

## Chinese Art

### 9. The Twentieth Century – People's Republic of China

*Pinyin spelling mostly approximates to English pronunciation apart from, notably,  
Q = "ch" in cheap. X = "sh" in sham. Zh = "j" in jasmine. Z = "ds" hands. C = "ts" as in tsar.*

*Names are given with surnames first*

## Contents

<b>Liberation – Art for the People</b> .....	3
<b>Soviet Influence – Socialist Realism</b> .....	7
Oil Painting.....	7
<i>Dong Xiwen [also Part 8]</i> .....	10
Prints.....	12
<b>Tradition Chinese painting (<i>guohua</i>)</b> .....	16
Li Keran (1907- 1989) .....	19
Feng Zikai (1898 – 1975) .....	26
<b>Cultural Revolution to the end of Mao</b> .....	30
<b>Art on the Periphery</b> .....	42
Taiwan – Fifth Moon Group.....	42
<i>Liu Kuo-Sung (Liu Guosong, born 1932)</i> .....	42
Singapore.....	46
Hong Kong .....	47
<b>The 1980s</b> .....	50
Realism in Oils .....	51
<i>Luo Zhongli (born 1948)</i> .....	51
New Wave.....	57
Traditional Chinese Painting .....	59
<i>Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010)</i> .....	68
<b>References</b> .....	75

## Liberation – Art for the People

On October 1<sup>st</sup> 1949 the People's Republic was declared by Mao and Beijing became the capital again. Excitement and expectation prevailed, as well as relief after years of strife and economic chaos. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of art education and artists. The Artists Association was set up under the Ministry of Culture. Approved artists became registered members of provincial and local branches of the Association. They were employed in work units, which paid salaries and included free accommodation and food, and they lived together in the same courtyard or apartment. This security was new and welcomed, but came at a price. The work unit policed the attitudes and daily behaviour of artists. Punishment meant loss of studio space or art supplies, assignment to an undesirable job or worse.

Private art schools were closed, the commercial market ended and private patronage largely stopped. A few pieces were sold from public exhibitions and bought by senior party officials. Art for art's sake stopped, being elitist and unacceptable to CCP thinking. Commissions came solely from the government, and affected all forms of art.



Jiang Feng, *Studying is Good*, 1942



Hong Bo, *Joining the Army*, 1947



Li Qun, *Warm Clothes and Ample Food*, 1944

Artists were summoned to the first National Congress of Literature and Art Workers in July 1949 to hear the official policy towards the arts. Zhou Enlai and Mao were there. High priority was given to works considered part of the folk tradition; "*The Liberated Area woodcuts, New Year's pictures, picture story books are all rich in Chinese style and flavour*".

Peasants did not like the black and white woodcuts, preferring the colourful new year and paper gods pictures (*nianhua*) which they could display in the home and on the farm. The CCP hated these, regarding them as feudal and superstitious. Mao said new themes would be found for *nianhua*; the rebirth of China, great victories in the war of liberation, lives and struggles of ordinary people. This had been the policy in Communist-held areas for some time before liberation. Yan Han's print *Army and People Cooperate* [Part 8] is one example of a new theme. The traditional *nianhua* showed auspicious subjects. Popular ones had a fat baby boy surrounded by fruits or fish - customary symbols of fertility, abundance and good luck. Jiang Feng (above) replaced these with tools of education and included a little girl, with the slogan (ironic given the deluded basis of the later Great Leap Forward) "*Studying is good. After you study, you can do accounts and write letters.*" New year prints also had a propaganda value.

The First National Art Exhibition was held in July 1949. Derk Bodde, American academic and historian of China, saw it and commented;

*"most interesting were the less sophisticated works prepared by communist propagandists for use among the peasants. There were coloured lantern slides illustrating the powers of the Liberation Army or its cooperation with the people; lithographed wall newspapers in which news of the day was presented in the form of brightly coloured pictures arranged like American comic strips; coloured New Year pictures ... in which the traditional God of Wealth and the Eight Immortals are replaced by up-to-date themes as peasants working together in the field or participating in a "bean election" [voting for village officials by casting beans into jars beneath the names and picture of candidates]; 'scissor pictures' [designs cut with scissors from red paper – a traditional art of peasant women] modernised to show Liberation Army soldiers or peasants at work ... The entire exhibition left two dominant impressions. One was the dynamic force that graphic art can give when it is harnessed with conviction and skill to certain guiding ideas. The other was the extent to which the Communists, as no other group in Chinese history, have succeeded in conveying their message to China's rural millions."*

Not all *nianhua* were for peasants and workers. Those produced for foreign consumption appeared in the January 1952 issue of *China Pictorial*, and were political and far more sophisticated. Hou Yimen and his wife, Deng Shu, produced a complex composition of postures and gestures in their *nianhua*. Lin Gang recalled old paintings of court ladies in his picture of a model worker meeting high officials, but the vanishing point and clever grouping of figures are very different to traditional Chinese methods.



Hou Yimin and Deng Shu, *Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the CCP*, 1951, ink and colour on paper.

These two works won prizes from the Ministry of Culture. Public recognition was given to paintings only when the party considered them particularly successful. A work might be mentioned by an important party leader in a published speech or in an official journal or selected for display in a local or national exhibition or, even better, given an award at an exhibition. Those of particular prestige would be reproduced in one of the propaganda journals, in a newspaper or as a poster and widely circulated in China.



Lin Gang, *Zhao Guilan at the Heroes Reception*, 1951, ink and colour on silk originally

This is true of *Founding of the Nation* by Dong Xiwen [who we met in Part 8] which was one of several paintings depicting the history of the CCP. Other artists, including Xu Beihong and Wu Zuoren, produced other examples; Luo Gongliu commemorated the people's guerrilla warfare against the Nationalists.



Luo Gongliu, *Tunnel Warfare*, 1951

An adaptation of *Founding of the Nation* is now in the National Museum of China. Its history could be an example of Winston Smith's work in 1984's Ministry of Truth. Dong Xiwen depicted Mao at Tiananmen Square proclaiming the establishment of the PRC. The painting has received little critical admiration but is an icon of Chinese art. Reproduced widely in September 1953, including on the front page of *People's Daily*, it was the party-approved interior decoration for the home. A photograph called "My Family" in *China Pictorial*, an English-language propaganda magazine, shows a model Chinese family listening to their radio in a neat and tidy sitting-room - on the wall hangs a large poster of *The Founding of the Nation*.



Dong Xiwen, *The Founding of the Nation*, 1952-3 (original version)

Behind Mao in the front row wearing red ribbons, from left to right, are General Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Madame Song Qingling (widow of Sun Yatsen), Li Jishen, the white-bearded Zhang Lan and General Gao Gang. Gao Gang was chairman of the Central Planning Committee and the 6<sup>th</sup> ranking member of the Politburo. Apart from Mao's admiration for Gao's efficiency, the leader marvelled at Gao's virility; he was said to have had 100 mistresses. Gao mounted a bid for power which started well but went awry after he talked to Deng Xiaoping who promptly told Mao. Gao was purged and sent to prison where he committed suicide in Spring 1955. *The Founding of the Nation* was set to be displayed at the National Art Exhibition of 1955, but now Gao was persona non grata. He was removed from the painting. Dong Xiwen made the pink chrysanthemum larger and completed the gate behind. That unbalanced the composition, so two more microphones were added.



*Founding of the Nation*, 1955 version

Later in the Cultural Revolution in 1967, Liu Shaoqi (regarded until then as Mao's heir) was disgraced and he had to be removed. This was awkward as Liu was the imposing chap next to Gen Zhu De. Liu's head was changed and reduced in size, his torso was changed and legs shortened so the figure appeared to be in the second row; the carpet pattern was extended to cover where Liu's feet had been.



*Founding of the Nation, 1967 version*

This was not the end. Lin Boqu (the white-haired gent at the far left) was purged during the Cultural Revolution for allegedly opposing the marriage between Mao and Jiang Qing. Dong, too ill to paint, refused to allow anyone to touch his work. Two artists made an exact copy in 1972 with Lin Boqu removed. Finally, in 1979 a replica was made with all the figures of the original restored, although the four microphones remained and a previously unknown bloke in the back row was made to resemble Deng Xiaoping.

## **Soviet Influence – Socialist Realism**

### Oil Painting

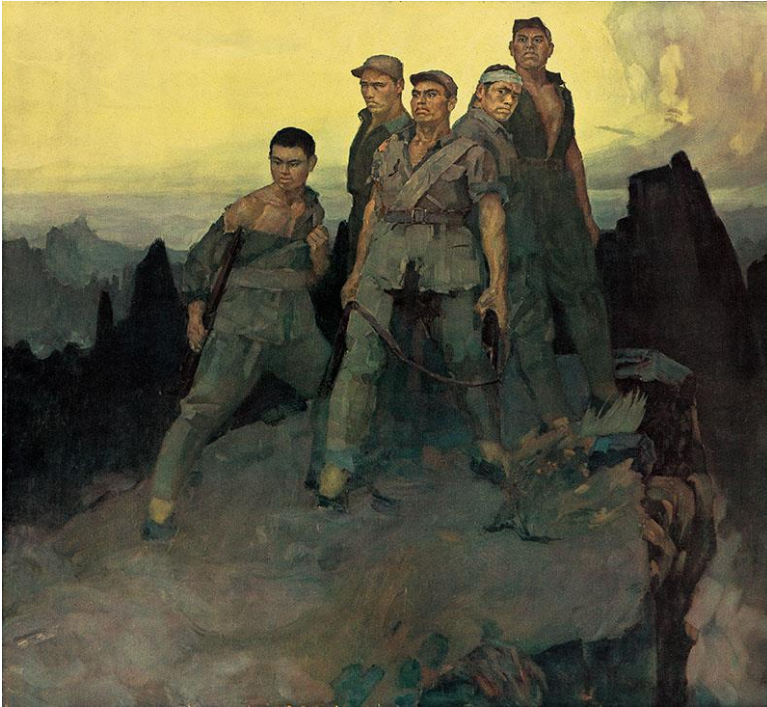


Konstantin Maksimov, *A Warrior of the Chinese Revolution*, 1955 (oil)

The Iron Curtain and the Korean War closed doors to the West for Chinese art students, who were sent to the USSR to study instead. From 1953 to 1957, the years of China's first Five Year Plan, many aspects of the Soviet system were adopted and teams of technicians sent to China. Soviet and Russian art books began to replace those on Post-Impressionism in libraries and shops. The Tsarist social realist painters, the Wanderers (particularly Ivan Kramskoy, Ilya Repin, Vassily Surikov and Valentin Serov) who had left the Imperial Academy in 1863 to set up an artists' cooperative were the most popular. Georgy Malenkov, President of the Soviet Union, explained that social realistic art must *"bring to light the lofty spiritual qualities and typical positive features in the character of the ordinary man and woman, and create vivid artistic images of them, images that will be an example to others."* In a 1953 speech Zhou Yang, CCP literary and Marxist theorist said; *"We take socialist realist methods as the highest creative and critical standard for all our literature and arts"*.

Konstantin Maksimov arrived at Beijing's Central Academy from Moscow in February 1955 and became a dominant influence in the teaching of oil painting. He insisted that every picture should tell a story or at least that the subject matter should be immediately apparent to the viewer. His style was loose and free, with broad squared-off brush strokes.

Oil was not a popular medium in China, so subjects were chosen for their emotional appeal to workers, peasants and soldiers. *Five Heroes* shows the Chinese soldiers who fought the Japanese Army in Hebei, killing dozens before committing suicide by throwing themselves off the mountain to evade capture. He Kongde painted many works based on the Korean War in which China lost 150,000 men (the US lost 35,000 soldiers) – “volunteers” as the Chinese Army could not be officially involved - as they routed MacArthur’s forces and drove them back from the Yalu River.



Zhan Jianjun, *Five Heroes on Langya Mountain*, 1959 (oil)



He Kongde, *A Letter from Home*, 1957 (with many later repairs) (oil)



Feng Fasi, *The Heroic Death of Liu Hulan*, 1957 (oil)

Feng Fasi depicts the defiance of a peasant girl of 17 who was tortured and executed by troops of the warlord Yan Xishan but refused to reveal the hideout of her fellow Communists. The executioner, on the right, has been testing the hay-cutter works properly.





Wang Dewei, *Hero's Sisters*, 1957 (oil)

Wang Dewei's painting was very popular and a stylish composition – a wounded soldier is helped to sanctuary by two young women, carefully evading contact with the enemy.

Competition to enrol in Maksimov's two-year course in Soviet academic oil painting was fierce. Only 20 artists were selected. Not everyone painted history scenes, but Soviet socialist realism art also included portraits. Wu Zuoren [Part 8] painted an impressive portrait of Qi Baishi.

Many students followed Maksimov's style, but some Chinese artists opted for a more detailed realism associated with Vassily Surikov and Ilya Repin. One was Wang Shikou. He was a graduate of the Hangzhou and Shanghai art academies who joined the Communists at Yan'an. He used Western principles in his woodcuts. *Reform the Hooligans*, for example. He was very interested in land reform. In the 1950s Wang Shikuo produced sketches for an oil painting *The Bloody Shirt*, an elaborate composition showing peasants holding up the tattered garment of a tortured and murdered friend before a cowering landlord. Sadly, Wang died before completing the version in oil, but the sketch has far more realism than Maksimov taught.



Wu Zuoren, *Portrait of Qi Baishi*, 1954 (oil)



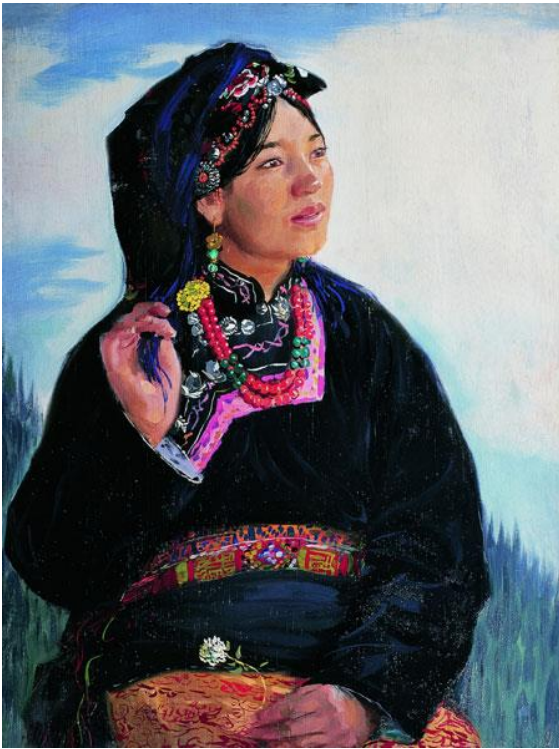
Wang Shikuo, *Reform the Hooligan*, 1947, woodcut print



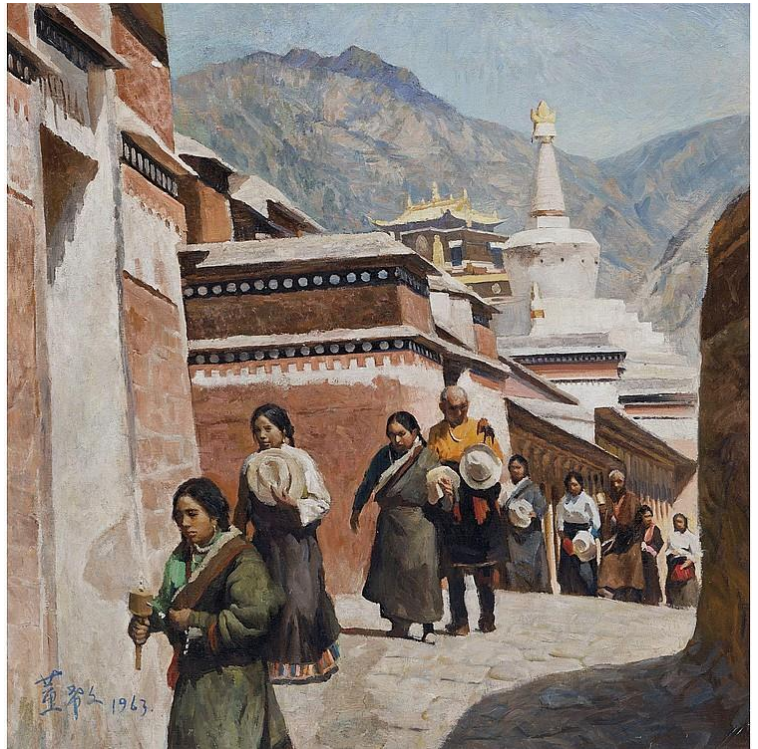
Wang Shikuo, *The Bloody Shirt*, 1950s, charcoal sketch

*Dong Xiwen [also Part 8]*

Oils were produced of more optimistic scenes. Dong Xiwen, back to sophisticated work after *Founding of the Nation*, visited Tibet many times. His peasants and herdsmen show the influence of Valentin Serov and Isaac Levitan. *Labuleng Temple* captures the piety of Buddhist worshippers. Dong Xiwen's affection for Tibetans shines through. The happiness of the serfs when they were given their own land to work is captured not just by their expression but also the atmosphere created by gorgeous blue skies, glistening snow-capped peaks and sun-bathed earth.



Dong Xiwen, *Tibetan Woman*, 1955 (oil on woodblock)



Dong Xiwen, *Labuleng Temple*, 1963 (oil)



Dong Xiwen, *Farmers Get the Land*, 1963 (oil)

Dong Xiwen's *Spring Comes to Tibet* was reviewed as a model of socialist realist art by a CCP critic: "In the foreground are apricot trees in bloom; a group of Tibetan women, working in a sunlit field, follow with their eyes a line of lorries on a newly built highway winding its way beneath mountain peaks capped with snow." The trees foretell an abundant harvest and suggest Tibetans flourishing under Communist Rule. In truth the advent of the CCP in Tibet brought much oppression.



Dong Xiwen, *Spring Comes to Tibet*, 1955 (oil)

### Prints

The Communist Party set up print departments in art schools. The first opened in 1955 under Li Hua. Before then, however, Soviet prints had become a major influence. By 1949 woodcut prints for the new style New Year pictures were already in decline because they were not popular with workers, peasants and soldiers who much preferred the traditional door gods.

Great emphasis was placed in the early years of the PRC on celebrating the industrial recovery of China. Soviet fine-line style became a common means for depicting construction projects; Chengdu-Kunming railway, Daqing oil field, steel and shipbuilding of Luda. **Gu Yuan (1919-1966)** produced many. His *Anshan Steelworks* is a fine example of the Soviet style in muted colour but (naturally enough) with a few red highlights. *First Train to Chengdu*, subtitled *Desire of 40 Years Realised* has no colour but Li Shaoyan uses the fine-line technique. Just as with oil painting the emphasis softened in later years into more lyrical themes. Gu Yuan's *Boulevard in a Beijing Suburb* and *Clearing a Path in Snow* earned praise in the 1955 National Art Exhibition.

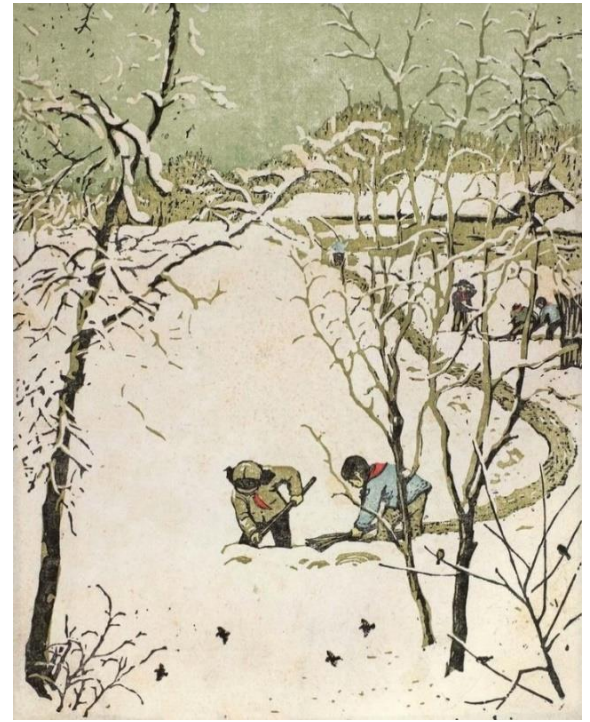


Gu Yuan, *Rehabilitation of Anshan Steelworks*, 1949 woodcut



Li Shaoyan, *First Train to Chengdu*, 1953

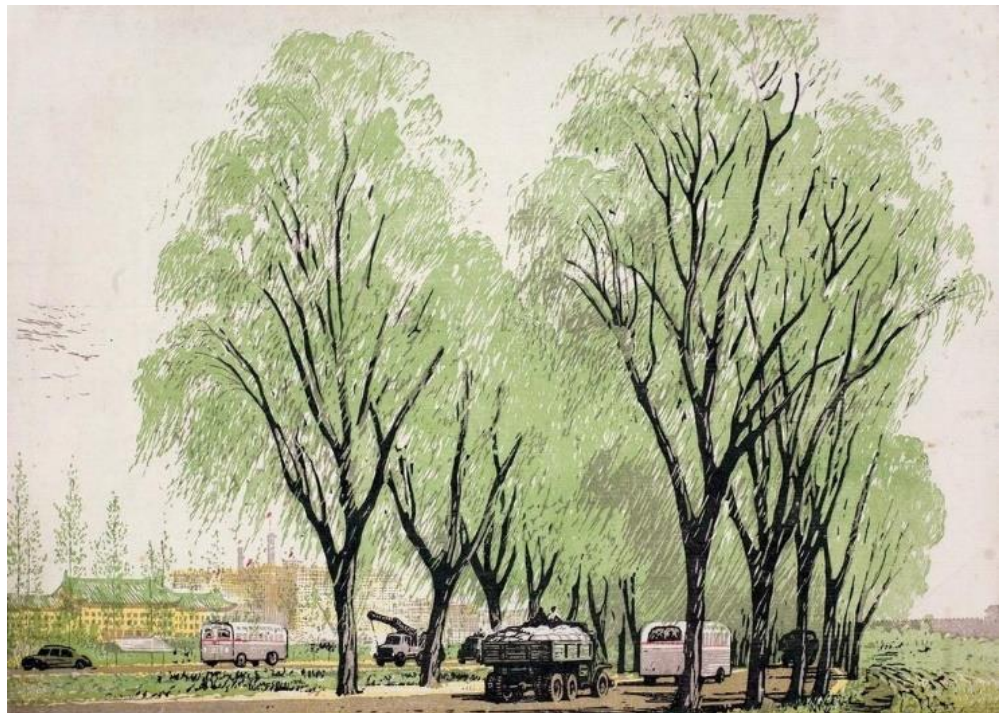
Between 1951 and 1966 radical Chilean graphic artist Jose Venturrelli lived in China, mainly Beijing, teaching and exhibiting. Many print-makers felt his influence and started to use more colour with less detailed compositions to produce more dramatic scenes.



Gu Yuan, *Clearing a Path in Snow*, 1954

In March 1958 100,000 demobbed Chinese soldiers were sent to the virgin forests of China's northeast border, an area that came to be known as *Beidahuang*, the Great Northern Wasteland. They were to farm the area. It also helped to have soldiers on the border as tension with the USSR was increasing. Artists were sent to produce propaganda.

**Chao Mei (born in 1931)** was the most important. He had grown up in Nanjing, joined the army in 1949 and worked in art propaganda. He produced prints which came to represent the new territory. His standard format was dramatic steppe or forest altered in some way to show the achievements of the demobbed troops.



Gu Yuan, *Boulevard in a Beijing Suburb*, 1954

*First Track* shows troops arriving in the Great Northern Wasteland. A low viewpoint with an exaggerated foreground and diagonal action (used often by Venturrelli to great effect) adds drama. The figures appear heroic and in Chao Mei's print, far away as if to emphasise the effort required even to arrive in this wildness, let alone tame it. Human labour supported by mechanisation is praiseworthy and is shown either producing abundance or in contrast to native wild grasses and beasts.



Chao Mei, *First Track of Footprints*, 1960



Chao Mei, *September in the North*, 1963



Chao Mei, *A Spring Night Among the Wilderness*, 1958

In 1952 Li Huanmin, a young veteran of the Communist army in Northern China, began underground propaganda work for the Communist conquest of Tibet. He learnt to speak the language and became a specialist in Tibetan life. *Tibetan Girl* is a print of a youngster who had peeped into his tent after the 1958 Xunhua Tibetan Uprising in which 500 monks were executed by Chinese soldiers and more than 3000 people incarcerated. Only children dare approach CCP cadres; adults suffered terrible punishment. Huanmin's *On Golden Road* shows the influence of socialist realism. In Soviet-style the figures are central and dramatic with a Western diminution as they wind back in depth.



Li Huanmin, *Tibetan Girl*, 1959



Li Huanmin, *On Golden Road*, 1963

## Tradition Chinese painting (*guohua*)

Revolutionary China had little use for traditional Chinese painting, regarded as an inheritance from elitist scholars. *Guohua* survived initially because important political figures remained convinced of its value and because its abolition might have undermined Mao's policy of enlisting educated non-Communists to help the new regime. Fairly soon, however, traditional painters were told to forget about landscapes, bamboo, birds and flowers and to paint figurative scenes executed in a realistic mode, according to the Soviet dogma. Art academies emphasised figure painting. Training was devoted to drawing plaster casts of famous sculptures and human models. The only traditional technique taught was outline-and-colour painting.

After 1949 **Jiang Zhaohe**, who already knew how to paint figures in a Western fashion [Part 8] painted cheerful pictures instead of the street-poor, and with more colour. Jiang's paintings show that painting in the traditional Chinese medium could take a Western form but still retain traditional conventions – the use of black outlines, skin carefully modelled and figures set against flat largely featureless background are links to Chinese past practices.



Jiang Zhaohe, *Driving Tractor*, 1956



Jiang Zhaohe, *Seed Planting*, 1950s

Fang Zengxian and Zhou Changgu were among those young artists who carried on this trend. Their subjects and compositions were usually simple. According to Fang Zengxian who taught at Hangzhou Academy from 1953 to 1966, the method he and his young colleagues developed involved drawing the structure of the human form but ignoring the effects of light and shade, texture or volume.

Fang Zengxian's *Every Grain is Hard* was shown in the 1955 National Art exhibition, which concentrated on works expressing the achievements of the nation's reconstruction and depicting the spirit of the labouring people. This work, along with Zhou Changgu's *Two Lambs*, won prizes at the exhibition. Both are Chinese in feeling (the vertical format, flat background, wet strokes of ink, emphasis on form, thick ink line) but with Western attributes (portrait-like face, foreshortened lambs and horse-and-cart and spatial recession).





Fang Zengxian's *Every Grain is Hard*, 1954



Zhou Changgu, *Two Lambs*, 1954

Under the CCP prescription, landscapes should have figures and these should not be scholars gazing at the sky or idling in boats, but modern men and women doing useful things. Some artists managed this. Guan Shanyue painted *Newly-opened Road* in 1954, almost 2 metres high and 1 metre wide, showing a view of a mountain gorge with a band of monkeys curious as construction trucks lumber up a mountain road. The work [unavailable] was a successful combination of Chinese ink and Western spatial effects.

Other artists produced odd mixtures of traditional Chinese landscapes with figures simply drawn in. Shi Lu produced an awkward landscape *Beyond the Great Wall* [unavailable], Pu Quan cursorily added unconvincing lorries to a traditional landscape in *Transport Fleet*.



Pu Quan, *Transport Fleet*, 1960s

From the outset, Mao insisted that writers and artists must undergo “a long and even painful process of steeling”. Steeling was to be accomplished in ways spelled out by his propaganda chief Hu Qiaomu: “First they should in accordance with the instructions of Comrade Mao Zedong engage themselves earnestly in ideological reform, study Marxism, and identify themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers ...

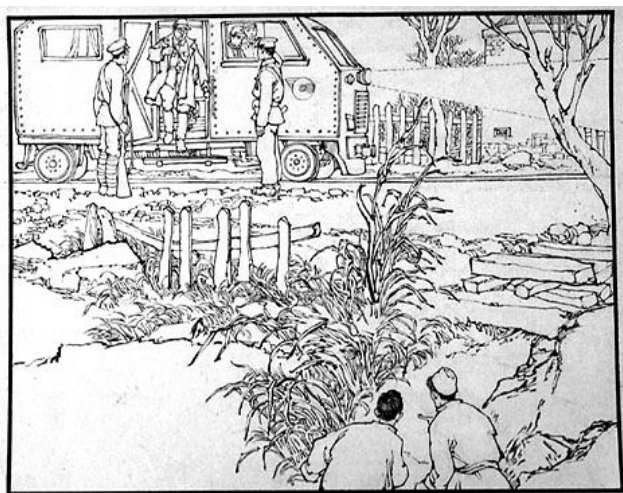
Second, Marxist ideology in regard to art and literature should be widely taught ...". Political indoctrination courses were held for artists who struggled to paint acceptable pictures. Most from the first course were given menial jobs - as patterned cloth decorators in textile factories, for example - but those from the second course were simply abandoned with no means of support. Chen Yi, mayor of Shanghai is credited by *guohua* artists with mitigating their financial plight, purchasing many traditional paintings himself. The market for their work disappeared as Shanghai collectors fled when the Communists took over.

The serial picture, *lianhuanhua*, has a long history. They were particularly popular in Shanghai before liberation. Most were small books, about 3 by 5 inches with one picture per page, sometimes with speech balloons but more often with lengthy captions to tell the story. They reached a wide audience through open air stalls where readers could rent them very cheaply. Early PRC *lianhuanhua* told stories of land reform, the Korean War, the epic of the Long March and the lives of such heroes as Lu Xun, Wang Jingshan (the Iron Man of Daqing) and the soldier Lei Feng.



Travelling Children's Library, Shanghai 1949 (photograph Sam Tata: image source Virtualshanghai.net)

They were hugely popular. Between 1949 and 1966, 600 million picture books were sold. For many shunned traditional Chinese painters the only way to re-enter the art world was to undergo training as book illustrators. This is what Cheng Shifa did, setting a high standard with his illustrations to the Ming novel *The Scholars (Rulin waishi)* in 1957. He later won second prize in the first National *Lianhuanhua* Exhibition held in 1963 for his illustration of *Kong Yiji*. The famous *Railroad Guerillas*, the story of coal miners and railway workers who fought the Japanese along a railway line in Shandong province, won 1<sup>st</sup> prize at the exhibition. Thirty million copies were sold.

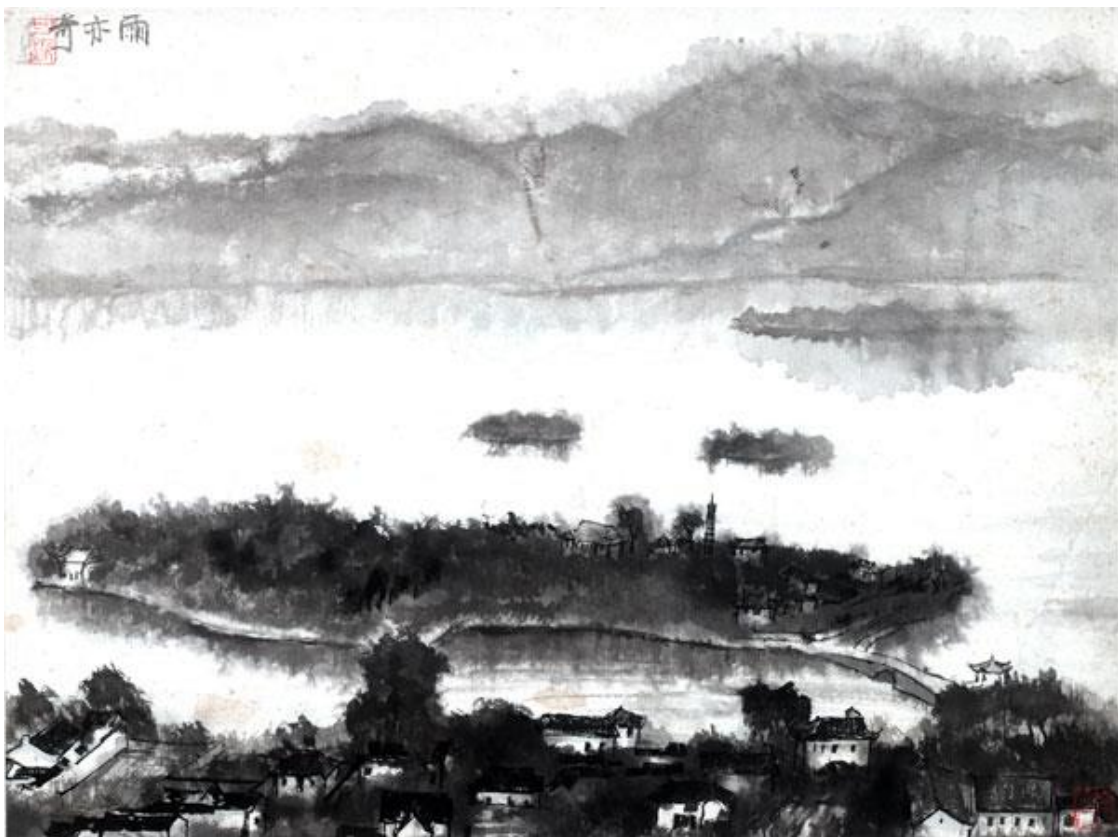


*Railroad Guerillas* (2 pages) *lianhuanhua* by Ding Bingzeng and Han Heping

A few senior figures of the art world were left alone after 1949, simply being encouraged to avoid certain subjects. Xu Beihong, Huang Binhong and Qi Baishi were seen as testimony to the regime's ability to use the cultural heritage in the service of new China. Qi Baishi was not required to learn the new approach to art and continued painting in the traditional manner. Indeed, his enduring health and productivity was important propaganda in the 1950s. Mao, also from Hunan, was a fan and acquired at least five works by Qi Baishi in the early years of the PRC.

#### Li Keran (1907- 1989)

Although the PRC disapproved of landscapes unless they included figures of ordinary folk doing something useful, Li Keran, Zhang Ding and Luo Ming had the idea of reforming Chinese painting by drawing landscapes from life. This followed the example of Huang Binhong [Part 8] whom Li Keran admired and who had emphasised the importance of the direct study of nature. While Binhong made sketches as preparation for paintings produced in the studio, Li Keran and his friends intended to paint landscapes from life (like the French Impressionists). Administrators were sceptical but eventually funded the artists to travel to southern China for five months in 1954 and try out their scheme.

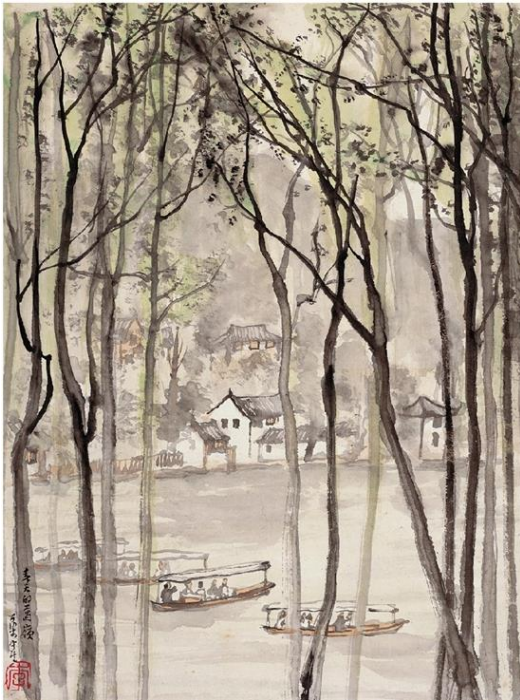


Li Keran, *Miraculous Rain*, 1954 (ink and rain on paper)

Li Keran painted the scenery of West Lake in Hangzhou on a rainy day. He intentionally let the rain drop on parts of his painting, especially the top but also in spots (!) elsewhere, to dilute the ink. The title refers to the scenery as well as the effect of raindrops on the picture. When he and his friends returned an exhibition was arranged for late September 1954 and the brochure included their description of the expedition:

*"In the first half of this year, we had the opportunity to go to the Jiangnan area for an ink painting sketch-from-life trip. Using expressive techniques of traditional ink painting to describe true scenes and objects was a new attempt, so our goals and requirements were relatively simple; they were: to paint some landscape paintings that have the style of traditional Chinese paintings, but are not the same old thing, and that have a touching authenticity ... [they had seen many travellers and realised how much] the liberated people love the beautiful rivers and mountains of their motherland [and how fortunate the Chinese people are to live in] an environment that is like a painting ... [our aim is] not so simple if we intend to develop further the excellent parts of tradition, to make them suitable for reflecting recent reality, and to blend modern foreign techniques into traditional styles, so as to enrich their expressive power."*

The exhibition received praise and fuelled a commitment to traditional painting by the party establishment. Li Keran was termed the model painter and the party allowed him to travel within the country. From 1954 Keran regularly went on long journeys to the most beautiful parts of China. He advised his pupils to meditate and gain insight into the landscape they saw in front of them, before painting it.

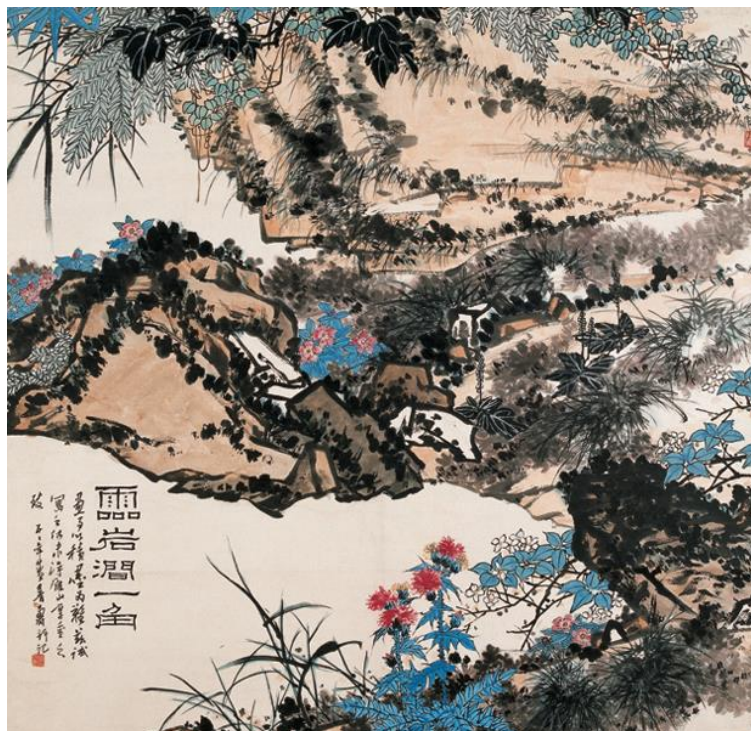


Li Keran, *Geling Hill in the Spring*, 1954



Li Keran, *Garden in Suzhou*, 1956

Other landscape-from-life expeditions were funded. Between 1954 and 1957 Chinese painting professors spent Sundays on expeditions to draw from life in the Hangzhou suburbs. Pan Tianshou had more success with this type of landscape which did not include people: *"I tried to study figures. I did it for about three years and created some works, such as Bumper Harvest, Paying Tax in Grain, Planting Melons against Possible Crop Failure etc. but I could not do it well because I was not trained in figures and techniques failed me. I was like a man starting to learn carpentry at age 66. I felt it was extremely difficult."* His *Lingyan Gully* scene is meticulously executed and reminiscent of his familiar works of flowers and rock [Part 8].



Pan Tianshou, *A Corner in the Lingyan Gully*, 1955

Li Keran was born Li Sanqi in 1907 to an impoverished family in Xuzhou, Jiangsu. His father had jobs as a farmer and fisherman and then became a chef. His illiterate mother was never given a personal name. He was a child prodigy in music and painting. His family had only one book, *The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual*, which he loved so much he slept holding it. In 1923 his mother allowed him to go to Shanghai, giving him what little money she had. Lin Fengmian accepted Keran in a post-graduate programme at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou after seeing his paintings, even though Keran had no formal training. Li Keran arrived at the studio each day two hours early so he could practise. He contributed two modernist oils to Shanghai exhibition in 1931, and painted a fauvist landscape of his home in 1937. He was a communist ideal; an accomplished person from an illiterate and poor family, and worked on propaganda under Zhou Enlai during the Japanese invasion.

After Liberation Li Keran is best known for his landscapes. Following the success of the 1954 expedition he was given permission to travel to East Germany in 1957. He saw Rembrandt's works there and was impressed by the artist's luminous style of painting. Li Keran began using ink heavily, and in his landscapes largely neglected the usual light areas of sky and foreground. His new style of dense paintings was foreshadowed by his view of Dresden.

Li Keran developed this style across a series of paintings. One typical format can be seen (below) in another dusk painting, this time at *Lake Rong*. Keran also painted two other landscape formats, the vertical waterway through an urban area and a more substantial one winding through mountains. These three compositions he painted often. Bright waterfalls in a dark mountain scene became a favourite subject too, inspired by Rembrandt's use of light in *Raising of the Cross*, c 1633.



Li Keran, *Dresden at Dusk*, 1957

Before Li Keran's trip to East Germany the restrictions placed *guohua* art were relaxed in The Hundred Flowers (HF) initiative of 1956. Official advice to artists now included:

*"Socialist realism in our view is the most fruitful creative method but it is not the only method ... Learn from abroad and not exclusively from the Soviet Union; don't neglect the great tradition of Chinese painting."*

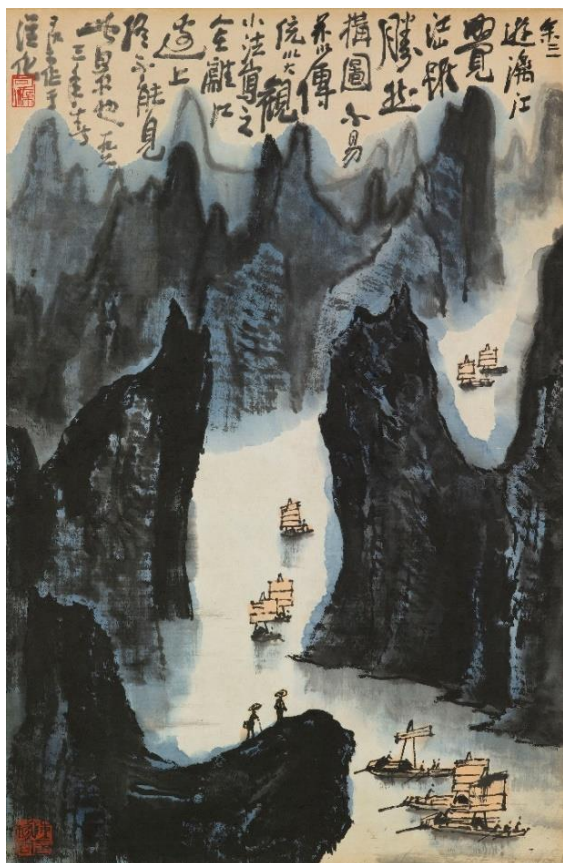
In part this turn away from Soviet art reflected the growing friction between Mao and Khrushchev. The HF invited criticism of the Party. But by spring of 1957 this had become such a torrent that hardliners became alarmed that China might follow Hungary's revolt of the previous year. In June the party abandoned intellectuals and artists. Zhou Enlai tried to argue that *"mental labour and manual labour are both needed. Our intellectuals, by deploying mental labour, are part of the working class."* This counted for little and artists were attacked. The Anti-Rightist campaign sentenced young artists to labour camps for expressing opinions on common professional subjects such as standards, methods of art education and the role of art officials. Some were transported to rural labour camps in Heilongjiang, the Chinese equivalent of Siberia, and were forced to leave their families behind. Others received punishment but were allowed to remain close to home.



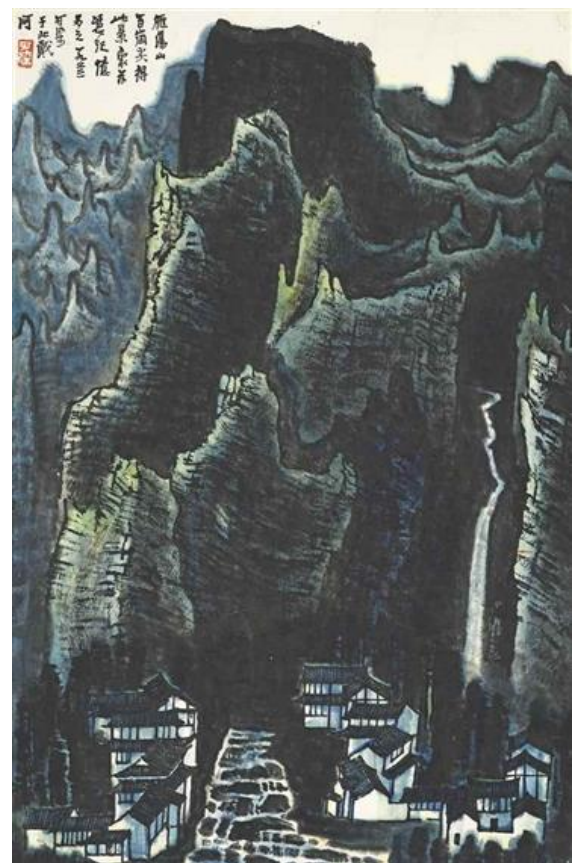
Li Keran, *Dusk at Lake Rong*, 1963



Li Keran, *Hometown of Lu Xun*, 1962



Li Keran, *Landscape of River Li*, 1963



Li Keran, *Yandang Mountain*, 1963

Yan Han was branded a rightist and was thus shunned by friends and family who feared being regarded as collaborators. His condemnation read: "Since the 1953 reorganisation, the party has allowed him free rein to devote himself to the creation of woodcuts. He has not been required to undertake any administrative work. Every month he receives a very high salary; moreover, he receives fees from the publication of his works. The party has given him superior material conditions, but Yan Han uses this freedom from going to a regular job to organise activities all over, to solicit people for the Antiparty group."

He underwent labour reform in the Beijing suburbs and was then assigned a menial job, prohibited from art and barred from official exhibitions from 1957 to 1962. This punishment was also suffered by Lui Haisu and Li Kuchan, whose salary was slashed to a pittance and was reduced to selling movie tickets to survive (MacFarquhar). Many condemned artists never painted again.

Despite this crackdown, the relaxation on *guohua* art heralded by the HF remained partly in place because relations with the Soviet Union were worsening and partly because of political infighting to get rid of senior art administrators. *People's China* reported in June 1957:

*"certain people holding leading positions in the world of art had scant respect for our national heritage and took a very supercilious and high-handed attitude in regard to traditional Chinese painting."*

*People's Daily* confirmed this view in an editorial;

*"Guohua is the cultural product created from the life and labour of our nation's people. It established, over a long period, an intimate relationship with the thought and feeling of our nation's people and has an important function in the spiritual life of the people, so is loved by the masses."*

Li Keran took advantage of this relaxation to return to a favourite theme which he had had to abandon as politically unacceptable after Liberation. Most of his paintings in early 1940s were of water buffalo which Li had seen in a big cowshed near to his refuge in Chongqing during the Japanese invasion. Boys herding the cows reminded him of scenes in his war-torn homeland in eastern China. He considered buffaloes as the epitome of courage, persistence and diligence.

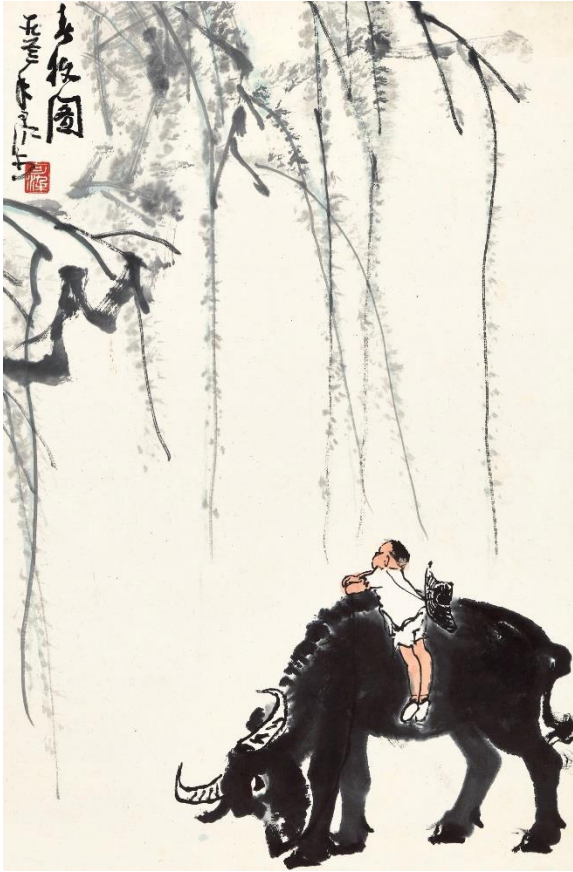
He repeatedly painted the water buffalo. In a long inscription on his *Five Water Buffaloes* (1962) Keran wrote:

*"The buffalo is powerful. It has never been boastful before a child but bows to him instead. It can drive carts and wear the plough, working through its whole life to serve the peasants but never ask for a reward. It is obedient, hardworking and eager to improve itself."*



Li Keran, *Buffaloes Bathing in the Stream*, 1960s

He thought the water buffalo was equally happy to take herd-boys to work or to play. However, Li Keran, perhaps reflecting his own relationship with the party, also drew defiant buffaloes, the one below with the inscription *"The water buffalo has a mild nature but can become stubborn at times."*



Li Keran, *Herding under Willows*, 1963



Li Keran, *Stubborn Buffalo*, 1962

Bucolic landscapes and figure paintings with no political content were now approved. Early in 1958 the Ministry of Culture called on artists to adopt a new art theory, the combination of “*revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism*”.



Guan Shanyue, *Grazing*, 1959



Guan Shanyue had painted charming waterside scenes in the Chinese medium before Liberation, and took them up again.

One of the most popular pictures in 1959 was Wu Fan's *Dandelion Girl*, a simple image of a peasant girl, sent to collect grass, having put down her hoe so she could dreamily blow dandelion seeds.

The work is a *shuiyin* print, a method dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, blocks being hand-coloured with Chinese ink and colour then printed on layers of sprayed paper to produce different tones. The effect is similar to a painting.

Wu Guanzhong (on whom more later) reflected the freedom afforded traditional Chinese artists by including Western elements in his poetic scene with water buffalo.



Wu Fan, *Dandelion Girl*, 1959 (*shuiyin* print)



Wu Guanzhong, *Street Scene*, 1960 (watercolour)

## Feng Zikai (1898 – 1975)

Feng Zikai was another artist who was encouraged to paint in this period, urged on by Zhou Enlai when the two met in 1959. Zikai, the son of a scholar and trained to be an art teacher, was known for producing lyrical paintings which conveyed a mood with economy, recalling Shen Zhou's pictures of scholars [Part 4]. Some of his works showing a young woman gazing into the distance convey a sense of loneliness or longing much like Hopper.

He was a father at a young age and marvelled in how his children explored the world through play and developed their creativity. He painted children often, usually their emotions were depicted by their gestures rather than by facial features. Feng Zikai also loved cats - they can be seen in many of his paintings. He never lost his belief that leisure and beauty were vital in life, as in art.



Feng Zikai, *Missing a Loved One*, 1930s (?)



Feng Zikai, *Bird Flying Away*, 1940s

Feng Zikai was enthusiastic about the new regime but a painting he produced in the early 1940s hinted at the rough waters that lay ahead for him. Depicting a young girl releasing a bird, the inscription reads, *“the sky is wide enough to allow a bird to fly as it wishes”* suggesting a diversity of life which was abhorrent to the CCP.

Zikai's enthusiasm was tempered by his experience at the conference held in 1949 to describe the new policy towards art. Zikai didn't realise this was a command requiring no comment. His daughter, Feng Yijin, wrote about what her father said at the conference: *“traditional Chinese painting subjects such as plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum should still be painted. Workers, peasants and soldiers are tired after working all day. Paintings help to relieve their exhaustion. Just like today – the organisers put a flower on every table (Hawks).”*

Feng Zikai was immediately criticised harshly: art should be political or utilitarian. As a consequence, Feng Zikai produced few paintings after Liberation. This made life difficult as he had lost the family estate to Japanese bombing. He supported himself and his family by translating Russian novels into Chinese.

Feng Zikai became sought-after in the mid-1950s for official posts as the administration began once more to appreciate traditional Chinese art, but he was not adept at bureaucratic politics. Feng's lifelong work was a collection of images and poems inspired by his teacher Li Shutong called *Paintings for the Preservation of Life*, marvelling over all forms of life and counselling against interfering and killing. The first volume was appeared in 1929 and Feng Zikai published a new volume every decade.



Feng Zikai, *Learning to Farm*, 1950s



Feng Zikai, *Sewing Clothes*, 1950s/1960s (?)

Although views towards art had been relaxed, Hawks recounts how Feng Zikai ran into trouble because of a speech and an essay. In 1962, speaking of nature, he said,

*“People can plant hedges that are quite beautiful if they allow them to grow naturally. Unfortunately, gardeners are wont to trim them to a uniform size with their hedge cutters, producing the effect of a crude haircut ... What is beautiful about a hedgerow in which every plant looks the same? If such plants could talk and were allowed to speak their minds they would cry out in protest.”*

Considered to be an argument against toeing the official party line, the speech resulted in Zikai losing his official posts and income.

In an essay of the same year, Feng Zikai drew criticism for seeming to suggest that production output was not of supreme importance when he wrote about his old family cat Uncle Cat (*Mao Bobo*) saying;

*“Cats really can turn quiet into lively, boring into interesting, sadness into laughter, and alienation into intimacy [helping to break the ice with visitors]. Even if the cat doesn’t catch mice, the cat is essential for people’s lives.”*

The essay would prompt harsh treatment during the Cultural Revolution (below).



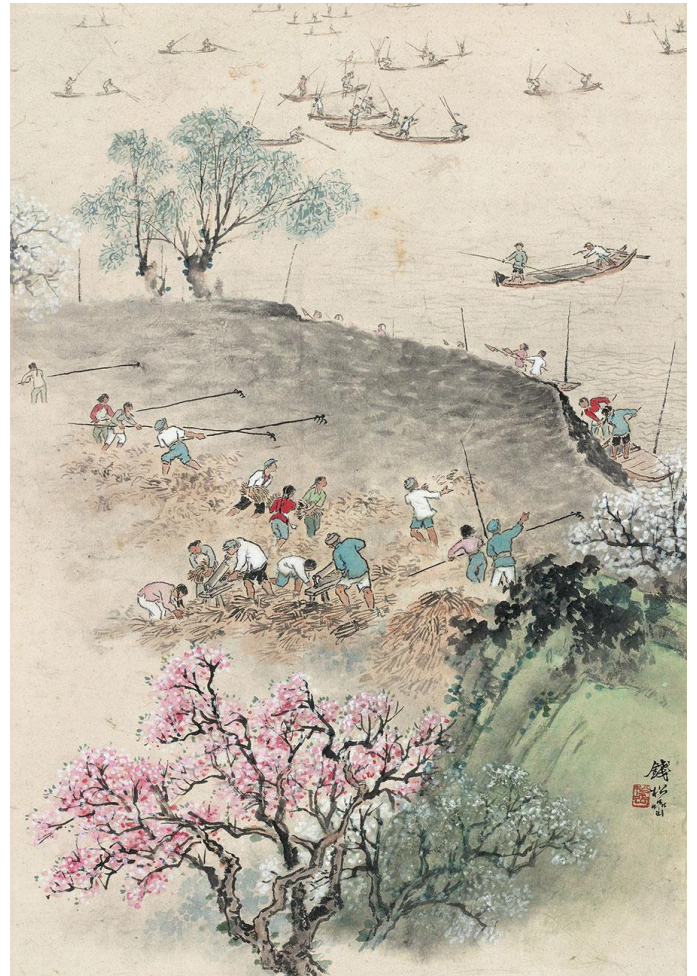
Feng Zikai, *The Cutting of Evergreens*, from *Paintings for the Preservation of Life*, 1949

The Great Leap Forward (GLF), based on the ludicrous idea that experts were not required because technical progress could be made by peasants and workers if they were ideologically pure, proved to be a catastrophic tragedy. From 1959 to 1961, now called the Three Disaster Years, the GLF produced economic chaos and famine in the countryside, resulted in 19 million 'excess deaths' – those who died outright of starvation or in the years afterward as a result of a severely reduced diet (Gittins). Soviet aid abruptly ended and Soviet technical advisors, by then being ordered around by illiterate cadres, were withdrawn. The situation finally got so bad that Mao was forced to see sense. He withdrew into isolation leaving others to do the hard work of getting China back on her feet. During the GLF, artists and art students in their thousands were sent to labour in factories or the countryside. Prominent teachers such as Li Keran, Wu Zuoren, Jiang Zhaohe and Dong Xiwen were not treated so harshly, spending a couple of weeks labouring in May 1958 at the Ming Tombs Reservoir construction site.

The end of the GLF saw further liberation in arts, reflected in changes in art education. Portraiture, landscapes, bird and flower painting in the traditional Chinese style were taught at the Central Art Academy. Students were expected to spend a couple of months a year on painting trips to rural or minority areas, to factories or scenic spots to gather material and make sketches. Many paintings in 1962 to 1964 were even more poetic than previously.



Wei Zixi, *Field Literacy Class*, 1962



Qian Songyan, *Happily at Work*, 1962

Exhibitions were held in 1963 and 1964 of paintings done by artists during their visits to rural areas. Prominent among these were decorative pictures of peasants at leisure. Wang Xuyang's *On the Canal* is one example, which has the main figure shown from the back, and Chao Mei's *The Break* showing a young man and girl resting in comfort, gazing quietly into the distance after they had helped to store grain. Neither of these are available but Wei Zixi's *Harvest* is a fine example of this type of work with figures resting and mostly facing away.



Wei Zixi, *Harvest*, 1962

Those figures are women and they formed the basis of another genre during these years – the pretty girl picture. Wu Qiangnian's *Commune Girl* leaning leisurely against a fence, Ma Xiguang's *Mountain Village Schoolmistress* and He Yunlan's *Girl of the Dong Nation*, her lovely face framed by a large hat are among those cited as examples [the first two are unavailable]. Jiang Zhaohe produced another. Invariably the women are depicted looking to the side in a gaze of modesty.



He Yunlan, *Girl of the Dong Nation*, 1962



Jiang Zhaohe, *Farm Girl*, 1962

Pretty woman and idle peasants convey an impression of a society where work is pursued diligently but not frantically with free time spent relaxing and at ease. It would not be long before party cadres, led from the top, would denounce these images: "artist's works do not reflect real struggles, they have only weak links with workers and peasants, and harmful bourgeois influences and unhealthy phenomena have developed".

## Cultural Revolution to the end of Mao

In June 1964 Mao warned writers and artists:

*"In the past 15 years the literature and art circles for the most part ... had not carried out policies of the Party and had acted as high and mighty bureaucrats ... In recent years they have even slid to the verge of revisionism. If serious steps are not taken to remould them, they were bound at some future date to become groups like the Hungarian Petofi Club [the society which brought about the revolt against Hungary's Communist government]."*

Mao began speaking of the need for a Cultural Revolution. In October a new China Art Gallery was opened in Beijing and showed nothing but propaganda pictures and woodcuts. From 1964 on, Mao started appearing more often in People's Liberation Army (PLA) paintings. If he did not appear his writings did. There were certainly no pictures of workers, peasants and soldiers at leisure. These changes set the tone for the coming decade.

Posters, cartoon and portrait images of Mao were ubiquitous from 1966 to 1976. There were rules. Images of Mao should be *"red, smooth and luminescent"*. Mao should be the dominant figure and the composition should be bright and lit to show that Mao was the primary source of light; all surfaces facing him should appear to be illuminated. Slogans such as *"Mao is the sun in our hearts"* were thus made manifest. Some departures were allowed if, for example, the artist was a member of the PLA or ideologically sound. Red began to be used widely in art.

Shi Lu was persecuted because of his celebrated *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi*. Shi Lu was commissioned to show Mao leading Communist forces to victory against the Nationalists in 1947 in Northwest Shaanxi. Shi Lu had witnessed the warm reception given to Mao when the leader and his bodyguards climbed to a summit to encourage soldiers to persevere against the better-equipped enemy. Shi Lu depicted that arrival with Mao in an elevated position, painted in prominent dark tones, planning his next move.

After 1964 a torrent of criticism denounced the work: Mao was only a small figure; he was separated from the masses; Shi Lu apparently painted Mao in the picture as if *"hoping he would fall off the cliff"*; Mao's horse seems to buck and turns its back to Mao; (more importantly) so does the peasant tending the horse. Mao appeared *"isolated and at the end of the road"* which was interpreted as blaming Mao for the disaster of the GLF.



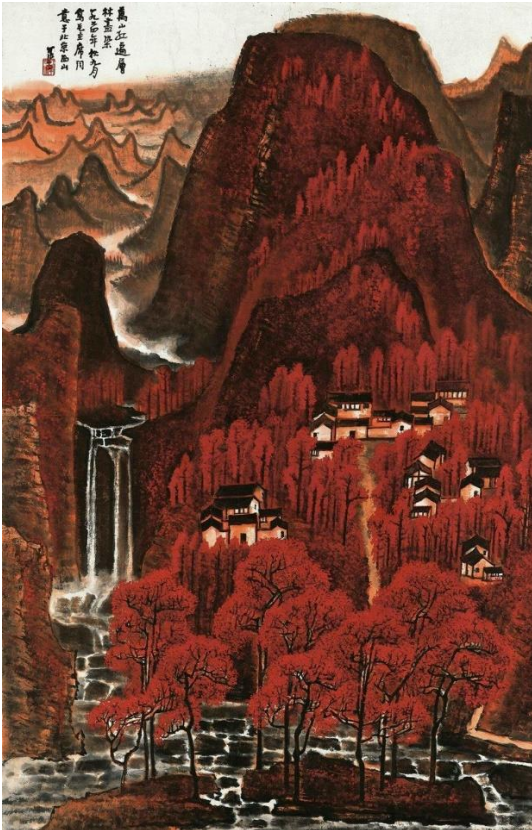
Shi Lu, *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi*, 1959

These attacks ruined Shi Lu's mental health. He was an ardent supporter of the CCP, joining in 1939, and was a devoted follower of Mao. He was the first artist to depict the leader in a woodcut, so such fierce criticism must have been a grave shock. He was sent by his family to recover in a mental asylum. When the Cultural Revolution (CR) began it was rumoured that Shi Lu was faking illness to avoid criticism and punishment. He was snatched from the asylum and made to endure struggle sessions, where he was admonished and clubbed in front of large crowds, practically every day (Hawks). He was sent to a labour camp. He never recovered from this ill treatment, becoming tubercular and schizophrenic. Shi Lu died in a Beijing hospital in August 1982.

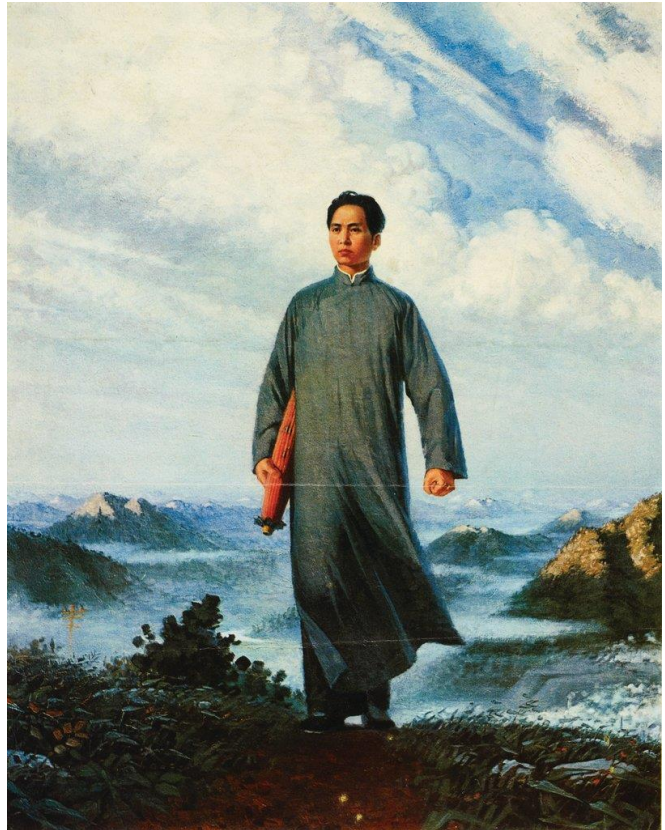
Li Keran was more fortunate. In 1964 his landscapes of mountains (above) were criticised for their sad atmosphere, deemed unhealthy and dark. Recognising that red was the dominant CCP colour, Li Keran simply painted pretty much the same composition using that shade instead of black. His 1964 work (below) silenced the critics, also taking its title from the start of the poem Mao had written in 1925:

*I stand alone in autumn cold  
On Orange Islet's southern head,  
The Xiangjiang flowing to the north,  
I see all crimson hills ahead  
With tiers of woodland dyed in red.*

Other red landscapes appeared in this period. Qian Songyan painted a work with the same title in 1965 with a foreground of red kaoliang - Chinese sorghum - an important product of northern China. Although of low economic value, in the 1960s it was the staple food of the poor in the region.



Li Keran, *Ten Thousand Crimson Hills*,  
1964



Liu Chunhua, *Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan*, 1967

The real aim of the CR initiated by Mao in 1966 was to get rid of Liu Shaoqi, Mao's designated successor, and his supporters at every level of the party. Liu had built up a power base founded on the catastrophic failure of Mao's GLF but, while levelling much criticism, failed to mount a leadership challenge. Mao wanted Liu purged but party members supported Liu too strongly for Mao simply to dismiss his deputy. *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* was the culmination of an aspect of this feud.

Shortly after the founding of the CCP in 1921 young communists were active organising unions and strikes at collieries and ironworks in Hunan. The Anyuan strike in 1922 was of major significance. The union of the Anyuan miners was one of the four major ones and the first one to be led exclusively by the CCP. After the successful strike it became one of the strongest and most secure communist bases and a fertile recruiting ground. Liu's leadership of the strike was commemorated by Hou Yimin in *Comrade Liu Shaoqi and the Workers of Anyuan* painted for the opening of the Museum of Revolutionary History in 1961. The painting drew good reviews and was reproduced as a poster in 1962.



Hou Yimin, *Comrade Liu Shaoqi and the Workers of Anyuan*, 1959

In the same year a film, *The Earth is Burning*, was made about the strike. Mao is not mentioned. When Liu appears the sky lights up, transformed by the promise of dawn. This film and Hou Yimin's painting were labelled as "poisonous weeds" and destroyed (the image above is from 1959). *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (above) revised history, so that Mao rather than Liu Shaoqi masterminded the famous strike. *People's Daily* published a colour reproduction. Parades were held to commemorate the publication. By 1968 it was regarded as the model painting. An estimated 900 million copies were eventually printed.

Mao roused the Red Guards (RG) to do his work for him and gave them its goals: to overthrow those in the party who took the capitalist road and to destroy the *Four Olds* – old ideas, old culture, old customs and the old habits of exploiting classes to corrupt the masses. Mao posted a big-character poster himself on the door of the room where the central committee met calling on the RG to "*Bombard the Headquarters.*" The RG Manifesto vowed to "*turn the old world upside down, smash it to pieces, pulverise it, create chaos and make a tremendous mess, the bigger the better.*" Mao supported RG students who were denouncing teachers and professors and CCP cadres (those named by Mao's cohorts). Wide leather belts with heavy buckles were a standard part of RG uniform, used as a weapon against those who failed to cooperate.



Red Guards (with their leather belts) and students, waving copies of Mao's Little Red Book, parade in Beijing in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. (Photograph: Jean Vincent/AFP/Getty Images)

In August 1966 the first half million RG paraded in Tiananmen Square. Over the next four months seven more parades were held. In total 15 million youths travelled by free rail and were lodged and fed in Beijing. Once again Mao had little comprehension of the consequence of his action. "*None of us had imagined what fury would be unleashed*", said Nie Rongzhen, Marshal of the PLA and head of China's nuclear weapon programme. Deliberately the top echelon of the CCP pushed the young RG into violence. The acts of the RG were appalling. In one of the first cases teenagers beat one of their teachers until he was dead, in front of his wife and afterwards celebrated over the corpse. Many teachers were murdered in this way. The RG ransacked houses, beat officials, questioned and tortured their victims over weeks. Eventually Mao had to call in the PLA to restrain the RG, a move which for a long time simply made matters worse.



When the CR started in 1966, universities, art schools and museums closed. Artists were condemned as Rightists. Many were forced to become factory or farm workers and prevented from writing or speaking to spouses working nearby, remaining as virtual slaves for years. Wu Zuoren and his wife, the flower painter, Xiao Shufang were separated and sent to the country where he became a swineherd and was often beaten. Works of art were stripped from academy gallery in Beijing and at least four faculty members, Ye Qianyu, Luo Gongliu, Li Kuchan and Huang Yongyu were beaten with belts and buckles by the RG in public. The RG raided the homes of artists and destroyed everything they could find or carried it off. From September 1966 when his house first was searched to the end of 1972 the paintings Lin Fengmian did not destroy himself were confiscated. A pamphlet produced by the RG questioned why Li Keran had been given the special privilege to stay home and paint: in exchange for *“a high salary from the nation, he did no real work.”* He was forced to sit for hours each day writing confessions based on Mao’s theories (a common penalty). The RG confiscated all his art – many pieces were later put on sale in Hong Kong - and he was sent to work in the fields and his family dispersed to other locations.

As well as destroying paintings, the RG sometimes were instructed to prevent artists from working again. Li Kuchan was careful in guarding his dominant arm from injury. Hawks interviewed Chen Dayu, a traditional Chinese painter, whose hand was repeatedly clubbed in Nanjing: *“the RG deliberately and maliciously tried to injure the hands and arms of ‘reactionary’ bird-and-flower painters so they could never paint again.”* Li Kuchan also refused to implicate others. *“Bravely silent eagles with sage-like vision who were not flying became a well-recognised language among friends and artists (Hawks).”* Li Kuchan again painted eagles, but this time in white, the colour of resistance to corruption.



Li Kuchan, *White Eagle*, 1973

Kuchan continued to paint clandestinely, passing his small works to his friends. He also painted groups of birds which evoked the atmosphere of the CR; *Small Birds* is one example, huddled together seeking cover from rain. This seems discouraging but Li Kuchan was also suggesting that victims should gain solace by sticking together. Eventually, as ever, the rain would stop and the weather would improve. This promise helped his friends to survive long periods of suffering.

Kuchan was likened by the authorities to the vultures he painted: *“They live on high mountains and hide in deep forests. They have a savage personality and eat the meat of dead people. They have no hair on their heads and look so ugly. They are the most sinister member of the bird family.”*



Li Kuchan, *Small Birds*, 1960s

The wife of Mao, Jiang Qing, thought vultures *“the very embodiment of a spy”*. In 1968, pointing to Pan Tianshou’s many paintings of vultures [Part 8], she endorsed the false charge that Tianshou was a spy.

In January of 1969 he was transported by train to his native village and forced to march in mud and snow past jeering crowds wearing a sign reading "I am a secret agent." Hawks cites a fellow painter who remembered the episode: "At that time the road leading to his hometown of Ninghai was almost impassable. He had to drag his shoes through snow and mud just to walk along the road. The atmosphere was vicious and intense." Pan Tianshou died in obscurity on September 5th 1971; no funeral was held, no notification given. His quiet image below seems to show an old buffalo exhausted by a long life of toil. However, the noble beast's form is mirrored by the rock suggesting lasting resilience; characteristic of both Pan Tianshou and his art.



Pan Tianshou, *Buffalo on a Summer Pond*, 1960s

Jiang Qing controlled cultural life. Only those art exhibitions she approved were permitted and her authority extended to the stage. From 1961 to 1966 she excluded all works apart from eight pieces, commonly referred to as *Eight Model Operas*, but the first 5 are operas, the next 2 ballets, and the last a symphony based on one of the operas.

1) *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* set in Manchuria and based on the heroic deeds of an army detachment in defeating a KMT gang.

2) *On the Docks* focusses on the struggle in the summer of 1963 between the communists and the bourgeois to attract the support of young dockers.

3) *The Red Lantern* tells how three generations of a family in Northern China fought against the Japanese invaders.

4) *Shajiabang* deals with the liberation of the town of that name in Jiangsu during the war with Japan.

5) *The Raid on White Tiger Regiment* set in Korea in 1953 describes the defeat of US forces by Chinese People's Volunteers.

6) *The Red Detachment of Women* set in 1927 to 1937 about a poor peasant girl on Hainan Island who becomes a revolutionary fighter instead of a slave.

7) *The White-Haired Girl* about a girl in the late 1930s in a Hubei village who escapes from an evil landlord, survives by foraging in the mountains (which turns her hair white) and gets her revenge when her village is liberated.

8) *Shajiabang* symphony.



"With wild berries from the mountain, the food offerings at the Nainai Temple, and the corn she planted herself, Xi'er was just barely able to survive".

Hua, Sanchuan, *White-Haired Girl*, 1963 (one frame of *lianhuanhua*).

The *lianhuanhua* produced for the film made in 1963 is regarded as an excellent example of the art.

In 1964 Marshal Lin Biao, Minister of National Defence, told PLA artists that the object of art was to unite and educate people. To accomplish this art was to be created through the *Unity of the Three* – a worker was expected to pronounce on the revolutionary correctness of the painting, a cadre would speak for the party and the artist would guarantee professional accuracy. The artist, naturally enough, was by far the least important. Madame Mao's model operas used this three-level creation of the PLA: the cadres, the experts (playwrights, musicians and actors) and the workers, peasants and soldiers as teachers and critics.



Ye Yushan and others, *Rent Collection Courtyard* (detail), 1965

The most famous sculpture of the period, *Rent Collection Courtyard*, was subject to the *Unity of the Three*. In 1965 a tableau of 114 life-sized clay figures was set up in the former mansion of a Sichuan landlord. The team of sculptors from Sichuan Academy, led by Ye Yushan, listened to the comments and criticisms of the local peasantry who often stopped by to see how the work was going. Some had been tenants of the landlord and described their experiences and suggested ways of improving poses.



Ye Yushan and others, *Rent Collection Courtyard* (detail), 1965

Peasants had gathered in that courtyard every year bringing their usually meagre harvest to pay the rent, often leaving nothing for themselves. Some mortgaged their crop for decades in advance. They were cheated, sold their children to make ends meet and, even then, many were dragged off to the landlord's own private prison for debt and left to die.

The replica of the *Courtyard* unveiled in Beijing in late 1967 included new figures incorporating ideas from soldiers and the RG. Advice from cadres ensured that some figures were modified to hold political placards or one of Mao's books.

Andrews gives a detailed account of how the *Unity of the Three* determined the composition of *Acupuncture Anaesthesia* with Tang Muli, the painter, relegated simply to paint the work. The model for the nurse in the foreground was the most politically correct member of staff at the hospital and, as it was important to show her smiling in enjoyment of her labour, her surgical mask is omitted. The patient's head is turned in an unnatural position for lung surgery so that he could clearly be seen with a smile to demonstrate that acupuncture works as an anaesthetic. Thus, political considerations outweighed medical protocols. As was presumably the case for the open can of fruit which would seem to be unhygienic.

However, the medics had their way in two respects. Tang Muli was not allowed to sketch from life, as she and her materials were prohibited from the operating room. Instead, she had to work from photographs which was usually not allowed for politically-correct art. The doctors overcame the cadres' argument for the ubiquitous Mao buttons to be included on surgical scrubs and political slogans and posters on the walls. The resulting work was thought to be very daring.

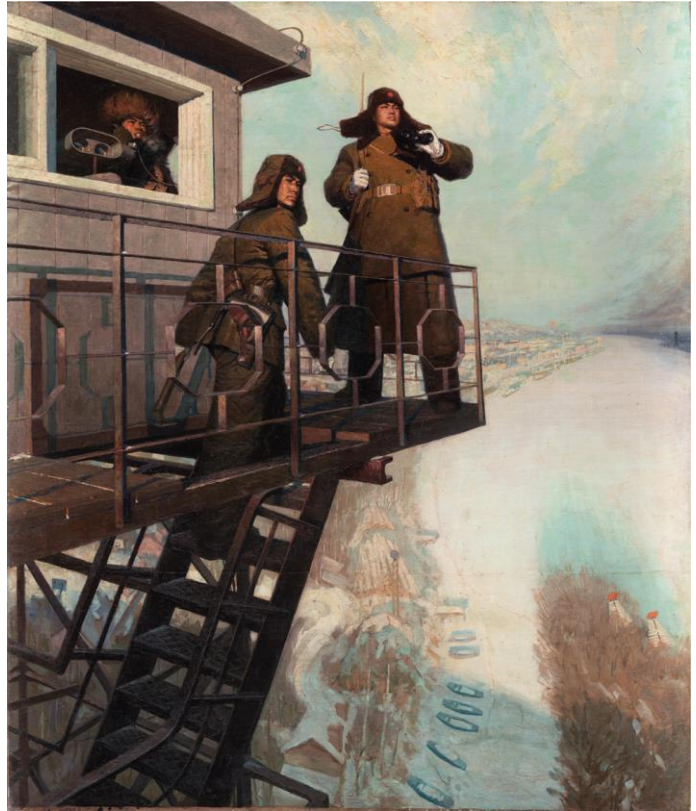


Tang Muli, *Acupuncture Anaesthesia*, 1972 (oil)

Tang Muli's work was shown in the National Exhibition of 1972 and is typical of the socialist realism style favoured by Jiang Qing for this and subsequent shows. Aside from images of Mao these exhibitions concentrated on heroes from among workers, peasants and soldiers. Many compositions mirrored Jiang Qing's staging of her operas: the hero, placed at height in centre stage, was set against a background of rugged terrain or some violence of nature as a foil for their calm competency. *"I am a Seagull"* by PLA artist Pan Jiajun is one of the best examples of this type of staging. After successfully repairing a telegraph line the PLA engineer cables her codename (hence the title). She is raised by the angle of view. The vicious rainstorm emphasises the calm courage of heroic youth.



Pan Jiajun, "I Am Seagull", 1971 (oil)



Shen Jiawei, *Standing Guard for our Great Motherland*, 1974 (oil)

At the age of twenty-six, Shen Jiawei was sent to Heilongjiang province in the far northeast of China assigned to work with the PLA at a base very close to China's border with Russia. Border conflicts with the Soviet Union were now common. *Standing Guard* shows three heroic Chinese soldiers in a watchtower placed precipitously high. Jiang Qing praised the work and consequently it became immensely popular; reproduced in newspapers, magazines, posters, and even on a high tower that faced the Soviet Union.



Chen Yifei, *Eulogy of the Yellow River*, 1972 (oil on canvas)

In 1972, Shanghai authorities commissioned a group of young artists to create paintings based on the *Yellow River Cantata*, a piece of music written in 1938 but adapted during the CR for the piano. The piece was praised by Jiang Qing. Chen Yifei's painting was first publicly exhibited at the PLA National Art Exhibition in 1977. Once again, our hero is precariously high; the Great Wall below to the left.

Gao Jingde, who arranged the 1972 exhibition, sought high standards, but most capable artists were incarcerated or in labour camps. Gao overcame the reluctance of local authorities and freed many artists who had been attacked by the RG and jailed without a conviction. Hou Yimin had been hung by his arms and beaten by the RG, not just for having painted Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan miners but also because he had a landlord background and collected antiques. His wife, Deng Shu, had suffered a heart attack when she was assaulted. Their feelings can be imagined when, having been released to paint, they learned of the job assigned to them. *Chairman Mao's Heart Beats as One with the Hearts of the Revolutionary Masses* was a 1967 oil showing Mao, followed by senior CCP folk, striding across a stone bridge in Tiananmen Square to shake hands with a group of RG, workers and soldiers. Hou Yimin and Deng Shu were required to produce a more polished version for the 1972 National Exhibition; here Mao stands alone cheered on by youngsters.



Hou Yimin, Deng Shu, Luo Gongliu and others, *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution must be waged to the End*, 1972 (oil) (central detail)

Liu Shaoji was moved from Beijing in October 1969 and died in November; his ashes thrown into a common grave under another name. His wife was imprisoned. Mao's cross-hairs then moved on to Lin Biao. By calling in the PLA to curb RG violence, Mao had increased Lin's influence. That had to be curbed. Again, there was an aspect to this feud played out in art.



Liu Zhide, *Old Party Secretary*, 1973



Li Fenglan, *Spring Hoeing*, 1972-3



Dong Zhengyi, *The Commune's Fish Pond*, 1973

During the GLF, Mao had declared that everyone could be an artist, it was not a matter of talent but simply of will. Lin Biao took the opposite view, regarding artists as genius and the masses incapable of producing art. Thus, their rivalry was made manifest when the party started lauding paintings by peasants. In the late 1960s, peasant art from Huxian county in Shaanxi province was applauded in the national press and in the 1970s Jiang Qing set up Huxian as a model of peasant art: “*working people of China not only produce material wealth but are creators of socialist culture and art.*” Huxian peasants were trained by professionals and much supposedly amateur art, and not just at Huxian, was reworked by academically trained painters.

Some amateur artists are regarded as having genuine talent, three being noted most often. Liu Zhide painted *Old Party Secretary*, a great favourite in China through reproduction and on tour in Europe in the 1970s. An idealised image of a veteran leader grown grey in the service of the revolution, pausing from hard physical labour to make notes on a Marxist text. Dong Zhengyi painted *Commune Fish Pond*. Li Fenglan, a cotton farming group leader and mother of four, was something of a star. She talked about her life as a painter in an article in the January 1974 edition of *China Reconstructs* headlined *How I Began to Paint the Countryside*. *Spring Hoeing*, one of three of Fenglan’s works shown in the national exhibition in Beijing in 1973, was started in 1972 and many changes were made based on the opinions of fellow peasants. The women were all co-workers; the one in the foreground is the brigade’s team leader.

In September 1971 Lin Biao fled China with his family in an aeroplane that crashed when attempting to land in Outer Mongolia. His supporters all over China were arrested. By then President Nixon had announced his intention to visit Beijing in 1972 and his advisor Henry Kissinger had spoken of the US desire for China to join the UN. Zhou Enlai realised many foreign dignitaries would be coming to China, opening embassies, requiring hotels and restaurants. Thousands of paintings would be required and Zhou maintained that these should be traditional Chinese art, not propaganda or lauding Mao. Zhou saw this as an ideal opportunity to use talented older artists in detention who had not painted for 6 or 7 years. Further, Zhou Enlai insisted the artists be allowed to stay and eat in the hotels, thus greatly improving their life and diet. More than 40 artists were released from camps, and not just to work on paintings for Beijing buildings. As China was in need of foreign exchange Zhou also had artists painting works for export.

By the end of 1973 Zhou Enlai was seriously ill from cancer and was no longer able to protect and support artists. Jiang Qing, long resenting Enlai breaking her control on culture, seized her chance. She collected 211 paintings from hotels and in spring 1974 mounted an exhibition of Black Art similar to Hitler’s Degenerative Art in the 1930s. She held up leading painters to mockery and vilification. Andrews notes that Cheng Shifa attracted much criticism from Jiang Qing for his unhealthy apolitical paintings of deer which sold well abroad. Jiang was highly sensitive to criticism (real or imagined). Li Kuchan’s painting of eight ragged lotus leaves was thought to criticise her model operas. Huang Zhou’s pictures of donkeys were construed as referring to Jiang Qing and her gang as asses and in revenge she had the artist pull donkey-carts every day before dawn (Sullivan).



Cheng Shifa, *Shepherdesses and Deer*, 1973

Huang Yongyu got into trouble for *Winking Owl* which was claimed to scoff at socialism. The phrase “*keeping one eye open and one closed*” signifies public officials turning a blind eye to corruption. In China the owl is considered to be a bird of ill omen, a night hunter, with a cry regarded as the harbinger of death. The owl becomes active when the sun’s power wanes, so the winking owl might have been considered to be predicting the demise of Mao. Anyhow, Yongyu’s painting was destroyed (he painted the subject many times later in life). He had form. His *Animal Crackers* - sketches of animals done at night when Yongyu was labouring in Xingtai in 1964 - were paired with captions which his fellow labourers found them enormously funny. He produced a small volume of the 80 cartoons when he returned to Beijing for his friends.



Huang Zhou, *Five Donkeys*, 1972

His owl in *Animal Crackers*, incidentally, with both eyes open complains, “*in daytime humans curse me, at night I work for them [killing mice]*”. The *Crackers* were political: a donkey on a treadmill moans about walking a thousand miles a day without getting anywhere; a centipede points out that having many pairs of feet doesn’t make him walk any faster (both were considered criticisms of the GLF); a snake explains, “*they say the path forward is tortuous, that’s why I have such a supple body*” (partly quoting Mao and suggesting only snakes could survive in the CCP as policies changed with bewildering speed), a parakeet says, “*I may imitate people’s voices but I don’t understand what the words mean*” (another attribute for survival as a cadre). When *Animal Crackers* was discovered by authorities in Beijing, Huang Yongyu was sent to labour camp for more than three years. The originals were destroyed but he produced a reconstructed version, *A Can of Worms*, in 1983.

Mao died in the autumn of 1976 and a month later Jiang Qing and her Gang were arrested. Some paintings in the following years, part of the Scar Period, lamented the violence of the CR which Professor Fei Xiaotong, one of China’s leading sociologists, summarised as “*a sea of blood and tears*” (Bonavia).

Some of the worst fighting of the CR took place in Sichuan; thousands were killed. The winter of 1967/8 saw battles between rival RG bands armed with rifles, bayonets, clubs, crowbars and sulphuric acid, even artillery stolen from the PLA. Cheng Conglin depicted one incident, the title suggesting there were many.



Chen Conglin, *Snow on X Month X Day 1968*, 1979 (oil)

Gao Xiaohua showed two young men guarding a street armed with a machine gun and a rifle. One of their comrades is wounded and covered by a RG banner. Gao had worked as a military photographer so probably had had his fill of scenes of violence. The year 1976 had begun with the death Zhou Enlai. Senior CCP officials minimised press coverage and prohibited public mourning.

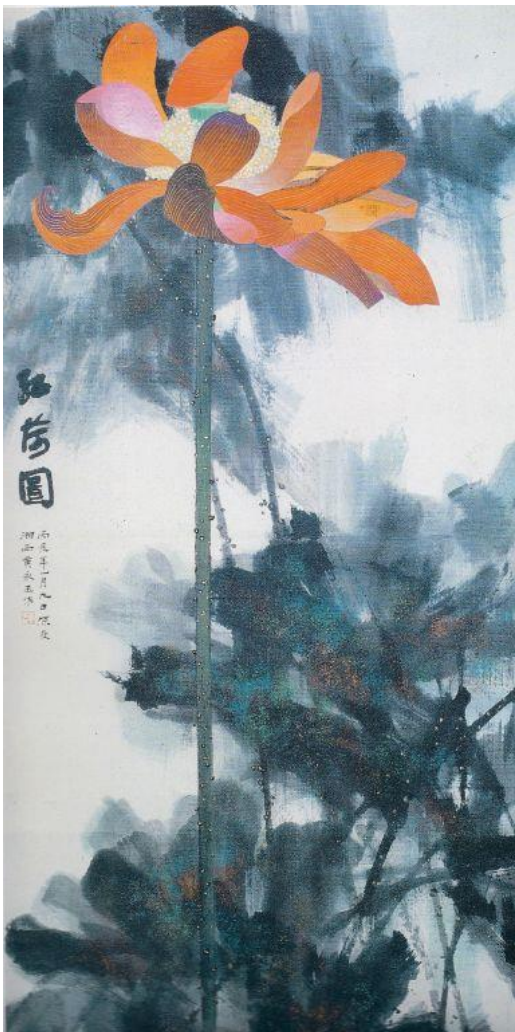




Gao Xiaohua, *Why?* 1978 (oil)

Enlai's body was taken out of the city in an ordinary minibus. Although there was no announcement, two million people lined the 20-mile road in silence. Lin Gang and Ge Pengren painted this scene in *Funeral of Zhou Enlai* in 1977 [unavailable]. On 4 April 1976, the Qingming grave-sweeping festival, a huge crowd placed wreaths at the Heroes Memorial in Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou Enlai and to protest at the tyranny of the Jiang Qing's Gang. When police tore down the banners and wreaths a passionate outbreak of anger was brutally put down. Ai Xuan painted *Defending the Wreaths* (1978) [unavailable] in commemoration of this day, known as the Tiananmen Incident.

Some paintings were celebratory: *Animal Crackers* creator Huang Yongyu painted a tribute to Zhou Enlai during the night after the leader's death; the upstanding stem of the lotus showing respect for a man who had tried to shield artists and take China to prosperity. Huang Guanyu's girl is unlikely to be reading Mao.



Huang Yongyu, *Red Lotus*, 1976



Huang Guanyu, *July*, 1978 (oil)

## Art on the Periphery

### Taiwan – Fifth Moon Group

The Japanese occupied Taiwan from 1895 to 1945. After 1905 art was taught in secondary schools and teachers' training colleges, and European influences were felt. After Japan left the joy of liberation did not last long as the new government imposed a dictatorship. In 1947 the populace revolted. Thousands of Japanese-educated Taiwanese were killed in savage punitive measures and martial law was imposed which remained in force until 1988. The development of cultural life ground to a halt as Taiwan's new KMT masters regarded themselves as custodians of China's heritage: *"what we must recognise today is that the essence of an anti-communist war is that it is a cultural war. Therefore, we must first have a deep and penetrating conception of the spirit of Chinese culture."* In this climate art was deeply conservative.

### Liu Kuo-Sung (Liu Guosong, born 1932)

Liu Kuo-Sung was born in Anhui province in China. His father, a member of Chiang Kai-shek's National Revolutionary Army (NRA), was killed in the war against the Japanese when Kuo-Sung was six. When 16, he entered the Nanjing NRA Orphan School, one of many opened by Madame Kai-shek for army children. One year later, in 1949, when the school moved to Taiwan, Liu Kuo-Sung went with it. He described how young painters on Taiwan broke the stifling attitude to art (very similar to the French Impressionists):

*"we visited the Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition annually in our first three years of school. Every year, the award-winning artworks were poorly made, and were lacking in diversity and variety. In the fourth year, four of us decided to participate. Three of us failed, and it was apparent that only those who presented the most conservative artwork had been selected ... I took the initiative and suggested that if we could not showcase our work in official exhibitions, we should organize our own. This idea was later supported by our tutor, and this is how the Fifth Moon Group began".*

The Fifth Moon Group was influenced by Abstract Expressionism (AbEx) in America, which Lui had seen in the library at the US Embassy in Taiwan; *"we realized that Abstract Expressionism in America was inspired by the West's impression of Chinese calligraphy, so why don't we advocate our own traditional heritage? We therefore decided to develop a new path, combining the two great cultures to cultivate our own aesthetic."* Liu Kuo-Sung mentions painters of the Song dynasty famous for their splashed-ink style [Part 2], *"They were the first abstract artists before the Renaissance came along. Chinese painting was so far ahead of the West then."*

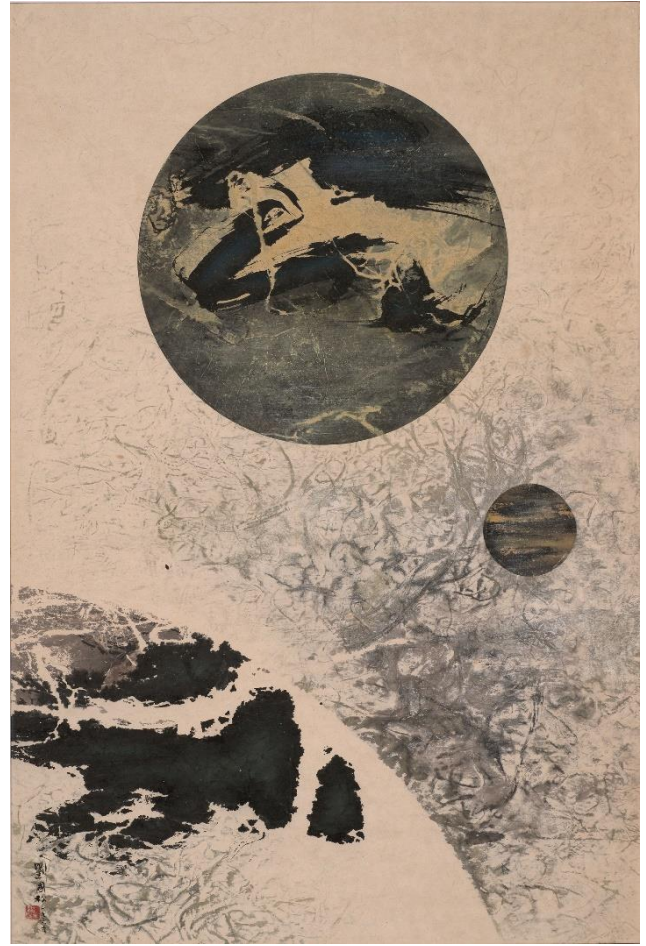


Liu Kuo-Sung, *Green Earth*, 1967 (ink and colour on paper)

Liu experimented with Cezanne, Klee and Picasso, and he was painting on plaster laid over canvas, scratching the surface, dripping ink like Pollock. In 1962 he saw an exhibition of paintings from the Palace Museum, giving him his first encounter with ancient Chinese masterpieces. He decided to abandon oils for Chinese ink and brush. Liu Kuo-Sung produced many paintings of rock and water, like *Winter Landscape* with dark blue, earth tones, greys and white dominant. The red seal is beautifully placed.



Liu Kuo-Sung, *Winter Landscape*, 1967



Liu Kuo-Sung, *Which is Earth?* 1969 (ink colour and collage)

The Apollo missions and images of earth from space initiated his *What is Earth?* series, spread over five years. Some of these combined paint with collage. Later, Liu Kuo-Sung painted images of the Moon, inspired partly by the space missions and partly by the huge globular lanterns that hang in Chinese temples.



Liu Kuo-Sung, *Blue Moon Landscape*, 1969



Liu Kuo-Sung, *Moon Rising*, 1971 (ink, colour and collage)



Liu Kuo-Sung, *Moon's Metamorphosis No. 75*, 1971 (ink, colour and collage)

After this celestial exploration, he settled on landscapes, *One Atop the Other* seems to use more ink wash than his previous landscapes with delicate pink and blue hues suggesting sky and distance. Other Fifth Moon members include **Chuang Che (born 1934)** who was considered within the group to be influenced by Klee but to be much more powerful and expressive. One member of the Fifth Moon who elected to stay in Taiwan is **Chen Tingshi (1916- 2002)** whose *Day and Night* series are large woodcuts with empty spaces and large solid blocks of colour or ink.

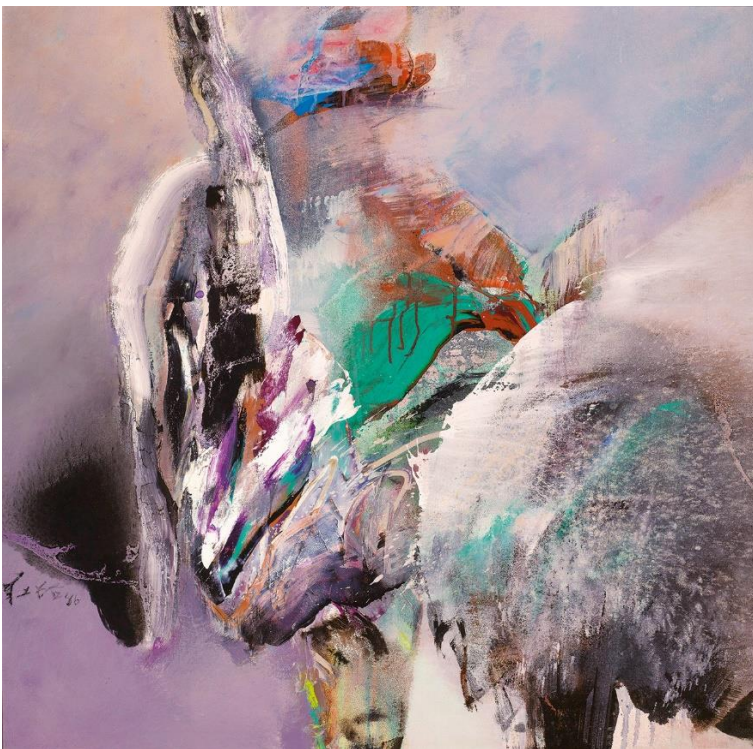
In the eyes of the Taipei establishment the Fifth Moon Group was not only an outrageous assault on traditional Chinese art but actually subversive. The group was attacked in the press and Liu Kuo-Sung was threatened with arrest in 1960 when he tried to open a modern art centre. It was impossible for any of the members of the group to get a teaching job. They were saved by the enthusiasm of foreign residents in Taipei and the attention their exhibitions attracted abroad. The Ton Fan group, another set of rebels banned by the police, also survived through overseas interest, but its influence was far less than the Fifth Moon Group which essentially brought modern art to Taiwan.



Liu Kuo-Sung, *One Atop the Other*, 1986



Chuang Che, *Moon Eater*, 1967 (oil, ink and collage on canvas)



Chuang Che, *Abstract 8609*, 1986 (acrylic on canvas)



Chen Tingshi, *Day and Night #11*, 1972 (ink, print and colour on paper)

## Singapore

Watercolours were introduced to Malaya by 18<sup>th</sup> century maritime artists and the medium flourished in 19<sup>th</sup> century public schools, founded on the Victorian model, for local people. Sir Richard Walker, who began organised art teaching in Singapore in 1923, taught and nurtured a stream (!) of water colourists including **Lim Cheng Hoe (1912-1979)**, whose family moved to Singapore from China when he was seven. Lim Cheng Hoe is regarded as one of the important pioneer artists in Singapore, alongside his peer **Cheong Soo Pieng (Zhong Sibin, 1917-1983)** who was trained in Shanghai and arrived in Singapore in 1946. Both painted scenes from local villages, but in very different styles.



Lim Cheng Hoe, *Kampong Hut*, 1957 (watercolour)

Cheong's paintings of Malay villages and people became more abstract with elements carefully arranged and rendered, yet they retained his affection for the subjects. *Malay Village* starts this trend, with shapes repeated. *In the Village* goes further, shapes and surfaces contrasting beautifully. He also painted true abstracts.



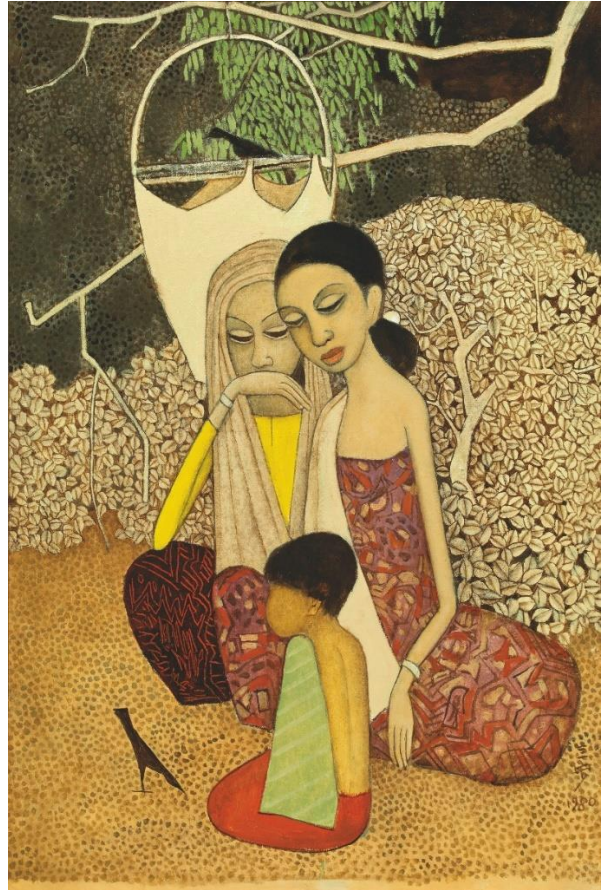
Cheong Soo Pieng, *Kampong Fishing Village*, 1961 (ink and watercolour)



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Vermillion Abstract*, 1965 (oil)



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Malay Village*, 1960s (ink and watercolour)



Cheong Soo Pieng, *In the Village*, 1980 (oil)

### Hong Kong

Before World War II art was limited in Hong Kong, but afterwards refugee artists arrived from China. Yet, the dominant artistic influence came from the American presence during the Korean War and Vietnam, so that AbEx was established by the middle/late 1960s. In the late 1960s **Lui Show Kwan (Lu Shoukun, 1919 - 1975)** brought a strong Chinese flavour to Hong Kong's art. Born in Canton, the son of a scholar-painter who owned an antiques shop, Show Kwan studied Chinese painting in the traditional fashion, copying classical works of past masters. He did this after graduating from Guangzhou University in economics in 1946. After moving to Hong Kong in 1948 he worked as an inspector for a ferry company. Every day he absorbed views of Hong Kong's mountains and harbour. These he began painting in a free style which developed into a modern revival of Chan painting [Part 2].



Lui Show Kwan, *Sails*, c 1960



Lui Show Kwan, *Victoria Gap*,  
1959



Lui Show Kwan, *Chan Painting*,  
1964



Lui Show Kwan, *Lotus*, 1969



Lui Show Kwan, *View of Hong Kong*, 1970s



Every form of modernism was supported in HK (in contrast to Taiwan) in the 1970s and 80s. **Wucius Wong (Wang Wuxie, born 1936)** began his career with village and town scenes – *Back Alley* is an example which also has wonderful calligraphy. Later he produced abstract landscapes of dreams, bathed in mist and light, which recall the works of Wu Bin of the Ming Dynasty [Part 5].



Wucius Wong, *Back Alley*, 1958



Wucius Wong, *Mountain Thoughts No. 6*, 1981



Wucius Wong, *Meditation No. 11*, 1987

## The 1980s

Two years passed after the death of Mao before artists who had been branded as Rightists were cleared. Artistic paralysis was broken in 1979 by the Stars group who hung their work on railings outside the Chinese National Art Gallery on 28 Sep 1979. Police forced the Stars to move, but the artists courageously marched in protest to the offices of the Beijing Party committee. The Artists Association arranged for them to hold an exhibition in four rather dark rooms of the Shufang Studio in Beihai Park. Although the *Beijing Daily* refused to carry an announcement of the exhibition, 40,000 people went to see it: 170 paintings, graphics and sculpture pieces were shown; anything that was different from the general run of accepted art. A second show was held the following year.



Wang Keping, *Idol*, 1978/9



Wang Keping, *The Silent One*, 1979



Huang Rui, *Liberty*, 1978

Some of the work was unlike anything seen before. **Wang Keping**, who wrote scripts for TV, produced wood sculptures attacking the cult of Mao, *Idol*, and censorship, *The Silent One*. **Huang Rui**, who worked in a leather goods factory, painted *Liberty* from life (the first time he had seen a nude female) urging artists, after Delacroix, to fight on for freedom. By 1981 the Stars group was breaking up and most went abroad; Wang Keping to Paris, Huang Rui to Tokyo, Ma Desheng to Switzerland, Ai Weiwei and Yan Li to New York, Qu Leilei in London.

The art of the Stars was seen by very few people in China, but those who did responded to the message of freedom and defiance of authority. Artists pressed for outmoded restrictions to be abandoned. Wu Guanzhong noted that the study of nudes was scientific, aiding realism, and artists who did not study them were abstract, a damning noun to the party. These calls for liberalisation alarmed the authorities. In early 1980 Deng Xiaoping justified the purge of artists in the GLF, and abolished the rights to speak out freely, hold debates and write wall newspapers. However, the Stars exhibition and other gestures of artistic independence during the Beijing Spring of 1979-81 opened a decade of astonishing activity.

## Realism in Oils

Chen Yifei and Wei Jingshan painted the most striking history painting of the post-CR era, commissioned by the Military Museum, depicting the fall of the Nanjing Presidential Palace to PLA soldiers, signified by the raising of the Communist flag.

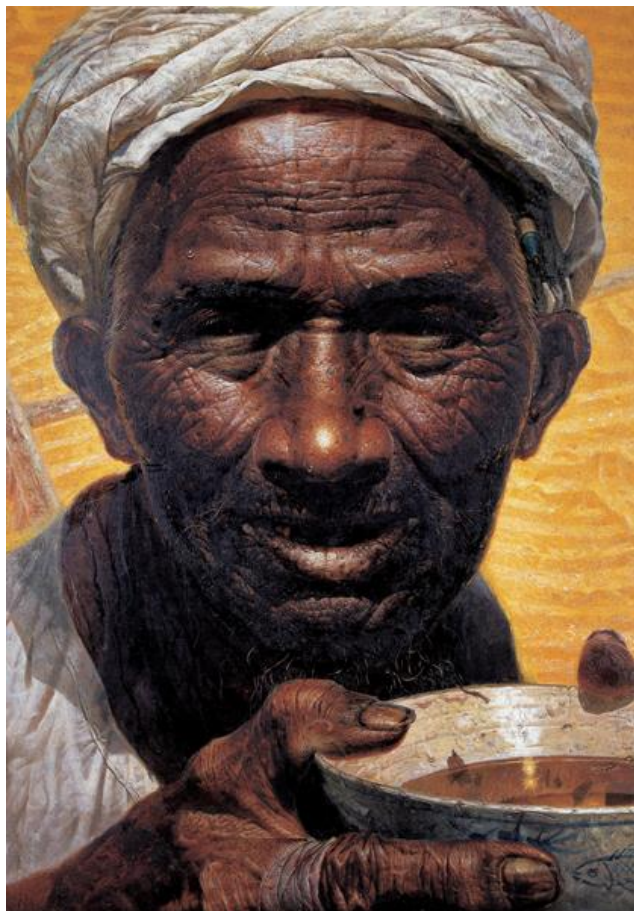


Chen Yifei and Wei Jingshan, *The Taking of the Presidential Palace*, 1977 (oil)

The refined realistic style, most evident in the brickwork, differed from the rough brushwork of artists trained in the 1950s in Soviet Socialist Realism. It was the first and most influential exploration of photorealism, “a style that was to characterise much of the art of the 1980s (Andrews).” With China embarking on the Four Modernisations, artist’s subjects were expected to be modern and positive. They often chose the national minorities of China’s borders.

### Luo Zhongli (born 1948)

The sensation of the National Youth Exhibition held in December 1980 was Luo Zhongli’s gigantic (2.15m x 1.5m) painting of the head of a worker, *Father*, parodying the huge Mao portraits that had hung everywhere. The idea for *Father* is said to have come from Luo seeing a reproduction of a photo-realist painting by American Chuck Close in a Chinese art magazine. The obvious backwardness of the subject after 30 years of Communism worried the principal of the Sichuan School of Fine Arts who insisted the ballpoint pen was added to show the peasant was modern, educated and prosperous.

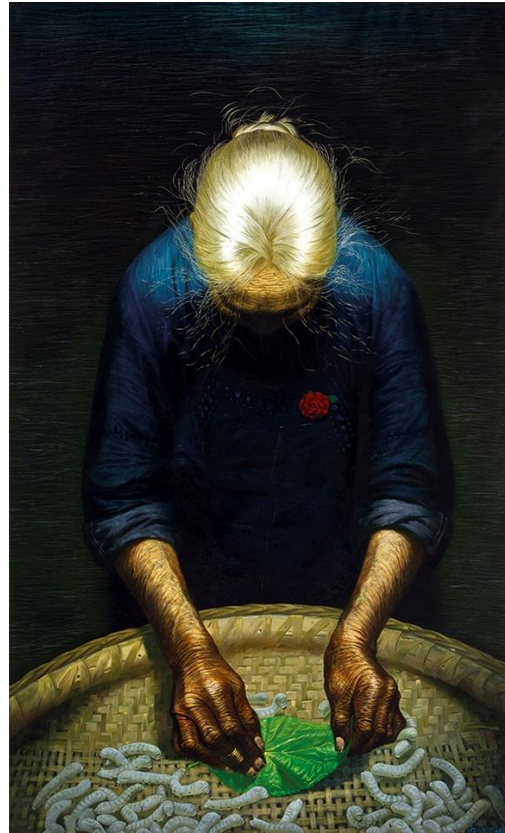


Luo Zhongli, *Father*, 1980 (oil)

Born in Bishan in 1948 Luo Zhongli graduated from the Sichuan Academy in 1968, at the height of the CR. Luo relocated to the remote Daba mountain on the Sichuan-Shaanxi border and lived there for ten years, sharing the hard life of the peasants and working in a steel factory. He encountered the subject of *Father* one night in 1975 and was spellbound by “his immobile figure – silent, staring, anesthetized.” While working there, he was influenced by the weathered, worn faces of the farm workers toiling in the fields and grandmothers tending the silkworms.



Luo Zhongli, *Years*, 1981 (oil)



Luo Zhongli, *Spring Silkworms*, 1980 (oil)



Luo Zhongli, *Tibetan Girl*, 1988 (oil)

In 1978 Luo Zhongli came down to Chongqing and after graduating from the Sichuan Fine Arts Academy joined the staff as a teacher of oil painting, progressing to professor.

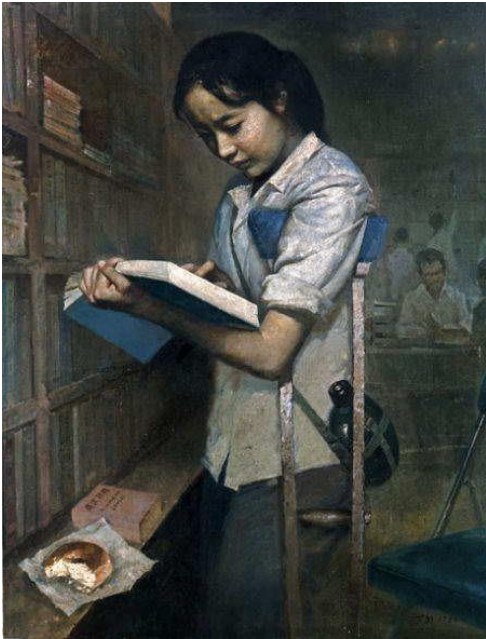


Luo Zhongli, *Autumn*, 1989 (oil)



Luo Zhongli, *Peasant Life*, 1980s (oil)

At the same exhibition where *Father* was shown, **Ai Xuan (born 1947)** won a prize for a picture of a girl on crutches reading by the shelves in her local library. Ai Xuan was born in Zhejiang and after graduating from Beijing Academy went to Sichuan. From Chengdu he set out on long journeys onto the Tibetan Plateau, creating memorable canvases reflecting the mood of this sparse region and its inhabitants; *Stranger* of 1984 was a celebrated work [unavailable in final form].



Ai Xuan, *With High Aspiration*, 1980 (oil)

Ai Xuan continued painting scenes of Tibet into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sullivan comments; “Ai Xuan’s Tibetans live in a desolate, cold, empty world in which the only sound that breaks the silence is the moan of the unceasing wind”.



Ai Xuan, *Study for The Stranger* (1984), 1982 (pencil on paper)



Ai Xuan, *Waiting for the Sun in Winter*, 1994 (oil)



Ai Xuan, *Sounds Getting Away*, 1989 (oil)



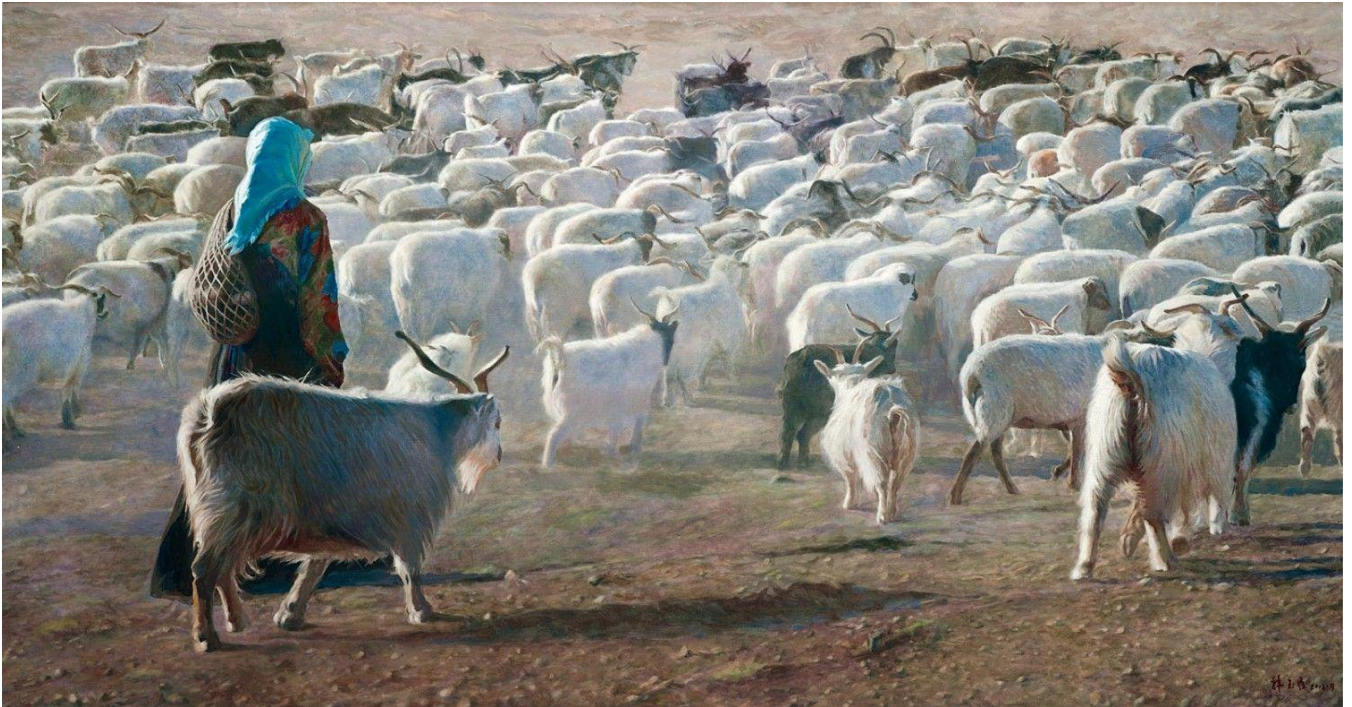
Ai Xuan, *North Wind*, 2001 (oil)

Another American artist who appealed to Chinese oil painters was Andrew Wyeth whose realism was unclouded by ideology. Wyeth's *Christina* had a strong influence on **He Duoling** when he painted a peasant girl with her dog and water buffalo on minutely-rendered grass.



He Duoling, *Spring Breezes have Arrived*, 1981 (oil)

Realistic paintings of Chinese minorities, with Tibetans prominent, remain a strong artistic genre. While he was a student **Han Yuchan** discovered the works of the master Dong Xiwen [Part 8] which inspired a fascination for Tibet. That was later strengthened by Ai Xuan's art. The blue, pink and green hues of his beasts may bring to mind William Holman Hunt and *Our English Coasts*.



Han Yuchan, *Shepherdess*, 2012 (oil)

There were other subjects for realism, including landscapes. Suzhou was popular, especially her canals. Another topic was colourful costumes. Chen Yifei has enormous regard in this genre, his paintings of beautiful women in historical dress are immensely popular. These are part of the literary and cultural movement which began in the late 1980s known as the "search for roots", a reclaiming of China's past which had been treated with disdain by the CCP.



Chen Yifei, *Beauties on Promenade*, 1997 (oil)



## New Wave

The Artists Association promoted the orthodox mainstream through its official exhibitions, but artists were not happy. Selection committees often accepted works because of personal favours or political correctness. Official exhibitions were ignored by serious young artists of the New Wave, who produced paintings influenced by the long-forbidden world of Western culture. Not only modern artists appealed. When the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston sent paintings from its collection to China in 1981, the realism of John Singleton Copley and Winslow Homer, the figures of John Singer Sargent drew more attention than AbEx artists. The still, cool figures of Hopper and, perhaps surprisingly, trick of the eye paintings by William Michael Harnett and John Frederick Peto proved inspirational.



Zhang Peili, *Midsummer Swimmers*, 1985 (oil on canvas)



Gao Min, *Youth*, 1991 (oil on canvas)



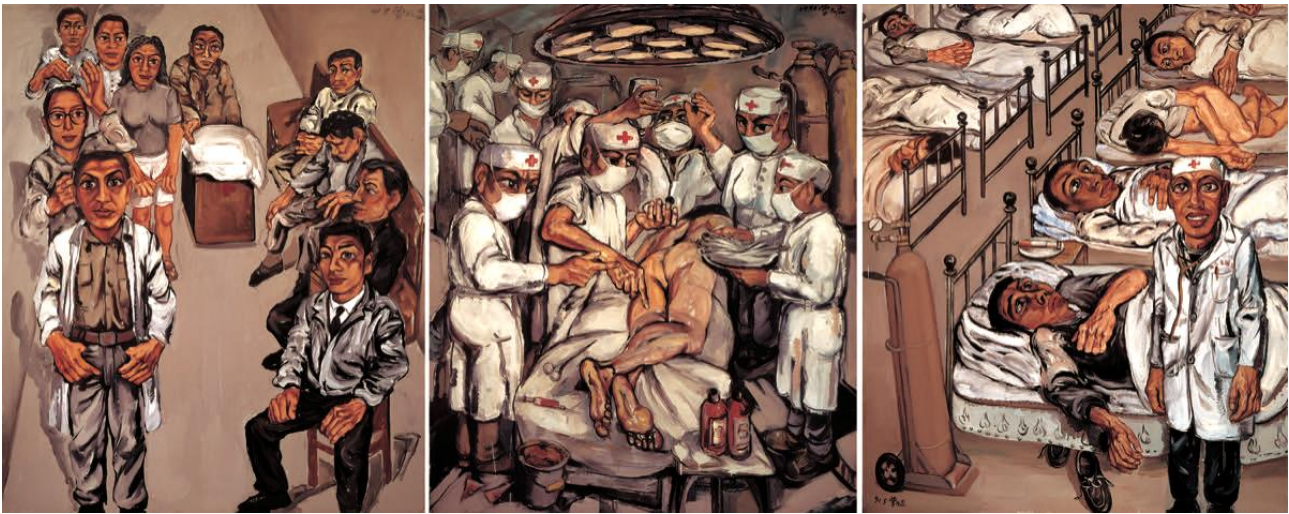
Mao Lizhi, *Old Door No. 1*, 1989 (oil on canvas)



He Datian, *Gate*, 1986 (oil on canvas)

European artists also influenced works. Sullivan cites Ingres on *Seated Girl* by Dong Qiyu; Piero Della Francesca on *Peasants in a Landscape* by Chang Xiaoming and Caravaggio or Georges de la Tour on *Red Candles* by Gao Min [all unavailable]. He Datian's deep interiors with a distant door recall Pieter de Hooch. These artists of the New Wave were condemned by the CCP for borrowing heavily from the West. The modern movement continued, however. Works were not allowed to be shown in China, but the authorities (swayed by future revenue and favourable foreign exposure) allowed them to be exhibited in Hong Kong.

Some New Wave works expressed disillusionment. **Zeng Fanzhi (born 1964)** had been influenced by Cezanne in his early still life paintings. His *Hospital* series, recalling Max Beckmann, was sparked by the patients he saw in a nearby hospital (whose bathroom he had to use as his nearby apartment did not have one). He captured their look of helplessness as they were treated by indifferent doctors and nurses.



Zeng Fanzhi, *Hospital Triptych No. 1*, 1991

Facial expression of officials was also the theme in Fanzhi's *Mask* series provoked when he moved from the country to Beijing in 1993 and found the city cold and full of spuriousness: "Chinese officials started wearing suits and ties...Everybody wanted to look good, but it also looked a bit fake ... as if they were posing on a stage."



Zeng Fanzhi, *Mask*, 1990s



Zeng Fanzhi, *Mask Series No. 3*, 1994

Whether officials were interested in the revolution or the well-being of people was debateable. Gittins notes that the total CCP membership in 1988, from a population of 1.1 billion, was 47.75 million. Eight million had applied to join in 1987; two million were accepted. The assumption was widely held that one only joined the party in order to secure personal advantage. Fang Lijun's *Series 1* and *Series 2* leave Sullivan in little doubt that the shaven-headed, small-eyed bullies are cadres.



Fang Lijun, *Series 2*, 1991-2

### Traditional Chinese Painting

The party's relaxation of restrictions on traditional ink-and-colour painting meant that new themes were available for popular genres.



Yang Zhiguang, *Delivering a Meal on a Snowy Night*, 1958



Yang Zhiguang, *Lady Washing in the River*, 1988

**Yang Zhiguang (also Yang Taofu, 1930 – 2016)** was a prolific figure painter, making his name in the 1950s. *Delivering a Meal* comes from his experiences on a farm in Hubei in 1958 during the GLF, and he was praised for his *Newcomer to the Mine* during the CR; a portrait of a smiling young woman in mining gear. From these subjects, he turned to even more lyrical themes, produced with a lighter touch.



Yang Zhiguang, *Sheep Herding in Tibet*, 1991

Traditional genres or styles of them, scorned by the CCP as elite art, reappeared. Yang Shanshen painted animals using dry and wet brushstrokes.



Yang Shanshen, *Horse from Twelve Animal Signs of the Chinese Zodiac*, 1979

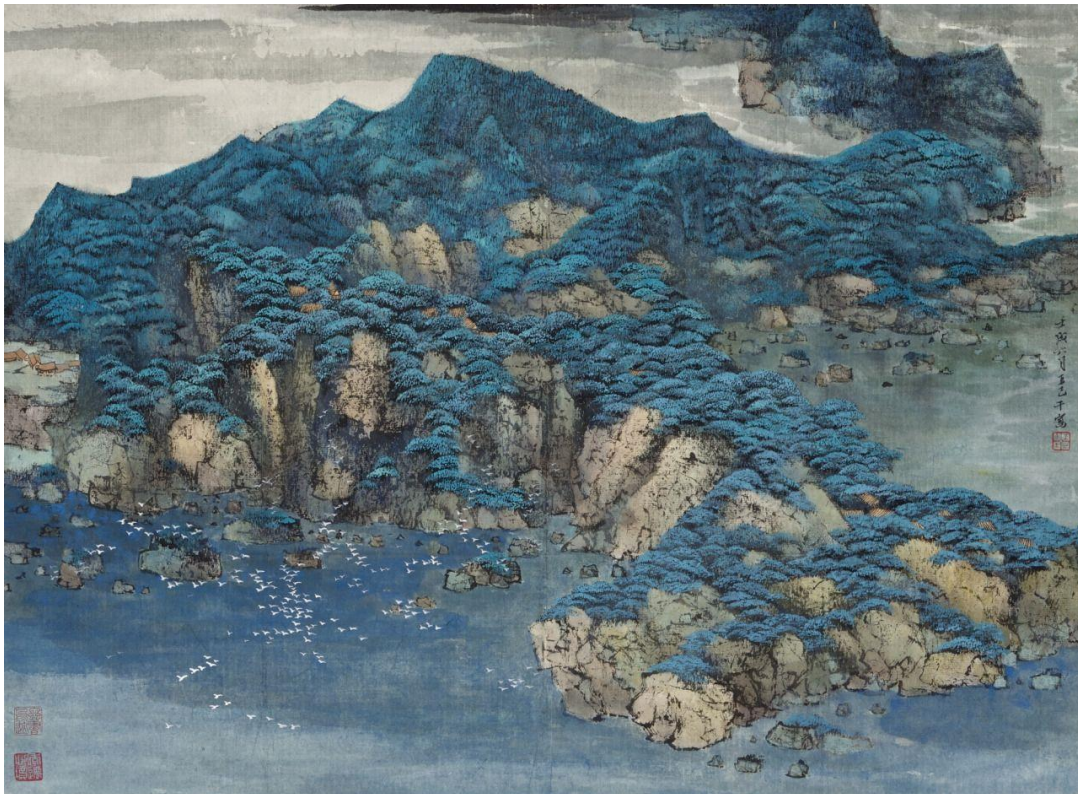
**Wang Jiqian (also C C Wang, 1907 – 2003)** produced the first example seen in decades of a traditional literati theme. The plants are rendered in colour, but the emphasis on ink strokes against light wash are hallmarks of old scholarly art. Fine and delicate ink marks on areas of wash were also used by Wang Jiqian in landscapes. One is a favourite literati subject of mountains swathed in mist. Another has foliage shown by repeated forms which has the coolness of Dong Qichang [Part 5]. Both have simple buildings (another feature of scholarly art) and the animation of a flock of birds.



Wang Jiqian, *Bamboo and Rock*, 1986



Wang Jiqian, *Landscape*, 1981



Wang Jiqian, *Landscape*, 1982

**Huang Yongyu (born 1924)** – of *Animal Crackers* and *Red Lotus*, above – did much to revive bird and flower painting. Moreover, there are elements of Chan and action painting in Yongyu's works. Ink and colour were applied with fingers and sticks, in bold strokes and by dripping colours. *Spring Lotus Pond* combines these with the great delicacy of the flowers.

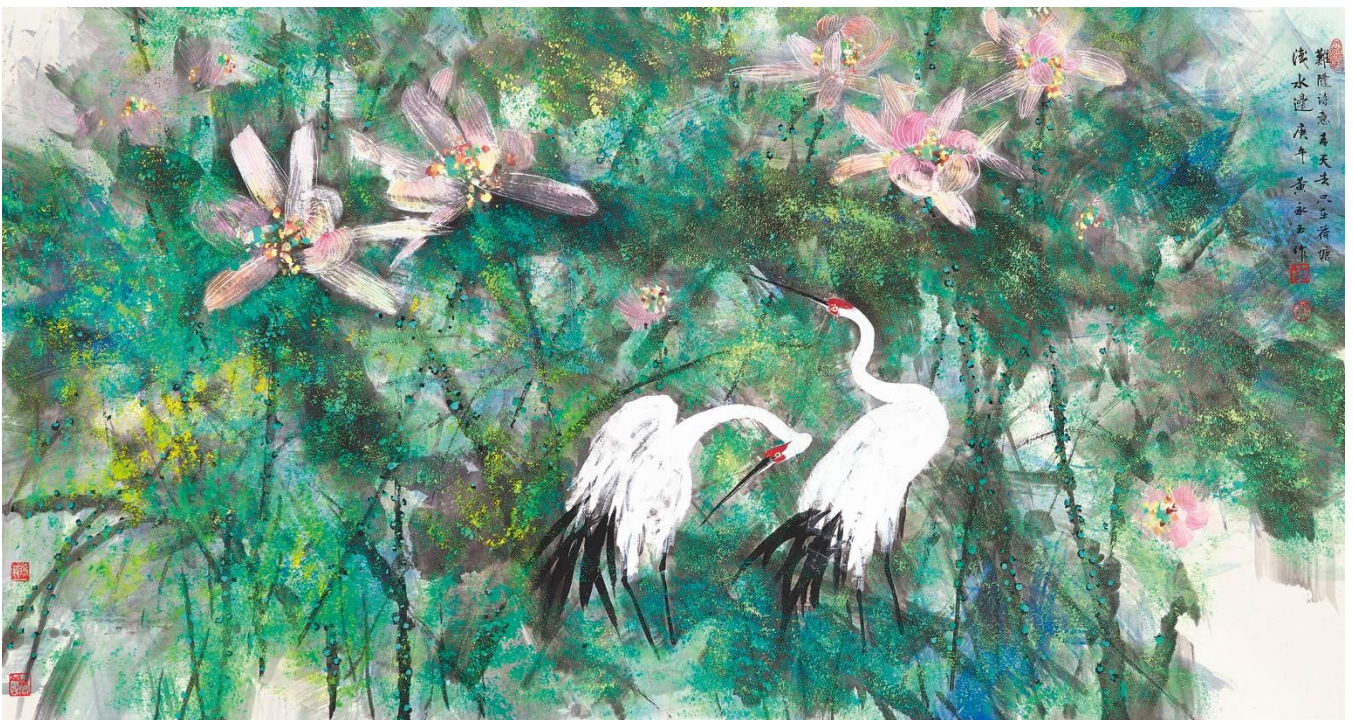


Huang Yongyu, *Spring Lotus Pond*, 1976

In the 1980s, Yongyu developed these approaches with his cranes – a bird beloved by scholars, for example Shen Zhou [Part 4], and prominent in Chinese myth. *Crane in Reflection* looks a fine example of Chan painting, and *Two Cranes* again contrasts the delicate accuracy with which the birds are rendered against the freer style of the flowers and foliage.



Huang Yongyu, *Crane in Reflection*, 1984



Huang Yongyu, *Two Cranes in a Lotus Pond*, 1990

Huang Yongyu also produced landscapes in vivid colours. He returned after a long absence to his native town of Fenghuang in western Hunan, where he painted in the late 1970s and early 1980s views of the riverside, houses and gardens with great attention to detail. Later Yongyu painted landscapes in the freer style he used for lotus ponds and, again, with a detailed feature: here, a boatman.



Huang Yongyu, *Village Scenery*, 1979



Huang Yongyu, *Xiangxi River in Winter*, 2001



Eccentrics also flourished in the 1980s or, rather, in a notable case were discovered. **Chen Zizhuang (1913-1976)** came from a farming family in Sichuan. He had a tempestuous life (similar to Caravaggio, it seems); bodyguard to a warlord, a member of a secret society as well as a painter. In his character as well as in his art he resembled Zhu Da [Part 6]; “difficult, abusive, often drunk. Unacceptable for membership of the Artists’ Association and hounded by the woman painter Zhu Peijun, an ally of Jiang Qing. But he was revered by his students and by other young painters who were too terrified to approach him (Sullivan).”



Chen Zizhuang, *Living in Willows*, 1964



Chen Zizhuang, *Peonies and Rock*, 1960s

In the 1960s and early 1970s Chen Zizhuang bravely adhered to traditional genres, maintaining a continuity which was picked up by his students. His *Duck* and *Heavenly Steps* have a freedom of the Chan eccentric. *Peach Blossom* is drier and more precise, the shape of the pear replicating the bottom of the vase. All these subjects were anathema, and as a consequence, Zizhuang had to endure horrendous suffering and humiliation during the CR. Chen Zizhuang died in poverty, forgotten by the art world, with his works destroyed or hidden. He was discovered through a major exhibition of his work in 1988 in Beijing and he lives on in the work of his followers and students in Sichuan.

The most gifted is **Li Huasheng (born in 1944)**, son of a boatman, born in Yibin. As a young artist, Huasheng painted propaganda works in oil for the CCP during the day and studied traditional Chinese art at night by pouring over ink painting manuals. He showed his paintings to Chen Zizhuang in 1972 and was mentored by the elder artist over 4 years until Chen’s death. Li Huasheng was invited to demonstrate his art to Deng Xiaopeng, despite the fact that at the time he was painting wild landscapes. He was detested by conservatives in Sichuan and was lucky not to be arrested or shot.



Chen Zizhuang, *Duck and Lotus Pond*, 1974

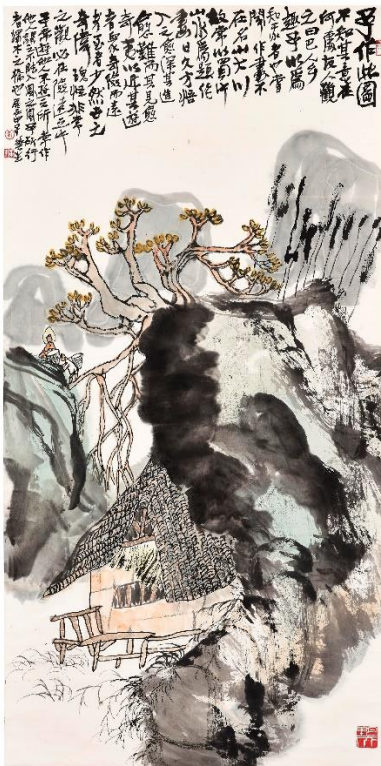


Chen Zizhuang, *Heaven Steps and Temples*, 1960s/1970s



Chen Zizhuang, *Peach Blossom and Pear*, 1972

Li Huasheng courageously weathered the worst of the storms and was accepted reluctantly by the establishment. In 1985 he was made honorary member of the Sichuan Fine Arts Academy.



Li Huasheng, *Landscape of Sichuan*, 1984



Li Huasheng, *Fisherman on an Autumn River*, 1984

On a brief visit to the US in 1987 he was shocked by the air of freedom and independence, and perhaps that culminated in Li Huasheng turning to purely abstract ink paintings later in his career. However, the 1990s saw more landscapes which, together with the efforts of Chen Zizhuang and the other artists mentioned so far, did much to revive old styles of Chinese art.



Li Huasheng, *Landscape*, 1993



Li Huasheng, *In the Woods*, 1993

Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010)

Wu Guanzhong is one of the giants of modern Chinese art and is considered to have created a new style of *guohua* painting. He did not simply return to the past, but developed traditional genres by including new attributes, some drawn from Western art, and, most notably, moving them towards the much-valued principle of expression and then abstraction. Wu Guanzhong once tried to paint a pine tree on Mount Tai but was not pleased with his efforts: "I then tried to capture it with the bold and racing strokes of my ink brush" and in this more expressive way found he "had discovered the spirit of the pines." The *Twin Pines* appear strong and dominant. The same approach to Wisteria captured the delicate tendrils of the much more fragile plant, emphasised by the neighbouring solid building coloured in a strong tone.



Wu Guanzhong, *Twin Pines*, 1980s

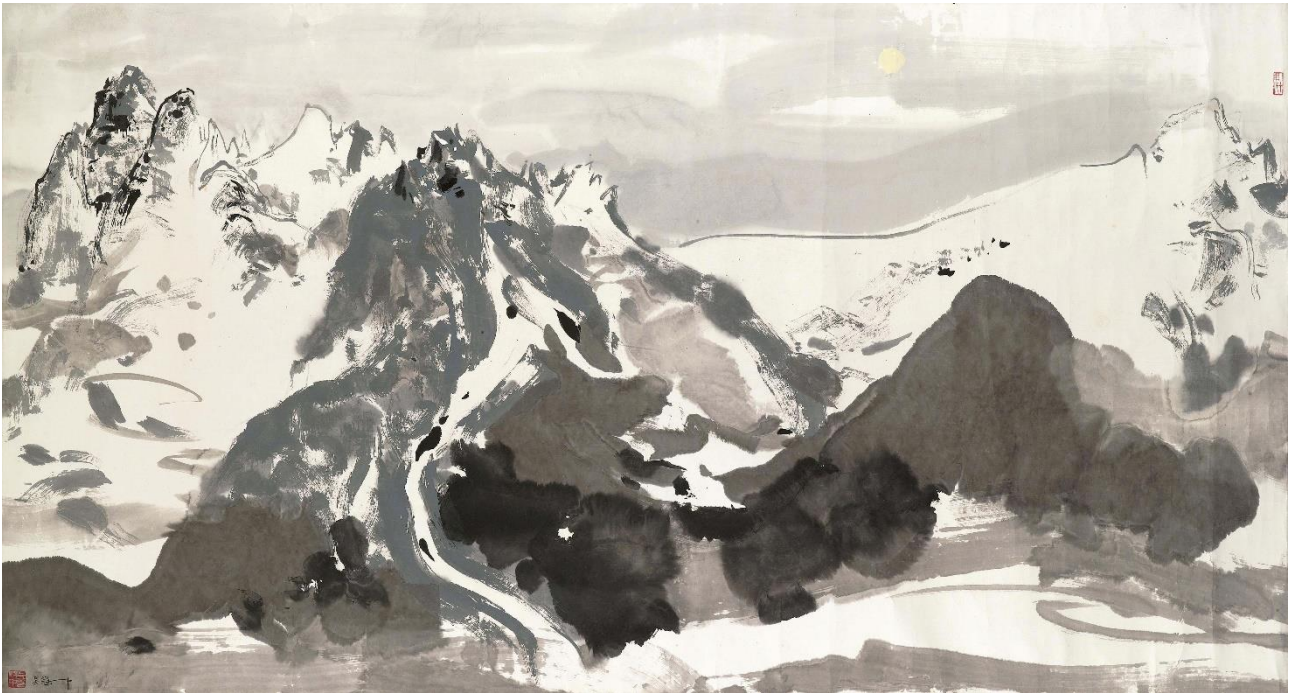


Wu Guanzhong, *Wisteria*, 1980



Wu Guanzhong, *Pine Forest*, 1992

*Pine Forest*, dense and impenetrable, is more deliberate but in an abstract manner. Wu Guanzhong's landscapes have different means of abstraction. *Yulong Mountain* has broad sweeping washes. *Fishing Village* has heaving hills and dunes. Abstraction is carried to greater length in *Great Wall* but the painting still catches the tumultuous route of the impressive structure as well as its power, the fort helping.



Wu Guanzhong, *Yulong Mountain under Moonlight*, 1980s



Wu Guanzhong, *Fishing Village at Mount Lao*, 1989



Wu Guanzhong, *The Great Wall*, 1986

Lion Grove Garden, a large rockery in Suzhou, is painted Pollock-like with buildings and a bridge in wonderfully contrasting detail. Of these different styles of landscape Wu Guanzhong wrote in 1982: *"I felt that I was pursuing something: the people's feelings, the earth's rhythms, a traditional style and the formal principles of modern Western art."*

The son of a village schoolteacher, Guanzhong was studying Electrical Engineering at university but a visit to an exhibition at the Hangzhou Academy had a profound effect. Against his family's wishes he abandoned science for art – with enormous success. Wu Guanzhong won a scholarship to study in Paris. He returned to China in 1951 after 5 years to teach modern painting in the Central Academy in Beijing.

During the CR Guanzhong was attacked for admiring Cezanne and Modigliani and was forced to destroy much of his early work. He was banned from painting and writing about art for seven years; he and his wife were separated and sent to labour in the countryside, and suffered severely. Wu Guanzhong was one of the artists Zhou Enlai rescued to decorate buildings and hotels in Beijing in 1973. After his return to Beijing Wu was allowed to paint one day a week. He worked in the Chinese medium partly because his flat was small (oil canvases take up room, *guohua* paintings can be rolled up) and partly because oil paints are expensive.



Wu Guanzhong, *Lion Grove Garden*, 1983



Wu Guanzhong, *Bamboo*, 1974



Wu Guanzhong, *Bamboo Shoots*, 1980s

Wu Guanzhong modernised bamboo paintings. One of the traditional views of bamboo by the river is transformed into a close study of the plant with the river and village in the background. The nature of the buildings is a foretaste of a change in Guanzhong's style a decade or so later. The strength and resilience of *Bamboo Shoots* are expressed powerfully: no winter, no matter how harsh, could hinder their growth.

Wu Guanzhong painted many scenes of Jiangnan; the beauty of the houses has great appeal. In *Twin Swallows* there is a marvellous contrast between the regularity of structure and the unevenness of life depicted by the tree and the two birds. The dark doors and the reflections complete a wonderful pattern.



Wu Guanzhong, *Twin Swallows*, 1981

Swallows appear in other scenes of Jiangnan, which become sparser; white and grey architecture augmented with colourful dots and brief washes.



Wu Guanzhong, *Water Village in Jiangnan*, 1989



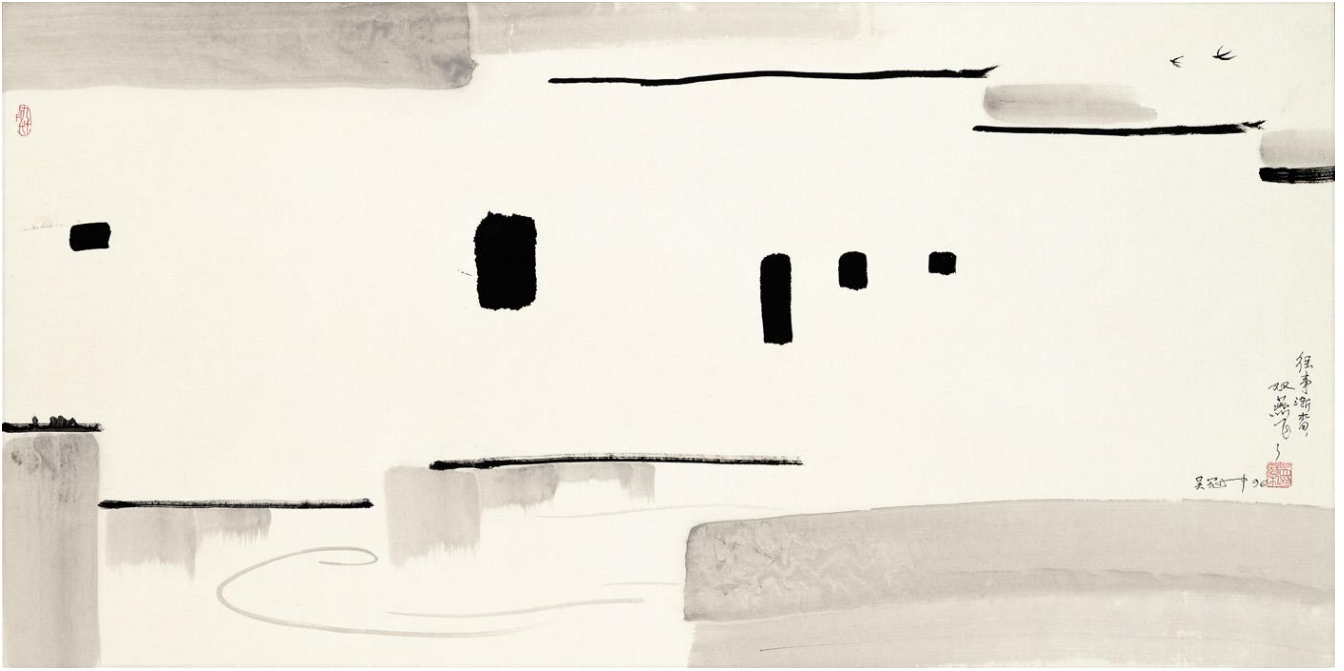


Wu Guanzhong, *Zhou Village*, 1990s

Guanzhong still painted detailed landscapes, but even in those clever highlights of colour appear as people, washing, flowers and foliage with more diffuse patches in the distance. Yet, the great power of Wu's work is most evident in the abstraction of his 1996 *Reminiscence*: a striking arrangement of ink lines and wash yet a convincing image of a memory of swallows flitting over the town's buildings.



Wu Guanzhong, *The Dong Ethnic Village in Spring*, 1991



Wu Guanzhong, *Reminiscence of Jiangnan*, 1996

The revival of Chinese art was given added impetus in the late part of the 1980s when the state began to lose interest in how artists made a living, and loosened its control of the kind of art produced. Many artists showed work in temporary gallery spaces, in foreign embassies or the apartments of diplomats. The shift marked a stronger involvement in the international art market, and Chinese artists from then on no longer had to look to the Communist Party as the sole arbiter of art.

## References

- Andrews, Julia F, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, University of California Press, 1994.
- Bonavia, David, *The Chinese: A Portrait*, Penguin Books, 1989.
- Clunas, Craig, *Art in China, Oxford History of Art*, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Crankshaw Edward, *The New Cold War: Moscow v. Peking (sic)*, Penguin Books, 1965.
- Fenby Jonathan, *The Penguin History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power 1850-2008*, Allen Lane, 2008.
- Gittins, John, *The Changing Face of China: From Mao to Market*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Han Suyin, *Eldest Son: Zhou Enlai and the Making of Modern China 1898-1976*, Hill and Wang, 1994.
- Hawks, Shelley Drake, *The Art of Resistance: Painting by Candlelight in Mao's China*, University of Washington Press, 2017.
- Hejzlar Josef, *Chinese Watercolours*, Galley Press, 1987.
- Johnston Laing, Ellen, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*, University of California Press, 1988.
- Kao, Mayching (editor), *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, Oxford University Press, 1988
- Ma Jian, *Red Dust: A Path Through China*, Vintage, 2002.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Chinese Intellectuals*, Frederick A Praeger, 19600.
- Sullivan, Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, University of California Press, 1996.
- Sullivan, Michael, *The Arts of China (Fourth Edition)*, University of California Press, 1999.
- Tregear, Mary, *Chinese Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1980.