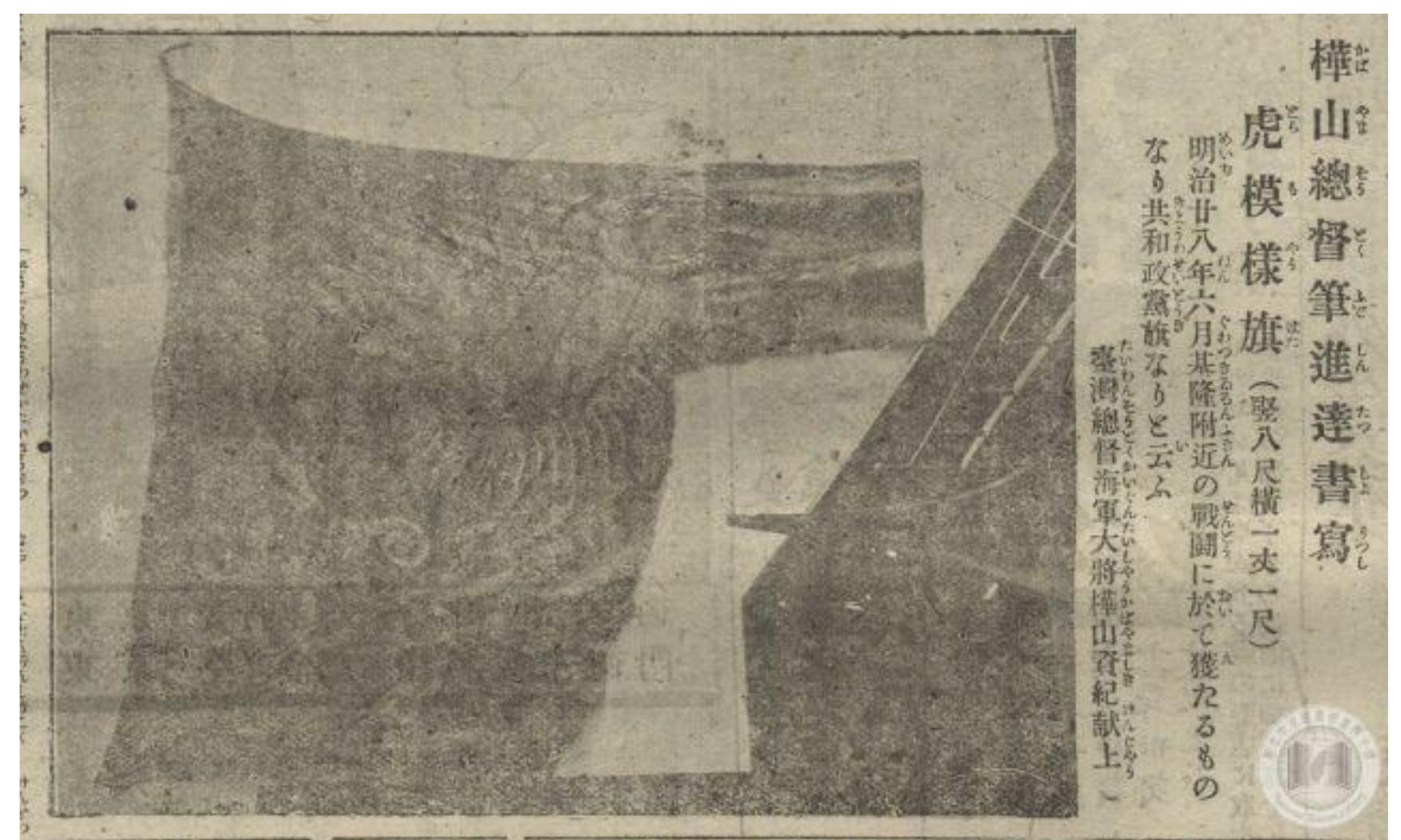


Tiger flag, front, before treatment

Lennard, Frances, Nancy Pollak, Chunmei Lin and Wan-Ping Chen. "Blue Flag with Yellow Tiger? Flags, Authenticity and Identity." *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 36, no. 1 (2013): 1-14. Forthcoming.

An article depicting the new flag in the *Taiwan Daily Newspaper*, 27 November 1909 (below), shows that the lower right corner was never present, and the upper right corner appears different. The flag itself and surviving photographs and records were analysed to try to answer these and other questions:

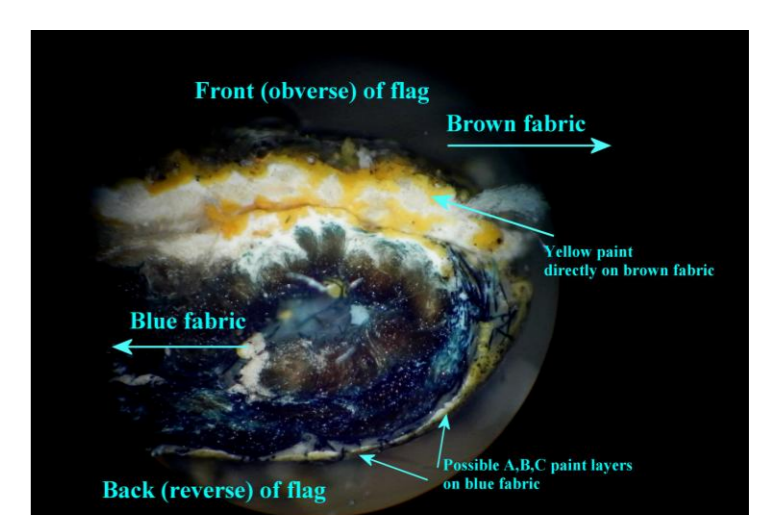
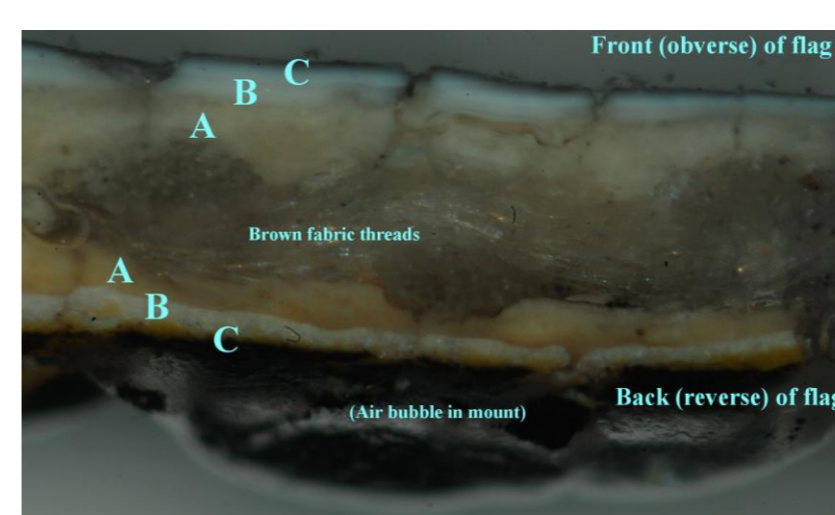
- Was the whole flag originally blue, as believed?
- Were some of the repairs part of the original construction, faithful copies of repairs to the original 1895 flag?



Unfortunately there is too little dye left to allow conclusive dye analysis so the original colour remains a puzzle. Under close examination some of the slits appeared to have been made with a sharp blade and could have been original. These were preserved, along with the upper right corner which had been stitched with the same thread. It was felt that other repairs were much more likely to have been added through the flag's lifetime, and as they were causing major distortion they were removed.



An image of a long slit through the tiger (left, and at 198x magnification, right) indicates that it was cut deliberately



Cross-sections indicated that paint layers on the brown fabric continued onto the blue fabric, showing perhaps that the upper right corner was painted at the same time as the rest of the flag

The 1909 flag acts as a surrogate for the flag raised in 1895 as well as being an extremely significant object in its own right.