The Historical Formation of Chinese Contemporary Art and the Socialist Legacy

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Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the period in China from the 1950s to the 1990s, during which "contemporary art" (*dangdai yishu* 当代艺术）gradually emerged. This is part of a complicated historical narrative centered on the state. Existing understandings of this tumultuous period have been complicated by the fact that modern and contemporary Chinese art history has largely been written by critics—active protagonists—who have naturally promoted particular accounts. The thesis proceeds through an analysis of key debates and initiatives by artists, art critics and art historians inside China, drawing on primary research and interviews. The contention of this thesis is that contemporary art is not only an integral part of the culture that developed under the auspices of the state, but that Chinese contemporary art itself completely embodies the complexity and paradoxes of state culture.

Declaration

This is to certify that

1. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
2. Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used;
3. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of footnotes, tables, charts, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed

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Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisors Professor Charles Green and Associate Professor Claire Roberts for their supervision, guidance and continuous support of my PhD candidature. Their initial enthusiasm for my chosen topic was critical to my decision to undertake this study. Throughout this journey, their intellectual curiosity, vision and passion continuously motivated me. Their knowledge and patience carried me forward across all the research and writing. I built my work on their long-term experience in the field of art historical inquiry as well as their continuous involvement in contemporary art practice and discourse. As both an eminent art historian and an accomplished artist continuously active in the contemporary art field, Professor Charles Green has taught me to look further beyond the contemporary and to situate the contemporary in the historical. I have benefited enormously not just from the four years of supervision from Professor Claire Roberts, but also from the wisdom and insights she has in her ongoing dialogue and interactions with China. I was born only one year before she came to Beijing to study at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Above all, their supervision and teaching has made this learning experience much more than an academic process of study, but a transformative journey in life where I have experienced generosity, dedication and kindness through them. This journey has been a completely new adventure for me but I have not a moment of fear or reservation, because they have been holding both my hands tightly along the way.

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Pan Tianshou, *Transporting Iron Ore by Sailboat* (*Tieshi yunfantu* 《铁石运帆图》), 1957, ink and colors on *xuan* paper, 243 x 249.5cm. Collection: Pan Tianshou Museum, Hangzhou.	p.482	N
Li Keran, *Plein Air Sketching In the Countryside* (*Xiangcun xiesheng* 乡村写生), 1954, ink and color on paper, 28 x 41cm. Source: Spring Auction, Guangzhou Huayi Auction Company, August 10, 2019. https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5154570304/, accessed September 30, 2019.	p.491	N

Introduction

Aims and Objectives

This thesis aims to explain the narrative of contemporary art (*dangdai yishu* 当代艺术) when it appeared in China, and it aims to expose the gap between the established narrative of how and where this happened and the historical reality. It is not the task of the thesis to define contemporary art, but to create a new understanding of how the concept was constructed in China and to therefore explain that Chinese contemporary art has quite a contested history. The construction and description of contemporary art involved more than art historians narrating existing historical facts of art and bringing together art works and ideas to form a narrative. To understand this, we have to pay close attention to the discourses and initiatives created by artists, art critics and historians inside China, for they shaped the appearance of what is now seen as Chinese contemporary art. This thesis does not deal with art discourse that occurred outside mainland China and the Sinophone world.

By and large, with a few remarkable exceptions, scholarship on Chinese contemporary art as defined above stresses its historical break with the state-controlled system and the official ideology of Socialist Realism (*Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi* 社会主义现实主义) consciously created in the decades leading up to and following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.[1] It tends to describe contemporary art as new art, detached from post-1949 art and in particular

[1] For example, Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan's *Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi* (A History of Chinese Modern Paintings) (1986); Gao Minglu, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi 1985–1986* (*A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*) (1991); Lyu Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi1979–1989* (*A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989*) (1992).

ruptured from state-sponsored art with its artistic principles and structures of production, created up to the end of the Cultural Revolution(1966–1976).[2] Such descriptions tend to be based on the binary narrative models of politics versus art, orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, suppression versus rebellion, dependence versus independence, official positions versus non-official ones and so on. But in China, at least, setting up oppositions to narrate the appearance of contemporary art is actually the passive acceptance and extension of a revolutionary narrative that was transformed into an avant-garde rhetoric, emphasizing resistance to state ideologies and existing authority.

Merely describing contemporary Chinese art as disconnected from the artistic traditions formed between 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution, and before then, I will show, is oversimplified and will prove ineffective in interpreting the rich panorama of often-forgotten artistic works, events, phenomena and ideas of the past thirty years. Treating the idea of an avant-garde as the basis for contemporary art's appearance and its legitimacy is, we shall see, narrow-minded. In practice, such a received and diluted idea will prove far from adequate in describing the multifaceted, complex and fluid historical reality of China since the 1950s.

In contrast, I will seek to situate the historical formation of contemporary art in China firmly within its origins, along a time frame of seven decades from 1949 to the present, looking in particular at the flux surrounding art after the Cultural Revolution,

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[2] See John King Fairbank, "Mao de wuchanjieji wenhua dageming" ("Mao's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution"), in *Weida de Zhongguo deming* (*The Great Chinese Revolution*), trans. Liu Zunqi (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House, 2013), 378–406.

before the years that most studies and exhibition catalogs focus on.[3] The decades that my thesis surveys, from the 1950s up to the 1990s, saw a continual process during which the influence of Mao's regulation of literature and art evolved from being absolutely dominant to being significantly weakened after 1976. Recognizing the shifting content and manifestations of Socialist culture in China will enable us to see that contemporary art has been the integral, close friend of changing Socialist culture in China rather than its adversary. I will identify contemporary art's close relationship, as it evolved during those years, to official structure and ideology in China. To do so, I will review the formation of artistic trends and thinking in response to the constraints and influences of such a discursive context and structure during its dominance, as well as the state of artists and art against a more complex social background when such dominance was reduced.

When considering the historical process of contemporary art in China, we inevitably encounter a confusing mixture of terms such as "modern art" (*xiandai yishu* 现代艺术), "New Wave art" (*Xinchao meishu* 新潮美术), "avant-garde art" (*qianwei yishu* 前卫艺术), "new art" (*xin yishu* 新艺术), and "contemporary art" (*dangdai yishu* 当代艺术).[4] Generally, they are used by Chinese artists and art critics synonymously

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[3] As Paul Gladston pointed out, within the existing literature on the subject (including that published within and outside the PRC), there is a generally held view that the development of contemporary Chinese art was initiated by artists belonging to a group known as the Stars, who, in Beijing towards the end of September 1979, were the first to stage an unofficial public exhibition of artworks inside the PRC that not only did not conform to the CCP's then continuing requirement that all art should take the view of the masses and be entirely subservient to the political aims of the Party, but also, in some cases at least, presented thinly veiled criticism of Mao and the CCP. See Paul Gladston, "China's Post-Maoist 'Avant-garde' in Context: Modern and Contemporary Art in China, 1911–2011," in '*Avant-Garde' Art Groups in China, 1979–1989* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 21.

[4] Art critic Zhang Qiang wrote the following in response to the author's question on the usage of these terms in the 1980s: "In most instances, 'modern' was used to refer to 'modern art' in terms of its artistic forms, so as to distinguish it from traditional art. 'Contemporary' was more a concept of time. 'Contemporary' art was mainly Realist art but wasn't 'modern art' that was carrying out experiments

and interchangeably, to distinguish artworks and art events outside of established official norms and systems.[5] Of these, "contemporary art" came into active circulation after 1991, as a temporary signifier for art of an anti-institutional and global tendency.[6] Subsequently, the use of this term has extended to encompass a selected sequence of art and art activities from 1976 to 1989, which were actually described as "modern art" in the 1980s. The selection of historical facts to fit the narrative of contemporary art in China was, I shall demonstrate, filtered through the lens of contemporary art understood through a Western(ized) framework. To phrase this slightly differently, the widespread consensus about the historical formation of contemporary art, as if it was a series of self-evident facts, is a discursive formation under the influence of a Western perspective understood and internalized by Chinese artists and art critics.[7] Such a doubled perspective led to the rupture and differentiation of contemporary art in China from the revolutionary past, when in

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striving to be 'contemporary' mainstream art as well? As to the use of 'avant-garde' as the pre-position for art, it was of some effect in terms of stressing the tone. During that radical period, no one would pay attention to the differences of these terms and to regulating them. Rather, it was common and not unusual to mix and fuse their usages, which was being innovative and creative." Zhang Qiang, email interview with author, November, 2016.

[5] Paul Gladston has observed that the period immediately after the confirmation of Deng's reforms saw the production and exhibition of distinctly unofficial forms of art, which have since been interpreted as the starting point for the development of avant-garde, experimental and museum-based forms of art within the PRC since 1979, otherwise known in Anglophone contexts as "contemporary Chinese art." See Gladston, "China's Post-Maoist 'Avant-garde' in Context," 21.

[6] Lyu Peng has pinpointed Wang Guangyi's use of "contemporary art" (*dangdai yishu*) in *Art Market* (*Yishu shichang*) *Changsha* no. 1, (January 1991) as the first signpost of this term appearing in the art discourse in China. See Lyu Peng, "Sheji dangdai yishushi shuxie de bage wenti" ("Eight Issues in the Writing of Contemporary Art History"), Art China, accessed October 26, 2016, http://art.china.cn/exclusive/2015-06/30/content_8030391.htm.

[7] For instance, Li Xianting wrote, "In late 1979, the seminal 'Stars' art group raised the curtain on China's avant-garde art … the Stars exhibitions were milestones in contemporary Chinese art," as they demonstrated two important characteristics that uniquely define contemporary Chinese art: their use of strong social, political and cultural criticism to observe and depict the existential conditions of society, and the adoption of a strong element of symbolism in their aesthetic vocabulary while relying on realist technique in execution. See Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art," in *China's New Art, Post-1989, with a Retrospective from 1979–1989*, ed. Valerie C. Doran, exh. cat. (Hong Kong: Hanart T. Z. Gallery, 1993), xv. Wu Hung wrote that new experimental art forms provide contemporary Chinese artists with an international language and inside China, these new forms forged an independent field of art production, exhibitions, and criticism outside official and academic art. See Wu Hung, "Conditions, Spheres, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 398.

reality it is a continuity of the logic embedded in the revolutionary past, which is my argument in this thesis. However, while I understand that terms such as "modern art," "New Wave art," "avant-garde art," "new art" and "contemporary art" were all part of the discursive construct of contemporary art in China, I must continue to use these particular terms when analyzing this historical period, as they are customarily used in the common vocabulary and narrative models of contemporary art. I emphasize this point in order that the reader not be distracted by the continued prevalence of apparently anachronistic terms and labels. I am well aware of how strange they sound.

Above all, I intend to analyze the emergence of these concepts and with them the idea of contemporary art in relation to its historical conditions. I will do this in order to reveal its historical logic and ideological underpinnings. I recognize that the formation of ideologies about contemporary art in China is part of the historical reality. In my investigation, I will ask specific questions, such as: What has been the process of the construction of the idea of contemporary art? What identities have been sponsored or permitted in what was a controlled environment? Who was involved—who were the chief protagonists and were their expected roles? What ideas lie behind periodization in the historical narrative of contemporary art? How has the boundary of contemporary art been instituted? What and who were excluded from such a system of contemporary art? What have been the consequences of the instituting of contemporary art as the mainstream of art made in the present?

To answer these questions, I have chosen to focus on ideas that came to be identified with contemporary art and their alignment with the Chinese state's ideological frameworks and mechanisms, or in other words, on art's interaction with the state and

its ideology. I therefore identify and discuss events, exhibitions, artworks, opinions and publications that were critical in shaping the conception and development of Chinese art from the 1950s to the 1990s. I review the process of the emergence and transformation of artistic phenomena and trace their backgrounds to political, social, and cultural conditions that have influenced the creation, distribution and reception of art in this process. I will explain the ideological and intellectual bases that have shaped the appearance of contemporary art and the consequences of such a complex, intricate construction in terms of artistic practice and the contemporaneous interpretation of artistic practice.

The Institutionalization of Art in the New Regime

Control over literature and art and establishment of its hegemony had been critical to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As early as the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945), the CCP had consciously sought to establish a propaganda state. Following the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, the CCP asserted complete control over the practice of literature and art, first among writers and artists active in the CCP-controlled base, and then across the country, a process that was consolidated after the CCP founded the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.[8] The set of principles and policies for regulating art was based on Mao's definition of artistic and literary practice, mainly emphasizing its ability to respond to political needs. Along

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[8] See Mao Zedong, "Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua" ("Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"), in *Mao Zedong Xuanji (Yijuanben)* (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong,* Volume 1) (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1966), 854–855. See also Li Xiangdong Li and Wang Zengru, *Ding Ling Zhuan* (*Biography of Ding Ling*) (Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House), 292–-300. See also Chen Shunxin, "1938-1952: Zhanzheng de xianshi he renmin qunzhong wenhua yu shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi bentuhua he xitonghua de guanxi" ("1938-1952: The Relationship between the Reality of War, People's Mass Culture and the Nationalization and Institution of Socialist Realism") in *Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi lilun zai Zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanhua* (*The Acceptance and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China*) (Hefei: Anhui Educational Publishing House, 2000), 145-227.

with such a designation of literature's and art's role in political reality, the CCP instituted a complex system to regulate and control their production. A symptom of such a system of control after 1949 was the increasing dominance of Socialist Realism as an officially sanctioned art form to be practiced and presented in public domains.

The state exerted its control of literature and art through cultural and propaganda departments. The bureaucrats in these departments were highly educated urban intellectuals and artists. They were responsible for interpreting the Party leaders' thoughts to the wider public.

The institutions that implemented this control from the 1950s to the mid-1960s included the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (*Zhongguo wenxue yishujie lianhehui* 中国文学艺术界联合会, hereafter referred to as the CFLAC). The CFLAC consisted of the Chinese Writers Association, the China Artists' Association, the Chinese Musicians Association and the Chinese Theatre Association. At the first Congress of Writers and Artists (*Wendaihui* 文代会) to review the cultural and artistic management of the Liberated Areas (*Jiefangqu* 解放区) in 1949, Vice-Culture Minister and Vice Chairman of CFLAC and leading literary critic and theoretician Zhou Yang declared: "In addition to directing minds, the directing of the organization of culture and art should be strengthened."[9] When CFLAC's Director, the renowned writer Guo Moruo, gave the Congress's concluding speech, he defined the soon-to-be-established organizational structure that would manage culture and

art.[10]

The origin of such regulating institutions for art and literature was the League of Left-Wing Writers and Artists in the 1930s and 1940s.[11] Prior to 1949, organizations of writers or artists were set up on a voluntary basis to support exchanges among writers and to protect the interest of writers and artists. The institutions that came into being after 1949, however, had a different function: they were to regulate the directions that artists and writers might take in their works.[12]

The field of visual art was directly managed by the China Artists' Association (*Zhongguo meishujia xiehui* 中国美术家协会). Founded in July 1949 in Beijing and known until 1953 as the Chinese Art Workers' Association, the China Artists' Association (CAA) was a national professional artists' association supervised by the Propaganda Department of the CCP. The development and orientation of the artistic programs sponsored by the CAA directly reflected Party policy. The CAA's 1953 charter, reflecting that optimistic moment in China's post-liberation history, described its mission in broadly moderate Marxist–Leninist terms:

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[10] Guo Moruo, "Wei jianshe xinzhongguo de renmin wenyi er fendou" ("Struggle for the Construction of People's Literature and Art in New China"), in Feng Xianguang, "Guo Moruo yu xinzhongguo de wenhua jianshe" ("Guo Moruo and the Cultural Construction of New China"), *Guo Moruo xuekan* (*Guo Moruo Academic Journal*), no. 1 (2000): 22–5.

[11] Leo Ou-fan Lee, "The League of the Left-Wing Writers and the Polemics of on Literature," in *Republican China 1912-1949, Part 2*, The Cambridge History of China, ed. John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 428–44.

[12] Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue gaishuo* (*A Brief Overview of Chinese Contemporary Literature*), (Nanning: Guangxi Education Publihsing House, 2000), 74. The creation of an institutional structure in Beijing and nationwide to organize and regulate free artists and artists involved in the Anti-Japanese War after winning the war in 1946 is also discussed in detail in *Beijing's Painting History of the Twentieth Century*. See "Beiping meishu zuojia xiehui" ("Peking Artists and Writers Association") and "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chengli chuqi de beijing huihua" ("Beijing Paintings in the Early Period of the Founding of the People's Republic of China"), in Beijing huayuan (Beijing Fine Art Academy), *Ershi Shiji Beijing Huihuashi* (*Beijing's Painting History Of the Twentieth Century*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing, 2007) 200–14.

> The Chinese Artists' Association is an organization made up of voluntary members of the Chinese art community who, through their artistic endeavors, are actively involved in advancing China's revolutionary struggle and developments.
>
> The Association embraces the Marxist–Leninist literary and art policies advocated by the Chinese Communist Party, maintaining that the purpose of art is to serve the people; that artists should participate in social struggle and build closer ties with the people; that creative and critical approaches in line with Socialist Realist doctrines should be adopted; that art activities that appeal to the people should be encouraged; and that the intellectual and artistic quality of artwork should be enhanced continuously through learning and self-criticism.[13]

From 1949 to 1957, Jiang Feng was the Vice Chairman of the newly founded CAA and the leading figure in Mao's project of cultural reform in the art world. Like Jiang Feng, most members of the leadership of the Communist Party's art and cultural institutions had come from left-wing groups. In 1957, Jiang Feng was classified as a "Rightist" during the Anti-Rightist Movement.[14] From that point on, he was sacked

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[13] Quoted in Jane DeBevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2014), 22.

[14] See Naranarayan Das, *China's Hundred Weeds. A Study of the Anti-Right Campaign in China (1957–1958)* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1979). See also John King Fairbank, "Chaozao xinde guojia" ("Creating a New Nation"), in *Weida de Zhongguo deming* (*The Great Chinese Revolution*), trans. Liu Zunqi (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House, 2013), 347–51, and Julia F. Andrews, "Traditional Painting in New China: Guohua and the Anti-Rightist Campaign," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (1990): 555–77.

from all his official positions and deprived of Communist Party membership.[15] With the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Movement, by 1957 the optimistic and open-minded early charter of the CAA came to an end. The CAA was then disbanded in 1966, and for twelve years during the Cultural Revolution until its reconstitution in 1978. Across its period of existence, the CAA has been obliged to revise its charter many times owing to the fact that its legitimacy was dependent on political correctness and the status of particular thoughts and positions at different moments. Artistic styles and policy issues were debated in the CCP's Propaganda Department, which shared a directorate with the government's Ministry of Culture, so that both could define a correct line for art. As each new policy developed, was fixed and then shifted again, the Party's frequent explanations obscured earlier stances that then had to be discarded. This made for a highly uncertain context for art and one vulnerable to political shifts.

Tensions Between Artists, Intellectuals and the State

After 1949, many of the left-wing and progressive artists who chose to remain in mainland China contributed to the task of establishing an official bureaucracy of art, as did teachers in art academies, members of artists' associations and art institutions, arts and cultural bureaucrats and high-level Party cadres. They all contributed to the implementation of policies that would support nation-building and the new regime. Yet by the time of the Anti-Rightist Movement's crackdown in 1957, the bureaucracy they had helped create was itself called into question by Mao. Autonomous, individual artistic practice appeared hazardous and incompatible with the collectivity

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[15] "Dayuejin' he wenyi zhengce de tiaozheng 1958–1965" ("'Great Leap Forward' and Adjustments of Policies in Literature and Art (1958–1965)"), in Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 277.

of the new Socialist state, and resistant to its ideological control. Artists and intellectuals began to feel enormous political pressure. From the early 1960s up to the initial stages of the Cultural Revolution, cultural professionals were increasingly seen as sources and evidence of bourgeois influence. Official propaganda accused intellectuals and artists of being more concerned with having "expertise" than being "Red."

While intellectuals and political elites within the Party had since 1949 helped Mao build his empire, they did not always align themselves with Mao's decisions. More than ever before, their presence within the Party was a major cause of insecurity for Mao, who by the mid-1950s was increasingly on the political sidelines, in semi-seclusion. Mao resented the accumulation of power by other Communist Party members through organizations and establishments, and sought to concentrate it in his own hands. After the One Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956, he gradually withdrew trust in intellectuals as a group and emphasized the anti-intellectualism that had been so evident at Yan'an by reasserting his trust in farmers.[16] By 1966, when the Cultural Revolution broke out, Mao and his extreme leftist allies planned to reinvent existing power structures. Within the Party, this meant violent ideological cleansing.[17]

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[16] The Hundred Flowers Campaign occurred in 1956, during which time the Communist Party encouraged citizens to openly express their opinions of the regime. After a brief period of liberalization, Mao abruptly changed course and punished those who challenged the Communist regime in the ensuing Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. See Hong Zicheng, *1956: Baihua Shidai (1956: Hundred Flower Era)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010). See also Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974). See also Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 298.

[17] Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China*, 323–28. Through the case study of Deng Tuo, a propagandist and loyal Party man victimized in the Cultural Revolution, this book reveals the tension between service to politics and service to culture for intellectuals who joined the Party state as

Across literature and art, Mao's denunciations of cultural organizations began to gain momentum in 1962. He harshly criticized the state of literature and art since the 1950s, especially singling out leaders of literary and artistic circles for censure. He accused them of feudalism and capitalism, and of showing little enthusiasm for Socialist art. He was determined to reinfuse revolutionary fervor into the Party and government bureaucracies, and to intensify class struggle to restore ideological purity. From this point on, the radical faction of the Party exercised increasing power over literature and art.[18] The most emblematic event was the Symposium on Literature and Art Problems in the People's Liberation Army in February 1966, and the subsequent issuing of the document "Important Points on the Symposium on Literature and Art Problems in the People's Liberation Army."[19] This paper suggested that literature and art circles had been infiltrated by anti-Party anti-Socialists who were in opposition to Chairman Mao Zedong. The so-called "black line" that the document repeatedly referred to was the conjunction of so-called bourgeois literature and art thinking, and revisionist thought in both modern literature and art and the literature and art of the 1930s under the Nationalist Party's governance. The message of this symposium and its document, a prelude to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, was that a radical

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bureaucrats. This inherent tension is a key to understanding the relationship between the Party state and artists and intellectuals in China.

[18] Hong Yung Lee, "The Rise of the Radical Red Guards," in *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1978), 111–36. See also Richard Curt Kraus, *The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[19] The Symposium on Literature and Art Problems in the People's Liberation Army was convened by Jiang Qing in Shanghai, with the support of Lin Biao, the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission and the Secretary of Defense. After the symposium, a document was drafted based on the transcription of Jiang Qing's speeches. It was then revised by Chen Boda, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan before Mao reviewed and revised it three times. On April 10, 1966, it was published within the Party as a document issued by the Central Committee of the Party. On April 18, the newspaper of the People's Liberation Army, *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefangjun bao*), published it in full. For details of Jiang Qing, see Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

notion of culture would appear that would determine selection and exclusion, and prosecute rupture, revolution and violent intervention. The new notion of culture would negate what had been accomplished in art during the first seventeen years of CCP rule from 1949 to 1966, and by extension, would largely remove left-wing literature and art from the 1930s, Western art and traditional Chinese art from the narrative of future development.[20]

With the institutionalization and politicization of artistic practice and discourse in the 1950s and the 1960s, both Communist and non-Communist artists and intellectuals entered into a relationship with the new regime that would be defined by their willingness to comply with the Party's ideological control. All artists and intellectuals, no matter whether they were close to the governmental structure or not, inhabited the same space defined by the ideology of the CCP. It was not possible to question the regime, only to test the limits of what was permissible. Therefore, artists and theoreticians remained vulnerable to governmental shifts and changing attitudes to art and culture.

When the Anti-Rightist Movement started in 1957, intellectuals and experts were singled out and belittled. In the working session of the Central Committee at Beidaihe in 1962, Mao renewed his commitment to class struggle, and after the 10th Plenary Session of the 8th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee in September that year, that class struggle intensified. In December 1963, Mao Zedong harshly criticized the state of art and culture. In "Regarding the Materials for Story-telling

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[20] Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxueshi (A History of Chinese Contemporary Literature)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010.

Activities in Shanghai," he commented specifically, writing, "Many Communist Party members were enthusiastic about promoting feudalist and bourgeois art, yet they were not keen on promoting Socialist art. Isn't it a weird thing?"[21]

Spurred on by this comment, CFLAC began a rectification campaign, a political device to eradicate opinions and purge factions within the Party's cultural organizations. During this wave, aesthetic opinions were seen through the lens of class struggle and subjected to intense criticism. The official art world immediately assigned artists to join the masses in the countryside in making propaganda works, through "a combination of official leadership, artist's authorship and the masses' participation."[22] This kind of "three in one" approach (the unity of official leadership, artistic authorship and the participation of the masses) was supposed to be effective in helping artists avoid the trap of bourgeois liberalization by staying in touch with the aesthetic preferences and experiences of the masses. On the other hand, officialdom now openly condemned the intellectual leanings of certain artists, censoring and attacking all art they considered dubious. Artists were forced to see their former works through this new perspective. For instance, historical paintings of the revolution that had been completed after the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Great Leap Forward were now subjected to investigation and criticism. Dong Xiwen's painting *The Red Army Was Unafraid of the Hardship of Expedition* (*Hongjun bupa yuanzhengnan* 红军不怕远征难) (1957) [Figure A] was removed from public view for its "gloomy and depressing, pessimistic and melancholy" mood when displayed at the *Art Exhibition Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the*

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[21] "'Jizuo' sichao dui meishu shiye de yingxiang" ("The impact of extreme left trend of thoughts on art"), in Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 317.
[22] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 318.

PLA.[23] From the summer of 1964, paintings of landscapes and birds-and-flowers were completely absent from exhibitions and their publications.[24]

Figure A: Dong Xiwen, *The Red Army Were Unafraid of the Hardship of Expedition*, 1957, oil on canvas.

We have seen that during all of the political campaigns against artists in the 1950s, the competition between brush-and-ink painting and oil painting about what would (or could) be tolerated by the new regime was underlain by differences in individual opinion and even by personal grudges. All of these factors played a role in determining the shifting, rather than fixed, parameters affecting the criticism of art and artists. A speech by the writer Lao She will serve to further highlight how political movements could be seized upon to vent personal revenge. In 1957, as the

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[23] *Art Exhibition Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the PLA* (*Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun jianjun sanshi zhounian jinnian meishu zhanlanhui*) was opened at the Beijing Working People's Cultural Palace (Beijingshi laodong renmin wenhuagong) on 1 August 1957.
[24] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 316–19.

vice president of the CFLAC and a collector of traditional brush-and-ink painting and calligraphy, Lao She gave a talk titled "Being Primarily A Socialist Man—A Speech at the Anti-Rightist Struggle in the Circle of Chinese Painting in Beijing on September 28."[25] Lao She attacked Jiang Feng, who was formerly deputy director of the Central Academy for Fine Arts (CAFA) and by this time had been condemned as a Rightist, for suppressing Chinese brush-and-ink painting while leading the art academy in Hangzhou. Lao She singled out two ink painters, Ye Gongchuo (叶恭绰 1881–1968) and Xu Yansun (徐燕荪 1899–1961), for special denunciation, blaming them for having objected to attitudes of the leadership of the CFLAC regarding Chinese brush-and-ink painters. He explained:

> Some people always say, I studied painting when I was young and never studied politics, but I can paint well. This shows that one can learn to paint without having political thoughts. In response to such a comment, I answer as such: we are in now living a different era. One could learn to paint without studying politics before but today it's no longer true. Besides, Xu Yansun and the others have learned to paint but they hate the political life of the new society. This makes them tyrants of the art world.[26]

As painters and collectors, Xu and Ye were both active and influential figures in the field of brush-and-ink painting and antiquities. They had both objected to the idea that the CFLAC should preside over the field of brush-and-ink painting, which offended

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[25] Lao She, "Shouxian zuo yige shehuizhuyi de ren-jiuyue ershibari zai Beijing guohuajie fanyoupai douzheng dahui shang de fayan" ("Being Primarily A Socialist Man—A Speech at the Anti-Rightist Struggle in the Circle of Chinese Paintings in Beijing on September 28"), *Art*, no. 11 (November 1957), 21–2.

[26] Lao, "Being Primarily A Socialist Man," 21–2.

Lao She. As a writer and as a practiced cultural bureaucrat, Lao She held little sympathy for those who had disagreed with him. It wasn't long, however, before he found himself in the poetically just but dire situation of being harshly criticized himself as the Cultural Revolution broke out. He was severely beaten by Red Guards as they were targeting the leadership of the Cultural Ministry and the CFLAC. Unable to bear the humiliation, on August 24, 1966 he threw himself into a river and committed suicide. As a compliant Socialist, Lao She was obliterated by the very regime to which he had pledged loyalty and on whose behalf he had attacked its enemies. His tragic fate highlights the complex politics that informed cultural practice during the period 1956–1965 and points to the instability and complex interactions between the political context and artistic events that lay ahead.

Despite the existence of a moment of slight relaxation between 1956 to 1957, frequent political campaigns, criticism and frictions dominated the entire literary and artistic field throughout the period from 1956 to 1966, shaping an ideologically compliant artistic doctrine. During lapses such as 1956–1957, there were attempts to shift the course of mainstream artistic ideas, policies and approaches, but they were soon disrupted and deconstructed by much larger and more powerful political currents. During these political criticism and campaigns, not all artists were suppressed, but the extent of the influence of the criticism was so far-reaching that this constrained art and thinking across society, sidelining individual emotions, expression and individuality.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Socialist Realism ceased being an artistic language that contemporary artists actively practiced, so much so that from the end of

the 1970s onwards, to criticize, reject, oppose, avoid and distance oneself from the tradition of Socialist Realism emerged as one of the leading characteristics of the art of the New Period (*Xin shiqi* 新时期).[27] The onset of the New Period, from 1979 on, however, brought about a discourse on modernism that was promoted by the government and embraced by society.[28] In the spaces of exhibition and commentary that were defined both by the government and by individual intellectuals and artists, Socialist Realism increasingly became a thing of the past, even though pedagogic practices in art schools took a longer time to change. Therefore, the emergence of contemporary art is usually stated to have occurred after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the Reform and Opening-Up (*Gaige kaifang* 改革开放) announced at the XIst Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in December 1978, the first occasion after the death of Mao Zedong when a new vision for China was formally announced.[29] The suspension of the legacy of Socialist Realism from art and from the discourse of art gradually became the new reality. Artists seemed eager to part with Socialist Realism, not least on the grounds that it had been the state-authorized art form that was synonymous with the institutional frameworks of previous decades, especially during the period of Mao Zedong's rule from 1942 to 1976. So the historical accounts and awareness of contemporary art in

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[27] The 11th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held in August 1977, named the period after the end of the Cultural Revolution the "New Period (*Xin shiqi*)" of Socialist revolution and construction. It generally refers to the period between 1979 and 1989. See Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi* (*A History of Contemporary Literature in China*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010). See also Zhang Xudong, "Xinshiqi wenxue: Lishi shuxie yu yishixingtai" ("New period literature: historical writing and ideology), in *Gaige shidai de Zhongguo xiandai zhuyi: zuowei jingshenshi de bashi niandai* (*Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*), trans. Cui Wenjin (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014), 105.

[28] In Zhang Xudong's book *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, written first in English during the first five years of Zhang's Ph.D. study in the United States in the early 1990s and translated and published in Chinese in 2014, Zhang painted a meticulous image of the discursive structure for cultural practice of the 1980s. See Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, 3.

[29] See Chi Fulin, *Panoroma of Reform and Opening-Up in China (1978–2012)* (Beijing: China International Press, 2013); see also Timothy Cheek, *Living with Reform China since 1989* (London: Zen Books, 2006).

China that emerged subsequently are mostly informed by the notion of an absolute rupture from the decades prior to 1976, with little recognition of the historical continuity in art's relationship to its previous decades.

Here is where this thesis parts company with accepted accounts.[30] After 1976, the ideological structure and institutional frames for the emergence of Socialist Realism remained, in the form of an almost invisible set of rules whose influence persists in the post-Cultural Revolutionary period from the last three decades of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century.[31] The legacy of Socialist Realism in post-revolutionary art in China was not manifested through contemporary artists directly employing its stylistic apparatus (though they famously did this), but through the reenactment of the gestures and logics—through behaviors and systems—that were integral to its ideological structure. The identification between the historical creation of contemporary art and that of the contemporary Chinese state is grounded in the internal identification of both with the revolutionary logic essential to

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[30] For example, Yi Ying's survey of art from 1949 to 1993 stressed the emergence of modern art since 1979 and its differentiation from pre-1976 art. See Yi Ying, *Cong yingxiong songge dao pingfan shijie: Zhongguo xiandai meishu sichao (From Hero Lauds to the Earthly World: Trend of Thoughts in Modern Fine Arts in China)* (Beijing: China People's University Publishing House, 2004). Huang Zhuan also defined the 1980s as a period of modern art in China to differentiate it from the previous decade. See Huang Zhuan, "Meiyou zuobiao de yundong: Zhongguo guannian yishu 20nian" ("A Movement without Coordinaes: 20 Years of Chinese Conceptual Art"), in *Zhongguo dangdai meishu tujian 1979–1999 guannian yishu fence* (*Chinese Contemporary Art Anthology: A Volume on Conceptual Art of 1979–1999*), ed. Lu Hong (Wuhan: Hubei Education Publishing House, 2001), 2–3; see also Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art," in *China's New Art, Post–1989, with a Retrospective from 1979–1989* (Hong Kong: Hanart T Z Gallery, 1993), x–xxii.

[31] Since the current Chinese president Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, he has increasingly consolidated his power in the Party, tightened ideological control across the country and constantly demonstrated that he's the ultimate leader to the country. On Oct 18, 2017 Xi delivered a 205-minute speech entitled "Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era" to sum up the ending of his first term and the beginning of his second term at the 19th National Congress of the CPC in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. In this speech, Xi repeatedly emphasized the term "new era" and made clear that he was the best leader to guide China into this new era. See Chris Buckley and Keith Bradsher, "Xi Jinping's Marathon Speech: Five Takeaways," *New York Times*, October 18, 2017, accessed February 28, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-party-congress.html.

the practice of the CCP. Even though many perceive an ideological tension between contemporary art and the state, both in fact share a similar structure based in the narration of their position, status and revolutionary logic, privileging the new and disregarding historical continuities. The mechanisms of ideology and politics that gave rise to Socialist Realism continued while contemporary artists, whether conscious or unconscious of this, still worked away within its parameters.

The internalized continuities between post-revolutionary art and Socialist Realism, that we will call the legacy of Socialist ideology and Socialist Realism in particular, have not been fully recognized thus far in existing historical accounts and understandings of contemporary art in China. The result has been an ahistorical perception of contemporary Chinese art, by which I mean that its genealogies are incorrectly taken to be exogenous, from outside China, with motifs surviving ahistorically or by reference to pre-twentieth-century Chinese 'heritage,' while the recent early Communist past and early twentieth-century Chinese modernism are ignored.

My study contributes to establishing a localized understanding of contemporary art and its discursive practice in close relation to its internal political and social genealogy. It helps to loosen the interpretive framework of contemporary art superficially informed by Western modern and contemporary art genealogies, and suspends the constant comparison and evaluation of Chinese contemporary art against that of Western origins. By pointing out that the current perception and narrative of contemporary art is an evolving discursive practice, my study is not intended to undermine the contribution of earlier artists and theoreticians, or the legitimacy of

their historical positions. Instead, I believe that without fully understanding the ideological structure that has informed such historical formation of contemporary art and how it operates, it is impossible to grasp our current position in the axis of Chinese history. By acknowledging the continuous logic of the 'CCP's regime, I recognize the urgency of making transparent the workings of such a logic as it concerns each of us, art practitioners working in China, in the historical juncture of the present. I will argue that artistic practice after 1976 is shaped by and upholds the CCP's revolutionary logic, not least by upholding the revolutionary aim to sever ties with the past and parade the superiority of the new over the old. An ahistorical conception of contemporary art has kept the interpretation of artistic practices limited in scope, with a narrow sense of historical relevance.

Having tabled my key propositions and key aims, this Introduction will now unfold in three sections. The first describes the field with which this study engages. I will survey foundational accounts from the 1980s onwards that were written and published in Chinese by Chinese art critics and historians living and working in mainland China at the time of writing.[32] Western philosophies, theories and modern art movements introduced into China in the 1980s, and the experience of globalization since the 1990s, have significantly shaped the discursive construct and practice of contemporary art in China. Under such influences and based on their previous experience of the Mao era, the generation of artists and theoreticians active in

[32] I have also consulted numerous books on the history of contemporary art in China written in English, including Paul Gladston's *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014) and Wu Hung's *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s–2000* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2014). As these works have not been translated into Chinese, they have not exerted a significant impact on the conception of contemporary art history in China. The focus of this thesis is early foundational writings on art and art history by Chinese art historians and critics in Chinese. While these writings have circulated, widely and been read and accepted, more or less, by Chinese practitioners as historical facts and have exerted considerable influence on the field, they have not been systematically or critically analyzed.

mainland China since the 1980s established their lineages and periodizations of contemporary art based on the idea of disrupting and separating it from the revolutionary history of the former decades. Many fragmented accounts, historical analyses and exhibitions have been based on such an incomplete and problematic lineage of contemporary art and proffered as authoritative and defining frameworks. The second section summarizes my methodology. The final section consists of a chapter outline.

Surveying the Field of Writing in Chinese on Chinese Contemporary Art

This section describes the state of play with regard to current understandings of Chinese contemporary art. Since the field is dominated by perceptions formed since the mid- and late 1980s, and by historical accounts, especially by two leading figures—Gao Minglu (高名潞 b.1949) and Lyu Peng (吕澎 b.1956) and their legacies—this section will revolve around an overview of the contributions of Gao and Lyu. However, and this is an important note, the detailed work of the review of texts on Chinese contemporary art is deferred to my thesis chapters themselves, since the specificity of historical events needs to be matched to the generality and the ambitious sweep of the literature, such as it is.

But for now, and remembering that the detailed work of reviewing this literature will appear in subsequent chapters, it is important to note that if we wish to find the historical narrative of contemporary art in China we must look beyond the few accounts written in Chinese by prominent art critics and historians, to numerous short, fragmentary records appearing in curatorial essays, as well as commentaries in fields related to contemporary art in China. We will take note of about a dozen books

focusing on contemporary art in China, principally written by eminent curators and historians such as Li Xiaoshan (李小山 b.1957), Gao Minglu, Lyu Peng, Lu Hong (鲁虹 b.1954), and Zou Yuejin (邹跃进 1958–2011), who have provided us with comprehensive and valuable accounts of the sequence of artistic development in China since 1949, and we must note that some of these publications were written in collaboration with other colleagues.[33] We will also take account of the shorter accounts—the long essays, commentaries and lectures by both artists and critics. For instance, critics including Shao Dazhen (邵大箴 b.1934), Shui Tianzhong (水天中 b.1935), Zhang Qiang (张蔷 b.1940), Jia Fangzhou (贾方舟 b.1940), Liu Xiaochun (刘晓纯 b.1941), Li Xianting (栗宪庭 b.1949), Peng De (彭德 b.1957), Huang Zhuan (黄专 1958–2016), Zhu Qi (朱其 b.1966), Zhao Chuan (赵川 b.1967), Yi Ying (易英 b.1953), Zhou Yan (周彦 b.1954), Wang Xiaojian (王小箭 b.1953), Wang Zhiliang (王志亮 b.1983), Duan Jun (段君 b.1982) and others have written on specific phenomena, periods, artists, or groups.[34]

It is time to distinguish between these writers. There are basically four generations of art critics and historians who have made contributions to the discourse of contemporary art history in China. The first generation includes art critics such as Shao Dazhen, Shui Tianzhong, Zhang Qiang, Jia Fangzhou and Liu Xiaochun, who were born before the CCP established the PRC in 1949. They all graduated from

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[33] Please see the Bibliography for details of these works.

[34] Please see the Bibliography for their key texts and works. In the last few years, works of an art historical nature have been produced by a younger generation of scholars. Examples include Duan Jun, *Performance Art in East Village in Beijing in the 1990s* (*20 shiji 90 niandai beijing dongcun xingwei yishu*) (Hong Kong: Four Seasons Publishing House, 2016) and Wang Zhiliang, *Discourse and Movement: Two Key Words in the Art History of the 1980s* (*Huayu yu yundong: 20 shiji 80 niandai meishushi de liangge guanjianci*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House, 2018).

university before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. Gao Minglu and Li Xianting were of the second generation. They were both born in 1949 and came of age in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, during which their education was interrupted, resuming only after the end of this upheaval. Yi Ying, Lyu Peng, Lu Hong, Li Xiaoshan, Wang Xiaojian, Zou Yuejin, Huang Zhuan, Peng De and Zhou Yan belonged to the third generation, born in the 1950s. They were only teenagers during the Cultural Revolution and went to university after the turmoil ended. Wang Zhiliang and Duan Jun, for example, belong to the fourth generation. Of them, some practiced as curators and art critics simultaneously, mostly notably Gao Minglu, Li Xianting, Li Xiaoshan, Lyu Peng, Lu Hong and Huang Zhuan. All of the above-mentioned people were key members of the three generations of Chinese art critics and historians active in mainland China from the mid-1980s. Their work has constituted the main body of historical knowledge upon which the work of the fourth generation of Chinese art critics and historians is based.

Terminology

Even though art critics and art historians have different opinions regarding exactly which year should be considered as the beginning of contemporary art in China, people generally assume that there was a resurgence of modern art after the end of the Cultural Revolution, leading up to the time when the term "contemporary art" (*dangdai yishu* 当代艺术)" began to come into use after 1991. Prior to 1991, "modern art" (*xiandai yishu* 现代艺术) and "avant-garde art" (*xianfeng yishu* 先锋艺术 or *qianwei yishu* 前卫艺术) were the words used to refer to art appearing between 1979 and 1989, the decade following the end of the Cultural Revolution, that were inspired or influenced by Western modern artworks in terms of styles, approaches and

concepts.[35] This type of categorization had parallels in other fields of culture such as literature, dance, music and theatre.[36] The intention was to distinguish the art being created from revolutionary art, especially that of the Cultural Revolution and the years of relentless political movements preceding it. Embedded in such terms, by and large adapted from Western art's terminologies and hierarchies, was a shared desire among artists of this period to be considered part of the world stage, especially after being so isolated during the Cultural Revolution. Artists felt that Chinese art had lagged behind the West, and so imported formal devices and theoretical frameworks from Western art to distinguish their art from their predecessors'. It is worth noting that while Chinese artists and art critics remained discriminating and alert to the nuances of Western art, in their application of its terms in China they remained unperturbed by the differences between original contexts and their applicability to Chinese conditions. I will therefore need to uncover and review what I will call their self-theorizations and self-canonizations in more detail, and will do so in my third and fourth chapters.

Contemporary artists who mostly emerged after the 1980s would pass on the legend of the "'85 New Wave" (*Bawu xinchao* '85 新潮) as a critical and crucial signpost in the story of the genesis of contemporary art in China.[37] In the late 1980s, the words

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[35] A close reading of *Fine Arts in China* newspaper, published between 1985 and 1989, reveals that the term "contemporary art" was already in use but was mainly used to indicate the type of art that was being produced at the moment.

[36] This phenomenon was noted in Zhang Qiang's essay "Tansuoxing huihua zongheng tan" ("A Discussion on Paintings of an Exploratory Nature"), in *Zhongguo meishu shinian: Zhang Qiang meishu wenji* (*Chinese Fine Arts Ten Years: Zhang Qiang Collected Works of Fine Arts*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 1991), 29. For a reference on literature, see Hong Zicheng, "Bashi niandai wenxue de tezheng" ("Features of Literature in the 1980s"), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue gaishuo* (*A Brief Overview of Chinese Contemporary History*), (Nanning: Guangxi Education Publishing House, 2000), 92–103.

[37] The '85 New Wave was a phenomenon emerging between 1984 and 1986, characterized by the rise of group exhibitions and artists' collectives initiated by a young generation of painters all over China, following *The Sixth National Fine Arts Exhibition* (*Diliujie quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan*) in 1984. In his speech given at the National Oil Painting Symposium (*Quanguo youhua yishu taolunhui*), April

"avant-garde" and "modern" were almost synonymous, both signifying a concept of art that was innovative, ahead of its time and producing tensions with orthodoxy and traditional art.[38] What might appear perplexing, though, is that the protagonists who were active, and who became known as contemporary artists, in the 1990s were almost the same protagonists of "modern art" during the previous decade. Their transition from "modern" and "avant-garde" artists to "contemporary" artists happened imperceptibly. Some of these contemporary artists more recently claimed that they were simply modern artists in an artistic sense.[39] Yet older artists who had been just as important in the period from the late 1970s to the 1980s, and who had been active before and during the Cultural Revolution, were to be barely remembered in later accounts of contemporary art in China.[40]

The adoption of the term "avant-garde," and of validation provided by the idea of modern art during in the 1980s, established a framework for evaluating artists that remained relevant well into the 1990s and beyond. This framework excluded other artistic practices and positions that coexisted with recorded ones, but which were now perceived as in opposition to the avant-garde and the modern. It was within this crystallization of a narrative that so-called modern art seamlessly evolved into what was considered contemporary art. Along with this process, the Chinese term *meishu* (美术 fine art; literally, beautiful art) also gradually faded away from the discourse of

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14–17, 1986, Gao Minglu named this phenomenon the "'85 Art Movement" and considered it a modern art movement. See Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in the Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 101–39; see also "'85 Art New Wave" in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Penny Wang (New York : Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 51–97.

[38] Li Jiatun [Li Xianting], "Zhongyao de bushi yishu" ("What is Significant is not the Art"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no. 28 (July 1986): 1.

[39] Zhang Xiaogang expressed this insistence on his status as a modern painter to art critic Guan Yuda during Guan's studio visit with him in 2017. Guan Yuda, interview with author, Nanjing, China, Feb 18, 2017.

[40] The example of Pang Tao (b.1934) will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

contemporary art. [41] In the meantime, and especially during the 1980s, there were instances where the two Chinese terms "*meishu*" and "*yishu"* (art 艺术)" were used without any discrimination. Since the 1990s, however, artistic practices from the 1980s and the 1990s have come to be referred to as contemporary art.[42] In effect, contemporary art and modern art became interchangeable. Such terms as "fine art," "art," "avant-garde art," "modern art" and "contemporary art" all underwent changes of meaning after being translated into Chinese and applied to Chinese art.[43] It is worth bearing this in mind when encountering the narratives of Chinese artists and art theoreticians, who usually either did not fully grasp or did not care to consider the original contexts and relevance of such terms.

Both Gao Minglu and Li Xianting did percipiently elaborate on the changing meanings of these terms.[44] Yet neither of them linked their analyses of these changing utterances to a consideration of the 1980s. Their accounts only recognized the projections of meanings on these terms in the Chinese context, without examining the ideological structures and historical conditions that enabled such projections. These shifts in terminology were far from being a purely technical issue. This was a

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41 "Fine art" as a term was first translated from Japanese bijitsu into Chinese and introduced to China by scholar Wang Guowei when translating John Henry Muirhead's *The Elements of Ethics* (London: J. Murray, 1901) into Chinese in 1902. He began to use the term "fine art" (*meishu*) in his own writing *Commentaries on The Red Mansion Dream* (*Hongloumeng pinglun*) which was published in 1904. In Japanese, the term "fine art" was originally translated from the German term "schöne kuns", meaning beautiful art, when Japan participated in the World Expo in 1873. In his writing, Wang Guowei loosely defined "fine art" as a field of practice including music, calligraphy and painting, sculpture, literature, drama and opera. See Yi Xiaolang, "Lun Zhongguo jindai sanshinian 'meishu' gainian de yinru" ("On the Introduction of the Concept of 'Fine Art' into China in the Three Decades of Modern Times"), *Journal of Liupanshui Normal University* (*Liupanshui shifan xueyuan xuebao*), vol.27 no.3, 2015:55.

42 Lyu, "Eight Issues in the Writing of Contemporary Art History."

43 See Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

44 See Gao, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde*, 33. See also Li Xianting, "Liuchun Zhongguo qianwei yishujia yishu xu," ("An Introduction to Liu Chun's *China Avant-garde Artists*"), in *Zhongyao de bushi yishu (What is Significant is not the Art)* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), 189–191. Originally written in 1989.

complex issue involving changing frameworks and specific discussions among artists and art historians at that time. The absence of in-depth analysis of the ideological basis and structural conditions that generated these shifts in art historical discussions maintains a political unconsciousness that continues nevertheless to mobilize actions and narratives in art.

Periodization

Gao Minglu has noted that, compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese art historians tend to add apparently precise time periods to the titles of their writings on twentieth-century Chinese art, specifying such time periods as either modern or contemporary.[45] As examples, he cited Ruan Rongchun and Hu Guanghua's *Fine Art of China's Modern Times*, Pan Yaochang's *A History of Art in China's Modern Times*, and Lyu Peng and Yi Dan's *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989*.[46] Since 1954, mainland Chinese historians have generally divided modern Chinese history into three periods: (i) early modern (*jindai* 近代, 1840-1919); (ii) modern (*xiandai* 现代, 1919–1949); (iii) contemporary(*dangdai* 当代, 1949 onwards).[47] There have also been many discussions about this early system of periodization in historical discourse in China, such as combining the period from 1840 to 1919 and the period from 1919 to 1949 as early modern (*jindai* 近代) and considering 1949 the beginning of the

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[45] Gao Minglu, "Meiyou xiantiao de lishi: dui Zhongguo dangdai yishushi xushi de sikao" ("A History without Linear: Reflections on Historical Narratives of Chinese Contemporary Art"), *Literature and Art Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 115.

[46] Ruan Rongchun and Hu Guanghua, *Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi*) *(The History of Chinese Modern Art)* (Tianjin: Tianjing People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005). Pan Yaochang, *Zhongguo Jinxiandai Meishushi (The History of Chinese Modern Fine Arts)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009). Lyu Peng and Yi Dan, *Zhongguo Xiandai Yishushi 1979–1989 (A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989)* (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 1992).

[47] This system of periodization was initially proposed by historian Hu Sheng in 1954 and remained relevant in historical writings in China until 1999. See Hu Sheng, "Zhongguo jindai lishi de fenqi wenti" ("The Periodization of Chinese History in Recent Eras"), *Lishi yanjiu* (*Historical Research*), no. 1 (February 1954): 5–15.

modern (*xiandai*) period. This consideration was based on the Socialist nature of Chinese society after 1949.[48] Such an approach to periodization has been commonly applied to historical narratives since 1999. In the Chinese art field, these approaches in periodization aren't always followed, as we can see from Lyu Peng and Yi Dan's title for their book, *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989*. I would also add Gao Minglu's own work *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985-1986* (*Zhongguo dangdai meishushi*《中国当代美术史》) to Gao's list of examples of titles of history volumes bearing precise time periods.[49] This publication was the first art historical record of the decade between 1976 and 1986. It was written by art critics and artists who had been active participants, as magazine editors and witnesses, during the latter part of this period, between 1985 and 1986. Although these two years are the focus of this publication, the book also covered art in the decade from 1976. The central content of this quickly written book was a survey of the artistic positions and approaches of a younger generation of artists during the "New Wave," of which Gao Minglu was a principal supporter. The title of the book included both the term "contemporary" (*dangdai*) and "fine art" (*meishu*), which were common references at this time.[50]

Even though *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986* was co-authored with a number of colleagues, the book was primarily based on Gao's own

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[48] Zhang Haipeng, "Guanyu zhongguo jinxiandaishi de fenqi wenti" ("On the Issue of Periodization in Chinese Early Modern and Modern History"), *Beijing ribao* (*Beijing Daily*), July 27, 2015, 23.

[49] Although the writing of this publication was completed in 1988, it wasn't until 1991 that the book was published. Gao attributed the delay to the political dynamic of 1989, characterized by increasing government control of ideology. See Gao, "A History without Linear: Reflections on Historical Narratives of Chinese Contemporary Art," 115.

[50] Zhang Qiang also used "contemporary" and "meishu" regularly in his reference to art of this period. See "Guanyu 'wo de pipinguan' de tongxin" ("Letter Exchanges about My View of Criticality") in *Huihua xinchao* (*The New Tide of Painting*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1988), 113–18.

conception of the period.[51] Apart from writing the introduction, the first, second and sixth chapters, and part of the eighth chapter, Gao also compiled and edited all the writings collected in this volume.[52] This work remains seminal to Gao's writing as a historian of Chinese contemporary art. In his introduction to the book, Gao devoted twenty-three pages to elaborating his motivations. From this, we understand that the term "contemporary" (*dangdai* 当代)" in the title of the book wasn't meant to refer to the time period that the book covered. The writers were not yet naming art made between 1985 and 1986 as "contemporary art." There was merely a suggestion that this was contemporary history, a historical record of a time period written by its contemporaries—by those who had been participants. Gao traced the origin of this act of historicizing the present by its participants to the ideas of historians such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Benedetto Croce and Robin George Collingwood, and in particular, to Croce's motto "All history is contemporary history."[53] Gao referred to Collingwood's idea of reconstructing history by studying the internal thought process of historical persons, and explained that a contemporary history would make value judgments about what to discard and what to promote, even about the immediate past and its participants. Gao differentiated the history they were embarking on writing from that of historians of modern China, whose historical writings he described as histories of the dead.[54] His argument was that this new contemporary history of his peers would be written by those who had been involved. In Gao's view, their historical account would be one full of both rational and imaginative empathy, rather

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[51] In the foreword to this book, it was written that apart from Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan, Wang Xiaojian, Shu Qun, Wang Mingxian and Tong Tian, Jia Fangzhou and Hou Hanru also contributed drafts for the first and the fifth chapters. See Gao Minglu, 'Foreword', in *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985-1986*, ed. Gao Minglu, 4.
[52] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 4.
[53] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 2.
[54] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 2.

than a cut-and-paste piece of archival materials.[55] I will examine this book closely in my fourth chapter.

Gao's words were charged with his clear sincerity and driven mission. During the period 1985–1986, Gao and his contemporaries occupied central positions in the Chinese art world. In 1968, as a youngster at the age of nineteen, Gao answered the call of Chairman Mao Zedong, during Mao's Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement, to go to rural areas on a hardship posting, exposing himself to the so-called education of farmers and workers.[56] Gao was sent to Inner Mongolia, where he lived the life of a shepherd. Before long, he picked up his childhood hobby of painting and was accepted to study in a local vocational school for teachers. After one year of studying, he stayed on as a teacher. In 1977, he enrolled in a course for artists in the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts (*Tianjin meishu xueyuan* 天津美术学院). At the beginning of the 1980s, he entered the Chinese National Academy of Arts (*Zhongguo yishu yanjiu yuan* 中国艺术研究院) in Beijing as an MA student in art history.[57] It could be argued that during his youth, Gao had been so moved by Mao's revolutionary exhortations that he had acted on them with the radicalism that would later be seen in his empathy for historical rupture and the idea of the avant-garde.

But by the end of the 1980s Gao's perceptions of the mid-1980s had changed. When he was involved in organizing the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* (*Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan* 中国现代艺术展), he proposed that the term "avant-garde" be used in the

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[55] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 1–23.
[56] See Michel Bonnin and Krystyna Horko, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968–1980)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2013).
[57] See Sheng Wei, "Gao Minglu's Bawu Qianzhuan" ("The Pre-85 History of Gao Minglu"), 2015, accessed January 6, 2017, http://art.ifeng.com/2015/0615/1265637.shtml.

English title of the exhibition whose original Chinese title literally translates as "Chinese Modern Art Exhibition." According to Gao's understanding of Western art history, the two terms "avant-garde" and "modernism" went side-by-side and were almost the same thing. He wrote later, in 2011:

> But in the Chinese context of the late 1980s, avant-garde (*qianwei*) seemed more radical and broader than modern art (*xiandai*). Therefore, when I discussed the English title of the exhibition with some critics, such as Zhou Yan, the editor of the exhibition catalogue and Hou Hanru, the catalogue's translator, we all agreed that "avant-garde" made more sense than "modern" as a translation of the original Chinese title. We also had a feeling that although "modern" in the Chinese context means "new," in the West, it might be a term out of fashion, even suggesting a period style. The term "avant-garde," however, is more contemporary, ongoing, and not confined to a style. It particularly fit the art of the '85 Movement in the second half of the 1980s.[58]

Gao observed that artists and art critics began to use the word "avant-garde" to describe their practices in the second half of the 1980s, and that "avant-garde" was an acquired label. We saw this term extended to cover the art of the late 1970s in accounts written after the 1980s. This is clear in Gao's later books and exhibitions, from *China Avant-garde Art* (1997), *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art*

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[58] With this quote, I intend to highlight that the projection of "avant-garde" on artistic practices, especially those of the '85 New Wave, was an afterthought in art historical accounts. Being avant-garde was not a selfconscious act of the artists and critics involved in the '85 New Wave and the 1980s. It was a name that was given later to this period of practice. The artists and critics involved did not intend it to be a movement from the very beginning. There was no organized goal to be achieved other than exploring ways of practices beyond the Socialist Realist genre. See Gao, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde*, 166.

(2005), *The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde* (2007) and *The '85 Movement: The Enlightenment of Chinese Avant-Garde* (2007) to *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (2011).[59] *The '85 Movement: The Enlightenment of Chinese Avant-Garde* (2007) was a revision of *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, and he expanded the original book into a two-volume publication with a much larger section on the No Name Group (*Wuming huahui* 无名画会).[60]

In 2006, Gao curated an exhibition of the No Name Group that toured within China and positioned the group as the longest-running and earliest non-official artists' collective in China. The No Name Group was situated at the very beginning of contemporary art in China. Gao's interpretation of No Name insisted on their stylistic approaches having a critical political agenda, highlighting their marginalized position and escapist detachment from accepted ideology, recounting their gatherings in parks and suburbs of Beijing to paint *en plein air*, making oil paintings of landscapes and portraits that were not at all in the Socialist Realist style. The Chinese title for the publication *The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde* was "*Wuming: Yige beiju qianwei de lishi*," which can be literally translated as "The No Name: A History of a Tragic Avant-garde." This label and Gao's interpretation of the No Name Group caused a rift between Gao and the founders of the group, Zhao Wenliang (赵文量 1937–2019) and Yang Yushu (杨雨澍 b.1944), who did not agree at all with

[59] The books are *Zhongguo qianwei yishu* (*China Avant-Garde Art*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Publishing House, 1997), in Chinese; *Qiang: Zhongguo dangdai yishude lishi yu bianjie* (*Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art*) (Beijing: China Millennium Monument, 2005), in Chinese and English; *Wuming: Yige beiju qianwei de lishi* (*The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde*) (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), in Chinese; *Bawu meishu yundong* (*The '85 Movement*), (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007), in Chinese; and an expanded version of *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*.

[60] See Chapter Two for a detailed description of the history of this group.

Gao's politicization of their works.[61] Gao's "rediscovery" and "reclaiming" of the No Name Group as avant-garde was underlined by his reading of the terms "avant-garde" and "modern" onto the group's stylistic decisions. Gao insisted that the choice of No Name Group members to only paint landscapes and still lifes had been politically driven and that their modernist aesthetics was an avant-garde gesture.[62] In his version, just as the artists had acquired a heterodox status, so had their aesthetics. In fact, the artists Gao discussed only took on "No Name" as a group name in 1979 when they were approached by Liu Xun (刘迅 1923–2007), head of the Beijing Artists' Association, who suggested that they come up with a name for the group in order to help them organize an exhibition.[63] Gao's politicized reading of the No Name Group's choice of themes for their works cannot account for the fact that when the political context became relaxed, the artists involved in the group continued to paint landscapes and still lifes. The history of the No Name Group will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

Among Gao Minglu's contemporaries, Li Xianting was supportive of young artists in the New Wave but did not completely agree with Gao Minglu's enthusiasm about designating it a genuine movement. When acting as an editor at *Fine Arts in China*, an important platform for the coverage of New Wave activities and discussions to which Gao Minglu was a frequent contributor, Li Xianting saw himself as primarily an editor whose job was to stir up discussions and debates. For this purpose, he used many pseudonyms to voice opinions and initiate debates that did not necessarily

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[61] Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, interviews with author, Beijing, December 26, 2016 and March 6, 2017.
[62] Gao, *The No Name*, 23.
[63] Gao, *The No Name*, 277.

reflect his own views. The articles helped to give the impression that there were a multiplicity of viewpoints expressed by a diversity of contributors.[64] Using Li Jiatun as a pseudonym, he challenged the positioning of '85 New Wave art in his 1986 essay "What is Significant is not the Art."[65] He started by observing "The ''85 Art Movement' is not an art movement. The reason for this is because China basically lacks the social and cultural background for modern art."[66] He reasoned that there was no intellectual foundation for such a movement and that the painters involved lacked the necessary intellectual awareness to have initiated such a thing, stressing the self-consciousness and intellectuality associated with modern art. Li observed that artists' interests in the collective social consciousness inevitably caused their work to appear rather uniform. "They borrow the external façade of Western modern art," he wrote, "to harbor their own weak and nervous 'pure spirit.' Therefore, work from the '85 New Wave is basically either Surrealist or in the style of Rauschenberg, because these two artistic languages are most suitable for transmitting the artists' philosophical sentiments."[67] Most subsequent accounts of this period fail to sufficiently recognize the relationship of the New Wave to its historical context, which, as suggested in the provocation by Li Xianting, involved many more participants and perspectives than just the younger generation of painters who had quickly made their names through their participation in high-profile exhibitions. The relationship of the '85 New Wave to its wider context had been oversimplified into a story of rejection and rebellion. Artistic attempts, attitudes and thoughts other than the New Wave were not considered relevant to the genesis of contemporary art in China,

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[64] Li Xianting, interview with author, Beijing, August 19, 2016.
[65] See Li, "What is Significant is Not the Art," 1–2. Li Xianting's use of a pseudonym was a common practice throughout his time as an editor at *Fine Arts in China*.
[66] Li, "What is Significant," 1–2.
[67] Li, "What is Significant," 1–2.

which is a major issue that I seek to draw attention to and help to overcome in my thesis.

The difference in opinion between Gao and Li wasn't limited to that around the '85 New Wave, about which they held almost opposite views, but extended to the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* of 1989. Both men had participated in the organization of the show.[68] Whereas Gao saw *China Avant-Garde* as a landmark exhibition to celebrate, and by doing so make the '85 New Wave a heroic feat, Li thought of the show as marking the end of the '85 New Wave, highlighting the fact that due to its lack of intellectual content, the '85 New Wave did not exhibit much diversity.[69] After 1989, Gao Minglu left Beijing to study in the United States, while Li remained in Beijing and played an important role in supporting artists and establishing consensus around solidifying a number of artistic trends that emerged from the beginning of the 1990s. Unlike Gao, Li did not go on to work as an art historian. In 2000, he published a book, *What is Significant is not the Art,* which collected most of his essays from the 1980s and the 1990s.[70]

Art History Writing in China in the 1990s and Beyond

In the narratives that emerged after the 1980s, young artist collectives involved in the '85 New Wave came to be described as "avant-garde," largely based on the structure established by Gao and his colleagues. This became a powerful label that

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[68] Gao Minglu was responsible for the overall conceptualization of the exhibition, and Li Xianting took responsibility for laying out works in the exhibition space. See Li Xianting, "Wo zuowei 'Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan' cezhanren de zigongzhuang" ("My Confession as the Curator of *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*"), in *What is Significant*, 256–65.
[69] Li, "My Confession," 259.
[70] Li, "My Confession," 259.

distinguished them from older generations of painters. In art critic Yi Ying's account, for instance, the split between young artists on the one hand and middle-aged or older artists on the other hand was an opposition based on the artists' attitudes towards Western modernist art. [71] According to Yi, the young artists who were susceptible to Western modernism were also advocates for artistic freedom, while older artists defended earlier artistic traditions and thus the art system that they had been part of.[72] This older generation was now portrayed as a conservative force in opposition to the '85 New Wave. Yi Ying's perspective remains critical when we reconsider now-dominant narratives about the origin of contemporary art in China. It is revealing to place Yi's descriptions against Zhang Qiang's account, which concluded that debates at that time heightened the sense that differences between artists of different opinions were important and substantial.[73] Through Zhang's writing, we can see that in the mid-1980s, while young artists were launching themselves onto the scene, they took up terms such as "New Wave," "modern" and "contemporary" as flags and emblems to establish difference and identity.[74] These terms or signs gathered their own symbolic value as markers underscoring their difference from artists of the older generations. Along with identities such as "contemporary," "modern" and "New Wave," the artists and critics who paraded such terms needed to establish values that could legitimize their novelty and portray a rupture from older generations of artists. The mid-1980s brought about this superficial rift between senior artists and critics and the New Wave school of mostly young artists. And out of this arose the need to write art history that would validate the new status of young artists. Gao Minglu later wrote:

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[71] See Yi, *From Hero Lauds to the Earthly World*, 105.
[72] Yi, *From Hero Lauds to the Earthly World*, 105.
[73] Zhang Qiang, "Jishi youle yishu qunti?" ("Since When There Emerged Artist Groups?"), in *New Tide*, 83–4.
[74] Zhang, "Since When There Emerged Artist Groups?" 83–4

> In 1985, artworks by young artists undoubtedly constituted an aggressive trend. Other previously existing types and levels of exploration, pursuit, and creation were all of secondary importance that year.[75]

In the meantime, and by contrast, the writings of the older art critics and historians Zhang Qiang, Shui Tianzhong and Shao Dazhen provided a more comprehensive overview and a more complicated cultural context for artistic practice related to the 1980s.[76] Their accounts tend to give a more comprehensive overview that covers parallel attitudes, approaches and styles in art practiced by artists of various generations and considers them related and responsive to each other within a shared historical space. However, as none of them continued to publish widely on contemporary art, their contributions have had less effect on a gradually solidifying consensus about the origins of contemporary art in China than the views offered by a younger generation of art critics and historians, especially the works by Gao Minglu and Lyu Peng, both of whom were far more prolific and thus more influential. In 2002, Zou Yuejin published *A History of Chinese Fine Arts: 1949–2000*, which was the first comprehensive survey of art in China since 1949. Following on from this work, he

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[75] Gao Minglu, "The Arrival of an Avant-garde Movement" in Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s–2000* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), 64.

[76] Zhang Qiang provided another valuable testimony to the same period of time that was the focus of Gao Minglu's book *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*. *The New Tide of Painting* is a much less well-known work than Gao's and offered an immediate account of artistic practices and debates between 1985 and 1986. Zhang situates the collectives formed by a young generation of painters in a context within which all artists and art critics of various generations were exploring means of modernizing art in China, the "New Wave" being just one option but not the only one or all of it. See Zhang, *New Tide*, 1988. See also Shui Tianzhong 水天中, "Dangdai youhua chuangzuo yinxiang" ("Impression of Contemporary Oil Paintings"), *Wenyi yanjiu* (*Art and Literature Research*), no. 4 (1986): 29–32; see also Shao Dazhen, "Zijue de xuanze: qianyi zhongguo dangdai yishu he houxiandaizhuyi" ("Self-conscious Choice: On Chinese Contemporary Art and Post-modernism"), in *Zhongguo xiandai meishu lilun piping wencong: Shao Dazhen juan* (*A Collection of Chinese Modern Art Theory and Criticism: Shao Dazhen*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2011), 135–43.

co-curated an exhibition entitled *Art of Mao's Era 1942–1976*, and edited a publication of the same title in 2005.[77] Before passing away in 2011, Zou Yuejin taught art history at CAFA and was not as active and widely read as Lyu Peng. Lu Hong had also written widely on the history of contemporary art, but this was mostly in the form of textbooks with only basic sketches of the progression of contemporary art in China.[78] Other art critics such as Peng De, Huang Zhuan and Yi Ying did not write substantial volumes on the history of art, but rather focused on essays, reviews and short commentaries, mostly accepting Gao's narrative of the 1980s as historical fact.[79]

It is important to acknowledge that in Gao's work since the 1980s, he has always tried to differentiate the logic and character of Chinese art from that of Western art. After he left China he curated a series of exhibitions, including *Inside-Out: New Chinese Art* (1998), *Chinese Maximalism* (2003), *The Wall: Reshaping Chinese Contemporary Art* (2005) and *The Yi School: Thirty Years of Chinese Abstract Art* (2008–2009). In each of these exhibitions he has consistently attempted to represent what he considers

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[77] Zou Yuejin, *Mao Zedong Shidai Meishu (1942–1976)* (*Fine Arts of Mao Zedong's Era 1942–1976*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005). The exhibition was co-curated with Wang Huangsheng and Li Gongming. It took place at the Guangdong Museum of Art from April 30 to May 29, 2005.

[78] Lu Hong, *Zhongguo dangdai yishu 30 nian* (*Chinese Contemporary Art 1978–2008*), (Changsha: Hunan Fine Art Publishing House, 2013) and *Yuejie Zhongguo xianfeng yishu 1979–2004* (*China Avant-garde 1979–2004*), (Wuhan: Hubei Fine Art Publishing House, 2006).

[79] For example, see Huang Zhuan, "Chuangzao lishi: dui Zhongguo ershi shiji bashi niandai xiandai yishu de jingshen jidian" ("Create history: commemoration of Chinese modern art in 1980s"), written as the exhibition foreword for the *Create History: Commemoration Exhibition of Chinese Modern Art in the 1980s* curated by Huang Zhuan, held at OCAT Shenzhen from November 3 to 31, 2006. See Huang Zhuan, *Yishu Shijie Zhong de sixiang yu xingdong* (*Thought and Action in the Art World*), (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 111–14. See Peng De, "Zhongguo youhua de lishi yu xianzhuang" ("The history and current state of Chinese oil paintings"), in *Lixiang Yu Caozuo: Zhongguo Guangzhou Shoujie Jiushi Niandai Yishu Shuangnianzhan Youhua Bufen* (*Ideal and Operation: The First 1990s Biennial Art Fair, Guangzhou China, Oil Painting Section*), ed. Lyu Peng (Chengdu: Sichuan Fine Art Publishing House, 1992). See Yi Ying, "Xiandai zhuyi de kunjing yu women de xuanze" ("The predicament of modernism and our choice"), *Meishu* (*Art*), no. 4 (May 1989): 10–13. See also Yi Ying, "Qianwei haishi xinchao" ("Avant-garde or New Wave"), *Meishu shilun* (*Art Historical Discourse*), no. 3 (March 1989): 9–10.

the alternative modernity of Chinese contemporary art. In his view, Chinese contemporary art has been influenced by Western modern art, and in the meantime, Chinese artists have actively transformed Chinese traditions into contemporary resources for creation and thus established their own unique positions.[80] All of the above-mentioned publications were produced after Gao Minglu left China to study and work in America, demonstrating a continuity with his previous thinking and experience working in China in the 1980s, as well as being driven by a desire to speak from the position of a member of the Chinese diaspora. But owing to my focus on texts that were written in mainland China and circulated there, my examination of Gao Minglu's work and contribution in this thesis is limited to his writings published during the 1980s.

I now turn to Chengdu-based art historian and curator Lyu Peng. In 1977, Lyu Peng had failed to gain entry to the Sichuan Fine Art Academy. Instead, he enrolled in the Sichuan Academy of Politics, majoring in Political Education. At university, he translated essays and books on Western art history from English to Chinese. This background prepared him to work as an art historian. To date, he has written some ten books.[81] The very first history book he completed was *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989* (1992), in collaboration with Yi Dan. The prompt for this book was an invitation from Changsha-based artist Li Luming (李路明 b.1957), then an editor at

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[80] Gao Minglu, "Wo de malasong" ("My Marathon"), in *Wenyi Yanjiu Yu Wo de Xueshu Xiezuo (Research in Literature and Art and My Academic Writing)*, ed. Jin Ning (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2019), 26–36.

[81] Lyu Peng's books included: *Lyu and Yi, A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989*; *Zhongguo dangdai yishushi, 1990–1999* (*90's Art China*), (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000); *Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi* (*A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*), (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006); and *Zhongguo dangdai yishushi 2000–2010* (*Contemporary Art in 21st Century China*), (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2014). The other books are variations or shortened editions of the above volumes.

Hunan Fine Art Publishing House, at the start of 1989.[82] Initially, Lyu Peng dismissed 1980s' modern art in China as a "folk version" (*xiangxia banben* 乡下版本) of the European modern art that he had encountered in his translation of Western art histories. This was a view shared by his friend Yi Dan.[83] Lyu told Li Luming that he would take a quite critical view towards this period, and Li was open to this approach and continued to push this commission forward.[84] *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989* was started during September 1989, soon after the Tian'anmen Square protests in June, and finished in January 1990.[85] According to most written accounts, Chinese contemporary art can be traced back to the end of the 1970s or the beginning of the 1980s and is marked by the emergence of artist groups such as the Star Group and the No Name Group. When Lyu Peng and Yi Dan wrote *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989* (1992), they highlighted the emergence of "Scar Art" (*Shanghen* 伤痕艺术) and named the Star Group as marking the beginning of their decade-long narrative, which embodied a rejection of former revolutionary artistic principles and a defiance of governmental authority.

Like *A History of Chinese Modern Art 1979–1989*, Lyu Peng's subsequent works were marked by an acute sensitivity towards shifting political and social dynamics, and their potential impact on art and art writing. This is a distinctive characteristic of

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[82] After the book was published, Li Luming felt that it was too much of a personal perspective and so he invited another four writers, Li Xianting, Lu Hong, Zou Yuejin and Yin Shuangxi, to each write a historical account of the same period. Li Xianting refused the invitation as he felt that it was too soon to write a history. Yin Shuangxi turned down the invitation as he didn't have time. In the end, Zou Yuejin wrote *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000* (*Xinzhongguo meishushi 1949–2000*), which was published in 2002, and Lu Hong also wrote his account. Li Luming, email interview with author, August 17, 2019.

[83] The use of the term "folk version" indicates a lesser status.

[84] Lyu, "A Summary at Forty Years Old."

[85] See Cindy Cox, "Chronology of Events Related to the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident," *World Affairs* 152, no. 3 (1989): 129–34. See also Geremie Barmé and Linda Jaivin, eds., *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Times Books, 1992).

Lyu Peng's output as an art historian: he reacted quickly and wrote diligently. In 1999, Lyu Peng wrote his second book on Chinese art, *90's Art China*, which was published in March 2000.[86] The difference between the English title of *90's Art China* and its Chinese title, which can be more literally translated as *A History of Contemporary Art 1990–1999*, was not a casual discrepancy at all. Lyu Peng had translated many works from English into Chinese in the 1980s and was well aware of the gap in meaning. While the Chinese title clearly announced that it was a history of contemporary art, the words "history" (*lishi* 历史) and "contemporary" (*dangdai* 当代) both dropped out of the book's English title. When asked about the difference between the Chinese and English titles, Lyu Peng responded that he needed to be cautious about the word "history," but that he was not paying much attention to the word "contemporary" when conceiving the title in English.[87]

Both of the books mentioned above were written very quickly. The immediacy of the two accounts and their sheer proximity to the periods they covered—both were written before the decade had even ended—makes his efforts seem more like acts of active participation than critical records. Similarly, when Gao Minglu and his friends wrote *A Contemporary Art History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, they also chose to name their book a work of history. This was an urge to actively historicize the present, requiring imagination and also active participation. It was also an act of territorial claiming. Gao's idea of contemporary history being written by its participants was echoed in Lyu's self-identification as a 'historian' of contemporary art. In addition to penning these books, Lyu (like Gao) was proactively participating

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[86] Lyu, *90s Art China*.
[87] Lyu Peng, email interview with author, October 27, 2016.

in shaping art by curating exhibitions. Their historical imaginations fully embraced their subjectivity as participants in history.

Immediately after 1989, astutely reading the wind of political change, Lyu Peng set out to establish a magazine on the subject of the art market. He also initiated an art fair in Guangzhou that will be discussed in my fifth chapter. Lyu's curatorship and art writing ran simultaneously, and in necessary tandem, with the government's grand vision in the aftermath of June 4, and within a social climate that prioritized the market. His endeavor (like Gao's) was situated in a nationwide discourse that set the modern against backwardness, and which valorized pragmatism against idealism.[88] Lyu Peng and his contemporaries displayed great sense of idealism in their early attempts in magazine and exhibition-making. They had thought that the market economy would play a critical role in accessing and establishing the value of contemporary art, which at that time was still associated with intellectual activity and was still somewhat marginalized in wider society. They were eager to foster a Chinese market for contemporary art which would not be dependent on Western art theories and value judgments.[89] Their stratagems were complex in intention. They sought affirmation and assessment through the market.

When the term "contemporary art" came into active use in China during the 1990s, it was commonly—and loosely—used to talk about art of the 1980s and after.[90] This

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[88] Wang Hui, "Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti" ("The Intellectual State of Contemporary China and the Issue of Modernity"), in *Qu Zhengzhihua de Zhengzhi: Duan Ershi Shiji de Zhongjie Yu Jiushi Niandai* (*Depoliticized Politics: The End of the 20th Century and the 90s*), (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 61.
[89] Lyu, "Shichanghua de kaishi yu guoji jiegui" ("The beginning of marketization and internationalization"), in *A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*, 864.
[90] Lyu, "Eight Issues in the Writing of Contemporary Art History."

blurry use of terms was perhaps not entirely disingenuous, but was definitely indicative of a common perception of what would be considered contemporary art from that point onwards. We then saw a historical vision within which the 1980s was an integral part. When art historians made reference to the 1980s in their accounts, there was an underlying assumption that the period from 1976 to 1989, and the period after 1990, were but two parts of an indivisible whole. Moreover, together these two periods allowed a neat linear vision of art that progressed from "Scar Art" to the Star Group, and then to the New Wave.[91] From then, the sequence evolved into what was more easily considered contemporary art: art made after 1990. The basic conception of the 1990s was also to be a linear one, moving forward from one important event in art or movement of art to the next. In this increasingly consensual narrative, contemporary art after 2000 showed all the signs of increased diversity and efflorescence, a testimony to an increasingly open and flourishing society in China. This conception of art from the late 1970s onward is shared by most historians and art critics.[92] It is basically one shaped by a Westernized conception of contemporary art originating from democratic contexts and, as Paul Gladston has argued, "interpreted as one capable of divergences from authority conducted very much at a 'microlevel . . . "below" politics and ideology.'"[93] The assumed role of contemporary art as a locus of criticality, containing moral and critical resistance towards power establishments, is obliquely projected onto artistic works and positions in China. This projection assigns a greater amount of agency to individual artists, makers, curators and theoreticians than has been actually possible and present within the highly restrictive sociopolitical and cultural context of China. We must also remember that

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[91] Li, "Major Trends,"x–xxii.
[92] Gao Minglu, ed. *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (San Francisco, New York, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[93] Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 10.

the conception of contemporary art emerged after 1989, at a point when the Chinese social and economic structure was undergoing dramatic changes. Above all, there emerged a commercial space in addition to the governmental space for artistic activity, but it wasn't entirely independent from the state structure. This is a topic that will be discussed in my fifth chapter. From 1949, Chinese society was centrally organized in such a way that there wasn't really a non-official space existing outside of the social structure under the rule of the CCP. As a result of the assumed status of contemporary art based on its critical distancing from social praxis and divergence from established authority, the oversimplified historical narrative of contemporary art in China ends up excluding artistic approaches and the attitudes of those who didn't display such criticality in their political and social positioning. As such, what had happened prior to 1976 could not be imagined as part of the story about contemporary art in China. Nineteen seventy-six was not a point of connection but a cut-off. It is this understanding and all that it entails that is what this thesis seeks to question.

So we necessarily turn to questioning the narrative forms that critics have chosen. As the two of the most prolific writers on Chinese contemporary art, Gao Minglu and Lyu Peng wrote subjective accounts that were acts of interpretation situated in prioritizing what Fredric Jameson has named "the political unconscious" (*Zhengzhi wuyishi* 政治无意识), prioritizing the political perspective as the dominant horizon of all reading and all interpretation.[94] What Gao and Lyu set up was a narrative of art

[94] The term "Political Unconscious" comes from Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art* (1981). In this book, Jameson's interpretive framework was mainly based on his neo-Lacanian idea of unconscious ideology and his invocation of structural causality to reconcile Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives. Professor Jameson visited China in 1985 and taught at Beijing University during the fall. The Chinese translation of his transcribed lectures was subsequently published in 1986. The book *Post Modernism and Cultural Theories* (Xi'an: Shanxi

that was modernist in nature; it was progressive and linear, moving towards what was newer and better. This sequence was also based on the necessity of rupture from revolutionary art, giving little recognition to the historical continuities that link the revolutionary decades to those afterwards. Their stories left out the figures and the conditions that were associated with state-supported structures for art. They created an oversimplified account and myth of the genesis of contemporary art in China, as a new art occurring in absolute opposition to state structures. This in itself is a problematic proposition, as the CCP was an almighty supermachine that ruled over the entire society and that heavy-handedly contained individual agency and any potential oppositional intention. Even though it was a polarizing and binary configuration of art history, it rapidly became the dominant story that has gone on to shape most interpretations of Chinese art.

Narrative Models

The writings of Gao Minglu and Lyu Peng have served as perhaps the most important bases for most understandings of Chinese art in recent decades. Their scholarship is in fact profoundly shaped by two pre-existing narrative models in historical discourse in China, as described by Gao Hua (高华 1954–2011), a leading historian of the CCP and twentieth-century China. According to Gao Hua, Professor of History at Nanjing University, two narrative types have occupied a defining position in modern Chinese history: the revolutionary narrative (*geming xushi* 革命叙事) and the modernization narrative (*xiandaihua xushi* 现代化叙事). Gao Hua made a profound yet simple analysis of the roots and lasting impact of these narratives:

Normal University, 1986) which has remained the most widely read and quoted in Chinese discussions of postmodernism (*houxiandaizhuyi*).

> The so-called revolutionary narrative arose from the 1920s to 1940s and is the revolutionary history of the left. Various 'organic' or 'organised' new intellectuals such as Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白 1899-1935), Zhang Wentian (张闻天 1900-1976) and He Ganzhi (何干之 1906-1969) imported a series of concepts and categories from new leftist theories in the Soviet Union and Japan, constructing a system for leftist forces to apply to understanding the reality, past and future of China, with the core theme being the legitimacy and inevitability of revolution in China.[95]

Gao Hua suggested that because the "revolutionary narrative" was rooted in an era of revolutionary struggle, it was marked by strong tones of political mobilization. Socialist Realism was a visual language and carried the inner logic of the revolutionary narrative. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the revolutionary narrative began to slide into ossification and dogmatism. The revolutionary narrative was also underlined by an excessive pursuit of a grand narrative, insisting upon a fixed sense of an inflexible mission before engaging in research and discussion:

Guided by authoritative descriptions or authoritative documents, it selectively cut and pasted historical material in order to affirm a certain authoritative description, simplifying the complex processes of history into an explanation of 'inevitability'

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[95] Gao Hua, "Xushi shijiao de duoyangxing yu dangdaishi yanjiu: Yi wushi niandai lishi yanjiu weili" ("Diversity of Narrative Perspectives and Contemporary Historical Research: the Case of Historical Research on the 1950s"), in *Geming Niandai* (*Revolutionary Age*) (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2010), 289. All translations in this thesis are by the author unless otherwise stated.

while covering over many rich and fresh historical layers.[96]

The other main narrative model, according to Gao Hua, was a narrative centered on the early 1980s as an exceptional moment. According to this model, the discursive frame of contemporary art emerged in the 1980s with the introduction of Western modern art movements, discourses and theories. Under their impact, art criticism and historical discourse in China adopted Western terminologies and frames to account for contemporary art practices in China. This Western influence, as Gao well knew, had its roots long before, in the May Fourth Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. This had set in motion new but still hierarchical structures of knowledge. Accordingly, the West was more modern; it was superior and advanced, the model to emulate. This inevitably led to misinterpretations, simplified definitions and a stereotyped canonization of particular art. But it also created gaps and caused friction between art criticism and art practice, as well as the rigid internalization of such externally validated critical frameworks by artists.

The point that I am making is deceptively simple but easily overlooked. The art history of Gao Minglu and Lyu Peng—the most influential writers on contemporary Chinese art—had been clearly influenced by both of these historical narrative models. Accordingly, the end of the Cultural Revolution was viewed as the starting point for contemporary art. After them, the continued use of a fragmented history led to the oversimplification of Chinese art's complexity that they did not, strictly speaking, intend. By placing the beginning of Chinese contemporary art in 1976, and juxtaposing contemporary art with the universally accepted understanding that 1976

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[96] Gao, "Diversity of Narrative Perspectives," 289.

saw the beginning of the loosening of social relations, the liberation of ideas and the people's strong desire to escape the past after the end of the Cultural Revolution, contemporary art has been linked to particular overdetermined narratives, both illustrating and masking ideology and the coexistences of artistic approaches.

The assumed path of modernization in China may or may not mirror the roads taken by other countries, but the narratives we have just sketched view China's recent history through a global lens, particularly in artists' sifting through creative forms and artistic movements from the mid-1980s to the present. Such approaches have tended to suggest the universal applicability of European and American art historical trajectories, failing to acknowledge the specificity of China's own process of modernization, despite its long history of intersection with international currents. One manifestation of this is the insistence by Gao and Lyu on using such terms as "avant-garde" and "New Wave" to differentiate certain artworks and approaches in art and on privileging the new and the young as protagonists of change and development.

A New Narrative

How could a China-oriented art history be written? Using the existing lens of art history to look at contemporary art in China has excluded far too many locally born practices, events, thoughts and specificities. These demand attention and the close analysis of individual makers, views and experiences in order to gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the historical process of contemporary art.

This thesis will examine some of these events, discourses and practices, often ones that have been deemed less important than trajectories that mirrored the universal

process of modernization. Taking into account the intricate specificity of recent Chinese history, I argue that the trajectory of Chinese contemporary art, from its practice to its discourse, has remained not far removed from the logic of the ideology that underpinned Socialist Realism: it continued to follow the ideological frameworks set back in the Mao era and the latter's pursuit of modernity. To see contemporary art as a "'rebellious and progressive"' matrix of ideas and actions is in fact to fall into line with Socialist Realism's historical demands that artists present reality in their creative work. In other words, according to the often-quoted existing accounts, the birth of contemporary art after 1976 was "'witness"' to the increasing openness of Communist society, and "'dissidents and rebels"' became integrated into society. This thesis argues that art and art history in mainland China share a covert kinship with the state's structures.

The marginalization of artists and intellectuals post-1989 exacerbated the tension between artists and the state, but this gradually evolved into the polarization between works and ideas that circulated outside of the state-sponsored art system, thanks to the emerging formation of other spaces such as the commercial art space and opportunities to show work outside of China, and those existing within the state-sponsored art systems. In the discourse of contemporary art, artistic martyrdom as a symptom of or reaction to authoritarian suppression became a common trope—for instance, performance artists being taken into police custody and exhibitions being closed by the authorities[97]—just as the market economy promoted

[97] For instance, in June 1994, Ma Liuming, a performance artist based in the East Village (*Dongcun*), Beijing, was jailed on the charge of pornography. Artists living in this area were expelled. See Duan Jun, *Performance Art in East Village in Beijing in the 1990s*, 29. Another example is the *Fuck Off* exhibition (*Buhezuo de fangshi*) held in November 2000, which was closed by the police three days

by the state was internalized by the art community, especially among those who did not hold positions in the state-sponsored art system. The market itself became a player, a protagonist, in the historical narrative of contemporary art and especially in Lyu Peng's writings. In *A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China* (2006), Lyu devoted an entire chapter, for example, to analyzing the process of marketization in the 1990s, and he continues to uphold the conviction.[98] Art historians who moved abroad after 1989, including Gao Minglu, retroactively projected the qualities of integrity and idealism through their approach to scholarship onto the period leading up to 1989, and pushed the creation of a Chinese avant-garde backwards to 1977.[99] The result has been that what we think of as the story of 1980s Chinese art is both fact and myth.

By contrast, in the field of literature in China there has been a considerable amount of research that studies and analyzes the historical and discursive constructions of contemporary literature.[100] In universities, the history of contemporary literature is taught as a discipline. But across art academies and universities in China, the history of Chinese contemporary art is not a subject for study, nor is it the object of discussion by artists. Without a more detailed explanation of how contemporary art was established in mainland China, we are stuck with general accounts that rely on the modernist notion of historical rupture, and thus readers are led to fall into the trap of generalizations, overlooking the profound connections between what is recognized

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after its opening. See Andrew Solomon, "Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China," in *Far and Away: Reporting from the Brink of Change* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 137.

[98] See Lyu, *A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*. See also Lu Hong, *Zhongguo dangdai yishushi 1978-2008 daxue jiaocai* (*Chinese Contemporary Art History College Textbook 1978–2008)* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, 2014). Lu Hung, email interview with author, January 2018.

[99] Gao, *The '85 Movement*, 50–62.

[100] For example, see Hong Zicheng, "Diyijiang Dangdai wenxueshi yanjiu xianzhuang" ("Lecture one The state of studies on histories of contemporary literature"), in *Wenti yu fangfa: Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi yanjiu jianggao* (*Problems and Methods: Lecture Notes from the Study of Chinese Contemporary Literature History*) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2015), 3–15.

as contemporary art and, for example, the art of the first half of the twentieth century. One way of proceeding is to understand what these ruptures were supposed to be, what they actually were, and how they came about. In essence, in this thesis I will be arguing against an understanding of the history of contemporary art based on the idea of rupture.

Thesis Methodology and Chapter Outline

My research has proceeded along two main pathways. One has been the close reading and analysis of the art historical texts that form the dominant narrative of the development of contemporary art in China, and of little-known and under-studied archival resources on the period. These resources include Chinese language art newspapers, journals, supplements to newspapers, transcripts of conference proceedings, and interviews with art historians, critics and artists who participated in those years, many of whom provided access to their personal archives.[101] This research led me to locate often-obscure artworks and details of art events and situations relating to the art field over the past four decades, mostly focusing on the late 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. Here I emphasize the importance of interviews with Chinese artists, critics, curators and scholars who contributed to the historical formation of contemporary art since 1976.

Through primary research and interviews, I sought on the one hand to determine what

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[101] The artists and art critics I have interviewed and talked to for this thesis include Yan Zhenduo, Pang Tao, Lin Gang, Liu Huanzhang, Pang Jun, Cao Dali, Li Xiushi, Yuan Jia, Bao Kun, Li Xiaobin, Huang Rui, Bao Pao, Zhang Qiang, Gao Minglu, Li Xianting, Lyu Peng, Wang Youshen, Liu Qinghe, Hu Jianping, Wang Guangyi, Ren Jian, Li Luming, and so on. I have consulted Yan Zhenduo's personal archive on the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, Li Xianting's archive at the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong, a small archive on Liu Xun at the Beijing Art Academy, Zhang Qiang's personal archive in Beijing, which includes a complete set of *Fine Arts in China* and his letter exchanges with artists in the 1980s.

actually were the historical facts, art practices and debates that occurred, and on the other hand to try to determine what were the narratives that the participants, critics and historians strove so hard to fix in place as the 'correct' shape of history. What I am arguing in this thesis is that the historical narrative that we know was designed by the narrators and participants—there is nothing new or strange about such a proposition to anyone who has been exposed to theories of history over the last generation or two. My task is to determine to what extent that narrative was conditioned by the prevailing ideological structures.

This thesis will also pinpoint the very interesting disjunctures between art criticism and artistic practice as contemporary art was formed in China. On the one hand, I have located a pathway to contemporary art in China that doesn't conform exactly to existing accounts, opening up new horizons for the re-examination of the actual process and of individual experiences. On the other hand, I map out the formation of critical and historical discourses of what has been regarded as new art, and propose that these embody the logic of state culture. I have aimed to generate different narrative possibilities and perspectives for historicizing contemporary art in China in general, and to suggest a narrative that draws attention to the ongoing legacy of ideologies that underpin the Socialist legacy of New China.

In the chapters that follow, I will pay close attention to the affinity between art and literature and examine parallel and divergent phenomena and trends of thought in both fields, which have shared the same ideological structure and centralized bureaucratic system in China. I have followed thoroughly the research, discourses and methodologies in the historical analysis of contemporary literature in China.

Especially, I share the perspective of considering non-mainstream literature trends from 1942 to the 1980s as an integral part of the system of Socialist culture, and apply the same perspective to analyzing the inherent kinship of contemporary art in China with the state.[102]

It is important to consider Chinese art of the first and second halves of the twentieth century as a consistent totality and, in the meantime, to give attention to the variations and complexities of art that was produced during this long historical process. In this thesis, I focus on selected events, individuals, institutions and ideas which have impacted the formation of art and its discourse between 1972 and 1996. I contextualize them in their historical realities and portray the states and ideas of art through these time periods. The period of focus from 1972 to 1996 draws attention to heightened tensions and synergies between choices that individual artists made and the underlying ideological intentions of these choices. Throughout this thesis, I try to demonstrate the agency of individual artists and individual cultural bureaucrats, and how such agency has been continuously defined and restrained by the inescapable structures and mechanisms of the ruling CCP. The complex relationship that exists between individual actors in the art world and the state machine throughout the CCP regime continues today. This relationship will continue to evolve over time with different dynamics and forms of manifestation.

Chapter Outlines

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[102] Hong Zicheng's book *A History of Contemporary Literature in China* demonstrates the close links between the two distinctive eras of pre-1976 and post-1976. These links are provided by the resumption of literary traditions that had been more-or-less abandoned during the Cultural Revolution. See Hong Zicheng, "'Dangdai wenxue' de gainian" ("The Concept of 'Contemporary Literature'), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi* (*A History of Contemporary Literature in China*), (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 9.

I will now briefly outline the main arguments of each chapter.

Chapter One considers the year 1972 as a point of crucial transition for art in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution and describes how these changes of that year prepared the way for events that would take place during the latter period of the Cultural Revolution. The most significant condition for art was the return of professional artists to the practice of art, and this occurred through the revival of national art exhibitions, the commissions of hotel paintings in Beijing and the operations of the Beijing Fine Art Company.

Chapter Two examines artist initiatives, exhibitions, publications and events that arose during the important years from 1978 to 1982, and especially within the short window of time between 1976 and 1979. The few years right after the end of the Cultural Revolution witnessed an eruption of new structures and events. I argue that this series of events, often portrayed as a sign of liberalization and the beginning of an avant-garde art potentially divergent from the state's ideology, was in fact a convergence of efforts enabled by individuals, government and cultural bureaucrats simultaneously.

Chapter Three reviews key exhibitions, symposia and discourses that occurred in the first half of the 1980s. It places the formation of the '85 New Wave in the historical context of a more relaxed intellectual environment after the end of the Cultural Revolution, by portraying two groups of practitioners—the middle-aged and senior artists and the young generation of artists and art critics—and emphasizing their diverging objectives for art. The former group of artists, and their importance in this

period, has been underestimated and overlooked.

Chapter Four traces the important but little-known efforts of individual art critics to create a historical discourse about ’85 New Wave art during the latter half of 1980s, and explains the canonization of New Wave art. This was exemplified by the immensely significant national discussion about the so-called “purification of language” in 1988, which separated stylistic and technical concerns from conceptual and ideological considerations, prioritizing the former at the core of contemporary art. As a discussion, the idea of a purification of language was effectively embraced by young, academically trained artists as a new formula to make art. This has had profound consequences.

Chapter Five deals with the complex space occupied by art in the post-1989 period, until 1996. The student movement in 1989 and subsequent deep political shifts changed China’s intellectual and cultural landscape profoundly. This chapter looks at the drastic changes in the art world in response to 1989. Artistic positions and approaches of the first half of the 1990s were affected by the discussion of “purification of language” and the events of 1989, as well as the emergence of commercial and international networks of circulation. It was within such a dynamic that the conception of contemporary art was established, with strong influence from Western neo-liberal perspectives. Given the political and international conditions at that time, it was projected as being anti-state, anti-institution and emphatically global. I will show that there are discrepancies between such a Westernized perception of contemporary art and the actual political, social and cultural conditions within China.

The Conclusion discusses the present-day trajectory of de-internationalization and the move away from cosmopolitanism, in which China's own nativist subjectivity is placed centrally as the intrinsic aspect of its contemporaneity, even if it is strongly influenced by Western contemporary discourses. From the mid-1990s onwards, counterintuitively, this became more and more obvious as Chinese artists came into frequent contact with the international art world through exhibitions and economic exchanges. This situation arose from an anxiety about self-definition. Constant references to Western artistic discourses and the delay in revising Chinese art history and its relationship to the state only aggravated the anxiety.

I add three appendices to my thesis: a Glossary providing further detail for some additional names, terms and events; a Timeline of Principal Events; and finally, useful background information relating to the period that precedes the period of focus for my thesis. In Appendix 3, I detail the emergence and resonances of three debates central to the artistic discourses of the period between 1956 and 1965: 1) nationalizing oil paintings (*youhua minzuhua* 油画民族化); 2) re-evaluating Impressionism; and 3) reforming brush-and-ink painting. Each debate embodied the complex process of the politicization of art and its discourses by the government.

Chapter One
Undercurrents and Individuals During the Cultural Revolution: A Space for Art, 1972–1976

Introduction

This chapter proposes that 1972 was the crucial moment of transition between art made during the Cultural Revolution and the development of art in subsequent years. While art made during the Cultural Revolution has been examined by many historians, the latter period of the Cultural Revolution, from 1972 to 1976, largely awaits discussion that explores its relevance to later art made after 1976. The connections, continuities and ongoing influences from this period of time have not been examined closely in scholarship on the history of Chinese contemporary art.

My aim in this chapter is to explore precisely and describe the historical context that contemporary art found itself in after 1976, connecting it to episodes that occurred in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. While the contrast between before and after 1976 is clear, and has been emphasized in all historical narratives, the important continuities have been insufficiently acknowledged. The continuities that connect the art and art writing of the Cultural Revolution to that of the beginning of the so-called New Period (*Xinshiqi* 新时期, 1979–1988) will be this chapter's focus.[1] I will start my discussion of art, however, with a poem.

[1] The 11th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held in August 1977, named the Chinese society after the end of the Cultural Revolution the "New Period (*Xinshiqi*)" of Socialist revolution and construction. It generally refers to the period between 1979 and 1989. See Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi* (*A History of Contemporary Literature in China*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010). See also Zhang Xudong, "Xinshiqi wenxue: Lishi shuxie yu yishixingtai" ("New Period Literature: Historical Writing and Ideology"), in *Gaige shidai de Zhongguo xiandai zhuyi: zuowei jingshenshi de bashi niandai* (*Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014), 105.

In ‘This is Beijing at 4:08’ (1968), poet Shi Zhi wrote:[2]

My heart shudders in pain, it must be
My mother’s sewing needle runs me through
At this moment my heart transforms into a kite
Tethered to hear hands

So tight it may snap
I have to stick my head out the train window
Up till now, till this very moment,
I begin to understand what has happened

—A fit of parting shouts
Is about to sweep away the train station
Beijing still underfoot
Slowly begins to drift away

Once more I wave to Beijing
And I want to grab her by the collar
And shout to her
Remember me, Mother Beijing!

[2] Shi Zhi was the pen name of Chinese poet Guo Lusheng (b.1948). His poetry was widely circulated among sent-down youth during the Cultural Revolution and was considered a major influence on poetry groups such as the Misty Poets (*Menglongshi*) of the 1970s and 1980s.

I've grabbed something at last

No matter whose hand it is—I will never let go

For this is my Beijing

This is my last Beijing.[3]

The poem was written on December 20, 1968, amidst the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Above all, it expressed the agony shared by many young people as they departed for their hardship postings during the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement (*Shangshan xiaxiang* 上山下乡).[4] Those young people who were sent off for ideological re-education in the countryside were generally referred to as sent-down youth. Such forthright expressions of sentiment, especially ones linked to modernist literature or art, were off limits and at the time could not be published.

A couple of years before, on November 28, 1966, Jiang Qing had made a speech at the Capital Literary and Art World Forum of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*Shoudu wenyijie wuchanjieji wenhua dageming dahui* 首都文艺界无产阶级文化大革命大会) in Beijing. She contemptuously declared:

> Capitalism has a history of several centuries; nevertheless, it has produced only a pitiful number of "classics." They [writers and artists working in capitalist systems] have created some works modeled after the "classics," but these are stereotypical and can no longer appeal to the people, and are

[3] Shi Zhi, "Zheshi sidian lingba fen de Beijing" ("This is Beijing at 4:08"), in *Winter Sun: Poems by Shi Zhi*, trans. Jonathan Stalling (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 33.
[4] See n 39 in *Introduction*.

> therefore completely on the decline. On the other hand, there are some things that really flood the market, such as rock-and-roll, jazz, strip tease, Impressionism, Symbolism, Abstractionism, Fauvism, Modernism—there's no end to them—all of which are intended to poison and paralyze the minds of the people.[5]

From the start of the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing, in her role as a leading member of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, had played a significant part in directing art and culture. Her speech defined the boundaries permitted for art and literature. However, even under these dire circumstances where modernism was officially alienated and denounced, artists continued to express themselves. As literary critic Wang Yao has observed, " trendy poetry with a modernist art approach continued to grow in the 'underground'."[6] What was a "trendy poetry" movement became an undercurrent and Shi Zhi was clearly a symptom of its longevity.[7]

Shi Zhi was a talented young poet who wrote a series of modernist poems characterized by symbolism and expressing personal anguish, such as *Fish Trilogy* (Winter 1967).[8] He admired Pushkin, Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov, George Gordon

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[5] Jiang Qing, "Zai wenyijie dahui shang de yanjiang" ("Speech at the Forum on Art and Literature"), in *Jiang Qing jianghua xuanbian* (*An Anthology of Jiang Qing's Selected Speeches*) (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1968), 13–28.

[6] Wang Yao, "Wuge 'guanjianci' de xiuding yu dangdai wenyi sichao de yanjin" ("The Amendment of 'Five Key Words' and the Evolution of Contemporary Art and Literature Trends"), in *Zuowei wenti de bashi niandai* (*The Eighties as Problem*) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2013), 151.

[7] See Hong Zicheng, "Menglong shi xinbian xu" ("Foreword to *New Compilation of Misty Poetry*"), in *Wenxue yu lishi xushu* (*Literary and Historical Narratives*) (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2005), 267.

[8] "Yuer sanbuqu" ("Fish Trilogy") (1967–1968) was the first work Shi Zhi wrote, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution when he was only nineteen years old. It describes a trapped fish that dies in pursuit of freedom. It is a work full of allegorical language commenting on the complex relationship between the Red Guard generation and Chairman Mao at the start of the re-education campaign. It's written with delicate notes of lyric expressive subjectivity and charged with pessimism and emotional

Byron, Alfred de Musset, Charles Pierre Baudelaire and Federico García Lorca, and often recited and shared their works with his friends.[9] In May 1968, the police interrogated him because Jiang Qing had read transcriptions of his poems and considered them reactionary "black poems."[10] Later, in December 1968, he joined the group of high school students sent to Xinghua Village, Fenyang County, Shanxi Province for re-education. There, he found himself surrounded by sympathetic peers, mostly middle school students from intellectual families of high- and middle-level governmental officials who had fallen out of favor, as well as ordinary people. Many had chosen to be stationed in the countryside in order to avoid the actions of vicious revolutionary left-wing factions in their city schools. Living in his new though supportive rural community allowed Shi Zhi to write without the risk of being criticized as anti-revolutionary, free from the political pressure he experienced in Beijing when he was suspected of writing reactionary poems. His three most popular poems—"Soul", "This is Beijing at 4:08", and "Believe in the Future"—were all written in 1968. All of his poems grew out of his emotional suffering. They were expressive and lyrical, evoking the experiences and sentiments of many sent-down youths. His poems quickly found their way outside Xinghua Village to other rural areas where youth from the cities had been sent, hand-copied and passed from person to person. Thousands of young people came to identify with his poems. Shi Zhi's poetry inspired many other sent-down youths across the country to write and circulate

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power. For an English translation, see Shi Zhi, *Winter Sun*; see also Translator's Note, accessed February 29, 2020, https://jacket2.org/commentary/shi-zhi-fish-trilogy-poet-forerunner.

[9] See He Jingjie, "Xinzhong de Guo Lusheng" ("Guo Lusheng in My Heart"), in *Chideng de shizhe* (*The Light-bearing Messengers*), ed. Lydia Liu (Liu He) (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2017), 283.

[10] He, "Guo Lusheng in My Heart," 283.

their own poems through copies made by hand.[11] This underground literature was a complicated phenomenon that existed in parallel to the frameworks permitted by official ideology during the Cultural Revolution. It preceded a wave of lively poetry writing, reading and publishing that emerged right after the end of the Cultural Revolution.

In the visual arts, too, the newly animated art scene of the late 1970s had its roots in the Cultural Revolution. The sudden burst of activity in the years immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution are connected to the faint early signs of change that appeared during the Cultural Revolution. In scholarly studies, art made during the Cultural Revolution and the events surrounding them is rarely considered, still less analyzed in relation to art of the New Period and after.[12] The narratives that writers on Chinese modern and contemporary art have constructed are mainly based on the idea that there was a rupture, and so the official end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 is generally regarded as marking the beginning of a new period. Art that emerged within the period from 1976 to 1984, immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution, was named "New Period art" (*Xinshiqi yishu* 新时期艺术).[13]

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[11] See Ge Xiaoli, "Guo Lusheng zai xinghuacun" ("Guo Lusheng in Xinghua Village"), in Liu ed., *The Light-bearing Messengers*, 288–98.

12 Julia F. Andrews has written that older artists in particular associated the artistic images of the Cultural Revolution very directly with the torture they suffered. For most young and middle-aged artists, however, the ten "lost years" included a good deal of painting. The official analysis of the Cultural Revolution by party historians is extremely negative, an opinion that most Western observers share. Although most people agree with this political line, such strong condemnations have made it awkward for artists to discuss work they produced during that period or to consider, except privately, its relationship to the art of preceding and succeeding periods. Even for those who were very active, the decade is often described as a "big blank." This understanding goes some way towards explaining the general motivation for the rupture narrative. See Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 314–15.

[13] Regarding the accepted periodization of art after the Cultural Revolution, see Zou Yuejin, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts: 1949–2000* (2002); Lyu Peng, *A History of Art in Twentieth Century China* (2009); Ralph Croizier, Shengtian Zheng and Scott Watson, *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–76*, ed. Richard King (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Wu Hung, *Contemporary*

Writing on art made during the Cultural Revolution has focused on the absolute dominance of Revolutionary Romanticism (*Geming langman zhuyi yishu* 革命浪漫主义艺术). This was the only kind of art officially approved and publicized throughout the Cultural Revolution. The art of Revolutionary Romanticism was an invention of Mao Zedong in 1958 in an attempt to create a unique art form with Chinese national characteristics made for the proletariat. As such, it should be distinguished from Soviet Socialist Realism, and also from the Realism that cultural theoreticians from the left-wing culture of the 1930s such as Zhou Yang and Hu Feng (胡风 1902–1985) had promoted.[14] Mao's proposal was to combine Revolutionary Realism (*Geming xianshizhuyi* 革命现实主义) and Revolutionary Romanticism (*Geming langmanzhuyi* 革命浪漫主义) into one art, which was the Revolutionary Romanticism of Socialist Realism. In practice, this meant that artists were urged to "fabricate" views of reality based on political concepts, goals of political utopia, romantic passion and idealized realities instead of actual reality. Stylistically, this meant a narrow formula of "red, bright and shining" aesthetics (*hong, guang, liang* 红、光、亮).[15] In addition, Mao commanded workers, farmers and soldiers to actively enter into the worlds of art and literature in order to override the authority of so-called experts. He encouraged collective and group works, where no single individual would claim authorship or stand out alone. This had been the primary content of Mao's radical cultural strategy

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Chinese Art: A History 1970s–2000 (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014); Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

[14] See Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxueshi (A History of Chinese Contemporary Literature)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 202.

[15] The visual principle of "red, bright and shining" has been discussed in many writings related to the art of the Cultural Revolution. See Jiehong Jiang, ed., *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007) and Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian, eds., *Art and China's Revolution* (New York: The Asia Society Museum, 2008).

since 1958, throughout the Cultural Revolution, and would make a lasting and significant impact on art and literature across the following decades.[16]

To differentiate art after the Cultural Revolution from art before, in the discourse of art written after the Cultural Revolution, makes sense to a degree. After all, accentuating the difference was compatible with a desire to do away with the Cultural Revolution. Such a need, such a differentiation, was due to the revulsion and fatigue that artists and critics felt about conditions they had experienced from the 1950s to 1976, the period when art became absorbed into politics. However, this differentiation was also fostered by the government's own invention of such differences, even including its invention of the New Period in 1978, which was essentially built on the negation of the preceding years.

In practice, as art historians, understanding this promotion of the sense of rupture and differentiation in art after 1976 helps us grasp the art of the New Period. Yet it hinders a deeper investigation into the complex connections between the two periods, the period of the Cultural Revolution and the period after. In reality, these two periods are related to each other both by rupture and by profound and complex connections. In other words, it is important to consider how the art and writing of the New Period came about, and to place them in the longer perspective of the three decades after 1949, including the Cultural Revolution. This will provide a better understanding of both New Period art and contemporary art in China.

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[16] There are many books written on art of the Cultural Revolution. I refer to Andrews's *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China* for discussions of art during the Cultural Revolution as well as detailed descriptions of the state's bureaucratic structure of art. See also King, *Art in Turmoil*.

The Dismissal of the Former Art Bureaucracy and the Negation of Artists

The Cultural Revolution didn't appear overnight. Mao had always distrusted intellectuals and professionals including artists, considering them part of the elite. He punished them periodically through a series of campaigns such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. In 1962, Mao started to call attention once again to class struggle. During the course of political developments from 1962 to 1966, with the escalation of Mao's theory of class struggle, a process of overthrowing and re-evaluating the classics in literature and in art was set in motion.[17] The organizations that underlaid artistic production continued with their activities as before, however, with little divergence. In terms of how production was organized and ideologically supervised in the art field, there was no fundamental change between the two periods before and after 1966.[18] However, in 1966 the radical faction led by Jiang Qing accused writers and artists who had been active since 1949 of constituting a "dictatorship by the proponents of a sinister line" (*heixian zhuanzheng* 黑线专政).[19] Most senior artists and officials of the art establishment, especially those who were already adults before 1949, were attacked for following this sinister line. They were removed from their posts, incarcerated, persecuted and assigned to manual labor. Liu Xun, then Director of Art Creation Department of People's Fine Arts Publishing House, for example, was thrown into the prison for nine years during the Cultural Revolution.[20]

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[17] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 130–1.
[18] The art historian Zou Yuejin has pointed out that there wasn't a great difference between models of making revolutionary art between 1949 and during the Cultural Revolution, and from even earlier in the 1940s in the so-called liberated areas. See Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 130–1.
[19] See "Budui wenyi zuotanhui jiyao" ("Summary of the Military Literature and Art Forum"), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) May 29, 1967; see also Kwok-sing Li, *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People's Republic of China*, trans. Mary Lok (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1995), 151.
[20] Liu Xun, "Jianli" (CV), accessed through the archive of Beijing Art Academy, April 5, 2018.

As the Cultural Revolution began, the former institutional structures that had been established since 1949 were obstructed, then discredited, and many were dissolved, except for a few temporary organizations and institutions such as the Beijing Fine Art Company that maintained production of artworks. As I explained in the Introduction, these institutions comprised a centralized system of state-sponsored art media, artists' associations, art museums and art academies.[21] Such structures had proved themselves effective in organizing and regulating art and its discourses since 1949 through both support and encouragement and punishment and criticism. But from 1966, the exhibition programming of Beijing's National Art Museum of China (NAMOC), for example, ceased completely. It did not resume until 1972. *Art* magazine stopped publication altogether. The Ministry of Culture, the Central Propaganda Department and the CAA, the Party and government organizations responsible for art before 1966, were all abolished.[22] Over 2,600 members of the Ministry of Culture and the institutions under its direct leadership were framed, persecuted, sent to labor camps, imprisoned or killed during the Cultural Revolution.[23]

This "ultra-leftist direction" (*jizuo luxian* 极左路线) dominated all of art and culture from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and it was marked by the overwhelming presence of Red Guard art.[24] This was mainly propaganda made by members of the Red Guard Movement, young members of the first generation raised after 1949. The Red Guard, inspired by the cult of Mao Zedong and guided by Jiang

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[21] It wasn't until the late 1970s that the component parts of the Chinese cultural establishment, made up of art academies, art associations, museums, and print media, were reconstituted.
[22] For a discussion of the structures of the Chinese government administration, see the Introduction.
[23] Beijing Fine Art Academy*, Beijing's Painting History*, 328.
[24] See William A. Josef, *The Critique of Ultra-Leftism in China, 1958–1981* (Stanford: Stanford University Press Library, 1984); see also Zou*, A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 130–1.

Qing, set out to construct a new pictorial history for the PRC, one that dramatized Mao's revolutionary role and minimized that of most other Communist leaders.[25] Many of the published works from the early years of the Cultural Revolution were painted for Red Guard-organized exhibitions. In the first half of 1967, there were seven exhibitions of Red Guard art organized by rebel factions in all major schools, academies, factories and official institutions across Beijing. In that year, the only national art exhibition held was of Red Guard art, titled "Long Live the Victory of Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line" (*Maozhuxi geming luxian shengli wansui meizhan* 毛主席革命路线胜利万岁美展).[26] There were more than 1,600 artworks in the exhibition, including propaganda paintings and woodblock prints made by art and craft academy students, art workers, workers, peasants and soldiers.

Mao encouraged Red Guards to reject professional expertise and authority from their teachers and seniors, and to dismantle and assault cultural establishments. Red Guards at art academies denounced and criticized senior professors, artists and officials across the art world, in many instances publicly humiliating them and physically torturing them.[27] Students and teachers at art academies were sent to be "re-educated" by workers, farmers and soldiers.[28] In Beijing, for instance, staff members at government art institutions and art academies were sent to May Seventh cadre schools

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[25] For a detailed discussion of Red Guard art, see King ed., *Art in Turmoil*; see also Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 332–42.

[26] This exhibition opened on October 1, 1967 at the Chinese National Art Gallery and subsequently toured the nation. See NAMOC, ed., *Zhongguo meishu nianjian* (*Annual of Chinese Art 1949–1989)* (Nanning: Guangxi Arts Publishing House Co. Ltd., 1993), 102.

[27] The artist Zheng Shengtian has given an account of the suffering of senior professors and school administrators during the Cultural Revolution at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou where he was a young teacher. Pan Tianshou, then president of the academy, and more than thirty of his colleagues were forced to stand on a truck with dunce caps on their heads and cardboard placards hanging from their necks and paraded through the streets of Hangzhou. See King ed., *Art in Turmoil*, 97.

[28] Zhang Qiang, interview with author by email, December 2016. Pang Tao, interview with author, Beijing, February 2018.

and military farms for hardship postings from the beginning of autumn in 1969 to the first half of 1970.[29] It was nearly impossible to carry on making art under such dire circumstances, but there were some exceptions. For example, Wu Guanzhong, who was posted to Li Village, Huolu County in Hebei Province to engage in manual labor, managed to keep on painting in private, using a manure basket for an easel. This situation for artists and intellectuals lasted until 1971 and 1972, when a thaw began and slowly people were able to return to the cities.

The Reopening of National Art Exhibitions

By mid-1967, some of the Red Guards who had caused the most social chaos were being disciplined. Schools that were closed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution were reopened, as were factories and villages. One year later, in late 1968, the Red Guard Movement had clearly subsided.[30] On 28 April 1969, the first Plenary Session of the 9th Communist Party of China's Central Committee was held in Beijing. In this session, a new Central Committee was elected. Mao Zedong was its chairman and Lin Biao its deputy chairman.[31] Meanwhile, the Central Cultural Revolution Group (*Zhongyang wenge xiaozu* 中央文革小组) was disbanded.[32] The second Plenary Session was subsequently held in Lushan, Jiangxi Province, from August 23 to September 6, 1970. Chaired by Mao Zedong, this session discussed the

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[29] See Cheng Yinghong, *Creating the New Man: From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 117.
[30] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 332.
[31] For more details of Lin Biao's life see Jin Qiu, *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press Library, 1999); see also Lin Biao Reference Archive, accessed December 20, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/index.htm.
[32] The Central Cultural Revolution Group was formed in May 1966 to replace the Central Committee Secretariat and the Politburo Standing Committee as the de facto top power organ of China in the first few years of the Cultural Revolution. See Tony Saich, "The Cultural Revolution and its Aftermath," in *China: Politics and Government* (New York: SpringerLink, 1981), 45–71.

revision of the Constitution, and the fourth five-year plan for the national economy. The chaos of the Cultural Revolution abated and the political situation was stabilized. The economy that had been on the decline over the previous two years showed its first signs of recovery. Some libraries that had been closed in 1966 reopened their doors.[33]

On September 13, 1971, after an abortive coup against Mao, Lin Biao and his family fled for the Soviet Union but died when their plane crashed over Mongolia. This was a significant turning point in the course of the Cultural Revolution. It signaled the collapse of the Cultural Revolution both in theory and in practice. Many in the leadership came to the recognition that the endless disruption of social order caused by the Cultural Revolution should be halted. From this year, Mao's health began to decline. With Mao's approval and backing, Premier Zhou Enlai now presided over daily administration of the Central Committee to restore social order and economic production. He administered culture, hygiene and sports, and reduced the influence of extreme leftist factions.[34] Artists were able to begin to resume pursuing their personal interests in a relatively open fashion. For instance, in 1971, artist Yan Zhenduo and a few of his friends were able to gather in the Beijing Fine Art Company's studio every Saturday and pay for a life model to paint.[35] [Figure 1.1] This was a significantly more relaxed situation than before. Gradually, art activities resumed, initially without regulation by any official art system. Yet such individual pursuits were cautious and modest. If conditions slowly improved, the next important sign of recovery would be the resumption of national art exhibitions.

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[33] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 333–9.
[34] Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* [in Chinese], trans. Feng Keli (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 2012), 64–5.
[35] Yan Zhenduo, interview with author, Yan Zhenduo's home in Mentougou, Beijing, December 2016.

Figure 1.1: Yan Zhenduo, *Colleagues Sketching in the Studio*, 1974, oil on canvas.

Prior to the Cultural Revolution, national art exhibitions were usually initiated and organized by major cultural institutions. The exhibitions were open to submissions from artists from all over China. Brush-and-ink paintings, oil paintings, woodcuts, sculptures, propaganda paintings, comic paintings, water color paintings, New Year pictures, paper cuts and lacquer paintings were all included in these national art exhibitions.[36] In July 1971, the Cultural Group of the State Council (*Guowuyuan wenhuazu* 国务院文化组) was established as a new national cultural institution in the absence of the Ministry of Culture, Publishing Bureau, and Central Cultural

[36] Yang Zi, "'Wenge' shiqi quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan de yunzuo jizhi yanjiu" ("Research on the Operational Mechanism of National Art Exhibitions during the Culture Revolution"), (Master's diss., Chinese National Academy of Arts, 2010), 7.

Revolution Group (CCRG).[37] There had been a four-year gap since the last national exhibition.

In 1971, the Art Unit of the Cultural Group of the State Council submitted a proposal to the Central Committee to stage a national exhibition in 1972, taking advantage of the need to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (*Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 延安文艺座谈会). Zhou Enlai approved the plan. Soon, the Art Unit set up a temporary office at NAMOC and started preparations for the national art exhibition. This was a real opportunity for artists who had been unable to work or exhibit during the Cultural Revolution to start again.

On May 23, 1972, the *National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"* opened at NAMOC. The exhibition was on display for two months, showcasing more than 270 artworks. [Figure 1.2] The number of visitors to the exhibition was 935,000, a huge figure indicating the eagerness of people to participate once again in public life. The audience included foreign diplomats, foreign visitors and visitors from other sectors of culture.[38] True to the format of previous national art exhibitions, all kinds of media were exhibited and the works primarily consisted of images of the iconic figure of Mao Zedong, the three revolutionary movements encompassing class

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[37] Wu De was the group director of the Cultural Group of the State Council, and Liu Xianquan the vice director. Its members consisted of Wu Shaohua, Yu Huiyong, and Wang Mantian. Wang Mantian was in charge of art. See Central Intelligence Agency of United States, *Appearances and Activities of Leading Personalities of the People's Republic of China* (Washington: United States Central Intelligence Agency, 1976), 389; see also NAMOC, *Annual of Chinese Art 1949–1989*, 18.

[38] "Quanguo meishu zuopin he sheying yishu zuopin zhanlan bimu" ("The closing of national art and photography art exhibitions"), *People's Daily*, July 24, 1972, 2.

struggle, production and scientific experimentation, as well as typical images of workers, farmers and soldiers.

Figure 1.2: *Anthology of Selected Works from the National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art,"* 1972.

About 65 per cent of the exhibitors were workers, farmers or soldiers. Even so, and most significantly, trained artists who had been barred from participating in exhibitions since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution were allowed to contribute. A major collective painting by Hou Yimin (侯一民 b.1930), Deng Shu (邓澍 b.1929), Jin Shangyi, Zhan Jianjun, Yuan Hao (袁浩 b.1941), and Yang Lingui (杨林桂 b.1941), *To Carry on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the End* (*Jiang wuchanjieji wenhuadageming jinxing daodi* 将无产阶级文化大革命进行到底, 1972) [Figure 1.3], and Tang Xiaohe (唐小禾 b.1941) and Cheng Li's (程犁 b.1941) *Strive Forward in Winds and Tides* (*Zai dafengdaliangzhong qianjin* 在大风大浪中前进, 1971), were among the exhibited oil paintings submitted by professionally trained

artists.[39] The basic method of composing paintings of the leader remained—presenting Mao in the center of the painting and surrounding him with people, in keeping with the revolutionary aesthetic principles of three prominences (*santuch*u 三突出) designed to highlight the prominence of the political leader.[40] The theme of the elderly Mao swimming was a popular subject for prints, stamps and songs after he was photographed swimming in the Yangtze River on July 16, 1966, two months before the start of the Cultural Revolution. It symbolized his will to "Strive Forward in Winds and Tides" (*Zai dafengdaliangzhong qianjin* 在大风大浪中前进). In their enormous oil painting *Strive Forward in Winds and Tides* (1971), Tang Xiaohe and Cheng Li took their compositional cue for from French painter Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19). They painted Mao dramatically holding up his right hand, forming the tip of a pyramidal combination of forms for monumental effect. This was a carefully considered choice. [Figure 1.4]

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[39] In this exhibition, other oil paintings that were painted by professionally trained artists included *Chairman Mao Visiting Guangdong's Countryside* (*Maozhuxi shicha Guangdong nongcun*, 1972) by Chen Yanning, *Taking Copper by Force from Tiger's Mouth* (*Hukou tuotong*, 1972) by Wu Yunhua, and *I am Haiyan* (*Woshi haiyan*, 1972) by Pan Jianjun. See *Jinian maozhuxi zai yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua fabiao sanshi zhounian quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlanhui xuanji* (*Anthology of Selected Works from the National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art"*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1972).

[40] Lyu Peng, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi* (*A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 542.

Figure 1.3: Hou Yimin, Deng Shu, Jin Shangyi, Zhan Jianjun, Yuan Hao, Yang Lingui, *To Carry on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the End*, 1971, oil on canvas.

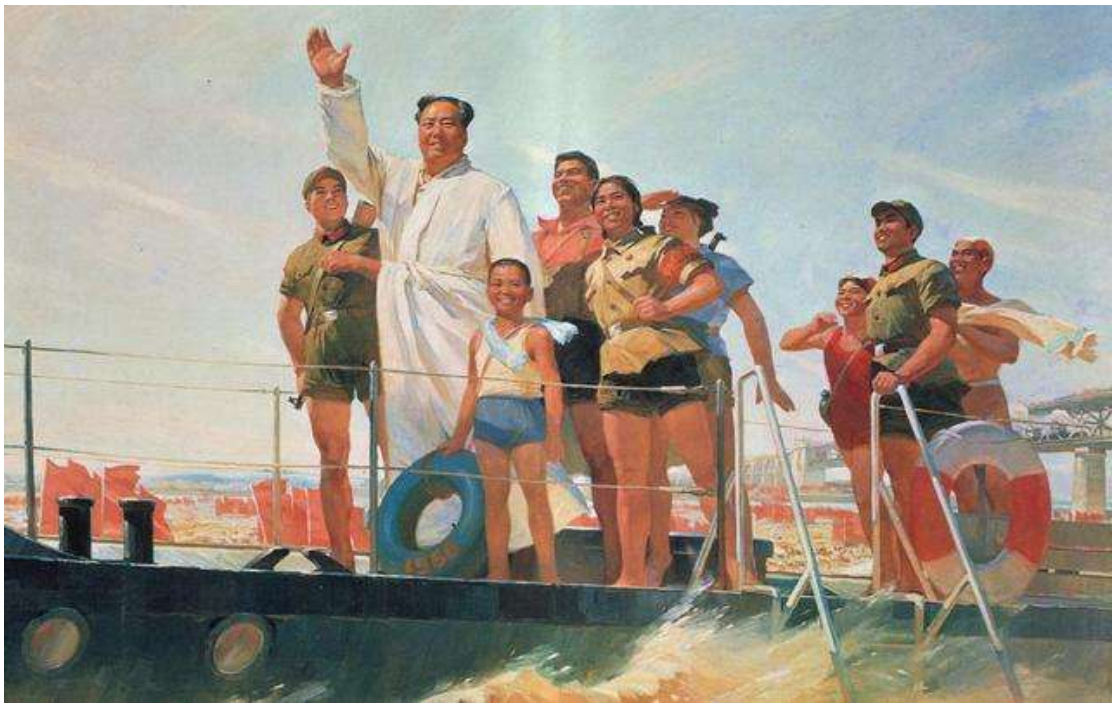

Figure 1.4: Tang Xiaohe and Cheng Li, *Strive Forward in Winds and Tides*, 1971, oil on canvas.

In the category of brush-and-ink painting, professional artists' entries included Yang Zhiguang's (杨之光) *New Soldiers in the Mine* (*Kuangshan xinbing* 矿山新兵, 1971), Guan Shanyue's (关山月) *Southern Oil Town* (*Nanfang youcheng* 南方油城, 1971) and Qian Songyan's (钱松岩) *Picturesque Jiangnan Prosperous Countryside* (*Jinxiu*

jiangnan yumixiang 锦绣江南鱼米乡, 1972). While adhering to correct political subject matter, the works of these professional artists nevertheless demonstrated their brilliance in techniques and artistic quality. The paintings were clearly intended as models for other artists, especially those of a younger generation, after years of the absence of such accomplished paintings on public display. Artists even began to sign paintings with their own names, indicating the growing sense of individuality that was now condoned.[41] From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, artists had only been allowed to assist in the art made by workers, farmers and soldiers; their own names couldn't appear.

A landscape painting in oil, *Spring Arriving in Xing'anling* (*Chundao xinganling* 春到兴安岭, 1971), by Heilongjiang-based artist Li Xiushi (李秀实) [Figure 1.5], also featured in the exhibition. It was the only work in the whole exhibition that didn't include human figures. In 1956, Li Xiushi had been admitted into Dong Xiwen's studio at CAFA. Remembering this period in the late 1950s, a time when CAFA was heavily under the influence of Soviet models, he reminisced that he discovered many high-quality exhibition catalogs of Impressionist works in the CAFA library.[42] This opened his eyes to the potential of oil painting. After graduation, Li was assigned to work in Heilongjiang. He soon realized that there were many official strictures on the depiction of human figures in paintings, such as scale, prominence and appropriate representation in general. Preparing the work for the *National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art,"* he recalled his annual visits after 1961 to Xinganling

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[41] Lyu, *A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*, 546.
[42] Li Xiushi, interview with author, Li Xiushi's studio, Mentougou, Beijing, December 12, 2017.

forests and Beidahuang's black soil country. He had collected notes and written down his observations and so decided to choose the landscape of that area as his subject. *Spring Arriving in Xinganling* was not a typical Socialist Realist painting at all. A landscape painting of relatively modest size, it depicted a large dark forest in the background and a wood-carrying freight train, spouting plumes of smoke, rushing along through deep snowfields in the foreground. The smoke, cooled by the freezing air, gathers and forms red-tinged halos against the towering Korean pines. In the artist's words,

> When I was working on this painting, the heavy snow falling in the forest just stopped. The air was especially fresh. As the temperature dropped to minus 40-something degrees, nature acquired its own character. For instance, when the sun came out and shone onto the snow on the ground, it looked like blood all over the ground. The more the sun cast on the ground, the redder it appeared. Smoke that shot into the air didn't dissipate but was like a pillar standing there. I made two paintings, one of the morning and one of the dusk, which was very red. I realised afterwards that it must be the use of red that enabled the work to be chosen. At that time, art was a sea of red paintings. It was the campaign of 'learning from Dazhai in agriculture' so I added slogans in the work. When the work was submitted for approval at the provincial level, it was fully approved.[43]

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, with artists facing less political danger, Li

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[43] Chen Yaojie, "Li Xiushi: hewei Zhongguo youhua de dangdai jingshen" ("Li Xiushi: What is the Contemporary Spirit of Chinese Oil Paintings"), *Artron*, October 28, 2016, https://amma.artron.net/observation_shownews.php?newid=879771.

Xiushi painted over the slogan, turning *Spring Arriving in Xinganling* into a pure landscape painting.[44] This unrecorded anecdote is not insignificant. It shows how artistic decisions are acutely affected by changing political contexts, as is the artistic agency of the artist. The process of making this work and its transformation during and after the Cultural Revolution is as important as the work itself. [Figure 1.5]

Figure 1.5: Li Xiushi, *Spring Arriving in Xiangling*, 1971, oil painting.

On October 1, 1973, the Cultural Group of State Council simultaneously opened three exhibitions at NAMOC: the *National Exhibition of Serial Pictures and Brush-and-Ink Painting* (*Quanguo lianhuanhua Zhongguohua zhanlan* 全国连环画、中国画展览), the *Exhibition of Huxian Peasant Painting* (*Huxian nongmin huazhan* 户县农民画展), and the *1973 National Exhibition of Photography* (*Yijiuqisan quanguo shying yishu zhanlan*1973 年全国摄影艺术展览). [Figure 1.6] The *National Exhibition of Serial Picture and Brush-and-Ink Painting* continued to be guided by the political themes of 1972. The works depicted iconic revolutionary leaders, class struggles, the campaign criticizing Lin Biao (1974), the countryside experience of sent-down intellectual youths, and mass campaigns such as "learn from Daqing in industry" (*Gongye xue Daqing* 工业学大庆) or "learn from Dazhai in agriculture," as well as paintings

[44] Li, interview.

depicting the building of the nation's defenses.[45]

Figure 1.6: Catalog of *Huxian Peasant Painting Exhibition*, 1973.

In this array of themes and subjects, one work stood out from all of the works in the three exhibitions. It was the brush-and-ink painting *An Old Professor's New Work* (*Laojiaoshou xin zhuzuo* 老教授新著作, 1973) by Zhong Zengya (钟增亚 1940–2002). [Figure 1.7] Zhong had studied with artists Guan Shanyue and Yang Zhiguang and graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art in 1966. *An Old Professor's New Work* was a highly realistic work that portrayed a white-haired senior intellectual researching herbal medicine late at night. The acceptance of the painting sent a significant message to the public. Not only was the painting depicting an intellectual—a member of an elite—allowed to be shown, the intellectual took central position in the composition. The work's presence in the exhibition revealed the relaxation of political pressure. Intellectuals were no longer subjects to be criticized and reformed. They could return to their posts. And as in this painting, they might even become models to admire.

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[45] See Li, *A Glossary of Political Terms*, 129.

Figure 1.7: Zhong Zengya, *An Old Professor's New Work*, 1973, brush-and-ink painting.

From 1972 to 1976, seventy-four national and regional art exhibitions were held. They exerted widespread influence across the country.[46] These exhibitions were a

[46] According to NAMOC records, these exhibitions were arranged exclusively by the Cultural Group of the State Council. In addition to the exhibitions already mentioned, they included the *National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China*, the *Exhibition of Workers' Paintings from Shanghai, Yangquan and Lu Da*

formidable window onto the art being produced. Through these shows, professional artists had opportunities to present their art to the public, despite still abiding by the artistic and thematic boundaries of the time. In the meantime, through visiting these exhibitions, young art students, non-professionally trained painters and the public gained direct access to original works of art and to examples of artistic and technical excellence exemplified by these works. The multiple restrictions and challenges regarding subject matter were real but were also creative starting points. Experiments in artistic language occurred within such confines. While many untrained workers, peasants and soldiers created drawings and paintings and continued to write revolutionary slogans, which still constituted the overwhelming pool of red visual materials, art students, art connoisseurs, professionally trained and senior artists also contributed to the making of a considerable number of outstanding oil paintings and brush-and-ink paintings that appeared in national art exhibitions and were published as New Year pictures (*Nianhua* 年画), propaganda paintings and posters. The print runs of posters were enormous and they were circulated broadly, with profound impacts on other artists. For instance, Shanghai painters Chen Yifei (陈逸飞 1946–2005) and Xu Chunzhong (徐纯中 b.1947) collaborated on a gouache painting depicting the heroic death of Jin Xunhua, a Shanghai-born high school student who drowned in Heilongjiang while protecting an electricity pole from being swept away by a flood. (*Chairman Mao's Red Guard: Learn from the Model of Revolutionary Youth Jin Xunhua*, gouache, 1969) [Figure 1.8] Jin's deed was promoted as a national

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(*Shanghai, Yangquan, Lüda gongren huazhanlan*) in 1974, and the *National Exhibition of New Year's Pictures and Children's Art* (*Quanguo nianhua, shaonian ertong meishu zuopin zhanlan*) in 1975. See Yang Zi, "Research on the Operational Mechanism of National Art Exhibitions during the Culture Revolution", 8. Yang Zi's statistics came from NAMOC, ed., *Zhongguo meishu nianjian (Yearbook of Chinese Art 1949–1989)* (Nanning: Guangxi Arts Publishing House Co. Ltd, 1993) and *Xiang zuguo huibao xinzhongguo meishu 60 nian* (*Report to the Mother's Land Sixty Years of Art in New China*) (Beijing: People's Art Publishing House, 2009).

model of selfless sacrifice and this work was repeatedly published as a postage stamp and a color poster, with a print run of 40 million copies.[47]

During the decade of the Cultural Revolution, there indisputably remained a very restricted space for artistic exploration and circulation. Even so, Yang Zi has argued that although the Cultural Revolution restricted artists' individualities, exhibitions held during the Cultural Revolution enabled elite artists to exert influence afterwards.[48] Despite the political conditions, the talent of these elite artists was clear. The argument is that bureaucratic interference was not damaging to artistic practice. This is highly debatable. Before and during the Cultural Revolution, artistic practice and discussion were continuously subject to extreme politicization and manipulation through ideology. This did huge damage to the making of art as well as art writing. The officially approved Socialist Realism was actually a bogus realism (*wei xianshizhuyi* 伪现实主义) that attacked genuine realist practice. Art criticism was twisted to support officially approved approach to art that customized the reality for ideological purposes and political passions and helped establish such a practice as a convention in art.[49] The political violence, destruction of the normal life of artists, and constraints imposed on free artistic practice cannot be underestimated despite the examples of a few individual artists who were able to demonstrate their artistic talent and agency in this process. In China, as I have demonstrated, all artistic agency was defined and contained by ideological boundaries.

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[47] Xu Chunzhong, "Wo yu Chen Yifei hua Jin Xunhua" ("I Painted Jin Xunhua with Chen Yifei"), *Zhiqing* (*Educated Youth*), no. 3 (July 2014), 10.
[48] Yang, "Research on the Operational Mechanism of National Art Exhibitions," 70–1.
[49] Hong Zicheng, "Guanyu 50–70 niandai de Zhongguo wenxue" ("About Chinese Literature from 1950s to 1970s"), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue gaishuo* (*A Brief Overview of Chinese Contemporary History*) (Nanning: Guangxi Education Publishing House, 2000), 43.

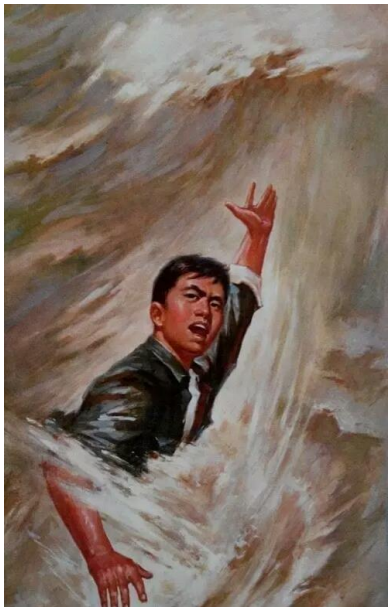

Figure 1.8: Chen Yifei and Xu Chunzhong, *Chairman Mao's Red Guard: Learn from the Model of Revolutionary Youth Jin Xunhua*, poster, 1969.

The Return of Art Through Hotel Commissions

The most fundamental change in 1972 was the return of artists from labor camps and paddy fields to art-making, primarily through the re-emergence of national art exhibitions and the need to decorate hotels in Beijing for diplomatic functions as China sought to re-engage with the wider world. While everything to do with art was still precarious and art was made within strict limits, the sporadic and still unsteady political relaxation from the previous dominance of extreme leftist politics shouldn't be underestimated in terms of its impact on the restoration of artistic work and expertise in the subsequent years.

At the 9th People's Congress in April 1969, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai decided that the central government would restart its diplomatic relationships with the rest of the world. China would slowly open itself up to international dialogue. The Sino-American relationship was still antagonistic and the Sino-Soviet relationship

was deteriorating, but America needed allies in its competition with the Soviets, so China and America strengthened their exchanges.[50] On July 9, 1971, Kissinger paid a secret visit to Beijing and met with Premier Zhou Enlai. It would take some time for the USA and China to establish diplomatic relations, but Kissinger's visit led to Nixon's visit to China the following year. By October 1971, the PRC had gained its seat at the United Nations, and in February 1972, Nixon visited China. China and Japan established diplomatic relations in the same year and by the end of 1972, China had established or revived diplomatic relationships with forty-one countries.[51]

In September 1971, in preparation for the visits of international leaders to China, Zhou Enlai ordered that the new or renovated hotels including the Beijing International Club (*Beijing guoji julebu* 北京国际俱乐部), Minzu Hotel (*Minzu fandian* 民族饭店) and Beijing Hotel (*Beijing fandian* 北京饭店), should be fitted out with Chinese paintings that would demonstrate the long and unique cultural traditions of China.[52] Foreign visitors were not to be faced with portraits of Mao Zedong and Party slogans. Acting on his instructions, the governmental bodies in charge brought in teachers, mostly senior artists from CAFA and the Central Academy of Art and Design who had been sent to military farms, to take on the commissions.[53]

After the Spring Festival of 1972, work on the commissions began in Beijing and other key cities too. Artists including A Lao (阿老 b.1920), Yan Han (彦涵 1916–

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[50] Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua-yu Li, eds. *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949–Present* [in Chinese], trans. Hua-yu Li (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019).
[51] Zhang Chi, *Historical Changes in Relations Between China and Neighboring Countries (1949–2012)* (Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden, 2013), 15.
[52] Song Ke, "Architecture at a Political Turning Point: Diplomatic Buildings in 1970s Beijing," *Architecture Beyond Europe*, no. 12 (2017): n.p., https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.3759.
[53] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 342.

2011), Deng Shu (邓澍 b.1929), Wei Tianlin (卫天霖 1898–1977), Li Kuchan (李苦禅 1899–1983) and Dong Shouping (董寿平 1904–1997) worked on paintings for the Beijing International Club. After the Beijing International Club, these artists moved on to make paintings for the Beijing Hotel. They were joined by Huang Zhou (黄胄 1925–1997), Huang Runhua (黄润华 b.1932), Zheng Naiguang (郑乃珖 1911–2005), Xu Linlu (许麟庐 1916–2011), Zong Qixiang (宗其香 1917–1999), Yuan Yunfu (袁运甫 1933–2017) and Wu Guanzhong, with Qiao Shiguang (乔十光 b.1937) assigned to work on interior decoration for the expanded Beijing Hotel. Wu Zuoren and Bai Xueshi (白雪石 1915–2011) created paintings for the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse (*Diaoyutai guobinguan* 钓鱼台国宾馆). [Figures 1.9–1.11]

Figure 1.9: Dong Shouping, *High Mountain and Flowing Water*, c.1971, brush-and-ink painting. East Lobby, International Club, Beijing.

Figure 1.10: Zhang Guofan, *Crane*, 1972, hotel mural inlaid with jade and shell. Dining Hall, International Club, Beijing.

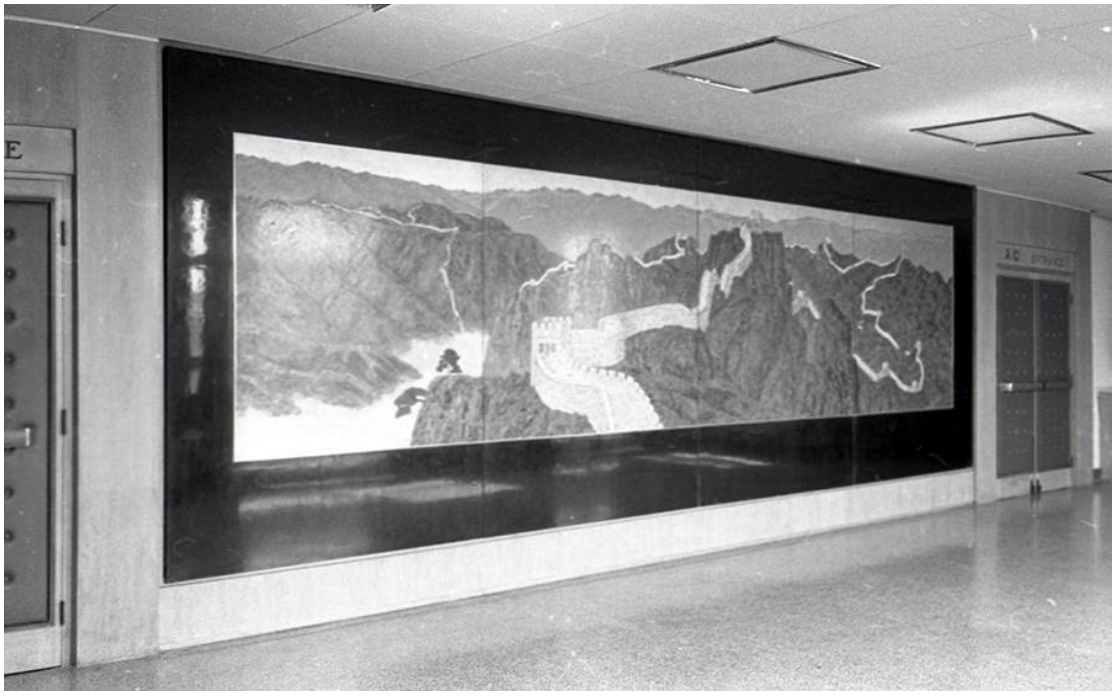

Figure 1.11: Qiao Shiguang, *The Great Wall*, 1972, lacquer painting. Front Hall of the Cinema, Beijing International Club, Beijing.

The choice of themes for the paintings was mainly determined by the interior contexts of the architecture, through discussions with architects of the buildings, and

considered for the purpose of decoration.[54] For the commission depicting the Yangtze River for the grand dining hall in the East Wing of the Beijing Hotel, Wu Guanzhong went on a research trip with fellow artists Yuan Yunfu, Huang Yongyu and Zhu Danian to sites along the river, from Shanghai to Suzhou, Nanjing and Mount Huang, and further west to Chongqing. From this trip, Wu Guanzhong completed a six-meter-long sketch for his oil painting *The Yangtze River in 1974* (1974 *nian changjiang* 1974 年长江, 1974). He collaged together various scenes sketched along the river, from high upstream to the river's mouth, in one panoramic view, the format reminiscent of traditional Chinese handscroll. [Figure 1.12] Painting these hotel paintings went on for over a year. All of the works were free from Socialist Realist strictures and depicted traditional themes, mostly natural landscapes and exotic, ethnic scenes intended to reference the beauty of the landscape and the ethnic diversity and harmony of China's peoples. It must be emphasized here that it was through making these hotel paintings that artists were able to reconnect to their practice; the commissions enabled a special, even if temporary, space for them to work.[55]

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[54] Based on the writing of Liu Yongliang, one of the architects of the Beijing International Club. See Liu Yongliang, "Bihua yu jianzhu" ("Murals and Architecture"), *Jianzhu Xuebao* (*Architecture Journal*), no. 12 (1982): 54–9.

[55] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 334.

Figure 1.12: Wu Guanzhong, *The Yangtze River in 1974*, 1974, oil on paper.

Simultaneously, other kinds of art gradually emerged again. In Beijing, senior art officials and senior artists were gradually released from state supervision. Their conditions improved. Instructed by the State Council, artists and sent-down youths with special artistic skills returned to cities, eager to change the frozen art scene and organize exhibitions. Cultural centers, educational institutions, workers' clubs, and art

centers for the public were to be the locations for art exhibitions in Beijing. Artists were instructed to decorate parks for National Day and Labor Day celebrations. They trained amateur artists. In cultural centers, art teachers from primary schools and middle schools and art enthusiasts from factories, enterprises, governmental institutions and villages gathered together, coached by teachers and graduate students from art academies in Beijing. Miyun County, for example, hosted Yin Shoushi (尹瘦石 1919–1998), Wu Guanzhong and Zhou Sicong (周思聪 1939–1996) etc. from the Beijing Academy of Art as visiting artists; they painted from life and gave lectures. After 1971, Beijing youth palaces and childrens' centers provided entry-level training for future artists. In 1971, universities and colleges began to enrol workers, peasants and soldiers as new students. The emergence of these events and venues in Beijing sent out the message to the rest of the country that local art scenes could be developed.[56]

The thaw in the art world would, however, soon be interrupted by the actions of the Gang of Four, who led a vitriolic attack on the Premier Zhou Enlai at the end of 1973 and the beginning of 1974.[57] Commissioned to make landscape paintings in national and contemporary styles for the decoration of hotels and venues to greet international visitors, artists depicted landscapes and episodes from China's long cultural and artistic history. The choices were similar to those made for exported paintings, and were made to earn much-needed foreign exchange. In Shanghai, for example, rehabilitated artists produced almost two thousand such paintings, and art

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[56] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 341; see also Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 384.
[57] See Alexander C. Cook, *The Cultural Revolution on Trial: Mao and the Gang of Four* (New York: Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, 2016).

organizations nationwide began similar projects that enabled many artists to resume their artistic activities after six to seven years of inactivity and produce an outpouring of high-quality paintings.[58] However, as Zhou Enlai grew weaker from cancer, Jiang Qing and her allies sought to position themselves for the succession battle by launching an ideological campaign targeting Zhou Enlai and the initiatives he'd set in motion, such as the paintings made for hotels and export purposes. They started by criticizing *Chinese Painting* (*Zhongguohua*), a catalog of nonpolitical paintings by famous brush-and-ink painters including Lin Fengmian, Li Keran and Pan Tianshou published by the Shanghai Foreign Trade Administration in 1972 as a promotional tool. [Figure 1.13] Many of the works produced for the interior decoration of the hotel venues designed for diplomatic purposes in Beijing were gathered together and exhibited, with criticism aimed at Zhou Enlai who supported the production of these works.[59] In the view of the Gang of Four, many works did "not carry out Chairman Mao's revolutionary cultural and artistic direction" (*bu zhixing Maozhuxi's geming wenyi luxian* 不执行毛主席的革命文艺路线).[60]

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[58] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 368.
[59] Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 373.
[60] On February 25, 1974, *Wenhua dongtai* (*Cultural Updates*) published a text, "Dangqian meishu chuangzuo zhong cunzai de yixie yanzhong wenti" ("Some Serious Issues in Current Artistic Practice"), which included a collection of "Black Paintings." The journal was published by the leading unit of Creative Practice of the Cultural Group of the State Council. See Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 343. See also Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 374.

Figure 1.13: Cover of *Chinese Painting*, catalog published by Shanghai Foreign Trade Administration, 1972.

At the beginning of 1974, the Gang of Four ordered the confiscation of offending paintings made for the Beijing International Club, Beijing Hotel and Minzu Hotel, and had works removed from a long list of other locations and outlets, including the National Political Consultative Conference Assembly Hall (*Zhengxie litang* 政协礼堂), antique stores, Rongbaozhai (荣宝斋), Beijing Institute of Art (*Beijing huayuan* 北京画院) and CAFA. Many of the confiscated works were sketches artists had made in preparation for the actual works; some were intended as personal gifts and not meant for display in hotels, but they were still attacked for their deviations and criticized as "Black Paintings" (*Heihua* 黑画).[61]

In February 1974, an exhibition of "Black Paintings" was mounted at NAMOC, including 215 works by 19 artists who were accused of counter-revolutionary

[61] King, *Art in Turmoil*.

tendencies. One hundred and fifty thousand workers, solders and peasants visited the exhibition to criticize the works. Jiang Qing ordered that the exhibition then be shown in the Great Hall of the People. Other art institutions in Beijing organized their own exhibitions to criticize "Black Paintings". Other provinces such as Shanxi Province and cities including Shanghai and Wuhan followed. According to the fragmentary records that survive, nearly 100 artists were named "Black Painting artists" and implicated in this campaign.[62] In an absurd way, while being the target of political criticism, such a nationwide display of brush-and-ink paintings, many of them created by skilled and established artists, created an invaluable educational occasion, exemplifying diversity and excellence in artistic quality. Like the national art exhibitions, these displays were born out of particular political circumstances and were the result of the workings of a political apparatus that compromised artistic undertakings. However, their existence was like an undercurrent that carried on artistic traces throughout this particular historical period.

The Beijing Fine Art Company

Art historians have differentiated the early period of the Cultural Revolution from its later phases. In the later period, from 1971 to 1976, more art was made in oil on canvas and in ink on Chinese paper. In the earlier stage, from 1966 to 1970, posters and prints and Red Guard art were popular. Later art departed from the famous models of revolutionary art developed by the Eighth Route Army and veterans of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts and Literature in Yan'an during the late 1930s and 1940s, towards a more academic but still Socialist artistic language.[63]

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[62] Andrews, "The Black Painting Exhibitions," in *Painters and Politics*, 360–77.
[63] Julia F. Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," in King, *Art in Turmoil*, 27–57.

As part of the undercurrent of the Cultural Revolution, some of the artist members who were involved in the making of official Socialist Realist paintings and fulfilling state commissions continued to experiment with modernist techniques and styles in private. They came from extremely diverse backgrounds and consisted both of artists who were educated before 1949 and of those who went to art academies in the 1950s. The artist couple Pang Tao and Lin Gang, for instance, collaborated on historically themed paintings in the 1970s.[64] Pang Tao had grown up in a family of famous modernist painters—Pang Xinqin and Qiu Di—and trained at CAFA in the years after 1949, whereas Lin Gang had been sent to study in the Soviet Union in 1956. Some of the artists working within the state propaganda structure, such as the Beijing Fine Art Company (*Beijing meishu gongsi* 北京美术公司), also had possibilities of continuing their own experiments in art-making, but to a very limited extent. These individual differences and experiences are usually neglected in accounts of Cultural Revolution art, which is invariably homogenised.[65]

The Beijing Fine Art Company was part of the state bureaucracy of art that managed to continue to exist during the Cultural Revolution.[66] In 1950, the Beijing Municipal

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[64] See Wang Xiaomei and Zhang Miaomiao, eds., *Lin Gang Pang Tao liushinian yishu huiguzhan* (*Lin Gang Pang Tao: A Sixty-Year Retrospective*) (Beijing: NAMOC, 2010); see also Pang Tao, *Pang Tao* (Beijing: Culture and Arts Publishing House, 2010); Xu Zhengyun, ed., *Lin Gang* (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), 14–15.

65 Lyu Peng, "Jieji douzheng' yu 'wenhua dageming' shiqi de yishu" ("Art during 'Class Struggle' and 'Cultural Revolution'"), in *A History of Art in Twentieth Century China*, 519–73; see also Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, "Miwuzhong de yishu" ("Art in the Mist"), in *Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi* (*A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1986), 287–307.

[66] The Beijing Fine Art Company was absorbed into the Beijing Gehua Fine Art Company in 1997. Zhang Li, director of Human Resources at Gehua Fine Art Company, joined the Beijing Fine Art Company in 1981 to work as a librarian in the Research Department of the Company. Her mother joined the Beijing Fine Art Company in 1956. In the absence of published materials and given the difficulty of accessing archival materials on the company, I have drawn on oral accounts by Zhang Li

People's Art Studio (*Beijingshi renmin meishu gongzuoshi* 北京市人民美术工作室), was founded under the supervision of the Literature and Art Department of Beijing Municipal Cultural and Education Bureau (*Beijingshi wenjiaoju wenyichu lingdao de wenhua shiye danwei* 北京市文教局文艺处领导的文艺事业单位). Its purpose was to assist in the production of political propaganda.[67] Later, in 1956, the Beijing Fine Art Company came into being by merging dozens of private fine art studios and advertizing studios that had been producing portrait paintings, oil paintings and charcoal drawings to sell to state institutions, armies, schools and state-owned companies.[68] This was part of a nationwide Socialist reform to set up joint state–private partnerships. As a result, private enterprises were absorbed and combined into a large entity, which in this case was the Beijing Fine Art Company. When it was first established, the Beijing Fine Art Company had 750 staff members and was the biggest cultural enterprise in China.

In 1958, the Beijing Municipal People's Art Studio was closed and its staff were absorbed into the Beijing Fine Art Company.[69] The main business of the Beijing Fine

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for my understanding of the business of the Beijing Fine Art Company. Zhang stated that the archive of the Beijing Fine Art Company got lost when the company was taken over by Gehua: Zhang Li, interview with author, Gehua Plaza, Beijing, June 10, 2018. I also refer to the personal diary of Hu Man, who directed the Beijing Municipal People's Art Studio until 1958, for the range of activities that the studio was engaged in. After 1958, the Beijing Municipal People's Art Studio was closed and its members were absorbed into the Beijing Fine Art Company. See Hu Man, *Hu Man Ji Xinzhongguo Meishu Huodong1952–1966 (Hu Man's Record of Fine Art Activities in New China from 1952 to 1966)* (Beijing: Chinese Bookstore, 2014).

[67] An Shiming, *Beijing meishu huodong dashiji (Beijing Art Chronology 1949–1989)* (Beijing: Beijing Municipal Artists' Association, 1992), 24.

[68] Yang Jianru, "Yiduan buneng wangque de shijue wenhuashi: 1950–70 niandai de Beijingshi meishu gongsi yu guojia renwu" ("An Unforgettable History of Visual Culture: Beijing Fine Art Company and State Tasks from the 1950s to 1970s"), *Wenyi lilun yu piping* (*Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*), no. 4 (2019): 135–47.

[69] On May 19, 1958, Xin Mang, Zhuang Yan, Zhang Songhe, Xiao Su, Tian Ling, Peng Cheng, Luo Feng, Pang Jun, Xiao Yuming, Chen Shuguang, Liu Ziming and Zhang Wenxin were transferred to the Beijing Fine Art Company. On May 21, 1958, a celebration of the founding of the Beijing Fine Art Company was held in the New China Cinema in Dali Shamao Hutong. See An, *Beijing Art Chronology*, 56.

Art Company was not particularly different from the Studio's, producing paintings and sculptures of political figures for official functions. Their highest profile commission was the official portrait of Mao Zedong that hung above the Tian'anmen Gate, facing the Square. Other work involved decorations for official venues and state events, including the funerals of political leaders, the design of public utilities and signs, architectural commissions and exhibition designs for governmental museums. The latter included everything from the design of archeological displays to exhibitions of Chinese art and crafts held outside China, the creation of paintings for export purposes, and painting commissions for foreign embassies based in China. In many cases, the Beijing Fine Art Company didn't just design an exhibition but also made paintings based on the theme of each exhibition, even fabricating replicas of antiques for display.[70]

The company had artist members and technical staff, including carpenters and electricians.[71] Its artists included Xin Mang (辛莽 1916–2007), Zhuang Yan (庄言 1915–2002) and Liu Xun, most of whom had been in Yan'an in the 1940s, the early "incubating" phase of Chinese Communist art. During the Cultural Revolution, in 1965, the artist team was dissolved and some of its members were suspended from their posts, subjected to political prosecution and sent to labor in rural and remote areas. However, to ensure that the company continued to be in service, fulfilling the needs of propaganda during this period, some young professional artists were brought in to take their place. These included the Beijing-based artists Yan Zhenduo, Pang Jun (庞均 b.1936), Cao Dali and Wang Lu (王路 b.1936). They had all graduated from

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[70] Zhang, interview.
[71] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 338.

CAFA before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. According to Yan Zhenduo, he joined the Beijing Fine Art Company in 1968 and continued painting during the Cultural Revolution, making large portrait paintings of political leaders, landscape paintings, and paintings of factories and mines. Yan Zhenduo and his schoolmates from CAFA, Chen Yilu (陈以禄 b.1941) from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, and Yang Yanping (杨燕屏 b.1934) from the Architecture Department of Tsinghua University were taken on by the Company for oil painting commissions. Zhang Songhe (张松鹤 1912–2005), who had attended the Guangzhou Fine Arts Training School, and two CAFA graduates, Chen Shuguang (陈淑光 b.1931) and Bao Pao (包炮 b.1940), were among those responsible for sculpture. They also designed and fabricated art exhibitions in Beijing and in the provinces. Their obligations included traveling to places of significance in the Party's revolutionary history, including Yan'an, Jinggangshan, Changsha and Nanchang, to paint *en plein air*. They also made research trips to rural areas around Beijing and to factories and mines in order to create propaganda paintings.[72] In the intervals, they produced landscape paintings that were sold in shops located throughout the city that were managed by the Beijing Fine Art Company and sold abroad by the state in exchange for foreign currency.[73] By the 1980s there were more than 600 staff members at Beijing Fine Art Company. It had its own archive and library, where exhibition catalogs from the West were accessible to staff employed by the company.

Artists of many generations, educational backgrounds and experiences gathered at the Beijing Fine Art Company from the 1950s through to the 1970s. Some of them had

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[72] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 338; see also Yan, interview.
[73] Yan, interview.

been skilled craftsmen and artisans before 1949 and some were younger members who had been taught by senior artists who were active before 1949. For instance, Yan Zhenduo entered the Beijing Normal College of Art in 1959 at the age of eighteen. The College had departments of music, theatre and art. Originally, it was set up in 1889 as a center for higher-level education, to train teachers, and was a department at the Imperial University of Peking (*Jingshi daxuetang* 京师大学堂). In 1904, the department was transformed into a college for training teachers. In 1949, the Central Education Department assigned Japan-trained artist Wei Tianlin (卫天霖 1898–1977) to found a Department of Art and Craft and assume the role of director. Many of the artists who taught at this college, including Zhang Qiuhai (张秋海 1898–1988), Zuo Hui (左辉 1912–1992), Wu Guanzhong and Li Ruinian (李瑞年 1910–1985), had studied modern art in Japan, France, Belgium and elsewhere. The teachers also included Zhuang Yan and Xin Mang, who had trained at the Luxun Academy of Art,[74] as well as Liu Yalan (刘亚兰 b.1923), who had studied in the Soviet Union in the 1940s. Yan Zhenduo recalled that his exposure to Western modern art was through these artists.[75]

After he joined the Beijing Art Company in 1968, one of his two major tasks was painting portraits of Mao Zedong. These paintings were mainly made for use by Red Guards, who staged endless numbers of dramas and exhibitions to parade their loyalty to Mao. Other portraits of Mao were commissioned to decorate conference rooms,

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[74] See D.L. Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 45–6; see also Elena Meyer-Clement, "Towards Mass Culture under Mao Zedong," in *Party Hegemony and Entrepreneurial Power in China* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 47.

[75] See the official website of Beijing Normal College for the history of the Beijing Normal College of Art, accessed on January 2, 2017, https://english.bnu.edu.cn/about/bnuhistory/index.htm.
Yan Zhenduo had emphasized the exposure he received to Western modern art when studying in this school. Yan, interview.

public spaces and classrooms. Yan's other task was to paint site-specific pictures of historical and political themes for venues such as the Museum of Chinese Revolution and the Military Museum. Yan Zhenduo recalled that after Lin Biao was named Mao's successor, Yan enlarged a painting depicting Mao Zedong and Lin Biao for the façade of the Working People's Cultural Palace (*Laodong renmin wenhuagong* 劳动人民文化宫), measuring five or six meters tall.[76] All these commissions were painted in the Company's large studio, which was ten meters high and fifty to sixty meters wide.

During his time in the Beijing Fine Art Company, Yan Zhenduo devoted some of his private time and energy to studying the color theories of Impressionism and their possible applicability in China. This was unusual work, and had to be carried out in secret as Impressionism was still off limits in public discussions. He learned that with the distinctly different climate and air quality across different regions of China, and with the difference in humidity between southern China and northern China, it was not possible to represent different regions in China with one version of Impressionist color. He tried to address this in his works of that time.[77]

Looking back on the situation now, we can understand that artists who had jobs at the Beijing Fine Art Company were, effectively, art workers (*yishu gongzuozhe* 艺术工作者) offering artistic skills to accommodate the needs of the state. For Yan Zhenduo and his artist friends who worked at the company, making paintings was a paid job. Yan Zhenduo felt that by being part of this production company and necessarily

[76] This painting was based on an original painted by Peng Bin (b.1927) and Jin Shangyi, entitled *With You in Charge, I Am at Ease* (*Nibanshi, wofangxin*), 1977. Yan, interview.
[77] Yan, interview.

maintaining a distance from the literary and artistic field, he wasn't subject to too much political pressure during the Cultural Revolution. Instead, as long as he finished his commissions, he could have some private time to paint still life subjects, through which he could practise with colors and forms and experiment with late Impressionist inspired techniques.[78] He could also visit sites outside Beijing, such as the Summer' Palace, to paint *en plein air*. These trips and exercises created an artistic space for him to explore stylistic issues. The example of the Beijing Fine Art Company is that of paid artists working through the Cultural Revolution. Unlike artists of the No Name Group, for example, who will be discussed in Chapter Two, the artists of the Beijing Fine Art Company had greater access to painting materials and resources. Based on that experience, many of them would become active participants in the art boom in Beijing in the late 1970s.

The End of the Cultural Revolution and the Continuation of Painting by Homogeneous Themes

By the end of 1974, Mao Zedong ordered a return to the task of economic modernization. With Deng Xiaoping's reappointment as CCP Vice Chairman in January 1975, economic and social conditions started to get back on track.[79] Adjustments were to now be made in the fields of literature and art, allowing works that had not conformed to the Gang of Four's directives to gradually re-emerge. With Mao's approval, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China allowed *People's Literature* (*Renmin wenxue*《人民文学》) and *Poetry Journal* (*Shikan*《诗

[78] Yan, interview.
[79] Lawrence R. Sullivan, "Chronology," in *Historical Dictionary of the People's Republic of China* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007), xxv.

刊》) to start producing new issues. In March 1976, a few art journals including *Art*, which was published by the Federation of Literature and Art Circles, were allowed to publish again.[80] But the Gang of Four and the extreme leftists could still create obstacles. In November 1975, the Gang of Four initiated the "Anti-Deng and Anti-Rightism" campaign (*Pideng fanji youqin fan'anfeng* 批邓、反击右倾翻案风), attacking Deng Xiaoping, who was the number one Deputy Prime Minister.[81] In April 1976, Deng was stripped of all his positions.

It was not long, however, before the situation shifted again, making 1976 a pivotal year in Chinese history. Following Zhou Enlai's death on January 8, Zhu De's death on July 6, the Tangshan Earthquake on July 28 and Mao Zedong's death on September 9, the Gang of Four was isolated and placed in detention on October 6. On October 14, the CPC Central Committee announced that the Gang of Four had been smashed, a major sign that spelt out the end of the Cultural Revolution. Beginning on October 21, nationwide denunciations of the Gang of Four began. In the arts, a restructured Ministry of Culture organized a discussion involving artists from all over the country, urging them to denounce the Gang of Four's crimes against culture.[82] From November 1976 to the following year, celebratory exhibitions were organized

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[80] The first issue of *Art* magazine after the end of the Cultural Revolution was published in March 1976. Hua Junwu was its Chief Editor. Brush-and-ink artist Guan Shanyue's painting *Being Beautiful While not Competing with Spring* (*Qiao bu zhengchun*, 1973) was the cover image. Its editorial proposed supporting diverse artistic creation, activating art criticism and encouraging debate. See *Art* Editorial, ed., *Meishu shidai huajuan* (*Art Magazine Times Schroll Painting*) (Beijing: People's Fine Art Publishing House, 2014), 60.

[81] This was the last major political attack initiated by Mao, who was upset by Deng's efforts to correct the wrongs of the Cultural Revolution, which he considered a personal offense to himself. See Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping,* 93.

[82] "Wangzhong yixin zheng fue: shoudu wenyijie fennu shengtao 'sirenbang' liyong wenyi fantang de taotianzhuixing" ("Conquering Corruption with All One's Heart: The Capital's Literary and Artistic Circles Angrily Denounced the Heinous Crimes of the 'Gang of Four' Using Arts and Literature Against the Party"), *People's Daily,* December 17, 1976, 1.

in Beijing and all over the country.[83] On February 18, 1977, NAMOC held the *National Art Exhibition to Ardently Celebrate Comrade Hua Guofeng's Appointment as Central Party Chairman and Chairman of the Central Military Committee and Ardently Celebrate the Great Victory of Smashing the 'Gang of Four's' Plot to Usurp the Party and Take Power* (*Relie qingzhu Hua Guofeng tongzhi ren zhonggong zhongyang zhuxi, zhongyang junwei zhuxi, relie qingzhu fensui sirenbang zhuandangtuoquan yinmo de weida shengli quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan* 热烈庆祝华国锋同志任中共中央主席、中央军委主席，热烈庆祝粉碎'四人帮'篡党夺权阴谋的伟大胜利全国美术作品展览).[84] By now, themes and styles were no longer as strictly supervised as during the Cultural Revolution. Even so, in practice artists were still affected by the mode of working that was common during the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-Rightist Movement. This was evident in the ubiquitous political subject matter in artworks and in their conformity to a common Socialist Realist style. Even if artists painted works that reflected critically on the Cultural Revolution, they tended to work with the same political themes.

On October 10, 1976, four days after members of the Gang of Four were arrested, two newspapers and a magazine simultaneously published an editorial titled "The Common Will of Hundreds of Millions of People".[85] In this editorial, the idea that "we must unite closely around the Party's Central Committee led by Comrade Hua Guofeng" was proposed for the first time. On October 24, 1976, millions of soldiers

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[83] An, *Beijing Art Chronology*, 38.
[84] An, *Beijing Art Chronology*, 38; see also Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 328.
[85] During the Cultural Revolution, "two newspapers" refers to *People's Daily* and *Liberation Army Daily*, and "one magazine" refers to *Red Flag*: "Yiwan renmin de gongtong xinyuan" ("The Common Will of Millions of People"), *People's Daily*, October 10, 1976, 1; *Jiefang junbao* (*Liberation Army Daily*), October 10, 1976, 1; *Hong Qi* (*Red Flag*), no. 10 (October 10, 1976): 2.

and civilians gathered in Tian'anmen Square to celebrate unmasking the conspiracy of the Gang of Four and their failed attempt to usurp power. In the midst of this festivity, Hua Guofeng, the highest leader in the Party, ascended the Tian'anmen Rostrum to the crowd's cheers and shouted "(Be) at ease, at ease, at ease…" (*Fangxin, fangxin, fangxin* 放心、放心、放心). Wu De (吴德 1913–1995); then the Director of Beijing Revolutionary Committee, spoke to the crowd, declaring that the great leader Chairman Mao had personally written a note to Comrade Hua Guofeng including the phrase "With You in Charge, I am at Ease."[86] According to Wu, this was proof of Chairman Mao's infinite trust in Hua Guofeng, who was now officially proclaimed as the true heir to the supreme leader. Taking this as their signal, artists immediately set about recreating images of the meeting between Mao Zedong and Hua Guofeng. Without any actual historical photo, the painters designed their imaginary scenes based on photographs of Mao meeting foreign guests, the arrangement of his study, and well-known hand gestures. Before long, painters all over the country had turned out almost 100 paintings and sketches based on "With You in Charge, I am at Ease." They were all basically identical.[87] Brush-and-ink painter Li Yansheng (李延生 b.1943) was the first to depict Mao Zedong meeting Hua Guofeng. [Figure 1.14] He had been invited to Beijing to paint the scene by Rongbaozhai Gallery and the People's Fine Arts Publisher, which issued one million poster copies of the painting in 1976, which were immediately followed by another print run of 1.1 million copies the next month.[88]

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[86] See Li, *A Glossary of Political Terms*, 289; see also David M. Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (Stanford: Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 135.

[87] Wen Lipeng. "Shinian jianxin sanda kuabu" ("Ten Years of Firm Belief Three Major Strides"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no. 5 (February 1988): 3.

[88] Chen Lusheng, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi 1949–1966* (*The Art History of the People's Republic of China 1949–1966*) (Beijing: China Youth Press, 2000).

Figure 1.14: Li Yansheng, *With You in Charge, I am at Ease,* 1976, poster.

Peng Bin, a graduate of Luxun Academy of the Arts in 1940 and a painter at the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution, and Jin Shangyi, who taught at CAFA, collaborated on an oil painting of the same subject that year as well. [Figure 1.15] Stylistically, their painting represented a departure from Socialist Realism. It shows Mao and Hua sharing an intimate chat and not a formal discussion of state affairs. The closed cabinets in the background are a formal element and not a vehicle for political symbolism. The scene is rendered from eye level, a significant iconographic change from portraying idolized figures looking down at the viewers as in Socialist Realism, and the figures are modeled using soft and gentle rather than bravura, rhetorical brushstrokes. The figures in the painting are not deified, and books and cups are placed in a carefully haphazard and naturalistic arrangement across tables and on sofas. The scene is set in a corner of Mao's study, not in a large

conference room as viewers might have imagined. Put simply, the artists depicted an everyday meeting between two venerable politicians.

Figure 1.15: Peng Bin and Jin Shangyi, *With You in Charge, I Am at Ease*, 1976, oil on canvas.

Almost simultaneously, the central government sent out editorials to mourn Zhang Zhixin (张志新 1930–1975), a female Communist Party member who had been thrown into prison and prosecuted for criticizing the Cultural Revolution. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, many victims were rehabilitated and Zhang Zhixin was a prominent early case.[89] In the spring of 1979, Zhang was officially proclaimed

[89] Jonathan Chaves, "A Devout Prayer of the Passion of Chang Chih-hsin," *Modern Chinese Literature Newsletter* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 8–24.

a martyr.[90] Artists from all over the country quickly produced works depicting this new subject in different media. In 1979, an exhibition of *Art, Photography and Calligraphy of Learning from Zhang Zhixin* (*Xuexi Zhang Zhixin meishu, sheying, shufa zhanlan* 学习张志新美术、摄影、书法展览) was held at NAMOC, including works made in a wide range of styles, from realistic sculptures to surrealist paintings.[91] Zhang was portrayed in a variety of poses: lying flat on a bed, squatting, looking out of her cell window, reclining, resting her head in her hands, and expressing a variety of complex emotions from sadness, indignation, loneliness and depression to hope. Wen Lipeng (闻立鹏 b.1931), son of poet and scholar Wen Yiduo (闻一多 1899–1946), who had graduated from CAFA's Oil Painting Department in 1963 and was retained as a teacher at CAFA, painted *The Daughter of the Earth* (*Dadi de nu'er* 大地的女儿, 1979). In this highly symbolic image, the body of Zhang Zhixin wearing a white dress lies on a hilltop covered by red flowers, which appear like pools of blood stripping down the hillside. This imaginary scene was set against the backdrop of dramatic clouds rendered in expressive brush strokes. [Figure 1.16]

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[90] Wang, Youqin, "Finding a Place for the Victims: The Problem in Writing the History of the Cultural Revolution," *China Perspectives*, no. 4 (2007): 65–74, accessed February 12, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24052855.

[91] The exhibition was held in September 1979. See NAMOC, *Annual of Chinese Art 1949–1989*, 93.

Figure 1.16: Wen Lipeng, *The Daughter of the Earth*, 1979, oil on canvas.

Artist Cao Dali (曹达力 b.1934) presented a surrealist diptych of Zhang Zhixin. In Cao's melancholic portrait *Zhang Zhixin* (1980), the young martyr appears at the bottom of the sea as if in a dreamscape, eyes closed, holding a violin. [Figure 1.17] Renée June-Nikel (known in China as Wang Henei 王合内 1912–2000), a French sculptor who in 1937 moved to China with her husband, Chinese artist Wang Linyi (王临乙 1908–1997) and taught at CAFA, cast a realistic bust of Zhang Zhixin in bronze. [Figure 1.18] Even though the eyebrows, forehead and angle of her face implied a Socialist Realist style, her visage was meticulously and realistically sculpted. In all of these variations on the theme of Zhang Zhixin, her heroic character was essentially a pretext to denounce the Cultural Revolution. Artists took full advantage of the opportunity to create works that responded to a political directive but

allowed them to express a complex array of emotions relating to the immediate past, and more importantly to experiment with a broad range of artistic forms and styles. In both of the examples of depicting Zhang Zhixin and Hua Guofeng in art, artists continued to respond collectively to a common political theme, carrying on the mode of making art by representing and interpreting a given political subject, but stylistically and artistically, artists were moving towards greater diversity, and above all expressing their own feelings and revealing both truth and darkness in their works. This was a major transformation in artistic creation but one that was closely connected to earlier practices, attesting to the continuity of certain aspects of historical reality at a moment of major political change such as the end of the Cultural Revolution.[92]

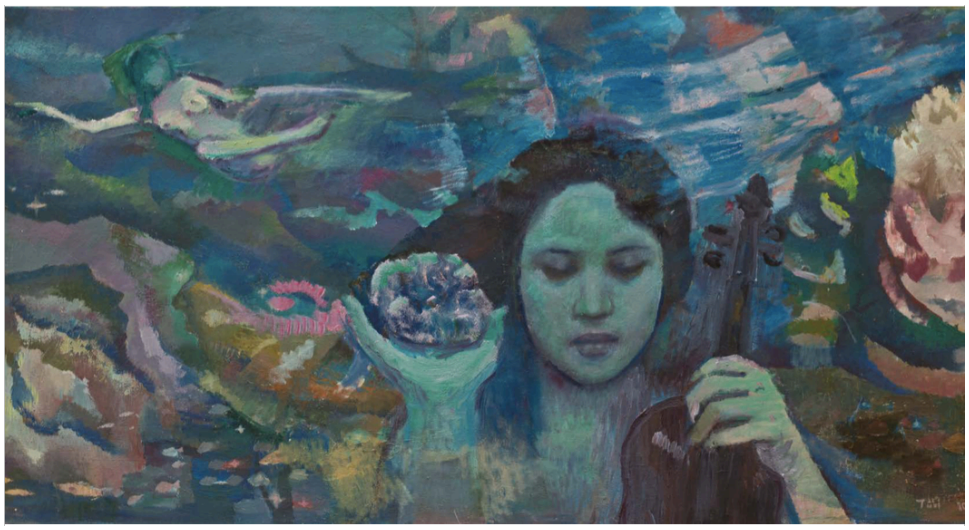

Figure 1.17: Cao Dali, *Zhang Zhixin*, 1980, oil on canvas.

[92] He Rong, "Meishu chuangzuo de weida zhuanzhe" ("Major Transformations in Artistic Creations"). *Meishu* (*Art*), no. 9 (September 1979): 6–8.

Figure 1.18: Renée June-Nikel, *Zhang Zhixin*, 1980, bronze sculpture.

Conclusion

In a well-known essay, Chinese literary historian Hong Zicheng noted the discrepancy between Jiang Qing's absolute public condemnation of so-called bourgeois art, and her apparently contradictory choice to bringing together "feudalistic" Peking opera and elements inspired by Western music played with Western musical instruments in revolutionary model operas during the Cultural Revolution. She ordered condemned Peking opera actor Zhang Shilin to teach the foxtrot to model opera performer Qian Haoliang. Her artists were supposed to learn from European, Mexican and American films, including *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Dove* (1974), no matter that both were regarded as bourgeois art.[93]

[93] Hong Zicheng, "Geming yangbanxi: neibude kunjing" ("Revolutionary Model Operas: Internal Predicaments"), in *Du zuopin ji* (*Notes of Reading Works*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2017), 88–9.

In visual art, historical reality also alerts us to the diverse training that elite artists had gained before the Cultural Revolution. After 1949, both Chinese traditional arts and Western modernism continued to exert influence, even if they only trickled down through family traditions, collected objects, exhibition catalogs, the odd touring exhibition and remembrances of overseas studies. As high-ranking cultural officials and educators directed Chinese art through the power of centralized government administration, they carried with them their own experiences, since they were often themselves senior artists and writers from earlier decades of pre-Communist rule. Their expertise was suppressed but they seized upon chances within the limitations imposed during the Cultural Revolution. Skill and training weren't entirely erased during this time. There existed more diversity in artistic practice than most previous writers have acknowledged, and this difference interfered with the actual transmission of political ideology. On the one hand, cosmopolitan and classical influences were attacked and prohibited; on the other, they remained alive in private.

This chapter has examined a number of critical events and facts with a focus on 1972 as a crucial year, seeing the return of professional artists to their work through commissions of hotel paintings in Beijing, the reopening of national art exhibitions, and the ongoing operation of the Beijing Fine Art Company. I have highlighted two collective representations of timely political themes, even after the end of the Cultural Revolution. A surprising multiplicity of artistic experiences and skills were presented, even in national art exhibitions that celebrated political themes, and this diversity was circulated to a younger generation through exhibitions, even in the case of the "Black Painting" exhibitions. The collapse of the art establishment and the removal of artists and cultural officials from their posts during the Cultural Revolution was enormously

significant, but in terms of artistic practice, would generate a fluid social space for artistic experiences to emerge beyond the usual social, bureaucratic and academic barriers.

Through these events, I have described the extent to which artists could act with any degree of freedom during this time, and explained that, if only to an extremely limited extent, artistic agency did exist. This chapter has argued for a more nuanced historical understanding of art produced during the Cultural Revolution period and leading into the late 1970s, when artists of different generations and status began to organize their own exhibitions, which will be the subject of Chapter Two.[94] The events and organizations I have discussed in this chapter were all located within the state's ideological horizons and were subject to state control. This perspective on the historical narrative of Chinese contemporary art forces us to part company with Western avant-garde perspectives on contemporary art's development, with their emphasis on art's criticality and distance from the state. And within Chinese-language studies of the art of this period, it is perhaps easier to overlook the relevance of events and projects underway between 1972 and 1976, and concentrate instead on art, artistic events and writings produced after 1976 as the origin of contemporary art in China. We will next think about what this means for the insistence on the Star Group and their street demonstrations as one of the key points of origin of contemporary art in China.

The lesson of this chapter is that leftist politics was not a completely dominant influence, as is clear if we pay attention to the art itself, as well as to specific artists

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[94] This phenomenon of self-organized exhibitions and art events will be discussed Chapter Two.

and their experiences. The art of the Cultural Revolution was not always political propaganda; individual artistic activities didn't always conform to the mandates of political propaganda. During the Cultural Revolution, different kinds of art remained hidden, sometimes in plain sight. Opportunities and spaces within the dominant state structure gradually appeared. We cannot afford to assume the homogeneity of Socialist Realist art. Instead, during this period, the events that I have described prepared the way for new art that would rapidly appear at the end of the Cultural Revolution, albeit an art that remains inseparable from the structure and logic of the ideology of the ruling Communist Party.

Chapter Two

Top-down and Bottom-up, Transition and Adjustment, 1977–1982

Introduction

In the last chapter, I described the four years from 1972 to 1976 as a period of gradual recovery in art, and I explained that professional artists were able to make art again, though still within tight ideological boundaries. There was some space for artists to exhibit, and this was through national art exhibitions and "Black Painting" exhibitions that presented the works of professionally trained artists, even though all of them were organized with the state's priorities and critical frameworks in mind. Here, I look at the years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, and I explore an often-dramatic efflorescence of art, explaining that this was the continuation of the limited resurgence of art from 1972. In this chapter, I will examine the artist initiatives, exhibitions, publications, art events and public discourses of the period, focusing on 1976 to 1979 as a short window of relative freedom. In particular I will discuss the Beijing Oil Painting Society (*Beijing youhua yanjiu hui* 北京油画研究会), the Stars Group (*Xingxing huahui* 星星画会), the April Photography Society (*Siyue yinghui* 四月影会), the No Name Group (*Wuming huahui* 无名画会) and their exhibitions at this time.

As a period of transition and adjustment, the three years from 1976 to 1979 have been given too little attention.[1] Moreover, as I have stressed all through the thesis, the

[1] In *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, Gao Minglu and his co-authors defined the period from 1976 to 1978 as the period of post-Cultural Revolution art and summarized it briefly in

narration of the beginnings of contemporary art in China has placed great emphasis on artist collectives such as the Stars Group, and in more recent years also the No Name Group, and on their defiant attitudes, approaches and independence from the state, without considering the connections and continuities with earlier periods, and without considering the many other events and groups both preceding and parallel to them. These activities didn't necessarily display any outright radicalism or resistance towards the state, and some of them directly involved artists employed by cultural establishments and even cultural bureaucrats. Yet the lack of attention given to these alternative historical events needs to be remedied and different experiences and perspectives incorporated into the narrative. My intention is to reveal these events and exhibitions in the political and social contexts of their time, and to explore the intersections of political change and the agency of liberal-minded individuals both within and outside the official art establishment. The artist groups, events and discussions I will discuss in this chapter were part of a holistic social and cultural space, embedded in the transformations of the time. They carried over the impact of the gradual recovery starting from 1972. I will show a complicated picture, one far from the assumption that a binary tension existed between artists and the state. This is not to contradict the importance of the Stars and No Name groups, but to bring to the fore a more comprehensive understanding of the period.

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about two pages, largely focusing on the political propaganda art that continued to exist. The years between 1979 and 1984 were considered a period of humanistic art, manifested through discussions and the production of artworks that articulated individuality and feelings of suffering and human compassion. See Gao Minglu, ed., *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi 1985–1986* (*A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985-1986*), (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1991), 26–31. Lyu Peng wrote succinctly about the period through a discussion of a revolution of artistic forms and the Stars exhibition but placed emphasis on the year of 1979. See Lyu Peng, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi* (*A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006), 649–63.

One of the key signals of change was the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhonggong zhongyang shiyijie sanzhongquanhui* 中共中央十一届三中全会), held from December 18 to 22, 1978.[2] It officially marked the beginning of China's Reform and Opening-Up program.[3] This event manifested the government's determination to close the chapter on the Cultural Revolution and to move the country towards a new period of reform and openness. Such a critical shift in political conditions enabled a new political space, one of apparent relaxation in expression, that encouraged intellectuals to "liberate their thoughts" (*sixiangjiefang* 思想解放 or *jiefang sixiang* 解放思想).[4]

Earlier, on December 11, 1978, Zhou Yang, then Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Chairman of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, made a speech on "Literature and Art in the New Era of Socialism" at the Guangdong Literature Work Forum.[5] His address was crucial. Zhou Yang began by arguing clearly that the mission of literature and art in the New Era of Socialism was to reflect the reality of Socialism and depict new social developments, along with—and this was crucial—a diversity of themes.[6] He explained that literary and artistic works should agree or disagree with, and even expose, faults in society. "No

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[2] See Hu Fuming, "Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biaozhun" ("Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth"), *Guangming ribao* (*Guangming Daily*), May 11, 1978, 1; see also Timothy Cheek, *Living With Reform: China Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 62.

[3] See Glossary and Introduction n 27.

[4] For a more in-depth discussion on cultural reform during this period, see Perry Link, "The Limits of Cultural Reform in Deng Xiaoping's China," *Modern China* 13, no. 2 (April 1987), 115–76.

[5] The Guangdong Literature Work Forum (*Guangdongsheng wenxue chuangzuo zuotanhui*) was organized by the Guangdong Unit of China Writers Association at the Guangdong Victory Hotel (*Guangdong shengli binguan*) from December 5 to 16 in 1978. See Jiang Lifu, "Xu zibei liangpiao canyu de wenxue zuotanhui" ("A Literature Work Forum with Self-prepared Food Coupon"), accessed April 10, 2020, https://cul.qq.com/a/20160116/024144.htm.

[6] Zhou Yang, "Guanyu shehuizhuyi xinshiqi de wenxue yishu wenti" ("Literature and Art in the New Era of Socialism"), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), February 23–24, 1979, 1.

comment" would also be accepted, and thus the formalist aspect of modernism should be permitted. With regard to subjects and styles, Zhou Yang cleverly cited Mao's policy of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend," and argued that from this Chinese art might derive "Two Freedoms" (*liangge ziyou* 两个自由)—the freedom to develop different subjects and styles, and the freedom to debate different schools of thought in science, which acted as an indirect signal for enquiry more broadly.[7] Zhou Yang concluded by reflecting on the governance of literature and art. He proposed the relaxation of censorship and the removal of political constraints on literature and art. His speech was a message to high- and middle-level cultural bureaucrats and officials like Jiang Feng, who was named Director of CAFA and Chairman of the newly reinstituted CAA later in 1979, and Liu Xun, Secretary of the Preparatory Committee for the Beijing Unit of the CAA and Party Branch Secretary of Beijing Fine Art Academy, who would soon be implementing these messages. And artists, whether inside or outside state bodies, would mirror these messages at the grassroots level.

The appearance of such an apparent opening put everyone, both government officials and individuals, in a mindset to seek change and brought people of all backgrounds and differences into convergence in 1979. In this fleeting moment from 1976 to 1979, when the bureaucratic structure for art and literature was yet to fully re-emerge, most political and social elites selectively evoked the previous policies of the first seventeen years of the PRC, from 1949 to 1966, to legitimize change.[8] Specifically,

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[7] Zhou, "Literature and Art," 1.

[8] The seventeen-year period prior to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution is an important concept of historical periodization frequently used in historical narration of new China. It consists of two stages.

in the artistic domain, many artists, including Jiang Feng and Liu Xun, were now taking up high-ranking positions in the reconstituted official art system hierarchy.[9] They referred in their speeches and writings to democracy in art (*yishu minzhu* 艺术民主) while at the same time upholding the Four Cardinal Principles and the official line of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom" (1956), and advocated the relaxation of restrictions on artistic activities and practices.[10] On February 9, 1979, the CAA organized a discussion to commemorate Premier Zhou Enlai's 1961 "Speech at the Forum on Literature and Art and the Creative Practice of Feature-length Films" ("*Zai wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui he gushipian chuangzuo huiyi shang de jianghua*"《在文艺工作座谈会和故事片创作会议上的讲话》).[11] At this gathering of around 200 Beijing-based art practitioners, Jiang Feng, who had been restored to Party membership and named director of the CAFA, drew attention to a reference to art in

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The first stage, between 1949 and 1957, was a period in which many new institutions were established and old ones were transformed. The second stage, from 1958 to 1966, was a period of relatively steady social development. Historian and Professor at Sichuan University Luo Zhitian is an authority on the study of this period and wrote: "To understand this 'thirty-year' (post-1978) historiography, it is necessary to go back to the 'seventeen-year' (1949–1966) research before the Cultural Revolution and examine and analyze these studies for trends of continuity and fracture in the accumulation of scholarship." See Luo Zhitian, "Change and Continuity in the Recent 30 Years of Research on Modern Chinese History: Some Unsystematic Reflective Thoughts," *Frontiers of History in China*, no. 4 (2009): 479 [trans. Wu Yanhong, from *Shehui kexue yanjiu* (*Social Science Research*), no. 6 (2008): 134–45].

[9] In 1979, the China Artists' Association cleared Jiang Feng of the former accusation of him being a Rightist and appointed him as the president of the association. He was appointed the Director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts by the Ministry of Culture in the same year. See Beijing huayuan (Beijing Fine Art Academy), *Ershi shiji Beijing huihuashi* (*Beijing's Painting History of The Twentieth Century*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing, 2007), 352. Liu Xun was released from the prison on July 7, 1977. He was appointed the Deputy Director and Secretary of the Communist Party Branch of the Beijing Fine Art Academy in 1978. See Liu Xun, CV, April 11, 2007, Beijing Fine Art Academy Archive.

[10] See Deng Xiaoping, "Upholding the Four Cardinal Principles," People's Daily Online accessed February 13, 2020, http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1290.html.
See Jiang Feng, "Minzhu yao zhengqu, buneng kao ence" ("Democracy Should be Fought for, instead of Being Bestowed"), *Meishu* (*Art*) no. 2 (1979): 7; see also Liu Xun, "Yinshi lidao, fanrong qunzhong meishu huodong" ("Guidance According to its Trend of Development, Diversify Mass Art Activities"), *Art* no. 9 (September 1979): 8–9.

[11] Bianzhe (Editor), "Nuli shixian Zhouzongli yiyuan, fanrong meishu chuangzuo" ("Striving to Realize Premier Zhou's Unfulfilled Will and Enable Artistic Creation to Flourish"), *Art* no. 2 (February 1979): 3.

Zhou Enlai's speech about developing democracy and pointed out that after years of rule by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, people had come to value democracy much more.[12] Thus he urged everyone to act as the Premier had said, to dare to think, to speak, to act, which meant to dare to have democracy:

> At the moment, those working in the respective fields of philosophy, history, politics, economy, and especially in news media, should dare to raise new issues, new opinions, to break through restricted areas, but the circles of literature and art haven't pushed far enough, mainly because of concerns. These concerns should be taken apart, otherwise, there would be no democracy.[13]

This short speech by Jiang Feng, together with statements made by other senior artists and officials including Liu Kaiqu, Wang Zhaowen, Pang Xunqin, Ye Qianyu, Wu Guanzhong and Wang Qi, among others, were published in *Art* magazine, contributing to a new discourse on art, literature and film aligned with ideas of democracy and diversity and advocating a more tolerant context for the production of art.[14] In the meantime, artists like Wu Zuoren and Wu Guanzhong, and art critic He Rong, seized the opportunity to articulate the issue of formalism (*xingshi zhuyi* 形式

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[12] Jiang, "Democracy," 7.
[13] Jiang, "Democracy," 7.
[14] See Liu Kaiqu, "Yao an yishu guilv banshi" ("Act according to the Rules of Art"); Wu Guanzhong, "Yao zhongshi youhua wenti" ("Pay Attention to the Issue of Oil Painting"); Ye Qianyu, "Yao dakuangkuang, buyao xiaokuangkuang" ("Yes to Larger Guidance and No to Small Restrictions"); Wang Zhaowen, "Lishi jingyan zhide zhuyi" ("It's Worth Paying Attention to Historical Experience"), *Art* no. 2 (February 1979): 4–48.

主义), breaking a taboo of nearly two decades.[15] All of them were aware of the importance of pushing forward a new, liberal discourse for the practice of art. At this moment, the overall structure for art that had been dismantled at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution was yet to be fully rebuilt. Sharing their desire to renormalize art, many very different artists would now interact, appearing in the same exhibitions or mounting exhibitions in the same spaces.

New Spring Art Exhibition (Xinchun huazhan 新春画展)[16]

It was therefore no coincidence that at the end of 1978 artist Yan Zhenduo would consider the possibility of initiating an exhibition without direct state sponsorship.[17] Formal institutions of art were responding slowly to the new conditions; it would take another year, for instance, for the CAA to be fully functional again.[18] By contrast, when individual artists noticed signs of political relaxation, they moved immediately to take advantage of the window of freedom.

Between 1977 and 1978, Cao Dali, Pang Jun and Yan Zhenduo, all painters at the Beijing Fine Art Company, traveled to the middle and lower parts of the Yangtze

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[15] See Chapter Three of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of their contribution at this time.
[16] Art historians Julia F. Andrews, Gao Minglu, Lyu Peng and Zou Yuejin have all written about the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, but only briefly. For instance, Julia Andrews framed this exhibition as one of the quasi-official exhibitions with participating artists comprising amateur painters, serious but relatively apolitical official artists, and Communist Party members. See Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 386. Chinese art historians have not written in any depth about this event; neither have they considered it relevant to the development of contemporary art in China.
[17] Yan Zhenduo, interview with author, Yan Zhenduo's home in Mentougou, Beijing, December, 2016. The following account of the experience of organizing the *New Spring Art Exhibition* is based on Yan Zhenduo's accounts.
[18] The preparatory work team for the CAA was established in August 1978 to prepare for the recovery of CAA. See Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 354; see also "Dashiji" ("Chronology"), China Artists' Association, accessed February 2, 2019, https://www.caanet.org.cn/eventsdetail.mx?id=31.

River and to Guilin in Guangxi Province to research and paint landscapes and portraits of ethnic figures on site. The paintings were to be sold in the Beijing Painting Shop (*Beijing huadian* 北京画店), an enterprise that was part of the Beijing Fine Art Company.[19] After returning to Beijing, Yan Zhenduo had a work meeting at the Art Unit of the Beijing House of Culture for Workers (*Beijing gongren wenhuagong* 北京工人文化宫), located in the historic site of the Imperial Ancestral Temple (*Taimiao* 太庙) just outside of the Forbidden City.[20]

There he met with his sister Yan Guangye, who had just become the director of the Party Committee at the House of Culture. They talked about the lack of cultural activities in the spare main hall at the temple. As landscape painting generally didn't contain overt political content and thus conformed with cultural policies at this time, Yan Guangye thought it would be a good idea to invite her younger brother and his friends to paint on site in the temple and exhibit their works, to enrich the House of Culture's public programs. As discussed earlier in Chapter One, Yan Zhenduo and his colleagues at Beijing Fine Art Company had had the chance to continue making landscape paintings in private during the Cultural Revolution, both for the purpose of contributing to the company's business of selling these landscape paintings to foreigners in exchange for foreign currency and for the artists themselves to be able to carry out their own artistic experiments, playing with stylistic elements. Making landscape paintings gave these artists a certain autonomy. These were their own artworks beyond the political propaganda art they made at work. At this meeting, Yan

[19] The Beijing Painting Shop was located at 289 Wangfujing Avenue, Beijing.
[20] See Wang Jianwei, "Taimiao" (The Imperial Ancestral Temple"), in *Beijing dushi kongjianzhong de lishi wenmai chuancheng* (*Inheritance of Historical Context in Beijing's Urban Space*) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2016), 106.

and his sister made a decision to mount a small exhibition.[21]

During August 1978, Yan Zhenduo, Pang Jun, Cao Dali and Wang Lu, all of whom worked at the Beijing Fine Art Company, spent a few days painting *en plein air* in the temple grounds, and then held a four-person exhibition in the eastern hall, adjacent to the main hall of the Beijing House of Culture for Workers.[22] [Figure 2.1] The exhibition consisted of more than a hundred paintings, including both works they had painted of the temple buildings and landscape paintings from the middle and lower reaches of the Yangzi River and Guilin, which Cao Dali, Pang Jun and Yan Zhenduo had created during their research trip. The exhibition was very popular among House of Culture visitors and attracted large crowds. It was a refreshing experience to witness an exhibition of paintings that didn't preach any propaganda messages. [Figure 2.2]

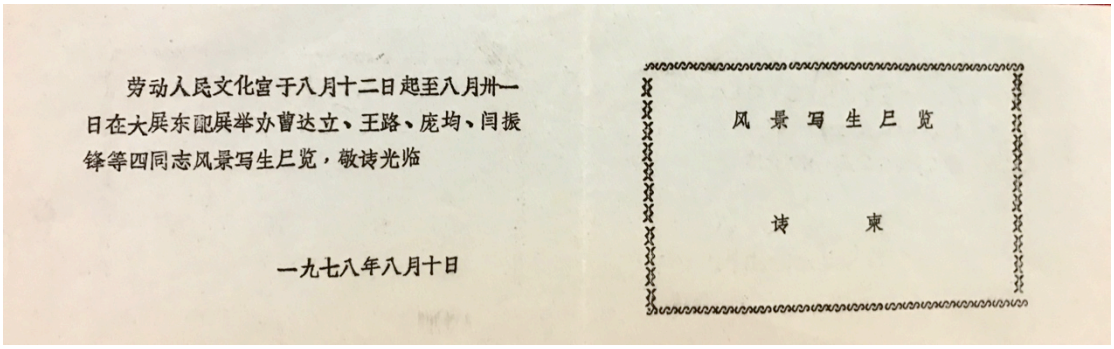

Figure 2.1: Invitation, *Plein Air Landscape Painting Exhibition*, 1978.

[21] Yan, interview; see also Yan Bo, "Beijing youhua yanjiuhui de yuanqi" ("Beijing Oil Painting Research Association: A Concise History"), in *Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile—A Beijing Perspective*, eds. Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong University Press, 2019), 301–3.

[22] *Fengjing xiesheng zhanlan* (*Plein Air Landscape Painting Exhibition*), August 12–31, 1978, Side Hall East of the Main Hall, House of Culture for Workers.

Figure 2.2: Pang Jun, *Former Site of Shaoshan Agricultural Hall*, 1979, oil on canvas.

Encouraged by this success, at the end of 1978, Yan Zhenduo approached his brother-in-law Chen Xiangye, the director of Zhongshan Park, and asked his permission to hold an exhibition in the Waterside Pavilion (*Shuixie* 水榭).[23] [Figure 2.3] From 1916, when the pavilion was built, it had been an important gathering place for artists and intellectuals where they could display their works and exchange ideas. To resuscitate this history of displaying art in the pavilion was no small act, a mere two years after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Memories of severe punishments were still fresh, haunting everyone. During that period any self-initiated artistic activity could lead to uncertain, and potentially deadly, consequences.[24]

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[23] See Shen Ning, *Nanwang shuaifuyuan: minguo shiqi meishu shiliao zhaji* (*Unforgettable Shuaifuyuan: Notes on Historical Materials of the Republic of China*) (Taipei: Independent & Unique, 2015), 66.
[24] Yan, interview.

Figure 2.3: Li Xiaobin, *Entrance to the New Spring Art Exhibition*, 1979, photograph.

To organize the show, Yan Zhenduo teamed up with his artist colleague and close friend Pang Jun. The two artists turned first to older artists to secure their participation, because they were aware that senior artists had suffered most from political repression during the Cultural Revolution and would be very eager to present their work. [Figure 2.4] Pang Jun invited artist friends who were of his parents' age, most of whom, like Liu Haisu (刘海粟 1896–1994), Wu Guanzhong, Wu Zuoren, Wei Tianlin and Li Ruinian, had studied art in Europe or Japan before returning to China in the 1930s. Yan Zhenduo approached his professors at CAFA, among them Dong Xiwen. Yan also invited artists such as Luo Gongliu and Lin Gang, who had studied in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and others like Zhuang Yan and Liu Xun, senior painters from the Yan'an period, who had received their art education inside China without overseas study. Their diverse backgrounds exemplified the sheer mix of experiences and styles

in oil painting across China at that moment. This variety, and especially the influence of European modernism prior to 1949, had been made almost invisible for nearly twenty years, from the start of the Anti-Rightist Movement to the end of the Cultural Revolution, in favor of Socialist Realism. Finally, the *New Spring Art Exhibition* would bring this diversity back into daylight.[25]

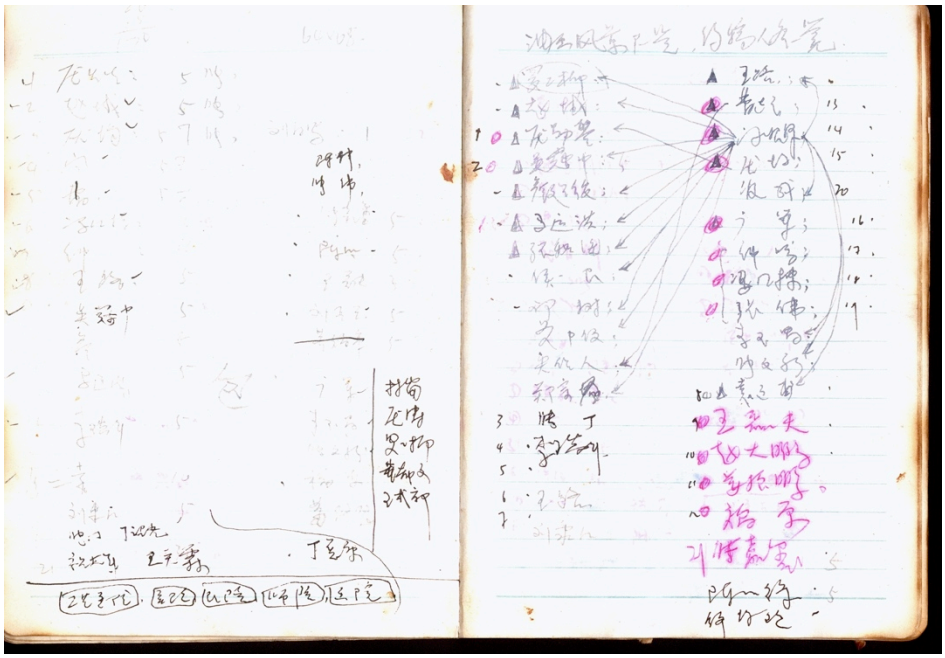

Figure 2.4: Notebook belonging to Yan Zhenduo showing page outlining a plan as to who would contact whom to solicit works for the exhibition, 1978.

Simultaneously, Yan Zhenduo and Pang Jun also turned to their peers, including their colleagues in the Beijing Fine Art Company including Wang Lu, Cao Dali, and Zhao Yixiong. They also invited younger artists such as Feng Guodong and Zhong Ming to join the show. These artists had not been systematically trained in art academies but had studied painting in their spare time, attending short courses taught by artists such as Yan and Pang in places such as the Houses of Culture and at extracurricular

[25] Lao Dai, "Jintian shoudu de yishujie" ("Today's Art World in the Capital"), *Art* no. 2 (February 1979): 48.

courses for young students and workers.[26] This was not an unusual practice. Finally, some of the participants were children of older artists. These included Lin Yan, daughter of Lin Gang and Pang Tao, and Yuan Zuo and Yuan Jia, sons of Yuan Yunfu, who were only in their teens but had been learning how to paint from their parents.[27] While some artists have briefly mentioned the importance of multigenerational interaction in their accounts of their exposure to and interactions with art during the Cultural Revolution, there hasn't been a full recognition of this condition as a critical backdrop to the dynamism of artistic practice and exchange of this period.[28] The alignment of such different generations, all with different educations and reputations, in the *New Spring Art Exhibition* was unique. It was through personal connections, and because the former systems and hierarchies—established after 1949 but dismantled at the onset of the Cultural Revolution—had not yet been fully recovered, that the exhibition could be realized.

With the list of artists ready, preparations for the exhibition got under way. [Figure 2.5] The artists worked with the staff of Zhongshan Park to clean up the Waterside

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[26] Painters of the Beijing Fine Art Company, such as Yan Zhenduo, Wang Lu, Pang Jun and Cao Dali, had all taught at the Beijing Youth Art Preparatory School (*Beijing qingnian meishu buxi xuexiao*), which was the successor of Xihua Art Preparatory School (*Xihua meishu buxi xuexiao*). The Xihua Art Preparatory School was an example of a private teaching program that originated in the Republican era. Members of the No Name Group such as Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu had both studied there. See Yang Tiange, "Beijing Private Xihua Art Preparatory School (1953–1960): Education and Style," in *Crescent: Retrospectives of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu*, eds. Su Wei, Yang Tinage and Feng Xi (Beijing: Inside-Out Art Museum, 2018), 121–25; see also Li Fushun, *Beijing meishushi* (*Beijing Art History*) (Beijing: Capital Normal University Press, 2008), 1142.

[27] Pang Tao had trained her daughter Lin Yan to observe and represent natural scenes. Pang Tao, interview with author, December 12, 2018.

[28] For instance, artist Zhu Xinjian (1953–2014) has talked about the importance to his artistic formation of reading and painting with a professor at the Southeast University in Nanjing, who was friends with famous artists such as Lin Sanzhi and Gao Ershi, during the Cultural Revolution. See Zhu Xinjian, "Wo he 'xinwenrenhua'" ("Me with 'New Literati Paintings'"), in *Huiyi yu chenshu* (*Remembrance and Statement*), eds. Lyu Peng and Kong Lingwei (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2007), 190.

Pavilion, which during the Cultural Revolution had been used for storage. They invited each participating artist to contribute two or three works, asking specifically for landscape or still life painting. [Figure 2.6] Yet this in itself was hardly an apolitical gesture. On the contrary, it was ingenious. Most of the invited artists had previously been required to paint political propaganda. Paintings of natural scenery—forests in North China, fields of peony blossoms, a lake full of lotus flowers—had been made and viewed only in private. In fact, during the Cultural Revolution, artists, both those working within the official cultural establishments and those without such affiliations such as members of the No Name Group (which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter), in private considered landscape and still life paintings their favored genres. Such a choice of genre and subject was not, however, to demonstrate or state an ideological challenge to the dominance of Socialist Realism. To paint landscape and still life was a natural continuation of their initial training in art, and through these exercises they could explore color and form on canvas. Such works would have been criticized during the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution as decadent and bourgeois, not serving the purpose of the revolution.[29] Finally, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, to show these genres in public was, if not revolutionary, nothing short of a breath of fresh air.[30]

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[29] Huang Duwei, "Suqing jizuo sichao de yingxiang" ("Clean up the Influences of Extreme Left Trends of Thoughts"), *Art* no. 2 (February 1979), 10.

[30] In Gao Minglu's work on the No Name Group, he stressed the political nature of the landscape paintings by members of the group. In fact, as my examination of this period reveals, many artists, both independent and officially employed, chose to make landscape paintings in private. See Gao Minglu, *Wuming: Yige beiju qianwei de lishi* (*The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde*) (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005). See also Kuiyi Shen and Julia F. Andrews, *Blooming in the Shadows: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974–1985* (New York: China Institute, 2011). The authors position the No Name Group in relation to the Stars Group and the Grass Society (*Caocaoshe*) as three examples of unofficial art from 1974 to 1985 and precursors to the permitted emergence of modern art practices by the Communist Party in 1985.

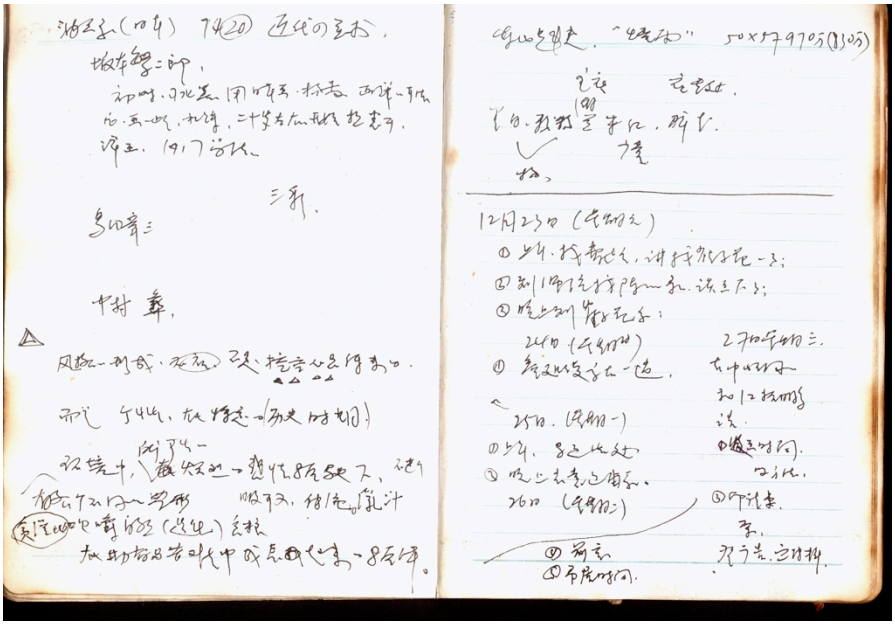

Figure 2.5: Notebook belonging to Yan Zhenduo showing page listing all participants in *New Spring Art Exhibition*, 1978.

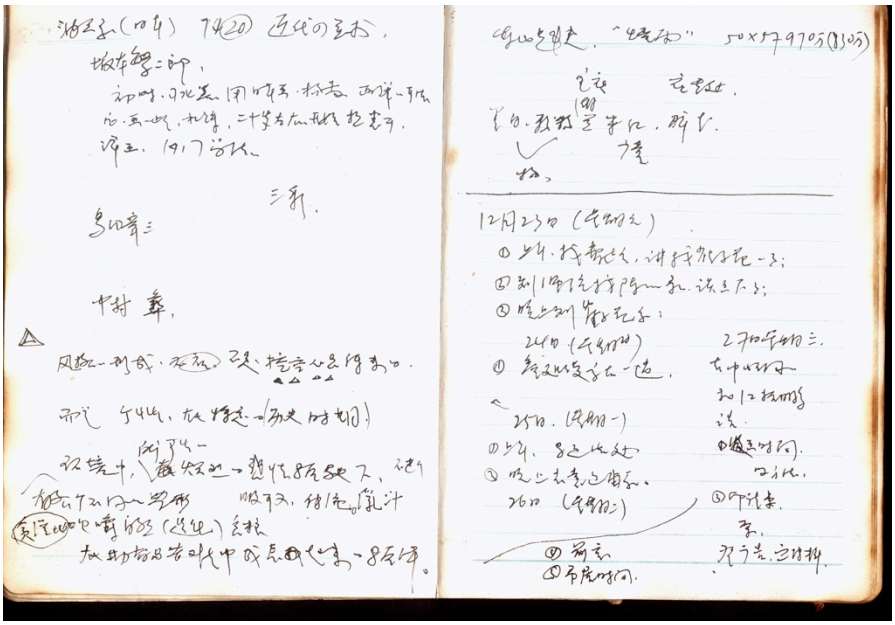

Figure 2.6: Notebook belonging to Yan Zhenduo showing page making plans for the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, 1978.

Owing to their varied educational backgrounds and experiences, the painting styles of this group of artists ranged from academic to Post-Impressionist, Expressionist, and Abstract Expressionist. Summing up Beijing's art scene in the February 1979 issue of

Art magazine, one of the magazine's editors, Lao Dai, specifically mentioned the appearance of Impressionist-style paintings (*Yinxiangpai* 印象派画) in the show.[31] The reappearance of such styles was particularly meaningful. Since the late 1950s, as mentioned in Chapter One, Impressionism (along with abstraction) had been labeled negatively as modernist and thus officially banned. But such paintings were finally put on view in this exhibition. While this might appear strange to a Western reader, it was the case that by adopting what was by this point an anachronistic style—Impressionism was by this point more than a hundred years old and its motifs, *plein air* methods and high colors had been adapted across the globe for decades—was a self-conscious and artistically risky act owing to its deviation from the still-dominant style of Socialist Realism. Included in the exhibition was Liu Haisu's *Autumn* (*Qiu*《秋》), a *plein air* painting that had been painted in Beijing's Fragrant Hills in 1978, capturing fiery red maple leaves and a pine tree in a cascade of yellow and green. [Figure 2.7] In his inscription on the left-hand side of the canvas, the artist compared himself to van Gogh, whom he admired.[32] In paintings like this, Liu was combining traditional Chinese ink painting with European techniques, especially those of his beloved van Gogh and of Cézanne. Wu Zuoren and Pang Xunqin contributed still life paintings of flowers in a vase. Cao Dali painted a pond of beautiful white lotus leaves and red lotus blossoms (*Heavy Frost with Rich Color* 霜重色浓, 1979). [Figure 2.8]

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[31] Lao, "Today's Art World," 48.

[32] The inscription reads "*Shiqing huayi liangwuxin, cangsong hongye yizishen, xingdao tucheng qiusiyuan, renjian youdao shi fangao*," which may be translated as "Poetry and painting are natural forces, pine trees and red leaves have their own significance. The formation of the autumn scene on the canvas was a natural output, one is then referred to as Van Gogh."

Figure 2.7: Liu Haisu, *Autumn*, 1978, oil on canvas.

Figure 2.8: Cao Dali, *Heavy Frost with Rich Color*, 1979, oil on wood.

In the exhibition installation, the paintings were hung salon-style, arranged spontaneously and intuitively by the organizers, mainly Yan and Pang. According to

Yan, they deliberately ignored differences in age or professional stature when arranging the paintings. There was to be no hierarchy among the artists in the show, and the placement of paintings was determined by formal aspects alone. The logistics of the show were arranged on a democratic basis as well. Artists of all generations took turns guarding the pavilion.[33]

While preparations for the exhibition were underway, Yan and Pang visited Jiang Feng at his home.[34] At this time, he was still waiting for his reassignment.[35] When Jiang Feng learned about the young artists' plan, he immediately agreed to contribute a Preface to the exhibition booklet. In two days, Jiang Feng wrote one of the most circulated and widely read exhibition essays in the history of modern and contemporary Chinese art.[36] In this succinct statement, Jiang Feng wrote in full support of the artists' plan and pointed out that the potential to sell works through such efforts was welcome, although the artists were just focusing on the exhibition at this time. Above all, Jiang Feng asserted that Chinese citizens were entitled by law to the "right to organize themselves," as expressly stipulated in China's Constitution. Jiang Feng listed six positive points in favor of artists organizing exhibitions on a regular basis and forming their own painting societies. We can paraphrase his key points as follows: 1) supporting art practices; 2) diversifying the styles, media and subjects of artworks; 3) encouraging painters to learn from each other, to compete

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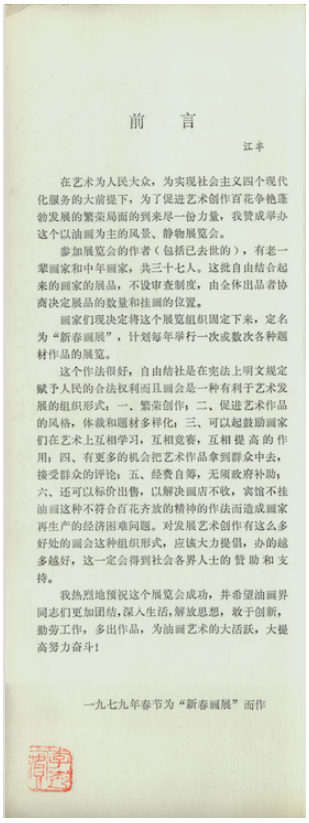
[33] Yan Zhenduo's notebook from that time includes notes about the shifts of artists guarding the exhibition, February 1979. Yan, interview.

[34] Jiang Feng had worked with Pang Jun's parents Pang Tao and Lin Gang at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

[35] Jiang Feng would assume the post of the Director of Central Academy of Fine Arts and Chairman of the China Artists' Association on November 10, 1979. See Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History,* 352.

[36] Jiang Feng, "Qianyan" ("Foreword"). *Beijing youhua yanjiuhui* (Beijing Oil Painting Society), a small handout made in 1979.

with each other, and to help each other improve their work: 4) supporting artists gaining more opportunities to show their artworks to the public and to receive comments from the public; 5) supporting artists pricing and trading artworks; 6) supporting artists funding exhibitions through independent means without governmental subsidies.[37] This Preface was initially printed in the booklet made for the exhibition and reprinted in the inaugural issue of *Reading* magazine.[38] [Figure 2.9]



前　言

江丰

在艺术为人民大众，为实现社会主义四个现代化服务的大前提下，为了促进艺术创作百花争艳蓬勃发展的繁荣局面的到来尽一份力量，我赞成举办这个以油画为主的风景、静物展览会。

参加展览会的作者（包括已去世的），有老一辈画家和中年画家，共三十七人。这批自由结合起来的画家的展品，不设审查制度，由全体出品者协商决定展品的数量和挂画的位置。

画家们现决定将这个展览组织固定下来，定名为“新春画展”，计划每年举行一次或数次各种题材作品的展览。

这个作法很好，自由结社是在宪法上明文规定赋予人民的合法权利而且画会是一种有利于艺术发展的组织形式，一、繁荣创作；二、促进艺术作品的风格、体裁和题材多样化；三、可以起鼓励画家们在艺术上互相学习，互相竞赛，互相提高的作用；四、有更多的机会把艺术作品拿到群众中去，接受群众的评论；五、经费自筹，无须政府补助；六、还可以标价出售，以解决画店不收，宾馆不挂油画这种不符合百花齐放的精神的作法而造成画家再生产的经济困难问题。对发展艺术创作有这么多好处的画会这种组织形式，应该大力提倡，办的越多越好，这一定会得到社会各界人士的赞助和支持。

我热烈地预祝这个展览会成功，并希望油画界同志们更加团结，深入生活，解放思想，敢于创新，勤劳工作，多出作品，为油画艺术的大活跃，大提高努力奋斗！

一九七九年春节为“新春画展”而作

Figure 2.9: Jiang Feng, Foreword for *New Spring Art Exhibition*, printed in the booklet made for the exhibition.

Jiang Feng’s arguments, along with those of other high-ranking, senior

[37] Jiang, “Foreword.”
[38] Jiang Feng, “Jiangfeng wei Beijing ‘xinchun fengjing jingwu huazhan’ suoxiede qianyan” (Jiang Feng’s Foreword to the *New Spring Art Exhibition*), *Dushu* (*Reading*), no. 1 (February 1979): 38.

artist-bureaucrats like Liu Xun, were crucial in expanding the space for artistic exploration. Even though it would be a few months before Jiang was formally named President of CAFA and chair of the CAA, the signal he sent in his Preface inspired the formation of a new wave of artists' organizations across the country. The official records of the CAA show that across China, 166 artists' groups were registered in the wake of the *New Spring Art Exhibition*.[39]

Jiang Feng's call for artists to initiate their own exhibitions and form artist groups, and, further, to sell works, would have been unthinkable during the Cultural Revolution. Here, timing was critical. Jiang's Preface was printed after the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and at the beginning of a period of national economic reform. On February 4, 1979, after reading Jiang Feng's Preface, brush-and-ink artist and Professor at CAFA Ye Qianyu responded to Jiang Feng with an enthusiastic letter. There, he expressed his excitement about Jiang Feng's essay, writing "Your avocation is extremely favorable to the prosperity of artworks, and a 'democracy of creative practice' can only be guaranteed through specific measures. Organization of painting societies, self-organized exhibitions, taking responsibility for one's own paintings, with such a change of atmosphere, the situation would become completely different."[40]

Not only did Ye Qianyu convey his support in writing, he would also show his

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[39] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 374.

[40] Ye Qianyu, letter to Jiang Feng, 4 February 1979. This letter was shown by art historian Yin Shuangxi when he spoke at the New Spring Seminar, organized by the author in collaboration with artist Liu Ding at the Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum on March 18, 2017. Translation from Chinese to English by the author. Yin Shuangxi obtained an image of this letter from Jiang Feng's family. The original exists in the collection of the family.

backing by visiting the *New Spring Art Exhibition* and the *Stars Art Exhibitions* (*Xingxing meizhan* 星星美展 1979-1981) that took place afterwards, placing orders to purchase oil paintings by young artists in these exhibitions. On the opening day of the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, Ye Qianyu placed a reservation on young Yuan Jia's painting of hung and dried fish.[41] [Figure 2.10] And at the first *Stars Exhibition* outside NAMOC, Ye reserved works by Zhu Jinshi, Ai Weiwei and Huang Rui.[42] His action affirmed Jiang Feng's proposition that artists should be able to support themselves by selling their works.

Figure 2.10.1: Yuan Jia, *Drying Fish*, 1979, *oil on canvas*.

[41] After the show ended, Yuan Jia went to Ye Qianyu's home to deliver the painting as a gift to Ye since Ye was a good friend of his father Yuan Yunfu. Ye Qianyu was not home, and on the following day, he sent a letter addressed to Yuan Yunfu to acknowledge the receipt of the painting. In his letter, Ye enclosed a painting of his own as a gift to Yuan Jia. Yuan Jia, interview with author, Beijing, December 2016.

[42] Zhu Jinshi, interview with author, Zhu Jinshi's studio, Beijing, December 2016.

Figure 2.10.2: Ye Qianyu wrote a letter to Yuan Yunfu and left a painting of his own in exchange for Yuan Jia's painting, 1979.

After the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, many of the forty-odd featured artists formed a group called the Beijing Oil Painting Society (*Beijing youhua yanjiu hui* 北京油画研究会).[43] In September 1979, Liu Xun, a member of this new Society, suggested that the *Second Exhibition of the Beijing Oil Painting Society* be held earlier than scheduled to coincide with the opening of the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers (*Disici wendaihui* 第四次文代会), organized by the All-China Federation of Literature and Art Circles from October 30 to November 16 in 1979.[44] This was the first congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and more than 3,200 writers and artists were in attendance. Deng Xiaoping's opening address to the congress defined the evaluation of what had

[43] The Association was founded in March 1979 as Spring Tide (*Chunchao huahui*). See Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 386. It changed its name to the Beijing Oil Painting Society in April. For the English translation of the group's name, I refer to a photograph of members of the artist group posing with a sign bearing their Chinese and English names outside the second exhibition. Joan Cohen referred to them as the Oil Painting Research Association and Jane Debevoise referred to them as the Beijing Oil Painting Research Association. See Joan Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting 1949–1986* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1987), 53; Jane Debevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 22–3.

[44] On July 2, 1949, the First Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists was convened in Beijing. At this gathering the All-China Federation of Chinese Literary and Art Circles was created.

happened in the field of literature and art during the Cultural Revolution:

> Our policy on literature and art was on the right course and our achievements in this area were remarkable during the seventeen years prior to the Cultural Revolution. The so-called "black-line dictatorship" was a total calumny fabricated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.[45]

Severe indictments of the Gang of Four and general optimism for the future as well as a call for intellectual freedom were reiterated at this congress.[46] The *Second Exhibition of the Beijing Oil Painting Society* was quickly organized by its members. It took place in the Painted Boat Pavilion (*Huafang zhai* 画舫斋) of Beihai Park from October 14 to 30, 1979. [Figure 2.11] At this exhibition, the works were not only landscapes or still lifes, but included realistic, decorative, expressive or abstract art according to the artists' choices. The themes and styles in the show were extremely diverse, and the visual languages were observably more personal. Feng Guodong (冯国栋 1948–2005), for example, showed a Surrealistic self-portrait, painting a tortured, redheaded, demon-like man among flying brooms (*Zihuaxiang* 自画像, 1979). [Figure 2.12] Just as he was finishing high school, the Cultural Revolution began and he was sent to work as a cleaner in a canvas factory.[47] He was one of the two young artists in the group who had not received formal art training. But when he made this intensely symbolic painting, he had worked at the Society for sixteen years.

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[45] Howard Goldblatt, *Chinese Literature for the 1980s: The Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 2.
[46] Goldblatt, *Chinese Literature for the 1980s*, 2.
[47] Feng Xi, interview with author, Feng Xi's studio in Tongxian, Beijing, January 2017. Feng Xi is Feng Guodong's son.

Figure 2.11: Photographer unknown, photograph of some of the participating artists of the second exhibition of Beijing Oil Painting Society opened on October 13, 1979.

Figure 2.12: Feng Guodong, *Self-Portrait* (*Zihuaxiang* 自画像), 1978, oil on canvas.

As the official involved in the organization of the Fourth Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers, Liu Xun distributed the Beijing Oil Painting Society's exhibition booklet, a black-and-white printout of a list of participating artists with

their short bios and pictures, to all members participating in the congress. [Figure 2.13] The effect was that the Beijing Oil Painting Society inspired other artists to follow suit: to put on their own exhibitions and form artist groups. Large numbers of congress attendees and people from all walks of life came to the exhibition, which welcomed 1,500 visitors on its first day.[48] After this event, two more exhibitions were held by the Beijing Oil Painting Society, in November 1980 and July 1982.[49] Talks and debates were held during the exhibition and the exhibition toured in revised forms to many other cities, including Sichuan, Guangdong, Hubei, Shanghai and Zhejiang.[50]

[48] Yan, interview.
[49] The third exhibition took place on November 15 to 30 in 1980 and the fourth took place on July 8 to 21 in 1982 at NAMOC.
[50] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 375.

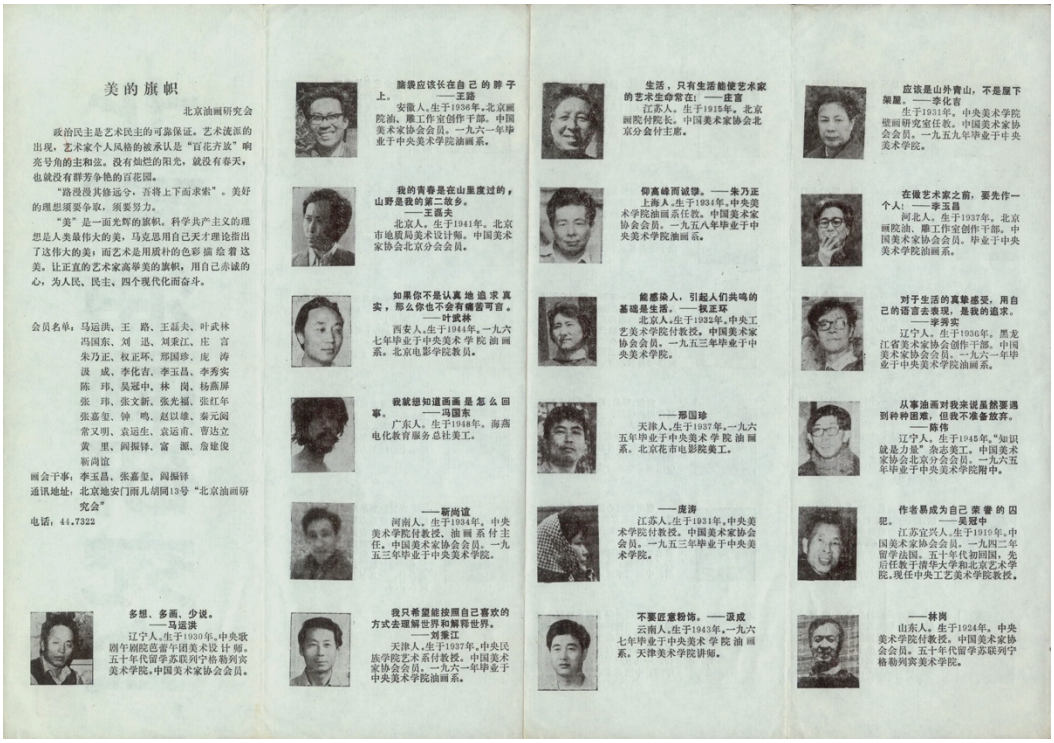

Figure 2.13: A booklet of the Beijing Oil Painting Society, showing all its members, October 1979.

The exhibitions and forums held by the Beijing Oil Painting Society generated immediate and lasting impact. They opened artists' eyes to the possibility of self-generated, self-managed artist organizations for the first time since 1949. In fact, artist groups formed by younger artists as part of the later '85 New Wave acknowledged the inspiration of the Beijing Oil Painting Society.[51]

In the discussion held on the afternoon of the opening day of the Beijing Oil Painting Society's second exhibition on Oct 13, 1979, works that demonstrated nudity and the

[51] In the spring of 1981, a group of young painters organized their own exhibition, *New People New Works* (*Xinren xinzuo zhan*), in Canghe Park in Hefei, Anhui Province. The exhibition was a direct aftereffect of the second exhibition of the Beijing Oil Painting Society that toured to Hefei but was delayed as a result of official censorship. See "Xinchao ziliao jianbian" ("A Brief Compilation of New Wave Materials"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no. 40 (October 1986): 3.

influence of Western modern art were the focus of discussion.[52] [Figure 2.14] It was at this event that French-trained artist Wu Guanzhong put forward a passionate argument for formal beauty in painting. His ideas were laid out in a series of articles he wrote on the aesthetics of formalism, published between 1979 and 1981 in *Art* magazine. Three of the articles were pivotal: "The Beauty of Form in Paintings," "On Abstract Beauty" and "Content Determined by Form?".[53] The first article discussed the differences and similarities between "beautiful" (*mei* 美) and "good-looking" (*piaoliang* 漂亮) in painting; his second essay pointed out the ubiquity of abstract beauty in calligraphy and even in the spirit stones from Lake Tai (*jiashan* 假山), arguing for the need to study abstract art. The first two articles prepared the ground for the third one, which was titled "Content Determined by Form?" Here, Wu Guanzhong unveiled his real intention: to analyze the nature of art and question the dogma that "content is more important than anything else, and form is decided by content." This was obviously a significant and loaded proposition. His essays championed artistic autonomy and free artistic exploration, which would have been forbidden over the previous decade. In Wu Guanzhong's and his sympathetic colleagues' minds, legitimizing formal expression would be a pathway to artistic freedom.

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[52] Tao Yongbai, "'Beijing youhua yanjiuhui dierci zhanlan' zuotanhui jiyao" ("A Summary of the Second Exhibition of the Beijing Painting Research Society"), 1979, unpublished.
[53] Wu Guanzhong, "Huihua de xingshimei" ("The Beauty of Form of Paintings"), *Art*, no. 5 (May 1979): 33; "Chouxiang mei" ("On Abstract Painting"), *Art*, no. 10 (October 1980): 37–9; "Neirong jueding xingshi?" ("Content Determined by Form?"), *Art*, no. 3 (March 1981): 52–4.

Figure 2.14: Li Xiaobin, photograph of a discussion held on the afternoon of the opening day of the Beijing Oil Painting Society' second exhibition on October 13, 1979. Clockwise, Ye Qianyu, Wu Guanzhong, Jiang Feng, Liu Xun.

From the late 1950s on, Wu Guanzhong had been a victim of the politicization of art. He had been continually marginalized in the realism-dominated art world due to the modernism obvious in his works and in his thinking. Like most artists, he was sent to a labor camp during the Cultural Revolution and it was only in 1973 that he was brought back to work on mural paintings in the Beijing Hotel.[54] In 1979, he was finally given a large survey exhibition at NAMOC and had the opportunity to share his thoughts in writing and public lectures.

Jiang Feng participated in the same discussion at the second exhibition of the Beijing Painting Society. He supported free artist initiatives but maintained deep-seated reservations about particular styles of art. Commenting on the artworks he saw at the *Stars Art Exhibition*, held nearly two weeks earlier on September 27, 1979, he worried that the artistic experimentation he saw was too esoteric for common people

[54] Wu Guanzhong, "Yanhan kushu tudi" ("Severe Coldness Scorching Summer Land) in *Hengzhan shengya* (*Standing in One's Career*) (Beijing: Unity Press, 2008) 40–5.

to understand and that basic training and drawing skills had been ignored.[55] Among the most discussed works in the *Stars Art Exhibition* were self-taught sculptor Wang Keping's (王克平 b.1949) Primitivist wooden sculptures of torn, twisted and distorted forms. Using stumps with big and awkward knots from branches that made them difficult to chop and thus were discarded by local mill workers, Wang Keping made surreal forms resembling the bluntness of some African sculptures. "Silence" (*Chenmo* 沉默, 1978), shown at this exhibition, depicted a face with its left eye blinded and right eye covered, with a howling mouth stoppered by a large plug. [Figure 2.15] Despite his support of the artist initiatives including the Stars Group, Jiang Feng fundamentally occupied a very different position regarding abstraction to that of European-trained artists like Wu Guanzhong. Jiang continued to see abstraction as indicative of incorrect ideological leanings. In defense of realism, Jiang openly condemned Wu's text on abstraction.[56] He was firm in his position and asserted, "The kind of theories in Western modern schools that propose the idea of 'form determines content and form as content' set out to lead our Socialist art onto the wrong track of formalism."[57] While veterans such as Jiang Feng and Wu Guanzhong were both supporting the making of a democratic space in art at this time, the extent and content of their aspirations and demands varied based on their individual life experiences. The ongoing presence of such internal tension was key to the needs of senior artists like Wu Guanzhong to continue seeking formal freedom and stylistic

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[55] Tao, "A Summary," 2.
[56] Wu Guanzhong, "Wofu danqing! Danqing fu wo!" ("I Burden Art! Art Burdens Me!"), in *Standing in One's Career*, 85.
[57] Jiang Feng, "Jiangfeng tongzhi zai 'quanguo gaodeng yishu yuanxiao meishu chuangzuo jiaoxue zuotanhui' kaimushishang de jianghua zhaiyao" ("A Summary of the Speech by Comrade Jiang Feng on the Opening of the National High-level Art Academy Art Education Symposium"), *Meiyuan* (*Art Work*), no. 3 (May 1982): 7–9.

diversity as critical elements of artistic autonomy in the following years. It would be considered by the young generation of artists and art critics a sign of a conservative attitude, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Figure 2.15, Wang Keping, *Silence*, 1978, sculpture.

The Stars Art Exhibitions

The ripple effect of the *New Spring Art Exhibition* was instant. In light of its open nature, the young artist Huang Rui, taking "Xia Pu" as his alias, wrote about the *New Spring Art Exhibition* with great excitement in the second issue of *Today* (*Jintian*《今天》) magazine.[58] He cited a large quantity of the text from Jiang Feng's Preface to the *New Spring Art Exhibition* and echoed his sentiments. He wrote, "The works of Western Academicism, Impressionism, Expressionism, and Fauvism appeared one

[58] Xia Pu, "Cai yishu xianhua xiangei chuntian: ping Zhongshan gongyuan *xinchun huazhan*" ("Picking Flowers for the Spring—A Review of the *New Spring Art Exhibition* in Zhongshan Park), *Jintian* (*Today*), no. 2 (February 1979): 56–7.

after another in the show, just like in an African botanical garden."[59] *Today* was an independent journal of poetry, founded in Beijing in December 1978 by the poets Bei Dao, Mang Ke and the artist Huang Rui.[60] [Figure 2.16] The magazine's editorial team organized two poetry readings in Yuyuantan Park, one in April and the other in October 1979. Many poets made their debuts on these occasions, reading their works to the public. Audiences numbered around one hundred people.[61] In between these two poetry readings, on September 9 of the same year, the editorial department of the magazine also held a free talk with its contributors and readers in the Purple Bamboo Park (*Zizhuyuan gongyuan* 紫竹院公园). These events provided a lively and attractive platform for many writers who had continued writing their own works during the Cultural Revolution but hadn't had a chance to exchange and interact with each other.

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[59] Xia, "Picking Flowers for the Spring," 56.
[60] Zhu Zhu and Wang Jing, "Huang Rui fangtan" ("Interview with Huang Rui"), in *Yuandian* (*Origin Point*), ed. Zhu Zhu (Hong Kong: Shijie Art Publishing House, 2007), 37–49. See Tian Zhiling, "Beidao tan jintian: qingchun he gaoya gei tamen de nengliang" ("Beidao on Today: The Energy that Youth and High Pressure Granted Them"), *Nanfang dushibao* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), accessed on December 12, 2019, http://liyitao111.blog.sohu.com/89317879.html.
[61] Zheng Xian, "Weiwancheng de pianzhang" ("An Uncompleted Chapter"), in *Zhideng de shizhe* (*The Light-bearing Messengers*), ed. Liu He (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2017), 73.

Figure 2.16: Huang Rui, first cover of *Today*, 1978.

By this time, *Today* was a stable and independent organization with a decent-sized social network and influence, and a core group of around thirty writers, artists and volunteers.[62] Yet most artists involved in *Today* magazine felt that they didn't have much public exposure at these gatherings of poetry readings or in the journal, other than through their contribution to the design and illustrations in the journal, and on the covers of poetry collections.[63] Huang Rui designed the cover image for the first issue, which was used for the following eight issues as well. [Figure 2.17] Ma Desheng, Zhong Acheng, Qu Leilei and Ai Weiwei made woodblock prints and drawings as illustrations in the journals. Having seen and written on the *New Spring Art* Exhibition that took place in February 1979, Huang Rui approached artists involved in *Today*, including Ma Desheng, Qu Leilei and Wang Keping, about an exhibition

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[62] Li Jianli. "Xingxing meizhan yu jintian zazhi" (*Stars Art Exhibitions* and *Today*), in Liu, *The Light-bearing Messengers*, 497.

[63] For instance, Ma Desheng had created a black and white woodblock print of a telephone dial, with the characters of the title of Yan Li's poem "Public Phone" (*Gongyong dianhua*) on the cover of Yan Li's poetry anthology (*Gongyong dianhua*, 1982). He prepared another, depicting scraps of paper floating in the wind, for Mang Ke's poetry anthology "Old Dream" (*Jiumeng*, 1982).

where their works would all be foregrounded. They enthusiastically agreed and planning began.[64] The planning of the *Stars Art Exhibition* took place inside the editorial team of *Today*, which helped with logistics, transporting artworks, bookkeeping and exhibition publicity.[65]

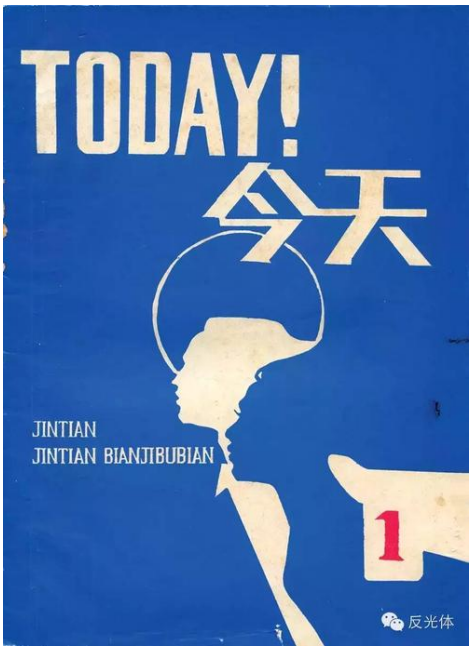

Figure 2.17: Huang Rui, redesigned cover for the second print run of the first issue of *Today*, 1979.

The first *Stars Art Exhibition* opened on September 27, 1979 in a small garden to the east of NAMOC, with artworks tied to the park railings. [Figure 2.18] Inside the museum, the *Beijing Municipal Artworks Exhibition* (*Beijing shi meishu zuopin zhanlan* 北京市美术作品展览) was on display to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Initially, the Stars artists had contacted the Beijing Artists'

[64] There is a great deal of literature on the Stars Group and their exhibitions. For Chinese references, see Yi Dan, *Xingxing lishi* (*History of the Stars*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Art Publishing House, 2002); see also Zhu ed., *Origin Point*. For English literature, see Huang Rui, *Huang Rui: The Stars Period 1977–1984* (Hong Kong: Asia One Books, 2012); Paul Gladston, *"The Stars," in 'Avant-garde' Art Groups in China, 1979–1989* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 39–82; see also Martina Koppel-Yang, "Artists' Groups, Events and Exhibitions," in *Semiotic Warfare: A Semiotic Analysis, the Chinese Avant-garde, 1979–1989* (Beijing: Timezone8, 2003), 58–65.

[65] Li, *Stars Art Exhibitions and Today*, 497.

Association to ask for a venue for their exhibition. Although they were not actually rejected, they became frustrated by the fact that they had to wait in line until the following year to put up their exhibition at a venue that would be allocated by the Beijing Artists' Association. Finally, they decided to mount the exhibition on their own, outside the museum.[66] In this first exhibition, they presented more than 150 works including ink paintings, oil paintings, woodblock prints and wooden sculptures, mainly works with self-consciously modernist affiliations. For instance, Huang Rui's large paintings *Seamstresses in a Street Production Unit* (*Jiedao shengchanzu de tiaozhibu nugong*《街道生产组的挑补绣女工》1979) and *Old Summer Palace's Last Testament* (*Yuanmingyuan yizhu*《圆明园遗嘱》, 1979) demonstrated the impact of both Cubism and Symbolism.[67] [Figures 2.19, 2.20]. His works were displayed alongside Bei Dao's poem "Our Morning Sun" ("*Women meitian zaochen de taiyang*" 《我们每天早晨的太阳》, 1979).[68]

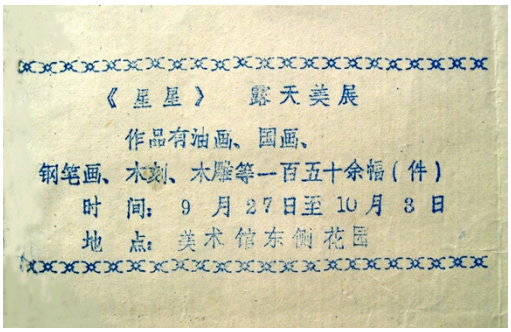

Figure 2.18: Invitation to *The Stars Exhibition (Open Air)*, September 27–October 3, 1979.

[66] Huang Rui, "'Xingxing' jiushi" ("The Past Events of the 'Stars'"), in *Huiyi yu chenshu* (*Remembrance and Statement*), ed. Lyu Peng and Kong Lingwei (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2007), 108–9. In this script of his lecture, Huang Rui specified the dates of the exhibition as September 27–October 7. Yet in a photograph of the exhibition, the exhibition dates that were printed on the poster were September 27–October 3.
[67] See Huang, *Huang Rui: The Stars Period*.
[68] Li, *Stars Art Exhibitions and Today*, 496.

Figure 2.19: Huang Rui, *Seamstresses in a Street Production Unit*, 1979, oil on canvas.

Figure 2.20: Li Xiaobin, *The First Stars Exhibition*, 1979. The painting in the photograph: Huang Rui, *Old Summer Palace's Last Testament*, 1979, oil.
Underneath, Bei Dao's poem *Our Morning Sun*, 1979.

On the third day of the exhibition, the police arrived. They took down and confiscated the works and put up signs that announced the cancellation of the show. Urged on by

political activists including Xu Wenli—the Chief Editor of *May Fourth Forum* (*Wusi luntan*《五四论坛》), a pro-democracy underground journal—some of the *Stars Art Exhibition* artists participated in a public demonstration on October 1, China's National Day, protesting against the confiscation of their works and pressing for a venue to stage their exhibitions. The main protagonists were, however, political activists who had been involved in the Xidan Democracy Wall, and not all were artists.[69] According to Huang Rui, those involved in organizing the protest were predominantly pro-democracy activists who advocated political democracy. For the activists, the seizure of works in the *Stars Art Exhibition* by the police was a perfect pretext for initiating a new protest, but they needed someone like Huang Rui—an artist directly involved in the exhibition—to be part of their protest. Not all Stars artists joined the protest. But with reservations about the demonstration, Huang Rui decided to be involved. The march was peaceful and demonstrators followed the guidance and rules set down by the police. [Figure 2.21] Two months later, in December 1979, the *Stars Art Exhibition* resumed in the Painted Boat Pavilion, but now with the permission of the Beijing Artists' Association. Then, in August 1980, another exhibition of the Stars Group was installed inside NAMOC. But soon after, many of its members left the country, as some felt the increasing constraint of space for art and publishing.[70] More importantly, individuals were allowed to study abroad at 'their own expense or to move abroad by marrying foreigners after January 1979.[71]

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[69] According to Huang Rui's recollection, seven artists of the *First Stars Exhibition* including Wang Keping, Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Qu Leilei, Zhong Acheng, Yan Li and Bo Yun, gathered on September 29 to discuss whether to join the protest or not. Among them, Ma Desheng, Qu Leilei and Wang Keping supported Xu Wenli's proposal to stage a protest. Huang Rui was against the idea but he chose to join when the remaining members decided to protest. See Huang Rui. "'Xingxing' jiushi" ("The Past Events of the 'Stars'") in Liu ed., *The Light-bearing Messengers*, 505.

[70] Zhu and Wang, "Interview with Huang Rui," 37–49.

[71] On January 14, 1981, the State Council approved the "Instructions for Studying Abroad at One's

Figure 2.21: Photographer unknown, photograph of demonstration on October 1, 1979.

To a great extent, the demonstration that resulted from the obstruction of the first *Stars Art Exhibition* outside NAMOC overshadowed the actual exhibition and the real interest of its artists in exhibiting. The sequence of events has inspired a certain historical mystique, in which the Stars Group has been portrayed as politically minded, resistant to the state system and therefore recognizably avant-garde.[72] In fact, both Jiang Feng, who had recovered his position as the advisor to the Cultural Ministry in

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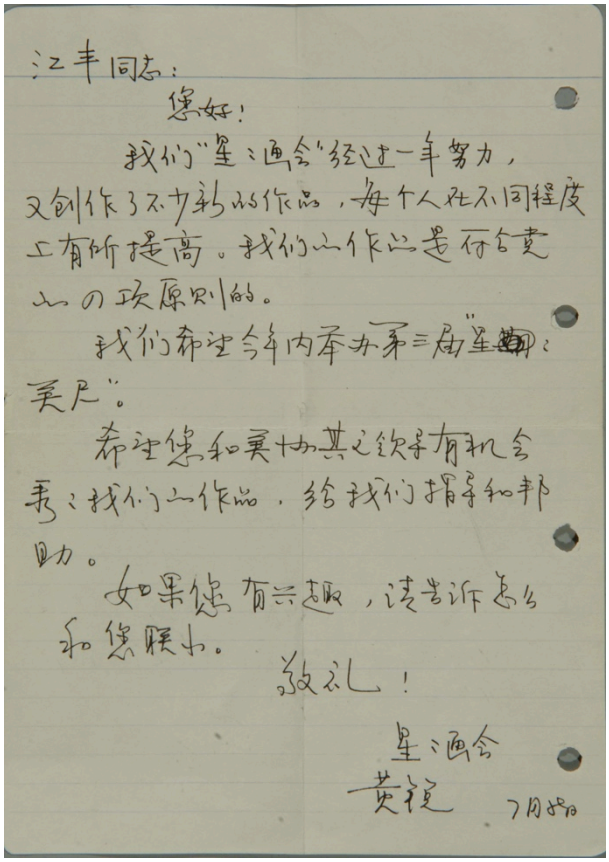
Own Expenses" and "Interim Provisions for Studying Abroad at One's Own Expenses" by seven units including the Ministry of Education. It was clearly stated that studying abroad at your own expense was a channel for cultivating talent. See "Zhongguo wushinian jiaoyu dashiji 1949–1999" ("Chronology of 50 Years of Education in China 1949–1999), Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, accessed April 20, 2020, http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_163/200408/3452.html.

[72] Yi Ying wrote that the avant-garde art movement represented by the Stars was a main trend of this period: "'Avant-garde (*qianwei*)' here has a particular meaning: it is always antagonistic against the mainstream culture and presents itself in marginal and rebellious forms. It consciously and unconsciously set itself against the background of Western modernist art forms and opinions." See Yi Ying, *Cong yingxiong songge dao pingfan shijie* (*From Hero Lauds to the Earthly World)* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2004), 99.

April 1979 and acted as the President of CAFA since August in the same year, and Liu Xun, visited the first *Stars Art Exhibition* and the artists on its opening day.[73] Some of the Stars artists belonged to the families of senior cultural bureaucrats and high-level officials. They had personal ties to members of the state cultural establishment and they took advantage of this to request that their works be shown. In letters addressed to Jiang Feng by artists Huang Rui and Ma Desheng, both with family connections or contacts through friends to the officials, dated July 9, 1981 and November 30, 1981 respectively, the artists offered their respects to Jiang Feng and asked that he continue to support the activities of the Stars Group.[74] [Figures 2.22, 2.23]



江丰同志：

您好！

我们"星星画会"经过一年努力，又创作了不少新的作品，每个人在不同程度上有所提高。我们今作出是符合党的政策原则的。

我们希望今年内举办第三届星星美展。

希望您和美协其它领导有机会来我们今作品，给我们指导和帮助。

如果您有兴趣，请告诉怎么和您联系。

敬礼！

星星画会

黄锐 7月9日

[73] Tian Zhiling, "'Xingxing' handing le dangshi de shehui" ("'The Stars' Shook the Society Then"), *Nanfang dushibao* (*Nanfang Metropolis Daily*), May 18, 2005, B20.

[74] Huang Rui, handwritten letter to Jiang Feng, July 9, 1981, unpublished; Ma Desheng, handwritten letter to Jiang Feng, November 30, 1981, unpublished. Both in the family archive of Jiang Feng.

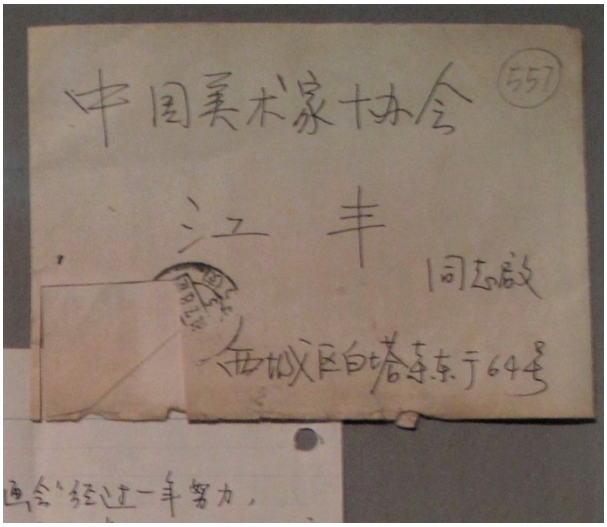


Figure 2.22: Huang Rui, letter to Jiang Feng with envelope, July 9, 1981.

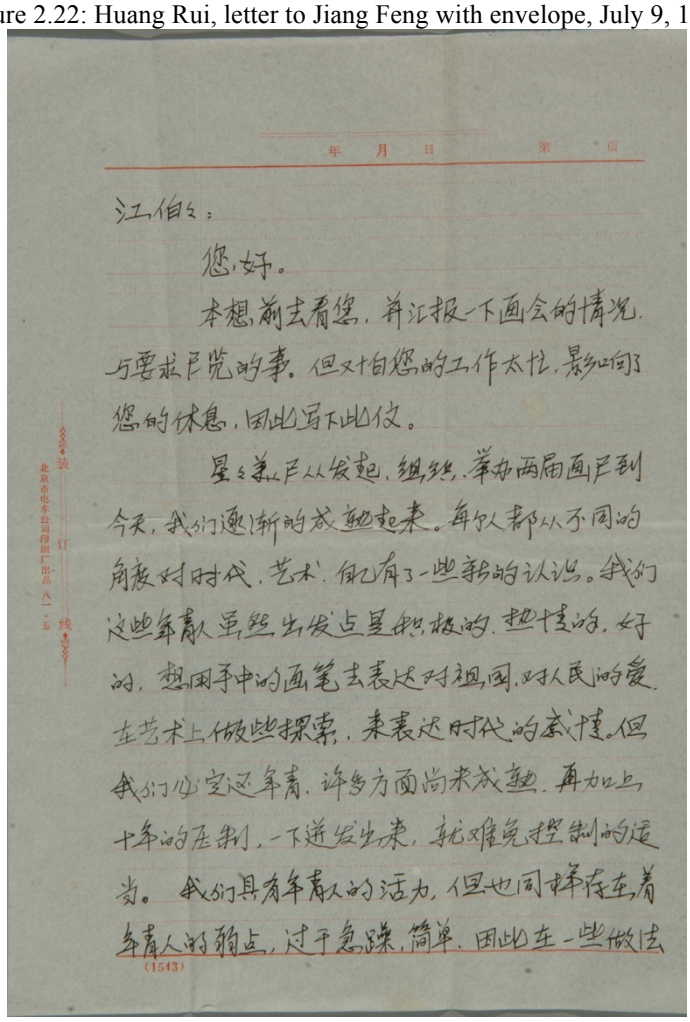


Figure 2.23: Ma Desheng, letter to Jiang Feng, November 30, 1981.

Brainstorming a name for their first exhibition, Huang Rui came up with a simple,

cryptic but evocative word: star. He thought that the word—star—signified a celestial body that would shine on its own without a sun.[75] Having survived the Cultural Revolution, most of the poets and artists involved with *Today* magazine intended to set themselves apart from the previous worship of Mao, who was compared to the sun, the single shining source of light in the solar system, and they wanted a name that suggested their desire for an independent existence.[76] Essentially, just as starlight comes from stars that emitted that light millions of years ago, the Stars artists were acknowledging that they were closely connected to the exhibitions and senior artists of the Beijing Oil Painting Society and the official cultural establishment.[77] The significance of these connections has not thus far been properly acknowledged. In the foreword to *The Second Stars Exhibition*, the Stars artists affirmed their link with this older generation of artists, assuring them that they would never break with their predecessors.[78] They wrote:

> When we unite our liberated souls and our creative souls, art gives life a big stimulus. We will never break away from our seniors (*xianbei* 先辈). We have inherited from them the ability to recognize life and the spirit of exploration.[79]

From *People's Mourning to* April Photography Society

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[75] Huang, "The Past Events of 'The Stars'," 119–20.
[76] Huang, "The Past Events of 'The Stars'," 119–20.
[77] "Di'erjie xingxing meizhan qianyan" ("Preface to the *Second Stars Art Exhibition*"),l accessed December 17, 2019, https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection/search/archive/li-xianting-archive-the-stars/object/preface-and-words-from-the-audience-of-the-second-stars-art-exhibition.
[78] Liu, "The Stars Art Exhibitions and Today," 505.
[79] "Di'erjie xingxing meizhan qianyan" ("Preface to the *Third Stars Art Exhibition*"), held at NAMOC.

The history of the April Photography Society goes back earlier than the other groups discussed so far, to April 1976. It was inevitable, after years of political suppression, that mourning would become an outlet for protest. In April 1976, a few days before the Qingming Festival, the traditional day of mourning the dead, several million people took to the streets in Beijing, occupying Tian'anmen Square, the city's most prominent public square. They went to release pent-up outrage over the Cultural Revolution. They did this by publicly honoring Premier Zhou Enlai, who had died in January. Mourners left poetry and wreaths around the Monument to the People's Heroes. Zhou had been generally considered a more sensible senior member of the Communist Party leadership, one who had tried to minimize the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. The Gang of Four was still in power and ordered the removal of wreaths, and banned any massing of people at the square. On April 5, 1976, a crowd of more than 100,000 came together in a spontaneous demonstration later remembered as the "April Fifth Movement" or the "Tian'anmen Incident," which was branded by the Gang of Four as a counter-revolutionary movement.

Sixteen teachers from Beijing's Number Two Foreign Language Institute collected over 1,000 poems that had been distributed at the square and published them in November 1978 in an anthology, *The Tian'anmen Poems*.[80] This collection recorded the sadness, pain, desperation, frustration and anger of mourners. The political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution had been lived through with no outlet for expressing genuine emotions, whether public or private, other than those that were officially

[80] Tong Huaizhou ed., *Tiananmen shichao* (*Tiananmen Poems*) (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1978). Tong Huaizhou was a name the group gave themselves collectively, literally meaning "remembering Zhou together." This anthology was translated and published in English in 1979. Xiao Lan, ed. and trans., *The Tiananmen Poems* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1979).

sanctioned. The most famous poem was by a high school student, Wang Juntao:

> In my grief I hear demons shriek;
> I weep while wolves and jackals laugh.
> With tears I shed to mourn a hero,
> With head raised high, I draw my sword.[81]

Here, we are reminded that during the Cultural Revolution and earlier, writers, artists and intellectuals had been deprived of their livelihoods, condemned to hard labor and endured public humiliation, imprisonment, mental and physical torment. Some had lost their lives through torture or suicide. Elites were not the only people who suffered. Anyone who showed any sign of disobedience or resistance was subjected to violence and fierce control.[82]

While many young people recited poetry at Tian'anmen Square to express their emotions, others voluntarily documented the event with their cameras. Present at the square were photographers who were members of official cultural institutions, such as Niu Weiyu, a high-ranking photographer from Xinhua News Agency (*Xinhuashe* 新华社), and also young artists with cameras without affiliations at official art institutions. Most members of the No Name Group, mentioned earlier, went to Tian'anmen Square, and some participated directly in the protest.[83] Both professional and

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[81] Xiao, *The Tiananmen Poems*, 24.
[82] For personal accounts of the Cultural Revolution, see Ma Bo, *Blood Red Sunset: A Memoir of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1996); see also Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History 1962–1976* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017).
[83] Gao, *The No Name*, 17.

non-professional photographers photographed the crowds. In 1979, more than 500 photographs documenting both the mourning at Tian'anmen Square as well as the suppression then ordered by the Gang of Four were collected and published in a book called *The People's Mourning* (*Renmin de daonian* 《人民的悼念》). [Figure 2.24] The photographs were taken from many different angles: from above and below, wide-angle and close-up details. Apart from nine film stills taken from *Long Live Dear Premier Zhou Enlai* (*Jing'ai de Zhou Enlai zongli yongchui buxiu*《敬爱的周恩来总理永垂不朽》), a documentary film made by the Central News Documentary Film Studio (*Zhongyang xinwen jilu dianying zhipianchang* 中央新闻记录电影制片厂), the images included in the publication had been submitted by 124 volunteer contributors.[84] The photographs were accompanied by over 400 written for the occasion. Images were in both black-and-white and color.[85] All bore eloquent witness to the sequence of events ignited by Zhou Enlai's passing. The collection documented a process of people striving for the right to mourn: citizens voluntarily organizing mourning activities, spontaneously taking to the streets to protest the Gang of Four's suppression of the mourning, confronting the police and the military. The closing images of the album were of the opening of the *Exhibition in Commemoration of Zhou Enlai* at the National Museum of China on January 8, 1977. On that day, people returned to Tian'anmen Square, openly grieving over Zhou Enlai with bouquets of flowers and poetry condemning the Gang of Four.

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[84] Editorial Team, "Houji" ("Postscript"), *People's Morning*, n.p.
[85] Note that color film was very expensive and hard to come by without connections.

Figure 2.24: *People's Mourning*, 1979.

Preparations for the publication started in late December 1976.[86] Work on the publication lasted from December 1977 to January 1979. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978, the State's public position that the April Fifth Movement was a counter-revolutionary movement was overturned, clearing the way for *The People's Mourning* to be published.[87]

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[86] The main members of the editorial team included Wang Anshi and Wang Jiaoyu of the Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Li Xiaobin and Zhang Chengzhi of the History Museum, Tong Huaizhou of Beijing International Studies University, as well as Wu Peng, Ren Shimin, Luo Xiaoyun, An Zheng, and Gao Qiang. Among them, the only professional photographer was Gao Qiang. A friend of theirs, Guo Meimei, whose father Gao Xiaochuan was secretary to Wang Zhen, helped arrange for Ye Jianying to write the book's title. Wang Zhen was a political leader who had supported the rehabilitation of the Tian'anmen Incident. See Wang Zhiping ed., *Yongyuan de siyue* (*April Forever: In Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of The April Society*) (Beijing: China Book, 1999), 26.

[87] As the publication came together, many publishers approached the group with interest. An Zhen's mother, Fan Kang, was editor-in-chief of the Beijing Publishing House. The publishing house planned to publish a photo album and a poetry collection before January 8, 1979. Fan approached the editorial team of *People's Mourning*. She promised to respect the team's editorial choices without requiring any changes, and to covering all the expenses incurred. See Shi Yijun, "Siwu yundong qijian de yingxiang jilu: 'Renmin de daonian' chuban jingguo" ("A Record of the Influence of the April Fifth Movement: the Process of Publishing *The People's Mourning*"), Sina blog, accessed October 10, 2018, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_616c456c0102wjph.html.

The April Fifth Movement photographs were fundamentally different from official photography, which functioned as an instrument of propaganda. The photographs were direct and unvarnished. They were photojournalism that sought to record events as they were, unlike the posed photographs of the previous decades that adhered to Socialist Realist principles. After the compilation of *The People's Mourning*, some of the photographers involved, mainly Wang Zhiping and Li Xiaobin, wanted to continue with this mode of photography, for it seemed to them that this was free of political obligations.[88] They were not required to portray social, economic or political triumphs. Photographing the Summer Palace in early autumn, 1978, Wang Zhiping was inspired to organize an exhibition of nonpolitical photographs. In his mind, the exhibition would showcase the aesthetic concerns of the photographers, not the politics of officialdom. His friends had photographed the April Fifth Movement, and they quickly responded, naming themselves the April Photography Society.[89]

A loosely organized group of amateur photography enthusiasts, the April Photography Society had between twenty and thirty members.[90] They included both April Fifth photographers such as Wang Zhiping, Li Xiaobin, Wang Miao and Ren Shimin, and members of the Friday Salon, which had been formed before the April Photography Society. The Friday Salon was a regular gathering of educated people who were

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[88] Wang, *April Forever*, 38.
[89] Wang, *April Forever*, 38.
[90] Scholars of Chinese photography history have written in-depth about the April Photography Society. See Claire Roberts, *Photography and China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 129–36; Chen Shuxia, "The Changing Roles of Photography in Revolutionary China, 1937-1981," (Master's diss., University of Sydney, 2012), 83–120; Wu Hung and Christopher Philips, *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2005); Gu Zheng, "80 niandai qingnian sheying tuanti jishi: qimeng shidai de tuxiang quwei" ("Chronology of the Young Photo Groups of the '80s: Imagery Preference in the Era of Enlightenment"), *Xin zhoukan* (*News Weekly*), no. 308 (October 2009), n.p.

interested in photography. Most of them were film directors, cameramen and the children of employees of the Beijing Film Studio. They gathered around Di Yuancang (狄源沧 1926–2003), a special effects photographer at the Beijing Science Education Film Studio. Beginning in winter 1976, they met regularly every Friday evening at Chi Xiaoning's home in the dormitory of the Beijing Film Studio, where Chi's parents had worked before their deaths. In this bungalow at the south-western corner of courtyard at No. 11 in Taiping Hutong in the Xicheng District, group members listened to lectures given by senior artists. Ren Shulin remembered that

> This salon invited everybody to teach, those who painted, wrote poetry, made sculpture, made films, as well as specialists in enlargement, and in making cameras. Twenty to thirty people from diverse backgrounds attended the salon regularly, and they were interested in all kinds of subject matter and artistic styles.[91]

A dozen people lectured in the Friday Salon, including photographers Li Weiming and Ding Yi, sculptors Qian Shaowu, film cameramen Li Xi and Du Yuzhuang, film directors Ling Zifeng and Chen Guoduo, and the artist Shao Bolin. Di Yuancang was the key speaker. He had studied the history of foreign photography but his lectures covered both Chinese and international photographers' work without favoring one over the other. He was critical of both and always looked for breakthroughs in the practices of established photographers. The photographers of the Friday Salon went on group outings to many Beijing suburbs, including Xiangshan, Yingtaogou, Dajue

[91] Ren Shulin, *Zuotian de qingchun: bashi niandai zhongxuesheng* (*Youth of Yesterday: Middle School Students of the 1980s*) (Beijing: Beijing Joint Publishing Company, 2016), 8–9.

Temple and Shidu. Two photography exhibitions were held between 1978 and 1979 in the three rooms of Chi Xiaoning's home. The largest room was hung with two rounds of thread, from which hand-developed black-and-white photographs of various dimensions were suspended with paper clips. The second exhibition, titled *Silver Star*, also featured Friday Salon members. After visiting this exhibition, Li Xiaobin and Wang Zhiping invited the members to join the first exhibition of the April Photography Society.[92]

The April Photography Society held its first exhibition in the Orchid Room (*Lanshi* 兰室) of Zhongshan Park from April 1 to 25 in 1979. [Figure 2.25] The exhibition was titled *Nature, Society, Man*. It presented two hundred photographs by over fifty photographers. The works included the genres of still life, landscape, portraits of everyday figures, and scenes of everyday life, a significant departure from the omnipresent posed, polished portraits of heroes and leaders from the Cultural Revolution's propaganda. [Figure 2.26] For instance, photographer Wang Miao showed one delightful photo of two boats joined by their fronts on a glistening lake, which was entitled "Rendezvous" (*Yuehui* 约会, 1972), and another of a group of people looking at a monkey inside a zoo cage, titled "Inside and Outside of the Cage" (*Longli longwai* 笼里笼外, 1972). Both were carefully composed. Like Wang Miao's photos, the works in the exhibition were closer to what was commonly known as art photography (*yishu sheying* 艺术摄影), capturing the beauty of nature and reflecting feelings and emotions. Inspired by Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg's memoirs *People, Years, Life*, which had been published in the 1960s, Wang Zhiping felt that the title of

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[92] Ren, *Youth of Yesterday*, 8–9.

the exhibition expressed the core group's belief in self-expression and humanism. In his foreword to the exhibition, he highlighted that the artistic and thematic content of photography should not be mistaken for form. He highlighted the photography shown in the exhibition as art, differentiating it from documentary photojournalism and emphasizing its distance from politics. The exhibition traveled to at least five cities.[93]

Figure 2.25: Li Xiaobin, photograph of opening of The April Photography Society's first exhibition, *Nature, Society, Man*, 1979.

[93] Wang, *April Forever*, 38.

Figure 2.26: Scanned pages of the booklet made for the first *Nature, Society, Man* Exhibition, 1979.

A year later, the group held a second exhibition, also titled *Nature, Society, Man*. This time, the show was installed at the Painted Boat Pavilion in Beihai Park, and was open from April 3 to April 22, 1980. One year later again, the April Photography Society held a last exhibition at NAMOC. Like the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, the April Photography Society's exhibition series presented a vast variety of landscapes, still lifes, and portraits of ordinary people. These were works that recognized the photographers' individual expressions of emotion unrestrained, and their pursuit of artistic quality above other, more dogmatic purposes. Each exhibition brought in a large number of visitors, and each sparked great excitement.

The No Name Group (*Wuming huahui* 无名画会)

The No Name Group was another artist group that finally had the possibility to

exhibit their works from 1979 to 1980. Ever since the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, the children of officials and intellectuals had been subjected to political repression. Among this group were many aspiring artists, including a group of Beijing-based youngsters who had failed entrance exams to art academies because of the social stigma associated with their family backgrounds. Instead, they explored alternative ways to study.[94] For example, in 1957, after failing the oral exam for CAFA, Zhao Wenliang commenced at Xihua Preparatory School of Art (*Xihua meishu buxi xuexiao* 熙化美术补习学校).[95] Zhang Da'an, Yang Yushu and Shi Zhenyu also enrolled at the school for art lessons and met each other there between 1957 and 1959.[96] The Xihua Preparatory School of Art had formerly been the Beijing Women's Western Painting School (*Beijing nüzi xiyanghua xuexiao* 北京女子西洋画学校), a salon-style classroom for the social elite, founded in 1926 by Japan-trained artist Tang Shouyi. In 1953, it became the Xihua Preparatory School of Art on the orders of the Municipal Educational Bureau.[97] Tang Shouyi's two daughters, Xiong Xianpeng (熊先蓬) and Xiong Xianling (熊先菱), both of whom studied Western modern art under their mother's tutelage, were teachers at the school. They mainly taught realism but recommended Western modern art to their students, showing them

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[94] "A Chronology of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu," in Su and Su, *Crescent*, 381–3.

[95] When being interviewed for the Painting Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts about the status of paintings then, Zhao Wenliang answered that it was monotonous and so was rejected. See "A Chronology of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu," in Su and Su, *Crescent*, 381.

[96] See Gao, *The No Name* and a collection of thirteen monographs edited by Wang Aihe, a former member of No Name Group, on its group members. Wang Aihe, *Wuming huaji juan shiyi* (*No Name Painting Catalog Volume 1–13*) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011). Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu, interviews with author, Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu's home in Aoyuncun, Beijing, December 2016–August 2017.

[97] With the change of name, the school moved from its original location at No. 4 Wuliangdaren Hutong in Dongcheng District to the residence of its founder Tang Shouyi at No. 3 Shajing Hutong. In 1954, Tang Shouyi passed away and her husband Xiong Shaokun, who was also trained in Japan, became the head of the school. See Guo Linghe, "Xihua meishu xuexiao: chuandengzhe" ("Xihua Preparatory School of Art: A Light-bearer"), *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* (*China Newsweek*), no. 4, April 2, 2012, 84–6.

a full set of the Japanese version of *World Art*, including works by Cézanne and Picasso, which they had brought back from Japan.[98]

It was in this school that Zhao Wenliang was exposed to Western modern art movements such as Impressionism and Fauvism. The Xiong sisters stressed the use of blue, gray and purple, and taught modernism's representation of space as well as *plein air* painting. This was dramatically different from the Soviet art that dominated teaching in art academies at the time.[99] Such an eclectic mix of influences is visible in Zhao's paintings of the period. His *Sunset at Qianhai* (*Qianhai luori*《前海落日》, 1960) [Figure 2.27] is typical, painted mainly in whites, grays, blues and purples. With broad, expressive strokes, Zhao depicted the sunset in white, with pinkish light reflected across the sea. During this period, he habitually noted his observations, thoughts and feelings on the back of the paintings. On the rear surface of *East Park* (*Dong guanyuan*《东公园》, 1960), [Figure 2.28] Zhao wrote, "In 1960, the East Park seen from my sister's window, a starving era."[100] His paintings and their notes were poignant, reflecting the reality of oppression, distress and poverty.

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[98] Guo, "Xihua Preparatory School of Art," 84–6.
[99] Su Wei, "Color, Style and Value: On the Creative Language of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu," in Su and Su, *Crescent*, 169–74.
[100] Zhao Wenliang managed to keep most of his paintings in his own possession. Zhao Wenliang, interview with author, Beijing, June 2018.

Figure 2.27: Zhao Wenliang, *Sunset at Qianhai*, 1960, oil on paper.

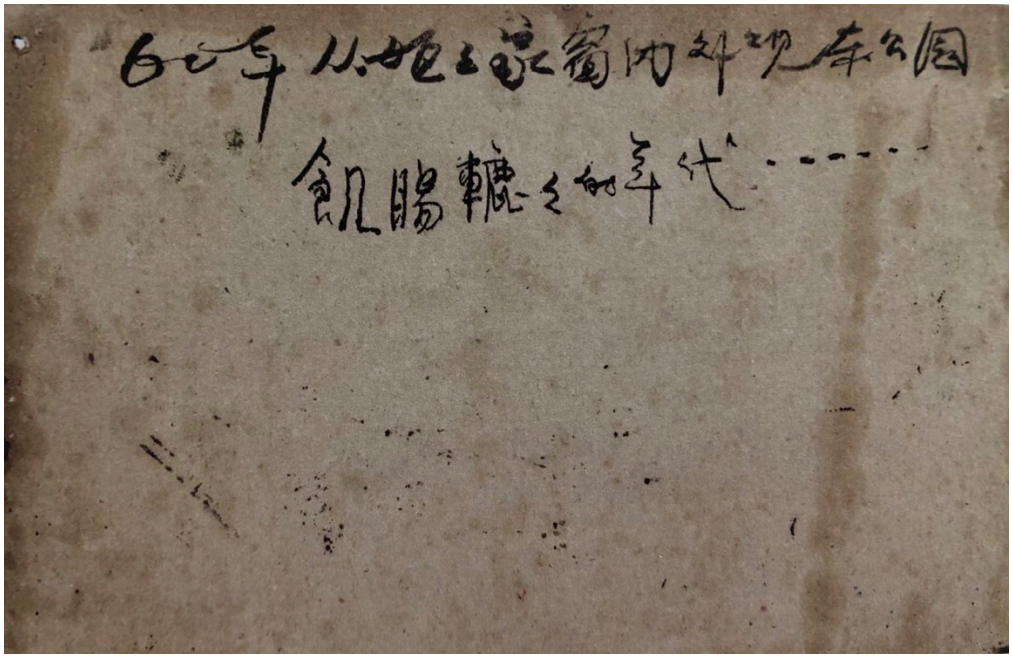

Figure 2.28: Zhao Wenliang, *East Park*, 1960, oil on paper.

In 1962, the Xihua Preparatory School of Art was taken over by the Educational Bureau of Beijing's Dongcheng District and transformed into the Beijing Youth Art Preparatory School. Xiong Xianling, one of the two sisters, continued to teach there up until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, but most of the professors were now graduates of CAFA, including Pan Jun and Yan Zhenduo.[101] From this point, teaching shifted back to the same system as that of the art academies: sketching plaster casts and employing Soviet-style methods. Zhao found this approach deeply uninspiring and spent less and less time at school.[102] Instead he would meet up with Zhang Da'an, Yang Yushu and Shi Zhenyu, friends he had got to know at the Xihua Preparatory School, and they would paint together. They were separated following their individual assignments to labor camps and to factories but continued to paint

[101] Yan Zhenduo, interview with author, Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum, March 2017. The reverse of a painting by Zhao Wenliang dating from 1962, and seen by the author, is inscribed "Painted in Beijing Youth Art Preparatory School in 1962. The only sketch that was a homework assignment set by Pang Jun."

[102] Guo, "Xihua Preparatory School of Art," 84–6.

together whenever they could. Even on 2 October 1966, forty-five days after the Cultural Revolution broke out, they managed to meet and sneak out together to the Reclining Buddha Temple (*Wofousi* 卧佛寺) in the Fragrant Hills (Xiangshan 香山), nearly thirty kilometers northwest of Beijing. These *plein air* painting expeditions to Beijing's suburbs continued throughout the following decade.[103] Their painting activities had to remain secret in the face of the ever-present political pressure against such individualistic artistic methods.

From the late 1960s into the early 1970s, other young people—including Zhang Wei, Zheng Zigang, Ma Kelu, Tian Suying, Liu Shi, Wang Aihe, Shi Xixi, and others—found each other. They were former classmates or newly met friends with similar family backgrounds, mostly children whose parents had been sent to the countryside for reform during the Cultural Revolution. Left behind in the city with high school classes abolished and universities closed, many were assigned jobs as workers, peasants, cooks and kindergarten assistants. But as the children of intellectuals, they also had access to personal libraries which included otherwise-censored publications, such as translations of John Rewald's *The History of Impressionism* (*Yinxiangpai huashi*《印象派画史》).[104] In the factories to which they were assigned, they were mostly making propaganda paintings. But in their spare time, they were eager to paint things other than portraits of political leaders or paintings of revolutionary themes. In 1973, this group of young painters met Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu and Shi Zhenyu. They quickly bonded through their common dedication

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[103] Yang Yushu, "Yang Yushu's zishu" ("Yang Yushu's Self-statement"), in *No Name Paintings, Vol. 9: Yang Yushu*, ed. Wang, 11–13.
[104] Wang, *No Name Paintings, Vol. 11: Zhao Wenliang*, 5–6.

to creating an individual artistic practice without conforming to Socialist Realism, and so they experimented eclectically and freely. They imitated the paintings they were reading about in exhibition catalogs, inspired by paintings by Rembrandt, Cézanne, and Picasso, and experimented with Expressionism, Fauvism, and also with historical Chinese models, including Huang Gongwang's paintings of snowy landscapes, Ni Zan's forests and mountains, Jin Nong's plums, and Ba Da's dried lotus plants.[105] They gathered at Zhao Wenliang's home in Shichahai or followed Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu across Beijing, sketching outdoors and gathering their advice. They traveled to scenic spots in the city, to Beihai, Purple Bamboo Park, the Temple of Heaven and the Forbidden City, and also to the city's more distant outskirts including the Botanical Gardens, Fragrant Hills, Summer Palace, Badachu, Shisanling, Beidaihe and Yuyuantan.[106] From these outings, they produced a large quantity of landscapes, and landscape details: depictions of trees, sunsets, moonlit scenes, and parks.

On January 1, 1975, a one-night private exhibition was held at Zhang Wei's home in Beijing. His two-room apartment was in a Soviet-style housing complex whose dark corridors made it possible to sneak paintings in without being spotted by neighbors or by the Party authorities supervising the neighborhood. Ten artists—Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, Shi Zhenyu, Zhang Da'an, Tian Yu, Kang Wan, Zhang Wei, Ma Kelu, Li Shan and Zheng Ziyan—were included in the exhibition.[107] It was not until July 17, 1979, with the support of Liu Xun, head of the Beijing Artists' Association, that the twenty-three artists held a public exhibition in the Painted Boat Pavilion at Beihai

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[105] Wang, *No Name Paintings, Vol. 11: Zhao Wenliang*, 5–6.
[106] In 1958, Zhao Wenliang visited the Diaoyutai in Yuyuantan to paint *en plein air* for the first time. This location was rarely visited by tourists and its scenery was wild and natural. Zhao, interview.
[107] "A Chronology of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu," in Su and Su, *Crescent*, 389.

Park.[108] Echoing Jiang Feng's foreword to the *New Spring Art Exhibition* encouraging artists to initiate groups, Liu Xun urged them to formalize their group by founding a more formal artists' association, and Zhao came up with the name "No Name."[109] On the opening day, the senior artist Liu Haisu, who had studied oil painting in Europe came to visit the show and in a gesture of support wrote an inscription and commendation on site for the group.[110] As an influential artist of his generation, Liu's backing of the younger artists was not uncommon in terms of cross-generational collaboration at this time, as I have demonstrated through the remarkable example of the *New Spring Art Exhibition*. Liu Haisu's interaction with the young artist members of the No Name Group was a part of the dynamic of a time when institutional structures and the hierarchy were not yet fully resumed.

In 1981, the No Name Group held its second exhibition in the Painted Boat Pavilion.[111] After that, several members continued to work independently in Beijing, including Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu, and Zhang Wei and Ma Kelu left the country in 1986 and 1988 respectively. The artists of the No Name Group and their experiences throughout the Cultural Revolution support my argument that the appearance of art events and a lively scene after the end of the Cultural Revolution wasn't a sudden rupture from the previous decade, but a continuation of an undercurrent during the Cultural Revolution. The members of the No Name Group were part of a larger artistic community made up of individuals who linked up and

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[108] *No Name Exhibition*, Painted Boat Pavilion, Beihai Park, July 7–13, preview, July 14– 29, open to public.
[109] Zhao, interview.
[110] Liu Haisu wrote the following in brush-and-ink on two pieces of xuan paper: *Meizaisi* (*Beauty lies here*) and *Wuming huahui* (*No Name Group*). See "A Chronology," in Su and Su, *Crescent*, 391.
[111] *The Second Group Exhibition of No Name Group*, Painted Boat Pavilion, Beihai Park, July 7, 1981.

found common ground through their education, family background and personal connections.

Creating a Discourse of Openness

As I have been explaining, artists and photographers in Beijing managed to maintain individual artistic practices that did not conform to official dogma, despite the increasing restrictions on literature and art after the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the late 1950s. The situation also applied in larger cities such as Shanghai as well. Art groups and informal associations existed as an undercurrent throughout the Cultural Revolution. The artworks of members of the various groups and associations were, however, only able to be publicly displayed after the end of the Cultural Revolution, through the efforts of senior artists such as Jiang Feng and Liu Xun, who had resumed their governmental positions. These senior artists were also key cultural bureaucrats and played an indispensable role in supporting the emerging new artist initiatives across this period. In the two years from 1979 to 1981, Liu Xun, as Vice President of the Beijing Artists' Association, actively supported new artist collectives including the Beijing Oil Painting Society, April Photography Society, No Name Group and Stars Group by helping them organize exhibitions at venues such as Zhongshan Park, Beihai Park and NAMOC. Up until then, artists in these groups had continually gathered to paint and exchange ideas, but the activity was casual and disorganized. None of them had formally named their groups until they realized that they would need an identifiable group name in order to register at the Beijing Artists' Association

and then, and only then, gain permission to mount an exhibition.[112]

As a cultural official, Liu Xun had seized the opportunity of political relaxation to encourage and support artists in presenting their works publicly. He made a point of attending their Beijing exhibition openings. He wrote supportively about the No Name Group and the *New Spring Art Exhibition* in his essay "Guidance According to Its Trend of Development, Diversity Mass Art Activities," arguing that their emergence was a manifestation of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom," and that "democracy in art couldn't exist without political democracy," referring to accepted slogans and ideas that were enshrined in the Constitution of the PRC.[113] These were messages that a few brave senior cultural officials gave voice to as they, too, navigated the new and uncertain political waters.

Besides these artist initiatives, from October 1978, a succession of solo exhibitions and retrospectives were organized for artists who had passed away or whose work had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. For example, in 1978, an exhibition of Pan Tianshou's (潘天寿 1897–1971) paintings and an exhibition of the exiled French-trained brush-and-ink painter Fang Junbi (Fan Tchun-pi 方君璧 1898–1986) were held at NAMOC in February and October respectively.[114] A tombstone restoration ceremony for Xu Beihong was held in Beijing in April 1978, organized by

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[112] Some of the artists associated with the Beijing Oil Painting Society, No Name, Stars, and April Photo Society groups have talked about Liu Xun's support for them. Yan Zhenduo, Zhao Wenliang, Huang Rui, interviews with author, Beijing, December 2017; see also Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 374.

[113] Liu Xun, "Guidance According to its Trend of Development," 8–9.

[114] Pan Tianshou had died in 1971. See Chapter One n. 27.

the CAA and the China CAFA.[115] All of these events were a consequence of the Central Committee's decision to rehabilitate artists and intellectuals who had been persecuted as Rightists. According to available documents, from 1978 to 1982, 127 exhibitions were organized at museums across the country, many for artists who had passed away during the Cultural Revolution.[116]

I would emphasize that even during the Cultural Revolution, China was not completely isolated from the rest of the world. After 1966 a small number of exhibitions from overseas appeared in Beijing, some then traveling to big cities such as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Kunming and Wuhan. But in 1972, 1974 and 1976, only one foreign exhibition each year entered China. In 1975, four foreign exhibitions toured China, including a show of Canadian landscape paintings, an exhibition of Romanian prints, a collection of Australian landscape paintings, and an exhibition from Albania.[117] And after 1977 the number of exhibitions from overseas to China increased year by year, and arrived from a variety of countries, including France, Sweden, Japan, Germany, America, England, Finland and Yugoslavia. Among these was the 1978 exhibition of *French Country Landscape Paintings in the 19th Century*, the 1979 *Japanese Modern Painting Exhibition*, and the 1981 *Exhibition of Original*

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[115] Xu Beihong passed away in 1953 and his tomb was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. See *Art*, no. 3 (March 1979): 39.

[116] NAMOC, ed., *Zhongguo meishu nianjian (Yearbook of China's Art 1949–1989)* (Nanning: Guangxi Arts Publishing House Co. Ltd, 1993), 1057–87.

[117] *Canadian Landscape Painting Exhibition*, April 16–30, 1975, NAMOC; *Romanian Printmaking Exhibition*, August 23–September 5, 1975, Shanghai Art Museum; *Australian Landscape painting Exhibition*, September 2–17, 1975, the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, Beijing; *Albanian Painting Exhibition*, November 28–December 11, 1975, NAMOC. See NAMOC, *A Yearbook of China's Art 1949–1989*, 1030.

American Paintings from the Museum Boston.[118] These exhibitions were extremely valuable, exposing Chinese artists to a surprising variety of original works of art, in most cases for the first time.[119] After the formalization of diplomatic relations with foreign countries, professionals from those countries were able to travel to China on exchanges. American photographer, journalist and art historian Joan Lebold Cohen paid a fourth visit to China in February 1979, immediately after Deng Xiaoping's visit to the United States.[120] She was granted permission to meet Chinese art historians and teachers, to visit art schools and talk to artists. CAFA invited her to give three lectures, and she brought sets of 35mm slides to introduce American art. Hundreds of people crammed into the first two lectures, during which she lectured on American art from the Armory show of 1913 onwards, including showing slides of work by Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and other New York School artists.[121] This was after years of ideological suppression and the systematic removal of modernist art from Impressionism onwards from official teaching and discourse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the rapid growth of artist initiatives and the proliferation art events and artist groups between 1977 and 1982. All of this had been initiated through fortunate but definite confluences and connections between people

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[118] *Exhibition of French Country Landscape Paintings in the 19th Century*, March 10–April 9, 1978, NAMOC; *Japanese Modern Painting Exhibition*, July 10–30, 1979, Beijing Workers' Cultural Palace; *Exhibition of Original American Paintings from the Museum Boston*, September 1–30, 1981, NAMOC. See *A Yearbook of China's Art 1949–1989*, 1031–1038.

[119] Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi* (*A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1986), 312–13.

[120] Earlier, Joan Lebold Cohen had accompanied her husband Jerome Cohen, Professor at the Harvard University School of Law, who helped pave the way for the normalization of diplomatic relations between America and China. See Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting*, 6–7.

[121] Cohen, *The New Chinese Painging*, 6–7.

that I have described, which have drawn on the memories of older artists as well as key primary and secondary sources. In particular, I have given a detailed description of the *New Spring Art Exhibition*, which took place within the official and ideological constraints of the moment, and I have done this through interviews with the main organizers and participants of the exhibition who are still alive. I have explained its impact on the Stars Group, the No Name Group and the April Photography Society, and embedded all of these initiatives within the ideological context of their time and the period of recovery from 1972. It is this history that I have foregrounded, not artistic affinities with Western practice. The confluences were between brave, open-minded artist-cadres working within the Communist Party system, individual artists employed inside the official art system, and non-official artists. The last group consisted of artists who in the late 1970s finally gained the opportunity to present their art in public. I have noted that the possibility to present one's works and organize events was often achieved through family ties, or networks of friends with such family ties, as well as support from artist-cadres.

The events that I have described took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s across Beijing and were evidence of profound but relatively short-lived changes in the government's art policies, and especially in the newly-tolerated use of public space for new art exhibitions. The dogma of the Cultural Revolution would now begin to be questioned along with the art that had been mandated during the Cultural Revolution. The complex issues that had emerged during the seventeen years from 1949 to 1966 could be put to one side or referred to cautiously and indirectly. This meant that far-left politics in cultural practices, specifically those dictated by the Gang of Four that had constrained art practice and driven "class conflict" through the far-left

politics of the former decade, began to weaken.

In conclusion, I have found that despite the top-down relaxation communicated by the likes of senior Party cultural officials such as Zhou Yang, Jiang Feng and Liu Xun (artists turned cultural bureaucrats), artistic agency was considerable, aided by the support given by the older generation to the younger generation, and by artists working within cultural establishments to artists without such status. This was remarkable and unexpected. As I have explained, this was due to a gap between the dismantling of art's institutional structures and their full reinstatement. I have emphasized that these developments led to a contradictory set of results, within which opening up would ultimately lead to the reassertion of political and cultural control. Two years after the Gang of Four's downfall, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978 put a decisive end to the freeze on art that had ensued during the Cultural Revolution. A new political atmosphere was clear after the Session, with this facilitating "change seeking" across society. This "change seeking" brought people from all kinds of backgrounds and with various agendas into a convergence in 1979 that was shared among artists across all ages and positions. In this fleeting convergence, political and social elites acknowledged the PRC's achievements in the seventeen years prior to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and now insisted that the May Fourth Movement spirit needed to be reiterated at this moment in time. Meanwhile, artistic exploration continued throughout the various stages of the Cultural Revolution, and would help to lead the way during the first ten years of art practice right after the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1980, to curtail the emergent democracy movement at this time, the Four Big Rights (*Sida quanli* 四大权力, *daming, dafang, dabianlun, dazibao* 大鸣、

大放、大辩论、大字报)—to speak out freely, air views fully, hold great debates and write big character posters—were all revoked.[122] This made free and open discussion once again more difficult and ended a particularly dynamic moment.[123] Gradually, the bureaucratic system of art and the official line for art were tightened, weakening the space for and effect of individual agency.

[122] The Four Big Rights dated from the Cultural Revolution and were included in the 1978 Constitution. See Linda Benson, "Building Reform-era China, 1977-89" in *China Since 1949* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 59.
[123] Wu Wei, *Zhongguo bashi niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqianmuhou* (*On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s*) (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2013), 23.

Chapter Three

The Signs of a Rift, 1982–1986

Introduction: Two Diverging Paths?

This chapter traces the emergence of two artistic lines of thinking: on the one hand, the idea of formal experimentation and exploration (*xingshi jiefang he xingshi tansuo* 形式解放和形式探索), and on the other, the idea of the so-called renewal of concepts (*guannian gengxin* 观念更新).[1] The chapter locates the emergence of the two ideas in the early 1980s, and argues that they became central concerns, deployed almost like slogans, over the two years of 1985 and 1986.[2] We will also discuss the tension that emerged between these two ideas. Effectively, both ideas were proposals underpinned by the concept of so-called "thought liberation" (*sixiang jiefang* 思想解放), a movement set in motion by the Chinese government following the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978. Thought liberation essentially amounted to the relaxation of ideological controls. This would further unchain practitioners in the art world, enabling them to explore new forms, new ideas, new approaches and new transformations (*qiuxin qiubian* 求新求变). Artists and art theoreticians had the opportunity to break through constraints and

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[1] The primary proponents of renewal of concepts or ideas were art critics such as Gao Minglu. According to Gao, "*guannian*" means ideas, and "*guannian gengxin*" means "to have a revolution in ideas" and "a desire for further cultural exchange between China and the West." In the Chinese context of the 1980s that meant advocating greater openness and freedom in artistic creation, and that entailed the pursuit of new ideas in the creation of art, rather than emphasizing material production. The notion of "*guannian gengxin*" became the most popular concept among the younger generation and even had an impact on the circle of middle-aged academic artists from late 1984. See Gao Minglu, "Chan Meets Dada: Merging Deconstruction and Tradition in the Avant-Garde Mentality," in *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 199–201.

[2] While existing wisdom accepts "renewal of concepts" as a development in art history, in this chapter I juxtapose it to formal exploration and interrogate the term "*guannian*" and its connotations in China.

political boundaries, and the chance to diversify the styles and themes with which they worked.[3]

For senior artists and theoreticians such as Wu Guanzhong, Wu Zuoren and He Rong, formal experimentation and exploration were code for the ideas of artistic autonomy, thematic and formal diversity, and freedom of self-expression that particular mid-career and senior artists held as beacons, as I discussed in the last chapter.[4] Artists were eager to commit themselves to experimentation in art without being bound by the overwhelming political obligations that had dominated earlier artistic production. For artists like Lin Gang, Pang Tao and many of their generation, the most important issues in art were form, style, artistic language, individual character, the expression of beauty and the characteristics of each medium.[5] These may seem relatively unexceptional ideas to Western art historians, but in the early 1980s in China, they were freighted and fraught with yet-to-be-decided outcomes.

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[3] Zhai Mo and Zhang Zuying, "Guannian de gengxin" ("The Renewal of Ideas") in Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan meishu yanjiusuo (Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts) ed., *Youhua yishu de chuntian* (*The Spring of the Art of Oil Paintings*) (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1987), 44–55; see also Chen Zui, "Xingshi de jiefang" ("Formal Exploration"), in *The Spring of the Art of Oil Paintings*, 140–52. Zhai Mo and Chen Zui were both MA graduates of the Chinese National Academy of Arts in 1981. Zhang Zuying was a researcher at the academy.

[4] I am following the late art historian Zou Yuejin's definitions regarding the various generations of Chinese artists. Zou defined senior artists as those who had started their art career and established themselves before 1949, who became authorities and influential artists within important art establishments after 1949. He defined the mid-generation artists as those born in the 1930s–40s and enrolled into art academies in the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. See Zou Yuejin, *Xinzhongguo Meishushi 1949–2000* (*A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2002), 177–8.

[5] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 178. According to Tao Yongbai's transcription of the two discussions on oil paintings held on the occasion of the closing of the Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists (October 30–November 16, 1979, Beijing), the oil painters attending these meetings were mainly concerned with the relaxation on themes and styles allowed in oil paintings as opposed to the restrictions on historical paintings, paintings of political leaders and one style of Socialist Realism. See Tao Yongbai, "'Beijing youhua yanjiuhui dierci zhanlan' zuotanhui jiyao" ("A Summary of the Second Exhibition of the Beijing Painting Research Society"), 1979, unpublished.

The idea of the "renewal of concepts" was a direct response in art to "thought liberation," and it breezily encouraged everyone to reflect on anything and everything. It first surfaced as an important issue for discussion at the Symposium on Oil Paintings (*Youhua yishu taolunhui* 油画艺术讨论会) in Jing County, Anhui Province, in April 1985.[6] This symposium was the first gathering of a national scale on oil paintings since 1949, and was attended by seventy artists across various generations.[7] It had a democratic atmosphere; everyone had a chance to voice their opinion and was viewed equally.[8] The proposition of "renewal of concepts" mainly consisted of the following ideas: 1) creating new conceptual frameworks for understanding art, especially oil paintings; 2) recognizing the value of individualized expression; 3) expanding the range of approaches to nationalizing oil paintings in China; 4) opening up the boundaries of the medium of art; 5) respecting exceptional artistic breakthroughs and accepting diversity as an essential aspect of artistic innovation; and 6) making it possible for artworks to circulate in the art market.[9] Essentially, the discussion about the renewal of concepts touched upon questions concerning what art is and what it is for, as opposed to questioning the formal language of art and the subject matter of artworks.[10] At that time, this proposal was a sign of younger artists developing a sense of subjectivity as they tried to consider the question of what art

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[6] The Symposium on Oil Paintings was co-organized by the Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts and the Anhui Association of China Artists' Association in April 1985. See Zhai Mo, "Lishi, guannian, gexing: youhua taolunhui shisui" ("History, Concept, Individuality: Recollections of the Symposium on Oil Paintings"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no.1 (June 1985): 1. Some forty papers were delivered at this symposium, and later published as *The Spring of the Art of Oil Paintings* (1987).

[7] Zhang Qiang, "Jingchuan shanzhuang huiyi de qishi" ("The Enlightenment of the Symposium Held in Jingchuan Shanzhuang"), in *Huihua xinchao* (*New Tide of Painting*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Publishing House, 1988), 91.

[8] Zhang, "The Enlightenment," 91.

[9] Zhai and Zhang, "The Renewal of Ideas," 44–55.

[10] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 177.

was and at the same time question the purpose of artistic creation and its relationship to human beings realizing their own sense of value.[11] They tried to break away from the idea of art being a mere representation of life and began to articulate their thoughts through art.

Triggered by the introduction of Western art practices and theories during what was called the period of Cultural Fever (*Wenhuare* 文化热) earlier in the 1980s, young artists and critics adapted terms, artistic forms, approaches and ideas from Western art history, and art and critical theory.[12] During this new wave of thinking about art, the renewal of basic concepts was emphasized again and again. In other words, artists, critics and art historians were defining new conceptual frameworks within which to make and view art. Such an aspiration would be manifested through their commitment to experimenting with new forms of paintings. The underlying meaning of this was the questioning of accepted norms and ideologies in Chinese society. The recurring themes in the discussions about the renewal of concepts were large questions about human relationships, ethics, morality and the meaning of life.[13] The significance of this must be measured with regard to the vastly different period before. Artists who engaged in this new idea of the "renewal of concepts" were convinced that modern paintings in general were products of the renewal of concepts. As long as concepts were not renewed, forms would not be updated.[14] In other words, these artists identified intellectual change as the precondition for the possibility of artistic

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[11] Zhang Qiang, "Quanzuo jige tezheng laikan" ("A Few Characteristics"), in *New Tide*, 87.
[12] See Zhang Xudong, "On Some Motifs in the Chinese 'Cultural Fever' of the Late 1980s: Social Change, Ideology, and Theory," *Social Text*, no. 39 (Summer, 1994): 129–56.
[13] This is my summary of some of the key themes recurring in this discussion by combing through essays published on this discussion in *Fine Arts in China* from 1985 to 1987.
[14] Wei He, "Liuge wenti guandian zongshu" ("A Summary of Opinions About Six Issues"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 23 (June 1986): 1.

innovation and stylistic development. Embedded in the social process of modernization in China at that time, these artists, most of whom had graduated from art academies and come into the art scene in the beginning of the 1980s, sought a rationalist approach (*lixing jingshen* 理性精神) and a sense of order in art.[15]

Although there was not exactly a split over the two proposals of formal exploration and renewal of concepts, it became clear that mid-career and senior artists on the one hand, and younger artists on the other hand, were demanding quite different things.[16] The divergence largely arose from experiences that were poles apart. The mid-career or senior artists and theoreticians had experienced the harsh and strict constraints on artistic practice during the Cultural Revolution. They valued the prospect of artistic freedom, the possibility of expressing individuality, and diversity in artistic exploration as the principal motivations for their art. The younger generation, who had entered art academies towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, had been blessed with a much more relaxed social atmosphere than the preceding two decades. They had not suffered dire punishments for their artistic opinions and their art. Wei Qimei (韦启美 1923–2009), a professor of oil painting in the Central Academy of Art, wrote:

> They are the lucky ones who have entered the palace of art through

[15] Gao Minglu, "Guanyu lixing huihua" ("On Rationalist Painting"), *Meishu* (*Art*), no. 6 (August 1986): 41–7.

[16] Mu Tu, "Chuangzuo buneng jigong jinli" ("Artistic Practice Shouldn't Be Too Rushed"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 16 (April 1986): 1. It was common to perceive the course of history as a progressive process of stages. In Mu's text, for instance, the author started by acknowledging the diversity of artistic forms and styles as an achievement of recent years. While he acknowledged that renewal of artistic concepts was a positive development, he also pointed out that it was a problem that artists were so eager to demonstrate their new ideas that they failed in improving their technical quality in realizing their works.

> examination and got into the art academy with the ideal of becoming a painter. When they picked up their brush, the notion of art was being liberated from the constraint of the 'left', the concept of realism was open for scholarly debates, modern paintings were no longer the forbidden fruit of the original sin, and beauty was being returned to the matrix of art.[17]

Wei Qimei described the context into which his students arrived. The younger generation of artists desired more far-reaching reform in art and the exploration of diverse artistic and theoretical concepts. But such an aspiration had been made possible only after continuous strife and the demands for freedom of artistic expression and theoretical inquiry that had been carried out by their predecessors.[18] In practice, young artists found formal exploration a limited idea, but they were missing the fact that it was on the basis of the advocacy of their predecessors that they were able to make such a leap and freely discuss concepts. So instead of a rupture between young artists and senior artists, I argue that the two lines of thinking, representing the dominant views of each generation, are more linked to each other than they have appeared, and the fact that they were perceived as irrelevant or antagonistic towards each other is a misreading of the actual situation.

During the 1980s, these two lines of thinking coexisted, yet often clashed and competed with each other, with the young criticizing the old for being conservative

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[17] Wei Qimei, "Xinde yidai" ("A New Generation"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 16 (November 1985): 1.
[18] In the previous chapter, I discussed the artistic and discursive spaces opened up by senior artists, cultural officials and individual artists. Zou Yuejin has also recognized that the tolerance and understanding of modern art by the first generation of Chinese artists educated before 1949 was important to the development of Chinese art in the 1980s. See Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 77–80.

and the old considering the young too radical and extreme. Their contestations simultaneously problematized the relationship between the so-called traditional and the so-called modern and issues such as nationalization versus Westernization, but these challenges were often articulated in an oversimplified fashion. No matter how incompatible their positions seemed, essentially both groups were groping for guidelines about artistic innovation while trying to define their relationship with the past and with the international world that China was re-entering. All of this took place in a political climate in which innovation and change were encouraged and sought.

The Genesis of the "Split"

In the previous chapter, I discussed the eruption of artist initiatives, events and discussions, as well as the energetic formation of artist groups, between 1978 and 1981. These developments were mostly initiated by open-minded artist-cadres within the cultural establishment of the Communist Party, individual artists employed by the official art system, and non-official artists who had exposure and access to the possibilities of presenting their works in public through their family ties or networks of friends with such family ties.

I have so far traced the beginning of an apparently optimistic narrative after the Cultural Revolution's long winter, a winter that even so had witnessed the new shoots of a possible spring. Yet from the end of 1979 and the beginning of the 1980s, the space for freedom of thought and speech slowly contracted once again.[19] By February 1981, the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council issued a

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[19] See *Timothy Cheek, Living With Reform: China Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 64.

Directive on Handling Illegal Publications, Illegal Organizations and Related Issues, revoking the right for free speech and public debate. Up to 1,000 activists involved in non-official publications were arrested and sentenced to jail.[20] After January 1983, Li Xianting was suspended from his role as the editor of *Art* magazine; he had introduced abstract art in the first issue of the year. Subsequently, conservative forces within the Communist Party set in motion the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (*Qingchu jingshen wuran* 清除精神污染) in the name of preventing corrupting influences from the West such as humanism (*rendaozhuyi* 人道主义), alienation (*yihua* 异化) and modernism from undermining Party leadership and social cohesion. This campaign lasted until 1984.[21]

Meanwhile, artists continued to embrace the ideals of freedom to experiment, latching onto a diversity of artistic forms and individual exploration as the manifestation of the Party's previous call for thought liberation. Most older artists—those born between the 1920s and the 1940s such as Wu Guanzhong, Huang Yongyu, Lin Gang and Pang Tao, some of whom had studied overseas—had missed the possibility of exploring their artistic potential during the Cultural Revolution. They, of course, welcomed the wave of intellectual freedom with a sense of urgency. The ongoing precariousness of politics made them value this freedom even more.

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20 Wu Wei, *Zhongguo bashi niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqianmuhou* (*On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s*) (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2013), 23. For example, in April 1981, Fu Shenqi was arrested for editing two journals, *Minzhu zhi sheng* (*Voice of Democracy*, 1979–81) and *Zeren* (*Responsibility*, 1980–81); see Robin Munro, Mickey Spiegel, Asia Watch Committee (U.S.), *Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994), 11.

[21] Wendy Larson, "Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-'Spiritual Pollution' Campaign in China," *Modern China* 15, no. 1 (1989): 37–71, accessed February 19, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/189131.

Mindful of the importance of maintaining the liberty granted to artists and creative practitioners at the end of the Cultural Revolution, many senior artists and art theoreticians, Jiang Feng included, held close the thought of change. They saw a diversity of individual styles as a sign of freedom of thought. On the one hand, they actively carried out their own artistic experimentation. On the other hand, they worked to create a space for lively debates and exchange. As more and more artists were rehabilitated and then restored to their previous positions, art and debates that had previously been criticized and suppressed were brought back into circulation as well. The re-evaluation of Impressionism, for example, was an important aspect of this wave of thought liberation alongside the discussions about formal beauty that artist Wu Guanzhong initiated in 1981.[22] When the political context made it possible for artists to pursue their own artistic directions and themes, they reactivated and reconnected with their limited experiences from the years before the Cultural Revolution. In terms of modernism, China didn't have many models other than Western modernist works of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries to look at.[23] Besides Wu Guanzhong, art theoretician Wu Jiafeng (吴甲丰, 1912–1996) was an influential player.[24] He contributed to the breakthrough in rehabilitating Impressionism from the former criticism that it was merely "formalism," "aestheticism," "naturalism," "art for art's sake," "anti-realism," "decadent" and " the expression of the rotten imperialist bourgeois line of thought," accusations made

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[22] This discussion was analyzed in Chapter Two.
[23] Larson, "Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-'Spiritual Pollution' Campaign in China."
[24] Wu Jiafeng had studied oil painting and graduated in 1934 from the Western Painting department of Shanghai Institute of Fine Art (*Shanghai meishu zhuanmen xuexiao*), a private art school set up by Liu Haisu in 1912. Since 1962, he had worked as a researcher in Western art history at the Chinese National Academy of Arts (*Zhongguo meishu yanjiuyuan*) in Beijing.

during the Cultural Revolution.[25] In 1979, Wu Jiafeng wrote an article entitled "A Re-understanding of Impressionism," which was expanded into a book and published in 1980.[26] [Figure 3.1] This thin publication was of great relevance. It provided a comprehensive introduction to the history and practice of Impressionism, giving it cultural legitimacy and pushing what was then regarded in Europe and elsewhere as early modernist painting back into the vocabulary of Chinese artists.

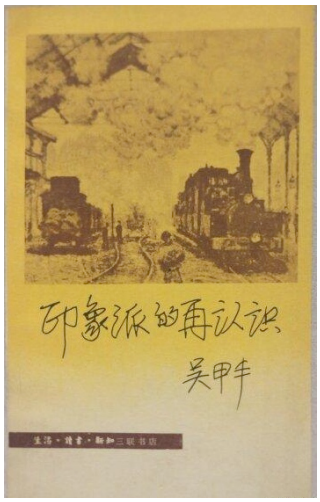

Figure 3.1: Wu Jiafeng, *A Re-understanding of Impressionism*, 1981.

Art historian Julia F. Andrews attributes the lasting popularity of Impressionism, even in the 1980s in China, to an "innate aesthetic affinity" between Impressionism and traditional Chinese painting.[27] When Chinese artists went to Japan and Europe to study in the 1920s and the 1930s, they were mainly taught by painters who worked in

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[25] As previously noted, Wu Guanzhong published an article to discuss Impressionist paintings in *Art Research* in 1979. See Wu Guanzhong, "Yinxiangzhuyi huihua de qianqianhouhou" ("All About Impressionism"), *Art Research*, no. 4 (1979): 53–5. Wu Jiafeng's text "A Re-understanding of Impressionism" was published in February 1979. See Wu Jiafeng, "Yinxiangpai de zairenshi" ("A Re-understanding of Impressionism"), *Shehui kexue zhanxian* (*Social Science Front*), no. 2 (1979): 318–28.

[26] Wu Jiafeng, *Yinxiangpai de zairenshi* (*A Re-understanding of Impressionism*) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1980).

[27] Julia F. Andrews, "The Politicization of *Guohua*," in *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (California: University of California Press, 1994), 180–2.

slightly old-fashioned styles, rather than the styles of modern artists such as Picasso and Braque. Impressionism was what most of them had studied.[28] Besides, Impressionism appealed to Chinese artists because it appeared to share certain fundamental aesthetic inclinations with traditional Chinese painting, including the "predominance of landscape subject matter, apparent spontaneity of execution, rejection of academic subjects and standards of refinement, emphasis on artistic individuality, and absence of overt psychological and political statements."[29] On the other hand, the European optical experiments with color and light undoubtedly seemed scientific and modern to young Chinese intellectuals, and the claim that Marxism was "scientific" had always appealed to the modern Chinese mind.[30] The scarcity of information and contact with other modernist models during the Cultural Revolution also partly propelled the dependence on Western modernist works of the early twentieth century such as Impressionism.[31]

Others who contributed to this "rehabilitation" of Impressionism included art historian Shao Dazhen, who in 1979 published an essay titled "Issues of Evaluating Impressionism."[32] Shao was a key contributor who helped animate the discourse of modernist art in this period of time. He was sent by the government to study art history at Leningrad's Repin Academy from 1955 to 1960, in a program that had a strong focus on ancient Greek and Roman art. Art historical learning in the Soviet

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[28] Wu Jiafeng, "Huanying yinxiangpai huihua zai woguo zhanchu" ("Welcoming Impressionist Works to be Shown in China"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 8 (September 1985): 1.
[29] Andrews, "The Politicization of *Guohua*," 182.
[30] Gloria Davies ed., *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2001), 189
[31] Larson, "Realism, Modernism," 37.
[32] Shao Dazhen, "Yinxiangpai de pingjia wenti" ("Issues of Evaluating Impressionism"), *Art Research*, no. 4 (1979): 56–63.

Union then, as I have previously explained, was heavily influenced by the school of German art history in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, assigning primary significance to accessing historical facts, conducting textual research and undertaking comprehensive studies of contextual circumstances of the studied subjects. The study of artworks was based on direct access to the actual objects and primary source materials. After he finished his study, Shao returned to China in 1960 and worked in the field of art theory and art history in CAFA, teaching ancient Western art history (the art histories of Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, and Ancient Greece and Rome).[33] In 1978, CAFA launched the art journal *World Art* (*Shijie meishu*《世界美术》), with Shao Dazhen as editor. [Figure 3.2] In the first and second issues of the journal, Shao wrote the most substantial series of articles on Western modernism. "A Brief Introduction of Western Modern Art Movements" systematically surveyed artistic movements from Neo-Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Symbolism through to Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art and Happenings.[34] The essays were then compiled into a book, *Modern Art Survey* (*Xiandai yishu qianyi*《现代派美术浅议》), in 1982 and widely circulated among young artists and art students.[35] [Figure 3.3] In addition, Shao gave public lectures all over the country, spreading his knowledge of Western modern art across China.[36]

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[33] Shao Dazhen, "Zixu" ("Author's Preface"), in *Zhongguo xiandai meishu lilun piping wencong: Shao Dazhen juan* (*A Collection of Chinese Modern Art Theory and Criticism: Shao Dazhen*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2011), 4.

[34] Shao Dazhen, "Xifang xiandai meishu liupai jianjie" ("A Brief Introduction of Western Modern Art Movements"), *Shijie meishu* (*World Art*), no.1 (1979): 20–30; "Xifang xiandai meishu liupai jianjie xu (xu wan)" ("A Brief Introduction of Western Modern Art Movements, Part 2"), *World Art*, no. 2 (1979): 59–68.

[35] Shao Dazhen, *Xiandai yishu qianyi* (*Modern Art Survey*) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Fine Art Publishing House, 1982).

[36] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 198–9.

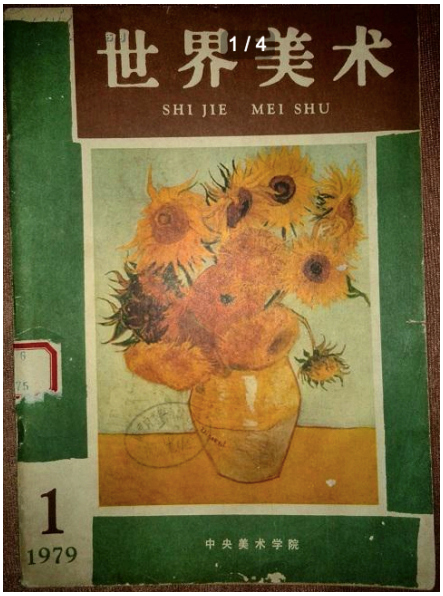

Figure 3.2: Shao Dazhen ed., *Fine Arts in the World*, 1979.

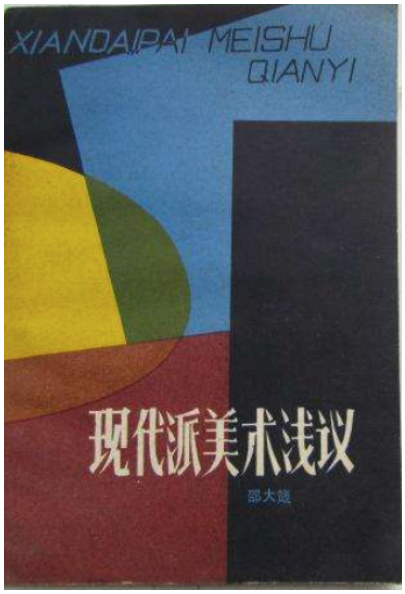

Figure 3.3: Shao Dazhen, *Modern Art Survey*, 1982.

In the meantime, thanks to the Reform and Opening-Up policy, a large body of Western theories were being translated and introduced into China from the late 1970s onwards, igniting a fascination with recent Western philosophy across society. At CAFA, the younger students of art theory and history such as Zhu Qingsheng (朱青生, b.1957) and Yi Ying (易英, b.1953), whose main study was of Roger Fry's writings

on form and content in paintings, were given a budget to order Western art theory books and catalogs for the school library between 1983 and 1985.[37] During the 1980s, a number of threads of Western philosophy became available in Chinese translation and were widely read. According to art critic Peng De, these included Jean-Paul Sartre's work on existentialism, which was translated and then first published in October 1981, Sigmund Freud's work on psychoanalysis and social psychology, Karl Popper's work on the philosophy of science, Herbert Marcuse's criticism of social control, and Jacques Derrida's theories on deconstruction and postmodernism.[38] This broad spectrum of theory was imported into China over almost a decade, from 1981 to 1989. The spread of Western theories and the analytical and critical spirit embodied in them was further enabled by the publication of seventy-four volumes in a book series titled *Towards the Future* (*Zouxiang weilai*《走向未来》) from 1984 to 1988.[39] [Figure 3.4] Edited by Jin Guantao (金观涛, b.1947), this influential book series aimed to expose young Chinese readers to the latest international developments in

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[37] Zhu Qingsheng, interview with Jane Debevoise and Anthony Yung, Peking University, Beijing, March 17, 2009; Asia Art Archive, *Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990*, www.china1980s.org, accessed April 6, 2018, http://www.china1980s.org/sc/interview_detail.aspx?interview_id=41.

[38] Peng De, "Xifang zhexue yu Zhongguo qianwei yishu" ("Western Philosophies and Chinese Avant-garde Art"), *Yishu dangdai* (*Contemporary Art*), no. 6 (2011): 30–3. Examples of the philosophical works introduced into China in the 1980s include Liu Mingjiu, ed., *Shate yanjiu* (*Research on Sartre*) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1981); Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Gao Juefu (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1984); Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, trans. Duan Juan et al. (Fuzhou: Fujian People's Publishing House, 1984); Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, trans. Li Xiaobin (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1989); and Wang Ning, "Hou jiegouzhuyi yu fenjie piping" ("Post-constructionism and De-constructive Criticism"), *Wenxue pinglun* (*Literature Review)*, no. 6 (1987): 145–53.

[39] Jin Guantao ed., *Towards the Future* (*Zouxiang weilai*) series (Chengdu: the Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1984–88). Regarding the history of this book series and its influence, see X.L. Ding, "The Counter-elite and Its Institutional Basis," in *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977–1989* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 67; see also Giorgio Strafella, *Intellectual Discourse in Reform Era China: The Debate on the Spirit of the Humanities in the 1990s* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017).

science, social sciences, the humanities, art and culture.[40] The series included translated works from Western writers as well as original books written by Chinese scholars.

Figure 3.4: Selected titles in the *Towards the Future* series, 1984–1988.

[40] Zhang Xudong, "Xinshiqi wenxue: Lishi shuxie yu yishixingtai" ("New Period Literature: Historical Writing and Ideology") in *Gaige shidai de Zhongguo xiandai zhuyi: zuowei jingshenshi de bashi niandai* (*Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*), trans. Cui Wenjin (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2014), 105.

The publication and circulation of translations of Western texts was a new and important shift. As Zhu Qingsheng recalled, at that time he and his contemporaries felt that painting was no longer relevant, and he came up with a slogan, "reversing the importance placed on hand and mouth" (*Shou yu kou de diandao* 手与口的颠倒). He meant that the articulation of a concept, an idea, should be more important than the manifestation of artistic and technical skills.[41] Zhu didn't specify what type of conceptual practice he was advocating; it was more a compelling sense of galvanizing the idea of having theories and ideas in artworks, to force change and catch up with conceptual art elsewhere. Zhu Qingsheng's outlook wasn't an isolated case. His peers, both artists and critics, held similar views and such a trend of thought forced form and content into a binary opposition based on oversimplified understandings of both terms, and now privileging literary consideration over formal experimentation. For instance, artist Shu Qun (舒群, b.1958) wrote in a manifesto for the Northern Art Group (*Beifang yishu qunti* 北方艺术群体):[42]

> We demand the following of our painting practice: Our paintings are not "art"! Painting is merely a means to conveying our thought. It must and can only be a component of our whole body of thought. We strongly oppose the cliché of so-called pure painting language and of its self-disciplined development based

[41] Zhu Qingsheng, "Xifang dangdai huatan geanguan" ("Looking at Contemporary Paintings in the West from the Other Shore"), *Wenyi yanjiu* (*Art and Literature Research*), no.4 (1986): 50; see also Zhu, interview.

[42] See Shu Qun, "'Beifang yishu qunti' lishi ziliao" ("Archival materials of 'Northern Art Group'"), in *Bawu meishu yundong lishi ziliao huibian 02* (*The '85 Movement An Anthology of Historical Sources*), ed. Gao Minglu (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), 84–6.

on the characteristics of materials.[43]

In such arguments, form was equated to technical skill and material quality, and to the hand of the artist. Content was, however, associated with concept and the mind, and came to occupy a self-justified high position in the hierarchical position of art.[44] This perception would later lead to younger artists and theoreticians dismissing more senior artists such as Pang Tao and Lin Gang, seeing them as bounded by academic conservatism and formalism.[45]

The prioritization of concept and ideas over form and the material aspects of an artwork also had a direct impact on the practice of young artists and their own positioning of their works. To assert their relevance, young artists and art critics tried to highlight the unique and distinctive character of their works, which they now often described as idea-driven (*guannianxing* 观念性). Indeed, we can find the word concept (*guannian* 观念) frequently evoked when describing the works of young artists. For instance, reporting on the *Jiangsu Youth Art Week: Large-scale Art Exhibition* (*Jiangsu qingnian yishuzhou daxing xiandai yishuzhan* 江苏青年艺术周·大型现代艺术展，1985) for *Fine Arts in China*, artist Xu Lei (徐累, b.1963) wrote that the entire exhibition demonstrated that young artists all paid more attention to conveying concepts than pursuing improvements in form, which he saw as the

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[43] Shu Qun, "Beifang yishu qunti de jingshen" ("The Spirit of the Northern Art Group"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 18 (November 1985): 1.

[44] Shao Dazhen had written about how young artists tended to dismiss the artistic experiments of older artists as just "fixing up" (*xiuxiububu*) and criticizing them for "playing with dots, lines and sides," (*wannong dianxianmian*). See Shao Dazhen, "Dangqian meishujie zhenglun zhi wo jian ("My Opinions on the Debates in Today's Art World"), in *A Collection of Chinese Modern Art Theory and Criticism*, 133.

[45] Shao, "My Opinions," 133.

positive result of the slogan "renewal of concepts".[46]

Figure 3.5: Exhibition view, *Jiangsu Youth Art Week: Large-Scale Art Exhibition* 1985.

Xu Lei offered a number of works as examples to illustrate what he meant by concepts in artworks. He argued that some of the works commented on human existence, as suggested by their titles, such as the oil paintings by Yang Zhilin (杨志麟, b.1956), *Humans Are A More Advanced Species than Fish: Humans Like Eating Fish* (*Ren shi yu de jinhua: ren xi shiyu* 人是鱼的进化—人喜食鱼, 1985) [Figure 3.6] and Zhang Ming, *The Origin of Life* (*Shengming de qiyuan* 生命的起源, 1985). Others, he wrote, were reflections on Chinese culture, such as the oil paintings *City* (*Cheng* 城) by Ding Fang [Figure 3.7], and *The Prototype of Divergence* (*Fenqidian de yuanxing* 分歧点的原型, 1985) by Chai Xiaogang.[47] [Figure 3.8] Chai's painting features a farmer couple, in a typical Northern Chinese rural setting rich in yellow earth, parting their ways as they walk downhill, possibly just ending an argument. He named the work *The Prototype of Divergence* to give it a literary meaning. Without

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[46] *Jiangsu Youth Art Week: Large-scale Art Exhibition* (*Jiangsu qingnian yishuzhou*) was held in Jiangsu Art Museum in Nanjing from October 15 to 22, 1985. See Xu Lei, "Ping Jiangsu qingnian yishuzhou, daxing xiandai yishuzhan" ("Review of *Jiangsu Youth Art Week, Large Scale Modern Art Exhibition*"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 23 (December 1985),1.

[47] For an in-depth analysis of Ding Fang's paintings, see John Clark, "Political Experession and the Recent Chinese Landscape Painting of Ding Fang," *Melbourne Art Journal*, no.4 (2009), accessed September 30, 2018, www.melbourneartjournal.unimelb.edu.au/E-MAJ

his title, the work would just appear as a painting of two farmers on their way home at the end of a day of hard work on the farm; with the title, the work gained an allegorical meaning, but one that was not tied to Marxist ideas. Xu explained that unlike painters in the past, these young artists were invested in what he called the "humanistic context of reality" (*xianshi shehui de renwenhuanjing* 现实社会的人文环境). They conveyed through their works and the titles given to them "their intuitive feeling of philosophical thinking" (*ping zhijie ganshou de zhexuexing sikao* 凭直觉感受的哲学性思考), and had the ability to "theorize their own artistic quality" (*jiang yishu pinzhi guijie wei lilunxing zongjie* 将自己的艺术语言归结为理论性总结).[48]

Figure 3.6: Yang Zhilin, *Humans Are A More Advanced Species Than Fish: Humans Like Eating Fish*, 1985, oil on board.

[48] Xu, "Review of Jiangsu Youth Art Week," 1.

Figure 3.7: Ding Fang, *City*, 1985, oil painting.

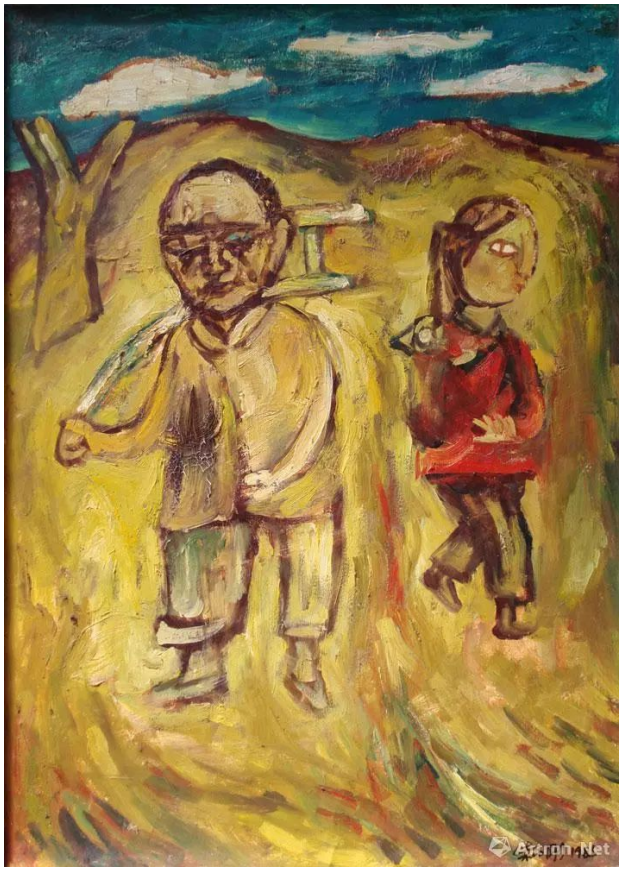

Figure 3.8: Chai Xiaogang, *The Prototype of Divergence*, 1985, oil painting.

As some of the works showed, the artists were trying to go beyond realistic

representation and to express theoretical and literary ideas. The author of the review employed the standard vocabulary popular at this time to associate the works of young artists with, what today read as quite vague but to a Chinese artist in the mid-1980s were the politically charged terms of spirit, theory, concept and philosophy. Clearly, many practitioners, both artists and critics, used these terms quite superficially and loosely. These loose ideas were widely used and were interchangeable with the artists' intuitive feelings, as the author pointed out in his text. The appearance of artworks with literary associations and references, together with writings that helped interpret and promote such works, was a noticeable aspect of the "renewal of concepts" phenomenon. The discursive framework that emerged at this time to describe the works of mainly young experimental artists and groups formed by young artists across the country associated art-making with intellectual endeavor and literary meanings. In such a discourse, the use of terms such as concept, spirit, psychology and rationality was loose and intuitive. Words were empty signifiers, more like slogans to project the idea of change than statements substantiated by actual ideas or arguments.

In summary, the mid-1980s saw a conceptual or literary turn in the work of mainly young artists, who tried to infuse their artworks with terms, ideas and concepts that they had read about and learned about during the period of Cultural Fever. To manifest a conceptual turn in art was to be progressive, and represented a step forward from the formal quests of their seniors. Alongside the creation of artworks inspired by conceptual and literary ideas was the formation of an active discourse, which invented vocabulary and freely used terms to enable a broader awareness and interpretation of such works.

Formal Exploration

In the waves of modern art and thought imported from the West, young artists adapted ideas and imagery freely and even wildly, as I have just shown. Senior and mid-career artists were also changing, but their experimentation was not considered as innovative as the works of young artists that explored literary concerns. Oil painter Wei Qimei has compared the transition of mid-career artists like himself at this time to the training regimes that athletes underwent to arrive at a higher level of performance, which often led to breakdowns and backslides.[49] In an interview given in 2007, Wei described the crisis he felt when he visited exhibitions during 1980, including the *Fine Art Exhibition of Advancing Chinese Youth* (*Qianjinzhong de Zhongguo qingnian meizhan*《前进中的中国青年美展》) (1985). He realized that many young artists had moved far ahead in terms of experimenting with techniques and themes of modern art, and he felt a sense of urgency if he was to catch up with them and catch up with the times. This led him to experiment in his own paintings. Fascinated with the American realist painter Edward Hopper, and with the calm of Hopper's everyday scenes, Wei Qimei turned his attention to urban views, depicting modern Beijing using simplified shapes, reduced detail and bands of saturated colors. In 1981, he completed *The Flyover*, a painting of the first multi-lane overpass built at Fuxingmen in Beijing in 1978.[50] [Figure 3.9] In *New Lines* (*Xinxian* 新线) (1983), he painted two large reels of cable left on an empty road under a blue sky using clear contours and sharply defined light. [Figure 3.10] He painted the first telephone booth in Beijing at

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[49] Xiao Chen, "Wenbu kaituo: yici youhua zuotanhui" ("Steady Expansion: An Oil Painting Symposium"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 47 (November 1986): 1.
[50] Xu Hui, "Yige reng zai yishu zhong xunmeng de ren: youhuajia Weiqimei" (A Dream-Seeker in Art: Oil Painter Wei Qimei), *Meishu guancha* (*Fine Arts Observation*), no. 9 (2007): 36–8.

this time, and visited the Institute of High Energy Research, the Astronomical Observatory, and the Meteorological Observatory to find subjects for his paintings.[51]

Figure 3.9: Wei Qimei, *The Flyover,* 1981, oil painting.

Figure 3.10: Wei Qimei, *New Lines*, 1983, oil painting.

[51] Xu, "A Dream-Seeker in Art," 36–8.

In 1980, the artist couple Lin Gang and Pang Tao, both professors at CAFA, made a research trip to the Elephant Trunk Hill (*Xiangbishan* 象鼻山), an iconic landmark in Guilin, Guangxi Province, in South China. After they returned to Beijing, they collaborated on *Travels in Lijiang II* (*Lijiangxing zhier* 漓江行之二 (1981), a large landscape painting on canvas that they covered with a thin layer of fine-grained sand. [Figure 3.11] Instead of representing Elephant Trunk Hill in a realist style, they constructed the image of the hill through the application of a red field of color. They simplified the surface of the Li River, above whose bank the hill sits, using an expansive white background with vague suggestions of mountains and their reflections in the distance. The sand surface was ingenious; it gave the hill an uncanny substance and texture.

Figure 3.11: Lin Gang and Pang Tao, *Travels in Lijiang II*, 1981, oil and sand on canvas.

The painting was inevitably the object of severe criticism from Jiang Feng, President of CAFA, who expressed his opinion at the time: “We advocate innovation and

diversity of styles and forms on one premise, which is to represent social life or natural landscape in a more authentic, more beautiful and more appealing manner. Without such a premise, for instance, in some works, the kind of innovation and diversity of styles and forms lies in abandoning the image of the depicted subject or distorting it to the effect that people do not understand. That is what we disapprove of and should oppose adamantly."[52] In this particular case, Jiang Feng was willing to tolerate Pang Tao's pursuit of semi-abstraction, given her background in modernist art arising from her family, but he did not approve of Lin Gang's experimentation, which seemed a betrayal of Lin's status as an orthodox artist emerging from within the Communist Party art system and its guidelines.[53]

Here, I should explain the backgrounds of Lin Gang and Pang Tao. Born in 1925, Lin was initially trained in the CCP-controlled Liberation Area. On account of his political and artistic credentials, he was among the first group of artists selected by the Communist Party to study in the Soviet Union between 1954 and 1959.[54] [Figure 3.12] Born in 1934, Pang Tao grew up in a family of modernist painters. Her father, Pang Xunqin, had trained in Paris in the 1920s and then co-founded the Storm Society (*Juelanshe* 决澜社), a modernist art group in Shanghai, in the 1930s. Her mother, Qiu Ti, studied modern art first in Shanghai and then in Japan and also joined the Storm

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[52] Jiang Feng, "Jiangfeng tongzhi zai 'quanguo gaodeng yishu yuanxiao meishu chuangzuo jiaoxue zuotanhui' kaimushishang de jianghua zhaiyao" ("A Summary of the Speech by Comrade Jiang Feng on the Opening of the National High-level Art Academy Art Education Symposium"), *Meiyuan* (*Art Work*), no. 3 (May 1982): 7–9.

[53] Pang Tao, interview with Peng Weihua, Beijing, 2014, unpublished.

[54] Lin Gang's prize-winning work was a water color history painting using folk art aesthetics entitled *Zhao Guilan at the Commemoration of Heroes* (*Qunyinghui shang de Zhao Guilan*) won the first prize in the annual *Nianhua* award in 1951, the year the work was created. See Wang Xiaomei and Zhang Miaomiao eds., *Lin Gang Pang Tao liushinian yishu huiguzhan* (*Lin Gang Pang Tao: A Sixty-Year Retrospective*) (Beijing: National Art Gallery of China. 2010); see also Xu Zhengyun ed., *Lin Gang* (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), 14–15.

Society. Both Pang Xunqin and Qiu Ti took part in underground work for the Communist Party in the 1930s. They remained on the mainland and joined official art organizations after 1949. Their daughter, Pang Tao, entered the National Art Academy in Hangzhou in 1949 and then CAFA in 1951, where she received her Masters degree in painting in 1955. After graduation, she stayed on as a teacher, teaching color in the Printmaking Department. By 1956, she was experimenting with simplified colors and abstracted forms, but her progress was stalled with the onslaught of political repression.[55]

Figure 3.12: Lin Gang, *Zhao Guilan at the Commemoration of Heroes*, 1951, water color.

Lin Gang and Pang Tao were married in 1959. After the Cultural Revolution, Lin Gang created a number of important history paintings depicting the revolutionary history of the Communist Party, most of them realized in collaboration with Pang

[55] For an account of Pang Tao and her family, see Pang Xunqin, *Jiushi zheyang zouguolai de* (*I Have Come This Way*) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2005). See also Pang, interview.

Tao.[56] While these were mostly commissions for governmental bodies such as the National Museum of China (*Zhongguo guojia bowuguan* 中国国家博物馆), or submissions for national art exhibitions, Lin Gang and Pang Tao also chose subjects less heroic and celebratory, with more of a lyrical and poetic mood, though still connected to cultural politics. *Writing Poems on the Long March* (*Wanli zhengtu shi bujin*《万里征途诗不尽》，1977) was created for the National Museum of China on the occasion of the Exhibition to Commemorate the First Anniversary of Chairman Mao's Death (*Jinian Maozhuxi shishi zhounianzhan* 纪念毛主席逝世周年展). [Figure 3.13] This painting depicts a lonely Mao Zedong riding a white horse, accompanied by a single soldier to his left, with a handful of yellow wildflowers in the foreground. Mao looks out towards the mountains stretching endlessly ahead and a glimpse of his marching army far away. The mood of the painting is subdued and gloomy. These Party-themed paintings were not as "red, bright and shining" as most official works produced during the Cultural Revolution era. They were darker and more subtle. In some paintings, the artists used the old master oil painting technique of building up an image in translucent glazes; this was not Socialist Realist technique. According to art critic Shui Tianzhong, this was the first time a glazing technique—as opposed to the standard Soviet Socialist Realist tonalist technique—had been employed in works of such an enormous proportion in China.[57]

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[56] "Pang Tao de nianpu" ("Pang Tao's Chronology"), in Wang and Zhang, *Lin Gang Pang Tao*, 61–82.

[57] Shui Tianzhong, "Cong geming de xushi dao shengming de sikao: Lin Gang huihua de fazhan mailuo" ("From Records of Revolution to Questions of Life: The Development of Lin Gang's Painting"), in Xu, *Lin Gang*, 14–15.

Figure 3.13: Lin Gang and Pang Tao, *Writing Poems on the Long March*, 1977, oil on canvas.

I will now backtrack in time in order to explain what this meant and why it would provide a pathway towards experimentation. Lin Gang's painting style can be traced back to the effect of his education in the Soviet Union from 1954 to 1960 on him. After Stalin's death in 1953, his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, brought a measure of détente with the West and the relaxation of rigid controls within the country.[58] The first generation of Chinese artists and theoreticians that were sent to Russia landed in a changed Soviet Union. During Lin Gang's time there, the atmosphere in Soviet art circles was more open and lively than in China. Lin Gang was exposed to a degree of artistic experimentation and opposing opinions on aesthetics. For his six years of study, Lin Gang was enrolled at the Repin Academy in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and studied oil painting in the studio of Boris Vladimirovich Ioganson for four years after two years of Foundation Studies. A highly respected painter, Ioganson emphasized structure and unity in composition, as well as bold paintwork and a

[58] See Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith eds., *Soviet State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

freehand, brushy style. In his oil paintings, he used color emphatically, relying on it rather than drawing to carve out spaces and forms. In creating the spaces between background and foreground, he demanded that his students understand how to change color to create pictorial depth. Ioganson believed that color would allow a painting to breathe and be alive. Regardless of the subject matter, a painting had to be constructed of subtle and carefully balanced relationships between colors, each enhancing the beauty of the other. For Chinese students who had been trained in academic realism, grasping Ioganson's notion of color was far more difficult and challenging than making precise drawings, which they were already skilled at. The greatest understanding that Lin Gang took away from Ioganson's studio was expression through color. Lin Gang admitted that for painting, he admired Rembrandt, but for color, he loved the Impressionists. He wished to adapt these methods to a Chinese, freehand (*xieyi* 写意) approach to painting in oils and for this, he understood that art had to be the product of synthesis—in this case across cultures—and not arrived at through academic training alone. When he returned to China, this became a distinctive element of his teaching at CAFA.[59]

To make this point even more clear, it is worth emphasizing that Lin Gang's education in the Soviet Union was drastically different from the training in the two-year postgraduate course offered in China by the Soviet portrait painter

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[59] Shui Tianzhong, "From Records of Revolution to Questions of Life," 14–15; see also Peng Weihua, "Cong xieshi de geming xushi dao chouxiang de shengming biaoda: Lin Gang's yishu fazhan" ("From Realist Revolutionary Narrative to Abstract Expressions of Life: The Development of Lin Gang's Art"), (MA diss., Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2014).

Konstantin M. Maksimov (1913–1994) from 1955 to 1957.[60] Maksimov was sent by the Soviet government at the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Culture to serve as a consultant in the Oil Painting Department of CAFA.[61] When Maksimov arrived, Jiang Feng welcomed him with great enthusiasm, anticipating direct and systematic teaching of the more advanced artistic pedagogy of the USSR. Maksimov's instruction in Soviet academic oil painting had a profound effect, not just on the twenty artists that were formally enrolled in his class but on art across China. After completing studies with him, these artists returned to the institutions across the nation where they had come from originally; they assumed important positions and passed on the Soviet Realism that they had acquired.[62] Liu Xun, an artist and government official discussed in Chapter Two, had studied with Maksimov in an additional course that was offered outside the formal program.[63] That Maksimov's disciples went on to occupy important bureaucratic positions, not least Jin Shangyi and Zhan Jianjun at CAFA, led to the continuous propagation of Soviet academic oil painting in Chinese art academies and circles long after Maksimov's departure.[64]

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[60] For studies on the impact of Maksimov's teaching in China, see Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "Western-Style Art Under Mao," in *The Art of Modern China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012) 148–52; see also Cao Qinghui, "Youhua jiaoyu zhengguihua chongjianzhong de 'maxunban' jiaoxue" ("The Maksimov Oil Painting Class in the Re-Building of Formalization of Oil Painting Education"), *Wenyi yanjiu* (*Art and Literature Research*), no. 10 (2007): 107–22; see also Chen Ruilin, "Huiwang lishi: 'Maxunban' yu Zhonghua renmin gongheguo chuqi de meishu" ("Looking Back to History: 'Maksimov Oil Painting Class' and Art in the Early Period of the People's Republic of China"), *Zhongguo meishu* (*Art in China*), no. 6 (2012): 18–21.

[61] "Sulian meishu de yingxiang" ("The Influence of Soviet Art"), in Beijing huayuan (Beijing Fine Art Academy), *Ershi Shiji Beijing Huihuashi (Beijing's Painting History of The Twentieth Century)* (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing, 2007), 234–38.

[62] Andrews, "From Popularization to Specialization," in *Painters and Politics,* 152–3.

[63] Liu Xun continued to practice oil paintings in his spare time throughout his life. He developed a passion for Soviet paintings which compelled him to create a collection of Soviet paintings, which he donated to the National Art Gallery of China in 2005. See Liu Xun, *Zhongguo meishuguan cang Liu Xun juanzeng zuopin ji* (*An Album of Works Donated by Liu Xun and Collected by NAMOC*) (Beijing: People's Education Publishing House. 2008).

[64] See Jiang Hua and Wu Jingyu, *Jin Shangyi* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei People's Publishing House, 2008), 22.

When the opportunity to experiment finally appeared, Pang Tao and Lin Gang took advantage of this, but as we have seen, they encountered intense criticism from their superior Jiang Feng, for works such as *Travels in Lijiang II* (1981). It was impossible not to take Jiang Feng's response seriously. As a result, Lin Gang added a few strokes in a very light gray tone to the upper right-hand side of the painting to suggest a fleeting ferry on the river, so that it would pass as a more realistic depiction of the landscape. In the meantime, his name was dropped from the label of the work even though the character "Gang" from his name remained, painted like an impression from an engraved name seal next to "Tao" from Pang Tao at the tip of the elephant-trunk-shaped section of the hill.

Jiang Feng's dislike of abstraction was far from just an artistic issue. He "objected to such dregs from Western art as abstract art being introduced into China" and considered it an ideological product of the fallen bourgeois society. He had even stated that to import modernist art and theories into Socialist China was "committing a mistake of the era."[65] For him it was fundamentally a question of the correct ideology. His criticism reflects the legacy of the strict categorization of artistic styles and languages according to political ideology over the previous four decades.

In a dramatic turn of events, in 1982, while debating the issue of abstraction, Jiang Feng fainted during a sudden heart attack and never regained consciousness.[66] Jiang Feng's resistance to abstraction and to artistic exploration were symptomatic of the

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[65] Lin Mohan, "Jiang Feng meishu lunji xu" ("Introduction to *Jiang Feng Art Theory Anthology*"), *Art Research*, no. 1 (1984): 3–4.
[66] Lin, "Introduction to *Jiang Feng*," 3–4.

limits of the official art system, which ultimately evaluated and constrained art according to Party ideology. This explains why senior artists and theoreticians, who understood the power of the system and carefully measured their exploration of media, styles and forms against the degree of political and intellectual freedom allowed at any one time, did not demand fundamental changes to the ideological structure. They feared that everything would fall back to the restrictions imposed on them in earlier times. So long as the system allowed them to carry out their mild artistic experiments, they accepted dependence because of the support and opportunities it provided. They carried out stylistic experiments in calibrated dialogue with ideological shifts.

The Intersecting of Two Lines of Thinking: "Formal Exploration" and "Renewal of Concepts"

The differences in artistic practice between older and younger generations of artists would become amplified as time went on. This took the form of antagonism between artists of different generations, and erupted in a sequence of events and debates that took place starting in 1984, most importantly in relation to the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition* (*Diliujie quanguo meizhan* 第六届全国美展) held in October 1984.[67] This major exhibition took place in nine cities across the country, each show specializing in one art medium. Prior to the exhibition, *Art* magazine published an editorial titled "In Anticipation of the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition*" in its first issue in 1984. The article criticized artworks that "blindly imitated Western modern schools" or "championed abstract 'humanity,' 'the value of human existence,' 'self-expression' and 'pure art' that transcended class and politics." Without citing specific examples,

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[67] See Zou, *An Art History of the People's Republic of China*, 199.

the editorial blamed "unhealthy intellectual content and odd forms" for polluting culture. Amidst the Anti-Spiritual Campaign that I referred to earlier, this editorial, appearing in a prestigious and official art magazine—*Art*—clearly represented the official attitude and provided the guidelines for what could be included in the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition*. As a consequence, the 3,239 artworks in various media presented in the exhibition were restricted to those that displayed realist principles.[68]

The *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition* was generally regarded as a lapse from the intellectual openness that had followed the end of the Cultural Revolution.[69] But there was no shortage of artists, mainly mid-career and older, who tried to work out how to accommodate themselves in their exploration of artistic languages. These were mainly the artists who worked as professors in art academies or within official art organizations. Many of them were anxious about the loss of time they had suffered during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, they had embraced the relaxations on ideological control in 1978 as their opportunity to freely explore new art and to create individual rather than collective practices in art. Resenting the conformity of artistic styles and choices of themes that seemed to be now demanded, they wanted their own artistic work and individuality.

We will now focus on one of these artists, and return to further consider Pang Tao, who I mentioned earlier in relation to the collaborative work *Travels in Lijiang II*

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[68] Chen Cui, "Cong xingshi jiaodu kan diliujie quanguo meizhan jiantan zhongguo youhua xiang hechu zhi wo jian" ("My Opinion of the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition* Considered from the Perspective of Formal Languages and a Discussion of the Direction of Chinese Oil Paintings"), in *Youhua taolun ji* (*A Collection of Discussions in the Oil Painting Symposium*), ed. Liu Yushan and Chen Lusheng (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1993), 279.

[69] Xi Lin and A Min, "Bianxuan zhiyu" ("After Editing"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 15 (November 1985): 1.

(1981) that she painted with her husband Lin Gang. Between 1980 and 1981, Pang Tao painted *Travels in Guilin I* (*Guilin xing zhier* 桂林行之一, 1980), which she submitted to the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition*. [Figure 3.14] This oil painting depicts a mountain scene in Guilin. Instead of following classical rules of composition in landscape painting, this work deliberately employs an extreme symmetry as its composing principle. It is a diptych, with each canvas encompassing part of the mountain, almost mirroring the other, so that when joined the mountain becomes a single form that may appear to take the shape of a plump female figure. Groups of golden trees adorn the top and are scattered over the middle parts of the mountain, giving the impression of a lush autumn. The water and distant mountains are painted as areas of light-toned color creating a large intensely graphic and ornamental painting. Its sequel, *Travels in Guilin II* (1980), would also take on this extraordinary symmetry which could be read both horizontally and vertically. [Figure 3.15] The mountains and their reflections in water are handled almost as patterns.[70] But *Travels in Guilin II* also evokes the hazy atmosphere of a brush-and-ink painting

[70] Xi and A, "After Editing," 1.

Figure 3.14: Pang Tao, *Travels in Guilin I*, 1980, oil on canvas.

Figure 3.15: Pang Tao, *Travels in Guilin II*, 1980, oil on paperboard.

In these works, Pang Tao returned to her experience of being exposed to the modern art of her early education at home, prior to the establishment of the PRC. But she was now among the group of middle-aged or older artists working in art academies within the official art structure, trying to take advantage of a freer political atmosphere for individual endeavor. These artists' works and their ideas were not appreciated by their young students. As earlier mentioned, Shao Dazhen pointed out that the emphasis on form and on the idea of aesthetic reform that had been championed by Wu Guanzhong in the late 1970s were by now rejected by young artists, who felt that the pursuit of formal beauty would constrain their expression of concepts and their ability to position themselves as conceptual artists according to Western postmodern art.[71] Young artists now rejected formal experiments in favor of literary content in an artwork.[72] This radical shift was reinforced by an exhibition at NAMOC by American artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1985 (November–December, 1985). Shao later commented that after seeing the exhibition many students at CAFA wanted to give up painting. He shared a recollection that encapsulates the powerful impact of Rauschenberg on art students: when French students visited CAFA in 1985, some CAFA students piled up bicycles on the sports ground and hung mops and shabby brooms outside the windows of their dormitories on the twelfth floor while others made use of found objects to create installations intended to welcome the visitors.[73] It was no wonder that these young rebels considered the older artists, including Wu Guanzhong and Pang Tao, completely irrelevant with their emphasis on painted form,

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[71] Shao Dazhen, "Tongku de sikao: zai Jiangsu meishu lilun zuotanhui shang de jianghua" ("Painful Reflections: Speech at the Symposium on Art Theories in Jiangsu"), in *Meishu lunwenji* (*Antholoy of Essays on Art*), ed. Jiangsusheng wenhuating (Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Publishing House, 1986), 16–22.
[72] Zhang Qiang, "The Enlightenment of the Symposium Held in Jingchuan Shanzhuang," in *New Tide*, 91–3.
[73] Shao, "Painful Reflections," 16–22.

beauty, line, use of color and expression through rhythm. They intended to give up painting entirely (whether they did so or not is beside the point), and a fixation on the conceptual was the criterion for deciding whether or not an art practice would be considered modern.

It was not just a divergence of opinions that drove the generations apart. Peng De later recalled another event that occurred the following year which highlighted and further intensified the tension that existed between generations. In May 1985, the Fourth Congress of Representatives of the China Artists' Association (*Zhongguo meishujia xiehui disici huiyuan daibiao dahui* 中国美术家协会第四次会员代表大会) was held in Jinan.[74] The agenda was to change the board of the CAA, but in the end the Association decided to continue with the leadership of senior artists that was already in place, with Wu Zuoren as CAA's director and Hua Junwu and Huang Yongyu remaining its deputy directors. This upset the younger representatives at the Congress and resulted in a chaotic situation with some of the younger participants taking over the microphones to express their opinions. In the end, Hua Junwu was so furious that he stormed out of the meeting and Huang Yongyu called in members of the local military to enable the proceedings to continue so that the decisions on senior leadership could be upheld.[75] This event showed young artists that the power of existing art institutions and structures was overwhelming. It had the effect of

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[74] "Zhongguo meishu 1985nian dashiji" ("Major Events of Chinese Art in 1985"), China Artists' Association, accessed January 2, 2019, https://www.caanet.org.cn/eventsdetail.mx?id=37.

[75] Peng De, "Xinchao meishu gushihui" ("Story Collections of New Wave Art"), in *Bawu meishu shishi kaoju·2015 Hubei meishuguan luntan* (*Truth and Facts about 85 New Wave in China·Collected Works of 2015 Forum of Hubei Museum of Art)* ed. Fu Zhongwang and Sun Zhenhua (Wuhan: Hubei Fine Arts Publishing House, 2016), 101.

encouraging many of them to embrace a non-official status.[76]

To underline the situation at this time, we should not neglect the fact that senior artists and theoreticians had gradually been reinstated into their positions. As discussed in previous chapters, figures such as Jiang Feng, Hua Junwu and Liu Xun had all held senior positions, but were purged and punished during the Cultural Revolution and then resumed power from 1978 onwards. They had enjoyed a level of material and social privilege thanks to their social and cultural status. This privilege would be slowly regained as cultural institutions resumed normal operations. For many senior artists, however, they simply recommenced their artistic journeys and were content with the greater personal freedom they now enjoyed, without feeling the urge to agitate for a new sociopolitical narrative.

When opportunities arose, some artists devoted themselves to making deeper changes that would enable diversity and autonomy in artistic experimentation. For instance, Wen Lipeng was by then a middle-aged oil painter and director of the Oil Painting Department at CAFA. He now wanted to create a space in the academy for artists to learn modern art in response to a changing cultural climate. In 1985, he established a Fourth Studio in the Oil Painting Department and transferred Lin Gang from the Second Studio to direct it.[77] The studio's main mission was to introduce the most

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[76] Peng De, "Who Propelled New Wave," 30.

[77] The studio-based system of teaching oil painting was initiated at CAFA in 1959 as a result of the "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" campaign. There were three studios, led by Wu Zuoren (Belgium-trained), Luo Gongliu (Soviet-trained) and Dong Xiwen (Vietnam-trained) respectively. The first three years were a testing period, and by 1962 it was fully implemented and each studio was named by number. Wu Zuoren's studio was named the first, Luo Gongliu's the second and Dong Xiwen's was the third. See Cao Qinghui, "Dui Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 1959–1964 nian youhua gongzuoshi jiaoxue de qianjian" ("Ideas on Oil Painting Studio

recent developments in Western modern art to students, and to encourage and support the young artists in their individual directions.[78]

Pang Tao was a supporter of the Fourth Studio from the beginning and helped draft its mission statement.[79] By this time, she had returned from a one-year stay in Paris which had been supported by the Chinese government. During that time she had visited many museums in Paris and across Europe, and for her the modern art practice that her father Pang Xunqin had brought back from his study in Paris in the 1920s had finally become real.[80] As well, she was inspired to take a closer look at Chinese cultural and artistic traditions.[81] Having seen and experienced displays of classical Asian and European culture, she was convinced that Chinese classical art, which had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, was of great importance. In this Pang Tao was not alone; many senior and mid-career artists rediscovered Chinese traditional culture with as great excitement as they encountered Western modern art.[82] Traditional culture could be rediscovered as a new source of inspiration.

But there was more to it than that. Faced with the impact of Western art and theories in China during the 1980s, many artists and critics, especially those who were older, recognized their need to reassert a Chinese cultural identity. They did not reject

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Teaching of the Central Academy of Fine Arts from 1959 to 1964"), *Fine Arts Observation*, no. 4 (2009): 105–7.

[78] Xiaobei, "Choubeizhong de sihuashi" ("The Fourth Studio in Preparation"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 44 (November 1986): 1.

[79] Pang Tao formally joined the Fourth Studio in 1988. See Pang, interview, 17.

[80] Pang Tao, "Bali meishu xueyuan suojian" ("What I Saw in an Art Academy in Paris"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 9 (March 1986): 4.

[81] Pang, interview.

[82] Shui Tianzhong, "Dangdai youhua chuangzuo yinxiang" ("An Impression of Contemporary Oil Paintings"), in *Collection of The Discussion on Oil Painting*, 296–301.

modern art but were wary of an unquestioning devotion to Western art. They felt that pathways to modernity should be diverse and take different forms. Each nation and each region should preserve its own character. Senior artists like Pang Tao felt that they should learn from Western modern art, postmodernism and contemporary art without kowtowing to it. When he returned from an official visit to France and Italy organized by the Chinese Ministry of Culture in 1982, Shao Dazhen wrote an essay titled "One Should Take One's Own Path".[83] In this essay, Shao marveled at the many masterpieces of Western art and situated them within their own cultures. He concluded that his visit had strengthened his belief that Chinese artists should discover their own path instead of directly importing Western art into China. Shao suggested a way of learning from the West while staying rooted in Chinese culture:[84] "Regarding the paths that have been taken, we should see which one is right and which one is wrong. As to what we have done and what we are undertaking, do not take a nihilistic attitude, since they are the result of the efforts of our predecessors and our contemporaries."[85] With "the paths that have been taken," he was referring to Western modern art, and he intended to correct the tendency of elevating Western modern art and dismissing the state of development of art in China among the Chinese art community. This thinking was not uncommon at the time. Artists rediscovered a fascination with classical Chinese culture, which many of them had been alienated from since 1949, and went in search of a unique Chinese character. Such an attempt to bring classical Chinese forms and symbols into the contemporary time might seem like a conservative approach from today's perspective, but we need

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[83] Shao Dazhen, "Yaozou ziji de lu: fang fayi suigan" ("One Should Take One's Own Path: Some Reflections on My Visit to France and Italy," *World Art*, no. 2 (June 1983): 63–75.
[84] Shao, "One Should Take One's Own Path," 63–75.
[85] Shao, "One Should Take One's Own Path," 63–75.

to return to the original context in which this occurred. Considering the negation of the classical past and the embrace of scientific realism and then Marxism under the Communist Party's ideology, such an approach to reactivate classical cultural resources was not simply an engagement with their forms, but a form of critical thinking. It was part of the process of seeking innovation in art. For some, innovation was found in learning from Western modern art, and for others the classical past could become a new resource. Reconnecting with one's own past was a mode of critical thinking in the face of an over-dominant and oversimplified leaning towards the new.

Such fascination was often manifest in the artists' appropriation of ancient cultural symbols such as Chinese characters cast on bronze vessels and oracle bone script.[86] From 1985, Pang Tao started a series of paintings that reconfigured ancient bronzes and associated motifs, turning them into a play of color and shape. One of her earliest experiments in this direction was *The Revelation of Bronze-Jue* (*Qingtong de qishi-jiao*《青铜的启示-角》(1985). [Figure 3.16] Inspired by the shape of Four-Ram Square *Zun*, a ritual bronze from the late Shang Dynasty, Pang Tao abstracted the head of a ram, representing it as an inverted triangle, and applied patches and layers of yellow wash. The use of color remained central to Pang Tao's art. Through color she manifested her creativity and artistic autonomy. Her approach echoes that of senior artists such as Wu Guanzhong for whom formal exploration was a sign of artistic freedom.

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86 For writings on the Shanghai School of Painting and artists using ancient scripts to stimulate new art forms, see Shen Kuiyi, "Shanghai Society of the Late Nineteenth Century and the Shanghai School of Painting," *Studies in Art History*, no.1 (1995): 135–59; see also Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998).

Figure 3.16: Pang Tao, *The Revelation of Bronze-Jue*, 1985, oil on canvas.

Over the following decade, Pang Tao would continue to base her works upon bronzes, distorting and re-representing them in boldly expressive color schemes. She traces her own interest in abstract paintings of lines and grids to the works of Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Rousseau which she saw in books at home in her childhood, to her mother's ability to combine colored wool threads to weave clothes of exceptional color combinations, and to her father Pang Xunqin's passion for classical music, including Debussy, which he often played at home.[87] As soon as she received her Master of Fine Art degree from CAFA, she was eager to make abstract paintings, but the Anti-Rightist Campaign started (1957) and her effort was obstructed. As to the choice of bronze vessels as a motif, Pang Tao recognized her father's influence, as he

[87] Pang, interview, 18.

told her not to directly copy Western abstraction but to integrate Chinese icons into her art.[88]

Surveying new trends in oil painting in the mid-1980s, critic Shui Tianzhong noted that when Chinese oil painters had the opportunity to see modern Western paintings, they now combined that inspiration with a newly found curiosity about ancient Chinese culture. The result was a dazzling constellation of potential analogies: Paul Klee's symbols and oracle bone scripts, pottery designs of magical fantasy and photorealistic portraits of prairie herdsmen, and Mondrian grids and the Tai-chi symbol and Eight Trigrams. Shui cited Li Xiushi's paintings depicting oracle scripts and ancient engravings on monuments and bronze vessels, and Zhan Hongchang's representations of rural scenes and the activities of farmers, as examples.[89] Li Xiushi, whose painting *Spring Arriving in Xing'anling* (1971) I discussed in detail in Chapter Two, was now experimenting with oracle bone script, calligraphy and motifs from Chinese bronzes in his paintings. In *Dream Talks of Rubbing 3* (1986), he composed a fantasy garden, the topography of which is outlined in flat white strokes that form Chinese characters written in the Clerical script (*Lishu* 隶书). [Figure 3.17] Inspired by Paul Klee's compositions employing a palette of rich color and a distinctive language of mystical symbols, Li Xiushi used exuberant colors of red, green and bright dots of blue, and added a small cat, a sun, and a small image of a painting by Picasso to his semi-abstract, dream-like composition. In his survey, Shui Tianzhong noted the rise of semi-abstraction and allegorical symbolism in the landscape paintings and portraits of the *Sixth National Fine Arts Exhibition*. More importantly,

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[88] Pang, interview, 18.
[89] Shui Tianzhong, "An Impression of Contemporary Oil Paintings," 296–301.

he reminded readers that older artists' changes in subject and style were as noteworthy as those of young artists who were throwing themselves onto the "wave of rationality"(*lixing zhichao* 理性之潮) and the "movement of pop art", creating works that were shifting, ambiguous projections of philosophical themes and theories.[90]

Figure 3.17: Li Xiushi, *Dream Talks of Rubbing 3*, 1986, oil on canvas.

Soon after the end of the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition*, the Shanxi People's Fine Art Publishing House initiated a new publishing project to gather works that had been denied entry into the *Sixth National Art Exhibition* into a catalog that was titled *The Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen*.[91] [Figure

[90] Shui Tianzhong, "An Impression of Contemporary Oil Paintings," 302.
[91] Ling Hubiao ed., *Diliujie quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan luoxuan zuopin xuan* (*Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen by the 6th National Fine Art Exhibition*) (Xi'an: Shanxi People's Fine Art

3.18] Ling Hubiao (令狐彪, 1942–1989), deputy publisher of Shanxi People's Fine Art Publishing House, wrote in the Foreword to the publication that he had been inspired by a suggestion to organize an exhibition of works not selected by the *Sixth National Art Exhibition* owing to the limited numbers of works that could be presented in the original exhibition, with the result that many strong works didn't get chosen.[92]

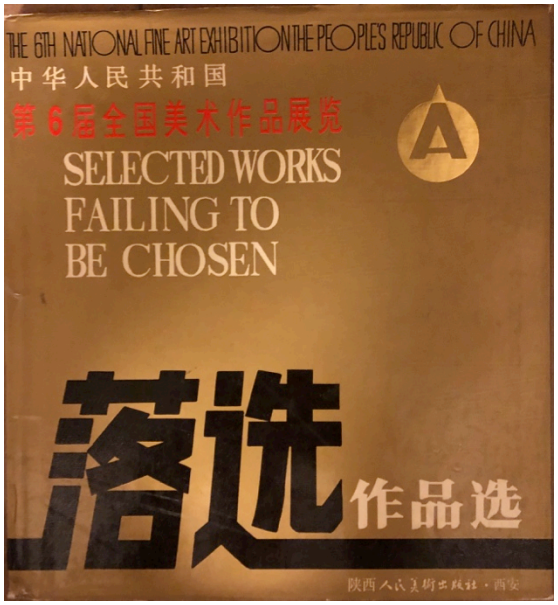

Figure 3.18: Ling Hubiao, ed., *Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen for the 6th National Art Fine Art Exhibition*, 1987.

More importantly, he felt that the evaluation of art shouldn't rely on one absolute standard: "There could be some works of individual styles and experimentation, which can not be easily recognized yet. There is the potential for discovery in the unchosen works. To publish them is to comply with the Communist Party's insistence

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Publishing House, 1987). Shanxi People's Fine Art Publishing House had not official involvement in the Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition.

92 Ling Hubiao, "Bianxuan liujie quanguo meizhan luoxuan zuopin de qianqianhouhou" ("All About Editing the Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen by the 6th National Fine Art Exhibition"), in *Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen by the 6th National Fine Art Exhibition*, 1–2.

on the cultural policy of 'Letting Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend'."[93] The publication was open to submissions from all media and showcased works in a variety of styles including Surrealism.[94] The subject matter of the rejected works included CCP revolutionary history, historical figures such as Lu Xun, legendary figures, farmers, ethnic minorities, rural landscapes and urban street scenes. For instance, Yu Xiaofu's (俞晓夫, b.1950) realist painting *I Knock at the Door Lightly* (1984) portrays a gathering of four master painters of Shanghai, Ren Bonian (任伯年, 1840–1895), Xu Gu (虚谷 1823–1896), Wu Changshuo (吴昌硕, 1844–1927) and Pu Zuoying (蒲作英, 1839–1911). [Figure 3.19] In the painting, they all turn towards the audience, as if trying to find out who is knocking at the door. The artist was expressing his admiration for such outstanding artistic figures in the history of Chinese art. The publication boasted a diversity of works as its most remarkable feature. The undertaking was symptomatic of a new social climate in which multiple pathways to recognition appeared, rather than the single standard set by the CAA.

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[93] Ling, "All About Editing," 2.
[94] Ge Men, "Shunhe renyi zhiju: fang luoxuan zuopin bianji" ("An Act that Complies with People's Intentions: An Interview with Editors of *Selected Works Failing to Be Chosen by the 6th National Fine Art Exhibition*"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 15 (November 1985): 1.

Figure 3.19: Yu Xiaofu, *I Knock at the Door Lightly*, 1984, oil painting.

A New Wave

While the senior artists were making their own ways experimenting with color palettes, patterns and forms of expression, and making changes in the institutional structure, all of which they valued as they regained artistic autonomy, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction among younger members of the art community with the extent of change and innovation in general. A new wave was in the making. Excluded from the *Sixth National Fine Arts Exhibition* of 1984, young artists instead began to organize themselves into their own artist groups, and show their works to each other in an attitude that defied the strictures of the conservative CAA. The artists' message was amplified by a number of art magazines and newspapers founded in

1985, including *Fine Arts in China* (*Zhongguo meishubao*《中国美术报》), *The Trend of Art Thought* (*Meishu sichao*《美术思潮》) and the newly relaunched *Jiangsu Pictorial* (*Jiangsu huakan*《江苏画刊》), which had been founded back in 1974. *Jiangsu Pictorial* focused on the most up-to-date art trends and debates rather than established art.[95] This move in itself testified to the demise of the Anti-Spiritual Campaign of 1983–84 and the swing back to a more relaxed social and political climate. Many young art critics worked as contributors and editors to these publications. The conjunction of young artists and art critics sympathetic to modern art that favored concepts, Western theories and philosophical perspectives over formal experimentation and traditional subject matter proved unstoppable. Those involved were reading newly translated books such as Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* and John Naisbitt's *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*.[96] Younger members of the Chinese art community were attracted by the different reasons for historical progression, along with the dialectical reasoning found in those books, which helped shape their view towards new art in China. They were eager to distinguish the modern art practiced by young artists from other types of art such as academic art (*xueyuanpai* 学院派) or traditional art (*chuantong yishu* 传统艺术), which they viewed as being in opposition to modern art.[97]

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[95] Peng De, "Who Propelled New Wave," 31.

[96] Alvin Toffler, *Disanci langchao* (*The Third Wave*), trans. Zhu Zhiyan, Pan Qi and Wang Yan (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1983); John Naisbitt, *Daqishi: Gaibian women shenghuo de shige fangxiang* (*Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*), (Beijing: Xinhua Bookstore, 1984). See Zhou Yan, interview with Jane Debevoise and Anthony Yung, Beijing, July 10, 2009, in *Asia Art Archive, Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990*, accessed August 9, 2018, http://www.china1980s.org/tc/interview_detail.aspx?interview_id=43.

[97] Zhou, interview.

On the occasion of the United Nations' designation of 1985 as the International Year of Youth, the *Fine Art Exhibition of Advancing Chinese Youth* was held at NAMOC from May 10–26.[98] This exhibition did not simply herald the emergence of the next generation of artists, it announced the intellectual emancipation of youth from their seniors. The selection committee consisted of mainly mid-career and younger art critics including Yuan Yunfu, Zhang Qiang and Gao Minglu, who supported young artists' works that were experimental and concerned with contemporary issues.[99] The artists' experiments, according to Gao Minglu, demonstrated the idea of the "renewal of concepts." New concepts, Gao wrote, meant new expressions and styles, which implied that the question lay not in what to paint, but how to paint.[100]

How did they paint? They did not paint complete scenes with a narrative as in typical Social Realist paintings; instead, they collaged fragments together without emphasizing any consistent narrative at all. In one of the prize-winning Chinese brush-and-ink paintings, *Li Dazhao, Qu Qiubai, Xiao Hong* (1985) by Hu Wei (胡伟, b.1957), three heroic figures from the history of the CCP are juxtaposed alongside each other on a blank group without any explanation or any attempt to idealize them [Figure 3.20]. Other prominent works considered by Gao Minglu as his examples of the "renewal of concepts" were realist works that depicted scenes without any

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[98] "Qianjinzhong de Zhongguo qingnian meishu zuopin zhanlan" (*Fine Art Exhibition on Advancing Chinese Youth*) was organized by the Chinese Organizing Committee for International Youth Year (*Guoji qingniannian Zhongguo zuzhi weiyuanhui*), showing nearly 600 works in different mediums of art by young artists from all over China, at the National Art Museum of China. See Xiao Xing, Zhou Zhen ed., Preface to *Fine Art Collection for the International Youth Year* (*Guoji qingnian nian zuopinxuan*), (Beijing: the Chinese Organizing Committee for International Youth Year, 1985), 1.

[99] Yuan Yunfu, "Pinghua yinxiangji" ("My Impression from Judging the Paintings"), *Art*, no. 7 (1987): 22–5.

[100] Gao Minglu et al. eds., *Zhongguo Dangdai Meishushi 1985–1986* (*A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*) (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1991), 70.

preaching, story-telling or, in Gao's words, any obvious meaning. For instance, in *The Spring is Here* (*Chuntian laile*《春天来了》) by Yuan Qingyi, a young man who has turned around gazes at an empty living room, with an open book and an apple on a table. [Figure 3.21] In Li Guijun's *The Painting Studio No. 140* (140 *Huashi*《140 画室》), the artist has painted three student-like characters in CAFA's No. 140 painting studio, one deeply absorbed in painting, one standing still, and one reading. [Figure 3.22] No. 140 was the studio where the artist himself worked. The figures are each immersed in their own world, evoking alienation and estrangement, a feeling strengthened by the painting of a seascape hung on the studio wall. Gao Minglu summarized these approaches to painting as "New Reality" (*Xin xianshi* 新现实). He defined "New Reality" as the combination of realist and surrealist painting, seeing in this a transition from the "Scar Art" (*Shangheng yishu* 伤痕艺术) and "Rustic Art" (*xiangtu yishu* 乡土艺术) that had appeared after the end of the Cultural Revolution but which had essentially remained bounded by realism.[101]

[101] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 71.

Figure 3.20: Hu Wei, *Li Dazhao, Qu Qiubai, Xiao Hong,* 1985, ink and colors on paper.

Figure 3.21: Yuan Qingyi, *The Spring Is Here*, 1985, oil painting.

Figure 3.22: Li Guijun, *The Painting Studio No. 140*, 1985, oil painting.

Besides the emergence of these new expressions, many of the 572 works in the exhibition revealed a shared thread: young artists engaging with philosophical questions and concepts. This was a drastically different scene to that of mid-career and older artists in the same period. In 1985, across graduation exhibitions at art academies all over China, new artists and critics emerged who were convinced that their difference from their predecessors lay in favoring concepts over themes, and illustrative or didactic content over formal experiments. The works of these new young graduates were seen at CAFA, the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, and the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. They combined solid academic training in realistic depiction and symbolism. For instance, in the graduation exhibition of the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, several works caused debates among the instructors. Some questioned Wei Xiaolin's judgment in depicting the Yellow River as peaceful rather than a raging, roaring force in his *Yellow River Series* (*Huanghe zuhua*《黄河组画》).[102] Geng Jianyi's painting of one male and one female figure sitting behind a desk, staring at the viewer with blank faces, evoked the alienation between the two sitting characters and reflected the impact of existentialist philosophy. [Figure 3.23] Explaining the source of the painters' philosophical associations, Gao Minglu observed that they had read Kant, Heidegger, Sartre and Wittgenstein, although not in any in-depth way. They adored South American novels, he wrote, and worshipped Marx.[103] The oral defenses for their graduation were extended by three days in Hangzhou, during which time members of the department's academic board and the diploma evaluation committee debated the artists' motivations, the level of

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[102] Tu Zhe, "Zhemei biyesheng zuopin yinqi zhengyi" ("Controversy Caused by the Graduation Works of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 9 (September 1985): 1.
[103] Gao Minglu, "'85 meishu yundong" ("The '85 Art Movement"), *Meishujia tongxun* (*Artists Newsletter*), no. 4 (April 1986): 15–23.

understanding expected of an audience, the references to Western painting and the redevelopment of Chinese tradition, the expression of deep private emotions, and the need to realistically portray life. No agreement could be reached, but in the end all of the candidates received their degrees.[104]

Figure 3.23: Geng Jianyi, *Two Persons under the Light*, 1985, oil painting.

The winning work in the *Fine Art Exhibition on Advancing Chinese Youth* triggered a trend towards this rationalism.[105] *In the New Era: The Revelation of Adam and Eve* (1985) by Zhang Qun and Meng Luding, both second-year students in the Oil Painting Department of CAFA, was a meticulously painted, quasi-surrealist painting that cast young, contemporary Chinese figures in the roles of Adam and Eve. [Figure

[104] Tu, "Controversy Caused by the Graduation Works," 1.
[105] Gao Minglu was the main propagator of rationalism in art. While a few theoreticians and artist groups put forward the call for rationalism, Gao Minglu published a defining text entitled "On Rationalist Painting," which gave a strong push to the popularization of the term. See Gao Minglu, "Guanyu lixing huihua" ("On Rationalist Painting"), *Art*, no. 8 (August 1986): 43–9.

3.24] Their longing for release from tradition and constraint was symbolized by frames and iron doors. Here, there were not only two nude figures but also surrealist elements in the composition. Art critics noted the artists' emphasis on a literary framework that abandoned visually appealing composition, rethinking painting as style. The partitioning and placement of elements was completely subjective, owing nothing to realism.[106]

Figure 3.24: Zhang Qun and Meng Luding, *In the New Era: The Revelation of Adam and Eve*, 1985, oil painting.

In this and other paintings, artists were making works distinguished by fresh

[106] Gao, "The '85 Art Movement," 15–23.

perspectives and languages of art. Alongside the appearance of new art by young artists there appeared essays introducing the latest developments, identifying "The Wave of Youth Movement" (*Qingnian yundong zhichao* 青年运动之潮)，"New Emerging Artist Groups" (*Xingxin yishujia jiqun* 新兴艺术家集群) and a "New Wave of Youth Art" (*Qingnian yishu xinchao* 青年艺术新潮).[107] In fact, as I have shown in this and the previous chapter, this wave of self-organization by artists had been preceded and inspired by artist initiatives of the late 1970s, in particular the Beijing Oil Painting Society and the April Photography Society, both of which had toured exhibitions to cities across China.

In April 1986, Gao was invited to speak at a National Oil Painting Symposium held in Beijing. This was a symposium organized by the Oil Painting Committee of the CAA and was mostly attended by middle-aged or senior artists, including Wu Guanzhong, Ai Zhongxin and Luo Gongliu, and artist-bureaucrats including Hua Junwu and Wu Zuoren.[108] Gao Minglu was invited to present on recent developments in the work of young artists. His speech, "The '85 Art Movement," became a defining text for young artist groups and new art in China. In the talk, Gao evoked the May Fourth New Culture Movement of the early twentieth century which embodied the creation of a new culture to Chinese intellectuals, to pinpoint that the confrontational nature of

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[107] The term "New Emerging Artist Groups" was the title of a column introducing the works of artist groups in *Fine Arts in China*. See Li Xianting, "Xinxing yishujia jiqun yi" (New Emerging Artists Groups: One), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 19 (November 1985): 1; see also Liu Xiaochun, "Qingnian yundong zhi chao" ("The Wave of Movements by the Youth"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 7 (February 1986): 1; see also Xiao Yuan, "Zaitan qingnian yishu xinchao" ("Re-discussing the New Wave of Youth Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 12 (March 1986): 1.

[108] Chuan Zi, "Rongqia, xinren, lijie, tancheng: quanguo youhua yishu taolunhui zai jing juxing" ("Harmony, Trust, Understanding, Honesty: National Oil Painting Symposium Held in Beijing"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 16 (April 1986): 2.

the ’85 Art Movement was inevitable given the cultural collision between China and the West following China’s opening-up and reform. He asserted:

> Its concern was the modernization of Chinese art. The movement also exhibited its own distinctive characteristics, namely, theoretical purposefulness and partisan practices. Theoretically, in one very short year, it reenacted the basic content and three phases of the May Fourth Movement’s struggle between China and the West, and between ancient and modern.[109]

Gao summarized three tendencies in the emergence of young artist groups and exhibitions during 1985.[110] The first was their promotion of a rational spirit. As examples, he cited the works of the Northern Art Group, which had been guided by ruminations over specific theoretical ideas such as Nietzschean non-rationalism and Hegelian dialetics, and attempts to demonstrate the immortal nature of the world without superstition or faith. In the *’85 New Space Exhibition* organized by the Society of Young Artists in Hangzhou, he said, the artists strenuously avoided the idyllic sentiments of pastoral poetry, abandoning the poetic sentiments that had been found in Rural Realism and Scar Art, and instead pursuing the visual experience of modern, urban civilization while adopting the techniques of the New Realist School, which combined realist painting and European Surrealism. The artists were attracted to systematization and orderliness: machinery and architecture were combined with geometric decoration to produce cold, indifferent, and lonely exteriors, which the artists identified with the aesthetics of Western modernism. To summarize, Gao wrote

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[109] Gao, “The ’85 Art Movement,” 15–23.
[110] Gao, “The ’85 Art Movement,” 15.

that their so-called rational paintings (*lixing huihua* 理性绘画) employed stillness and order, and because these emphasized symbolic functions, they succeeded in conveying the forlorn, uncanny atmosphere of Surrealism. In Gao's view, this kind of affect fitted perfectly with the artists' grand objective of creating sublime subjects.[111]

According to Gao, the second tendency aimed at intuition and mystery, and had figured prominently in exhibitions such as Beijing's *November Painting Exhibition*, the *New Figurative Exhibition* in Shanghai and Yunnan, and the *Zero Exhibition* in Shenzhen.[112] From the late 1970s, the idea of what I will translate as 'intuitionism' (*ben'nengzhuyi* 本能主义) flourished, along with a tendency to extreme self-expression (*jiduan ziwo biaoxian* 极端自我表现) in the depiction of intense emotions and instincts. Extreme self-expression was considered an important trend after 1976 as artists' awareness of individualistic, emotional states as subjects became legitimate once again. In a further development, young artists of this period emphasized a return to childhood and early times. Gao Minglu cited Tianjin-based artist Li Jin's (李津 b.1958)' painting series *Impressions of Tibet* (*Xizang yinxiang* 西藏印象) as an example of artists working in this trend, going back to the origins of being. In Li Jin's brush-and-ink paintings, humans become naked and animalistic, and

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[111] Gao, "The '85 Art Movement," 15.

[112] *November Painting Exhibition* (*Shiyi yue huazhan*), The Palace Museum, Beijing, November 1985. The exhibition was sponsored by Beijing Chongwen District Cultural Palace (*Beijing congwenqu wenhuagong*). Participating artists included Li Baoying, Xia Xiaowan, Shi Benming, Ding Pin, Cao Li, Liu Quan, Tan Ping and Ma Lu, all artists born in the late 1950s. See Li, "New Emerging Artist Groups: One," 1. The *New Figurative Exhibition* (*Xin juxiang huazhan*) was held in Shanghai on June 22, 1985 in Jing'anqu District Cultural Palace, Shanghai. Hou Wenyi, Liu Tiejun, Mao Xuhui, Pan Dehai, Xu Kan, Zhang Long and Zhang Xiaogang participated in the show. The *Zero Exhibition* (*Lingzhan*) was organized by twenty-five graduates of art academies in China and Shenzhen-based young artists in the square on the left side of Shenzhen Theatre (*Shenzhen xiyuan*) on January 19 and January 26, 1986. Participating artists included Wang Chuan, Jiang Wenzhan, Ying Weiping, Wu Shixiong, Lu Jia, Chen Honghui, Ke Youquan, Li Yunying, Li Jian, Xie Yuxi, Chen Xiuhua, Wei Xilin, Niu Mao, Ye Ling, etc. See Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 293.

animals are assigned human intelligence and become humanized. [Figure 3.25]

Figure 3.25: Li Jin, *Impressions of Tibet Series 1*, 1984, ink and colors on paper.

Gao explained that the third tendency was a renewal of concepts through "behaviorism". Nineteen eighty-five, he wrote, was the most appropriate year for the slogan "renewal of artistic concepts." Chinese artists, faced with Western contemporary art, now contemplated how to move towards a co-equal modernity. Contact with Western contemporary art's notion of the renewal of concepts first emerged in the world of theory and art criticism, and then painters—young, middle-aged, and elderly alike—were captivated by it. Misunderstandings easily arose regarding the meaning of "concepts" as art discourse devolved into a generalized,

hollow swell of vague but rhetorically-eclectic discussions about tradition and culture.[113]

During his speech, Gao presented many slides by young artist groups from across the country. Shortly after this, the Zhuhai Fine Art Academy (Zhuhai huayuan 珠海画院), decided to celebrate its founding with a nationwide event.[114] The Academy sought the opinion of Wang Guangyi, who had just been employed as an artist on staff. Wang suggested holding a gathering of young artists from across the nation, and when he reached out to his artist friends Shu Qun and then Gao Minglu, they hit upon the idea of holding a slideshow. On the one hand, it was common practice at this time for artists to exchange and share works through presenting slides to each other; on the other hand, it enabled artists to gather together and see works without having to mount an exhibition that would entail a large budget that they could not afford. This was the origin of the "'85 New Wave Slide Show and Symposium at the Zhuhai Institute of Paintings" (*Bawu qingnian meishu sichao daxing huandengzhan ji xueshu taolunhui*85 青年美术思潮大型换灯展暨学术讨论会).[115]

Known as the Zhuhai Meeting, this event took place in the Zhuhai Fine Art Academy from August 15–19, 1986, and was attended both by artists representing different groups across the country and by senior artists and theoreticians who worked for art magazines including *Art*, *Fine Arts in China*, *Trend of Thought* and *Jiangsu Pictorial*,

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[113] Gao, "The '85 Art Movement," 20.
[114] Wang Guangyi, interview with author, Beijing, December 2009. The founding of Zhuhai Fine Art Academy was part of the wave of establishing fine art academies by municipal governments to support their artists after 1981.
[115] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 331–32.

as well as art institutions from across China including the CAA, the Guangzhou Academy of Art and the Shanghai Art Museum. A massive 1,100 slides were sent in by artists to be considered for selection. The jury consisted of Gao Minglu and Zhang Zuying as presidents, and Cao He, Shi Guo, Wang Guangyi, Shu Qun and Zhang Peili as vice-presidents.[116] In the end the jury chose 342 slides for screening, amounting to 30 per cent of the total number of submitted slides.[117]

The Zhuhai Meeting was the first occasion where the phenomenon of "New Wave art" (*Xinchao meishu* 新潮美术) was defined, occurring in heated discussions around the issue of the nature of painting versus the tendency to conceptualize, and whether New Wave constituted a movement in modern art.[118] Gao and young artists at the meeting were tolerated by senior artists and art critics such as Wen Lipeng and Shao Dazhen attending the meeting, but his opinions were not necessarily shared by older art critics who were involved in the major art publications. Mid-career theorists and painters, not least Shao Dazhen, Zhan Jianjun and Wen Lipeng, agreed that New Wave art was a positive development, but they felt that many artworks were of poor quality, oversimplified and over-conceptualized. They stressed the importance of studying the language of painting and disapproved of the conceptualizing tendency of New Wave art.[119] In response to their opinions, Shu Qun wrote an essay, "Content Determines Form," accusing skilled painters of being nothing more than good craftsmen, adding

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[116] Jury members consisted of representatives of young artists as well as representatives from organizing institutions: Gao Minglu, editor of *Art* magazine; Zhang Zuying, General Secretary of the Artistic Committee of Oil Painting of the China Artists' Association; Cao He, Chairman of Zhuhai Federation of Literature and Art; and Shi Guo, Deputy Director of the Zhuhai Fine Art Academy.
[117] Gao, *A Contemporary History,* 331–2.
[118] Gao, *A Contemporary History,* 331–2.
[119] See Shao Dazhen, Zhan Jianjun, Wen Lipeng and Ge Weimo, "Xinchao sirentan" ("Four Persons' Comments on New Wave"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 38 (September 1986): 1.

to intergenerational tension.[120] In effect, the Zhuhai Meeting would lead to the determination of Gao Minglu to organize a group exhibition of New Wave art in 1987. The exhibition was eventually realized as the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* in 1989, which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Among the supporters of the New Wave, not all agreed that it was a modern movement. Shao Dazhen had taken over *Art* magazine as Chief Editor after December 1984. He employed Gao Minglu as a staff editor and supported articles on New Wave art. In 1987, Shao wrote:

> I do not agree to call this trend of thought a "movement" as it doesn't have a clear goal and programme, and it doesn't present itself as a clear picture. The young artist groups that have been included in this trend of thought are only a part of young artists' developments and are far from being the full picture of all artistic practices by young people. Besides, the aesthetic directions and artistic styles of these artist groups are extremely diverse. In addition, it's quite a stretch to call this trend of thought "'85 New Wave," as since 1979, young artists have been active in Beijing, Shanghai and all over China, carrying out all kinds of artistic experiments. With the opening of the *Young Artist Exhibition* in 1985, someone has run through their works, collected materials about them, and as a result, given the impression that it was a product of 1985.[121]

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[120] Shu Qun, "Neirong jueding xingshi" ("Content Determines Form"), *Art,* no. 7 (July 1986): 31–2.
[121] Shao Dazhen, "Meishu: zai chuantong wenhua yu xifang wenhua chongji mianqian" ("Fine Arts: Confronted by the Impact of Traditional Culture and Western Culture"), in *A Collection of Chinese Modern Art Theory and Criticism: Shao Dazhen*, 90.

Shao's comment presented another perspective to comprehend the nature and position of "New Wave" art. While young artists and critics such as Gao were eager to describe it as a movement and differentiate it from parallel developments, Shao argued that it was part of a coherent whole.

This was a fair commentary on the overwhelming leaning of art criticism towards the works and opinions of young artists at this time. In the coverage of New Wave in *Fine Arts in China*, initiatives by artists as early as 1980 had appeared, suggesting incremental change rather than a particular focus on events in 1985. In other words, it was a continuation built on earlier initiatives instead of something of a revolutionary nature. For example, the 80 Youth Oil Painting Research Society (*80 qingnian youhua yanjiuhui* 80 青年油画研究会) held two exhibitions in Huhhot and Baotou in 1980 and 1982.[122] And in Hefei, a group of young artists held an exhibition titled *New Human New Works* in Canghe Park during the Spring Festival of 1981, following the *Second Exhibition of the Beijing Oil Painting Society* in Hefei.[123] Among the art critics paying attention to the phenomenon, Zhang Qiang, in preparation for writing *New Tide of Painting* (1988), surveyed more than 150 artists involved in 21 artist groups during the mid-1980s. He met with or wrote to the artists and wanted to systematically understand their experiences, readings and art .[124] Through this, he noted his overall impressions:

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[122] Fang Zhou, "Xinchao ziliao jianbian san: Menggu" ("A Brief Summary of Materials on New Wave: Inner Mongolia"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 40 (October 1986): 3.
[123] Zhou Zhaokan, "Xinchao ziliao jianbian san: Anhui" ("A Brief Summary of Materials on New Wave: Anhui"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 40 (October 1986): 3.
[124] Zhang Qiang, "Wo weishenme xie zheben xiaocezi (daixu)" ("Why Have I Written This Book (In the place of a Preface)"), in *New Tide,* 2.

> 1. When they graduated in the early 1980s, art manifested hesitation and vagueness, "Scar Art," "Rustic Art" and formalistic art…all mixed together. Young artists found such works hard to understand and unsatisfactory. They intended to carry out their own practice based on their own knowledge and their own understanding of life. This created a gap between them and those who graduated in the 1950s, 1960s and even the more senior artists. 2. There were great differences among the concepts employed by different artist groups. In summary, a group either emphasized drawing references from foreign art, or sought development from the basis of Chinese art traditions, or they intended to combine both. 3. Each artist group was exclusive and excluded members from other art groups.[125]

Zhang Qiang's observations also provide a more nuanced picture of what is often considered a cohesive movement. Shao Dazhen and Zhang Qiang were typical of liberal-minded art critics of an older generation. Shao had been educated in the 1950s and Zhang graduated in the 1960s. Both of them supported young artists and their experiments with an open mind. Yet they recognized the continuities with the experiments that older artists were making.

The *Exhibition of Contemporary Oil Paintings* (*Dangdai youhuazhan* 当代油画展), held from March 29 to April 20, 1986, was organized by the Artistic Committee for Oil Paintings (Youhua yiweihui 油画艺委会) of the CAA, and was a survey of mid-career and established painters, and in particular those who had participated in

[125] Zhang Qiang, "Qingnian qunti kaocha yinxiang" ("Impressions from Research Young Artist Groups"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 26 (June 1987): 1.

the Anhui symposium in April 1984.[126] The exhibition was an effort to break through the bureaucratic structure of the national art exhibitions. Every artist who participated in the 1984 symposium was able to submit two works without having to go through a selection committee or the approval of regional artists' associations as was usually the procedure for national art exhibitions. Senior artists such as Wu Guanzhong and Wei Qimei, and middle-aged academic artists such as Jin Shangyi, Wen Lipeng, Zhan Jianjun and Yan Zhenduo, who were involved in the organization, also participated in the exhibition. The myriad styles of paintings could be loosely described as leaning towards Western classical painting. Despite the accomplishments of individual artists, the exhibition was regarded by young practitioners as "one-dimensional," a kind of formalism.[127] In reality, the exhibition presented the various directions of formal explorations that senior and middle-aged artists were experimenting with in their works. The preponderance of works demonstrated a lyrical, romantic realism, or expressionism, or pastoral naturalism.[128]

Conclusion

Accounts of the 1980s are full of stories about conflict, confrontation, debate and movements. In sum, the 1980s are supposed to have been a decade of opposition between generations, between modern and traditional culture, between concepts and formalist aesthetics. This narrative is like a mirror of the volatile political dynamic of the period but, as I have discussed, the divide wasn't as apparent in the historical reality where all these different positions coexisted.

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[126] "Dangdai youhuazhan qianyan: women de hua" ("An Introduction to Contemporary Oil Paintings: Our Words"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 15 (April 1986): 1.
[127] Gao, *A Contemporary History*, 571.
[128] Gao, *A Contemporary History,* 547–9.

Above all, narratives and impressions were generated by art critics and artists who became active in the mid- to late 1980s. The narratives that have been written since the late 1980s have become accepted wisdom about the period. Initially, the rise of such narratives was a response to the increasingly conservative and rigid aspects of the art structure and was influenced by the desire of participants to align themselves with Western avant-garde ideas, critically distant from official establishments. In fact, the official art structure of the 1980s was staffed by both liberal-minded and conservative artists and theorists. Both exercised influence through the same governmental structures. When under pressure, artists automatically blamed the official structure and organizations for being conservative. Rarely did they hold individual actors and specific circumstances accountable. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, there were senior and middle-aged artists, theoreticians and cultural bureaucrats such as Wu Guanzhong, Shao Dazhen, Zhang Qiang, Wei Qimei and Wen Lipeng who showed openness to and support of the opinions and initiatives of younger artists and art critics, even if they had reservations and doubts as well. But in the formation of a historical narrative of the 1980s, with its passionate focus on the New Wave as an avant-garde, the memory of the crucial involvement of senior artists and art critics has been largely downplayed. By the same measure, a number of open-minded officials have not received the recognition they deserve for standing up against the political pressure of the times.[129] In practice, when the young generation of art critics and artists later took on more senior roles, they would demonstrate the

[129] An instance recounted by Peng De concerning him being criticized for an article that he wrote in 1982, entitled "Aesthetics is the Only Function of Art," and being protected by members of the CAA such as He Rong, illustrates such a mechanism at work. See Peng, "Story Collections of New Wave Art," 100.

same tendencies to exclusion and closedness. Ultimately, the narrative of New Wave art stressed rupture between the generations and had little tolerance for anything beyond its self-advertized limits. That is only half of the actual story, leaving out the roles of senior artists and critics who made important contributions to an increasingly open intellectual and artistic space in the 1980s.

Chapter Four

New Wave Art Becomes History and the Purification of Language Debate, 1987–1989

Introduction: Looking for a New Framework

This chapter traces first the creation and then the immediate questioning of a legend during which early and mid-1980s Chinese art became celebrated for a wide but urgent variety of reasons. During the late 1980s, amidst all the attention on what was, after all, very, very recent Chinese art, an explosive debate occurred that has since been forgotten but which would have far-ranging though subtle consequences. This chapter tells the start of the story of the so-called "purification of language" debate in detail for the first time.

First though, I must embed the controversy within a long standing phenomenon of rapidly written and equally rapidly revised Chinese art criticism and art history that sought to quickly set events in print according to the participants' own perspectives and priorities. Taking a step even further back, I am embedding my narrative even deeper, inside the Chinese state's continual rewriting and reorganization of recent history. In other words, in both art and politics (and the two are in China always inextricably linked, as we have seen), setting the terms of history is a prime concern. I have been insisting on this throughout my thesis.

As occurred in China in the field of literature, histories of art were rapidly written and rewritten. While these were usually initiated by government agencies or by academies, now—during the mid- to late 1980s—the efforts to write an account of the recent past

were initiated by individuals, not by institutions or the government. Explaining his decision to write a history of the art made during an extremely compressed two-year period, between 1985 and 1987, art critic Gao Minglu recalled the intensity with which Western art, art criticism and critical theories were translated into Chinese as part of the "Cultural Fever" of the 1980s.[1] Never before, he emphasized, had the task of art history been charged with such a sense of urgency. In practice, art writing was not now a scholarly pursuit but part of practical action, seeking to change the course of art itself.

The emergence of New Wave art around 1985 had already been a complex process in which both artists and art theoreticians were making contributions almost simultaneously and equally. The continuous elaboration of New Wave art and the broad exposure given to New Wave artists in all major art journals—in *Art* (*Meishu* 《美术》), [Figure 4.1] *The Trend of Art Thought* (*Meishu sichao*《美术思潮》), [Figure 4.2] *Jiangsu Pictorial* (*Jiangsu huakan*《江苏画刊》), [Figure 4.3] *Painter* (*Huajia*《画家》), [Figure 4.4] and *Fine Arts in China* (*Zhongguo meishubao*《中国美术报》) [Figure 4.5]—gradually created a consensus that New Wave art was the most important art; at the same time, as I have explained in previous chapters, the terms, "'85 New Wave" and "New Wave art," used interchangeably, could cover all and any contemporaneous art practices and thoughts. The young editors of the new publications, who were mostly recent MA graduates in art history, did not just write about New Wave art as its witnesses. They consciously wove themselves into the

[1] Gao Minglu, "Shalong shalongzhan xinchun zuotanhui" ("Transcript of *Salon Salon* Exhibition: New Spring Seminar"), in *Shalong shalong: 1972–1982 nian yi Beijing wei shijiao de xiandai meishu shijian ceying* (*Salon Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile – A Beijing Perspective*), ed. Lui Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2019), 596–600.

phenomenon and they saw their endeavors as constitutive components.[2] This urgency and self-interest unfolded against a relatively liberal and therefore volatile political background.

Figure 4.1: Cover, *Art*, no. 1 (1985).

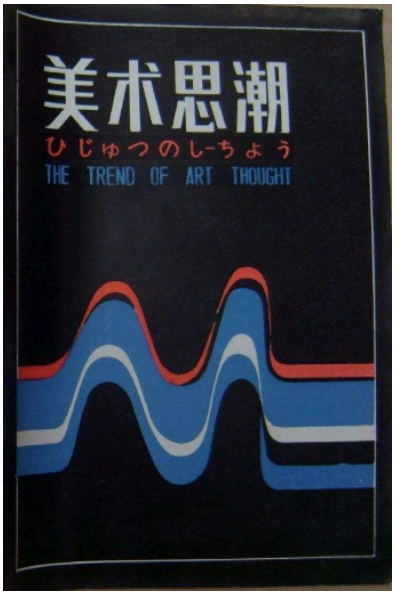

Figure 4.2: Cover, *The Trend of Art Thought*, no. 1 (1985).

[2] Chen Wei, "Xin kanwu, xin fengmao" ("New publications, new trends"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no. 15 (April 1986): 2.

Figure 4.3: Cover, *Jiangsu Pictorial*, no. 1 (1985).

Figure 4.4: Cover, *Painter*, no. 1 (1985).

Figure 4.5: Front page, *Fine Arts in China*, no. 1 (1985).

By the mid-1980s, as economic reform went into full swing and the political structure began to show more and more signs of its inadequacy, both liberal officials and conservative forces within the Communist Party were together able to define the direction and extent of economic and political reform, so much so that by the second half of 1986, intellectuals in China became visibly confident again after the earlier failure of the Xidan Democracy Wall Movement of 1978–1979. [3] The "Cultural Fever" of the time reflected their desire to break through: to transform theoretical thinking, to influence public opinion and intervene in social debates. Gan Yang, a leading cultural theoretician of the time, outlined the steps that led to the widespread consciousness of cultural issues:

[3] The conservative force within the Party leadership consisted of mostly theoreticians and senior Party members who controlled ideological interpretations in the Party. They resisted the more open-minded and younger leaders of the Party and their attempts for reform, on the ground that certain opinions threatened the Party's authority. See Wu Wei, *Zhongguo bashi niandai zhengzhi gaige de taiqianmuhou* (*On Stage and Backstage: China's Political Reform in the 1980s*) (Hong Kong: New Century Publishing, 2013).

> After the end of the "Ten-year Turmoil" [the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution], the task of modernization resurfaced again. It took three steps for Chinese people to arrive at the issue of culture: the first being opening up and introducing advanced technology from developed countries; the second being enhancing democracy and the rule of law while advancing economic reform. Advanced technology amounted to nothing without a matching advanced system of management. Lastly, cultural issues (*wenhua wenti* 文化问题) were laid out in front of the whole society, since the betterment of the political system and economic reform directly touched cultural traditions, cultural backgrounds, cultural psychologies and the cultural mechanism of the entire society.[4]

On September 18, 1986, with Deng Xiaoping's approval, Premier Zhao Ziyang organized a meeting of several members of the Party's research group on central political structures, formally initiating the momentous project of designing a plan for definitive political reform. While the Party leadership was moving ahead with its vision for reform, intellectuals demanded even more. By the end of 1986, student demonstrations broke out in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hefei, Wuhan and Hangzhou. On some campuses, large character posters were put up, demanding democracy and political change. By late January 1987, Hu Yaobang was publicly criticized and forced to resign from his position as the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist

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[4] Gan Yang, *Zhongguo dangdai wenhua yishi* (*Cultural Consciousness of Contemporary China*) (Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore Publishing, 1989), 2. Gan Yang described what lay at the heart of the "Cultural Fever," a certain anxiety that manifested in the population as people came in touch with the international world again after ten years of isolation during the Cultural Revolution. The earlier anxiety about being modern and international returned along with inquiry into the nature and state of Chinese cultural traditions.

Party. Upon Hu's resignation, an Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, orchestrated by conservatives within the Party's leadership, swept across the country and targeted the intellectual community that had been accused of advocating capitalist liberal thought in 1986.[5]

Within the Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping occupied the middle ground, sometimes supporting reform when economic reform was constrained by inefficiency or political stasis, and sometimes supporting the conservatives when public demands for democracy exceeded Party tolerance. Zhao Ziyang seized on this ambiguity, attempting to contain the political pressure of the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign within limits. By May 1987, Zhao Ziyang had managed to reduce conservative influence and bring back the agenda of reform and opening. In October 1987, the 13th National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China in Beijing signaled the end of the Party's Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign and brought the subject of political structural reform onto the official agenda of the Communist Party.[6] The ideal of reform, one that would generate new structures for art, was embraced by cultural officials and artists alike.

This was the backdrop to the rise of New Wave art and the immediate attempts to canonize its members. It is also why the institutionalization of art evolved into such a

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[5] The Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign (*Fandui zichan jieji ziyouhua*) was launched in 1987. See Henry He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China* (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), 119.

[6] The 13th National People's Congress laid down the principle of focusing on economic construction while insisting on two principles of the Party's leadership and Socialism, as well as plans for reform. See King-yuh Chang, ed., *Mainland China After the Thirteenth Party Congress* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018).

powerful force.[7] In trying to define what New Wave art was, one approach was to equate it to modern art and to place it within the history of modern art movements. Since the beginning of the so-called New Period (1979–88), modern art had been enthusiastically introduced and embraced by artists and theoreticians alike, and this enthusiasm was connected with ideological relaxation and freedom.[8] The primacy of modern art was connected to the process of modernization that the Chinese government had set in motion after 1978. The advocacy of modernization by the government was the critical backstop to the widespread acceptance of modern art in China.[9] The import of Western theories, philosophy and art from the late 1970s onwards represented not just fascination but a search for models and templates for practice. In retrospect, we can understand that art in China after 1978 involved both identifying and defining the attributes of modern art in a Chinese context, and simultaneously determining which art practices in China would be now considered part of the canon of modern art. In this process, modern art was the category of art that Chinese artists most desired, and the overwhelming indicator of value. All or

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[7] He Jiawei, "*Zhongguo dangdai meishushi yanjiure*" ("Chinese contemporary art history research fever"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 42 (October 1986), 1. This short essay introduced the research trip undertaken by Chinese artist Han Xin and his American wife, art historian Julia Andrews, to write a history of art in China since 1949, and ended with a mention of the upcoming publications on contemporary art history by Li Xiaoshan, Gao Minglu and Zhang Qiang.

[8] Liu Xiaochun, interview with Sun Wenjie, Beijing, China, April 2, 2012, in Sun Wenjie, "*Zhongguo meishubao yanjiu*" ("Research on *Fine Arts in China*"), (BA diss., Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2012), 34.

[9] Lyu Peng and Yi Dan, "Xuyan" ("Introduction"), in *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi* (*A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 1992), 2. The authors wrote: "In this past decade, all kinds of 'modern art' phenomena converged into an integral force of reform, just as it was pointed out in the report from the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee: 'To realize the Four Modernizations requires a major improvement of production power. This necessarily requires change in all aspects of production relationships and upper level structures that don't match the development of production power. It requires changes of all styles of ill-fitting management, activities and thinking. Thus it is a wide-spread and profound revolution.'" See also Hong Zicheng, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi* (*A History of Chinese Contemporary Literature*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 261. Writer Xu Chi writes, "It was not possible to have modernist literature and art in China before the process of modernization had started," and continues, "No matter what, we will achieve Four Socialist Modernizations and by that time, our literature and art with modernist thoughts and emotions will emerge." See Xu Chi, "Xiandaihua yu xiandaipai" ("Modernization and modernism"), *Waiguo wenxue yanjiu* (*Journals of Studies on Foreign Literature*), no. 1 (1982): 117–19.

nothing was the rule of this game.

Art History Writing as Choice

The initial attempt at systematically rewriting recent art history and historicizing contemporary art practice was Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan's *A History of Chinese Modern Painting* (*Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi*《中国现代绘画史》), published in December 1986.[10] [Figure 4.6] It was a modest survey of modern painting in China from 1919 to 1985, with black-and-white illustrations. Zhang Shaoxia had graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing Normal University in 1974 and from the Masters program of the Fine Arts Department of Nanjing University of the Arts in 1982. The subject of Zhang's Masters thesis had been European art history. By March 1986, he had completed the writing of *A History of Chinese Modern Painting* in collaboration with his schoolmate Li Xiaoshan, who was studying Chinese brush-and-ink painting at Nanjing University of the Arts.

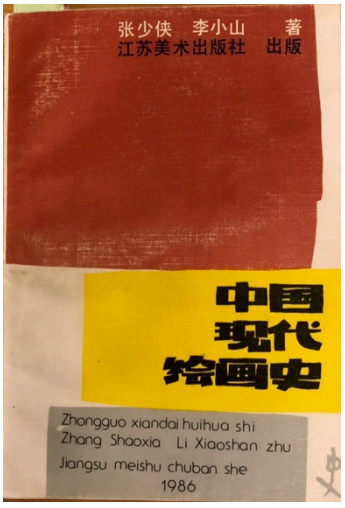

Figure 4.6: Cover, *A History of Chinese Modern Painting*, 1986.

[10] Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi (A History of Chinese Modern Paintings)* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1986).

Back in 1985, Li Xiaoshan had published a critical essay on the state of Chinese brush-and-ink painting that stirred up a heated discussion.[11] The essay pointed out the conservatism and failure of contemporary Chinese brush-and-ink painting, because of its attachment to feudal ideology. Recognizing that a transformation in the concept of painting led to revolution in painting, it identified the lack of transformation in its concepts as the heart of the problem. He claimed that Chinese brush-and-ink painting was in crisis.

A History of Chinese Modern Painting now mapped out a distinct historical trajectory of modern painting in China starting from 1919, marked by the introduction of Western painting into China and of young Chinese artists traveling abroad to study. By its account, Western painting grew in influence from the 1920s on, with the rise of art schools run by artists such as Xu Beihong, Liu Haisu, Yan Wenliang and Lin Fengmian, who had studied abroad and had championed and implemented modern art education in China.[12] At the same time, the authors argued that brush-and-ink painting had lost its dynamism and was in decline, its static formulas and

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[11] Li Xiaoshan, "Dangdai Zhongguohua zhi wojian" ("My view on contemporary Chinese ink wash paintings"), *Jiangsu huakan* (*Jiangsu Pictorial*), no. 7 (1985), 2–3. After the publication of Li Xiaoshan's essay, *Jiangsu Pictorial* organized a symposium in Zhenjiang to discuss the essay and published opinions from the discussion in a few following issues of the journal. In less than two months, the *Trend of Art Thought* magazine organized an invitational exhibition of Chinese brush-and-ink painting and a symposium in Wuhan. In December, the Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts and the Research Center of Traditional Chinese Painting co-organized a symposium on the trends in the development in Chinese brush-and-ink painting, attended by senior artists. In the beginning of 1986, more than ten middle-aged Chinese brush-and-ink painters from Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing gathered to paint at the Beijing Hotel and over two days discussed the related subject. In May 1986, the Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts and the CAA of Shanxi Province organized a discussion on brush-and-ink paintings and so on. *Fine Arts in China* gave continuous exposure to articles on the development of brush-and-ink painting. See Zhang Qiang, "Kending ziji, chengren bieren" ("Acknowledging oneself, recognizing the others"), in *Huihua xinchao* (*New Tide of Painting*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1988), 104.

[12] Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 3.

pre-established techniques constraining the possibility of innovation. The authors established a lineage of art across a sequence of chapters: from left-wing artists and their woodcut movement, led by Lu Xun, and woodcuts in the Liberated Areas of the 1940s, through art after 1949 that celebrated New China and the dominance of Soviet art in the 1950s, to art from 1957 through the Cultural Revolution, and finally the encouraging changes in art from 1976 up to 1985 due to increasing intellectual liberation and freedoms. The last decade was described by the authors as a "Spring of Art."[13] According to them, the history of modern painting was a sequence of breakthroughs against the constraints of brush-and-ink painting. Essentially, their model of history was an evolutionary procession in which tradition was a feudal residue and the modern was to be desired. They emphasized the positive significance of change, transformation and rupture from tradition, which were viewed as positive developments, and artists who worked in this manner were described as artistic pioneers of the new era.[14] The imperative of progression was linked to their historical materialism and the Chinese government's story of social development since 1949. The authors, aged in their late 20s and early 30s, considered the history of modern Chinese painting in China as one of improvements made against the closed, static circles of brush-and-ink painters. They described the progression to the modern in art as a complicated process of transformation, ranging from Chinese artists' initial hostile responses to external stimulation giving way to home-grown innovations based on external models. The authors wrote, "Newly emerging art groups had their slogans and mottos, some with radical elements, some with confusing ones …. The

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[13] The so-called New Period after the end of the Cultural Revolution was usually referred to as Spring, signaling the relaxation of ideological control when things came back to life. Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 308.

[14] Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 13.

development from a closed circle to a state of multiplicity can be considered the beginning of the modern painting history."[15] In their view, artists could be divided mainly into two types: those who worked in a conservative mode, continuing earlier practices (*yanxuxing* 延续型), including those artists whose developments were embedded in their loyalty to Chinese brush-and-ink;[16] and innovators (*kaituoxing* 开拓型) who rejected Chinese traditions and absorbed the new, Western, modern painting.[17] While the authors also included female artists such as Pan Yuliang (潘玉良, 1895–1977), Fang Junbi (方君璧, 1898–1986) and Sun Duoci (孙多慈, 1913–1975), as well as forgotten artists such as Chen Baoyi (陈抱一, 1893–1945), Sun Fuxi (孙福熙, 1898–1962) and Tang Yihe (唐一禾, 1905–1944) who had died premature deaths, their simplified analysis of artists and their practice set up a hierarchy ranking Chinese brush-and-ink painting below Western modern painting, with the latter far more aligned with new social developments.[18]

The book gained immediate and widespread attention. It was the subject of a symposium held across two days on November 6 and 7, 1987 in the Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts.[19] Organized by the Institute in collaboration with the art newspaper *Fine Arts in China*, the event was attended by

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[15] Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 6.
[16] In the first chapter of the book, entitled "Continuity of Chinese Traditional Paintings" ("Zhongguo chuantong huihua de yanxuxing"), the authors cited Chinese brush-and-ink painters such as Wu Changshuo, Huang Binhong and Qi Baishi as exemplars who continued the tradition of Chinese brush-and-ink painting. Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 1–21.
[17] The second chapter, entitled "Knocking Open the Door of Modern Paintings" ("Koukai xiandai huihua zhimen"), refers to Chinese artists such as Li Tiefu, Gao Jianfu, Xu Beihong and Pang Xunqin who had studied in Western Europe and Japan and brought back new forms of painting and ideas to break up the monopoly of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, as well as modern art education. Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 22–60.
[18] Zhang and Li, *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings*, 135–8, 147.
[19] The Research Institute of Chinese Painting (*Zhongguohua yanjiuyuan*) was founded in 1981 and had its name changed to *Zhongguo guojia huayuan* (China National Academy of Painting) in 2006.

over twenty art historians and critics.[20] Many applauded the authors for their active reinterpretation and revision of the relevance of historical artists. But there was also criticism from important figures, including the Nanjing-based brush-and-ink painter Dong Xinbin (董欣宾, 1939–2002). Dong insisted that categorizing works according to "continuation" and "innovation" was unsound, and would make it impossible to account for all of the complexities of the modern period. He compared their approach to fighting a modern war with wooden weaponry.[21]

Of *A History of Chinese Modern Painting*'s supporters, critic Gao Minglu didn't directly comment on the book, but in his essay "All History is the History of the Contemporary Age", he explained the idea of historical method applied to contemporary art.[22] He criticized historians who didn't pay attention to contemporary art, stressing the importance of a contemporary perspective and writing that reflected contemporary art. For him, history was worth writing only if it included events that could make history:

> One art history after another written in modern times in China only covers up to the end of Qing Dynasty [1644–1911], while the last century of modern and contemporary art history remains blank. It is this period of turbulent, transformative, complicated yet refreshing history that will directly impact the future development of history. As contemporaries who are creating this period

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[20] Liao Wen, "*Tuidong meishu yanjiu de lilun yu fazhan*" ("To motivate theories and developments in research in fine arts), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 49 (December 1987): 1.
[21] Dong Xinbin, "Xieshi bingfei erxi" ("Writing History is Not a Joke"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 49 (December 1987): 2.
[22] Gao Minglu, "Yiqie lishi doushi dangdaishi" ("All History is the History of the Contemporary Age"), *Fine Arts in China,* no. 49 (December 1987): 2.

> of history (*zheduan lishi* 这段历史), how can we be invisible to such a void [in the existing art histories].[23]

Gao concluded that to write history was to make conscious choices informed by a sense of the present.[24] This was to prove compelling and influential: writing wasn't just an act of taking stock but an action that could not just shape narrative but affect actions and awareness. Not only was there a sense of urgency in this, but also a sense that there was a need to act. Zhang and Li's book inspired fellow art critics to place their own observations on the historical record as well. Soon after the publication of Zhang and Li's book, Gao Minglu was to devote himself to a similar project.

In the previous chapter, I discussed Gao's widely circulated lecture of April 1986, in the course of which he identified the phenomenon of emerging young artists with a name, the "'85 Art Movement" (*'85 meishu yundong* '85 美术运动). His definition of modern art was very personal, arbitrary and subjective, but was by now being further circulated through his lectures and published essays. It was so widely circulated that it is now taken to be common knowledge about the state of art in the first half of the 1980s. Gao singled out young artists, artworks and events that were part of what he described as the "'85 New Wave" and defined them as the dominant, if not the singular, achievements of the period. In his review of the year 1985, Gao Minglu listed four notable trends.[25] Firstly, he said, reactions were triggered by the conservative *Sixth National Art Exhibition*, including the exhibitions organized in

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[23] Gao, "All History," 2.
[24] Gao, "All History," 2.
[25] Gao Minglu, "Yousecai de yinian" ("A Year of Colors"), *Fine Arts in China,* no. 6 (February 1986): 1.

defiance of it. In these exhibitions, three generations of artists—young, middle-aged and old—had all self-consciously explored their own distinctive artistic languages. Secondly, he noted the many self-organized exhibitions by artist groups. They could lead to a distinct art movement. Third, he argued that there were clear signs of a generational gap between young and older artists, and the gap centered on debates over the fate of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, as well as over the evaluation of artworks. In other words, the understanding of creative concepts and the consideration of tradition versus innovation were dividing points. Lastly, the consideration of new art was supercharged by a comparisons between Western and Chinese cultures.

While New Wave art continued to be a notable phenomenon throughout China in 1986, it simultaneously began to show the familiar sign that it was "streams dashing out of a canyon and entering into a gentle river."[26] I shall now explain how, after the plan to mount an exhibition in the National Agricultural Exhibition Center in July 1987 was halted, the New Wave art movement went into a temporary hibernation.[27] What this meant was that the historicization of New Wave art unfolded in the course of diminishing artistic activity and currency from that time: that is, July 1987. The discourse of art and the practice of art were now to operate on two separate tracks, sometimes running in parallel, and sometimes in diverging directions.

Riding on the wave of excitement following the Zhuhai Meeting in August 1986, Gao Minglu set out to organize an exhibition of works by young artists from the '85 New

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[26] Shui Tianzhong, "1986 nian meishu yaoshi yinxiang" ("An Impression of Key Art Events in 1986"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 1 (January 1987): 1.
[27] Zhou Yan, "Shoujie 'Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan' beijing ziliao" ("Background Information on the First 'Chinese Modern Art Exhibition'"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 6 (February 1989): 3.

Wave in Beijing and began to work with cultural bureaucrats at the National Agricultural Exhibition Center. Zhou Yan recalled that Gao Minglu had contacts working at the Center and it was thus easier to obtain agreement from them to realize an exhibition.[28] However, planning was obstructed by the tightening of censorship on cultural activities in light of the 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign.[29] Frustrated by the post-1978 oscillation between liberalization and crackdown, and angered by this particular move backwards, Gao now initiated a major writing project to record recent history.[30] In April 1987, he gathered together a group of art critics including Zhou Yan, Wang Xiaojian, Wang Mingxian, Shu Qun and Tong Dian.[31] They spent seven months writing *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986* (*Zhongguo dangdai meishushi, 1985–1986* 《中国当代美术史 1985 至 1986》), a major production focusing on 1985 and 1986. [Figure 4.7] By April 20, 1988, Gao Minglu and his tight-knit group had completed the manuscript.[32] In the foreword, Gao wrote with emotion and urgency about the need to create a record of 1985 and 1986, expanding and rewriting his short essay "All History is the History of the Contemporary Age," which had earlier been published in *Fine Arts in China*:

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[28] Zhou Yan, interview with author by email, February 25, 2020.

[29] Gao's failed exhibition proposal from 1987 was eventually realized as the *China/Avant-garde Exhibition* in the National Art Museum of China in February 1989. See Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 108.

[30] Zhou Yan, interview with Jane Debevoise and Anthony Yung, Beijing, July 10, 2009. "Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990," Asia Art Archive, accessed August 9, 2018, Year, www.china1980s.org.

[31] Zhou Yan was a lecturer at CAFA, Wang Xiaojian (b.1953) was an editor at *Art* magazine, Wang Mingxian (b.1954) was an editor at *Construction and Architecture* magazine (*Jianzhu*), Shu Qun was an artist and Tong Dian was a postgraduate student of sociology at Nankai University. Zhou Yan, interview.

[32] Although the writing of this publication was completed in 1988, it wasn't until 1991 that the book was published. Gao attributes the delay to the political dynamic of 1989, characterized by the increasing government control of ideology. See Gao, "Meiyou xiantiao de lishi: dui Zhongguo dangdai yishushi xushi de sikao" ("A History without Linear: Reflections on Historical Narratives of Chinese Contemporary Art"), *Wenyi yanjiu* (*Literature and Art Studies*), no. 7 (2011): 115–25.

When we write the history of a recent period, that is, human activities that have just happened, we are making judgments of their value. We are making a selection, eliminating some and elevating the others. The material existence [of our judgment] will be the historical matter that future researchers examine.[33]

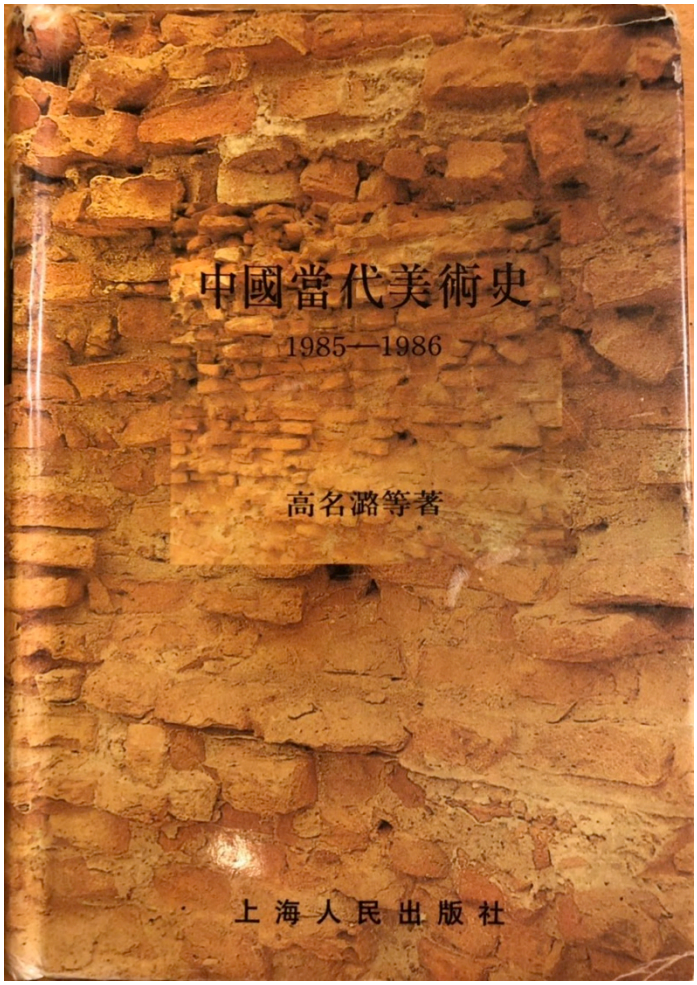

Figure 4.7: Cover, *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, 1991.

A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986 emerged from a still-powerful conviction that modern art meant a new canon of artists, who would

[33] Gao Minglu, "Daolun" ("Introduction"), in *Zhongguo dangdai meishushi, 1985–1986* (*A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*), eds. Gao Minglu et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1991), 11.

mainly be young artists who had entered art academies towards the end of the Cultural Revolution and graduated in the first half of the 1980s. Along with this loosely-defined but generational canon came a defiant attitude. Gao, his artists and his art critic associates felt that the official art establishment was an embodiment of regression and constriction. His book had a distinct agenda: to promote a New Wave of artists and through that promotion, to diminish the importance of other art made by older artists. This created a dichotomy between what was perceived as modern art by young artists and the conservative positions of middle-aged and older generation artists. Young artists were portrayed as active advocates of the new art:

> Middle-aged painters who are content and assured of their own world of experience surely consider forms of expression a fundamental concern, and [formal] language (*yuyan* 语言) and techniques the primary elements of art. The new generation who are not content with the world of experience and eager to explore the mystery of unknown worlds, however, place [formal] language and techniques (*jiqiao* 技巧) second.[34]

The last chapter of *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986* contained a sociologically inflected analysis of China's art system. It used statistics and charts to summarize the transformations and trends in China from 1977 to 1986. According to this chapter, there were dramatic shifts in the number of participants involved in organizing modern art activities (including exhibitions, seminars, symposia, and the publishing of articles) every year, mirroring the politics of

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[34] Gao Minglu et al., "Fengge yu duoyuan" ("Styles and Multiplicity"), in Gao et al., *Contemporary History,* 534.

liberalization. The figures were: 0 in 1977 and 1978; 37 in 1979; 201 in 1980; less than 100 annually in 1981, 1982 and 1983; 6 in 1984 as a result of the "Anti-Spiritual Pollution" campaign; and a rise to 926 in 1985 and then to 3,475 in 1986.[35] The authors then measured the development of modern art in comparison to the categories of political art, foreign art of ancient and modern periods, ancient Chinese art, Chinese folk art, and academic art to demonstrate their crucial point that Chinese modern art became the mainstream in 1985 and 1986.[36] What was Chinese modern art? The authors replied:

> It doesn't entirely depend on Western modern art as a system of reference, but neither is it disconnected from many concepts and styles in Western modern art. It's defined by the cultural characteristics of this period…to be concrete, as long as it proposes (or doesn't propose yet reveals in artworks) new concepts (*xin guannian* 新观念) unlike past artistic phenomena, and forms a trend (*chaoliu* 潮流) or a movement (*yundong* 运动), it can be called modern art.[37]

The authors of both publications, *A History of Chinese Modern Painting* and *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, referred to what they thought was a quote from the Italian art historian Benedetto Croce, "all history is

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[35] Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan and Tong Dian, "1977–1986 nian xiandai meishu huodong renshu qingkuangbiao" ("A chart of figures of participants in modern art activities from 1977 to 1986"), in Gao et al., *Contemporary History,* 609.
[36] Gao et al., *Contemporary History*, 618.
[37] Gao et al., *Contemporary History*, 607.

contemporary history."[38] In fact, when Fu Ren'gan's Chinese translation of Croce's book was published in 1982, the Chinese translation was faithful to the Italian original, "every true history is contemporary history."[39] But when it was widely circulated it became a slogan and the word "true" was dropped.[40] Not only did Chinese art historians stick with this incomplete quote, they preferred their own interpretation of Croce's sentence, that contemporary art history was not an account of historical facts but a contemporary interpretation of historical events by contemporary practitioners. In other words, they granted themselves the liberty to create their art history not only by revisiting past events but by documenting and highlighting current happenings. In so doing, they twisted the phrase to their advantage and weaponized art history.

After *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings* and *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, yet another book was commissioned. This was to be *A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989* (*Zhongguo xiandai yishushi 1979–1989*《中国现代艺术史 1979–1989》), [Figure 4.8] published by Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House. At the beginning of 1989, Li Luming, one of the editors at the press, invited Lyu Peng to create a book about the past decade in art.[41] Lyu Peng had graduated

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[38] Benedetto Croce, *Theory and History of Historiography*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: George 1921), 12. Croce's main meaning was that all history was written from the point of view of contemporary preoccupations and that we look at the past through the eyes of the present.

[39] "All history is contemporary history" was "Ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea." See Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e Storia della storiografia* (Milan: Adelphi edizioni, 2011). The Chinese translation appears in Benedetto Croce, *Lishixue de lilun he shiji* (*Theory and History of Historiography*), trans. Fu Rengan (Beijing: Commercial Press, 1982), 64.

[40] The reason for dropping the word "true" from the original sentence might be due to the fact that most people didn't read the original and just learned about this saying through hearsay. See San Yinwen, "Yiqie lishi doushi dangdaishi?" ("Every History is Contemporary History"?), *Wenhui bao* (*Standard*), August 19, 2016, 2, accessed March 1, 2018, http://lit.cssn.cn/lsx/sxpy/201608/t20160819_3168135.shtml.

[41] Li Luming, "Wo de chuban liushuizhang" ("A Record of My Publishing Experience"), lecture delivered by Li Luming at the Inside-Out Art Museum on June 10, 2017, unpublished. After Lyu Peng completed his writing, Li Luming found it too personal and invited four other art critics, Li Xianting, Lyu Hong, Zou Yuejin and Yin Shuangxi, to each pen an art history book in 1992. Li Xianting and Zou

from Sichuan Normal University in 1977 with a Bachelors degree in Law and had been translating books on European modern painting and painters. His previous job had been an editor at *Cinema and Theatre* magazine in Chengdu. Yi Dan, co-author of the book, had entered Sichuan University to study Chinese literature in 1977 and completed his Masters degree in English and American literature from Michigan State University in 1984. The two of them completed a 400-page volume in less than a year. They divided the decade from 1979 to 1989 into three stages: 1979–84, which was referred to as a period of preparation and breakthrough; 1985–86 which represented the expansion of Chinese modern art; and 1987–89 which was characterized as a period of retrospection and polemic.[42] Like the other two volumes, this work made the phenomenon of young artists, this time collectives formed between 1985 and 1986, central to its narrative. It solidified the story of modern art in China, constructing a narrative in which formal exploration, especially with technical formalism coupled with a rejection of realism, was central in the first half of the 1980s, and the emergence of young artist collectives with leanings towards conceptual art exemplified the mid- and late 1980s.

Yuejin both declined the invitation, and Zou Yuejin switched to writing an art history of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Lyu Hong agreed to write but took a very long time. Li Luming, interview with author by email, August 18, 2019.

[42] Lyu Peng and Yi Dan, "Xuyan" ("Introduction"), in *A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989,* 6–7.

Figure 4.8: Cover, *A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989*, 1992.

The *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* (*Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan* 中国现代艺术展) opened on February 5, 1989. Together with the three new books on recent Chinese art, plus the huge number of public discussions and debates, this was a sea change regarding modern art in China. The symbols of change were symbols of openness, artistic and individual autonomy and, above all, a break with both Chinese traditional art and the realist tradition after the 1950s. What this did was to constitute a particular concept of modern art in China, as well as solidify a set of ultimately prescriptive judgments about art. This conception of modern art referred to the Western modern art that certain Chinese art practitioners chose to identify with for validation. In the meantime, Chinese art in general suffered from the anxiety of a lack of authenticity and legitimacy. Perhaps, as some argued, China didn't have sufficient social and material qualifications to allow for a modern art, based on the linear logic of local social development?[43] Instead, I believe that there was another lingering fear: the fear

[43] Li Jiatun [Li Xianting], "Zhongyao de bushi yishu" ("What is Significant is Not the Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 28 (July 1986): 1.

of losing an identifiable Chinese subjectivity when exposed to the influence of the West, and at the same time, the desire to reject Chinese cultural traditions that were seen as backwards and even feudal. Such complex feelings, coupled with an inferiority complex, were founded on a sense of belatedness, that perhaps they were merely following Western art's developments and would never be as good as their Western counterparts. This mix of thoughts and feelings in turn influenced both art and criticism.

To sum up this chapter's discussion thus far: during this period, Chinese artists and art writers had been immersed in a double-edged process of claiming their own cultural position, which they felt had been hijacked by political agendas that reached a critical point during the Cultural Revolution. They wanted—and the evidence of the chapters preceding this one is that earlier generations had held similar aspirations, though this generation was supercharged in its determination to mark itself off from the previous one—to establish a course of artistic developments in China that didn't prioritize political intentions. In the mid- to late 1980s this now seemed both sensible and achievable. In searching for a cultural position with autonomy from national ideological frameworks and narratives, they now tapped into the momentous influx of Western modern art that entered China through a variety of formats including print media, exhibitions and artist visits (as had an earlier generation via international study and travel). They invoked the spirit of the May Fourth Movement, and democracy and freedom were two key concepts taken from Western modernity.[44] But, they were also

[44] See Disici wendaihui choubeizu qicaozu (The Document Drafting Unit of the Preparation Group for the Fourth Congress of Writers and Artists) and Wenhuabu wenxue yishu yanjiuyuan lilun zhengce yanjiushi (The Theory and Policy Research Unit of Literature and Art Research Institute of Cultural Ministry) eds., *Liushinian wenyi dashiji* (*Chronicle of Major Events in Sixty Years of Literature and*

convinced that in excavating the lineage of home-grown modern art in China, from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the present, they could truly situate their cultural subjectivity. To summarize, I am arguing that writers created something of a phantom. Relatively free of previous political constraints, they described an art system that was derivative of Western experience and imported structures. My point is not to paint a portrait of slavish overseas imitation, for that was clearly not the case, but to emphasize the extreme degree to which the new writers and artists were prepared to go along a trajectory in order to mark out their difference.

In my view, the rise of New Wave art took place at a juncture where the desire for change and transformation overwhelmed culture. This post-Cultural Revolution desire propelled everyone across society to seek breakthroughs. However, an answer to the question of what New Wave art (*Xinchao yishu* 新潮艺术) and modern art (*xiandai yishu* 现代艺术) were was never clearly defined or analyzed. There were vague impressions and fuzzy interpretations. Both terms were often used interchangeably.

And the reason for the ubiquity of the apparently anachronistic phrase "modern art" throughout my thesis has been not that a regional version of modernist art (in the Western art historical sense) was signified, but that the phrase "modern art" was constantly deployed within Chinese art discourse. This may sound circuitous and even confusing, but it was the case, and that is why I have stuck with the formulation "modern art," when to a present-day viewer's eyes it might seem that I am looking at Chinese art that was edging into postmodernism, along with the imported postmodern

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Art) (Beijing: The Theory and Policy Research Unit of Literature and Art Research Institute of Cultural Ministry, 1979), 1.

theory that the art writers and artists were now reading, no matter how casually.

So the lack of close examination of both New Wave art and the discourse around it left open a space for free and, I would say, deliberately loose projections of what New Wave art actually was. Writer Wu Jiafeng compared the discussions in China about Western art to debates taking place behind car windows. What he meant was that since it was impossible for most to access original works of Western art, and no factual explanation of them was available, the discussions were not based on in-depth understandings of facts and existed in isolation. In the end, labels and slogans took the place of real knowledge.[45] The discourse of art, and in particular the attempts to canonize and historicize New Wave art during this period, were such an active form of projection that they almost overshadowed the acts of art-making and art criticism or, at the very least, gave the impression that art writing was operating on an independent track of its own, separate to the art but with a compelling agenda of its own, though one that was more than acceptable to the young artists.

Deviating Opinions

Against the wave of books and essays that valorized New Wave art at the beginning of 1987, art historian Zhang Qiang, who was one of the founding members and publishers of *Fine Arts in China,* completed yet another new book. *New Tide of Painting* (*Huihua xinchao*《绘画新潮》, 1988) [Figure 4.9] surveyed young artists and their groups, situating them in a number of debates that took place across the

[45] Wu Jiafeng, "Jietou tanyi: du Fanglong *Yishutan* yougan" ("Discussing art on the Street: Reflections on reading H. W. van Loon's *The Arts*"), in *Hualang zhong de sikao (Thinking in an Art Gallery)* (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 1984), 9.

mid-1980s.[46] Unlike *A History of Chinese Modern Paintings* and *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986*, Zhang Qiang's book wasn't meant to be a defining historical narrative. He tried to provide a factual account of the activities of young artists, but he also deliberately contextualized their developments by relating them to older artists and art critics.

We have seen that writing about New Wave art identified the "renewal of concepts," a clunky term that essentially defined art that revealed a valuation of concept over artistic techniques: in other words, art with a conceptual turn as its defining trait. Now, we began to see writing that claimed that this much-valued renewal of concepts was not all there was to art. *New Tide of Painting* lamented the overexposure assigned to the conceptual aspects of artworks. Some writers like Zhang Qiang pointed out that the contribution of philosophical thinking to painting and the reflection of new ideas introduced through translation in art had both been in reality quite limited. Instead, the basics in art remained, even for the New Wave artists, the language of painting—materials, techniques, and space—which had no direct relationship with philosophical concepts. In addition, Zhang thought, as a developing country China didn't have the highly developed cultural infrastructure of the West to support any close alignment with Western art and its concepts.[47]

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[46] Zhang, *New Tide of Painting*, 1988.
[47] Zhang Qiang, "Zuihou shiwunian" ("The Last Fifteen Years"), in *New Tide*, 109–10.

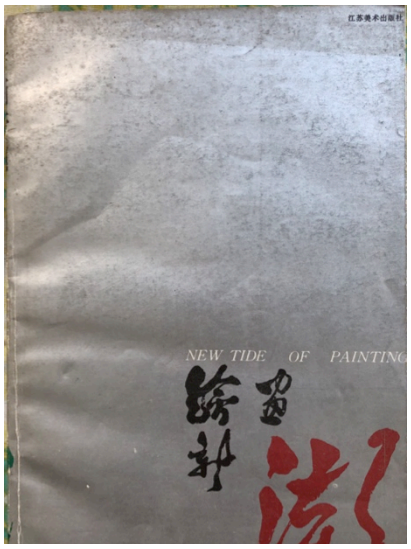

Figure 4.9: Cover, *New Tide of Painting*, 1988.

By mid-1986, criticisms of New Wave art had started to appear. Since New Wave art tended to distinguish itself by parading its "renewal of concepts," its overdependence on concepts and intellectual interpretation came under question. On May 16–25, 1986, the *First Exhibition of the Members of Beijing Youth Painting Association* (*Beijing qingnian huahui shoujie huiyuan zuopin zhan* 北京青年画会首届会员作品展) was held at NAMOC. It showcased approximately 150 oil paintings, ink paintings, prints and sculptures by recent graduates or current students of art academies and a small number of self-taught young artists.[48] The exhibition was considered by some as signaling a slowdown in the explosive impact of New Wave art on the young. In a short review of this exhibition, Yi Ying listed Meng Luding's *Red Wall* [Figure 4.10] and Xia Xiaowan's *Family* as examples of art depicting modern city life and the

[48] Mi Mi, "Beijing Qingnian huahui jiqi shouzhan" ("Beijing Youth Painting Association and its first exhibition"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 23 (June 1986): 2.

constrictions of habitable space.[49] *Red Wall* was an oil painting capturing a fleeting moment in a street scene in Beijing. In the image, a young man and a woman are seen crossing a busy street against a backdrop of Imperial-era architecture, their paths separated by a car racing by. The painting is like a snapshot that conveys a strong sense of motion. Depicted in flat monochrome strokes, the red walls are a prominent (and probably symbolic) visual element. Meng was making a conscious shift from the grand narrative of his prize-winning painting *In the New Era: The Revelation of Adam and Eve*, mentioned in Chapter Three. Instead, here he portrayed an everyday scenario in a highly expressionist style. Meng considered *Red Wall* a work that originated in his concerns for formal language and in his experience of urban life.[50] It represented a correction of the New Wave.[51]

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[49] Yi Ying, "Zouxiang Zongshen" ("Moving Towards Width and Depth"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 23 (June 1986): 1.
[50] Meng Luding, interview with author, Beijing, July 1, 2019.
[51] He Guiyan, "Guannian de yanshen yuyan de xiangdu: yu meng luding de duihua" ("The extension of concept and the dimension of language: a dialogue with Meng Luding"), Artron, accessed February 6, 2018, https://news.artron.net/20120723/n81167_1.html.

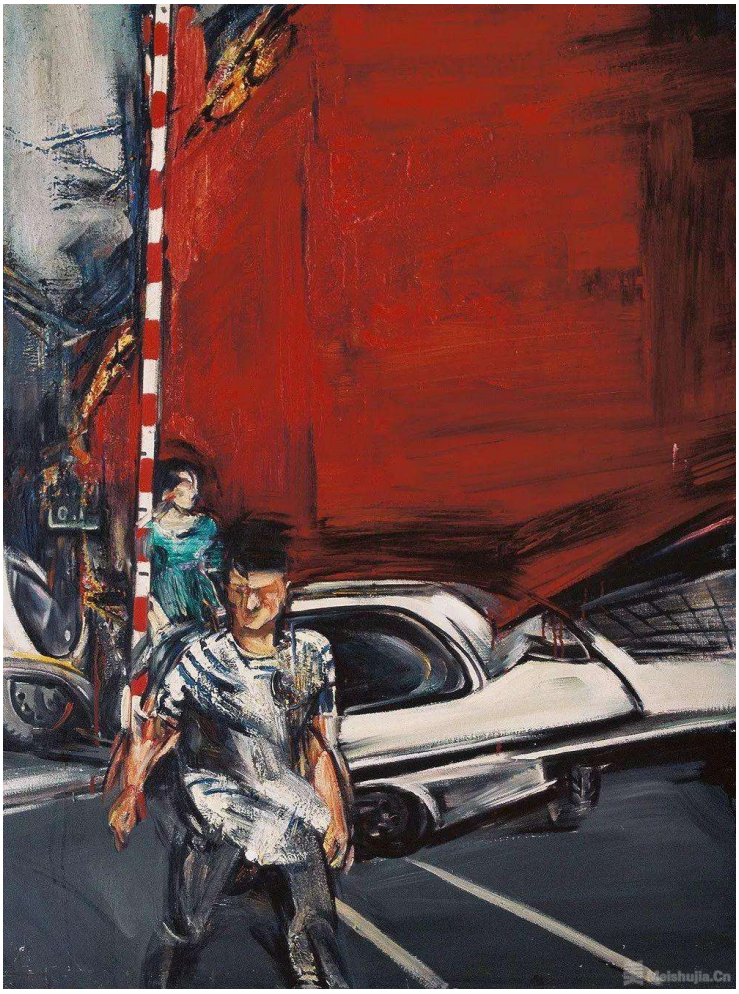

Figure 4.10: Meng Luding, *Red Wall*, 1986, oil on canvas.

Amongst the reflections on and criticism of the New Wave that now appeared, Li Xianting, who had been a supporter and participant in New Wave art and was an editor of *Fine Arts in China*, became prominent. In his essay "What is Significant is Not the Art," he started by saying that the '85 Art Movement wasn't a modern art movement at all.[52] He pointed out that China didn't yet have the requisite social and cultural settings for modern art. He argued that the '85 New Wave represented the continuing relaxation of control on culture that had started in 1978 and was not a new or special development in art itself. It was not a revolution in the paradigms of artistic

[52] Li, "What is Significant," 1.

expressions and art forms. He lamented the situation if it was that art had to act as philosophy and not art itself. In his view, art had its own internal logic, which wasn't, he argued, the focus of exploration in the '85 New Wave.[53]

Li's opinion was quite dissimilar from Gao Minglu's. Li Xianting felt that, while aspiring to be a self-conscious avant-garde intellectual movement, as he described it, the '85 New Wave was imitating Western forms of modern art while burdened by the long-held expectation that art bear political responsibility and exhibit political concerns. He criticized the so-called rationalism of the '85 New Wave for alienating individuals from society, as opposed to a higher level of humanism that might be achieved only after the emancipation of the individual. He compared avant-garde culture in China to a then-popular modular furniture fusing Chinese and Western features, which looked modern but was not produced out of the social structure of modern society. Thus he concluded, "The most avant-garde culture is no more superficial than popular modular furniture. On the one hand, it reveals people's longing for modernization; on the other hand, it exposes the restrictions imposed on people by traditional frames of thinking."[54]

On the front page, where Li's article was published, there appeared another essay by a like-minded colleague, Cai Rong, a fellow editor at the newspaper. Appearing under the pen name Ba Huang (巴荒), she compared the Chinese modern art movements of the 1930s and 1940s to that of the 1980s, recognizing the former for their artistic quality while regarding the latter as a transitional period compromised by its

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[53] Li, "What is Significant," 1.
[54] Li Jiatun [Li Xianting], "Houxiandai, minzuhua he daocao" ("Postmodern, Nationalization and Straws"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 8 (February 1987): 1.

alignment with theory. [55] The article sparked a wave of responses reflecting on what the development of New Wave art meant.[56]

By the beginning of 1987, some art critics and artists such as Shao Dazhen and Huang Jian were noting that New Wave art revealed what they called an anti-cultural trend (*fanwenhua de quxiang* 反文化的趋向), citing the examples of group or collective activities such as Xiamen Dada (Xiamen dada 厦门达达), who burnt their artworks in a square in Xiamen, or the sunbathing art happenings in Nanjing, or the sculptures performed by Shanghai artists in a variety of public venues such as a landfill site on Shanghai's outskirt.[57] [Figures 4.11 and 4.12] Artist Huang Jian (黄坚, b.1960), a Masters student at the Art School of Qinghua University from 1985 to 1986, referred to this anti-cultural tendency as a rejection of theories, concepts, -isms and systems, all valued ideas of the New Wave.[58] Huan Jian's text wasn't a criticism but more of an attempt to try to understand the emergence of performance-based works at this time, such as the actions undertaken by Xiamen Dada or the street sculptures in Shanghai.[59] Huang Yongping, a founding member of Xiamen Dada, considered their approach an extension of the mixture of modernist art being introduced into China

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[55] Ba Huang, "Chongfu yu beiju: sansi shi niandai yu bashi niandai xiandai yishu sichao bijiao" ("'Repetition' and 'Tragedy': A Comparison of Modern Art Movements of the 1930s, 1940s and 1980s"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 28 (July 1986): 1. See also Liu, interview, 40.

[56] Sun Wenjie, "Zhongguo meishubao sichaoban bianji yu zhuti zhaiyao" ("Editing of the Trends of Thoughts Column in *Fine Arts in China* and abstracts"), in "Research on *Fine Arts in China*," 34.

[57] See Gao, *A History of Chinese Contemporary Fine Art 1985–1986*, 343–5. On September 7, 1986, about a hundred young artists and art lovers presented their works outdoor in Xuanwuhu Park in Nanjing. On October 5, 1986, nearly 1,000 young artists gathered for the second time in Xuanwuhu Park to show their works outdoor. This self-organized event was called the "Sun-bathing Art Event" (Shaitaiyang yishu jiaoliu huodong). See *Fine Arts in China*, no. 46 (November 1986): 1. In mid November, 1986, Zhang Guoliang, Ding Yi and Qin Yifeng, three art students of the Fine Art Academy of Shanghai University, appeared on the streets of Shanghai wrapped entirely in yellow cloth posing as temporary sculptures. See *Fine Arts in China*, no. 51 (December 1986): 1.

[58] Huang Jian, "Zaijie nantao: qianwei meishu 87 zhanwang" ("An Inescapable Trap: The Prospect of Avant-Garde Art in 1987"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 1 (January 1987): 1.

[59] Huang, "An Inescapable Trap," 1.

and the result of its impact on the Chinese art community. "This kind of confusion [over different art movements of modernism] and artists' involvement in creating such a confusion has been valuable, which is something of a Dadaist spirit. It seems that the time for taking up Dadaism in China has arrived."[60]

Figure 4.11: Xiamen dada, *Reconfiguration-Destruction-Burning*, 1986, performance.

Figure 4.12: Zhang Guoliang, Ding Yi and Qin Yifeng, *Cloth Sculpture on Street*, 1986, performance.

Liu Xiaochun, Chief Editor of *Fine Arts in China,* urged Li Xianting to start a column on individual artists who had come into prominence in the New Wave, to offer

[60] Huang Yongping. "Xiamen dada-yizhong houxiandai?" ("Xiamen Dada: A kind of Postmodernism?"), *Fine Arts in China*, no.1 (January 1987): 1.

visibility to individual artists instead of collectives.[61] Starting from the 37th issue published on September 21, 1987, the series "New Wave Artists" (*Xinchao meishujia* 新潮美术家) featured a sequence of articles on ten artists including Ding Fang, Wang Guangyi, Wu Shanzhuan, Wu Shaoxiang, Gu Wenda, Xia Xiaowan, Shi Benming, Li Yanping, Chen Yufei and He Datian.[62] This new column was intended to highlight individual positions and thinking, which in Li Xianting's opinion were critical features of modern art.[63] To this end, he criticized the surprising homogeneity of art in the New Wave in terms of both the spirit and the language of paintings.[64] While attention was shifting away from art collectives, there was now a rise in advocacy for artistic quality in terms of technique and skill, and of course these were possessed by academically trained artists. Gao Minglu disapproved of Li's editorial decision to single out individuals from the collectives, which he felt would lead to jealousies and fallings out amongst group members.[65]

Towards the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987, differences appeared. Performance-based works and Dadaist approaches challenged institutional authority, rousing worries about an anti-cultural tendency, while arguments that artistic and technical quality had been compromised by ideas and concepts emerged together with a demand to return to first principles. The latter strand of thinking was mainly shared amongst artists who had been trained and worked in art academies, where there was an emphasis on artistic technique. With the great number of art academy graduates

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[61] Liu, interview, 40.
[62] Sun Wenjie, "Editing of the Trends of Thoughts Column in *Fine Arts in China*," 18.
[63] Li, "What is Significant," 1.
[64] Li, "What is Significant," 1.
[65] Gao Minglu, interview with Sun Wenjie, Beijing, China, April 26, 2012, in Sun, "Research on *Fine Arts in China*," 67.

and students across the country, this stress on artistic technique and skills as a critique of the New Wave would soon dominate the artistic domain.

Popularizing the Language of Art

Clearly there was fatigue and criticism of the overemphasis on references to philosophical ideas in New Wave art. Criticism of the idea of the New Wave unfolded among New Wave artists as well as among those who had already voiced their reservations and skepticism. Art critic Shui Tianzhong, a member of the selection committee for the *First Exhibition of the Members of Beijing Youth Painting Association*, observed that while he heard plenty about the "renewal of concepts" in New Wave art, he felt that in practice that this was a larger claim than what was actually conveyed in the artworks. He went on to say that the term "renewal of concepts" shouldn't be made into all there was about art and it couldn't resolve any artistic problems. He suggested that each work required improved skills and more attention to the actual making of art.[66]

In September 1987, Yin Shuangxi called for an objective evaluation of the New Wave.[67] He pointed out that many artists were still stuck expressing their "profound … new concepts" with outdated stylistic languages and thoughts. Some artists were lost in their exploration of big concepts and out of touch with art. In the end, he proposed that artists needed to stay closer to art (*yishu benti* 艺术本体) if their practice was to develop, and follow their instincts as opposed to being guided by

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[66] Chen Wei, "Zhonglaonian huajia lilunjia de fanying" ("Responses from Senior, Mid-aged Painters and Theoreticians"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 23 (June 1986): 2. Chen Wei was a pen name for Chen Weihe (b.1957), an editor at *Fine Arts in China*.

[67] Yin Shuangxi, "Shenhua yishu chuangxin" ("Deepening Artistic Innovation"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 37 (September 1987): 1.

philosophical ideas. Supporters of the idea of what became known as the "purification of language," including Yin Shuangxi, frequently referred to the idea of an ontological being of art (艺术本体) or the origin of art (*yishu de yuandian* 艺术的原点) as the core of art-making.[68]

As New Wave art gradually waned in energy but simultaneously became increasingly institutionalized, middle-aged artists gained more of the spotlight. While young artists thought the works in the *Exhibition of Contemporary Oil Paintings*, held in March 1986 in NAMOC, were homogeneous in their formalism and focus on technique, the middle-aged, senior oil painters in the exhibition argued that their aim was to convey their thoughts about contemporary times through what they called the "language of art" (*yishu yuyan* 艺术语言), by which they meant artistic expression.[69] From this point on, the idea of a "language of art" surfaced as a fashionable subject for art criticism.[70] The general thrust behind such a term was to contain the idea of art within the formal realm, and to assign concepts to the realm of culture more generally. When art was defined primarily within an aesthetic realm, then what happened beyond that was cultural critique and not art. This became the general understanding, especially among middle-aged artists at that time, of what modern painting should be: a skill-based formalism.[71]

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[68] Nan Sha, "Nanjing diyi yi huazhan" ("Nanjing 'The First Station' Painting Exhibition"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 38 (September 1987): 2.
[69] *Exhibition of Contemporary Oil Paintings* (*Dangdai youhua zhan*) was held from March 29 to April 20, 1986, at CAFA. See Zou Yuejin, *Xinzhongguo Meishushi 1949–2000* (*A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2002), 188.
[70] Zou, *A History*, 188.
[71] Jiang Shiyuan, Zhong Yueying, Chen Shaoping and Jin Weixin, "Xinchao fansi: zhexue, wenhua, huihua" ("Reflections on New Wave: Philosophy, Culture and Painting"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 2 (January 1987): 2.

The expectation that art should be proficient in technique partly originated in the conventions on the evaluation of art that had survived in Chinese art academies. The dominance of the realist tradition in art academies since the 1950s still determined that the primary judgment of artistic quality was based on likeness in drawing. Those who couldn't perfect their drawing skills were always considered lesser artists. To strive for recognition in an art academy, technical skill in drawing was indispensable.[72] It's no wonder that in the criticism of New Wave art, technical proficiency in art—or its lack—was put forward as a compelling counterweight. Many artists and critics, mainly middle-aged and young members of art academies such as third-year CAFA student of oil painting Ma Gang (马刚, b.1962) and Zhang Long (张隆, b.1961), student of the art department at East China Normal University, echoed this viewpoint and were now publishing articles criticizing the roughness and crudeness of the '85 Movement's art, blaming philosophy for hijacking the artists' attention to artistic language.[73] They bluntly expressed their views: "In the last year or two, we have borrowed the varied languages of others, to break ideological restrictions, but if this kind of simple, nondescript painting continues to exist, future generations will realize that they are nothing more than [illustrated] ideas and slogans. In this regard, our generation should see this more clearly."[74]

In the meantime, mid-career and academically trained artists began to gain commercial support. On June 30, 1986, the *Oil Painting Exhibition in Celebration of the Founding of the Art Gallery of the Beijing International Art Palace* opened in

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[72] Liu, interview, 33.
[73] Zhang Long, "Lixing huihua xiaoyi" ("Discussion on Rationalist Painting"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 51 (December 1986): 1.
[74] Ma Gang, "Wo de huaiyi" ("My Doubts"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 31 (August 1986): 1.

NAMOC. [Figure 4.13] The sixteen artists in the exhibition included Liu Xun, Zhuang Yan, Ai Xuan, Wang Huaiqing, Li Zhongliang, Mao Lizi, Wang Jindong, Wu Xiaochang, Li Kai, Sun Weimin, Sun Jingbo, Liu Jude, Ge Pengren, Yang Feiyun, Cao Li and Xie Dongming.[75] Most of them were oil painters, older and affiliated with art academies and other official institutions. The organizer of the exhibition was the Beijing International Art Palace (*Beijing guoji yiyuan* 北京国际艺苑, BIAP), and it was the first cultural and artistic joint venture approved by the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Administrative Bureau of National Industry and Commerce and the Beijing Municipal Government. BIAP was established in 1985 as a joint venture between the Japanese real estate developer Niko Niko Do Company Limited and the Chinese government, which controlled 51 per cent of the capital.[76] Liu Xun was its founding chairman. The company constructed and ran the Crown Plaza hotel on Wangfujing Avenue, on a prime location within the second ring road of the city.[77] Occupying 24,000 square meters, the building included a commercial gallery. [Figure 4.14] Before construction started in 1987, the Beijing International Art Palace had rented spaces in NAMOC for exhibitions and sold works to both Chinese and foreign clients.[78] Its mission was to place oil paintings on the market and to diversify the distribution of its artists' works. Previously, there had been channels such as galleries in high-end hotels and a small number of shops such as Rongbaozhai (荣宝斋) that

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[75] Liu Xun's works at this time, for example, were abstract oil paintings using freehand brushwork. They were hazy and expansive, and employed relatively bright colors. See Wu Guanzhong, "Qiren qihua Liu Xun" ("The Person, the Painting, Liu Xun"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 39 (September 1988): 1.
[76] Zhang Hong, interview with author, Beijing, April 8, 2018. Zhang Hong was Liu Xun's assistant at the Beijing International Art Palace. According to Zhang Hong, Liu Xun decided on most of the content and artists in their program. Liu Xun remained the head of the Beijing Branch of the CAA and vice president of the Beijing Painting Academy at this time. See also Jane Debevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 116.
[77] The full name of the hotel is the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza (*Beijing guoji yiyuan huangguan jiari jiudian*).
[78] "Beijing guoji yiyuan diyihui youhuazhan kaimu" (The Opening of the *First Oil Painting Exhibition of Beijing International Art Palace*), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 50 (July 1986), 1.

provided a regular commercial outlet for Chinese ink painters, but there was no analogous established gallery for oil painting.

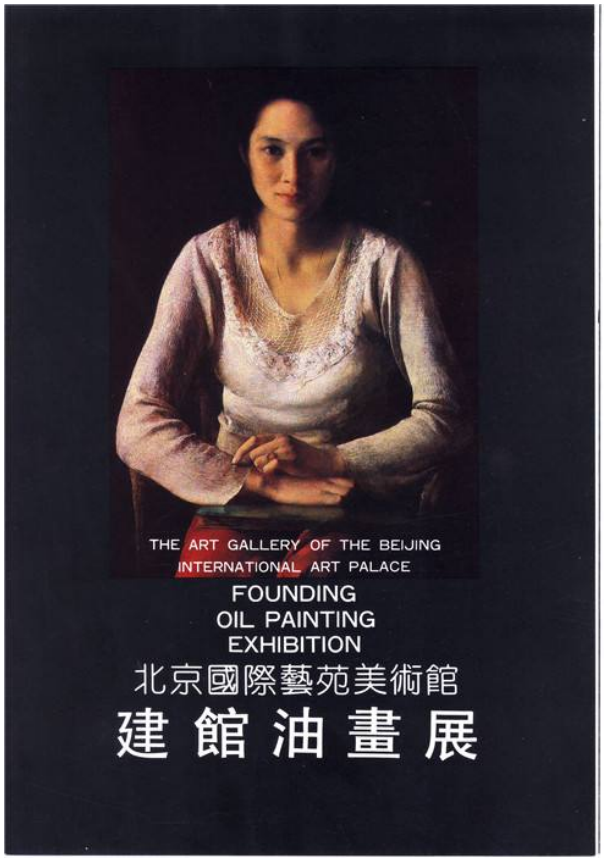

Figure 4.13: Invitation, the *First Oil Painting Exhibition of Beijing International Art Palace in celebration of the Founding of the Art Gallery of the Beijing International Art Palace*, 1986.

Figure 4.14: Photographer unknown, Liu Xun, in the Art Gallery of the Beijing International Art Palace, date unknown.

As middle-aged artists became more of a focus, a new column was introduced on the front page of *Fine Arts in China* in November 1986, dedicated to the discussion of these artists. Edited by Xu Encun (徐恩存, b.1965), the first editorial introduction to the column stated that middle-aged artists were not the forerunners of the New Wave but they were still a powerful undercurrent that shouldn't be neglected. They were confronted with many challenges in their work which deserved to be explored in a column.[79]

On December 21, 1987, the *Chinese Oil Painting Exhibition* (*Zhongguo youhuazhan* 中国油画展) was held in Shanghai. It presented 500 works selected from submissions of approximately 7,000 works by senior, middle-aged and young artists.[80] Organized

[79] "Zhongnian chuangzuo wenti taolun" ("Discussion on Middle-aged Artists' Artistic Issues"), *Fine Arts in China,* no. 45 (November 1986): 1.
[80] "Zhongguo youhuazhan qianyan" ("Forward to *Chinese Oil Painting Exhibition*"), *Fine Arts in China,* no. 51 (December 1987): 1.

by the Shanghai branch of the CAA and the National Oil Painting Committee, the exhibition included abstractions, which had previously been excluded from national exhibitions of this scale. Two new trends in painting stood out: Western neo-classicism and Western abstraction. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, painters had made various attempts to free themselves from the constraints of Socialist Realism. To do so, some took a very curious path, going in a backwards direction within an oversimplified understanding of the Western tradition in painting, looking to neo-classical painting in search of the essence of painting.[81] Jin Shangyi is a primary example of an artist turning to Western neo-classicism when he had a chance to develop his own artistic style after the end of the Cultural Revolution. "Everybody started talking about personal style," he said, " and I experimented with Western classicism."[82] As I discussed in Chapter One, Jin had undertaken the two-year course run by Soviet artist Konstantin Maximov from 1955 to 1957, and prior to that had graduated from CAFA studying oil painting in the realist style under Xu Beihong. In 1979, Jin traveled to Germany to study original paintings by European old masters.[83] After he returned, he made study trips to Dunhuang and the Yongle Palace in Shanxi, sites renowned for their splendid ancient mural paintings. *Returned Overseas Chinese* (1979) was an experiment grown out of both experiences and Jin's growing competence in applying the Western tradition of figurative realist paintings to depicting Chinese subject matter. [Figure 4.15] The sitter for this painting was his neighbor, a Cantonese woman who had returned from Hong Kong. Her simple gray-colored dress and posture of crossed hands highlight the sense of rhythm

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[81] Carol Yinghua Lu, "What is Important: An Interview with Li Xianting," *Frieze,* no. 181 (September 2016): 56.
[82] Jason Edward Kaufman, "Thoughts on a Chinese Artist Studying a Western Old Master," *Jin Shangyi: Compliments to Vermeer*, exh. cat. (Beijing: Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2011), 90–103.
[83] Jin Shangyi, "Nianbiao" ("Chronology"), Artron, accessed February 20, 2020, https://jinshangyi.artron.net/artist/yeartable/3.

in the backdrop, a detail of mural painting from the Yongle Palace. It was Jin's intention to represent elements drawn from Chinese traditional art, such as outlining and decorative elements using Western oil painting techniques. He had adopted a similar approach in the portrait of Peng Liyuan, a music student at that time and now the wife of the current Chinese President Xi Jinping, sitting in front of a detail of *Wintry Groves in a Snow Landscape*, a famous brush-and-ink painting by Fan Kuan (范宽, c.950–1032).[84] Jin's choice to focus on Western-style figurative oil paintings was driven by a desire to break away from the revolutionary aesthetics of the Mao period. The accessibility of realism had a broad appeal. "With traditional realistic painting you don't have to learn to appreciate it," he said. "You naturally gain a sense of beauty from it, [which is one reason] why in China the majority of people are still interested in realistic work."[85] Artists who pursued abstraction, on the other hand, aspired to free art from narrative and pursue what they considered purely artistic exploration.[86]

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[84] Jin Shangyi, *Qingnian nvgeshou* (*Young Female Singer*), 1984, oil painting, 74 x 54cm. Accessed February 20, 2020, https://jinshangyi.artron.net/works/detail/349.
[85] Kaufman, "Thoughts on a Chinese Artist," 90–103.
[86] While these approaches might appear strange, similar dynamics had been unfolding throughout the 1980s in Europe and North America under the umbrella label of neo-expressionism, a broad term that encompassed the neo-classicism of Carlo Maria Marioni, the belated expressionism of Georg Baselitz, and in between, the hybrid mix of abstraction and figuration of Sandro Chia or Francesco Clemente.

Figure 4.15: Jin Shangyi, *Returned Overseas Chinese,* 1979, oil painting.

In the first issue of *Art* magazine in 1988, senior artists and theoreticians who were also representatives of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party contributed texts responding to the Congress's call for reform.[87] In his essay "Developing New Ways, Promoting the Cause of Art: Thoughts on Practice," Liu Xun wrote in support of providing high-quality artworks for the market and of subjecting art to the rules of the market.[88] He reasoned that art needed extra financial backing in addition to the modest state support possible in a poor developing country like China, and that art should be allowed to circulate as a commodity, subject to

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[87] See "Canjia shisanda de meishujia changtan ganxiang yu meishu gaige" ("Artists Participating in the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party in Discussion of Their Comments and Reform of Art"). Artists whose speeches were published included Guan Shanyue, Zhou Shaohua, Chang Sha'na, Xiao Feng, Zhao Xucheng, and Liang Pingbo: *Meishu (Art)*, no. 1 (1988): 4–7.

[88] Liu Xun, "Kaituo xinqudao, fanrong meishu shiye" ("Developing new ways, promoting art cause—thoughts of practice), *Art*, no. 1 (1988): 8.

market forces. By this time, despite the setbacks of the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign, the Chinese art world was willingly responding to the climate of reform, especially as it involved a commercial dimension. This all pointed to an official and commercial recognition of experimental oil paintings.

Within the embrace of a market economy lay the recognition of the need for regulation, and this was the precursor to the full unfolding of a provocation, the "purification of [artistic] language," by artists and theoreticians working in art academies in the later period of 1988. The idea of a "purification of language" involved the idea that art should regulate itself through sheer formal quality, and that this should not be overshadowed by the primacy of concepts. On the one hand, the idea of the "purification of language" was a lament by such artists as Meng Luding, who regretted the diminution of artistic language in the face of the theory that had dominated the '85 New Wave Movement. On the other hand, the phrase was a polemic that continued the discussion of formalism that had been initiated by Wu Guanzhong and Wu Zuoren in 1979, in the episodes that I discussed in Chapter Two. The earlier episode had been disguised as a call for freedom and creativity after the propaganda of the Cultural Revolution. The idea and practice of free formal experimentation had entered into public view much earlier, at the same time as Scar Art (*Shanghen meishu* 伤痕美术), Rustic Realism (*Xiangtu xieshizhuyi* 乡土写实主义) and art displayed in the Star exhibitions. However, thanks to their social implications, Scar Art, Rustic Realism and the art of the Star exhibitions were much more noticeable than the art of formal experimentation.

But back then, the idea of "formal exploration" had been overshadowed, although it

had inspired many artists to experiment, mostly those working in art academies.[89] Formal experimentation had been sidelined as a variant on academism, but one with a minor ideological position, as opposed to Scar Art, Rustic Realism and the art of members of the Star Group, which had more of an obvious rupture from the propaganda art of the Cultural Revolution. In practice, the "purification of language" led to the appearance of a decorative style and couldn't compete with the eminence of New Wave art. Those supportive of a "purification of language" criticized the New Wave for its poor imitation, eclecticism, crude technique and literal-minded illustration of pre-existing concepts, all of which now seemed one-dimensional in practice.[90] Art critic Jia Fangzhou (贾方舟, b.1940) titled his essay with the call to "Return to the Ontology of Art," and stated that "any artist charged with a real mission should devote themselves to the reform of art itself, and ground themselves with the goal of the evolution and expansion of art."[91] The author perceived art as a field insulated from reality and the intellectual disciplines, and considered artists engaging with ideas as being distracted from the field of art itself. Similarly, Peng De wrote a short essay published on the same page as Jia Fangzhou's article, ridiculing artists for subjecting themselves to rationalist ideas and philosophy. "The spread of the philosophical turn in art," he said, "would do harm both to art and philosophy."[92]

In 1988, the art critic Li Xianting invited Meng Luding, who was then teaching in the fourth painting studio of Central Academy of Fine Art, to write an essay, "The

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[89] See Glossary for explanations of Scar Art and Rustic Realism.
[90] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts*, 186–88.
[91] Jia Fangzhou, "Huidao yishu de benti shanglai" ("Return to the Ontology of Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 49 (December 1988): 1.
[92] Peng De, "Lixing meishu de juxian" ("The Limitation of Rationalist Painting"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 49 (December 1988): 1.

Process of Purification," commending technique in art.[93] In his short essay, Meng wrote about Wang Yuping and Shen Ling, both students of the Fourth Painting Studio at CAFA.[94] [Figure 4.16] Through their works, he argued that shape, color, line and surface are the basic elements of painting, like words and sentences in literature. The artists, he wrote, conveyed subjective observations in their unique approaches to their subjects—the concept of uniqueness and individuality was important to Meng—but also achieved a high level of precision and deftness in their technique and in their processes of research and completion of their works. Crucial to the essay was his thesis that technique and formal expression in art were the primary concern of art-making. He wrote

> The emergence of any new art, requires an artist to intuitively experience and rationally interpret culture as a totality, as well as to translate that experience into a perfect and unique language; the language of any enduring artwork in the art history has always undergone a process of being continuously purified until perfection is achieved, since the value of language affects the value of content.[95]

Meng Luding's own work at this time was taking an abstract turn away from figurative paintings, such as those discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Three. An abstract mixed media work titled *Noise* (*Zaoyin* 噪音, 1988) was featured in the exhibition *Today's Art* (*Jinri yishu* 今日艺术) at the Shanghai Museum of Art

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[93] Li had specified that he didn't necessarily support the purification of language. He saw himself as an editor whose role was to make visible various perspectives on issues. Li, "What is Significant," 56.
[94] Meng Luding, "Chunhua de guocheng" ("The Process of Purification"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 18 (May 1988): 1.
[95] Meng, "The Process," 1.

on April 22–28, 1988. [Figure 4.17] *Today's Art* introduced a dozen young artists, including Meng Luding and Yin Qi from Beijing, Xu Hong from Shanghai, and Tang Song and Liu Anping from Hangzhou. The works focused on the materiality of painting in experimentation with mixed media.[96]

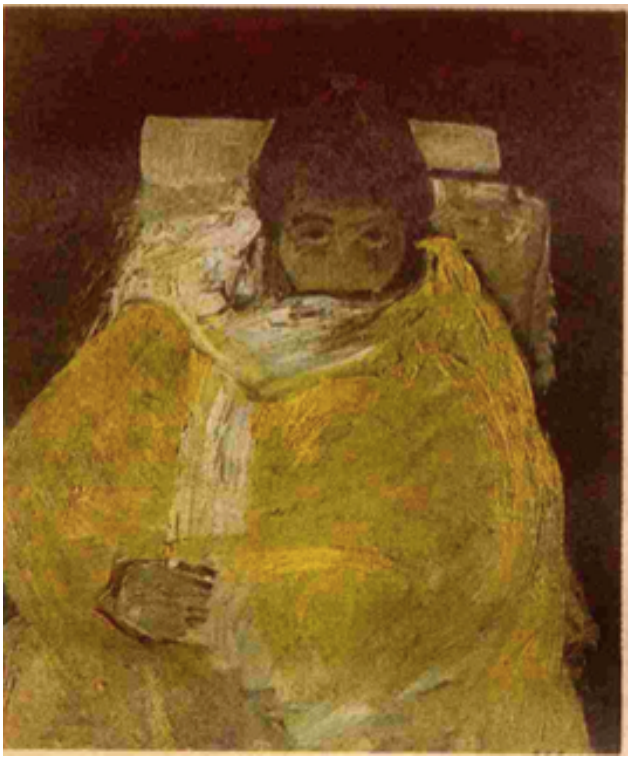

Figure 4.16: Wang Yuping, *Portrait*, 1987, oil on canvas.

[96] Gu Liming, "Xiezai Shanghai jinri yishu zhan zhihou" ("Written after *Today's Art* Exhibition in Shanghai"), *Fine Arts in China,* no. 33 (August 1988): 1.

Figure 4.17: Meng Luding, *Noise*, 1987, oil on canvas.

To ignite the debate on the purification of language, at the beginning of 1988 Li Xianting orchestrated a confrontation between two positions, one advocated by Meng Luding—who as noted had by then switched to abstract painting — and the other by Li Xianting himself, in support of art that addressed social, political and humanistic issues. Meng emphasized the importance of keeping art as art, not weighed down by narrative figuration, whereas Li suggested that purifying the language of art without keeping in mind its cultural context would lead to anemic academicism. Li called for a "big soul" (*dalinghun* 大灵魂), insisting that art give voice to social and humanistic concerns.[97] In October 1988, *Art* magazine organized a discussion around the theme of "Art and Culture, Spirit and Language," re-evaluating the relationship between

[97] Hu Cun, "Shidai qidaizhe dalinghun de shengming jiqing" ("The Era Awaits the Big Soul's Passion About Life"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 37 (September 1988): 1–2.

artistic language and culture.[98] There was now a sense of urgency in this discussion: it was obviously necessary to purify, improve, and upgrade art beyond the "rough" and crude language of earlier times. None of the critique of the lack of technical sufficiency in works of New Wave art, however, pointed to a specific example of an artwork or of an artist. Rather, it was a general observation based on an overall impression of the works and exhibitions of New Wave art. In effect, it was a way of creating a discursive target against which the discussion on artistic language would be directed and unfold.

Conclusion

Over the two-year span covered in this chapter, it is clear that advocates of the so-called "purification of language," mainly young graduates and teachers of art academies such as Meng Luding and Ma Gang, were proposing a way of making art that would shift the aesthetic trends of art away from the ideas, literary content and meanings that had so dominated the work of young artists involved in the New Wave during the mid-1980s. This new argument relegated every consideration beyond the technical and stylistic aspects of art to that of tired "politics." Artists and writers such as Jia Fangzhou, Xu Bing and Meng Luding saw the New Wave, with all its emphasis on literary ideas, as a risky instrumentalizing of art, similar to the way art had been politicized during the Mao era. Yet in trying to counteract the tendency, they set up an oversimplified binary between art and politics, between art and thought, between form and content, and between modernity and backwardness. This discussion turned out to

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[98] The Art and Culture, Spirit and Language Symposium was organized by *Art* magazine on October 5, 1988. It was attended by Shao Dazhen, Liu Dong, Gao Minglu, Zhou Yan, Fan Di'an and Xu Bing. See Huang Du, "'Yishu yu wenhua·jingshen yu yuyan zuotanhui' jiyao" ("A Summary of the Art and Culture, Spirit and Language Symposium"), *Art*, no. 12 (December 1988): 4–9.

be the new ideological structure for literature and art for following decades, but it significantly limited the vision of practicing artists and theoreticians to formal and technical concerns as the legitimate core of art. The compelling consequence of the writers' "purification of language" lay not in how their campaign manifested, but in the fact that it went on to replace the movement that it criticized. On the surface, the target was the overconceptualization of art at the cost of neglecting artistic language. Deep down, it led to the exclusion of social, political, cultural and intellectual concerns in favor of single-mindedly pursuing stylistic, aesthetic and technical excellence.

The wave of "purification of language" led to the rise of a neo-academic school of art (*Xin xueyuanpai* 新学院派), a new trend that emerged from 1988 onwards.[99] The logic backing the politics was that the development of art should be evolutionary (*jinhuade* 进化的), one cycle of development replaced by another at regular intervals. In each cycle, new visual experiences obliterated previous canons, leading to revolution. After such a clash, people absorbed new concepts and trends, re-establishing what appeared to be a different visual order. The "purification of language" represented art arriving at the latter point. This revolutionary model of thinking reflected the hyperactive but confused art world of the end of the decade, which we can more or less formularize in the following precepts: Let art return to art itself; art isn't a footnote to ideas, nor an interpretation of ideas. Neither is art a vessel for political, social or intellectual articulations and functions. Art has its independent language and value. Artists should receive formal and strict training in basic

[99] Sun Zhenhua, "Jianli meishu xinzhixu: ping xin xueyuanpai huazhan" ("Establishing a New Order of Art: A Review of New Academic Painting Exhibition"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 10 (March 1989): 4.

techniques. Artworks must be above popular art.[100] This idea conveniently deprived art of its previously valued social and ideological potential and essentially reduced it to a craft, easily controlled and easily contained inside the academic realm.

Under the influence of the "purification of language," ideology-free and depoliticized artworks became the new embodiment of the political ideal. Coincident with the discussion on "purification of language," Xu Bing (徐冰, b.1955) and Lyu Shengzhong (吕胜中, b.1952), both MA graduates of CAFA in 1987, gained widespread attention with their duo exhibitions at NAMOC in 1988.[101] Xu Bing's exhibition featured *Book from the Sky*, an installation comprising woodblock-printed books and scroll-like lengths of paper printed with false characters designed by the artist in a Song-style font standardized in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). [Figure 4.18] Xu Bing had hand-carved over 4,000 moveable type printing blocks. Such a meticulous and exhaustive production process required patience and dedication. It impressed and generated overwhelming compliments for its sophistication.[102] It had been Xu Bing's own intention to develop and achieve technical superiority within the medium of printmaking. And during his own intense trip to northern Shaanxi province, known for its rough, arid terrain, Lyu Shengzhong had been inspired by papercuts

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[100] Sun, "Establishing a New Order," 4.

[101] Xu Bing's exhibition was titled *Xishijian-shijie mojuan* (*A Mirror to Analyze the World: The Last Book of the End of the Century*) and Lyu Shengzhong's show was titled *Lyu Shengzhong jianzhi yishuzhan* (*Lyu Shengzhong's Paper-cut Art*). The exhibition dates were October 15–23, 1988.

[102] A symposium was organized at CAFA to discuss Xu Bing's works in this exhibition, moderated by Fan Di'an and attended by Shao Dazhen, Zhong Han, Du Jian, Zhou Yan, Jia Fangzhou etc. See Zhong Hua, "Zhongguo xiandai zhuyi de chuxian, shidai pubian yishi de tixian: zhongyang meishu xueyuan zuotan Xu Bing yishu" ("The Appearance of Chinese Modernism, the Manifestation of the Era's Universal Consciousness: CAFA Symposium on Xu Bing's Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 46 (November 1988): 1. Besides compliments, Xu Bing's work also attracted criticism. Art critic Wang Lin, for instance, stated that Xu Bing's false characters had been influenced by the pseudo-character works by Gu Wenda and Wu Shanzhuan, but that Xu Bing's characters had none of the resistance towards or discordance with authority intended by Gu and Wu and in comparison were docile, purified, academic and ready to comply. See Wang Lin, "Xu Bing yishu: Chenggong de beihou" ("Xu Bing's Art: At the Back of Success"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 22 (May 1989): 1.

made by local peasant women in the shapes of frogs, mice, pomegranates, lotus flowers and rabbits. In his first solo show at NAMOC in 1988, Lyu turned the art gallery into a temple filled with totem-like images, with papercuts of footprints suspended in mid-air and silhouette patterns accompanied by illegible calligraphy. [Figure 4.19] Speaking of the ideas behind his works, Lyu traced his inspiration to Chinese folk art and to his desire to make his artworks relevant to people's daily lives. To do so, he felt that he "should try to make his art [based on folk art aesthetics] look like a contemporary thing."[103]

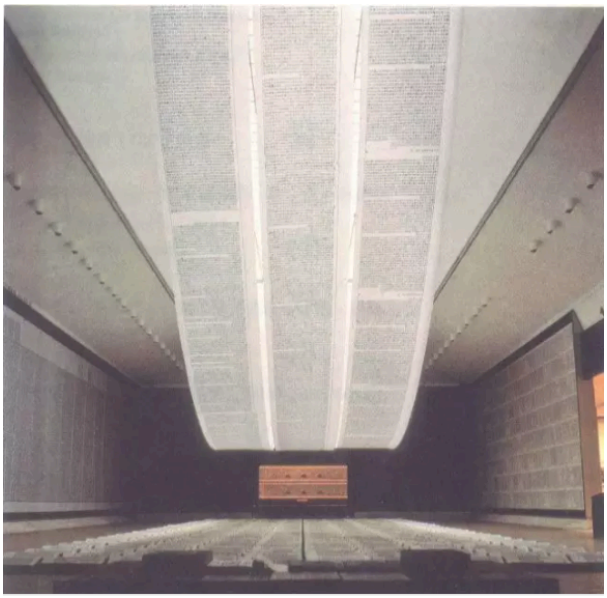

Figure 4.18: Xu Bing, *A Book from the Sky*, 1988, mixed media installation, NAMOC.

[103] Edward L. Davis ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 501; see also Yin Jinan, "Xu Bing, Lyu Shengzhong yishuzhan guanhou" ("After Seeing Xu Bing and Lyu Shengzhong's Exhibitions"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 46 (November 1988): 1.

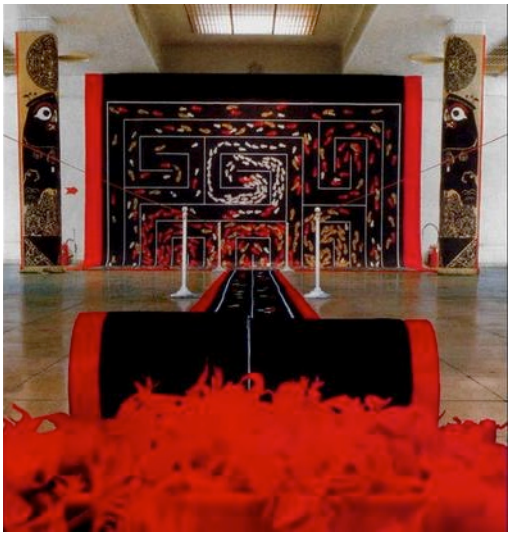

Figure 4.19: Lyu Shengzhong, installation view of *Lyu Shengzhong Paper-Cut Art Show*, 1988, NAMOC.

The works of both Xu Bing and Lyu Shengzhong can be situated amidst the discussion about "purifying language." As Xu Bing emphasized:

> I place my intention in the exploration of the language of printmaking and its technical features, to enable the language of printmaking to reach the purest state. In my view, when purifying language, artists can achieve purification and elevation of the spirit and of art.[104]

Xu equated the specific technical process of making and perfection to the fulfillment of a work's conceptual and literary potential. This was affirmed by many art critics. Du Jian (杜键, b.1933) was impressed by both shows. He felt that both shared the characteristics of "having a strong modern spirit and being groundbreaking," and that "they were not employing existing languages of art but were using unique languages of art they had created themselves." So he considered this "Chinese modernist art in

[104] Huang, "A Summary," 4–9.

the real sense ... which had achieved a thorough and unprecedented level of purity."[105] Jia Fangzhou echoed Du Jian's compliment, arguing that in Xu Bing's works the content and the language were in perfect unity, writing, "[t]he artist cut off the possibility of the audience wishing to understand the work through reading the characters. Instead, he incorporated his thinking, rich in philosophical meaning, into a highly purified visual language, which was quite a success and a valuable exploration."[106]

The "purification of language" debate of 1988 showed that there was definitely a sea change underway. From this point on, technical and stylistic intentions would be the priority. As a result, artists would voluntarily abandon ideological and societal issues, depoliticizing their works. The shift would soon be accelerated by the aftermath of the 1989 Tian'anmen Democracy Movement, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

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[105] Zhong, "The Appearance of Chinese Modernism," 1.
[106] Zhong, "The Appearance of Chinese Modernism," 1.

Chapter Five
Within and Without the State, 1989-1996

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine a chain of consequences that ensued from the events of 1989.[1] I connect intentions and actions to ideology. None of these were separate. On the contrary, art in the years after 1989 must be seen in relation to official frameworks at all times, but for my thesis this will mean unravelling the claims made by artists and writers as they began particular projects. I have already argued that the state and the systems that it supported were intrinsic in the development of contemporary art in China. This, and not the tropes of alienation, otherness and avant-garde subculture so familiar in modern and contemporary Western art history, are what we should pay particular attention to here. In effect, the creation of art and public events and exhibitions of art were to remain very significantly enfolded within the horizon of state ideology, while understandings of its course diverged under the influence of notions of avant-garde and Western art discourses.

The events of 1989 severely dampened the intellectual and idealistic spirit of the optimistic period described across the last two chapters.[2] The failure of the student

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[1] My perspective for analyzing the early 1990s is inspired by Chinese thinker Wang Hui's work "Intellectual State of Contemporary China and the Issue of Modernity" ("Dangdai zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing"), a text he first drafted in 1994. See Wang Hui, *Quzhengzhihua de Zhengzhi: Duan 20 shiji de Zhongjie Yu 90 niandai (Depoliticized Politics: The End of the 20th Century and the 90s)* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2008), 58–97.

[2] Urban anger was exacerbated by widespread official corruption, which seemed much worse than even during the Cultural Revolution. These two pressures provided the urban fuel for the explosion of student demonstrations in Tian'anmen in the spring of 1989. See Timothy Cheek, *Living With Reform: China Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 80.

movement in June 1989 sparked somber reflections among Chinese intellectuals on the limitations of potential change. Some, such as Wang Qishan (王歧山, b.1948), had participated directly in policy-making on a governmental level and interacted closely with the inner circles of government.[3] They believed that the key to solving the problem of corruption lay in their friends and patrons gaining power inside government. In the meantime, they were worried that radical student movements would disrupt gradual progress towards reform. Such worries were part of the continuing ascendency of conservatism.[4] While the space for political freedom was unequivocally constrained after 1989, many still believed that ongoing economic development would eventually lead to democratization.[5]

Meanwhile, Chinese society hurtled on like a high-speed train; relentless economic development swept across all walks of life. Deng Xiaoping's South China tour, from January 18 to February 21 in 1992, reasserted his economic agenda for the whole country.[6] [Figure 5.1] He set out a continuation of the program of economic reform and opening-up that he had set in motion in December 1978, and now he accelerated that program.[7] A market economy was the new order that would distinguish the

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3 Wang Qishan was a member of the editorial board of the *Towards the Future* (*Zouxiang weilai* 走向未来) book series from 1984 to 1988. In 1988, Wang was transferred to become the chief executive of the Agricultural Investment Trust of China. A year later he became Vice-Governor at China Construction Bank and then its Governor from 1994 to 1997. On March 17, 2018, he became the Vice-President of China.

4 Wang Hui, "Zhongguo 'xinziyouzhuyi' de lishi genyuan: zailun dangdai zhongguo dalu de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti" ("The Historical Roots of "Neo-liberalism" in China: Revisiting Intellectual State and the Issue of Modernity in Mainland China"), in *Depoliticized Politics*, 125.

5 Wang, *Depoliticized Politics*, 131.

6 For a detailed discussion of Deng Xiaoping's South China tour, its agenda and ramifications, see Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013).

7 The Chinese Communist Party's initial reform policies were announced at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. See Cheek, *Living With Reform*, 62.

1990s from the 1980s.[8]

Figure 5.1: Deng Xiaoping on tour in southern China in early 1992.

Within the art world, the market for contemporary art emerged as a clear phenomenon after 1989. In *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (2014), Jane DeBevoise paints a meticulous picture of the socio-economic context inside which contemporary art in mainland China was produced and circulated from 1978 to 1993. According to DeBevoise, the process of institutional change and the gradual shift away from a centralized structure of government-sponsored support and control led to a diversified system, but one increasingly reliant on financial incentives, private enterprise and the market.[9] The connections and parallels she correctly observes between the state support system and the initiatives of individual artists and critics represent more than just that; they

[8] The 14th Party Congress of 1992 legislated this commitment to reform in the name of 'socialist market economy,' based on the 'theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics.' See Cheek, *Living With Reform*, 82.

[9] Jane DeBevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 270.

complicate the self-proclaimed radical legitimacy of contemporary art critics and artists advocating for an art market at the beginning of the 1990s. DeBevoise explains that the aspiration to establish a domestic market for contemporary art at the beginning of the 1990s was derived from the vision of reformists within officialdom from the early 1980s onwards, and was always reliant upon the state and its mandate.[10] The state, artistic experimentation and the market are always profoundly linked in China. The art market was a manifestation of state ideology in the post-Mao period, no different to other spheres of life.

The possibility that artists could aspire to economic independence from sales of their work had begun to appear during the later 1980s, and was now further propelled by the government's introduction of market principles into the state-run system.[11] These market principles enabled particular artists and curators to develop their professional standing outside the familiar state-supported structures. The possibility of earning an income outside of official institutions meant that two types of artists prospered. The first type was commercial painters (*shangpin huajia* 商品画家), primarily art academy graduates or artists working within governmental cultural institutions, who produced paintings specifically for commercial galleries according to their demands.[12] Yan Zhenduo, who I mentioned in Chapter Two as a key founder of the Beijing Oil

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[10] DeBevoise, *Between State and Market*, 270.

[11] In 1987, Yan Zhenduo and Ye Wulin (b.1944) proposed an open-air market for oil paintings like a farmer's market. They pointed out that there were about 250 oil painters in Beijing and 99 per cent of their works had no chance to circulate. See "Jianyi kaiban 'youhua shichang'" ("A Proposal to Establish 'A Market for Oil Paintings'"), *Zhongguo meishubao* (*Fine Arts in China*), no. 10 (March 1987): 2.

[12] Artists Zhang Huan and Cang Xin made such paintings to sustain a living while making performance works in the early 1990s. See Duan Jun, *20 shiji 90 niandai beijing dongcun xingwei yishu* (*Performance Art in East Village in Beijing in the 1990s*) (Hong Kong: Four Seasons Publishing House, 2016), 23.

Painting Society, for example, was making paintings specifically for such a purpose.[13] In Beijing, a number of galleries mostly located in hotel lobbies and cultural institutions, such as the Beijing Concert Hall Art Gallery (*Beijing yinyueting hualang* 北京音乐厅画廊) and the Beijing International Art Palace (*Guoji yiyuan meishuguan* 国际艺苑美术馆), sold their works.[14] The second type was professional painters (*zhiye huajia* 职业画家) who were also art graduates, predominantly from the leading academies in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Chongqing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. They either did not have secure jobs or were not happy with the jobs they could find, and instead sought to establish themselves as full-time artists resisting commercial formulas. Some of these professional painters were self-taught.[15] The appearance of the Summer Palace Art Village (*Yuanmingyuan huajiacun* 圆明园画家村) and the East Village (*Dongcun* 东村) in Beijing was symptomatic of these artists leaving behind official employment and the prospect of state employment and trying to make livelihoods outside of the institutional structure. Among them were Beijing locals and artists from the provinces. They rented low-cost, affordable housing with very basic facilities in the villages around the Summer Palace in West Beijing. They showed their works in foreign embassies, hotels and commercial galleries. By the beginning of the 1990s, curators, dealers and gallerists, some from

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[13] Yan Zhenduo, interview with author, Beijing, December 2016.

[14] Chen Xiaoxin, "1990–1992 nian Zhongguo (dalu) meishu dashiji shulue" ("A Summary of Art Events in Mainland China 1990–1992"), in *90 niandai Zhongguo meishu* (*Chinese Art in the 1990s: 1990-1992*), ed. Zhang Qing (Urumqi: Xinjiang Art and Photography Publishing House, 1996), 192.

[15] Zhang Xiaojun, "Shangpin huajia: yishu xiang jinqian tuoxie" ("Commercial Painters: Art Making Compromise to Money") and "Zhiye huajia: kewang yishu, ye kewang shenghuo" ("Professional Painters: Longing for Art and Longing for Life"), in *Xunfang zhaji: laizi jiushi niandai de yishu xianchang* (*Travellog: From the Art Scene of the 1990s*) (Beijing: Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Associations Publishing House, 2011), 90–1.

Hong Kong, were frequenting artists' studios in this area.[16] Elsewhere, there were enterprising groups of recently graduated artists in southern cities including Shenzhen. They were employed by companies that exported decorative paintings or set up their own art businesses, forced to do this by the exigencies of financial reality.[17]

To a large degree, the state's decision after 1989 to tighten ideological control and contain the spaces within which intellectuals could discuss ideas and artists share their works aggravated the split between those who were more inclined towards the avant-garde and revolutionary aspects of contemporary artistic thinking, and those who intended to make changes and work within the official system—two groups that we have repeatedly encountered in this thesis. In the 1980s, the differentiation between these groups had appeared as a difference in artistic positions, such as the split between formal experimentation and the renewal of concepts, which was discussed in Chapter Three. After 1989, the split was more complicated. For instance, the art critic Li Xianting was made redundant in 1990 after the newspaper *Fine Arts in China*, for which he worked, was closed by the Cultural Ministry.[18] As a result of the renewed assertion of political control, artists and critics, especially those who had experienced pressure from and tension within the official structure, gradually formed a particular vision of what contemporary art would be. Superficially the distinction was based on whether the artist was affiliated with an official body, but gradually employment status became less relevant than the type of artwork and its means of

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[16] Zhang Xiaojun, "Yuanmingyuan huajiaqun" ("The Summer Palace Painters' Crowd"), *Meishujia Tongxun* (*Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*), no.7 (1992): 12–14.
[17] Zhang, "The Summer Palace Painters' Crowd," 12–14.
[18] *Fine Arts in China* was published from July 5, 1985 to December 31, 1989. See "Zai benbao gongzuoguo de renyuan mingdan" ("A List of Staff Members Who Have Worked in this Newspaper"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 52 (December 1989): 2.

circulation.

As artists and curators assumed professional identities based on international models in the 1990s, they also reinvented the globally familiar infrastructure for Chinese contemporary art, including commercial galleries with regular cycles of exhibitions, which would lead to the establishment of collecting art museums with acquisition budgets and public education programs, and the expectation that artworks could circulate commercially. In practice, this new infrastructure would intersect and overlap with the official bureaucratic structures that pre-dated them. But the prospect of an expanded infrastructure and the gradual emergence of a considerable domestic market for contemporary art further aggravated the division between those who depended on the official art institutions and those whose work circulated within this new infrastructure.

The division between the two broad camps of artists was essentially more emotional than real, with each side jealous of the other. Therefore, official art and so-called contemporary art became two parallel tracks operating separately. To illustrate this, in the 1980s, many exhibitions and events involving artists from the New Wave movement were backed by official organizations ranging from the editorial board of *Art* magazine to the CAA.[19] After 1989, however, more and more exhibitions took

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19 For example, in 1986, young artists in Hubei created many artworks, and as Hubei Artists' Association had no art museum of its own, it encouraged artists to look for exhibition venues themselves and organize their own shows. The artists selected their own works and organized twenty-nine exhibitions in different cities across the province. This was the formation of the Hubei Youth Arts Festival. See Lang Shaojun, "Hubei qingnian meishujie yinxiang" ("Impression of Hubei Youth Arts Festival"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 52 (December 1986): 1. Another example was the "*'85 New Wave Slide Show and Symposium in the Zhuhai Institute of Paintings*" (*85 qingnian meishu sichao daxing huandengzhan ji xueshu taolunhui*) discussed in Chapter Three.

place in commercial galleries, in temporarily sourced or rented venues, and in overseas museums, places that didn't require government backing in terms of organization and funding. These institutions became the primary platforms for contemporary art, and their exhibitions evolved very differently to those organized by the CAA and its local branches. These two art worlds were generally differentiated by the different media that artists used, the artists' institutional affiliations (or lack thereof), the subject matter of works, whether presentations were public or semi-public, and the means and circles of distribution.

The Proliferation of Entrepreneurship

In the art world, as across the rest of Chinese society, the spirit of entrepreneurship was promoted from the end of the 1970s onwards by everyone with public power and influence. By contrast, from 1949 up to 1966, the Communist Party had established a complex system of institutional structures to support artistic and cultural production—including the production and publication of art criticism—as well as to control these outputs.[20] During the Cultural Revolution, as I explained in earlier chapters, this system was paralyzed and officials and artists within the system were publicly criticized, suspended from their jobs, or imprisoned. After 1977, the same official structures slowly returned to normal. During this process of recovery, high-level cultural officials, principally Jiang Feng and Liu Xun, advocated for greater freedom in art. Jiang Feng had proclaimed in his widely circulated foreword to the seminal *New Spring Art Exhibition* that artists should be able to exhibit and sell their works freely. His younger colleague, Liu Xun, was later to establish the Beijing

[20] See Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (California: University of California Press, 1994).

International Art Palace in 1987. This commercial gallery mostly provided opportunities for academic oil painters to sell paintings to augment their state-controlled salaries, as we saw in Chapter Four.

This was not just an isolated business venture carried out by government officials from inside state-led art circuits. Founded in July 1985, the newspaper *Fine Arts in China* was both the result of the implementation of the "Reform and Opening-Up" policy of the 1980s and became its witness and chronicler. During those years, economic reforms in China sped up as the second stage of development commenced. This involved privatization and the contracting out of much state-owned industry. In the spring of 1984, many cultural newspapers including *Cinema* (*Dianyingbao*《电影报》), *Drama* (*Xijubao*《戏剧报》) and *Literature* (*Wenxuebao*《文学报》) started or relaunched.[21] In early 1985, five young researchers at the Institute of Fine Arts in the Chinese National Academy of Arts (*Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan meishu yanjiusuo* 中国艺术研究院美术研究所)—Zhang Qiang, Liu Xiaochun, Yang Gengxin, Zhang Zuying and Liu Huimin—heard that the government would soon loosen restrictions on the approval of new schools, newspapers, magazines and film productions.[22] Even individuals could apply for a license to start up a newspaper.[23] Taking advantage of the "contracting-out system," they borrowed RMB 200,000 (equivalent to AUD 45,000) from their work unit and started *Fine Arts in China* as an independent

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[21] See Ni Shili, "Xuwenyi: shengming de xueleishi" ("The History of Blood and Tears of Life"), in *Jue Zhi Meng* (*Dream of Consciousness*) (Taizhong: White Elephant Publishing, 2015), 4.
[22] Ni, *Dream*, 3–4. The first three studied art history at CAFA and worked as art history researchers at the CNAA after graduation. Zhang Zuying, an oil painter, graduated from the Department of Stage and Fine Arts of Shanghai Theatre Academy, and Liu Huimin, having studied Russian at Beijing Foreign Studies University, worked as a translator of fine arts theory.
[23] Ni, *Dream*, 3–4.

operation.[24] It would be the first newspaper specializing in art since the founding of the PRC.

The fact of an art market remained distant for almost all artists until well into the 1990s, but the idea was rather romantically imagined as the alternative to enmeshment with the state, even though by then the market was a part of the nascent entrepreneurial discourse of the state. In a key essay, "The Intellectual State and the Issue of Modernity in Contemporary China" (1994), Wang Hui pointed out that the events of 1989 didn't change the course of reform in China. On the contrary, pushed by the government, the pace of reform in the economy and in legislative action was more radical than during the most open years in the 1980s.[25]

This looked to Western commentators as if the market now had made inroads into the once-overwhelming system of state patronage of the arts.[26] The truth was somewhat different. It is a fact that from June 1989 through to 1991, there was a dearth of exhibition opportunities for avant-garde artists.[27] Many artists and art critics who had been active during the '85 Movement, not least Gao Minglu, Huang Yongping, Yang Jiechang and Fei Dawei, left China for destinations that included Europe and North America. As Wu Hung pointed out, "A new kind of individualized space was opened

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[24] Ni, *Dream*, 3–4. The *chengbao* system referred to the private or individual contracting of the operation of public assets such as bus lines, hospitals, and schools. The operators paid a fee as well as a percentage of the profit generated to the state. It was regarded as a form of entrepreneurship.
[25] Wang Hui, "Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiangzhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti" ("The Intellectual State and The Issue of Modernity in Contemporary China"), in *Depoliticized Politics,* 58.
[26] Richard Curt Kraus, *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).
[27] Lyu Peng, "Qianyan" ("Forward"), in *Guangzhou Shuangnianzhan 20 zhounian wenxianji* (*A Collection of Documents Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Guangzhou Biennale*), ed. Lyu Peng (Chengdu: Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2013), 1.

up when a 'craze for going abroad' (*chuguo re* 出国热) besieged the Chinese art world from the late 1980s to early 1990s, which resulted in the exodus of more than a thousand young artists to foreign countries."[28] For instance, Gao Minglu was awarded an American Academy of Sciences "American Academic Exchange Committee" postdoctoral scholarship in 1991, which allowed him to go to the US to research and study at Ohio University and Harvard University. Fei Dawei, Huang Yongping and Yang Jiechang all went to Paris for the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, Huang and Yang as participating artists and Fei as a facilitator to the curatorial team, and found ways to stay on.[29] This was a transitional period in Chinese society, and many artists were surprised by the arrival of the market economy. Artist Zhang Xiaogang remembered that when he arrived in Shenzhen from Germany in 1992, he was overwhelmed by the fact that all of his friends asked if he had a contract with a gallery, because all of them did; he was the only one who was not yet signed up with a gallery.[30] While artists could still aspire to a job in an art school, publishing house or university, they could also choose to be free of the old system, and for some that meant exploring opportunities overseas.

In 1990, even Lyu Peng was suspended from his job as Deputy Secretary at the Association of Literature (*Wenlian* 文联), a position he had held for five years,

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[28] Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970–2000s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 13.

[29] *Magiciens de la Terre,* Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Hall de La Villete, Paris, May 18–August 14, 1989. It was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin, with Mark Francis, Aline Luque and Andre Magnin. For a collection of writings on the exhibition, see Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013).

[30] Zhang Xiaogang, interview with author, Liu Ding, Su Wei, Edori Café, Beijing, December 12, 2011, in *Geti jingyan: 1989–2000 nian Zhongguo dangdai yishu shijian de duihua yu xushu* (*Individual Experience: Conversations and Narratives of Contemporary Art Practice in China from 1989 to 2000*), ed. Liu Ding, Carol Yinghua Lu and Su Wei (Guangzhou: Lingnan Fine Art Publishing House, 2013), 94.

because he tended to speak his mind too directly at work meetings. He would retain his job title but not his salary (*tingxinliuzhi* 停薪留职).[31] That year, he discussed with colleagues at Hunan Fine Art Publishing House how to promote and support new art. A journal published by the press had recently been suspended as a penalty for publishing sensitive content. Lyu suggested replacing it with a completely new journal that wouldn't include ideological discussions or be controversial but would address the art market. The magazine would introduce Western art market coverage, and hopefully draw an influential domestic audience inside China keen to appreciate the financial value of art. Lyu wrote, "through our choice of artists and art, this magazine could strategically support the development of Chinese modern art."[32] By the end of 1990, *Art & Market* (*Yishu shichang*《艺术·市场》) commenced publication with Lyu as editor.[33] [Figure 5.2] In his editorial to the inaugural issue, Lyu stated that the task of the magazine was "to provide academically authoritative background materials and information on Chinese art and artists for dealers of paintings, collectors, art agents, gallerists and publishers across the world in order to alert them to the promising direction of art collecting and help them identify the precise subjects for investment in the art market."[34] Lyu Peng went on to explain that the magazine would also bring to the Chinese art community information about art markets and

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31 This was supposed to be a punishment for Lyu's poor performance at work. Lyu's outspoken comments in academic meetings brought many warnings from the leadership of the CCP committee and the local Propaganda Department. See Lyu Peng, "Sishi xiaojie" ("A Summary at the Age of 40"), Art China, accessed November 10, 2017, http://art.china.cn/voice/2010-11/02/content_3807763.htm.

32 Lyu, "Forward," in *A Collection of Documents,* 1.

33 The first three issues of *Art & Market* was published by Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, where Li Luming was the editor overseeing the publication of this magazine. Li Luming had studied with Zhang Qing during his time at the Institute of Fine Arts of the Chinese National Academy of Arts in the late 1980s. From the fourth issue, *Art & Market* was published by Sichuan Fine Arts Publishing House (*Sichuan meishu chubanshe*).

34 Lyu Peng, "Yishu shichang 1991 nian diyiqi bianzhe qianyan" ("Editorial Foreword to the first issue of *Art Market* in 1991"), in *A Collection of Documents,* 92–3.

institutions from the rest of the world. By the latter half of 1991, Lyu managed to find investors to support his next venture, the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*.[35] His aim was to explore how to engage the new class of economic entrepreneurs with contemporary art.[36]

Figure 5.2: The first three issues of *Art & Market* magazine, 1990–1991.

This exhibition is known in China as the first Guangzhou Biennale (*Guangzhou shuangnianzhan* 广州双年展), but its formal title, the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*, though clunky, better communicates its mercantile ambition. It took place at the Guangzhou Central Hotel (*Guangzhou zhongyang jiudian* 广州中央酒店) in Guangzhou from October 20–28, 1992, after Deng's epochal Southern Tour in Spring 1992. With the art fair and the magazine *Art & Market* (nine issues were published between 1991 and 1994), Lyu Peng was drawing up a blueprint for the future of Chinese art, one that would be part of the new,

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[35] Lyu Peng, interview with Yung.
[36] Lyu, *A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China,* 877.

red-blooded, market-focused economy. Along with his friends and a group of young and, significantly, also mid-career critics (including Yin Shuangxi, Yi Ying, Peng De and Huang Zhuan), Lyu Peng published articles that introduced the concept of an international art market and wrote many of the essays himself.[37]

As Artistic Director of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*, Lyu Peng was determined to invent a financially lucrative model. He convinced the Chengdu-based Xishu Art Company's (*Xishu yishu gongsi* 西蜀艺术公司) General Manager Luo Haiquan (罗海全) to be its major funder. The company was set up by the Chengdu Branch of the China Auto Parts and Accessories Corporation (*Zhongqi lingbujian Chengdu xiaoshou gongsi* 中汽零部件成都销售公司).[38] They signed a contract with Lyu Peng, in which he was commissioned to plan and execute the exhibition in exchange for 20 per cent of its profits; Xishu Art Company would receive the remaining 80 per cent. Further, Lyu established an investment committee consisting of seven corporations, including the Xishu Art Company, and each was expected to invest RMB 1,500,000 (equivalent to AUD 330,000) into the event.[39]

Lyu stressed that this would be an investment, not a sponsorship. The investors would be rewarded with waived registration fees, free admissions and a percentage of the

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[37] Some examples include: Yin Shuangxi, "Youhua chuangzuo yu shichang" ("The Creation and Market of Oil Paintings"), *Yishu shichang* (*Art & Market*), no. 6 (February 1992): 51–3; Peng De, "Piping yu runbi" ("Art Criticism and Commissioned Writing"), *Art & Market*, no. 5 (September 1991): n.p.; Kong Chang'an, "Huihua yishu shichang wenti mantan" ("An Informal Discussion on the Market Issue of Paintings"), *Art & Market,* no. 1 (January 1991), n.p.; "Guanyu Zhongguo dalu yishujia zai shichangzhong de xintai: fang pipingjia Lyu Peng" ("About How Chinese Artists Think in the Market: Interview with Lyu Peng), *Art & Market*, no. 6 (February 1992): 56–7.

[38] Lyu Peng, "Wo de lichang" ("My Standpoint"), *Art & Market,* no. 9 (March 1994): 6.

[39] See invitation, exhibition and sales contract in Lyu Peng archive, at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

sales of artworks. An elaborate set of support tiers was mapped out in a marketing brochure, highlighting returns from artwork sales and visibility in domestic publications, including *Art & Market*, as well as on television.[40] Throughout the preparations for the biennial, everyone was intensely aware of the importance of publicity in mass media, with paid media coverage placed in art magazines, including in *Art & Market* and *Fine Arts*, as well as in the mainstream media.[41] [Figure 5.3]

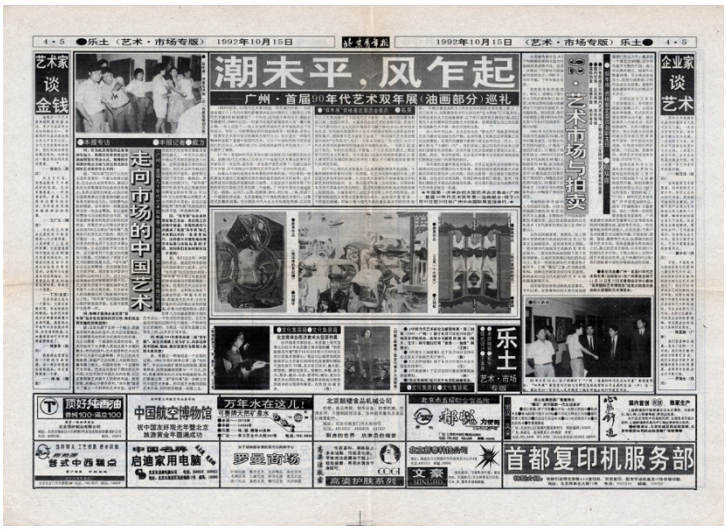

Figure 5.3: Coverage of the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair, *Beijing Youth Daily* (October 15, 1992), 4–5.

Part of the plan for the Biennial was that each participating artist would pay RMB 300 (equivalent of AUD 65) as their registration fee and would receive a receipt as proof. Three hundred and fifty artists with approximately six hundred artworks registered for the Biennial. The majority were mainland Chinese, with a few entries from foreign countries, including Britain and Italy. Prizes were judged by a jury of art critics and

[40] Sponsorship (investment) brochure, February 1992, Lyu Peng archive at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong.

[41] See a full-page advertisement for the *Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair*, in *Shenzhen tequbao* (*Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Newspaper*) (November 25, 1992): 12, in Lyu Peng archive at Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong; see also advertisement in *Art & Market*, no. 6 (1992): 67 and *Meishu* (*Art*), no. 5 (1992): 72.

the winning works could then be collected by the investors: RMB 50,000 for the first prize works (there were 2 first prizes), RMB 30,000 for the second prize works (5 second prizes), and RMB 10,000 for the third prize works (20 third prizes). The amounts of the prizes were also the sales prices.[42]

For this ambitious plan, Lyu Peng set up a group of thirteen art critics to judge the works. The thirteen critics comprised Peng De, Yin Shuangxi, Pi Daojian, Chen Xiaoxin, Yi Ying, Gu Chengfeng, Yang Li, Yi Dan, Yan Shanchun, Shao Hong, Yang Xiaoyan, Huang Zhuan and Zhu Bin.[43] They were Lyu's peers and members of the editorial board for *Art & Market*. Each critic received a fee of RMB 3000. Altogether the critics selected 400 from the 600 works and these were shown in the exhibition. [Figure 5.4] From those, ninety were nominated for the second round of judging. The jury then selected fifty-four works from which Lyu Peng would select the final twenty-seven works and determine the first, second and third prizes.[44] Those twenty-seven artworks would be offered to the sponsors. The intricate and convoluted selection process placed great emphasis on procedures and rules set beforehand and agreed upon by all. Legal counsels and notaries were involved to ensure fairness.

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[42] Guangzhou shoujie 90 niandai yishu shuangnianzhan zuzhi weiyuanhui [The Organizing Committee of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section*)], "Guangzhou shoujie 90 niandai yishu shuangninazhan (youhua bufen) fenggao" ["The *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)* Notice"], *Art & Market*, no. 6 (1992): 67.

[43] "Guangzhou shoujie 90 niandai yishu shuangnianzhan (youhua bufen) zige jianding weiyuanhui ji pingshen weiyuanhui chengyuan gongzuo zezhi" ["Responsibilities of Qualification Certification Committee and Jury of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*"], in Lyu, *A Collection of Documents,* 450–1.

[44] Lyu, *A Collection of Documents,* 450–1. The registration forms showed in many cases, Lyu Peng made decisions regardless of what the committee was suggesting. Registration forms of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*, Ren Jian's personal archive. See also Yang Li, "'Shuangnianzhan' pingxuan gongzuo jishi" ("Memo of 'Biennale'"), in Lyu, *A Collection of Documents,* 257.

Figure 5.4: Xiao Quan, group photo of art critics and artists, *Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair*.

As indicated in the original documents for the recommended and prize-winning artists, Lyu Peng's decisions were partly based on the jury's recommendations but were not always consistent with them. [Figure 5.5] The first prizes, named the Documenta Awards (*Wenxianjiang* 文献奖) were given to Wang Guangyi and Li Luming, who had invited to Lyu Peng to write and published *A History of China Modern Art 1979–1989* (1992). Wang Guangyi was nominated by four jury members to receive first prize and Li Luming had two votes for first prize. [Figure 5.6] The five second prizes, named Academic Awards (Xueshujiang 学术奖) were given to Mao Yan (毛焰, b.1968), Wei Guangqing (魏光庆, b.1963), Shang Yang (尚扬, b.1942), Zhou Chunya (周春芽, b.1955) and Shu Qun. Ren Jian (任戬, b.1955), who had received five votes from the critics, was instead given the third prize. Everything was meant to

appear like a formal business transaction.[45] Lyu was laying the groundwork for something bigger and new: a framework for a Chinese art fair, and beyond that, rules and processes for a market-oriented art system.

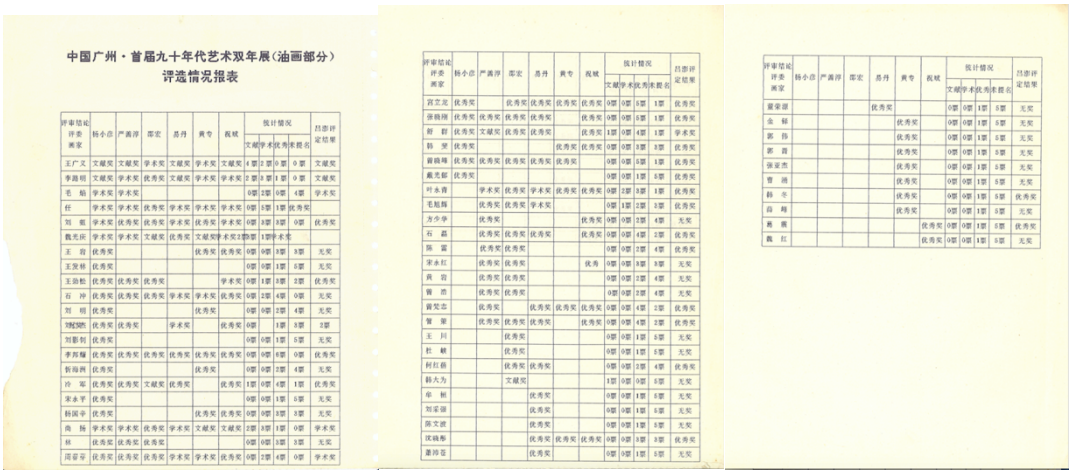
中国广州·首届九十年代艺术双年展(油画部分)
评选情况报表

Figure 5.5: Form for the evaluations by jury members for the *Guangzhou Biennale*.

Figure 5.6: Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism: Marlboro*, 1992, oil on canvas.

The participating artists were from all over the country. Some of them had been active since the mid-1980s, including Wang Guangyi, Shu Qun and Guan Ce (管策, b.1957),

[45] See "Guangzhou shoujie 90 niandai yishu shuangnianzhan (youhua bufen) pingxuan gongzuo tiaoli" ("Rules for Jury of the *First Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair*"), in Lyu, *A Collection of Documents*, 444–5.

who emerged from the New Wave. But mostly they were artists who had arrived at the scene later, in the early 1990s, such as Wang Jinsong (王劲松, b.1963), Song Yonghong (宋永红, b.1966) and Zeng Fanzhi (曾梵志, b.1964), new art academy graduates, who would go on to become highly visible for paintings that depicted social realities of the period. Since the event was located in Guangzhou, a sizeable proportion of the artists were from provinces in South China, from Hunan, Guangzhou, Hubei and Sichuan. The open call did not limit the submission of works to one type of artist or a limited set of themes, so it attracted a broad variety of works, covering all of the styles and artistic languages that had been adopted by Chinese artists since the '85 New Wave period. Viewers could see Expressionist, Abstract, Symbolist, Surrealist, Photorealist, Dada, Pop and conceptualist paintings, as well as collage works, prints, ready-mades and installation-based paintings. There were more modern or postmodern than realist works and this, together with the entrepreneurial organization, distinguished it from a parallel event, the 1991 annual painting exhibition organized by the CAA in Beijing.[46] One of the participating art critics of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)*, Pi Daojian, listed the trends that surfaced in the biennial. He wrote that artists were turning attention to their surroundings, and this meant the incorporation of symbols from mass culture and the media, and images of mass consumption. He observed that artists were not at all anxious about expressing national identity in their works, nor were they concerned about cultural developments of the 1980s; rather, they were taking a cynical and playful attitude towards historical imagery and popular consumption goods. He also noted—and this alludes to a common phenomenon that we have seen surface

[46] *China Oil Painting Annual Exhibition* (*Zhongguo youhua nianzhan*), November 15–December 6, 1991, National Museum of China and Eastern Oil Painting Gallery (*Dongfang youhua yishuting*).

repeatedly in earlier chapters—that these artists also demonstrated mastery in achieving excellence in realist technique, classical oil painting methods, even abstraction.[47] Pi's observations confirm my conclusion drawn in Chapter Four, that the idea of the "purification of language" divorced artistic forms and techniques from content and set up a false impression that experiments with form and displays of craftsmanship were all there was about art.

Lyu repeatedly emphasized the term "operation" (*caozuo* 操作) in his conception of the biennial, taking this as a crucial distinction between his show and previous exhibitions. Accordingly, he emphasized investment instead of sponsorship in explaining its economic operation; the platform was a corporation instead of a cultural institution; the procedure was guaranteed by legally binding documents instead of administrative notifications issued by cultural bureaucrats; and a jury of art critics provided academic support to the operation. The purpose of his operation was to generate instant effect across the economy, society and the academy, instead of simply hoping for "success."[48]

The goal of Lyu Peng's endeavor—a highly manipulative goal, it must be acknowledged—was to create opportunities: for artists' works to be circulated, to facilitate the union of art and the market, and in my view, to create a mythology of an active, vital art market. Lyu was creating a new discourse based on the validity of the art market which would give legitimacy to contemporary art (including through *Art &*

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[47] Pi Daojian, "'Shuangnianzhan zuopin de jiben guji'" ("A Basic Evaluation of 'Biennial' Works"), in Lyu, *A Collection of Documents,* 225–8.
[48] Lyu, "My Standpoint," 6.

Market). At the same time, his critics performed the symbolic role of providing academic credibility to the works that they now sanctioned. Above all, the intention was to open up the domestic art market and to consolidate the authority of this clique as critics, ensuring that they would become mediums between the artworks and the market. Building up the monetary value of artworks was equivalent to establishing the value and historical status of artists. Mostly donning smart Western business suits, the participating critics attended the opening ceremony, with thirty-eight journalists in attendance who immediately covered the event as a great celebration.[49] [Figure 5.7] The yearning for an art market was becoming a reality, and theoretical concepts turned into concrete reality.

Figure 5.7: Xiao Quan, photo of Lyu Peng (second left), with investors at the opening of the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair*, Guangzhou.

[49] See an advertisement for the Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair in *Shenzhen tequbao* (*Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Newspaper*), November 25, 1992, 12. See also *Beijing qingnianbao* (*Beijing Youth Daily*), October 15, 1992, 4–5, for a double-page spread of reports and interviews relating to the event.

On the same day that the *Guangzhou Biennial* opened, art critic Wang Lin opened *The Chinese Contemporary Art Research Documents Exhibition* in the library of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in Guangzhou.[50] This exhibition was organized by the academy with no investor backing. It consisted of black-and-white photographs of 200 artists' works that Wang Lin had collected. Unlike the *Guangzhou Biennial*, this exhibition was accompanied by little documentation. To discuss both exhibitions, a forum was held in a hotel inside the South China Botanical Gardens. Chaired by three art critics, Shui Zhongtian, Liu Xiaochun and Wang Lin, the forum was attended by about fifty art critics. One of the key issues they discussed was the marketization of art criticism. They arrived at an agreement calling for the protection of the rights to their intellectual labor in the new era of the market economy. Following this, forty art critics signed an agreement to defend their intellectual work, demanding fair compensation.[51] This included the standardization of a commissioning fee for curatorial essays and art criticism, which would be set at RMB 300–800 per thousand words, paid prior to writing. It specified a rate of RMB 25 per hour for work relating to consultation, lecturing and the judging of prizes, with an additional amount of RMB 40 per day for transportation. Such standardization of fees didn't exist at the CAA. The forty art critics who signed the consensus included senior figures such as Shao Dazhen, Li Songtao, Shui Tianzhong, Lang Shaojun, Liu Xiaaochun, Tao Yongbai, and younger members such as Li Xianting, Yin Shuangxi, Fan Di'an, Chen Xiaoxin and Yi Ying. Many of them held posts in art academies and official art

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[50] The *Chinese Contemporary Art Research Documents Exhibition* (*Zhongguo dangdai yishu yanjiu wenxian zhan*) was held from October 23 to 28, 1992 in the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts. See *Beijing Youth Daily* October 15, 1992, 5.

[51] Huang Danhui, "Meishu piping duanxiang sanze" ("Three Pieces of Thoughts on Art Criticism"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no. 2 (1994): 13.

journals.[52] Many who had signed the agreement had contributed to the developing art market and to *Art & Market* magazine. From their contributions, it was clear that a similar vision of the art market was shared by independent critics such as Lyu Peng and critics within the official system.

Within days of *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (The Oil Painting Section)* ending, Lyu Peng took the remaining works to Hong Kong for presentation at the Art Asia International art fair.[53] In the following year, he established a company called Shenzhen Outlet Art Development Company (*Shenzhen aolaite yishu fazhan gongsi* 深圳奥莱特艺术发展有限公司). This was a joint venture between Hong Kong Donglong Corporation (*Xianggang Donglong Jituan* 香港东隆集团) and Shenzhen Donghui Industry Group Limited (*Shenzhenshi Donghui Shiyegufen Youxiangongsi* 深圳市东辉实业股份有限公司), the latter of which bought the prize-winning artworks from the Xishu Art Company.[54]

By 1993, some of the prize-winning artworks sold by Xishu Art Company to Shenzhen Donghui Industry Group Limited had found their way to the office of Huayun Art Company (Huayun Yishu Gongsi 华韵艺术公司), a Shenzhen-based company that was about to open its own gallery. This company collaborated with the Art Committee (*Yiwei hui* 艺委会) of the CAA to organize the *1993 Autumn Oil*

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[52] Zhong Zhi, "Bufen meishu pinglunjia gongtong liyue weihu zijide zhili laowu quanyi" ("Some Members of Art Critics Reaching an Agreement to Defend the Rights of Their Intellectual Labor"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no. 3 (1993): 27.

[53] The *Art Asia International* was held in Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre on November 18–22, 1992. It was organized by International Fine Art Expositions. See *Art Asia: Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: International Fine Art Expositions, 1992).

[54] Zhang Xiaojun, "Xunfang zhaji: Shenchuan Micai de Shenzhen" ("Travellog: Camouflage-donning Shenzhen"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no. 2 (1994): 14–16.

Painting Exhibition (*Jiusan qiuji youhua lianzhan* '93 秋季油画联展).[55] They bought the work of the first two prize-winners at the *Guangzhou Biennial* from Donghui and hung them in their office. Based in property development and technology development, this company aimed to benefit from running an art business.[56]

Meanwhile, Lyu Peng was working with his fellow art critic Huang Zhuan on the second edition of the *Guangzhou Biennial*. This never took place. The *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (The Oil Painting Section)* ended when Xishu Art Company failed to fulfill its commitment to pay the prize money, despite the artworks having already changed hands, and was sued. While there was never any follow-up or result, this experiment left its legacy. One immediate result was the rise of exhibition formats that involved a group of art critics who would propose artists and artworks for inclusion in shows (*timingzhan* 提名展), and group-generated art criticism (*jituan piping* 集团批评) which meant that a group of art critics together engaged in commentary on one artist or one artistic tendency, rather than a single art critic. Furthermore, the Biennial established a model of exhibition-making which was summarized as "artists being the protagonists, art critics taking responsibility for academic events, and entrepreneurs looking after the investment and economic operation of art."[57] In this model, entrepreneurs didn't interfere with academic activities and art critics didn't interfere with the (often convoluted) economic

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[55] See Gao Minglu, "Zhongguo meishujia xiehui youhua banhua bihua chatuzhuangzhen yishu weiyuanhui chengli" ("The Artistic Committees for Oil Painting, Printmaking, Mural Painting and Illustration and Book-binding of China Artists' Association were Established"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 18 (November 1985): 2.
[56] Zhang, "Travellog: Camouflage-donning Shenzhen," 14–16.
[57] Pi Li, "Jiusan meishupipingjia niandu timingzhan (shuimo) zongshu" ("Summary of *The '93 Annual Exhibition of Art Critic Recommendations (Brush-and-Ink Paintings*)"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no.7 (1994): 18–19.

management. The *'93 Annual Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations (Brush-and-Ink Paintings)* and the *'94 Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations (Oil Paintings)*, for example, were based on the *First Guangzhou Biennial* and engaged some of the same art critics.[58] Many art critics, including Liu Xiaochun, Li Songtao, Lang Shaojun and Jia Fangzhou, now advocated the collective involvement of art critics in the organization of exhibitions. The curator and critic Pi Li wrote: "I found writings on a painter by a few art critics of more impact, more compelling, more serious and precise. I thought that we could promote both established and promising painters with the force of a collective effort."[59] There was now a definite feeling that the format of a group of art critics could set the right standard for an exhibition, and this would be a move towards the independence of art criticism. But in the eyes of some artists, this was merely the self-certification of art critics gathering authority for themselves. Brush-and-ink painter Dong Xinbin directly linked this kind of art criticism to the group attacks of the Cultural Revolution and reacted: "I placed my hope in artists studying theories on our own and saving ourselves on our own." Dong likened the art critics to a big group of fake foreigners armed with so-called modern theories, mainly led by a Beijing-based gang:

> They do not have the foundation of a modernized life, neither do they have any direct experience of a modern society. They do not have the experience of creating modern art, or of comprehensive research and theoretical

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[58] The *'93 Annual Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations (Brush-and-Ink Paintings)* (*93 meishu pipingjia niandu timingzhan (shuimo)*) was opened at NAMOC on June 29, 1993. *The '94 Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations (Oil Paintings)* (*94 meishupipingjia timingzhan (youhua bufen)*) was held at NAMOC from October 4 to 9, 1994. See Zhang Xiaojun, "Jituan moshi de yici jiaozheng: 94 meishu pipingjia niandu (youhua) timingzhan suiji" ("A Correction of Group Model: A Record of the *'94 Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations*"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no. 11 (1994): 16.

[59] Pi, "Summary of *The '93 Annual Exhibition*," 18–19.

> understanding of the essence of Western modern society. Their theories were copied from here and there. In action, they randomly brought together a trope of so-called modern art.[60]

Launching themselves onto the scene as a collective force, these art critics were seeking to consolidate and expand their positions. As Lyu Peng pointed out in symposium held on the occasion of the *'93 Annual Exhibition of Art Critics' Recommendations (Brush-and-Ink Paintings)* at NAMOC, "The continuous validity of it [exhibitions of artworks recommended by art critics] needs the people who are involved to gain the support of other sources and forms of power, in order to form a stable power structure."[61]

The enthusiasm to explore the market wasn't unique to artists and critics from the cities of South China. It was a national phenomenon. Shanghai moved even faster towards the market economy. While Lyu Peng was still scouting for investors to support his dream of the *Biennial* in 1992, the Shanghai Art Museum rented out its entire ground floor to the Bank of Communications (*Jiaotong yinhang* 交通银行) for three years.[62] This wasn't a conceptual art project but for real. The ground floor became a stock market run by the bank while the floors above remained exhibition spaces. This was a move by museum management to resolve the increasing shortage of funding for the museum, due to budget cuts from the provincial government. At around the same time, art museums and cultural institutions across Eastern Europe

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[60] Pi, "Summary of *The '93 Annual Exhibition*," 20.
[61] Pi, "Summary of the *'93 Annual Exhibition*," 20.
[62] Zhang Xiaojun, "Gupiao chongjin meishuguan" ("Stocks Rushed Into Art Museums"), *Artists' Newsletter Bulletin*, no. 11 (1992): 12–14.

were adapting to the new, harsh entrepreneurial economic reality in exactly the same way.

With hindsight, we could say that such measures were no more than a manifestation of a market-oriented mentality overwhelming Chinese society. Nevertheless, the shift was driven by a pragmatic idealism, in which the protagonists such as the art critics involved in the *First Guangzhou Biennial Art Fair* overemphasized the benefits of the market, its promise of enhancing value both monetary and social, and the role that it would play in the legitimization of contemporary art. In the minds of Lyu Peng and his art critic colleagues, there was an equation between art and the market which would result in greater freedoms; economic gains were identified with elevating art within society. All of this was to have long-lasting consequences for the Chinese art world.

The Symbolic Potential and Cultural Capital of Marginalization and Avant-Garde-ness

The politics of 1989 permeated the beginning of the 1990s. The *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, which opened on February 5, 1989, was forced to close for three days before it reopened, only to be suspended again five days later upon the receipt of a letter of threat.[63] Its first forced closure was triggered by a number of unanticipated

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[63] The *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* has been written about extensively by participants and scholars. For a detailed discussion of the process and structure of organizing this exhibition, see Zhou Yan, "Shoujie *Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan* beijing ziliao" ("Background information about the first *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 6 (February 1989): 4; see also Li Xianting, "Liangsheng qiangxiang: xinchao meishu de xiemuli" ("Two Gunshots: Bringing Down the Curtain on New Wave Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 11 (March 1989): 1. For writings on the exhibition in English, see Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge:

performances, initially because of the notorious gunshots fired in the exhibition by one of the participating artists, Xiao Lu.[64]

In fact, the organization of *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* was completely aligned with official administrative requirements. As its first exhibition announcement outlines, many official institutions were its co-organizers, including the magazines *Art* and *Reading*, the broadsheet *Fine Arts in China*, the editorial board of "Culture: China and the World Book" Series, and the Modern Art Salon.[65] The CAA and NAMOC were its supporting institutions. The exhibition was also supported by many senior artists and critics who occupied official positions within cultural establishments, such as Liu Kaiqu, Wu Zuoren, Shao Dazhen and Jin Shangyi, who were listed as its advisors and were in attendance at the official opening when the gunshots were fired.[66] Yet the politicization and the political historicization of the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* was substantially driven by the unanticipated

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MIT Press, 2011), 141–66, and Jane Debevoise, "The 'China/Avant-Garde Exhibition'," in *Between State and Market,* 195–213.

[64] When Gao Minglu reached agreement with the National Gallery of Art to host the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, it was specified that no performances and artworks with sexual content could be shown. As one of the curators of the exhibition, Li Xianting had conflicting feelings about not permitting works of a more avant-garde nature in the show. As he was mainly responsible for laying out the exhibition, he intended to present provocative works and installations in the first exhibition hall to give a strong first impression. He admitted giving consent to performances in private, including Zhang Nian's incubation of eggs and Wang Deren's spreading of condoms. See Li Xianting. "Wo zuowei Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan chouzhanren de zigongzhuang" ("Confessions of *A China Avant-Garde* Curator"), originally written in November 1989 and published in *Meishu shilun* (*Art History and Theory*), no. 3 (1989), and in Li Xianting, *Zhongyao de bushi yishu* (*What is Significant is Not the Art*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000), 256–65.

[65] "Chouxhan tonggao diyihao" ("Exhibition Preparation Announcement No.1"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 44 (October 1988): 1.

[66] "Chouxan Tonggao diyihao", 1. The full list of advisors was Ru Xin, Li Zehou, Liu Kaiqu, Wu Zuoren, Shen Changwen, Shao Dazhen, Tang Kemei, Jin Shangyi and Ge Weimo. See also Zhou Yan, "Background information on the first 'China/Avant-Garde Exhibition'," *Fine Arts in China*, no. 6 (February 1989): 4; see also Julia F. Andrews and Gao Minglu, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential For Autonomy And Community In Post-Mao China*, eds. Deborah Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 256–7.

performances on its opening day and the resulting interventions of the police and the museum, as well as the coincident timing before the student demonstration in June.[67]

The works in the exhibition had been mostly produced out of the '85 New Wave, and they reflected the artists' desire to adopt Western art forms and modern subject matter without a demonstrably anti-establishment outlook. Yet as Gao Minglu wrote, "because of the gunshots and other events, the exhibition was forced to close for three days. The government authorities still believed that this incident held political meaning, and most of the foreign news media reported it as a political event."[68]

Between Gao Minglu and Li Xianting, both curators of the exhibition, there were differences regarding the relevance of this exhibition and its avant-garde self-promotion. Li Xianting considered the idea of organizing the *China Avant-Garde Exhibition* in such an official venue as a sign of conservatism among New Wave artists and art critics. Such an act indicated the loss of genuine dynamism in art in China. Later, denying avant-garde status to the exhibition, he described the two gunshots as the curtain call for the New Wave.[69] As I have traced in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, both Gao and Li had long been active in their roles as editors of *Art* and *Fine Arts in China* respectively since the mid-1980s. Both had been supported by

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[67] The two gunshots were fired by Xiao Lu at her installation titled "Dialogue" (*Duihua*), comprising two public telephone booths that she made as part of her graduation work at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art in 1988. Her friend and fellow student Tang Song was arrested at the scene. Xiao Lu later turned herself in to the authorities. Both artists were released after three days following various interventions from family members who were high-ranking governmental officials. See Li, "Two Gunshots," 1; see also Xiao Lu, *Dialogue* (Translated from Chinese by Archibald McKenzie, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010; some sensitive passages that appear in the English language edition do not appear in the Chinese language edition.); and Thomas J. Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2006), 90–91.

[68] Gao Minglu listed the report of the *New York Times* on the closure as an example. See Gao, *Total Modernity,* 161.

[69] Gao, *Total Modernity*, 161.

their seniors including Zhang Qiang, Liu Xiaochun and Shao Dazhen. Through the publications *Fine Arts in China* and *Arts*, Li and Gao had actively promoted the art of their peers and younger generations, but particularly those influenced by Western modern art practices. By the mid-1980s, as we have seen in Chapter Three, they had been grouped together under the banner of New Wave art. By 1988, Li Xianting had tried to give art that appeared after the end of the New Wave a particular name: avant-garde art (*qianwei yishu* 前卫艺术). Working together with Liao Wen, his co-editor at *Fine Arts in China*, he devoted a new column that ran on the front page of the newspaper to the idea of avant-garde art.[70]

Aware that they had borrowed the term avant-garde from very recent Western art discourse, Li and Liao defined the avant-garde art that they introduced in their column as current art, embedded in a local, Chinese cultural context. They insisted that the new Chinese art should not be measured and judged as imitative, and that the Western avant-garde should not be taken as the gold standard reference point. However, they did not offer a clear definition of what they considered to be avant-garde, other than proffering broad prescriptions about a more complete awareness, being ahead of its time, and being advanced in style.[71] But as to what those characteristics actually looked like, there was no further explanation. The editors did point out that the purpose of starting their new column was to keep up-to-date with the latest developments, and to reflect new phenomena in the Chinese art world in a timely fashion. Conceptual art such as tactile art (*chujue yishu* 触觉艺术), which represented

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[70] Liao Wen and Li Xianting, "Qianwei yishu" ("Avant-garde Art Editorial Introduction"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 22 (May 1988)" 1.
[71] Liao and Li, "Avant-garde Art," 1.

human contact with the natural and physical world through analytical and objective words and mathematical data, and Geng Jianyi's proposal for "A Tap Water Factory," in which viewers were constructed as anonymous members of a collective space when looking from the outside in, were first introduced in this column.[72]

Gao Minglu, arriving at the English title for the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition*, was also assigning the status of "avant-garde" to art that was a mixture of late modernist art from the mid-1980s and the newly emerging art with a conceptualist dimension. As I explained in my Introduction, he proposed that the term "avant-garde" be used for the English title of this exhibition, whose original Chinese title *Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan* literally means *Chinese Modern Art Exhibition*. In Gao's understanding, in Western art history "avant-garde" and "modernism" went side by side; they were virtually the same thing.

To place Gao and New Wave art into a broader historical context, let's look at *The Perception of the Other: Western-ism in Contemporary Art* (1996), a thin publication written by the late art critic Zou Yuejin, a lecturer at CAFA.[73] Taking Edward Said's famous hypothesis of Orientalism, Zou defined Westernism (*Xifangzhuyi* 西方主义), which he interpreted as the twisted description of the West by the East, a description limited by perspective and experience.[74] He distinguished avant-garde art in China from the modern art that had been suppressed as politically subversive and bourgeois

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[72] Wang Luyan, "Chujue yishu xuanyan" ("Manifesto of Tactile Art"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 35 (August 1988): 1. See also Geng Jianyi, "Zuopin yu guanzhong" ("Artworks and Audience"), *Fine Arts in China*, no. 22 (May 1988): 1.

[73] Zou Yuejin, *Tazhe de yanguang: dangdai yishu zhong de xifangzhuyi* (*The Perception of the Other: Western-ism in Contemporary Art*) (Beijing: Writers' Publishing House, 1996).

[74] Zou Yuejin, "'Xifang zhuyi' yu 'dongfang zhuyi'" ("'Westernism' and 'Orientalism'"), in "*The Perception of the Other*", 106–7.

during the Cultural Revolution, and from New Wave art. He described the legitimization of avant-garde art through its absorption into art academies and the art market.[75] Zou was right, of course: avant-garde art was not a particular movement or style but a radical spirit present at different historical stages. Zou would conclude, significantly, that the government should provide structural support for the legitimization of avant-garde art if it were to become a genuine Chinese reinvention. His writing reflected Chinese artists' deep-seated longing for state acceptance and support, and provided some insights into the historical formation of avant-garde art (*xianfeng yishu* 先锋艺术) in China.

In this section, I have briefly mapped the trajectory of adoption and engagement with the term "avant-garde" from the late 1980s through art critics such as Li Xianting, Gao Minglu and later Zou Yuejin. Essentially, their trajectory projected Chinese artists and art critics in alignment with Western avant-garde art, while at the same time, the meanings of the idea of an avant-garde were constantly being redefined by actual conditions in China, including the desire for art to be supported by the state. This, of course, was fundamentally at odds with any expectation that avant-gardes be anti-institutional and antagonistic towards any form of state power.

The New Generation Art Exhibition and the Garage Exhibition

During this transition—from the late 1980s to the early 1990s—a new generation of artists and critics emerged onto the scene. The experience of the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* and its temporary closures, together with the aftermath of the suppression

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[75] Zou, "*The Perception of the Other*," 151.

of the student movement, prompted these younger art critics and artists to take a different approach. The change was so noticeable that it has prompted the impression that the period post-June 4 1989 constituted a rupture, making the 1990s profoundly separate from the former decade. This impression was reinforced by apparently different-looking artistic trends that were highly visible during the beginning of the 1990s—New Generation art, Political Pop and Cynical Realism—along with the cultivation of a market for contemporary art. Yet when I look at this apparent rupture from another angle, I would argue that the idea of a dramatic turn needs to be questioned.

The artists at the center of the apparent rupture, I think, wanted to create works that would be as different from their seniors as possible, as evidence of the gap between their works and those of the previous generation. Some of them had participated in the New Wave movement, but most were young artists and critics who hadn't been old enough to participate in mid-1980s art movements, though they had been exposed to New Wave art during their student years. Two exhibitions, *New Generation Art* (*Xinshengdai yishuzhan* 新生代艺术展) and the *Garage Show* (*Cheku zhan* 车库展), took place in 1991 under these circumstances in Beijing and Shanghai respectively.[76] They shared a similar model: both were conceived and initiated by artists, who found funding and the exhibition venues by themselves.

At the very beginning of the 1990s, even though official venues for art such as

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[76] *New Generation Art* (*Xinshengdai yishuzhan*) was held from July 7 to 14, 1991, at the China History Museum (*Zhongguo lishi bowuguan*), which became a part of the National Museum of China (*Zhongguo guojia bowuguan*) in 2003. *The Garage Show* (*Cheku zhan*) was held from November 22 to 24, 1991.

NAMOC had accommodated modern art in the 1980s, they were now off limits to contemporary art. But artists still managed to grab hold of resources within the government-controlled system. The *New Generation Art Exhibition* was one such example. While the art displayed in the exhibition appeared distinctive—conceptualist art was featured but the predominant form was realist paintings of exceptional skill, depicting daily scenes—one would be hard pressed to legitimately argue for its anti-institutional or alternative nature.

The conception of this exhibition started with CAFA printmaking graduate, Wang Youshen, who started work as an art editor at *Beijing Youth Daily,* an official newspaper, in 1988.[77] In 1990, he initiated and edited a full-page column titled "Art Gallery" (*Hualang* 画廊) in the newspaper.[78] It was dedicated to "displaying the latest art" (*zuixin yishu zhanshi* 最新艺术展示), by which was meant mostly neo-academic art or realist art of different types that had emerged in 1988 following the "purification of language" debate. The artists and art critics featured in this column, who included Yu Hong, Liu Xiaodong, Xu Bing, Hou Hanru and Zhou Yan, had been Wang Youshen's schoolmates at CAFA.[79]

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[77] Wang Youshen continued to work at *Beijing Youth Daily* until 2019, holding the position of Art Director. *Beijing qingnianbao* (*Beijing Youth Daily*) is the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League Committee in Beijing. It was established in 1949 and is now published by the Beijing Youth Daily Publishing Company. It is Beijing's most widely circulating metropolitan newspaper. See "Beijing Youth Daily," wikipedia, accessed April 6, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beijing_Youth_Daily.

[78] The first column was published on April 10, 1990.

[79] For instance, among the three articles published in the "Gallery" column on page 8 of *Beijing Youth Daily* (May 22, 1990), the first, "Nv huajia de shijie" ("The World of Female Painters") was a short report on an exhibition of the same title, held from May 20 to May 30 in the CAFA gallery. On the same page appeared a short feature "Fenghuotaishang Xu Bing tanyi" ("Xu Bing on His Art on Beacon Tower") with images about Xu Bing's rubbings of part of the Great Wall in Jinshanling, which he started on May 17 and would continue working on for two weeks. On the right side of this page appeared a short review, "Liu Xiaodong miandui zhenshi" ("Liu Xiaodong Facing Reality"), about Liu Xiaodong's solo exhibition at the CAFA gallery between May 12 and 20. This review reflected the

Through his *Beijing Youth Daily* platform and regular columns, Wang Youshen quickly orchestrated the appearance of an emergent artistic phenomenon, which he had noticed while editing the newspaper columns.[80] Planning an exhibition to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the newspaper resuming publication in 1981, Wang Youshen was inspired by Zhou Yan's essay "Ridicule and Self-Mockery," which provided him with a concise summary of the latest developments in neo-academic art.[81] There, Zhou Yan had summarized the trends recently seen across a range of shows at leading venues for the display of neo-academic art, notably at the Contemporary Art Gallery, the CAFA Exhibition Hall and the CAFA Gallery; they revealed, he observed, a shared mindset that mocked not just the material world but even more importantly the artists themselves.[82] He believed that despite the variations of their artistic styles, which showed the impact of photorealism, Lucian Freud's distortion, Goya's expressionism and Chinese brush-and-ink painting, "they are all expressions of their unique states of mind. No matter how many sources people can trace their artistic forms to, the mentality of 'ridicule,' [embedded in the works] both towards others and towards oneself, is the real psychological state of these young

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new discourse within which Liu Xiaodong and his friends from the New Generation group would now be viewed. It pointed out the realist character of Liu Xiaodong's paintings, and his concerns with alienation. The reviewer, Hou Hanru, was about to move offshore and establish himself at the centre of Western contemporary art's curatorial networks. According to Hou, Liu's exhibition demonstrates that the painter holds a pure and objective attitude towards the world. He respects existence and follows the rules of games in life. This is the character of modern people (*xiandairen*), and the essence of modern thoughts (*xiandai sixiang*). Here, Hou annexed Liu Xiaodong's objectivity within a discourse of modernization, a language that had been embraced by Chinese society at that moment along with the headlong implementation of a market economy.

[80] Wang Youshen, interview with Pan Gaojie, Wang Youshen's studio, Beijing, December 2012, in Pan Gaojie, "1991 nian 'xinshengdai yishuzhan' zhanlan yanjiu" ("A Research on the 1991 *New Generation Art* Exhibition"), (BA diss., Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2013), 20–5.

[81] Wang, interview with Pan Gaojie, in Pan, "Research on the 1991 *New Generation Art*," 22.

[82] The Contemporary Art Gallery was the former gallery of the High School affiliated to CAFA at 123 Longfusi Street, Beijing.

artists."[83] He illustrated "Ridicule and Self-Mockery" with Song Yonghong's painting *Emptiness* (1989), an image of an idle, bored young man which had been shown in Wang Jinsong and Song Yonghong's 1990 joint exhibition.[84] [Figure 5.8]

1990年12月18日 北京青年报 画廊● 7

调侃与自嘲

一种心态的视觉表现

画廊

●本版编辑 ●王友身
●版式设计 ●王友身

自然自如 日臻妙境

Figure 5.8: Zhou Yan's text "Ridicule and Self-Mockery," illustrated with Song Yonghong's work *Emptiness*, published in *Beijing Youth Daily*, December 18, 1990, 7.

Departing from the ideas he had garnered from Zhou Yan's text, Wang Youshen chose the term "New Generation" for the exhibition title; it signified a new generation

[83] Zhou Yan, "Tiaokang yu zichao: Yizhong xintai de shijuebiaoxian" ("Ridicule and Self-Mockery: The Visualization of a State of Mind"), *Beijing Youth Daily,* (December 18, 1990): 7.
[84] Song Yonghong, *Emptiness* (*Kongbai*), 1989, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm. See *Beijing Youth Daily* (December 18, 1990), 7. *Xin xingxiang huihua yishuzhan: Wang Jinsong Song Yonghong lianzhan* (*New Image Painting Exhibition: A Joint Exhibition of Wang Jinsong and Song Yonghong*), December 1990, Contemporary Art Museum, 123 Longfusi Street, Beijing.

no less than a new canon, and he intended it to be an exhibition of work by his peers. As the exhibition's initiator, Wang Youshen invited art historian and critic Shao Dazhen, CAFA Professor of Art History and Head of the Secretariat of the CAA, to be the art director. He next engaged four of his contemporaries, Zhou Yan, Yin Jinan, Fan Di'an and Kong Chang'an, to form the exhibition's artistic committee. Apart from Kong Chang'an, who had a job as the business manager of CAFA Gallery, the other three were young lecturers at CAFA.

On December 22, 1990, four days after Zhou Yan's essay was printed, Wang organized a meeting of his artistic committee. From this, Wang Youshen drew up a list of nineteen artists. After the meeting, Wang Youshen visited the artists' studios and invited them to participate in the exhibition. In a concept statement he drafted for *New Generation Art*, he observed:

> In recent years, young painters in Beijing have formed a new artistic tendency with their own creative styles. They are attentive to observing and recording life. They express their unique feelings of immediate concern to themselves. This new direction poses a rather major contrast with the denial of the reality and that of traditional art over the past few years. This exhibition focuses on this art tendency, both as an initial introduction and as a significant summary. This exhibition includes oil paintings, prints, brush-and-ink paintings, and sculpture.[85]

85 Wang Youshen, hand-written draft of exhibition concept and outline, unpublished, courtesy of Wang Youshen.

Backed up by the newspaper, he managed to rent an exhibition space in the National Museum of China as the temporary venue for the show. This building overlooked Tian'anmen Square in downtown Beijing. *New Generation Art* was definitely a Beijing phenomenon, and it is principally recent graduates of CAFA who are remembered as the participants. But from the list of artists whose work was included in *New Generation Art*, we can see that there were artists from other art academies, not least Wang Jinsong and Song Yonghong, graduates from the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. Born in the 1960s, none of the artists had been Red Guards or "sent-down youths," unlike so many of the artists we have discussed in earlier chapters. As CAFA lecturer in art history, Yin Jinan observed:

> They lacked profound historical memories or mental scars, and they embodied a distinct spiritual fracture (*jingshen duanceng* 精神断层) from the generation born in the 1950s. Their collective consciousness has been diluted, and there are no life principles or artistic views that they unanimously uphold. The concepts of a 'New Generation' is based on age, while that of 'Close Up' (*Jinjuli* 近距离) is based on artistic self-positioning [in relation to the reality]."[86]

Yin's description distinguished this new generation from the grand narratives of Socialist Realism and from newly imported Western conceptual art, found in the works of the previous generations active in the 1970s and the 1980s. Yi Ying, another art historian at CAFA, regarded New Generation art not as a movement or a specific

[86] Yin Jinan, "Xinshengdai yu jinjuli" ("New Generation and Close Up Artists"), *Jiangsu huakan* (*Jiangsu Pictorial*), no. 1 (1992): 16–17.

style but as a transformation of traditional academic art, influenced by New Wave art.[87] He described them as having a "neo-academic style." Yet in terms of subject matter, we note the same generational continuity at odds with critical rhetoric. Many participants in the New Generation exhibitions depicted ordinary people and everyday scenes in the sophisticated techniques that reflected the same rigorous academic teaching within the realist curriculum that they had undergone. They were essentially realists. They tended to depict people most familiar to them, their friends and co-workers, as models. New Generation artist couple Wang Hao and Wei Rong's photorealistic paintings portrayed the Dongcheng district of Beijing, where CAFA was located. They photographed daily scenes, signs and advertizements for their paintings and projected 35mm slides onto the canvases. [Figure 5.9] Each painting was meticulously produced, a process that took months.[88]

[87] Yi Ying, "Xinxueyuanpai: chuantong yu xinchao de jiaojiedian" ("Neo-Academic School: the Intersection Between Tradition and New Wave"), *Meishu yanjiu* (*Art Research*), no. 4 (1990): 18–21.
[88] Zhang Xiaojun, "Wei Rong, Wang Hao de zhaoxiang xieshizhuyi yishu pingshu" ("Artistic Comments on Photorealist Art of Wei Rong and Wang Hao"), in *Travellog*, 31–3.

Figure 5.9: Wang Hao, *Billboard*, 1987, oil on canvas.

Typically, New Generation artists represented the "surface" of things and rejected explicit declarations of any kind. They were fascinated by apparently meaningless details of ordinary life and rejected projecting any meaning or literary content onto their subjects. This was the key trait that distinguished them from the grand themes and philosophical abstractions, charged with social and existentialistic ideas, that had been so popular with the '85 New Wave artists and critics.

The *New Generation Art Exhibition* was not just an exhibition but part of a broader phenomenon of exhibitions coincidentally taking place from 1990 to 1991. These exhibitions included the *40th Anniversary of the Founding of CAFA: Teachers' Work Exhibition*, the *Liu Xiaodong Oil Painting Exhibition*, the *Female Painters' World*, the *Yu Hong Oil Painting Exhibition*, the *10th National Printmaking Exhibition*, the

Shen Ling Artwork Exhibition and the *New Figure Painting Show*, all of which were held in the CAFA Gallery. To this list we can add the *Wang Jinsong and Song Yonghong Joint Exhibition* shown at the Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, previously mentioned, and the *Zhao Bandi and Li Tianyuan Exhibition* held in the Beijing Tiandi Mansion, an office building with an exhibition space in the lobby.[89] These exhibitions, and the reviews and essays by critics including Zhou Yan and Yin Jinan, who as previously mentioned were both graduates and teachers from CAFA from the same period, constituted the prominent phenomenon generally referred to as New Generation art.

As I have observed, most works in *New Generation Art* were realist. Their particular focus on technical accomplishment showed the impact of the discussion on the "purification of language" from 1988. New Wave art had been criticized for its overconceptualization and rough artistic technique. But now, once that influential discussion about the purification of artistic language had spread across art academies, the approach that came to be termed "New Generation art" emerged among the artists associated with those same art academies; this was basically an ascendance of realist art, practiced under different umbrella names: photorealism by Wei Rong, Wang Hao, Zhan Wang and Zhang Defeng; expressionist realism by Shen Ling, Wang Yuping and Chen Shuxia; conceptual realism by Liu Qinghe, Wang Jinsong, Rong Yuanhong, Zhao Bandi, Fang Lijun, Liu Wei, Li Tianyuan, Liu Xiaodong and Wang Huaxiang.[90]

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[89] Tiandi Mansion (*Tiandi dasha*) was built in 1990 and had its name changed to Poly Plaza in 1992. It was equipped with a theatre and an exhibition space.
[90] Yin, "New Generation," 16–17.

In an unpublished essay, Wang Youshen reflected on the relationship between New Generation and New Wave art:

> In the early and mid-stages of the ’85 New Wave, most New Generation artists who were born in the 1960s didn’t directly participate in this enlightenment movement of Chinese contemporary art (*Zhongguo dangdai yishu* 中国当代艺术). Most were still studying at art academies in different cities across the country at that time. To think about it more closely, the artistic courses of most of us among the New Generation artists have grown alongside the development of the ’85 New Wave. To put it in another way, the enlightenment of contemporary art that we received was through the direct influence and aspiration of the ’85 New Wave. As a direct consequence, the early works of some New Generation artists bore traces of mainstream New Wave art.[91]

The essay confirms the continuities that we have been noting even as, on the other hand, this was rhetorically denied. Why the contradiction? The logic was deeply rooted in revolutionary mindsets. While the discussion of New Generation art centered on painters, it would give a false impression to associate the phenomenon of New Generation art only with oil painting. The *New Generation Art Exhibition* included brush-and-ink painting, sculpture, photography and installations. Brush-and-ink painter Liu Qinghe presented two new brush-and-ink paintings. *Two Persons*, made specially for the show, was a depiction of a normal daily scene: a

[91] Wang Youshen, “Xinsheng dai yanzhongde ‘Bawu meishu yundong’” (“The ‘’85 New Wave’ in the Eyes of New Generation”), unpublished, 1990. Courtesy of Wang Youshen.

woman sitting on a Western-style chair and a man in shorts standing looking out from a balcony. [Figure 5.10] The view, of a balcony corner, studiously avoided a panoramic depiction frequently found in brush-and-ink painting. Liu Qinghe used bast paper (*pizhi* 皮纸), which has long fibers and is not as sensitive to subtle ink effects, to emphasize his brushwork. The delicate linear depiction of the chair and fence contrast sharply with the skin and clothing depicted in ink and color wash. Twenty-six years later, when asked about his choice of subject matter back in 1991, he recalled his participation in the student movement in Tian'anmen Square. While he didn't make a direct connection between that event and his subsequent artistic direction, he observed that it felt safer to simply turn to painting daily life and people, avoiding politics.[92]

Figure 5.10: Liu Qinghe, *Two Persons*, 1991, brush-and-ink painting.

The only sculpture in the exhibition was by Zhan Wang, who had graduated from the

[92] Liu Qinghe, interview with author, Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, November 11, 2017.

Department of Sculpture at CAFA in 1988. His work *A Seated Girl* (1991) depicted a young woman with gray-blue hair dressed in a sleeveless vest, pants and white sandals, sitting on a wooden chair, leaning forward. [Figure 5.11] Two legs of the chair are lifted up, corresponding with her forward-leaning posture but also suggesting that the chair is being removed from beneath her, creating a distinct impression of instability. While the sculpture demonstrates Zhan Wang's skill in academic realism, the life-size scale, the ordinariness of the subject and the subject's vacant expression, together with the unexplained action of the uplifted chair, distinguish the work from Socialist Realist sculpture.

Figure 5.11: Zhan Wang, *A Seated Girl*, 1991, sculpture.

Most of the New Generation art would soon be recognized by the art market. However, four conceptual artists, all of whom worked at the *Beijing Youth Daily*, did

not receive as much critical attention or the same level of sales as their peers.[93] Zhu Jia, Wang Hu, Pang Lei and the organizer Wang Youshen were all CAFA graduates. Zhu Jia had painted flowers on flower-patterned fabric. Wang Hu contributed a series of abstract black-and-white photographs. Pang Lei showed abstract oils. Wang Youshen created a site-specific installation comprising a series of curtains printed with pages of the *Beijing Youth Daily* newspaper published between 1981 to 1991 that covered the windows of the Museum, facing onto Tian'anmen Square. All four received less attention than the realists as they didn't demonstrate the same kind of mastery of technical skills as the realist works. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, in 1987, performance art and conceptual art appeared at the same time as neo-academic art. While conceptual artworks were a minority in the New Generation exhibition in Beijing in 1991, they were featured prominently in another artist initiative, the *Garage Show,* in Shanghai the same year.

The main organizer of the *Garage Show* was Shanghai-based artist Song Haidong (宋海冬, b.1958), a graduate of the China Academy of Art.[94] Song had participated in the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* and traveled to Beijing for its opening.[95] Through his brief encounter with the Beijing art scene in 1989, Song emerged from the foray

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[93] On July 29, 1991, a discussion on the *New Generation Art* exhibition was held at CAFA. Attended by Wang Youshen, Fan Di'an, Zhou Yan, Yi Ying and Yin Shuangxi, the discussion was entirely focused on the realist paintings in the exhibition and there was no mention of the conceptual works of these four artists. See "Yishu zhuangtai yu xianshi: guanyu xinshengdai yishuzhan de taolun" ("The State of Art and Reality: A Discussion on *New Generation Art Exhibition*"), *Yishu guangjiao* (*Art Perspective*), no. 6 (1991): 55–61.

[94] The exhibition included artists based in Shanghai—Song Haidong, Sun Liang, Hu Jianping, He Yang and Gong Jianqing—as well as artists from Hangzhou, including Ni Haifeng, Geng Jianyi and Zhang Peili.

[95] Song Haidong, interview with Anthony Yung, Song Haidong's Home, Shanghai, April 3, 2009, Asia Art Archive, *Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990*, China 1980s, accessed April 20, 2019, http://www.china1980s.org/tc/interview_detail.aspx?interview_id=96.

with the impression that Beijing artists did not understand him and there was no capacity for real exchange.[96] By contrast, when he met Japanese art critic Chiba Shigeo, a famous advocate of Mona-ha, who was visiting Shanghai, he learned about Japanese modern art. Through Shigeo, Song saw the possibility of an art that was "different from the West-centered standard" and became more confident about expressing himself in the language that he wanted the most: installations of ready-mades.[97] Then the opportunity arose to organize an exhibition. Song Haidong presented the art that he was most interested in. The *Garage Show* did not benefit from any institutional affiliation. Song Haidong had raised a small amount of money with the help of one of his relatives.[98] It took place in the underground car park of the Shanghai Education Hall, hence the title, and lasted for three days.[99] Both Shanghai-based literary critic Wu Liang (吴亮, b.1955) and Japanese art critic Chiba Shigeo were featured on the show's poster as the essay writers.

Shanghai art was already beginning to gain international attention and the *Garage Show* was an important episode in Shanghai's admission to membership of the international art world circuit. The exhibition coincided with the visit of German curators who were researching works for Documenta.[100] At the time, two kinds of art prevailed in Shanghai studios: Political Pop, represented by such painters as Yu

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[96] Biljana Ciric, "Song Haidong fangtan" ("An Interview with Song Haidong"), in *Shanghai Tan 1979–2009: Shanghai yishujia ge'an* (*History in the Making: Shanghai 1979–2009: Artists Interviews and Work Archives*) ed. Biljana Ciric (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2010), 350.
[97] Ciric, "Interview with Song," 350.
[98] Ciric, "Interview with Song," 350.
[99] The address was 1 Yueyang Road, Shanghai.
[100] Zhang Xiaojun, "Youguan redian huajia de chuangzuo zhuangtai" ("About the Creative State of Hotspot Artists"), in Zhang, *Travellog*, 56. The essay was originally published in December 1991 and was included in this collection of all essays written for this column. This is the only place where the intention of the organizer is mentioned.

Youhan, Li Shan and Liu Dahong, and installation and conceptual art by artists such as Song Haidong and Hu Jianping. Many artists in the *Garage Show* belonged to the latter group.

The *Garage Show* had a very portentous subtitle: *The Actuality of Experience at the Moment* (*Dangxia jingyan de xianshi* 当下经验"的现实). This was a play on the sense of urgency that most artists felt while looking at their actual surroundings and experiences. The issues of the mid- to late 1980s were now fading; the newness of absorbing modern art from the West and experimenting with art that rejected tradition out of hand was over. The show featured many installations, photographs, videos and performances. Many of the works were linked by a strong rejection of meaning, avoiding allegorical or symbolic signification. Some artists deployed symbols while others abandoned them. Unlike the *New Generation Art Exhibition* of three months earlier, the *Garage Show* avoided an entrepreneurial structure because the participating artists came from diverse backgrounds and were more resistant to aesthetic packaging. Hu Jianping had graduated from the College of Liberal Arts at Shanghai University in 1984. His installation *What Do You Need* (1991) [Figure 5.12] was a barrel-shaped glass vessel, emblazoned with Coca-Cola and Marlboro cigarette logos, containing dried tree roots. In the early 1990s, these two American brands had become ubiquitous. The container was connected to a copper tap and, as the work's title suggested, the tap posed a question, "What do you need?", in the playful manner of a Coca-Cola commercial. Hu Jianping had been influenced by T.S. Elliot's modernist poem *The Waste Land*. His works were clearly allegorical, and he was deeply troubled by the state of culture and society: the work was triggered by a

newspaper cartoon published in China of a crying baby who rejected breast milk in favor of imported milk powder.[101]

Figure 5.12: Hu Jianping, *What Do You Need*, 1991, installation.

Ni Haifeng presented a series of photos of the installation he created in 1988 in a deserted warehouse in his hometown Zhoushan (*Warehouse No. 10*). [Figure 5.13] Generally situated in disused warehouses (chosen by the artist as metaphors for emptiness), his work existed only as the most transient of installations. He covered walls, objects and floors with numbers, mathematical symbols and fanciful equations. On one wall, his writing was reduced to repeating one number so often that it resembled a pattern. Inspired by Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, he hoped numbers and mathematics would create a "degree zero" in art: a totally meaningless language with nonsense equations and fragmentary symbols.[102] The works in the *Garage Show*, with their experimental and conceptual approaches, were a long way from the grand philosophical and ethical narratives that artworks from the mid-1980s

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[101] Wu Liang, "Shanghai "Cheku '91 Zhan Zhaji" ("Shanghai Garage Show' 91 Exhibition Review"), *Yishu Chaoliu* (*Art Currents*), no. 1 (1992), 8–10.
[102] *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) a book of literary criticism by Roland Barthes, is a literary manifesto that examines the arbitrariness of the constructs of language.

had proudly trumpeted. It was also the first time that video works were presented publicly, such as Zhang Peili's video *Hygiene No. 3* (1991).[103] As Chen Youjun observed, "[c]ompared with the art now popular in Beijing featuring political imagery, the *Garage Show* stressed the potential of art as a discourse, and it was through this level of abstract thought that it engaged with politics. Art could reflect reality through the phenomenology of daily experiences, not through the direct appropriation and transmission of political imagery."[104] This was to be an important legacy of the *Garage Show*.

Figure 5.13: Ni Haifeng, *Warehouse No. 10*, 1988, installation.

Through these two artist-initiated exhibitions, I have described the emerging artistic concerns and approaches following New Wave art and the discussion of the

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[103] Qiu Zhijie, "Luxiang yishu de xingqi he fazhan 1990–1996" ("The Emergence and Development of Video Art 1990-1996"), ArtDa, accessed February 26, 2020, http://www.artda.cn/view.php?tid=10816&cid=20.

[104] Chen Youjun, "Cong 'chongqi xiandaizhuyi' dao 'chonggou qianwei xinchao'" ("From 'Restarting Modernism' to 'Reconstructing Avant-garde and New Wave'"), *Shanghai yishu pinglun* (*Shanghai Art Review*), no. 3 (May 2018): 75–8.

purification of artistic language. The majority of artists who were loosely referred to as the New Generation group, were mostly painters—including Zhao Bandi, Liu Xiaodong, and Yu Hong—and they continued the lineage of New Academic art that we discussed in Chapter Four. This art prided itself on technical virtuosity and was well received by the art market. By contrast, the artists involved in the *Garage Show* in Shanghai were more conceptually driven and their work was more stylistically diverse, including installations, photography and video. Above all, these two contrasting projects attest to the emergence of pocket-sized spaces for art within the early 1990s social context that were not completely constrained by the state-run art system, nor by its systems of evaluation.

The Anxiety of Internationalization and Commercialization

From the early 1990s on, spaces beyond the state institutions became numerous and visible enough to fragment and polarize the unitary system of state-organized and state-supported art. This led to the idea of contemporary art in China, but one influenced by increasing contact with the global art world. This idea emblematized the anti-institutional legacy of avant-garde art, but in practice the art and the artists continued to exist in an authoritarian political system. In reality, there was little or no possibility that they could be autonomous from the system.

From the early 1990s, as the notion of contemporary art became established in China, the international art world began to exert a correspondingly powerful influence—but not, I am arguing, a dominant influence—on Chinese artists' values and horizons. Shanghai-based conceptual artist Qian Weikang felt intense pressure as he observed the rush among his friends to compete for the attention of visiting overseas

curators.[105] This anxiety was vividly captured in two 1996 works by Shanghai artist Zhou Tiehai. *Airport* (*Jichang* 机场) is a sound piece, broadcasting announcements of international departures from Shanghai Airport throughout the exhibition; a voice intones, "Ladies and gentlemen, boarding has commenced for Flight 949 from Shanghai to Tokyo."[106] The flight bound for Kassel in Germany was delayed because the important Documenta exhibition, held every five years, was only to take place the next year. The proliferation of biennials during these years, in the early 1990s, represented a horizon of hope and new platforms for Chinese artists that would go beyond the national structures of Chinese museums and institutions, towards the West. In his black-and-white silent video, *Will/We Must* (*Bixu* 必须, 1996), Zhou Tiehai caricatured the relationship between Chinese artists and the foreign curators who flew into town to pick artists. [Figure 5.14] He structured his video across nine episodes: "The Military Meeting" (*Junshi huiyi* 军事会议), "The Cafeteria" (*Kafeiguan* 咖啡馆), "In the Hospital" (*Kanbing* 看病), "Art Tour Guide" (*Yishu daoyou* 艺术导游), "Heartfelt Calls" (*Dianhua suzhongchang* 电话诉衷肠), "You Betrayed Me" (*Ni beipan wo* 你背叛我), "You Only Have Traditional Chinese Medicine and Witchcraft" (*Nimen zhiyou Zhongyi he wushu* 你们只有中医和巫术), "The Godfather" (*Jiaofu* 教父), and "The Raft of the Medusa" (*Meidusha zhi fa* 美杜莎之筏). "The Military Meeting" paraded the calculated moves of artists, planning their placement in the increasingly globalized art world. "In the Hospital" compared the experience of waiting to meet with international curators, usually one by one, to the experience of

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[105] Qian Weikang, interview with author, Liu Ding, Su Wei, Moganshan Road Café, Shanghai on January 18, 2012. See *Individual Experience,* eds. Liu Lu and Liu Su, 49.
[106] The exhibition where Zhou Tiehai showed this work was titled "In the Name of Art" (*Yi yishu de mingyi*), curated by Zhu Yi at the Liu Haisu Art Museum in March 1996.

waiting in line to see a doctor at a public hospital.

Figure 5.14: Zhou Tiehai, *Will/We Must*, 1996, video.

The general perception of this period has been dominated by accounts of market success and international recognition.[107] A small number of art movements were successfully identified and promoted by Chinese and international art critics and dealers.[108] With the rise in international participation, however, another unease would soon cast its shadow over the Chinese art community. Artist Zhang Peili explained this problem in an unusually frank, heart-felt presentation at a Dutch conference:

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[107] Ye Yongqing and Wang Lin, "90 niandaichu yishu shichang xunli" ("A Survey of Art Markets in the Early 1990s"), in Zhang ed., *Chinese Art in the 1990s: 1990–1992*, 155–69. See also Zhang, *Travellog*, in which Zhang documented such developments and phenomena.

[108] *China's New Art, Post-1989: With a Retrospective from 1979–1989* and *China Avantgarde* are two exhibitions that introduced these art movements to audiences abroad in the beginning of the 1990s. As indicated in the catalog (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 1993), the exhibition *China's New Art, Post-1989*, co-curated by Chang Tsong-zung and Li Xianting, toured to nine venues from 1993 to 1997, and a version of it travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia. *China Avantgarde*, co-curated by Hans van Dijk, Jochen Noth, Andreas Schmid, was shown in four venues in Europe from 1993 to 1994. See *China Avantgarde* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen Der Welt, 1993).

> I envy those Chinese painters prior to the Ming Dynasty. They were more or less free. There was not so much contact between Chinese culture and the West. The infiltration of Western culture into China was very slow then. After the Ming Dynasty, there were more and more missionaries. Many artists were court painters previously. Then Western paintings started to come in. Artists who worked in China before the Ming Dynasty might not have to worry about what was Chinese.[109]

Many artists experienced this uneasiness during more and more frequent encounters between China and the global art world, as well as in the arrival of an overwhelming domestic culture of consumption. Artist Zhang Xiaogang spoke about his difficulty in continuing to make art after returning to China from an extended visit to Europe arising from an invitation to exhibit abroad:

> I was not so interested in what was happening in China then. My whole brain was awash with the West. I kept thinking that China could not reach the same level and was only at the very beginning.[110]

What would become Zhang's dire restlessness did not just emerge from his inability to deal with the increasing pressure of participating in the international art world, but from the weight of an art system that was quickly emerging into a fixed form in China owing to the progress of the art market. Qian Weikang, who experienced a similar

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[109] Zhang Peili, interview with author, Liu Ding, Su Wei, Beijing, December 19, 2011, in Liu and Liu eds., *Individual Experience,* 83.
[110] Zhang Xiaogang, interview, 100.

anxiety, observed:

> Artists all changed. They were eager to participate in European exhibitions. International exchanges became a kind of vanity fair. One would not pay attention to Shanghai, only to New York. Whatever art events were taking place in New York were immediately known in Shanghai. As to what was happening in Shanghai, no one really cared. I also ran into another issue. I had to accept the concept of the curator or otherwise they would not give you [the opportunity] to show. I felt that artists had become actors. If I participate in an exhibition, I was supposed to represent their subject. My work was working for them, working for their exhibition. I was slow in adjusting myself to it and could not live up [to it].[111]

In 1992, when Lyu Peng initiated the first *Guangzhou Biennale*, a number of performance artists had voiced disagreement and concern about the commercialization of art. In October 1992, members of the New History Group (*Xinlishi xiaozu* 新历史小组), an art group that had started in May 1992 in Wuhan, sprayed detergent across the exhibition space of the *Guangzhou Biennale*.[112] They then proceeded to clean the floors and wipe down artworks. The exhibition was filled with the smell of hospital disinfectant. They published a document titled "Disinfection," mocking attempts to manipulate art through market operations. They published documents that revealed the organizers' manipulation of participating

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[111] Qian Weikang, interview, 49.
[112] Members of the New Historicism Group include Ren Jian, Zhou Xiping, Liang Xiaochuan, Yu Hong, Zhang Sanxi, Zhu Xikun, Wang Yubei, Zhao Bing, Dao Zi, Gong Ke, Ye Shuanggui, Fu Zhongwang, Ye Niu, Yu Youbin and Chen Mo.

artists and journalists.[113] [Figure 5.15]

Figure 5.15: New History Group, *Disinfection*, 1992, performance.

On January 8, 1993, an artist collective, Lanzhou Art Legion (*Lanzhou yishu juntuan* 兰州艺术军团), mailed blank death notices from local hospitals in Lanzhou to artists and art critics all over the country.[114] They published an obituary in *Shanxi Daily* (*Shanxi ribao*《山西日报》) announcing the death of a non-existent artist called Zhong Xiandai (钟现代). This was an invented name that meant "modern art in China." They created a sculpture of Zhong Xiandai using paper and mud, describing him as an artist "who was hand in glove with art critics, art dealers, newspaper and journal editors, to cultivate a network and to sell artworks like crazy." On January 17, they staged a public funeral for Zhong Xiandai with a glass coffin in which the naked body of Zhong Xiandai lay, accompanied by ten meters of long black cloth on which were written the characters for "burial" and "three downs and three oppositions" (*Sanda*

[113] For writings on the New History Group, see Gao Minglu and Norman Bryson eds., *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 28; see also Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 209–10.
[114] Members of the Lanzhou Art Legion include Yang Zhichao, Cheng Li, Ma Yunfei, Ye Yongfeng, Liu Yiwu and Liu Xinhua.

sanfan 三打三反)." This was a playful reference to the ubiquity of Communist rectification movements, in their case "overthrowing bullies of painting, overthrowing journals of painting, overthrowing dealers of paintings, as well as to anti-networking, anti-dealing in painting, and anti-publishing." Yang Zhichao, on behalf of the Lanzhou Art Legion, read out a memorial speech, chanted slogans, lit firecrackers, and donned a red, black and white funeral outfit and face mask. Four artists carried Zhong Xiandai's coffin and marched towards the city. After the march, they burned Zhong Xiandai, burying a small box of his ashes.[115]

I would argue that the organization of the first *Guangzhou Biennale*, the uninvited performance *Disinfection* and Zhong Xiandai's burial were inextricably linked manifestations of a widespread anxiety associated with the arrival of an art economy, an anxiety shared by many art professionals in the beginning of the 1990s. It would not be an overstatement to understand the first *Guangzhou Biennale* as a performance in its own right, whereby artists, art critics and investors mounted a show about the promise of the art market, and then acted out how the involvement of market operations in art could bring public attention and social legitimacy to contemporary art.

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that the disillusionment that followed 1989 propelled artists' aspirations to autonomy. These aspirations may have varied greatly, but they

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[115] For a detailed description of this performance, see Silvia Fok, "The Role of the Body in Representing Death in Art," in *Life and Death: Art and the Body in Contemporary China* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 52–4.

were all made possible by the further implementation of market economy reforms and by the resulting rise of an art system for contemporary art both within and outside art academies and state institutions. None of this would have occurred without state economic reforms. From 1989, the date of *Magiciens de la Terre* at Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Chinese contemporary art would gradually appear more and more frequently in exhibitions organized by Western art institutions, riding an emerging wave of globalization in the art world.[116]

The beginning of the 1990s heralded the arrival of the paradigm of contemporary art in China. This vision of contemporary art was strongly influenced by the fact of an art system and an industry that could support artistic practices without dependence on state-provided resources and infrastructure. Chinese artists, curators, critics and dealers actively participated in promoting the brand Chinese contemporary art abroad, while immersing themselves in constructing a domestic system based on their particular knowledge and understanding of the Western art system. Artists often attributed problems at home to the lack of a well-developed art system. In their frequent exchanges with the international art world, they lamented the fact that Chinese art was like an entrée of spring rolls in the buffet of international contemporary art, present but never the main course.[117] They were eager for more attention. From 1995 to 1998, Shanghai artist Zhou Tiehai created fake covers for seven international magazines such as *Newsweek*, *Flash Art*, *FACTS*, and *Art in America* (1995–1998), placing his own face or his artworks on the covers. [Figure 16]

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[116] For writings on *Magiciens de la Terre*, see Lucy Steeds et al., *Making Art Global (Part 2) 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989* (London: Afterall, 2013).
[117] Eleonora Battiston, "Zhou Tiehai, Shanghai and Globalization,", ShanghART Singapore, accessed February 20, 2019, http://www.shanghartsingapore.com/gallerysg/texts/id/137.

He saw the necessity for artists to be on high-profile lists of international artists in order for them to be welcomed into museums and dealer galleries and be covered in art criticism and by the art media. The work was triggered by an encounter in another artist's studio. During this visit, Zhou found himself talking to a French photographer who was doing a special feature on Chinese contemporary artists but who had no interest in him. It was clear to Zhou that artists must become part of the international art market, entering the world of the art world, before they could have any form of recognition.[118] This anxiety was only aggravated by the state's tightening of ideological control after 1989, with continual tension between authorities and contemporary artists whose performances and exhibitions were censored or forced to close.[119]

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[118] Battiston, "Zhou Tiehai."

[119] Wu Hung has observed: "This rather idealistic perception of contemporary artists was especially in vogue in the 1980s and 1990s, when government institutions firmly rejected new art forms, and when cancelations of contemporary art exhibitions were commonplace. Under such circumstances, terms such as 'modern art' and 'contemporary art' were largely synonymous with 'unofficial art' and 'alternative art'." See Wu Hong, "Introduction: Spheres of Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Contemporary Chinese Art*, 12. Paul Galdston has observed that public showings of contemporary art did remain a sensitive issue because of their potential to expose a still largely culturally conservative Chinese public to non-Chinese cultural values. He cited the *First Academic Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Art* (*Shoujie zhongguo dangdai yishu wenxianzhan*), scheduled to be held at NAMOC and the Capital Normal University Art Gallery, Beijing between 31 December 1996 and 3 January 1997 but cancelled abruptly by authorities in Beijing one day before its opening. See Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art,* 124–5.

Figure 5.16: Zhou Tiehai, *Fake Covers*, 1995–1998.

After Tian'anmen, many artists and critics discarded the passionate idealism of the 1980s. In its place, they linked visions of a rational, analytical, orderly system to establishing a strong economic base. In both public and private, bureaucracy ruled according to a shared, communal logic of pacification, economic growth and the narrow interests of a small propertied class. At one point, there had been a hope that China's new entrepreneurs would create a democratic vanguard. But artists forgot that the new business elite was fully dependent on the one-party state and above all on its exploitation of labor.

From the maze of wildly divergent perspectives, many intellectuals and artists came

to share the government's commitment to establishing a society ruled by the economy rather than politics. The counterintuitive rationale was the Marxist idea of the economic base determining the superstructure. In effect, and to the degree that it needed to focus on such a narrow sector of a vast society, the government offered culture as a welcome diversion from the political tensions of 1989, a scheme that involved and implicated a great number of intellectuals and educated elites into economic activities supported by a degree of political access and privilege. Some people who would have taken to the street to demand political reform and an open society were so implicated in speculative schemes that they also sought political stability and the privilege offered to them. For instance, in 2002 Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi set up the new media art department within the China Academy of Art and in 2005 Lyu Shengzhong set up the experimental art studio at CAFA. Both were attempts to introduce contemporary art's approaches into rigid school curricula. The experimental art studio at CAFA was expanded into the School of Experimental Art in 2014, and other art academies across the country followed suit. Qiu Zhijie is now its Dean. In 2008, Xu Bing returned to Beijing from New York in 2008 to serve as CAFA's Deputy Director. These are some examples of artists who in recent times have chosen to work with the state system. Their political vision was no longer radical or subversive. They sought to consolidate the existing order, not to challenge it.

In the 1990s, the Chinese art world underwent a gradual transition from a mixed community of idealistic intellectuals, radical conceptualists, pragmatic revolutionaries and naïve entrepreneurs to one of market operators and market disciples. As the government quickly consolidated economic growth as the state ideology for all, the ideas of economic opportunities on offer were taken to heart by intellectuals and

artists, many of whom initially regarded the market as the pathway to arriving at freedom of one kind or another. It was hoped that the marketing of art would show the government the value of art, which would then provide artistic freedom and legitimation. In the 1990s, the marketing of art was taken up by a group of art critics and curators such as Lyu Peng as part of proposals and plans to gain autonomy and social legitimacy for contemporary artists. The second gambit was that reform-period liberalism emerging in the early 1990s would liberate society from state excesses. But in the end, the freedom of the market determined the extent of that liberation. What was underestimated was the power of the state; instead of offering an outlet for independent art practice, the market was already implicated in the political agenda of the state. The market and the state become more and more tightly connected to each other, not pulling in opposite directions. Both the separation of the market from the state and the separation of politics from art would remain durable myths.

Conclusion

When I began writing this thesis, I was motivated by my lingering doubt that the history of contemporary art in China since the 1990s might be inadequately explained by the assumptions I found all around me. In particular, I was aware of the widespread idea that Chinese contemporary art had been underpinned by an avant-garde history made up of individuals' innovations pitted against institutions, academies and the state, much as generations of modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art historians had explored, theorized and explained Western European and North American art. As a curator and writer living and working in China, I had long realized the limitations of such frameworks in interpreting artistic works, individual positions and experiences, not only in China but across the globe beyond Western Europe and the US. Many existing narratives of Chinese contemporary art have been overtly and clearly framed by such perspectives. This realization compelled me to embark on this thesis.

I set out to establish a different understanding of contemporary art in China based on a series of close examinations of specific episodes and events. I focused on the close affinity between Chinese art's historical formation and the Chinese state's ideological mechanisms. This has led me to push back the date from which we must begin to see Chinese contemporary art's origins, backwards from 1976 all the way to 1949, when the PRC was founded. While the focus of my thesis is from 1972 to 1996, the earlier period of the 1950s provides important background to my narrative as outlined in the introduction and detailed in three key debates that have been included in Appendix 3 for additional contextual information on that period. Implicit, therefore, is my

contention that contemporary Chinese art is part and parcel of Socialist Chinese ideology and has been since 1949. I believe that I have shown that contemporary Chinese art should be viewed within the course of politics in China during the latter half of the twentieth century. I have understood, along with other scholars quite recently, that the decades after 1976 were not completely ideologically different from the three decades before 1976. Through my interviews with ageing participants and discoveries made in archives in China, I came to recognize that the end of the Cultural Revolution didn't bring a fundamental shift to the political ideology and structure of art in China. The same ideological basis and social structures substantially remained in place and proved surprisingly relevant to later practices of art.

Given what I have written, it may seem strange for me to now emphasize that throughout the research for this thesis, I was repeatedly made aware of the agency of individual artists and cultural bureaucrats, and yet I saw this agency continuously redefined and restrained by the inescapable structures and mechanisms of the CCP. Such a complex relationship between individual actors in the art scene and the state and Party machine extends across all aspects of Chinese society and continues today. This relationship has, of course, evolved over time, with different dynamics and forces creating apparently new cultural manifestations, but I argue that this evolution has only given the impression of real change and of false affinities with the course of American or European contemporary art.

I will now review the intellectual journey that this thesis represents and argue my contribution to the field of the study of contemporary art in China.

In Chapter One I examined how, in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, possibilities arose for professional artists to take up art again, participating in the national art exhibitions that now resumed, and creating quite dramatic and ultimately seminal site-specific commissions in hotels designated to accommodate foreign diplomats and visitors. The same artists were also able to work for state-owned companies that sold art in exchange for foreign currency. The Beijing Fine Art Company operated during this period, filling state commissions throughout the Cultural Revolution. I showed that this arrangement enabled artists employed by the Company to maintain artistic experimentation in private. Throughout this period, artists who later were members of groups including the April Photo Society, the No Name Group, and the Stars Group, also managed to continue making in secret works of art that didn't conform to Socialist Realist principles.

This insight was central to Chapter Two. My research substantially revised the impression that artistic undertakings other than Socialist Realism and revolutionary propaganda were disrupted and suspended during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, I linked this to changes that were set in motion from the middle of the Cultural Revolution, leading to the converging initiatives of individual artists and sympathetic and well-placed state bureaucrats, who all sought to reactivate Chinese art after 1976. Chapters One and Two therefore counter the prevailing narrative about this period—that Chinese art was marked by a rupture at this time, due to the Cultural Revolution—showing that there was not a sudden transition at the end of the Cultural Revolution, but that shifts were set in place from 1972 onwards. This, of course, led me to reassess such key artist groups and initiatives as the Beijing Oil Painting Society (*Beijing youhua yanjiu hui* 北京油画研究会), the Stars Group (*Xingxing*

huahui 星星画会), the April Photography Society (*Siyue yinghui* 四月影会), the No Name Group (*Wuming huahui* 无名画会) and their exhibitions. These artist groups came to prominence at the end of the 1970s. I found that different generational backgrounds, educational pedigrees, and degrees of official affiliation were at work together, and that knowledge of this diversity was essential to understanding, for example, the history and significance of the well-known exhibitions of the No Name and Star groups. Each artist group in fact had a complicated and ambiguous relationship with the state. This thesis therefore forces a reconsideration of what now seems, in the light of my research, to be the widespread, oversimplified interpretation of this period, especially of the Star Group. I have shown that the avant-garde character of the Star Group was conflicted at best, and at worst a construction that bore only a vague relation to Euro-American models.

I then explored the 1980s across Chapters Three and Four. The former chapter focused on the clash of two artistic trends that were at the time labeled as "formal exploration," by which was meant experimentation with diverse artistic forms, and which was to be identified with older generations of artists, and "conceptual renewal," by which was meant art made with self-conscious theoretical and philosophical references, and which was by contrast proposed by the younger generation of artists. The latter was widely known as the '85 New Wave Movement, and it has come to dominate the narrative of contemporary Chinese art. I showed the co-existence of both trends, which until now has been generally forgotten. The two trends were not two strictly divided lines of thought underpinned by fundamental ideological differences. My thesis has proven that they grew from a shared origin: both groups

desired change amidst the looser state policy settings generated by the momentum of policy reform across Chinese society from 1978 onwards. And both groups were in close dialogue with each other. There is no longer any real need to prioritize that particular younger generation's primacy over older artists, nor to locate in the former the genesis of Chinese contemporary art.

In Chapter Four, I detailed the appearance and then the reception of New Wave art, which has come to loom so significantly in the identity of Chinese contemporary art, but through a different lens, that of a debate about the purification of artistic language. The phenomenon of the "purification of language" was a call for formal quality and technical skill promoted by artists who regarded themselves as having been marginalized by an overemphasis on concepts and theories. They felt that narrative content and social issues had compromised technical excellence and artistic quality. This thinking, steeped in the experience of strategically navigating ideological shifts and crackdowns, with severe consequences always on the cards, steered artists towards technical superiority and formal experimentation, a phenomenon that has been occluded in much English language literature on the artists. The dominance of New Wave art resulted in the marginalization of other ideas about art, including so-called formal experimentations, that were just as current as New Wave art. I argued that a lasting consequence of this dynamic, involving the deliberately engineered rise of a highly entrepreneurial art market and participation in international exhibitions after 1989, was the depoliticization of art; this, of course, was precisely the reverse of what one would expect in a Socialist state but it was the result of a course laid out as far back as the end of the Cultural Revolution, and was exactly what the state wished.

In Chapter Five, the last section of my thesis, I surveyed the Chinese artistic scene at the start of the 1990s. The rout suffered by the 1989 student movement and the prevailing conviction that the market might well offer a new, free social space propelled artists and art critics to see the market as an alternative to the state's official art structures. I explained the events surrounding the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)* (1992), initiated by Lyu Peng, and I charted two associated artist initiatives and their reception. However, I concluded that these apparently new initiatives were embedded within and absorbed into the state's hegemony. The market became a much better, though covert, arbiter of rules and values, the soft face of an authoritarian state.

I have insisted that contemporary art can be seen historically, and that its Chinese genesis stretches back to 1949. My thesis does not offer the reader a year-by-year chronology of the development of Chinese contemporary art but, instead, an account of particular historical events and arguments about art that shaped the general conception of Chinese contemporary art. I have explained where this emerges from. Above all, I have shown that the logic of the CCP's official ideology has continuously shaped the narrative of contemporary art in China. My thesis demonstrates that the practice of contemporary art and its discursive constructions never strayed far from official frameworks. It was not able to. This, I believe, is a new scholarly contribution that can now be balanced against the artists' stated intentions and their claims for affinities with global art.

The reason why all this matters is because in China, and in written Chinese (as

opposed to in English language) accounts, the critical examination of contemporary art's history is rare and presents obvious challenges. The Socialist regulation of contemporary art, and the involvement of government authorities in support of or in opposition to artists, is not a subject of wide discussion in China. As a legacy of 1989, and the very public protests made by artists and academics, today official art academies and universities are reluctant to establish academic subjects on the history of contemporary art in China. Since 1989, the presentation and discussion of Chinese contemporary art in the Western art world, through themed exhibitions, international biennales and art fairs, has followed the basic process of attempting to synchronize Chinese contemporary art with globalized art. Many artists and theoreticians welcomed these actions as a sign of globalization.

At the same time, the genuine understanding of contemporary art's past remains mired in iconic images and discursive frameworks that were set more or less in stone back in the early 1990s. Many who helped formulate the framework have become authoritative and deeply respected figures, making it hard to question the foundations of their authority. While many artists were made irrelevant by such frameworks—particularly older artists whose careers stretched back into the 1950s and 1960s—many benefited from the symbolic value of contemporary art as part of a globalized condition. Furthermore, the contemporary art market, which only clearly emerged in China after 1989 (with the important exceptions that I explored in my first two chapters), took full advantage of the symbolic value of Chinese Socialist art. A narrow definition of contemporary art excludes many artworks, documents, artistic events, individual positions and local experiences and can be reconsidered with the recognition of Socialist frameworks.

In acknowledging the continuous logic of the CCP, I also recognized the urgency of making transparent the workings of the logic of the Party which impacts on everyone in China, and which has implications beyond China's borders, even for the discipline of art history as a whole. In nearly a decade since the current president Xi Jinping rose to power in 2012, the authoritarian Communist state has increasingly exercised power and control across society. The contemporary art field has not been exempt from tighter and tighter ideological controls, including in importing or exporting artworks for exhibitions, publishing books, producing exhibitions and writing catalogs. Each of these areas of art activity can be censored, with exhibitions closed or prevented from opening and printing delayed, sometimes indefinitely. The distribution and transport of books and catalogs can be stalled. Art academies and government-run art museums under the Communist Party's authority remain powerful systems, offering employment and status, opportunities for commissions, and possibilities to exhibit nationally and internationally, but always at the cost of compliant silence. Instead of challenging the system, many in contemporary art have embraced such structures in order to gain recognition and opportunities. In the process, art is usually directly equated with commercial value, social popularity and exposure. There is neither rigorous questioning nor inquiry into the historical and immediate conditions of contemporary art practice, nor is there a compass of values for action other than profit.

In summary, across this thesis, I continually sought to interrogate the idea that Chinese art has been dependent on the diffusion of Western art. I hope I have shown that this is not the case. Only by surveying the actual specificity of the development

of art in China during the Communist period can we begin to see the specificity of such complex historical processes, and only then will there be a nuanced understanding of contemporary art in China, along with its intricate relationship with state ideology and the complicated but remarkable agency of individuals in that narrative.

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Appendix 1
Chronology of Significant Political and Artistic Events 1911–1996

1911

Collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)

1912

Establishment of the Republic of China with Sun Yat-sen as the provisional first president.

Founding of Nationalist Party Kuomintang (KPT) by Sun Yat-sen. He later resigned in favor of Yuan Shikai.

Artists Liu Haisu, Wu Shiguang, and Wang Yachen establish a private art school named Shanghai Fine Arts Academy (*Shanghai meishu yuan* 上海美术院), which is renamed Shanghai College of Fine Arts (*Shanghai meishu zhuanke xuexiao* 上海美术专科学校).

1916

Yuan Shikai dies, leaving the country without a strong central leader. China descends into a period of control by warlords.

1918

The establishment of a national art school, Beijing College of the Arts (*Beiping yishu zhuanke xuexiao* 北平艺术专科学校), supported by Cai Yuanpei, Minister of

Education.

1919

The May Fourth Movement.

1921

Establishment of the CCP (*Zhongguo gongchandang* 中国共产党) in Shanghai.

1925

Death of Sun Yat-sen.

Chiang Kai-shek assumes leadership of KMT and launches the Northern Expedition which reunifies China under the Nationalist government.

1934–1935

Mao Zedong leads the Long March and establishes his revolutionary headquarters in Yan'an.

1937–1945

Sino-Japanese War.

1942

At the Yan'an Forum for Literature (*Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 延安文艺座谈会) and Art, Mao Zedong outlines the ultimate guiding ideology for art practitioners in his famous "Yan'an Talks."

1949

Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Central People's Government, announces the founding of the PRC on October 1.

The First National Congress of Writers and Artists (*Diyici zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui* 第一次中华全国文学艺术工作者代表大会) is convened and the All-China Federation of Literature and Art Circles (*Quanguo wenxue yishujie lianhehui* 全国文学艺术界联合会) is founded, with writer Guo Moruo elected as its first chairman.

July 1949

The Chinese Art Workers' Association (*Zhongguo meishu gongzuozhe xiehui* 中国美术工作者协会) is founded as a national professional arts association indirectly supervised by the Propaganda Department of the CCP. It changes its name to the China Artists' Association (*Zhongguo meishujia xiehui* 中国美术家协会) in 1953.

1950

The Central Academy of Fine Arts (*Zhongyang meishu xueyuan* 中央美术学院) is founded by combining the National Beiping College of the Arts (*Guoli beiping yishu zhuanke xuexiao* 国立北平艺术专科学校) and the fine art department of Northern China University (*Huabei daxue* 华北大学).

1953

The Ministry of Culture sends the first group of students to the Soviet Union and continues to do so until 1962.

Mao Zedong begins Rural Collectivization based on a five-year plan. Individual landownership is abolished and replaced with cooperatives.

Art academies set up oil painting departments and majors all over the country, formalizing and popularizing the education of oil painters.

1955

By the end of 1955 there is a growing confidence expressed by Mao Zedong in the scale and speed of industrialization in China. For Mao Zedong, the Socialist reform of the ownership of agriculture, industry and commerce is no longer a pressing challenge. He concludes that large-scale class struggle has ended and requests a switch of focus to economic development.

1955–1957

The Soviet government sends artist K.M. Maximov to Beijing on the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Culture, setting up painting courses and instructing the People's Fine Art Publishing House.

1956

In January Zhou Enlai delivers a speech at a conference organized by the Central Committee of the CCP, on the issue of intellectuals.

1956–1957

Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Baihua yundong* 百花运动)

1957–1958

Anti-Rightist Campaign (*Fanyou yundong* 反右运动) is launched by Mao Zedong to eliminate critical intellectuals. Half a million dissidents are sent to remote labor camps for "reform through labor."

1958

Anti-Waste and Anti-Conservatism Campaign (*Shuangfan yundong* 双反运动)

1958–1962

The Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin* 大跃进) is officially launched in May 1958, shortly after the conclusion of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

1959

In mid-April, Zhou Enlai delivers an address to the National People's Congress that has been described as possessing "curiously contradictory overtones." Variety in artistic expression now seems be encouraged, however, as the group of artists in attendance vows that "just as we need history painting, we also need bird-and-flower and landscape painting." Such suggestions are interpreted literally, and artistic activity increases accordingly in these three specific areas.

On 3 May Zhou Enlai invites a group of writers and artists, including Beijing

intellectuals and delegates to the National People's Congress and the Political Consultative Congress, to attend a conference in the governmental compound at Zhongnanhai. Zhou's frank remarks to the gathering on that spring day would not be published for twenty years.

At a July 1959 Politburo meeting held at Lushan, Jiangxi, several members including Peng Dehuai attack Mao's policy of the Great Leap Forward. Rather than modifying the Great Leap Forward, however, Mao interprets the criticism as a power play and moves to silence his critics.

The purge of Peng Dehuai following his criticism of the Great Leap Forward results in a new political movement against "Rightist tendencies" that autumn. Artistic effort is diverted into the public criticism of artists who have narrowly escaped the Rightist label two years earlier, which discourages experimentation.

1959–1961

Droughts and floods in 1959 and 1960 lead to poor harvests, food shortages, and starvation in the countryside. According to Chinese government sources some 15 million people are said to have died, but others place the death toll much higher. Intraparty and international conflicts leave the CCP leadership unable to respond adequately to the crisis. Today, the period between 1959 and 1961 is called the "Three Years of Disaster." (*Sannian ziran zaihai* 三年自然灾害) The suffering visited upon China's people by these natural and manmade calamities force Mao to give way. By late 1960, the government liberalized economic policies in order to stimulate food

production.

1961

On 19 June Zhou Enlai delivers a talk, “Speeches at the Symposium on Literary and Art Work and the Creation Meeting of Feature Films” (“Zai wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui he gushipian chuangzuo huiyi shang de jianghua”《在文艺工作座谈会和故事片创作会议上的讲话》), concerning literature and the arts that, like his speech two years before, remains unpublished until after his death. Delivered against a background of widespread food shortages, his message is a renunciation of the hardline cultural policies of the Great Leap Forward, calling for the regularization of artistic activity, the return of amateur artists to their regular jobs, the elimination of some newly founded art technical schools, and the democratization of art. He specifically urges intellectuals to speak their minds, claiming that the Party has been advocating the liberation of thought for three years with little result. Additionally, he criticizes people who restrict themselves to the framework of Mao’s Yan’an Talks.

Yet Zhou also stresses the need to balance freedom with order. That freedom of speech has limits is suggested when Zhou defends the Anti-Rightist Campaign, except as it applied to those who “only spoke one sentence in error.” He further orders leaders to remain responsible for preventing political errors but to interfere less in other realms. He suggests that tolerance for individual styles is desirable.

Zhou Enlai’s talks in 1961 are a mandate to promote regional arts of all kinds. Zhou argues not only for regional styles, but also for professional and local determination

of standards for art: “If we government leaders happen to love drama, painting, antiques, and so forth, that does not give us the right to set standards.”

The Propaganda Department similarly re-evaluates the cultural situation. The result of this analysis emerges in draft form in May. In December 1961, “Eight Articles on Literature and Art,” a document advocating the same sort of liberalization articulated in Zhou Enlai’s speech, are drafted and formally issued in April 1962.

1961–1963

Along with relaxation of the domestic economy comes a partial liberalization of social, cultural, and political controls. Artists find themselves eager to work, but some are freer than before to make their own creative choices. The liberalization of 1961 through 1963 is, for the most part, administered more benevolently than that of 1956. Artists in the early 1960s seek recognition largely on the basis of their art, not their political posture. Peaceful accord between painters of different groups is encouraged in this second attempt to implement the Hundred Flowers Campaign. A wider range of creative activities allows more artists to participate in the officially sanctioned art world.

Border disputes with India and the Soviet Union begin to isolate China, which responds with increasingly strident Chinese nationalism. Soviet-style oil painting remains a vital part of Chinese artistic production, but critics refer to it by function, as “history painting” (*lishihua* 历史画) or “propaganda painting,” (*xuanchuanhua* 宣传画) rather than by its style, medium, or heritage.

1962

The single most influential event in the cultural readjustment is a speech delivered by Chen Yi at the Canton Forum of Opera and Drama on 3 March. Chen tells artists that thought reform will no longer be implemented through movements, nor will the Party force them to read Mao's works. He further declares that because intellectuals had undergone thirteen years of reform, they should have their "capitalist class caps" removed. "Today," he said "I am holding for you a 'cap-removing ceremony'." This liberalization of thought and intellectual practice, referred to by Zhou Yang in a *People's Daily* editorial on 23 May, 1962, exerted an extremely powerful, if short-lived, influence on artistic circles.

In May the *Third National Fine Art Exhibition* (*Disanjie quanguo meizhan* 第三届全国美展) is the first exhibition to be opened at NAMOC, which is still under construction. By June 1962, the museum is officially opened. From 1963 to 1965, the museum averages sixteen exhibitions per year, ranging from solo shows to thematic group exhibitions. With the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, programming ceased until 1972.

1966–1976

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*Wuchanjieji wenhua dageming* 无产阶级文化大革命). China's legal, research and educational systems are paralyzed. Intellectuals and people with "counter-revolutionary" backgrounds are sent to labor camps or custodial work units.

1968–1978

The Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement (*Shangshan xiaxiang* 上山下乡) is initiated by Mao Zedong in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

The Red Guard Movement finally subsides in late 1968.

1969

The first Plenary Session of the 9th Communist Party of China's Central Committee is held in Beijing on 28 April. The Central Culture Revolution Group is disbanded.

After the 9th People's Congress, according to the decisions of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, the central government takes a series of measures to restart or improve diplomatic relationships with the international community.

1970

The 2nd Plenary Session of the 9th Communist Party of China's Central Committee is held in Lushan, Jiangxi Province from August 23 to September 6. Chaired by Mao Zedong, this session discusses the revision of the Constitution, and the fourth five-year national economic plan.

The Cultural Group of State Council (*Guowuyuan wenhuazu* 国务院文化组) is established as a new national cultural institution. With the dismissal of the Cultural Ministry, the Cultural Group of the State Council acts in the absence of the original

Cultural Ministry, Publishing Bureau, and the Central Culture Revolution Group.

1971

There is a gradual recovery of official art exhibitions under the Cultural Group of State Council and the newly structured cultural institutions.

In March, the *Navy Art Exhibition* (*Haijun meishu zuopin zhan* 海军美术作品展) is held at NAMOC.

On September 13, Lin Biao's failed coup ends with his death in a plane crash.

In October, the People's Republic China replaces the Republic of China, Taiwan as the legitimate representative of China to the United Nations.

1972

In February, Nixon visits China. In the same year, China and Japan re-establish diplomatic relations.

On May 23, 1972, the *National Art Exhibition in Commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art,"* (*Jinian Maozhuxi "Zai yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua" fabiao sanshi zhounian quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlanhui* 纪念毛主席<在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话>发表三十周年全国美术作品展览会) opens at NAMOC.

By the end of the year China establishes or recovers diplomatic relationships with forty-one countries, including Australia.

1973

In March, *Art* (*Meishu*《美术》) magazine resumes publication.

On 1 October, the Cultural Group of the State Council organizes three exhibitions at NAMOC: *National Exhibition of Comics and Brush-and-Ink Painting* (*Quanguo lianhuanhua Zhongguohua zhanlan* 全国连环画、中国画展览), *Exhibition of Huxian Peasants' Paintings* (*Huxian nongmin huazhan* 户县农民画展) and *1973 National Exhibition of Photography* (*Yijiuqisan quanguo shying yishu zhanlan*1973 年全国摄影艺术展览).

1974

On 15 February, the *"Black Painting" Exhibition* (*Heihuazhan* 黑画展) is held at NOMAC, with 18 participating artists and 215 works.

In April, Jiangsu Pictorial (Jiangsu huakan《江苏画刊》) is launched.

1976

On 9 September, Mao Zedong, Chairman of the People's Republic of China, dies, effectively ending the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping comes to power and leads for the next two decades.

1977

In February, the Ministry of Culture organizes a gathering of over a thousand people working in the arts at the China History Museum to criticize the Gang of Four for disrupting the construction of the country and for obstructing the development of culture and art.

In September, the Chinese Ministry of Education holds a National Conference on Enrollments at Colleges and Universities. At this conference, the decision is reached to resume national college enrollment examinations that had been suspended for a decade. The National Higher Education Entrance Examination is reintroduced, which ends the policy of only admitting people into higher education with farming, factory and military experience during the period 1971–1977.

Art Academies throughout China reopen and admit their first classes of students after the Cultural Revolution.

1978

In August, the Preparation Group for the CAA is set up to plan for the reopening of the Association. Cai Ruohong is appointed head of the group, with Zhu Dan and Hua Junwu as deputy heads.

In June, the art journal *Fine Arts in the World* (*Shijiemeishu*《世界美术》) is launched by CAFA.

In November 1978–December 1979, thousands of people in Beijing put up written complaints and protests about the ills of China on a 200-meter-long structure at the Xidan intersection of Beijing's main east-west avenue. It is called the Xidan Democracy Wall (*Xidan minzhu qiang* 西单民主墙).

On 18–22 December, the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhonggong zhongyang shiyijie sanzhongquanhui* 中共中央十一届三中全会) is held in Beijing. It officially marks the beginning of China's Reform and Opening-Up program and manifested the government's determination to close the chapter on the Cultural Revolution and to move the country towards a new period of reform and openness.

1979

In August, CAFA reforms its leadership, appointing Jiang Feng as the director and Liu Kaiqu, Zhu Dan, Gu Yuan, Luo Gongliu, Ai Zhongxin and Zhang Qiren as vice directors.

On 26 September, the Beijing Airport murals are completed and opened to the public.

On 30 October, the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists opens in Beijing, where policies for cultural reforms inspired by humanistic approaches are addressed.

On 3–10 November, at the Third Assembly of the China Artists' Association, a new charter is ratified and Jiang Feng assumes the role of chairman.

1980

In May, the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (*Shenzhen jingji tequ* 深圳经济特区) is established, the first such zone in the PRC.

In June, the Beijing Branch of the CAA is established, with Yin Shoushi as chairman.

On 5 August, the CAA and Beijing Hotel jointly establish and open the Artists Gallery (*Meishujia hualang* 美术家画廊), a commercial gallery, in the Beijing Hotel.

1981

On February, the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council issue the Directive on Handling Illegal Publications, Illegal Organizations and Related Issues, revoking rights to free speech and public debate.

1982

On 13 September, Jiang Feng dies of a heart attack.

1983–1984

Anti-Spiritual Pollution (*Qingchu jingshen wuran* 清除精神污染) Campaign.

1984

On 1 October, the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition* (*Diliujie quanguo meizhan* 第六届全国美展) opens at NAMOC.

In October, *The Trend of Art Thought* (*Meishu sichao*《美术思潮》) magazine is established by the Hubei Branch of CAA. It will cease publication at the end of 1987.

1985

On 21 April, the Symposium on Oil Painting is co-organized by the Art Research Institute of Chinese National Academy of Arts and the Anhui Branch of the CAA in Jixian, Anhui Province.

On 10–26 May, the *Fine Art Exhibition of Advancing Chinese Youth* (*Qianjinzhong de Zhongguo qingnian meizhan*《前进中的中国青年美展》) is held at NOMAC.

On 3 June, *Fine Arts in China* (*Zhongguo meishubao*《中国美术报》) newspaper is founded; it publishes its inaugural issue on July 6.

On 14 October, the Art Committee for Oil Painting (*Youhua yishu weiyuanhui* 油画艺术委员会) is established by the CAA, with Zhan Jianjun as its director.

In November, *Painter* (Huajia《画家》) magazine starts publication in Changsha, Hunan.

In November–December, the *Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange* exhibition is held at NAMOC. During his stay in Beijing, Rauschenberg is invited to lecture at the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts. The exhibition travels to Lhasa, Tibet.

1986

On 15–17 April, the National Oil Painting Symposium (*Quanguo youhua yishu taolunhui* 首届中国油画艺术讨论会), Guest House, Ministry of Communications, Beijing.

From 29 March to 20 April, Exhibition of Contemporary Oil Painting (Dangdai youhuazhan 当代油画展) is held at NAMOC.

On June 30, the *First Oil Painting Exhibition of the Beijing International Art Palace* opens at NAMOC.

In December*, A History of Chinese Modern Paintings* (*Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi* 《中国现代绘画史》) by Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan is published.

1987

In October, the 13th National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China is held in Beijing, signaling the end of the Party's Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization movement and bringing the subject of political structural reform onto the official agenda of the Communist Party.

On 21 December, the *Chinese Oil Painting Exhibition* organized by the Art Committee for Oil Painting of the CAA and its Shanghai branch opens at Shanghai Exhibition Center.

1988

On 20 April, Gao Minglu and his colleagues complete the manuscript of *A Contemporary History of Fine Art in China 1985–1986* (*Zhongguo dangdai meishushi 1985–1986* 《中国当代美术史 1985 至 1986》).

On 15–23 October, two exhibitions, *Prints by Xu Bing* and *Paper-Cut Art by Lyu Shengzhong*, are held at NAMOC.

On 22–24 November, the '88 Symposium on the Creation of Chinese Modern Art ('88 *Zhongguo xiandai yishu chuangzuo yantaohui* '88 中国现代艺术创作研讨会) is held in Tunxi, Huangshan, Anhui Province.

1989

In early 1989, Li Luming, editor at Hunan Fine Arts Publishing, invites five art critics active at that time to produce a record of the past decade. In the end, only Lyu Peng accepts the invitation after in the summer of that year completing *A History of China Modern Art* 1979–1989 (*Zhongguo xiandai yishushi 1979-1989*《中国现代艺术史 1979–1989》).

On 5 February, the *China/Avant-Garde Exhibition* opens at NAMOC.

From 15 Aprilto 4 June, Tian'anmen Square protests conducted largely by students bring international attention to China. The military clashes violently with the

protesters, who demand freedom and democracy, resulting in many deaths.

In December, *Fine Arts in China* ceases publication.

1990

China's biggest special economic zone launches in the suburbs of Shanghai at Pudong.

In November, the Shanghai Stock Exchange is formally established as the first stock exchange in mainland China since 1949.

In January, *Art & Market* (*Yishu shichang*《艺术·市场》) commences publication with Lyu Peng as editor.

1991

In February, the State Council holds a conference in Beijing on reforming the national economic system, establishing that the general objective for reform in the 1990s is to lay down the basic framework of a new Socialist planned commodity economy and to integrate the planned economy with market regulations as its operational mechanism.

On 7–14 July, the *New Generation Art Exhibition* (*Xinshengdai yishuzhan* 新生代艺术展) is held at China History Museum.

On 25 July, the new space for the Beijing International Art Palace (*Beijing guoji*

yiyuan 北京国际艺苑), spearheaded by Liu Xun, opens at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Wangfujing. Previously, it had rented space for exhibitions at NAMOC.

On 30 September, works by Liu Xiaodong and Yu Hong are included in Christie's Hong Kong auction of Chinese Contemporary Oil Painting. This is the first time contemporary works of Chinese art enter the international auction market.

On 22–24 November, the *Garage Exhibition* (*Chekuzhan* 车库展) is held in Shanghai.

In December, Australian Brian Wallace establishes the Red Gate Gallery, one of the earliest foreigner-run commercial galleries in Beijing.

1992

18 January–21 February: Deng Xiaoping's South China tour.

In October, the 14th National Representative Conference of the Chinese Communist Party is held in Beijing. Jiang Zemin is appointed General Secretary of the CCP's Central Committee. He clearly states that the objective of the reform of the Chinese economic system is to build a Socialist economy mechanism and urges hastening the steps of Reform and Opening-Up.

On October 20–28, the *First 1990s Biennial Art Fair (Oil Painting Section)* takes place at the Guangzhou Central Hotel (*Guangzhou zhongyang jiudian* 广州中央酒店) in Guangzhou.

A History of Chinese Modern Art: 1979–1989 (*Zhongguo xiandai yishushi 1979–1989* 《中国现代艺术史 1979-1989》), co-authored by Lyu Peng and Yi Dan, is published by Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House.

In December, invited by the 1990s Society (*Jiushi niandai she* 九十年代社) of Peking University, a group of *Yuanmingyuan* village artists holds an open-air modern art exhibition on campus.

1993

In January, an artist collective, Lanzhou Art Legion (*Lanzhou yishu juntuan* 兰州艺术军团), mails blank death notices from local hospitals in Lanzhou to artists and art critics all over the country and publishes an obituary in *Shanxi Daily* (*Shanxi ribao* 《山西日报》), announcing the death of a non-existent artist called Zhong Xiandai (钟现代), an invented name that means "modern art in China." On 17 January, they stage a public funeral for Zhong Xiandai with a glass coffin in which the naked body of Zhong Xiandai lies.

From January 30 to May 2, the exhibition *China/Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture* opens at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, later traveling to the Kunsthal Rotterdam, the Netherlands; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK; and Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense, Denmark.

From January 30 to February 28, *China's New Art, Post-1989* is held at the Hong

Kong Arts Centre and Hong Kong City Hall. A version of the exhibition travels to Sydney and Melbourne under the title *Mao Goes Pop* (June 2–August 15). From 1995 to 1997, the exhibition travels to six venues in Canada and the United States.

In May, China Guardian Auctions Co., Ltd. (*Zhongguo jiade paimai* 中国佳德拍卖), is founded, the first auction house in China to specialize in Chinese cultural objects and artworks. It holds the first auction for oil painting and sculpture on March 27, 1994.

In June, the 45th Venice Biennale opens, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva. 13 Chinese artists were invited to participate in the exhibition *Passaggio a Oriente,* for which Li Xianting and Francesca Dal Lago were curatorial consultants.

In June, the Annual Art Critics Nomination Exhibition for Brush-and-Ink Paintings [Niandu pipingjia timingzhan (shuimo bufen)年度批评家提名展（水墨部分）] opens at NAMOC.

1996

On March 19, the first Shanghai Biennale opens at Shanghai Art Museum. It is the first international biennale of contemporary art established in mainland China.

On March 1*, In the Name of Art* (*Yi yishu de mingyi*《以艺术的名义》), curated by Zhu Yi, opens at the Liu Haisu Art Museum.

On September 14, the video art exhibition *Image and Phenomena* (*Xianxiang, yingxiang* 现象，影像) is held at the gallery of the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou.

Appendix 2
Glossary of Additional Chinese Names, Terms and Events

Anti-Waste and Anti-Conservatism Campaign (*Shuangfan yundong* 双反运动)

Mao Zedong's "Sixty Articles on Work Method (draft)" ("Gongzuo fangfa liushitiao caoan") dated January 31, 1958, called on every unit, factory, cooperative, school, armed forces unit and so on to "struggle" against "waste" once a year, using the method of "airing views, rectification and reform." It was the result of the revelations of extravagance during the Hundred Flowers Campaign and an effort to maximize local resources in order to lessen dependence on the Soviet Union. In February, the Ministry of Defence responded to the call and launched an anti-waste campaign aimed at eliminating waste, bureaucracy and lethargy within all the units of the ministry. This campaign attracted much attention, and the Party Committee of the central government organizations (*Zhongyang guojia dangwei*) called a promotional meeting on February 16 to inspect anti-waste and anti-conservatism.

Art Committee (*Yiwei hui* 艺委会)

An institution set up within the Artists' Association at all levels to coordinate the organization and management of exhibitions for members, including the trading of artworks. The artistic committee for oil painting of the CAA was initially set up on November 14–15, 1985.

Cultural Fever (*wenhuare* 文化热)

Cultural Fever was an intellectual movement of the 1980s that addressed the issues

that arose following the introduction of economic reforms in 1978 and the ensuing changes to social dynamics caused by re-examination of China's cultural traditions. During this time, people at all levels of society, from celebrity professors to high school students, from government bureaucrats to excited workers and soldiers, actively participated in wide-ranging intellectual debates. In major provincial cities, reading groups, research bodies and conferences were organized. Western philosophical works, especially those published in the 20th century, were translated and read. Not only did these works occupy the intellectual field then, they also significantly transformed the dialectical structure of contemporary culture in China.

Democracy Wall (*Minzhuqiang* 民主墙)

A wall in Xidan, Beijing, where from November 1978 people pasted large character posters (dazibao) commenting on and criticizing social and political issues, came to be known as Democracy Wall. In the spring of 1979, Democracy Wall was unceremoniously moved to a small park in western Beijing, and those who wished to put up posters had to register their names and addresses with the authorities. By fall, the leaders of Democracy Wall (most notably Wei Jingsheng) had been arrested, tried and jailed. Public advocacy of political democracy of the liberal or parliamentary sort came to an end then, as the Four Basic Principles announced by Deng Xiaoping in March 1979 (which insisted that all public acts should uphold Socialism and support Party leadership) became the new law.

Deng Xiaoping's South China Tour (*Deng Xiaoping nanxun* 邓小平南巡)

Deng Xiaoping, who had his power weakened by the 1989 Tian'anmen protest and

retired from office, visited Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai from January 18 to February 21, 1992. During his travels, he delivered speeches to generate support for his reformist platform and his economic policy.

Dictatorship by the Proponents of a Sinister Line (*heixian zhuanzheng* 黑线专政)

Proposed in the Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with Which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing ("Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi zuotanhui jiyao"《林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺座谈会纪要》). It was a term to vilify literary and art work in the first seventeen years of the People's Republic. The summary asserted that since the founding of the People's Republic, the literary and art circles had been "under the dictatorship by the proponents of a sinister anti-Party and anti-Socialist line which is diametrically opposed to Chairman Mao's thought." Black was opposed to Red, which was symbolic of the Communist Party. It went on to state, "This sinister line is a combination of bourgeois ideas on literature and art, modern revisionist ideas on literature and art and what is known as the literature and art of the 1930s." Later on, Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and their followers extended their "dictatorship by the proponents of a sinister line" theory to the fields of education, publishing, physical culture, public health, public security and the Party's organizational, propaganda and united front work, as well as to other fields of Party and government work.

Four Cardinal Principles (*Sixiang jiben yuanze* 四项基本原则)

Four Cardinal Principles include: the principle of upholding the Socialist path; the principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship; the principle of upholding the leadership of the CCP; and the principle of upholding Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism. These four Cardinal Principles were laid out by Deng Xiaoping on March 30, 1979 at the Forum on the Principles for the Party's Theoretical Work, in his address entitled "Upholding the Four Cardinal Principles."

Fourth Congress of Representatives of China Artists' Association (*Zhongguo meishujia xiehui disici huiyuan daibiaodahui* 中国美术家协会第四次会员代表大会)

The Congress was held from May 6 to 11, 1985 in Jinan. At the Congress Wu Zuoren was elected as Director, and Wang Zhaowen, Gu Yuan, Ye Qianyu, Liu Kaiqu, Guan Shanyue, Hua Junwu, Li Shaoyan, Li Keran, Zhou Sicong, Qin Zheng, Huang Yongyu and Cai Ruohong were elected as deputy directors.

Gang of Four (*Sirenbang* 四人帮)

A political faction composed of four CCP officials including Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao (张春桥 1917–2005), Wang Hongwen (王洪文 1935–1992) and Yao Wenyuan (姚文元 1931–2005). They came to prominence during the Cultural Revolution. The Gang of Four controlled the power organs of the Communist Party of China through the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, although it remains unclear which major decisions were made by Mao Zedong and carried out by the Gang, and which were the result of the Gang of Four's own planning.

Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin* 大跃进)

This was initially an economic and social campaign led by Mao Zedong from 1958 to 1962. Confident about the country's development, Mao believed that such a campaign could rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a Socialist society through rapid industrialization and collectivization. It led to extreme and irrational actions in all walks of life.

Great Northern Wilderness (*Beidahuang* 北大荒)

The wild area of wasteland located in north Heilongjiang Province in Three River Plain, the plain along the river and Nen River drainage basin. The land in Beidahuang is very fertile black soil, because it is warm, the rain is rich in summer and the winter is long and cold, resulting in a small evaporation capacity. It' was transformed into the largest grain production base in China.

Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*Wuchanjieji wenhua dageming* 无产阶级文化大革命)

In 1966, Mao Zedong launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, also known as the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua dageming* 文化大革命). Frustrated by the direction in which China was going, Mao called on the nation's youth to purge the "impure" elements of Chinese society and revive the revolutionary spirit that he believed could lead to his vision of a communist state. The Cultural Revolution continued in various phases until Mao's death in 1976.

Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892–1978)

Chinese writer, poet, historian, archeologist. He joined the Communist Party in 1927. He was the first President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and remained so from its founding in 1949 until his death in 1978. For the first fifteen years of the PRC, Guo, with his extensive knowledge of Chinese history and culture, was the ultimate arbiter of philosophical matters relating to art, education, and literature.

He Rong (何溶 1921–1989)

Manchurian, born in Jilin, Jilin Province, He enrolled in the literature department of St. John University in Shanghai in 1942. In 1947 he entered the National Beijing Fine Art School (*Guoli Beiping yizhuan*) for his study. After graduation, he stayed on at the school as a teacher in art theory. In 1953 he was transferred to become a secretary of the Secretariat of the CAA and Deputy Director of the Editorial Department of *Art* magazine.

Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齐放，百家争鸣)

This political campaign occurred in 1956, during which time the Communist Party encouraged citizens to openly express their opinions of the regime. After a brief period of liberalization, Mao abruptly changed course and punished those who challenged the Communist regime in the ensuing Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957.

Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai's evaluation of the state of class struggle, their understanding of the historical task of economic and cultural construction for China and their estimate of Chinese intellectuals' political attitudes and states of mind were

the basis of and provided the conditions for the proposition of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" (*Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齐放，百家争鸣) as an important policy. In April 1956, Mao Zedong made his report on "ten major relationships" at the enlarged meeting of the CCP's Central Political Bureau. During the discussion, Lu Dingyi and Chen Boda, Secretary to Mao Zedong, suggested separating issues of an academic and technical nature from political issues in science, literature and art. In his speech on April 28, 1956, Chen Boda proposed to implement two slogans: "Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom" and "Let A Thousand Schools of Thought Contend" in art and science respectively. This opinion was accepted by Mao. At the highest-level state conference held on May 2, Mao Zedong publicly and formally put forth this idea, announcing that the guidelines of letting a hundred flowers bloom in art and that of letting a hundred schools of thought contend in academic work was necessary. He went on to state that within the limits of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, all kinds of academic thoughts, right or wrong, should be left alone without any interference.On May 26, 1956, the Central Committee of the CCP held a meeting with renowned scientists, writers and artists to convey the specifics of the policy of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend." Lu Dingyi, Minister of Propaganda, opened his speech by elaborating on the policy: encouraging the freedom of independent thinking, the freedom of debate, the freedom of creation and criticism, the freedom of expressing one's opinions, and the freedom of insisting on and maintaining one's opinions in the fields of literature, art and scientific research. He dismissed the perspective of the arts and sciences being unrelated to politics as a Rightist idea, but in the meantime criticized the leftist and oversimplified idea of

equating the arts and sciences to politics. Regarding the guidelines of Socialist Realism in creative practice, he stated that the Party believed Socialist Realism to be the best creative method, but not the only one. Under the premise of serving workers, farmers and soldiers, he said, any writer can create their work using what they think is the best creative method and compete with each other. In terms of their choice of subject matter, the Communist Party would not define limits. Confining the choice of subject matter to those about workers, farmers and soldiers, the new society or new figures in society was, he said, wrong.

Imperial Ancestral Temple (*Taimiao* 太庙)

Located just outside of the Forbidden City, the temple was turned into a public park in the 1920s. The temple buildings had been used for exhibitions since the Republican Era. It remained so after 1949 until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution.

Jiang Qing (江青 1914–1991)

Formerly Li Yunhe, Jiang Qing was born in Zhucheng, Shandong Province. She joined the Shandong Experimental Theatre in Jinan in the spring of 1929 and was an actress in Shanghai in the 1930s. In the autumn of 1937, Li Yunhe arrived in Yan'an and changed her name to Jiang Qing. She married Mao Zedong in 1938 as his third wife. In the 1950s, she was a member of the National Advising Committee of Film and Director of Film in the Central Propaganda Ministry. During the Cultural Revolution, she was a leading member of the CCRG. In October 1976, she was arrested and gaoled for her involvement in the Cultural Revolution. In May 1991, she ended her life by committing suicide.

Jin Shangyi (靳尚谊 b.1934)

After graduation with a Masters degree in oil painting from CAFA in 1957, Jin Shangyi stayed at CAFA as a teacher of sketching in the Printmaking Department. In 1962, he began teaching in the No.1 Studio in CAFA's Oil Painting Department. In 1983 he was appointed Deputy Director of CAFA, and in 1987 he became the Director. In 1996, he was appointed as Director of the Oil Painting Committee of the CAA and in 1998, he acted as the president of the CAA.

Learn from Daqing in Industry (*Gongye xue Daqing* 工业学大庆)

Daqing (大庆) is a prefecture-level city in the west of Heilongjiang province. "In Industry, Learn from Daqing" was a slogan promulgated by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, urging people to learn from the city of Daqing as an example for industrial production. Daqing was admired for the major oil exploration, which took 40,000 workers and staff from more than 30 oil factories and mining schools transferred to Daqing from all over China. By the end of 1963, the amount of crude oil produced from this oil field had reached 6 million tons.

Learn from Dazhai in Agriculture (*Nongye xue Dazhai* 农业学大寨)

Campaign organized by Mao Zedong in 1963. The campaign encouraged peasants from all over China to follow from the example of the farmers of Dazhai village in Shanxi Province by practicing self-sacrifice and upright political activity.

Leave without Salary Payment (*Tingxinliuzhi* 停薪留职)

This policy was effective during the transition from the Planned Economy (*Jihuajingji* 计划经济) to the Market Economy (*Shichangjingji* 市场经济) in the beginning of the 1980s. It meant that those who worked in institutions and governmental offices could retain their job titles while testing their luck in the market economy.

Liberated Areas (*Jiefangqu* 解放区)

During the Sino-Japanese War and the second Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), areas under the control of the CCP were referred to by the Communist Party as Liberated Areas. These areas were segregated, with guarded entrances, and had their own currencies and military forces.

Lin Biao 林彪 (1907–1971)

A marshal of the PRC who was pivotal in the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. He abstained from taking an active role in politics after the civil war ceased in 1949 and only became more active in politics when named one of the co-serving Vice Chairmen of the CCP in 1958.

Long March (*Changzheng* 长征)

A long and arduous journey undertaken by the Chinese Communist army from the south to the northwest of China in the fall of 1934, under pressure of extermination campaigns by Nationalist Party troops. The trek over six thousand miles of dangerous territory took more than a year. The surviving members of the Communist or Red Army regrouped in Yan'an in northern Shaanxi, which became the base of the CCP.

Luxun Academy of Art (*Luxun yishu xueyuan* 鲁迅艺术学院)

The academy was founded in 1938 by Communists in Yan'an to attract and accommodate student-refugees. Several members of the teaching staff in the art department at the Luxun Academy of Fine Arts were printmakers involved in the prewar new print movement.

May Seventh cadre schools (*Wuqiganxiao* 五七干校)

On May 7, 1966, Mao Zedong's May 7th Directive (*Wuqi zhishi* 五·七指示) was released in which he suggested setting up farms where cadres and intellectuals should be sent to for manual labor and ideological re-education. He proposed breaking the distinctions between different occupations and having everyone involved in political and economic activities, as well as military training, in addition to their own occupational duties. The first official May Seventh cadre school was set up on October 6, 1968 in Liuhe, a rural area in Heilongjiang. Before long, the May Seventh cadre schools became a nationwide re-education system.

Misty Poetry (*Menglongshi* 朦胧诗)

This undercurrent of poetry writing, which existed during the Cultural Revolution, preceded the emergence of a group of young poets after the end of the Cultural Revolution. The work of this latter group was often described as Misty Poetry owing to the emphasis on lyricism. The poems reacted against the restrictions on art during the Cultural Revolution and were often officially denounced as "obscure," "misty" and "hazy."

National forms (*minzu xingshi* 民族形式)

The issue of national forms was initially developed by literary theorists in the 1930s. It was strongly supported by Mao Zedong and appealed to many patriots because of its anti-imperialist flavor. Zhou Yang, who was appointed successively as education administrator of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region, Dean of the Luxun Academy of Art and Literature, and president of Yan'an University after his arrival in Yan'an in 1937, was a key proponent of national forms in literature, which for him meant indigenous, semi-literary folk styles.

No Name Group (*Wuming huahui* 无名画会)

A loosely formed group of artists in Beijing, later named the No Name Group in 1979. Members of the group included Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, Zhang Anzhi, Shi Zhenyu, Zhang Wei, Wang Aihe, Wei Hai, Zheng Zhiyan, Shi Xixi, etc.

Northern Art Group (*Beifang yishu qunti* 北方艺术群体)

The group was founded on September 15, 1984 at the conference room of Northern Literature (*Beifang wenxue*《北方文学》), a magazine published by the Literature and Art Federation of Heilongjiang Province (*Heilongjiangsheng wenlian* 黑龙江文联). The meeting was attended by more than ten people, all recent graduates of art academies, as well as graduates of science and technology, including Wang Guangyi, Shu Qun, Ren Jian, Liu Yan, Ni Qi, Lu Nan, Lin Wei, Ka Sang, and Wang Yalin. Shu Qun and Wang Guangyi were the main organizers.

Reform and Opening-Up (*Gaige kaifang* 改革开放)

Reform and Opening-Up referred to China's economic reform program starting in December 1978. Economic reforms introducing market principles were carried out in two stages. The first stage, from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, involved de-collectivization of agriculture, the opening up of the country to foreign investment, and permission for entrepreneurs to start businesses, while most industry remained state-owned. The second stage of reform took place in the late 1980s and 1990s and involved the privatization and contracting out of much state-owned industry, and the lifting of price controls, protectionist policies, and regulations, with state monopolies in banking and petroleum. As a result, the private sector grew remarkably, accounting for 70 per cent of China's gross domestic product by 2005. From 1978 until 2013, unprecedented growth occurred, with the economy increasing by 9.5 per cent a year.

Rightist and Anti-Rightist (*Youpai he fanyou* 右派和反右)

Rightist was a name placed on artists and intellectuals during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*Fanyou yundong*). In this nationwide purge of intellectuals and Party officials ordered by Mao Zedong and his Party authorities from the summer of 1957 until 1959, an estimated 550,000 intellectuals and patriotic democratic figures (including a small number of Communist Party members) were purged. This series of campaigns was initiated by Mao as a reaction against responses to the Hundred Flowers Campaign, which had promoted pluralism of expression and criticism of the government. The first wave of attacks began immediately following the end of the Hundred Flowers Campaign in July 1957. The definition of Rightist was not always consistent, sometimes including left-leaning critics of the government, but officially it referred to those intellectuals who appeared to favor capitalism and were against

collectivization. Most of the accused were intellectuals and legal professionals. The penalties included informal criticism, hard labor, and in some cases execution. One main target was the independent legal system. Legal professionals were transferred to other jobs; judicial power was exercised instead by political cadres and the police.

Rustic Realism (*Xiangtu xieshizhuyi* 乡土写实主义)

Paintings made towards the end of Cultural Revolution, which were realistic depictions of farmers and rural landscapes, as opposed to idolized depictions of the Socialist Realism.

Scar Art (*Shanghen meishu* 伤痕美术)

A term coined by art historians to describe Realist artworks, especially oil paintings, done by a group of students from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in the few years after the end of the Cultural Revolution. These works were realist in style, depicting the miserable lives of ordinary people who underwent the Cultural Revolution with striking negativity as their subject matter.

Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition (Diliujie quanguo meizhan 第六届全国美展)

On October 1, 1984, the *Sixth National Fine Art Exhibition* was held by the Ministry of Culture and the CAA in nine cities simultaneously, showcasing works organized into fifteen categories: oil paintings in Shenyang; prints in Chengdu; ink wash paintings in Nanjing; cartoons, illustrations and children's drawing books in Shanghai; New Year paintings in Hangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao; artists' works, water colors and gouache in Guangzhou; comics in Changsha; propaganda paintings and

drawings in Xi'an; and sculptures, murals and lacquer paintings in Beijing.

Tian'anmen Square Protests (*Tian'anmen shijian* 天安门事件)

Protests that began as student-led demonstrations in Tian'anmen Square in Beijing in April 1989. The protests were forcibly suppressed after the government declared martial law. In what became widely known as the June 4 Tian'anmen Square Massacre, troops with assault rifles and tanks killed an unknown number of demonstrators trying to block the military's advance towards Tian'anmen Square.

Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhonggong zhongyang shiyijie sanzhongquanhui* 中共中央十一届三中全会)

The Plenum, held from December 18 to 22, 1978, officially marked the beginning of China's Reform and Opening-Up program and set out Deng Xiaoping's reform goals. First, it made economic modernization the central goal of Party work. Second, it began to address the wounds of the Cultural Revolution by reversing verdicts on Party cadres who had been purged by Mao. Third, the plenum approved experimentation with market forces, beginning the breaking open of the planned economy. The slogan from this time was "practice" (*shijian*), and it would produce the key slogan of the 1980s, "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth" (*Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de weiyi biaozhun* 实践是检验真理的唯一标准).

Ultra-leftist direction (*jizuo luxian* 极左路线)

Since 1967, the ultra-left refers to rebel positions during the Cultural Revolution that

identified an antagonistic contradiction between the Communist Party state and the masses of workers and peasants conceived as a single proletarian class divorced from any meaningful control over production and distribution. In practice, the ultra-left defined their theory and practice as further "left" than that of the central Maoist leaders and argued that the objective interests of bureaucrats were structurally determined by the centralist Party state, in direct opposition to the objective interests of the masses. The Communist Party has used the term more broadly to denounce any orientation it considers further left than the Party line.

Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement (*Shangshan xiaxiang* 上山下乡)

A major political movement initiated by Mao Zedong in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Similar initiatives were carried out from 1955 to 1966 on a much smaller scale and on a voluntary basis. Mao considered sending privileged urban youth to mountainous areas or farming villages to learn from workers and farmers a remedy for bourgeois thinking in society. In practice it was also a way to resolve the problem of increasing numbers of idle youths as a result of the collapse of the educational system and institutional structures of society more generally during the Cultural Revolution. As a result, from 1968 to 1980, approximately 17 million urban students between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three were exiled to remote villages and border regions of China and lost the opportunity to receive a proper education. They spent an average of five to six years in these places, some staying for up to ten or eleven years, with annual or biannual holidays to visit families. It was compulsory, but young people could have a limited choice of the destinations for their postings.

With You in Charge, I am at Ease (*Nibanshi, wofangxin* 你办事，我放心)

A phrase included in one of Mao Zedong's last notes to Hua Guofeng, who believed that it was Mao's will and presented himself as the true successor.

Xiamen Dada (*Xiamen dada* 厦门达达)

Xiamen Dada: Modern Art Exhibition (厦门达达艺术展 *Xiamen dada: xiandai yishuzhan*) was an exhibition held in Xiaman New Art Museum from September 28 to Oct 5, 1986. After the end of the exhibition, the participating artists, including Huang Yongping, Lin Jiahua, Jiao Yaoming, Yu Xiaogang, Lin Chun, Ji Tairan, Cai Lixiong, Chen Chengzong, Li Yuehua, Li Xiang, Wu Yanping, Huang Ping and Liu Yiling, burned all sixty works, which took two hours.

Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art (*Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 延安文艺座谈会)

The Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art was held in May 1942 at the Communist-controlled city of Yan'an. It is most notable for the speeches given by Mao Zedong, later edited and published as "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," which dealt with the role of literature and art in the country. In this talk, Mao asserted that there would be no art detached from or independent of politics. The two main points were that (1) all art should reflect the life of the working class and consider them as an audience, and (2) that art should serve politics, and specifically the advancement of Socialism. According to Mao, there is no art for art's sake, no art that stands above classes, and no art that is detached from or independent of politics.

Mao's speech enforced a new creative discipline among Communist writers and artists. The full text was initially published in *Jiefang ribao* (*Liberation Daily*) (October 19, 1943), 1.

Yu Fei'an (于非闇 1888–1959)

A leading figure in the genre of bird-and-flower painting in the meticulous or *gongbi* style in the twentieth century. *Gongbi* bird-and-flower paintings are colorful works painted using fine brush strokes and strong color. This genre endured a long period of exclusion and stagnation from the Yuan dynasty, when scholar artists working in ink became dominant and colorful *gongbi* bird-and-flower paintings were eclipsed by those painted in ink in the freehand, suggestive *xieyi* style.

Zhongshan Park (*Zhongshan gongyuan* 中山公园)

Built in 1421 as an imperial altar of land and grain southwest of the Forbidden City, it became a public park in 1914. The Waterside Pavilion (*Shuixie* 水榭) is a single-storey rectangular pavilion built on the shore of the lake, half erected on land and half over water, supported by stone pillars driven into the lake bottom. Since 1914, the Waterside Pavilion has been used as a venue for exhibitions.

Zhou Yang (周扬 1908–1989)

Chinese literary theorist. Zhou had joined the Communist Party in 1927 and in 1931 became one of the leaders of the League of Leftist Writers. After 1949, Zhou became one of Mao's most supported literary theorists. In the 1950s and 60s, Zhou Yang was the Vice Chairman of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (*Zhongguo*

wenxue yishujie lianhehui), Vice Chairman of Chinese Writers Association and Deputy Minister of the Publicity Ministry of the People's Republic of China. He continued to be the authoritative interpreter and implementer of Mao Zedong's literary and artistic thought. In his various official positions in Yan'an and after 1949, he acted as the authoritative interpreter and implementer of Mao Zedong's literary and artistic thoughts from the 1940s to the 1960s. His work *Biaoxian xin de qunzhong de shidai* (*Representing the Age of New Masses*) (Zhangjiakou: Xinhua Bookstore, 1946) was a collection of essays that were later reprinted many times. The compact anthology contains seven essays written by Zhou during this period. The essays touch upon the relationship between new literature and art and the leftist revolutionary literary tradition; how to integrate literature and art into the public arena; the improvement and popularization of art education and creative production; the relationship between craft and thought; and the relationship that new literature and art have with Western classics, tradition, Marxism-Leninism and folk forms. The book promotes the idea that art comes from the masses, and labor comes before art.

Appendix 3

Context: Three Discussions, 1956–1965

This Appendix explains the broader artistic context in China out of which the narrative of my thesis emerges. I map three discussions on art, an aspect of Chinese art in the period before the years that are the focus of this thesis. The aim is to provide context for understanding the period from the 1970s onwards.

The three discussions are the nationalizing of oil painting (*youhua minzuhua* 油画民族化), the re-evaluation of Impressionism (*yinxiangpai* 印象派), and the reform of brush-and-ink painting (add pinyin and Chinese).[1]They represented attempts by active participants in the Chinese art system to broaden and diversify art and permit individualized practices while acknowledging ideological boundaries set by the Party. The discussions arose from a sense of relaxation brought about by the Hundred Flowers Campaign (*Baihua yundong* 百花运动) in 1956, which was later shut down with the Anti-Rightist Movement (*Fanyou yundong* 反右运动) of the following year and later the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.[2] Although the artists and theoreticians that initiated the discussions were employed in the government system of art and were experts and specialists, the impact of such discussions was all-encompassing. It was not possible to question the regime, only to test the limits of what was permissible. As such, artists and theoreticians remained vulnerable to

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[1] See Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 23.

[2] See Hong Zicheng, *1956: Baihua Shidai (1956: Hundred Flower Era)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010). See also Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974).

governmental shifts and changing attitudes to art and culture. An emblematic example of this situation and the difficult situation in which many artists found themselves if provided by Dong Xiwen.

In an act of self-criticism, artist Dong Xiwen (董希文 1914–1973), who had been categorized as a Rightist (*Youpai fenzi* 右派分子), wrote the following in July 1957:[3]

> When it comes to Impressionism and Post-impressionism in modern European paintings, I criticize them verbally, yet when I see the originals, I can't help feeling emotionally excited …. Concerning the relationship between thoughts and forms, and the issue of political standards versus artistic standards, I stress the so-called affect of forms so as to weaken the political primacy of the former. This kind of opinion regarding art is deeply bourgeois. Obviously, it goes against Chairman Mao's route in the arts and the creative path of Socialist Realism.[4]

This short quote appeared on June 15, 1958 in *Art Research* (*Meishu yanjiu*《美术研究》), an art journal published by CAFA.[5] It testified to the contradiction between the deepest feelings of artistic practitioners and the political stance they felt compelled to

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[3] See Naranarayan Das, *China's Hundred Weeds. A Study of the Anti-Right Campaign in China (1957–1958)* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1979). See also John King Fairbank, "Chaozao xinde guojia" ("Creating a New Nation"), in *Weida de Zhongguo deming* (*The Great Chinese Revolution*), trans. Liu Zunqi (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House, 2013), 347–51, and Julia F. Andrews, "Traditional Painting in New China: Guohua and the Anti-Rightist Campaign," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (1990): 555–77.

[4] Dong Xiwen, "Wo de jiancha" ("My testimony"), *Meishu yanjiu* (*Art Research*), no. 2 (1958): 10–12.

[5] *Art Research* (*Meishu yanjiu*) began publication in January 1957. Publication was suspended 1966–1978 and resumed in 1979.

adhere to in public. Yet above all, it revealed that by this time, artists recognized and accepted that the CCP's Socialist doctrine for art and literature (*Shehuizhuyi wenyi* 社会主义文艺) constituted a primary premise for their works.

Background to the Three Discussions

Discussions on the nationalizing of oil painting, the revaluation of Impressionism and the reform of brush-and-ink painting played a central role in artistic discourses in the 1950s and 1960s. While the threads of thought that each seemed to be concerned with were the formal aspects of artistic practice, the discussions were far more than purely stylistic in nature, for the emergence of such discussions was the result of artists and theoreticians responding to the new political and ideological dynamic. Even so, artistic producers were warned against "formalism" (*xingshizhuyi* 形式主义). Such cautions represented the continuation of the cultural directives that had typified the situation in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s.[6] The politicization of art was a gradual process initiated by the CCP, and implemented by artists who had been integrated into the official bureaucratic structure of the CCP and theoreticians who acted as both specialists and bureaucrats in a centralized system of art.

More importantly, these three discussions reveal to us some of the primary artistic concerns of artists and theoreticians at the time, and their tangled commitments to the nation and to the Party. Since 1949, Communist artists had actively participated in the project of nation-building under the new regime. To adapt ideologically and

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[6] See Hong Zicheng, "Yu 'chouzhong' you guan: Mayakefusiji, and Tian Han, Meng Jinghui" ("On *The Bedbug*: Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Tian Han, Meng Jinghui") (unpublished manuscript, May 2019), 11.

artistically was an integral part of such a commitment. While they were concerned about the development and diversity of a national style, their thinking was essentially contained by the ideological boundaries set by the Party. These discussions were part of the process through which artists and writers developed a discourse within such boundaries. In the process, they increasingly implicated themselves in the same political movement that was working towards curtailing their artistic autonomy. They were part of the government's system of control. Chinese government administration has two parallel structures: that of the CCP and that of the civil government. The Party structure descends from the Central Committee of the CCP, through the Propaganda Department, to the CAA, and through it to the art world. The civil structure descends from the State Council, through the Ministry of Culture, to specific art institutions. In practice, these two structures intersect each other.[7]

For artists and intellectuals, compliance with CCP political ideology was not managed overnight. In fact, it was a lengthy process of reform of thinking imposed by the government and of self-reform exercised by the intellectuals and artists themselves.[8] In 1942, at the Yan'an Forum for Literature and Art, Mao Zedong had outlined the ultimate guiding ideology for art practitioners in his famous "Yan'an Talks."[9] Together with his cultural theoreticians, including Zhou Yang (周扬 1908–1989),

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[7] Harry Harding, *Organizing China: The Problem of Bureaucracy, 1949–1976* (Stanford: Stanford University Press Library, 1981); see also Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 5.

[8] There is a considerable amount of scholarship on the participation of high-level cultural theoreticians and artists in shaping the artistic and cultural policies and practices, institutional frameworks and ideological outlooks in the early formation of CCP's regime. Such scholarship exists both in the form of biographical works on individuals or surveys of certain historical periods. For example, Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford England : New York: Clarendon Press, 1998). In survey texts, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics* and Theodore Chen, *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals* (Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1983).

[9] The full text was initially published in *Jiefang ribao* (*Liberation Daily*) (October 19, 1943): 1. See also Joan Lebold Cohen, "Introduction," in *The New Chinese Painting 1949–1986* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1987), 16.

Dean of the Lu Xun Academy of Art and Literature and President of Yan'an University, Mao set down what were regarded as the correct principles for literary and artistic practice.[10] In the "Talks", Mao urged writers and artists to absorb folk art and its languages in terms of both its subjects and aesthetics, combining folk art traditions with Soviet Socialist Realism to eulogize Communist values.[11] This was to make art accessible to the masses, to workers, farmers and soldiers, allowing art to play its role in conveying CCP political messages and mobilizing workers to follow CCP orders.

From the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art onwards, the CCP increased its powerful control over literature and arts, first among writers and artists active in the Communist Party-controlled base, and then across the country after the founding of the PRC in 1949.[12] Ultimately, Mao's speeches and the subsequent establishment of a centralized structure of bureaucracy in art and culture after 1949 were to prescribe artistic and cultural practices inside the political boundaries that Mao wanted.[13] From 1949, Mao and the officials in his new regime launched repeated political criticisms and movements targeting intellectuals and party members as a device to solidify their political governance. Constant political campaigns during the first decade of the new

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[10] See Chen Shunxin, "Mao Zedong de xianshizhuyi tixi de jianli yu Zhou Yang de chanshi" ("The Establishment of Mao Zedong's System of Realism and Zhou Yang's Interpretation), in S*hehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi Lilun Zai Zhongguo de Jieshou Yu Zhuanhua (The Acceptance and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China)* (Hefei: Anhui Education Publishing House, 2000), 196.

[11] Zhang Chengjie, "Yan'an de huayu xitong shi zenyang xingcheng de" ("How Did the Yan'an Discourse Emerge"), *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (*China Through the Ages*), no. 12 (2015), accessed August 22, 2016, http://www.yhcqw.com/html/qsp/2015/129/15129191455KC6A4100401A9BK6E1GJ3IJ3A.html.

[12] The bureaucracy and mechanism of administration and control in art and culture after the CCP established the new regime had been discussed extensively in the works of scholars including John Clark, Julia F. Andrews and Paul Gladston. Clark, for example, discusses the control hierarchy of official art in China. See John Clark, *Asian Modernities: Chinese and Thai Art Compared, 1980 to 1999* (Sydney: Power Publications, Sydney, 2011), 76–77; see also Julia F. Andrews, "The Reform of Chinese Art 1949–1952," in *Painters and Politics*, 34–110.

[13] For example, between 1949 and 1957, the artist Jiang Feng had dominated both the art academy system and the party-sponsored CAA, encouraging work in Socialist Realist styles. See Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 201.

Communist government were effective in reforming and suppressing styles and subject matter that contradicted CCP policies. The tension between political standards and artistic standards was a continuous and distinct feature of art under the early years of the CCP.[14] Neither art nor artists could be autonomous. Both were subject to political evaluation and were defined by politics. Gradually, Communist artists acquired through practice the mindset through which to measure their artistic work against ideological considerations. As Dong Xiwen's example revealed, they also criticized themselves for their failings.

By the end of 1955, six years after the Communist Party seized power, there was growing confidence about the scale and speed of industrialization. For Mao, Socialist reform of the ownership of agriculture, industry and commerce was no longer the pressing challenge. He concluded that large-scale class struggle had ended, and so he ordered a switch of focus to economic development.[15] His confidence prompted him to speed up economic and cultural development across the nation. His plan required the active participation and contribution of scientists and intellectuals, but to do this he needed to work with educated elites.[16] Soon, this was turned into action.

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[14] The vision of art as part of a larger 'revolutionary machine,' which was influenced strongly by the cultural policies of the Soviet Union as well as views put forward by Chinese Marxists during the May Fourth Movement of 1919, subsequently became the basis of an official directive issued by the CCP shortly after it came to power in 1949. This official directive required all artists working in the newly founded PRC not only to take the view of the masses but also to uphold the revolutionary aims of the CCP. See Paul Gladston, *'Avant-Garde' Art Groups in China, 1979–1989* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 15.

[15] Mao Zedong, "'Zhongguo nongcun de shehuizhuyi gaochao' xuyan" (Foreword to *The Socialist Climax of Chinese Rural Areas*), in *Mao Zedong Xuanji* (*Mao Zedong's Anthology*) (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1977), 223. See also Hong Zicheng, "'Baihua yundong' yu dangdai wenxue" ("'Hundred Flowers Campaign' and Contemporary Literature"), in *1956: The Hundred Flowers Era*, 2.

[16] Zou Yuejin, *Xinzhongguo Meishushi 1949–2000* (*A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Art Publishing House, 2002), 78–9.

In January 1956, Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩来 1898–1976) delivered a speech at a conference organized by the Central Committee of the CCP on the treatment of intellectuals. In Zhou's speech, a promise was made to improve their working and living conditions as well as the environment for intellectual activities. His speech concluded that intellectuals had become a part of the working class after having been put through reforms and that they could be counted on as active contributors in the historical task of economic and cultural construction.[17] The event laid out the premise behind "Let A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" (*Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming* 百花齐放，百家争鸣), which became an important Party policy.[18] It wasn't until the middle of that year that this policy was formally set out, significantly diminishing the residual tension between artists, scientists and the CCP that had mounted through the Party's previous cleansings and punishments of intellectuals. The issue of anti-sectarianism (*fandui zongpaizhuyi* 反对宗派主义) surfaced and the joining of forces of those who were willing to collaborate with the Party was made a strategic goal.[19] Haunted by previous experiences of criticism and punishment for incorrect thoughts and opinions, there was still much caution among intellectuals and artists regarding the limits of the relaxation, yet it was welcomed with excitement and even a sense of liberation.[20] The emergence of the policy set artists free to explore a freedom of creative practice beyond Socialist Realism. But

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[17] See Lu Dingyi, "Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming" ("Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend") (speech, May 26, 1956), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), June 13, 1956, 1.

[18] See Xia Xingzhen, "'Baihua qifang, baijia zhengming' fangzhen de xingcheng guocheng de lishi huigu" ("A Historical Survey of the Process of Formation of the Policy 'Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend'"), *Wenyibao* (*Journal of Literature and Art*) June 13, 1956. See also Hong, *1956: The Hundred Flowers Era*, 3.

[19] Sectarianism (*Zongpaizhuyi*) mainly referred to the disregard and rejection of non-Party members and intellectuals by CCP members and leadership in the mid 1950s. See Hong, *1956: The Hundred Flowers Era*, 5.

[20] Hong, *1956: The Hundred Flowers Era*, 4–5.

above all, discussing art would not risk one being placed in jeopardy for a political offense. In practice, the policy of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" would go through constant redefinitions and corrections and as a result, "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" attracted scores of interpretations, anticipations and projections. But above all, it presented an idealistic scenario that opened up possibilities in politics, the economy and culture. By the following year, the atmosphere of intellectual freedom and social reform became pronounced but would not last.

Discussion One: On Nationalizing Oil Painting

Since 1949, the medium of oil painting had been assigned strategic and ideological significance by the new government in terms of both representing revolutionary history and representing the new Socialist reality.[21] The regime entrusted artists to create historical paintings and portraits of political leaders in oil mainly for museum display and state collections, as well as for national art exhibitions. History paintings monumentalized events and heroes in revolutionary history. They represented and glorified past achievements of the Communist Party. Since 1953, art academies had set up oil painting majors, and studio art departments all over the country formalized and popularized the training of oil painters.[22] The subject matter of oil paintings was

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[21] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 70.

[22] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 79; see also Cao Qinghui, "Dui zhongyang meishu xueyuan 1959–1964 youhua gongzuoshi jiaoxue de qianjian" ("Humble Opinions of the Studio-based Model in Oil Painting Teaching from 1959 to 1964 in the Central Academy of Fine Arts"). *Meishu guancha* (*Art Observation*), no. 4 (April 2009): 105–7. Oil painting was initially introduced into China in the sixteenth century through Portuguese missionaries arriving in Macau. See Lyu Peng, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo yishushi* (*A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China*) (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2009), 19.

limited to still life studies, landscapes and genre paintings (*fengsu hua* 风俗画), but above all to history paintings celebrating the new regime, its workers, farmers and soldiers.[23] The Ministry of Culture and museums and cultural palaces such as the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and the Cultural Palace of the Working People in Beijing directly commissioned artists, mainly from CAFA, to create the paintings. National exhibitions held to celebrate major events were also occasions to commission history paintings.[24] Artists found the creation of these paintings a safe way to continue working while staying aligned with the CCP ideology. Through this process, artists had the chance to learn about the revolutionary history of the Communist Party. Many artists actually took to the road, traveling to revolutionary sites in order to paint *en plein air* and to prepare themselves for their history paintings.[25] For example, Dong Xiwen, Guan Fusheng and Liu Lun spent six months from May to November in 1955 traveling the route of the Long March (October 1934–October 1935), painting outdoors all through the journey.[26]

In addition to representing revolutionary history, oil painters were expected to convey the joy and happiness of working people in the new Socialist society, and to legitimize the new regime. To do so, they immersed themselves in the tropes of

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[23] Xu Hui, "Yige reng zai yishu zhong xunmeng de ren: youhuajia weiqimei" ("A Dream-Seeker in Art: Oil Painter Wei Qimei"), *Art Observation*, no. 9 (September 2009): 26–30.

[24] In the early years of the founding of the PRC, an orderly and complete system of producing art in the image of the regime was established. The organization of this system was in effect commissioning history paintings. See Zou Yuejin, *Mao Zedong Shidai Meishu (1942–1976)* (*Fine Arts of Mao Zedong's Era 1942–1976*) (Changsha: Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005), 72.

[25] See Liu Tong ed., *Qinli changzheng* (*Experience the Long March Firsthand*) (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2006); see also Sun Shuyun, *The Long March. The True Story of Communist China's Founding Myth* (New York: Anchor, 2008).

[26] Beijing huayuan (Beijing Fine Art Academy), *Ershi Shiji Beijing Huihuashi* (*Beijing's Painting History of The Twentieth Century*) (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing, 2007), 233; see also Wu Bunai, "Fang yan 'changzheng' luxian xiesheng guilai de huajiamen'" ("Interviews with Painters Who Returned from Painting En Plein Air Along the Long March Route"). *Meishu* (*Art*), no. 4 (April 1956): 17–18, 20.

Socialist Realism that such works required. In oil painting classes during this period, correct techniques and correct thoughts were assigned equal importance. The process of educating an oil painter was also one of reforming the painter's thoughts. The top-down structure of the national art education system ensured that regional art academies closely followed the examples set by the principal art academies directly led by the Ministry of Culture.[27]

As China and the Soviet Union became closer allies in the 1950s, China started to learn from the Soviets across all walks of life. Soviet specialists visited to offer expertise and assistance. Soviet art became more and more influential.[28] Soviet artists and exhibitions were invited to China. The official art system embraced Soviet art and prioritized Soviet oil painting over other forms and styles, including Chinese brush-and-ink painting, but also European and Japanese painting.[29] In 1952, the Ministry of Culture sent its first group of Chinese students to the Soviet Union to study art and theory, and continued to do so until 1962.[30] All of the artists and art historians returned to China after the end of their studies and were assigned to teaching and research positions in official institutions around the country.[31] From its launch in 1954, nearly every issue of *Art* magazine featured examples of Soviet art

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[27] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 78–9.
[28] On December 15, 1952, *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) published the editorial "Xiang sulian yishujia xuexi" ("To Learn from Soviet Artists"). The embrace of Soviet art by Chinese art officials and its influence in China is discussed at length by Julia F. Andrews. See Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 158–9.
[29] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 234–38.
[30] The first group of artists to be sent to the Soviet Union included Luo Gongliu, Li Tianxiang, Lin Gang, Deng Shu, Feng Zhen, Su Gaoli etc, as well as Cheng Yongjiang, Shao Dazhen, Xi Jingzhi and Li Yulan, who would be studying art theory. Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 237–8.
[31] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 237–8.

and translations of Soviet theories of art.[32]

The Soviet government sent the artist Konstantin M. Maksimov (1913–1993) to Beijing on the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Culture. Maksimov, who spent the period 1955–1957 at CAFA in Beijing, set up a two-year postgraduate painting course for artists and art educators; he was also an art advisor to the People's Fine Art Publishing House. His tenure helped promote Soviet academic oil painting and Soviet art education in China. Nineteen artists graduated from Maksimov's painting course, including Zhan Jianjun (詹建俊 b.1931), Hou Yimin (侯一民 b.1930) and Jin Shangyi (靳尚谊 b.1934). Yan'an trained painters such as Liu Xun attended other courses directed by Maksimov outside of the academy. They were to occupy powerful positions in art academies over the following decades.[33]

The dominance of Soviet art in China led to pressure being exerted on artists who made Chinese brush-and-ink paintings or oil paintings that didn't reflect the Soviet system. Under Soviet guidance, Communist theorists saw traditional brush-and-ink painting as a vestige of feudal China, criticizing it as inconsistent with serving the revolution.[34] Artists found their status largely dependent on their educational background and artistic positions relative to Soviet ideas.

This was little different to the continuing politicization of art in China since 1942. What was able to circulate or not always depended on political circumstances, which

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[32] Zou, *Fine Arts of Mao Zedong's Era 1942–1976*, 79.
[33] For the influence of Konstantin M. Maksimov on Chinese painters and the varied outcomes of his teaching on individual artists, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 156–7.
[34] Lyu, *A History of Art*, 449–59.

constantly changed direction. It was the same in literature. Literary historian Hong Zicheng (洪子诚 b.1939) has described the politicization of writing after 1949, recounting how novels were criticized for their politics all through the 1950s. Even if novels were fiction, within the cultural climate of the 1950s they were understood as histories and judged right or wrong on that basis.[35] The same tendency existed in art as well. For instance, during the Literature and Arts Rectification from late 1951 into 1952, many artists were accused of formalism and their careers were eclipsed.[36] Artist Wu Guanzhong (吴冠中 1919–2010), who had been teaching for two years at CAFA after his return from studying modern art in Paris between 1947 and 1950, was reported by his students for promoting bourgeois views and formalism in his classes. He was punished for promoting thoughts not consistent with the artistic direction of CAFA and promptly removed from his post at the academy and transferred to the architecture department at Tsinghua University. Such a transfer meant that he was reduced to training future architects in painting technique.[37] At this time, CAFA was under the directorship of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿 1895–1953), who had also trained in Europe but was an ardent promoter of academic realism. The range of Western art history that was allowed to circulate was very limited. Aside from a narrow version of

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[35] In his "Yan'an Talks," Mao singled out literary and artistic criticism as the main tool of political battle in the field and literature and art. As Hong Zicheng has pointed out, art criticism in China was neither a humanized, individualized and "scientific" reading of works nor was it an activity of connoisseurship, but a political and artistic verdict that represented political motivations and evolved into a "battling" method. See Hong Zichen, *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxue Gaishuo* (*A Brief Overview of Chinese Contemporary Literature*) (Nanjing: Guangxi Education Publishing House, 2000), 75.

[36] The Literature and Arts Rectification (*Wenyi zhengfeng*) was an ideological cleansing by the Chinese Communist Party of intellectuals in the field of literature and art, from late 1951 until 1952. See Wu Jun, "Wenyi zhengfeng xuexi yundong(1951–1952) yu renmin wenxue" ("Literature and Arts Rectification Movement (1951–1952) and *People's Literature*"), *Nanfang wentan* (*Southern Cultural Forum*), no. 6 (2006), 60–1.

[37] Wu Guanzhong, "Guyuan, lianyu, dumuqiao" ("Homeland, Hell, Difficult Path"), in *Wu Guanzhong Wencong 1: Hengzhan Shengya* (*Wu Guanzhong's Anthology: A Life of Standing Alone*) (Beijing: Unity Press 团结出版社, 2008), 21–4.

classicism and realism, the art movements that came after Impressionism were considered embodiments of decadent, bourgeois ideology. They were all rejected and harshly criticized. Soviet Realism dominated.[38]

The Hundred Flowers Campaign gave some artists a short window of possibility in which to defy the dominance of Soviet art. At a national conference on oil painting education organized by the Ministry of Culture in 1956, Dong Xiwen delivered a speech titled "On the Chinese Style of Oil Painting. Speaking from the Methods of Expression in Chinese Painting".[39] In this speech, which was subsequently published in the first issue of *Art* magazine in 1957, Dong defended the exploration of any style and any form against the accusation of formalism, and did so for the reason that, he argued, artists should have their own, national styles. He wrote,

> When it comes to oil painting, having studied laboriously the experience of the Soviet Union and other countries, we have made considerable progress and produced many works that depict reality truthfully. Yet, to stop it from being only an import, to make it rich, to gain a deeper love by more of the masses, we should not only continue to grasp diverse skills in Western oil painting, develop the many qualities of oil painting, we should also absorb it, digest it so that it is our own blood. That is to say, we should turn this form that came from outside into something of our own, something belonging to us Chinese,

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[38] Zhan Jianjun, "Dong Xiwen xiansheng de 'qianshoubingxu' he 'shunshuituizhou'" ("Mr. Dong Xiwen's 'Tolerance and Acceptance of All' and 'Going with the Flow'"), in Beijing huayuan (Beijing Fine Art Academy) ed., *Dong Xiwen Yanjiu wenji* (*A Collection of Essays on Dong Xiwen*) (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2009), 92.

[39] Dong Xiwen, "Cong Zhongguo huihua de biaoxian fangfa tandao youhua Zhongguofeng" ("On the Chinese Style of Oil Paintings Speaking from the Methods of Expressions in Chinese Paintings"), *Art*, no. 1 (January 1957): 6–9.

> and equip it with our own national style. In terms of the styles of paintings, a Chinese style of oil painting should be the highest aim that we oil painters should strive for.[40]

Dong Xiwen's speech was made following a conversation that Mao staged with officials in charge of the Chinese Musicians' Association on August 24, 1956.[41] Four months prior to this meeting, Mao had indicated his intention to change the Soviet model in his speech "On Ten Relationships."[42] In this conversation with musicians, Mao recognized the relevance of Chinese language, music and painting. He emphasized that while learning from foreign principles of music was important, Chinese musicians should also develop their own national characteristics, which would result in uniqueness. He urged Chinese musicians to become more Chinese rather than more Westernized. This was not the first time that the issue of national forms had arisen in Mao's thoughts. Earlier, in October 1938, he had put forward the issue of "national form" (*minzu xingshi* 民族形式)[43] and stressed the combination of "internationalist" content and "national" forms, intending to situate Marxist theories within the specific conditions of China. While at that time Mao didn't relate this idea to art and culture, cultural practitioners in the so-called liberated zone of Yan'an and

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[40] Dong, "On the Chinese Style," 6–9.
[41] Zou Yuejin, "Lishi yu xianshi de zaixian yu chongjian-1949–1966 nian de Zhongguo youhua yu minzuhua" ("The Representation and Reconstruction of History and Reality: Chinese Oil Paintings and Nationalization 1949–1966"), in *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 84–5.
[42] "Lun shida guanxi" ("On Ten Relationships") was a speech Mao delivered to the Political Bureau on April 25, 1956, after he spent two months listening to reports from thirty-four departments and ministries on various aspects of national developments including economy, national defense, diplomatic relationships, and so on. See *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), April 26, 1956, 1.
[43] This concept was proposed in Mao Zedong's report "Zhongguo gongchandang zai minzu zhanzheng zhong de diwei" ("The position of Chinese Communist Party in the national war"). This report was delivered at the Sixth Plenary of the Sixth Central Committee on October 14, 1938. See Zhou Aimin, "'Madisi zhi zheng' yu yan'an muke de xiandaixing" ("A Debate on Matisse" and the Modernity of Yan'an Woodblock"), in *Zai Jiedu Dazhong Wenyi Yu Yishixingtai* (*Re-Interpreting Mass Culture and Ideology*), ed. Tang Xiaobin (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2007), 72.

progressive-minded thinkers across the Nationalist-controlled provinces responded quickly to the discussion on the concept of "national forms."

Mao's desire to explore a specifically Chinese Socialist path of development was largely propelled in the mid-1950s by the political transformations taking place in the Soviet Union and East Europe after Stalin's death. As the Soviet model was called into question there arose the need to establish a Chinese model, both politically and culturally. By March 1958, Mao warned Party members against transplanting the Soviet system mechanically, considering it a sign of deficient originality. Being a poet himself, with a profound understanding of classical Chinese literature and art, Mao set a high value on romanticism. As art historian Shao Dazhen has pointed out, "He also apparently felt that there were some naturalist elements in Soviet Socialist Realism. He therefore proposed, sometime in 1957 or 1958, that for the purposes of artistic creation Revolutionary Realism (*Geming xianshizhuyi* 革命现实主义) be combined with Revolutionary Romanticism (*Geming langmanzhuyi* 革命浪漫主义). The new principle of Revolutionary Romanticism was in practice misrepresented in eulogies to the Great Leap Forward around 1959. But its true significance had been to correct the shortcomings of Soviet Socialist Realism."[44]

In 1958, artist Dong Xiwen echoed Mao's suggestion that Chinese music should be Chinese, and he therefore emphasized the relationship between oil painting and Chinese brush-and-ink painting. In 'his speech, Dong went to great lengths to elaborate on the characteristics and strengths of Chinese brush-and-ink painting,

[44] Shao Dazhen, "Chinese Art in the 1950s: An Avant-garde Undercurrent Beneath the Mainstream of Realism," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Hawaii: Wild Peony, 1993), 75.

concluding that Chinese painting and Western painting didn't contradict each other at all, but shared similarities, and imagined that both might gradually merge into what could potentially be oil painting with a Chinese style.[45] Ultimately, to do so would require an oil painter to study the legacy of Chinese brush-and-ink painting deeply, to familiarize themself with traditions (including with Chinese literature and the other arts) so as to cultivate a true passion towards Chinese style. To a great extent, Dong's speech read like a defense of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, which had been sidelined since 1949.[46] In the meantime, Dong applied these arguments to his own practice, actively incorporating into oil paintings techniques and aesthetic forms from Chinese tradition. He applied the vivid and bright colors of Chinese folk art and flat brush strokes from Chinese brush-and- ink painting in representing three-dimensional images. In his famous work *Founding Ceremony of the Nation* (*Kaiguodadian* 开国大典, 1953), [Figure a3.1] Dong Xiwen mainly outlined his figures and painted them in flat brushwork. He took the same approach to depicting the lanterns in the painting.

[45] Dong, "On the Chinese Style," 6–9.
[46] Shortly after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the Communist Party set out new guidelines for revolutionary art and disciplined those who painted brush-and-ink paintings of birds and flowers, criticizing such works as "decadent." The area of brush-and-ink painting that was pronounced most worthy of development after 1949 was figure painting, especially if the figures were engaged in building the new society. See Joan Lebold Cohen, "Chinese Ink Painting," in *The New Chinese Painting 1949–1986* (New York: Harry N Abrams Inc, 1987), 110.

Figure a3.1: Dong Xiwen, *Founding Ceremony of the Nation* (*Kaiguodadian* 开国大典), 1953, oil on canvas.

The discussion around the nationalization of oil painting was both a result of the tension between Chinese brush-and-ink painters and oil painters following the founding of the PRC, and specifically an outcome of the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Dong Xiwen's speech preceded the deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship and the departure of Soviet experts in the final years of the 1950s. It wasn't until then that the popularity of Soviet Realism declined and nationalistic sentiments ran high, causing an abrupt rise in the status of Chinese brush-and-ink painting. The views expressed by Dong Xiwen in his speech were quickly echoed by colleagues, who saw an opportunity to support the principle of individual exploration for artists.

Wu Zuoren (吴作人 1908–1997), a master of academic oil painting who had trained in France and Belgium and also taught at CAFA, joined Dong Xiwen in support of national forms in oil painting. In the fourth issue of *Art* in 1957, Wu published "A Few Individual Opinions on Oil Painting," an essay which emphasized the equality

among forms of painting, both Western and Chinese, as opposed to taking a hierarchical perspective.[47] Wu wrote about the importance of paying attention to life and reality, and of creating one's own content rather than studying methods and techniques mechanically. He recognized both the significance of learning the basics of oil painting, and that of developing one's own approaches and unique styles on such a basis. All in all, Wu addressed the issue of nationalizing oil paintings through a dialectical method, stressing the purpose of learning from both the past and the foreign in order to create one's own art. He detailed the evolution of European art schools from the 14th century to the 19th century to explore the idea that art was linked to specific social conditions and that styles were unique manifestations of individual artists, all of whom shared a universality linked to their times.

Many artists responded to this discussion, driven by both shared and individual circumstances, concerns and aspirations. The rhetoric of their discussions might sound excessively nationalist and essentialist today, but this rhetoric had its roots in the historical circumstances within which the debates took place. Practically speaking, it was challenging for Chinese artists to apply techniques from European and Soviet oil painting to the depiction of the physiognomy of standard Chinese faces which generally have a flat silhouette. Uighurs from Xinjiang in far northwestern China were a preferred subject for oil portraits in the 1950s and the 1960s. Artists found their faces similar to Caucasian faces; both were characterized by distinctive features including high noses and pronounced cheekbones. As well, differences in climate and humidity between Europe and China made it hard to render the same effects of color

[47]Wu Zuoren, "Dui youhua de jidian chujian" ("A Few Individual Opinions on Oil Paintings"), *Art*, no. 4 (April 1957): 4–5.

and light as in Impressionist painting, for example. These were practical obstacles towards achieving the look of Western oil painting and Soviet painting. Calls to nationalize oil painting provided artists with the opportunity to consider Chinese appearances as they were, in terms of cultural specificities and geographical and physical particularities. These practical considerations aside, this discussion was in itself the assertion of cultural subjectivity, and this would surface again in subsequent discussions about the relationship between China and the West.

Initially, when Wu Guanzhong was trying to create oil paintings depicting Socialist achievements such as land reform (*tudi gaige* 土地改革), he was frustrated.[48] All he encountered was criticism that he was a formalist. His depictions of workers, farmers and soldiers, which didn't conform to the realist style but which he was sure would be approved by his Paris mentor, the artist Jean Souverbie, were regarded as simply ugly by Chinese audiences. Wu felt he had to switch to landscape paintings to escape this trap. Landscape was a rare choice of subject matter at the time, and it was a subject that ostensibly need not serve the purpose of party propaganda. While teaching in Tsinghua University from 1953, he began experimenting with watercolor, combining it with his previous experience of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, applying his experimentation to depict trees. For him, trees were like humans, with moods and expressions. He felt that in ink painting, the trees of Guo Xi (郭熙 c.1020–c.1090), Li Tang (李唐 1066–1150) and Ni Zan (倪瓚 1301–1394) had been precise but

[48] On June 30, 1950, the central government of the PRC published a land reform law, which abrogated ownership of land from landowners and redistributed land to peasants. At the same time, in 1951, the government set in motion the process of collectivilization of land by demanding that farmers hand over their land to communes. By the spring of 1953, this movement of land reform was basically completed.

humanistic.[49] Wu saw this as an outstanding strength of brush-and-ink painting and aspired to achieve similar effects in his own paintings of trees, just as he was inspired by the fluent lines drawn in flat color on the painted pottery of ancient Greece, also found in the paintings of Matisse. Wu Guanzhong applied lines in thick layers of oil paint, applied color on top of the lines and used the tip of his palette knife to create winding, tortuous lines to express the top of trees.[50] He tried to lessen the contrast between bright and dark, instead creating a flattened effect through blocks of paint.[51]

Luo Gongliu, Dean of the Painting Department at CAFA in 1953, retrained in the Soviet Union from 1955 to 1958. Nevertheless, looking back on his career, he felt the two major influences on the development of his oil painting had been Qi Baishi (齐白石 1864–1957) and ancient Chinese mural painting. In both his artistic and teaching practice, Luo hoped to maintain the strength of oil painting while incorporating elements from Chinese brush-and-ink painting into oil, so as to escape the complete influence of Soviet and Western art.[52] At the time, CAFA students were sent to copy mural paintings in Dunhuang, the ancient Buddhist Caves site on the Silk Road in Gansu, northwestern China, as part of their training. In a text entitled "Understanding

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[49] Guo Xi was a landscape painter from Henan Province who lived during the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). He was a professional court artist who developed a detailed system of idiomatic brushstrokes. One of Guo Xi's techniques was to layer ink wash to build up form. He was celebrated for his use of light ink and magnificent composition. Li Tang was a Song Dynasty (960–1279) landscape painter. He developed and perfected the technique of the so-called "ax-cut" brushstrokes, which gave rocks and mountains a particularly refined quality. Ni Zan was a painter during the Yuan (1271–1368) and early Ming (1368–1644) periods. Ni Zan's landscapes after 1345 all take very much the same form: ink-monochrome paintings of widely separated riverbanks rendered in sketchy brushwork with foreground trees silhouetted against an expanse of water. His sparse landscapes never include people and defy many traditional concepts of Chinese painting. Many of his works hardly represented the natural settings they were intended to depict. Indeed, Ni Zan consciously used his art as a medium of self-expression.

[50] Wu Guanzhong, "Guyuan lianyu dumuqiao" ("Hometown Purgatory Single-Plank bridge"), in *Standing*, 24–5.

[51] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 88.

[52] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 89.

of Nationalizing Oil Painting," Wu Guanzhong reminded his readers that Chinese oil painting should have its own style, but the precondition for it was to fully master the art of oil painting.[53] It was clear that many artists who were involved in the discussion of nationalizing oil paintings wanted not just to paint Chinese subject matter, nor simply to transfer traditional techniques from Chinese painting directly into Western oil painting, but were investigating how to manage such a hybrid discourse, how to open up spaces for artistic exploration and how to legitimize free, formal experimentation. They were, in effect, asking the following questions: Should oil painting be nationalized? What kind of artistic forms should nationalized oil painting adopt? And for those who study and create oil paintings, should they learn the nationalized form or wait until they have fully grasped oil painting technique? What were the areas where the language and expression of oil painting connected with Chinese brush-and-ink painting? Or was oil painting a system with no relation to earlier forms of Chinese painting?[54]

The discussion about nationalizing oil paintings wasn't limited to Beijing. On May 28, 1958, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou organized a seminar on the subject of nationalizing oil painting.[55] As far as we can judge from the transcript of the discussion, all members of the teaching staff, including oil painters Ni Yide (倪贻德 1901–1970) and Wang Dewei (王德威 1926–1984), and brush-and-ink painters including Pan Tianshou (潘天寿 1897–1971), supported nationalizing oil painting by

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[53] Wu Zuoren, "Dui youhua 'minzuhua' de renshi" ("Understanding of Nationalizing Oil Paintings"), *Art*, no. 7 (July 1959): 18–20.
[54] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 84.
[55] "Guanyu youhua de minzu fengge wenti: Zhejiang meishu xueyuan jiaoshi zuotanhui jiyao" ("On the Issue of Nationalized Styles of Oil Paintings: A Summary of the Symposium Participated by Teachers of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts"), *Art Research*, no. 3 (1958): 44–9.

learning from Chinese brush-and-ink painting. [Figure a3.2] In the discussion, they condemned Jiang Feng, the former director of the academy, for his previous suppression of Chinese brush-and-ink painting and his insistence on the importance of academic drawing and three-dimensional modeling to Chinese brush-and-ink painting. Ni Yide, who had graduated from the Shanghai Fine Arts School in 1922, had studied oil painting in Japan between 1926 and 1928. He elaborated on the driving forces behind the rise of such a discussion and offered practical guidance, identifying the respective strengths of both brush-and-ink and oil painting, supporting individual attempts to nationalize oil painting rather than setting down universal formula and rules.[56]

[56] "On the Issue of Nationalized Styles," 44–9.

Figure a3.2: Pan Tianshou, *Transporting Iron Ore by Sailboat* (*Tieshi yunfantu*《铁石运帆图》), 1957, ink and colors on *xuan* paper.

While these discussions had their origins in the early 1950s, they were supercharged by the political climate of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and therefore reverberated throughout the 1950s until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. Despite the loosening of ideological control in the Hundred Flowers Campaign, some of protagonists still experienced direct political pressure. In the mid- and late 1950s, Dong Xiwen upheld the artistic policy of "Letting A Hundred Flowers Bloom and A Hundred Schools of Thought Contend" as the guiding principle for his teaching and practice. The Third Painting Studio, established in 1959 and led by Dong Xiwen and Xu Xingzhi (许幸之 1904–1991) at CAFA, encouraged its students to explore

different forms and schools of art, including Western art movements. During the Anti-Rightist Movement from 1957 to 1959, their approach would be criticized for the pursuit of individualism, which was considered anti-Socialist.[57] The Third Studio was regarded as representative of bourgeois art and was criticized for following the path of "white experts" (*baizhuan* 白专).[58] Its teaching staff and students were subjected to harsh treatment. Third Studio students' grades were artificially lowered, and their graduate works classified as "black paintings" during the Anti-Rightist Movement. Their after-class theoretical study group was also accused of being a "little salon."[59] Artists rose or fell depending on the kind of art they were trained in or taught. Different types of art were arbitrarily assigned political status and classified as right or wrong. This situation lasted well into the Cultural Revolution.

Discussion Two: Re-evaluating Impressionism

The re-evaluation of Impressionism was another vivid example of the politicization of art and its discourse during this particular period. Still under the influence of the Soviet art world, the discussion on Impressionism in China was triggered by a debate that took place in Soviet art circles. The Soviet debate, as Jiang Feng pointed out, originated from an exhibition of French art in Leningrad and Moscow in 1956.[60]

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[57] Xu Xingzhi, "Dong Xiwen de yishu lixiang" ("Dong Xiwen's Ideal of Art"), in Beijing Fine Art Academy, *A Collection of Essays on Dong Xiwen*, 86.

[58] "White expert" was a label that applied in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution periods to those who were regarded as being committed to scholarly research, possessing expertise, and not being concerned about political matters. Those who supported the Chinese Communist Party were considered "red" and those who were indifferent or held different ideological opinions were classified as "white". See Sigrid Schmalzer, "Red and Expert," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism*, ed. Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini and Nicholas Loubere (Canberra: ANU Press and Verso Books, 2019), 216.

[59] Xu, "Dong Xiwen's Ideal of Art," 86.

[60] *Exhibition of French Art of the 12th to 20th Centuries*, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (then Leningrad); Moscow, 1956. See Gary Tinterow and Philip Conisbee eds., *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), exh. cat., 581.

After seeing the works of leading artists such as Manet and the Impressionist artists Monet and Degas in the exhibition, many Soviet artists were led to think differently about Impressionism and were able to do so for a brief period due to critical political changes that had occurred in the Soviet Union. On February 24, 1956, three years after Nikita Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, took charge of the Soviet Union following the death of Stalin in March 1953, he spoke at the 12th National Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. He delivered a dramatic re-evaluation of Stalin, critically reflecting on the severe consequences of the personality cult of Stalin. The speech was circulated in the foreign media the next day. The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party distributed Khrushchev's speech to Party branches. This political shift was the backdrop to the re-evaluation of Impressionism among Soviet artists. Previously in the Soviet Union, Impressionism had been regarded as a decadent formalism, banned in the academies after 1948.[61]

In China, Impressionism had been initially introduced following the publication of books on Western painting in the 1920s and the 1930s and Chinese artists studying at art academies in Europe. While artists such as Liu Haisu (刘海粟 1896–1994) and Feng Zikai (丰子恺 1898–1975) wrote extensively about Impressionism, Xu Beihong, among those who supported Socialist Realism, denounced Impressionism as early as 1929.[62] As art became more and more implicated in politics through the 1930s and

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[61] Ari Akkermans, "The Hidden History of Estonian Impressionism Under Stalin," Hyperallergic, April 29, 2016. Accessed on January 10, 2020, https://hyperallergic.com/295066/the-hidden-history-of-estonian-impressionism-under-stalin/. See also Susan Reid and David Crowley eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010).

[62] Huang Huihua, "Ershi shiji wushi niandai guanyu yinxiangzhuyi de taolun" ("Discussion on Impressionism in the 1950s"), (MA diss., Chinese National Academy of Arts, 2017), 1.

the 1940s, the Communist art world adopted the same line in regard to Impressionism as their colleagues in the Soviet Union. Emulating even such an apparently harmless idiom as Impressionism (at least to Western eyes) was marginalized until the Hundred Flowers Campaign presented an opportunity.

From November 23, 1956 to January 23, 1957, four discussions on Impressionism were held at the Teaching Research Center of Western Art History in the Central Academy of Art (*Xiyang meishushi jiaoxue yanjiushi* 西洋美术史教学研究室).[63] Sixty to seventy participants were involved, including three CAFA directors, the majority of the teaching staff of the Oil Painting Department, students of oil painting training courses, all the members of the teaching research center of Western Art History, select staff from the Chinese Art History teaching research center, the sculpture, printmaking and color ink painting departments, as well as the Director and teachers of CAFA's affiliated high school, and finally, the editorial board of *Art* magazine. Individual artists participating in the discussion included Wang Shikuo, Wang Manshuo, Wang Linyi, Ai Zhongxin, Jiang Feng, Wu Zuoren, Li Zongjin, Li Hua, Xu Xingzhi, Hua Tianyou, Feng Faji and Jiang Zhaohe. Their education and experiences had been quite diverse: some had worked and been trained in Yan'an; others had received a European art education. In the second issue of *Art* magazine, published in March 1957, the works of Impressionist and related artists were prominently featured, including Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro and Toulouse Lautrec. The same issue carried a translation of Russian art critic Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov's text *On Impressionism*, and three

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[63] "Guanyu Yinxiangzhuyi de taolun" ("Discussions about Impressionism"). *Art Research*, no. 2 (1957): 24.

other translated texts from the discussion of Impressionism in the Soviet Union.[64]

Regarding the motivation behind this discussion, the editors of *Art* magazine wrote in their editorial:

> Impressionist painting is nothing new to Chinese painters, who had dealt with [the concept] a long time ago. Why does it become an issue again to be discussed today? This is what has happened: someone has said that Impressionism is Realism. This was the trigger. What is Impressionism and what is Realism and aren't they worth studying? Regarding these questions, people's views are complex, and it is not as simple as we have put it. There are different interpretations of Impressionism, Realism, and of Socialist Realism and so on. Thus, it is necessary and beneficial to single out Impressionism as an issue to be discussed and studied.[65]

Three issues were central to this discussion and were signaled in this quote. Was Impressionism a form of Realism? What was the significance of the innovation represented by Impressionism? What was the relevance of landscape, still life painting and paintings of narrative content? These questions were addressed in the second and third issues of *Art Research*, published in April and July 1957, in articles written by major artists and theoreticians including Jiang Feng ("Impressionism Isn't

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[64] The texts include Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, "Lun yinxiangzhuyi" ("On Impressionism") and "Fandui yinxiangzhuyi jiqi canliu" ("Opposing Impressionism and its remains"), and Eileen Groys, "Puliehannuofu and yinxiangshuyi" ("Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov and Impressionism"), *Art*, no. 2 (March 1957): 37–39; 43–6; 40–1.

[65] Stasov, "On Impressionism," *Art*, no. 2 (1957): 37–39. See also Kong Lingwei and Lyu Peng eds., *Zhongguo xiandangdai meishushi wenxian* (*Documents of Chinese Modern and Contemporary Art History*) (Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 2013), 449.

Realism?"), Wang Qi ("Is Impressionism Realism, or Naturalism?"), Jin Ye ("On Monet and the Nature of Impressionist Art: Some Opinions on the Issues of Evaluating Impressionism") and Xu Xingzhi' ("Impressionism is Impressionism").[66] Even though there was a hesitation to fully acknowledge Impressionism's achievements and relevance, because it was considered bourgeois, the overall tone of these essays was to understand the characteristics and limitations of Impressionism in order to open up the horizons of Chinese art. Despite their differences, these artists and art critics refused to dismiss Impressionism as formalism or understand it through the frame of Realism. Jin Ye, for instance, proposed to explain Impressionism through specific works of specific artists and analyze the complex artistic views embedded in the artists' concrete practices.

Yet towards summer and the latter half of 1957, the Anti-Rightist Movement caught up with the field of art and literature, bringing the vigorous discussion about Impressionism to a standstill. The Anti-Waste and Anti-Conservatism Campaign (*Shuangfan yundong* 双反运动) broke out in 1958.[67] At CAFA in Beijing, this campaign took the form of big character posters, forums and exhibitions that criticized the specialization of art and its distance from workers, farmers and

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[66] Jiang Feng, "*Yinxiangzhuyi bushi xianshizhuyi*" ("Impressionism Isn't Realism"), *Art Research*, no. 2 (April 1957): 1–10. Wang Qi, "*Yinxiangzhuyi shi xianshizhuyi, haishi ziranzhuyi*" ("Is Impressionism Realism, or Naturalism"), *Art Research*, no. 2 (April 1957): 11–23. Jin Ye, "Lun mania ji yinxiangzhuyiyishu de xingzhi: guanyu yinxiangzhuyi pingjia wenti de yixiekanfa" ("On Monet and the Nature of Impressionist Art: Some Opinions on the Issues of Evaluating Impressionism"), *Art Research*, no. 3 (July 1957): 10–34. Xu Xingzhi, "Yinxiangzhuyi jiushi yinxiangzhuyi" ("Impressionism is Impressionism"), *Art Research*, no. 3 (July 1957): 35–46.

[67] See Alfred L. Chan, *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 166; see also Julia Kwong, "The Great Leap Forward: 1958-59," in *Chinese Education in Transition*: *Prelude to the Cultural Revolution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), 87.

soldiers.[68] In May 1958, Mao Zedong laid down principles for artistic practice at the second session of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China.[69] He dictated that proletarian literature and art (*wuchan jieji wenyi* 无产阶级文艺) should combine Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism."[70] From that moment and throughout the Cultural Revolution, all genres of so-called formalism, including Impressionism, were considered bourgeois and hostile to the working class. They were regarded as the absolute opposite of Socialist Realism. Over the following two decades, Impressionism became an artistic and discursive taboo. It was completely obliterated from artists' practices and misrepresented as "anti-realism," "formalist," decadent and reactionary.[71] Only after the end of the Cultural Revolution were artists and theoreticians able once again to discuss Impressionism openly, as in Wu Jiafeng's book *The Re-understanding of Impressionism*, a concise but thorough introduction to the history of Impressionism published in 1980.[72]

Discussion Three: Reforming Ink Painting: The Peony Is Good, So Is the Clove

After 1949, brush-and-ink painting on silk or paper, part of a thousand-year-old

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[68] Anonymous reporter, "Gaizao sixiang, lizheng hong you zhuan—Ji Zhongyang meishu xueyuan shuangfan yundong" ("Reform Thoughts, Try to be Red and Loyal: Documenting the Anti-Waste and Anti-Conservatism in the Central Academy of Fine Arts"). *Art Research*, no. 1 (April 1958): 8–11.
[69] The second session of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (*Zhonggong bada erci huiyi*) was held from May 5 to 23 in 1958 in Beijing.
[70] Hong Zicheng, "*Nianbiao 1954–1965"* ("Chronology 1954–1965"), in *1956: The Hundred Flowers Era*, 220.
[71] Wu Jiafeng, *Yinxiangpai de zairenshi (The Re-understanding of Impressionism)* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1980), 4.
[72] Wu, *The Re-understanding of Impressionism*, 4. Wu Jiafeng (1916–1997) graduated from the Western Painting Department of the Shanghai Art College in 1934. He was researcher of Western art history at the China Research Institute of Art, Beijing.

Chinese tradition, was viewed by Communist theorists as a remnant of feudal China and labeled "art for art's sake." Chinese brush-and-ink painting had to actively reform itself and prove its relevance to the Revolution. Many painters devoted themselves to painting new New Year pictures (*Xinnianhua* 新年画), continuing the ideology of making art for the masses that had been established in Yan'an and which drew on a longstanding folk tradition. On August 10, 1949, the Beijing New Chinese Painting Research Society (*Beijing xinguohua yanjiuhui* 北京新国画研究会) was established at a meeting, attended by more than 150 artists in Beijing. This move helped organize Chinese brush-and-ink painters, who had previously valued more solitary identities, into a formal organization.[73] A series of discussions on reforming Chinese brush-and-ink paintings was initiated in the newspaper *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 《人民日报》) in 1949 and was then carried on in the journal *People's Art* (*Renmin meishu*《人民美术》) in 1950 by artists and art cadres including Jiang Feng, woodcut artist and then Vice Chairman of the CAA, Li Hua (李桦 1907–1994), woodcut artist and professor at CAFA, and Li Keran (李可染 1907–1989), brush-and-ink painter and CAFA professor, all of whom addressed the subject of reforming Chinese ink painting.[74] The central issue was how painters would represent Socialism in Chinese brush-and-ink painting, and how they would acknowledge the primacy of the CCP's definition of Realism. This was a considerable and fundamental transformation for Chinese brush-and-ink painting, the earlier development of which had been based on

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[73] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 209–10.

[74] Jiang Feng, "Guohua gaizao diyibu" ("The First Step of Reforming Chinese Ink Paintings"), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), May 25, 1949, 2. Li Keran, "Tan zhongguohua de gaizao" ("On the Reform of Chinese Ink Paintings"), *Renmin meishu* (*People's Art*), no. 1 (1950): 35–38. Li Hua, "Gaizao Zhongguohua de jiben wenti" ("The Basics Issues in Reforming Chinese Ink Paintings"), *People's Art*, no. 1 (1950): 24.

the tradition of emulation, with apprentices strictly copying the works of masters until they completely internalized their examples.

By the 1950s, Chinese brush-and-ink painters had to alter their landscape paintings to depict nation-building and industrialization by incorporating imagery of factories, railroads, telephone poles and new Socialist villages into their art. While oil paintings depicted the masses, Chinese brush-and-ink paintings would also serve the revolution. Consequently, Chinese brush-and-ink painters commonly embraced *plein air* sketching practice, traveling to famous sites such as the Yellow Mountain (*Huangshan* 黄山) and the Yellow River (*Huanghe* 黄河), as well as to collective farms, major construction sites and factories, to paint from life.[75] In 1954, artists Li Keran, Zhang Ding (张仃 1917–2010) and Luo Ming (罗铭 1917–2007) took a three-month trip traveling through Wuxi, Suzhou, Shanghai, Tai Lake (太湖) and Hangzhou, along the Fu Chun River (富春江), to Shaoxing and Huangshan, making brush-and-ink paintings depicting modern socialist landscapes.[76] [Figure a3.3] As economic construction and industrialization developed further around the country, more Chinese brush-and-ink painters traveled into rural areas to document industrialization and Socialist transformation.

[75] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 242–3.
[76] Zou, *A History of Chinese Fine Arts 1949–2000*, 49–53.

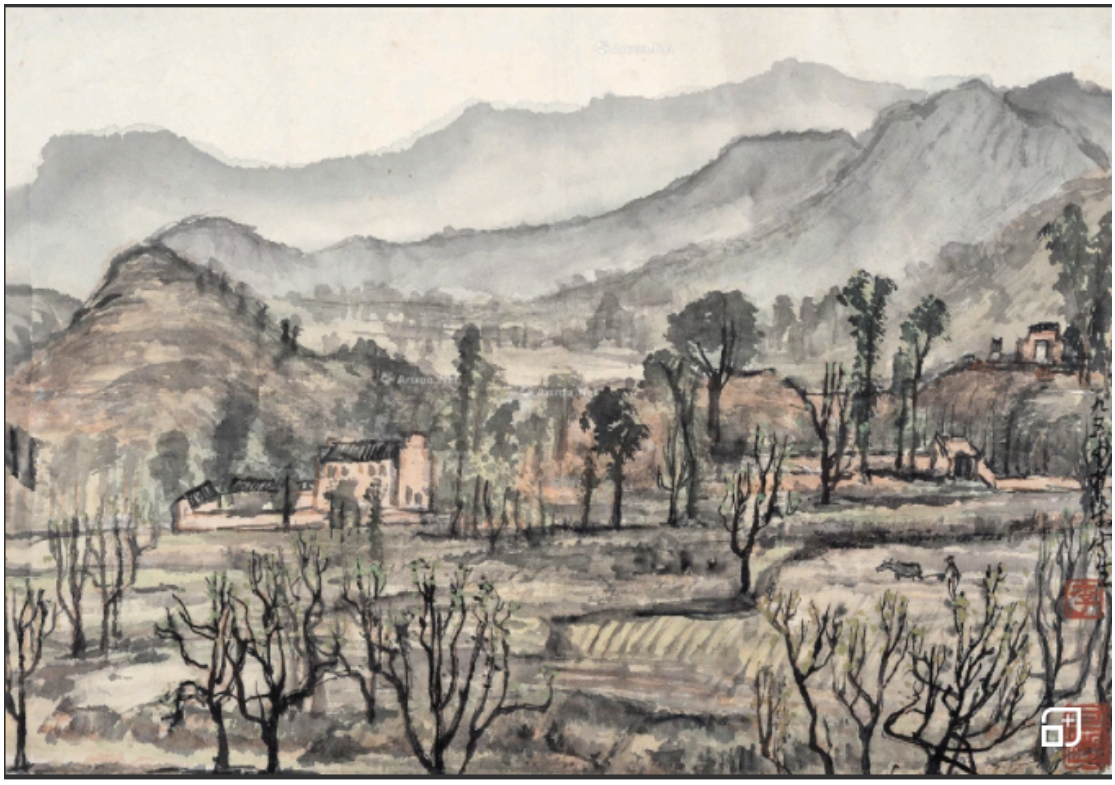

Figure a3.3: Li Keran, *Plein Air Sketching In the Countryside* (*Xiangcun xiesheng* 乡村写生), 1954, ink and color on paper.

In contrast to the swift adaptations of Chinese landscape and figure painters, bird-and-flower painting (*huaniaohua* 花鸟画) was regarded as irrevocably "feudal" and was given no chance to reform itself.[77] Official reservations about the value of landscape painting as well as bird-and-flower painting were voiced as early as the second meeting of the first committee of the CAA in May 1955.[78] Landscape and bird-and-flower were considered lesser genres, unable to reflect Socialist reality and its struggles; they were even dismissed as distractions.

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[77] Historically, there are three genres in Chinese brush-and-ink painting: landscape, bird-and-flower, and figures. As a traditional genre of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, bird-and-flower painting covers a wide range of natural subjects including flowers and plants, fish, insects, birds, and pets such as cats and dogs. Flower paintings, previously associated with Buddhist art, came into its own as a separate branch of painting in the Five Dynasties (907–960). For more details on the political and social reception of landscape, bird-and-flower and figure paintings, see Amy Jane Barnes, "Imagining China: The Birth and Consolidation of British Visions of China," in *Museum Representations of Maoist China: From Cultural Revolution to Commie Kitsch* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 38.

[78] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 242–3.

The onset of the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957 set in motion a series of events that would have a profound effect on brush-and-ink painters. The initial criticisms of art and artists in 1957 escalated. It was followed by the emergence of Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin* 大跃进) in art.[79] This radical campaign called on the masses to participate in artistic creation. On one hand, artists were directed to produce many more artworks and make them affordable to everyone; on the other hand, they were directed to go to villages to live as one with the masses, producing art to celebrate proletarian enthusiasm. As a result, many villagers were engaged in painting murals and propaganda paintings of invented events and scenes. The most frequently painted scenes celebrated extraordinary agricultural achievements. Both professional artists and local villagers participated in the campaigns.[80] Politics was the priority and in particular the principle of "learning from workers and farmers."[81]

The existence of bird-and-flower painting was called into question again in the middle of the Great Leap Forward. Towards the end of 1958, comments were again made about the irrelevance of Chinese landscape paintings and bird-and-flower paintings, and it was clear that they were to be reformed. But there would be a remarkable reversal of thinking in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split (1956–1966), which cast a shadow over the popularity of Socialist Realism in China. With the departure of Soviet experts and the snowballing of tensions with the Soviet Union, the status of

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[79] The Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin*) was initially an economic and social campaign led by Mao Zedong from 1958 to 1962. Confident about the country's development, Mao believed that such a campaign could rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a socialist society through rapid industrialization and collectivization. It led to extreme and irrational actions in all walks of life.

[80] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 278–83.

[81] Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 317.

Chinese brush-and-ink painting rose again, alongside renewed discussion about national forms. In mid-April, 1959, Zhou Enlai delivered an address to the National People's Congress, marked by its widely noted "curiously contradictory overtones."[82] In his speech, variety in artistic expression seemed to be encouraged: "just as we need history painting," he said, "we also need bird-and-flower and landscape painting." Such suggestions were immediately interpreted literally, with artists returning to these subjects. He Rong wrote a series of four essays published through 1959 in defense of bird-and-flower painting. In these essays, he evoked the spirit of the Hundred Flowers Campaign to argue for the usefulness of Chinese landscape and bird-and-flower painting in serving the masses.[83] He Rong's four essays were, in turn, "Landscape, Bird-and-Flower, and A Hundred Flowers Bloom," "How Beautiful the Landscape of Nature," "Peony Is Good, So Is Clove" and "More Beautiful than Nature."[84]

The first of this series of essays, "Landscape, Bird-and-Flower, and A Hundred Flowers Bloom," first appeared in March 1959. In this short essay, He Rong argued for a broader spectrum of representation in art, beyond class struggle. Bird-and-flower and landscape painting, he wrote, had their place in terms of serving the people. The second essay appeared in May. "How Beautiful the Landscape of the Nature: Re-discussing Landscape, Bird-and-Flower, and A Hundred Flowers Bloom" started

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[82] Zhou Enlai, "Guanyu wenhua yishu gongzuo liangtiaotui zoulu de wenti" ("On the Issue of Taking Two Approaches in the Work of Art and Culture"). This speech was delivered to a group of practitioners of art and culture in Beijing on May 3, 1959.

[83] Trained as an art historian, in 1953 he became a secretary of the Secretariat of the CAA and Deputy Director of the Editorial Department of *Art* magazine. See Beijing Fine Art Academy, *Beijing's Painting History*, 300–1.

[84] He Rong, "Shanshui huaniao yu baihuaqifang" ("Landscape, Bird-and-Flower and A Hundred Flowers Bloom"), *Art*, no. 2 (February 1959): 41–5; "Meizai daziran fengjing" ("How Beautiful the Landscape of the Nature"), *Art*, no. 4 (April 1959): 1415; "Mudan hao, dingxiang yehao" ("Peony Is Good, So Is Clove"), *Art*, no. 7 (July 1959): 8–11; and "Bi ziran gengmei" ("More Beautiful than the Nature"), *Art*, no. 8 (August 1959): 41–2.

by describing the beauty of natural scenes that the author had recently visited. Painting needed, he argued, to represent such natural beauty, and this would serve the masses, whose needs in turn were diverse. He evoked the example of the government distributing peach trees and cloves trees to the residents of Beijing to meet their needs for natural beauty in their everyday lives. He concluded that landscape and bird-and-flower painters could best serve the people by adhering to their genres. Two months later, "Peony Is Good, So Is Clove: A Third Discussion on Landscape, Bird-and-Flower, and A Hundred Flowers Bloom," appeared in defense of diversity in subject matter, refuting the idea that subjects could be classified as either significant or not significant. He dismissed the direct equation of art with political slogans or propaganda. If landscape or bird-and-flower painting could capture natural beauty and evoke people's passion for life and the beauty of the motherland's nature, it was not at all irrelevant. In summary, there were different ways for art to serve political causes and bird-and-flower or landscape painting could be amongst them. In August, He Rong wrote the short text "More Beautiful Than Nature: In Memory of Mr. Yu Fei'an, A Discussion of Landscape and Bird-and-Flower Painting, and A Hundred Flowers Bloom." In this essay, He Rong celebrated the exceptional painting style of Yu Fei'an (于非闇) in representing flowers and birds meticulously and realistically.[85] The purpose of these essays was uphold the unique place of bird-and-flower paintings.

While He Rong recognized that artworks were an instrument to provide the working

[85] Yu Fei'an (1888–1959), a leading figure in the genre of bird-and-flower painting in the meticulous or *gongbi* style in the twentieth century. *Gongbi* bird-and-flower paintings are colorful works painted using fine brush strokes and strong color. This genre endured a long period of exclusion and stagnation from the Yuan dynasty, when scholar artists working in ink became dominant and colorful *gongbi* bird-and-flower paintings were eclipsed by those painted in ink in the freehand, suggestive *xieyi* style.

people with a Socialist and Communist education, he firmly stood by the idea of maintaining diversity across artistic themes and genres, and thus affirmed the legitimacy of bird-and-flower and landscape paintings. He wrote that the function of art wasn't as direct as political slogans or political arguments. Not only was art unable to be either, it was not necessary. Otherwise, he stated we only need political slogans or arguments, and not art. It is within this context that he offered the slogan, "Peony Is Good, So Is Clove."[86] He Rong's four essays were part of an ongoing discussion on the reform and adaptation of Chinese brush-and-ink painting, so that it would be understood to be compatible with the ideological framework of the PRC. The debate involved many artists and theoreticians of differing opinions and practices. He Rong's justification of bird-and-flower painting was really an argument about artistic autonomy and diversity. Two decades later, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, He Rong would return to this idea. On December 14, 1980, in his position as Deputy Editor of *Art* and a member of the CAA, He Rong penned "A Revisit of 'Peony Is Good, So Is Clove'."[87] In this text, he recalled his original argument, in which he had advocated for the freedom of artistic practice from restrictions that were based on genres and content.

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[86] He Rong, "Peony Is Good, So Is Clove," 8–11.
[87] He Rong, "Zailun mudan hao, dingxiang yehao" ("Re-discussing 'Peony Is Good, So Is Clove'), *Ar*t, no.1 (Jan 1981): 9–14.