Figural Modernism: Figure Painting of the Lingnan School and the Modernization of Chinese Art, 1911–1949

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Abstract

This dissertation theorizes and examines the revival of interest in figure painting (renwuhua) in Republican China (1911–49). I argue that, in this period, figure painting assumed a central role to painters who sought to reform Chinese art, which was commonly understood as “declining.” This investigation will focus on the achievements of the Lingnan School 嶺南派 (lingnan pai), which originated in the region of Guangdong but attained national recognition in the period of investigation. Attention will be paid to three painters of this school, namely Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending, and Huang Shaoqiang, whose figure painting was guided by divergent concerns to reform Chinese art.

Chapter one analyzes figure painting as a discursive construct. By first tracing the emergence of discourses that Chinese art was “in decline,” the chapter will examine how such discourses endowed figure painting with symbolic meaning. The efforts to introduce European figure painting to China will also be investigated.

Chapter two examines Gao Jianfu’s relationship with figure painting. The chapter traces this abnormal eruption of interest in figure painting and argues that it could be dated back to the 1930s when Gao was presented with a dilemma as his earlier successful formulae turned out to be not as effective.

Chapter three delineates the career of Fang Rending, who was preoccupied with the concern to represent his “times” (shidai). By examining Fang’s exhibition activities in the Republican period, this chapter will show how Fang presented a different version of a “contemporary figure painting” each time, as well as his continuous effort to rebuild the vocabulary of the genre in ink and brush.
The final chapter investigates Huang Shaoqiang’s quest to paint for “the people” by visualizing the experiences of the poor and the socially neglected. The discussion will examine the development of his idiosyncratic visual vocabulary and narrative strategies, which had a strong pessimistic flavor. This chapter will also demonstrate that his obsession with the realist ideal to “paint for the people” led him into structural difficulties that he was unable to resolve.
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Fig. 129. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *My Brush is My Life* 問我生涯筆一枝, 1930. Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong*, 235.
Fig. 130. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of Grave of Painting 畫塚. Woodblock print. From Hua Zhong, 284.

Fig. 131. Xu Beihong, Rejoicing Over the Liberation of Nanjing at the World Peace Council 世界和平大會上聽到南京解放, 1949. Color ink on paper, 352 × 71 cm. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.

Fig. 132. Lin Fengmian, Beauty Playing the Flute 吹笛仕女, 1940s. Color ink on paper, 33 × 33 cm. From Lin Fengmian huaji 林風眠畫集 (Beijing: Beijing Gongyi Meishu Chubanshe, 2005), vol. 1, 37.

Fig. 133. Jiang Zhaohe, the Deluge 洪水, 1947. Color ink on paper, 300 × 270 cm. Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

Fig. 134. Fu Baoshi, Wash Your Hands 洗手圖, 1943. Ink on paper, 110 × 62.2 cm. Private Collection, USA.

Fig. 135. Xu Yansun, Ballade on an Army Procession 兵車行, 1956. 88 × 163.2 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.
Introduction

Figure Painting and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art

I. Figure Painting in the Spotlight: The Second National Exhibition under the People’s Republic of China (1955)

Although officially titled “The Second National Exhibition,” the exhibition held in 1955 was de facto the first one on a national scale held by the People’s Republic of China (PRC). For this reason, it is not difficult to see why the PRC conceived it as an opportunity to praise its social and cultural achievements since its takeover of the mainland in 1949. Preparation started in 1954; the exhibition opened in the newly finished Soviet Union Exhibition Center in Beijing in March of the following year. After its closure in May, the exhibition was planned to travel to six other cities, namely Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hankou, Chongqing, Xi’an, and Shenyang.

1 From July 2 to July 6, 1949, an exhibition of national scale was held at the National Beijing Art School during the first National Conference of Representatives from Literary and Art Circles. The exhibition displayed a large number of art objects that filled eighteen rooms; rather than oil and ink paintings, it was the “popular” art forms that were highlighted. As a report in Renmin ribao puts it, objects on view included “pictorials, window decorations, paper cuttings, comics, woodcuts, nianhua [new year pictures], lianhuanhua [serial comics].” Also, there were “stage photos, performance statistics, and stage models” of several theater companies. In sum, the exhibition could be understood as a collected display of the achievements of visual culture under the Communists until 1949. See Jin Feng, “Quanguo wendai dahui juban de yishu zuopin zhanlanhui kaimu” [Art Exhibition organized by the National Conference of Representatives from Literary and Art Circles Opens], Renmin ribao, July 3, 1949.


3 See “Di er jie quanguo meizhan jishi jinxing choubei gongzuo,” Renmin ribao, February 26, 1954.
A total of 996 works, in a variety of formats, were shown. The most eye-catching category was the newly formulated *caimohua* 彩墨畫 (“Painting with color ink”), which was invented by the art administrator Jiang Feng 江豐 (1910–1982) to include paintings executed with ink and brush. Intriguingly, of the 214 submissions in this category, figure painting—that is, paintings with the human figure as the primary subject—enjoyed unprecedented popularity among artists and critics. Veteran specialists in the genre submitted their latest creations, and a cohort of young figure painters, who embarked on their artistic careers after 1949, stepped up as well. The attention that these younger painters drew far exceeded that of their more experienced peers. These young painters, most notably Zhou Changgu 周昌穀 (1929–1985), Tong Wenxuan 湯文選 (1925–2009), Yang Zhiguang 楊之光 (1930–2016), and Feng Zengxian 方增先 (b.1931), put forward a new type of figure painting that synthesized politically correct messages with styles containing characteristic elements of the Chinese medium. Zhou Changgu’s *Two Lambs* 兩個羊羔 (signed 1954), a pastoral scene that romanticizes the life of ethnic minorities under PRC rule, was exemplary (fig. 1). On the one hand, the face and the action of the Tibetan girl are captured

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4 For details about the exhibition, see “Di er jie quanguo meishu zhanlanhui zai jing kaim” 第二屆全國美術展覽會在京開幕 [the Second National Exhibition Opened in the Capital], *Renmin Ribao*, March 28, 1955.
6 For example, Jiang Zhaohe 蔣兆和 (1904–1986), who began his exploration in figure painting in the 1930s and taught at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, submitted three figure paintings.
7 The *Two Lambs* was chosen as the cover for *Di er jie quanguo meishu zhanlanhui de guohua* 第二届全国美术展览会的国画 [Chinese Paintings in the Second National Exhibition] (Beijing: Chaohua meishu chubanshe, 1957), an official publication of a selection of paintings. It was also claimed to be the first Chinese painting to win a prize at an international occasion after 1949. It won a gold medal in the World Festival of Youths 世界青年聯歡節 held in Moscow in 1955. See Zheng Hanbai, ed., “Zhou Changgu nianbiao” 周昌穀年表 [A Chronology of Zhou Changgu], *Zhonghua shuhua jia* 中华书画家, no. 7 (2014): 71.
naturalistically, which conformed to the requirements of the social realist norms that dominated PRC in the 1950s. On the other hand, her upper body is defined by a series of continuous but angular brushstrokes; her skirt is conceptualized as an ink shape with varying intensity. Other similar combinations of Social Realism with Chinese characteristics included Tong’s *Mother and Daughter-in-Law Attending the Winter School* 婆媳上冬學 (1954), Yang’s *First Time in Life* 一輩子第一回 (1954) and Fang’s *Picking Mushrooms* 拾磨菇 (1954).

Reviewers were euphoric about this progress in figure painting at the exhibition. For instance, in an editorial in *Renmin Ribao* 人民日報, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, the anonymous reporter celebrated the “multiplicity of the types of man, scenes of their lives and work, and the expression of their inner thoughts” that could be seen in the exhibition.8 Similarly, in an article in *Ta Kung Pao* 大公報, the critic and scholar Shang Renxia 常任俠 (1904–1996) rejoiced at the sight of a revival of figure painting at the exhibition, exclaiming that “figure painting has now reoccupied the predominant position” after centuries of inactivity.9

The accomplishments in figure painting in 1955 were the result of the orchestrated efforts of the Communist state. The restructuring of the realm of fine arts began immediately after 1949, and it was the consensus among art administrators of the new regime that figure painting was crucial.10

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10 The priority given to figure painting was typified in an article entitled “tan fengjinghua” 談風景畫 [Talking about Landscape Painting] by the woodcutter Li Qin 力群. He was not alone; similar views could be found in the writings of other artists, critics, and art administrators. For example, influential woodcutter Li Hua 李樺 (1907–1994) also argued in “gaizao Zhongguohua de jiben wenti – cong xiang de gaizao kaishi jin er chuangzao zin de nei'rong yu xingshi” 改造中國畫的基本問題 – 從思想的改造開始進而創造新的內容與形式 [The Fundamental Issues in Reforming Chinese Painting – Beginning from the reform of ideas to the creation of new content and form] that “painting should represent human beings’ collective life, their thoughts, and feelings… [In our times] [I]landscapes,
Natural enough: whether it was the glorification of leaders or heroes, the promotion of the socialist way of life, or the vilification of political foes, the new state would require systems of figure painting that were unambiguous, effective, pleasing to the eye, as well as identifiably Chinese. Under the leadership of Jiang Feng, who *de facto* dominated cultural policies of the PRC from 1949 until his fall from power in 1957, major art academies (such as the national ones in Beijing and Hangzhou) were restructured, and a curriculum that privileged figure painting was introduced. Also, young artists were mobilized to create a new figure painting as a political mission. Topics were assigned to painters, and instructions about how they should be executed were prescribed. Painters were also organized to “experience life” in groups to visit and to live with peasants, so they could get a better sense of the subjects that they were to paint.

The ability of the Communist state to produce a figure-painting tradition within a mere six years was awe-inspiring. Nevertheless, it was not the first time that this genre occupied a central role in twentieth-century China. Enthusiasm for figure painting can be traced to the Republican period (1911–1949) when illustrious painters and critics turned their attention to the power and possibilities of the genre. The list of pioneers involved some of the most illustrious names in Chinese art of the twentieth century, including Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953), Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900–1991), Fu Baoshi 傅抱石 (1904–1965), Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), and

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12 Together with others, Zhou Changgu first joined a study tour to Dunhuang in 1954. Three months later he moved to Tibet to “deepen his experience about life” (*shenri shenghuo* 深人生活). *Two Lambs* was a product of this experience. See Zheng, “Zhou Changgu nianbiao,” 71.
Jiang Zhaohe 蔣兆和 (1904–1986), together with the now lesser-known Fang Rending 方人定 (1901–1975), Huang Shaoqiang 黃少強 (1900–1942), and Xu Yansun 徐燕孫 (1899–1961), to name but a few. Some of them, most notably Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, worked to transpose what they learned in Europe to China, while others, such as Fu Boashi and Zhang Daqian, were more committed to traditional techniques as well as aesthetic standards. Yet some others, such as Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang, were groundbreaking in the sense that they struggled to create a new figure painting according to their understanding of modern art. The potential of figure painting was so irresistible that even Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879–1951), a flower-and-bird specialist, was attracted to this genre for its expressive potential in the twilight of his artistic career. When compared to their successors in the PRC, these Republican painters were largely without any support from the state, nor did they share a common agenda. Artistically, they engaged with a multitude of artistic styles that they encountered via various new channels, such as exhibitions or printed materials. The figure-painting enthusiasts in the Republican period explored the potential of figure painting spontaneously and autonomously, but also randomly, at a time when Chinese painting was considered stagnant vis-à-vis its European counterpart.

This dissertation will examine and theorize this revival of interest in figure painting of the Republican period. I argue that figure painting occupied a central position to Chinese painters of this period, and their experimentations could be conceptualized as individual attempts to reform Chinese art, which was commonly understood as “declining.” This investigation will focus on the achievements of the Lingnan School 嶺南派 (Lingnan pai), which originated in the region of Guangdong but attained national recognition in the period of investigation. Attention will be paid
to three painters of this school, namely Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending, and Huang Shaoqiang, whose figure painting was guided by divergent concerns to reform Chinese art.

II. **Figure Painting and Art Histories of the Republican Period**

From a historiographical perspective, the current study is a belated attempt to investigate and theorize a body of visual sources—that is, figure painting—whose significance has long been recognized by researchers and scholars.

Interest in the art of the Republican period, which was bracketed by the Xinhai Revolution (1911) and the Nationalists’ retreat to Taiwan (1949), developed early. The first study in the field, Michael Sullivan’s *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (1959), appeared a decade after the period ended; the first doctoral dissertation, Kao Mayching’s “China's Response to the West in Art,” appeared in 1972. The early Sullivan and Kao are typical products of the “Western impact” model that prioritized European art and ideas as the motivation for the transformation in China.

The field witnessed a leap in two directions beginning in the 1980s. On the one hand, from a theoretical perspective, the “Western impact” model began to lose favor: while the new generation of researchers paid due respect to the influx of European art and ideas in twentieth-century China, they strove to establish a more balanced view by focusing on how Chinese artists retain and reinterpret tradition to “modernize” in the face of challenges. This theoretical turn is typified by mainland scholars Zhang Shaoxia 張少俠 and Li Xiaoshan’s 李小山 Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi 中國現代繪畫史 [History of Modern Chinese Painting] (1986), which is the first study of modern Chinese art in the Chinese language. Zhang and Li avoid equating “Western” with “modern” or “progressive” or “Chinese” with “backward” and “conservative,” and classify Chinese painters according to their attitude towards tradition. While they also admit that painters committed to
traditional Chinese art were less “daring” in terms of innovation, their historical significance at a time when the “modern” was at its height is also given due attention.

On the other hand, thanks to the increasingly positive evaluation of the Republican period in mainland China, as well as the accessibility of archives and related materials, the 1980s also saw the emergence of a fuller and multi-dimensional picture of the art of the period.\footnote{More recently, these collections were made even more accessible thanks to the large-scale digitalization of Republican newspapers and journals. An example is the \textit{Wan Qing qikan quanwen shuju ku} 晚清期刊全文數據庫 and the \textit{Minguo shiqi qikan quanwen shuju ku} 民國時期期刊全文數據庫, which covers mainly the collection of the \textit{Shanghai Library}.} For instance, the wealth of art journals and pictorials in the Republican period became a common source for researchers, while the role of newly-emerged institutions, such as art societies or public exhibitions, was recognized.\footnote{An example is \textit{Zhongguo meishu de xiandaihua: meishu qikan yu meizhan huodong de fenxi} (1911–1937) {the modernization of Chinese art: an analysis of the art journals and art exhibitions (1911–1937)} (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanli an shudian, 2008) by the Taiwanese scholar Liu Ruikuan 劉瑞寬. While the argumentation is slightly weak in this study, Liu used a variety of published sources in his narration that touch on the journals and exhibitions of artists committed both to traditional Chinese art as well as European art (classical and modernist included).} New historical agents were unearthed and introduced into the meta-narrative, with many other existing characters reevaluated.\footnote{A recent example is Aida Yuen Wong’s re-evaluation of Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) in \textit{The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China} (Leiden: Brill, 2016).} Besides painting, researchers also extended their enquiries into other art forms, most notably woodcuts, popular print, as well as commercial visual culture.\footnote{Tang Xiaobing’s \textit{Origins of the Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement} is the best work on woodcut in Republican China to date.} There is also a consensus in current academia that Japan played an indispensable role for Chinese painters, either as an intermediary for European art ideas or as a role model in...
combining modernity and tradition.\textsuperscript{17} In short, the last decade witnessed a diversification of interests, perspectives, sources, and methodologies.\textsuperscript{18}

The importance of figure painting in the Republican period appears to be an assumed fact of which most scholars or researchers demand little explanation or theorization. For instance, when the China Art Museum—previously the China Pavilion at Expo 2010—opened in Shanghai in 2012, the first section of its inaugural exhibition was entitled “The Revival of Figure Painting,” which featured paintings of the genre since the late nineteenth century. Studies of figure painting appeared occasionally. One of the earliest scholarly studies came from the Taiwanese scholar Liu Fang-ru 劉芳如, whose M.A. thesis “Minchu Zhongguo renwuhua zhi yanjiu, 1912–1949” 民初中國人物畫之研究 [Study on the Figure Painting of the Republican Period, 1912–1949] (1983) divided and investigated painters according to a stylistic paradigm. A more recent study can be found in \textit{Ershi shiji Zhongguo renwuhua shi} 二十世紀中國人物畫史 [History of Figure Painting in 20th-Century China] (2008) by the mainland scholar Yi E 裔萼. Although Yi E has drastically increased the stylistic and geographical diversity of her narrative, her work differs little from its predecessor as it was written as survey composing of biographies of figure painting specialists.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} See Aida Yuen Wong, \textit{Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006) and Joshua A Fogel, ed., \textit{The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art} (Berkeley, California: Global, Area, and International Archive/University of California Press, 2012).

\textsuperscript{18} Period histories benefited greatly from this diversification. Two recent examples of such histories are Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi’s \textit{The Art of Modern China} (2012) and Lü Peng’s 呂澎 20 \textit{Shiji Zhongguo yishu shi} 二世紀中國藝術史 [A History of Art in Twentieth-Century China] (2006). Both are descriptive and seek to be as comprehensive as possible, covering topics such as art education, exhibitions, art societies, and the art of propaganda.

\textsuperscript{19} Some other works worth mentioning include Man Yee Sandy Ng’s dissertation \textit{Lin Fengmian (1900-1991): Figure Painting and Hybrid Modernity in Twentieth Century Chinese art} (2005) and David Clarke’s chapter “Iconicity and Indexicality: the Body in Chinese Art” in his book \textit{Chinese Art and its Encounter with the World} (2011). Ng’s dissertation conceptualizes Lin Fengmian as an example synthesizing East and West by examining his figure painting. The sections, however, are inclined to enumerating and classifying Lin’s works. Clarke’s chapter uses Peircean semiotics to understand the fundamental differences between Chinese and European art and hence the importance of figure painting in twentieth-century China. While it is innovative, it might be too ambitious for a single chapter though.
The current study will examine figure painting on two levels within the specific context of the first half of twentieth-century China. First and foremost, “figure painting” will be investigated as a discursive construct in Republican art discourses. As this dissertation will demonstrate, in this unique environment Chinese art was universally believed by the Chinese themselves to be “regressive” or “in decline,” figure painting assumed symbolic significance as it simultaneously epitomized Chinese art’s weaknesses and European art’s strengths. Arguments built on the discursive category of “figure painting” were not only adopted to demonstrate the “shortcomings” of Chinese art, but were also used by intellectuals to understand the development and characteristics of painting in China. By tracing and systematizing discussions about figure painting found in textual sources since the late nineteenth century, this dissertation will delineate the rise, development, content, and impact of the discursive category of “figure painting” in the Republican period.

Besides investigating figure painting at a discursive level, this dissertation also conceptualizes works of figure painting as attempts in twentieth-century Chinese art to create an art compatible with modern standards. This claim might sound cliché at first sight, as such a reading could be projected onto any genre in the said period. For instance, one could not deny that the landscapes of Huang Binhong (1865–1955), who was dubbed as a “traditionalist” by Fong Wen, engaged with the novel conditions of the twentieth century as well. However, what this dissertation hopes to demonstrate is that, in the Republican period, the most radical and innovative

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examples to reform Chinese art are to be found in figure painting, as this genre, which was relatively neglected by the mainstream in China for centuries, offered painters the most freedom.

The historical development of figure painting in China allows us to postulate this claim with certainty. Figure painting (“renwu” 人物 in Chinese) was the first genre to develop in Chinese art, with the aesthetics and theories well-established around the 5th century. Not only the first documented painters in Chinese history were figure painters, but the first systematic attempt to theorize Chinese art—that is, Xie He’s 謝赫 (active 5th century CE) famous “Six Laws” 六法 (liufa)—was a set of criteria to evaluate this genre. The preeminence of figure painting was only challenged by those working in the landscape genre (shanshui 山水, “mountain and water”) in the Northern Song period (960–1127). The rise of literati theory in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), which regarded landscape as a channel to express an individual’s spiritual cultivation, sealed the complete victory of the landscape at the expense of other genres, most notably figure painting. It is true that figure painting could fulfill various social functions; as Richard Vinograd demonstrates in his study *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600–1900* (1992), portraiture was used as a tool to construct identities and cultural roles within literati circles in the Ming and the Qing dynasties. However, few advances were made by painters in terms of style and subject matter. Although figure-painting specialists appeared from time to time, it was marginalized at large in the Chinese art world. In sum, the hierarchy of genres was well-established in Chinese art by the late nineteenth century: landscape was at its apex, followed by flower-and-bird and figure painting, which was once the most important genre in China.

In light of this, many figure-painting enthusiasts of the Republican period, especially those who preferred to paint with ink and brush, soon found that they had to rebuild everything from
scratch. It is true that not all their figure paintings are of a high standard, yet their experiments offer us the most veritable records of Chinese painters’ struggles to be compatible with the latest requirements and conditions of their age. Building on this understanding, this dissertation will discuss the struggle of three painters—Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending, and Huang Shaoqiang—as reformists who used figure painting as their means. Not all of them were specialists in the genre: as touched on earlier, Gao Jianfu was celebrated for his flower-and-bird and animal paintings, and had little training in painting figures. Even Fang and Huang, who were known for the genre in their lifetime, appeared immature or uninspired in their experimentation at times. However, as will be demonstrated in the respective chapters, while their preoccupations were typical of the times, the answers that they proposed were not, thus offering three unique paths to reforming Chinese art in the twentieth century.

Three aspects of the painters’ rebuilding of figure painting will be given particular attention. The first aspect focuses on how figure painting was used to establish a connection between art and the modern age. To represent one’s “times” (shidai 時代) was a central term in the Chinese lexicon since May Fourth (1919), and it became a shared goal that cultural products reflect the characteristics of modern times. Chinese art was under severe criticism through this lens: it was a common conception that, although Chinese art once had a glorious past, it had ossified and failed to represent its times for centuries. Chinese painters were aware of this concern. In this dissertation, the three painters respond to this newly arisen need in their own ways: Gao Jianfu and Huang Shaoqiang explore the viability of depicting contemporary subjects, whereas Fang Rending’s preoccupation earns him the title of shidai huajia 時代畫家 (“painter of the times”).
The second issue focuses on how these painters sought to establish a connection between their art and the masses. Besides being stagnant, another common criticism about Chinese art—which was dominated by literati theories—was that it was too escapist and elitist in nature. Most of the literati painters regarded painting as a pastime, either for themselves or for their circle of literati friends, and never showed any attention in their art to happenings in the society around them. With the introduction of modern print technologies and the rise of public exhibitions, however, artists and their art could no longer evade confrontation with the masses. The three Lingnan artists were all enthusiasts of exhibitions and tried to engage their audiences from multiple angles. Of the three, Huang Shaoqiang was obsessed with this quest to “paint for the people”; chapter four of this dissertation is a story about how Huang sought to attain this goal but failed.

The last and final issue concerns how techniques and expressive devices, whether traditional or foreign, were adapted. As discussed, painters who preferred to paint figure paintings with ink and brush had to begin from scratch. At the same time, the visual sources that were available to them were plenty. How these painters encountered, adapted, and transformed these sources will be analyzed in the three chapters. As will be seen, these figure-painting enthusiasts looked up to European, Japanese, Chinese, or even Indian art, which further complicates the current understanding of the Republican art world.

III. The Significance of the Lingnan School and its Figure Painting

The three painters chosen—Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending, and Huang Shaoqiang—all belonged to the Lingnan School, a school that originated in Guangdong but attained national significance in Republican China. If the above discussion has, hopefully, clarified the importance of figure
painting as crucial to understanding twentieth-century Chinese art, the choice of the Lingnan School might require more elaboration.

The history of the Lingnan School began with three masters—the brothers Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng 高奇峯 (1889–1933), and their childhood friend Chen Shuren 陳樹人 (1884–1948)—who shared similar background and training. The trio were connected from the very beginning: they were all natives of Panyu 番禺, a town close to the provincial capital of Guangzhou, and their first training in art was related to the atelier of the master Ju Lian 居廉 (1828–1904), who also resided in Panyu. In the last years of the Qing dynasty, the trio departed to further their studies in Tokyo, and while the schools they enrolled in differed, they were all exposed to eclectic ideas as well as the latest repertoire and techniques of nihonga in Japan. After returning to China, they worked together for some time in Shanghai, where they began to earn their fame as painters with what they learned abroad. Eventually, the role of the Gao brothers became increasingly prominent as Chen Shuren pursued a career as a bureaucrat in the Nationalist government. Besides assuming teaching posts and appearing in exhibitions regularly, both Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng set up an atelier to recruit promising painters to pass their ideas and art to the next generation. This step proved to be crucial: the Lingnan School was the only group that could produce a second generation of painters who ended up playing a role of importance within the timespan of the Republican period. Two of the figure-painting specialists chosen for analysis in this dissertation,

21 Objections have been raised against the use of the term “Lingnan School” to refer to this group. For those who disagree with the styles and ideas of this group (mainly those of Gao Jianfu), the use of such a term means the overshadowing of the contributions of other art groups in Guangdong at the time. On the other hand, it was also argued that the term Lingnan pai was an anachronism that only gained circulation in the few years before the Communist takeover in 1949.
22 Gao Jianfu and Chen Shuren both studied with Ju Lian in the master’s atelier in Panyu. On the contrary, Gao Qifeng never studied with the old master. His knowledge of this school probably came from his brother.
Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang, were perfect examples of the “second generation” of the Lingnan School, while others, such as Zhao Shao’ang 趙少昂 (1905–1998), Li Xiongcai 黎雄才 (1910–2001) or Guan Shanyue 關山月 (1912–2000), all featured in varying degrees of importance in the Chinese art world in the Republican period.

As will be seen in the chapters, the rise of the Lingnan School in the Republican period was a story of controversies from without as well as within. However, no one could deny its historical significance in twentieth-century Chinese art. First and foremost, the Lingnan School is synonymous with eclecticism, one of the most influential trends of the century. While some contemporaries promoted the synthesis of Chinese and European art, no one could come up with a range of paintings to substantiate the idea as effectively as the Lingnan masters did (which, as we know nowadays, were inspired by nihonga to different degrees). This achievement was already recognized by their contemporaries: during the first National Exhibition in 1929, which was the first-ever national exhibition in the history of China, the critic Chen Xiaodie 陳小蝶 (1897–1989) had already named the Lingnan School as one of the six major schools in modern Chinese art.23

There were other reasons besides artistic ones that the Lingnan School was unique. A crucial factor was its strong geographical imprint that was unmistakable on the national stage. All members of the school—masters and followers alike—were Cantonese. This geographical identity, coupled with similar artistic beliefs and repertoire, made them easily recognizable as a group in

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23 Chen Xiaodie, “Cong meizhan zuopin ganjue dao xiandai guohua Huapai” 從美展作品感覺到現代國畫畫派 [From the Works in the Art Exhibition to the Various Schools of Modern National Painting], *Meizhan huikan* 美展彙刊 [Art Exhibition], no. 4 (April 1929).
The credentials that the founders acquired through their participation in the Xinhai Revolution (1911) also became an enviable asset of the Lingnan School. As former revolutionaries, the three masters were automatically considered “patriotic” and “progressive” in the imagination of many Chinese, while their networks with influential individuals in the Nationalist government also provided them with unrivaled resources on the national as well as international stage. For instance, thanks to Chen Shuren’s position in the government, the Lingnan painters could always use the venue for exhibitions, and prominent individuals visited their exhibitions, which were widely reported in the mass media.

The significance of the Lingnan School has long been acknowledged by modern scholars. Ralph Croizier’s *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906–1951* (1988) was the first book-length study to provide a comprehensive history of the school as an art movement in the Republican period. While the book is mainly descriptive, it is still invaluable to scholars three decades after its first publication. For instance, Croizier was the first scholar to convincingly demonstrate by comparative analysis the similarities between the paintings of the Lingnan School and Japanese art. Among Chinese scholars, Li Weiming is the most influential of this generation. His articles, which are based on concrete archival research and are sometimes exceptionally long by Chinese academic standards, are crucial in figuring out little-

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24 The artists under the leadership of Jin Cheng 金城 (1878–1926)—who, after Jin’s death, came to form *Hu She* 湖社 ("Lake Society")—were a close match to the members of the Lingnan School. At the time Jin Cheng’s school’s influence was booming in the north, and it was regarded by Chen Xiaodie, along with the Lingnan School, as one of the six prominent schools in modern Chinese art. Yet Jin Cheng’s premature death and the subsequent schism between his associate Zhou Zhaoxiang 周肇祥 (1880–1954) and his son Jin Kaifan 金開藩 (1895–1946) marked its decline; fortunately many artists associated with the Lake Society continued to be active in the art world. For more about Jin Cheng and *Hu She*, see Lü Peng, *Hushe yanjiu* 湖社研究 [a study on the Lake Society] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2010).
questioned assumptions about our understanding of the Lingnan School. His series of articles did not only verify the early histories of and myths surrounding Gao Jianfu but also analyzed how the master constructed his image as a reformer in the realm of art.\footnote{Some of Li Weiming’s most influential articles about Gao Jianfu include “Gao Jianfu liuxue Riben kao” 高劍父「留學」日本考 [A Study on Gao Jianfu’s Experience in Japan], “Xieshi zhuyi de sixiang ziyou yuan – yi Lingnan Gao shi zaoqi huxue wei zhongxin” 寫實主義的思想資源—以嶺南高氏早期畫學為中心 [Resources for Illusionism: As Seen from the Early Art Theories of Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng of the Lingnan School] and “Yishu yu zhengzhi er wei yi ti de jiazi mosh – er Gao yanju zhong yi ge nairenu xunwei de wenti” 藝術與政治二位一體的價值模式—二高研究中一個耐人尋味的問題 [The Convergence of Art and Politics as an Interpretive Model: the Curious Paradigm of the Studies on Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng]. “Gao Jianfu liuxue Riben kao” and “xieshi zhuyi de sixiang ziyou yuan” sorted out the early careers of the Gao brothers, whereas “Yishu yu zhengzhi er wei yi ti de jiazi mosh” did not only verified Gao Jianfu’s questionable revolutionary credentials, but also explored how Gao exploit such credentials to build up a public image of himself as the “revolutionary painter.” Li also published a series of articles about unstudied aspects of art in Republican Guangdong as well.}

While the Lingnan School is most famous for its flower-and-bird and animal paintings, studies on its figure paintings exist. The Taiwanese scholars Fu Licui and Chen Chun-chi have published articles on Gao Jianfu’s figure painting, with the former more interpretative and the latter more survey-like.\footnote{Fu Licui, “Yu gujin duihua — Gao Jianfu renwuhua de xiandai yiyi 与古今对话 — 高剑父人物画的现代意义 [Dialogue with the Past and the Present: the Modern Significance of Gao Jianfu’s Figure Painting],” Meishu xuebao 美术学报 [Art Journal], no. 1 (2012): 4–23. And Chen Chun-chi, “Gao Jianfu de renwu huihua tanjiu” 高劍父的人物繪畫探究 [A Study of Figure Paintings of Kao Chien-fu] in Cai You, ed., Jinian Xinhai 100 zhounian liang'an baijia shuimo dazhan xueshu yantaohui lunwenji 纪念辛亥 100 週年兩岸百家水墨大展學術研討會論文集 [Collected Papers of the Academic Conference for The invitational exhibition of Cross-Straits Artists to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Revolution in 1911] (Taipei: National Taiwan University of Arts, 2011), 31–66.} The two figure-painting specialists of the second generation of the Lingnan School, Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang, have also sparked the interest of modern researchers. The Chinese scholar Chen Jichun’s Illustrious Conduct and Noble Character: A Short Biography of Fang Rending 亮節高風：方人定小傳 (2015) is the latest study of Fang Rending. While its title sounds unnecessarily moralistic, this biography has incorporated information provided by the painter’s family and newly discovered sources from collections in the U.S. and Macau. On the other hand, Huang Shaoqiang’s hometown of Foshan supported the publication of
several collections of writings by the painter, and together with Li Weiming’s catalog essay for the painter’s 105th anniversary (2006), the career and the works of the painter were systematized. In sum, substantial studies were conducted on the figure paintings of the Lingnan painters, only that the paintings were examined as isolated accomplishments without the broader context of the revival of interest in figure painting in the Chinese art world.

The status of the Lingnan School and the fact that no study discusses the figure painting of this group together partially justifies the focus of this dissertation. However, in claiming that this study is filling a lacuna in academia, it should also be noted that the Lingnan School was the group that reacted the most passionately and profoundly to this rising interest in figure painting. As will be demonstrated, the Lingnan painters, Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang in particular, reacted sharply to issues in the reform of Chinese art and demonstrated a clear rationale in tackling these difficulties with figure painting. Furthermore, there was no other group in the Republican period that turned to figure painting in such a collective way. Besides the two specialists Fang and Huang, who were among the handful who made their names in figure painting and figure painting alone in the Republican period, one could also find Gao Jianfu, who was, without any prior training, magnetically drawn to the genre in his fifties, or the younger Guan Shanyue, who was devoted to the painting of figures until the 1950s. If we regard the Lingnan trio’s adaptation of Japanese eclecticism as the first initiative to reform Chinese art (which was also representative of the

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27 For a discussion on Guan Shanyue’s figure painting, see Li Weiming, “Zhanshi kulan he yuwai fengqing – Guan Shanyue minguo shiqi de renwuhua” 战时苦难和域外风情–关山月民国时期的人物画 [Wartime Hardships and Exotic Scenes – Guan Shanyue’s Figure Painting in the Republican Period], in Guan Shanyue Art Museum, ed., Shidai Jingdian: Guan Shanyue yu 20 shiji Zhongguo meishu yanjiu wenji 时代经典：关山月与 20 世纪中国美术研究文集 [Icons of an Era: Study on Guan Shanyue and Chinese Art in the 20th Century] (Nanning: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2009).
Chinese effort to reform the country’s art at large), we might conclude that this turn to figure painting constituted the second phase of their enterprise. Different from the first phase that was mainly imitative of or derivative from existing sources, this second phase signified the attempt of Chinese painters to build an art that was both original and simultaneously compatible with contemporary standards. In light of this, a study of the figure painting of the Lingnan School will not only add to the current academic literature on this group, but also propose a narrative of Chinese painters’ struggle for a genuinely modern Chinese art after their imitations of art foreign.

IV. **Structure of this Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of four chapters. The first chapter analyzes how figure painting functioned as a discursive construct, and will begin with a delineation of the “decline discourse”—the general belief that Chinese art was “in decline.” After delineating the emergence of the “decline discourse,” the chapter will examine how such discourses endowed figure painting with symbolic meaning. Besides, the efforts to introduce European figure painting to China will also be investigated.

The next three chapters will each focus on one artist of the Lingnan School respectively. Chapter two examines Gao Jianfu’s “struggle” with figure painting, which begins with a weird episode in the master’s career: not trained in figure painting, the older Gao suddenly turned into a champion of the genre in his last years. The chapter explains this abnormal eruption by looking at his plans to reform Chinese art at different phases of his career, and argues that this interest in figure painting could be dated back to the 1930s when Gao was presented with a dilemma as his earlier successful formulae turned out to be not as effective.
Chapter three analyzes the career of Fang Rending, who was preoccupied with the concern to represent his “times” (shidai). By scrutinizing Fang’s exhibition activities in the Republican period, this chapter will show that he presented a different version of a “figure painting” in each of his exhibition, which did not only embody his changing visions of “the times” but also his continuous effort to rebuild the vocabulary of the genre in ink and brush.

The final chapter investigates Huang Shaoqiang’s quest to paint for “the people” by visualizing the experiences of the poor and the socially neglected. The discussion will begin by examining his first attempts to paint his personal sufferings due to a series of family tragedies and will trace how he adaptively endowed this pessimistic vocabulary for events with universal significance. This chapter will also demonstrate that his obsession with the realist ideal to “paint for the people” led him into structural difficulties that he was unable to resolve.
Chapter One

The “Decline” of Chinese Art and the Rise of Figure Painting

In the early twentieth century, a prevalent view was held by the Chinese that their art was in decline, which arose from a comprehensive reevaluation of Chinese culture in the late 1910s. The first chapter of this dissertation will explore the evolution of the “decline” discourse surrounding Chinese art and will demonstrate how the category of “figure painting” assumed a crucial role within this discourse in the hands of painters.

I. Early Encounters of Chinese with European Art

The negative view that Chinese art was “in decline,” however, was not established overnight. Travelogues of the late Qing travelers to Europe reveal that Chinese intellectuals, including those who experienced European masterpieces, displayed a condescending attitude towards European art.

The late Qing reformist intellectual Wang Tao 王韬 (1828–1897) was perhaps the first Chinese traveler to encounter European masterpieces in situ. Invited by James Legge (1815–1917) to work in Scotland and translate Chinese classics from 1867 to 1870, Wang toured city after city on his way to the British Isles. In 1868, he visited the Louvre in Paris and documented his experience there in two entries in his famous travelogue, *Manyou Suilu Tuji* 漫游隨錄圖記 [The Illustrated Jottings from Carefree Travels] (1887). The first of these two entries records a spectacle concerning female art students at the Louvre:

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28 The route that Wang Tao took can be reconstructed from *The Illustrated Jottings from Carefree Travels*. He departed from Hong Kong by sea, sailing across South East Asia, around Aden, to the port Suez. He then reached Cairo by carriage and departed by sea again to Messina, and then to Marseille. From there he set off to Paris, where he stayed for about ten days. He then sailed across the strait to London, and from Edinburgh to his destination, the small town, Dollar, in central Scotland.
At the gallery, I witnessed a few women enter and begin to copy paintings. Some of them had a brush in hand, preparing painting materials and finished drafts; others applied colors. The washes were lively and animated...among these women there was one in her mid-teens, who had already painted six or seven works. All of them were landscapes in blue and green colors. The gradation of colors varied according to the distances and displayed a natural charm.

余至畫院，見有數女子入而臨畫，或雕鉛握槧，僅成粉本；或已施彩色，渲染生新...有一女子年僅十五六，所畫已得六七幅，皆山水也，悉著青綠色，濃淡遠近，意趣天然。29

In the second entry, Wang discusses European art from a macroscopic perspective:

Landscapes, flower and birds, figures, buildings, all of them attain the strengths of the respective genres, refined and requisite, and succeed in capturing the essence...The painting principles of the West prize resemblance to the object. They value the capturing of forms more than that of the spirit. As for the details, they are similar to the academic style of the Northern Song. The figures and buildings in Western paintings all appear to be protruding from afar and resemble actual objects. In art writings that evaluate artists, it is said that it is easy to fabricate non-existing objects but hard to capture existing ones. Thus, one should not take Western painting light-heartedly.

山水花鳥，人物樓臺，無不各擅其長，精妙入神...西國畫理，均以肖物為工，貴形似不貴神似。其工細刻畫處，略如北宋院本，人物樓臺，遙視之，悉堆垛凸起，與真逼肖。顧歷來畫家品評繪事高下者，率謂構虛易而徵實難，則西國畫亦未可輕視也。30

Wang Tao’s use of Chinese art terms deserves attention. In his first entry at the Louvre, Wang describes what he saw in terms of Chinese art: women art students paint in a “green and blue” (qingliu 青綠) palette; Chinese genres, such as “landscape” (shanshu 山水), “flower-and-bird” (huaniao 花鳥), “figures” (renwu 人物), and “buildings” (liutai 樓臺) abound; and finally,

30 See “Bowu daguan” 博物大觀 [Panorama of Museums], in Wang, 70–72.
occasionally the style is similar to “the academic style of Northern Song.” From this description alone, one can hardly tell that the Louvre Wang visited was displaying European art. It is thus not surprising that when Zhang Zhiying 張志瀛 (active late nineteenth century) illustrated this episode for Dianshizhai 點石齋, he depicted these female art students painting on scrolls lying on a table (fig. 2).

To the twenty-first-century mind, it is hard to understand why Wang Tao did not see some fundamental differences between European and Chinese paintings, such as Chinese scrolls versus European framed canvases, as well as differences in materials, sizes, and subject matter. However, travelogues written by other Chinese visitors reveal that Wang Tao’s reaction was typical of his generation. What they saw in European art were similarities with Chinese art, rather than differences. While these Chinese visitors were unanimously overwhelmed by the grandeur of the museum architecture, the relative accessibility of art collections by the public, and the resources devoted to the preservation of art objects in Europe and America, their descriptions also show that they mainly saw shanshui or huaniao in these museums. To use Chinese art terms to describe European paintings might have been expedient, yet some of these visitors even perceived Chinese

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31 Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (1818–1891), the first ambassador to be stationed in a foreign country in Chinese history (he was ambassador to both Great Britain and France), describes students studying shanshui, renwu, and huaniao, respectively, at the South Kensington Museum during his visit there in early 1876. Similarly, when another diplomat, Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838–1894), visited the Galleria Borghese in Rome, he admitted that he did not really like religious scenes of Jesus and Mary but relished in the ordinary shanshui, renwu, and huaniao there. For Guo’s description, see Songtao Guo et al., Guo Songtao, Liu Xihong, Xue Fucheng, and Song Yuren. Guo Songtao deng shixiji liu zhong 郭嵩燾等使西記六種 [Six Notes on the Visits to the West by Guo Songtao and Other Chinese Diplomats], ed. Wang Licheng, Zhongguo jindai xueshu mingzhu (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1998), 96–97. For Xue’s, see Xue Fucheng, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi si guo riji 出使西法意比四国日记 [Diary during Diplomatic Mission in the four nations of England, France, Italy, and Belgium], ed. Zhang Xuanhao and Zhang Yingyu, Zouxiang shijie congshu (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 320.
aesthetics in what they saw. An example was Li Shuchang 黎庶昌 (1837–1896), a diplomat who traveled extensively and was interested in art. After viewing a pencil drawing in the Prado, Li wrote:

One of them is a pencil drawing on paper depicting a place in Spain called Guadalajara. On the slanted side of the mountain, the pines line up sparsely into woods. Rays are diffused slightly on the other side of the mountain range and are complemented by a sketch of dark clouds in the valley. Occasionally, disarrayed crows take flight, decorating the hilltop with gentle grass, scattered rocks, sheep being herded, and the shepherd boy sitting with his legs stretched on the rocky ground. The brushwork and ink are affluent, with a calligraphic taste overflowing— it is the like of Wang Lutai [Wang Yuanqi 王原祁, 1642–1715] and Wang Shigu [Wang Hui 王翬, 1632–1717].

Not only could Li detect in a European landscape characteristics of the Qing masters Wang Yuanqi and Wang Hui, he could even perceive in a pencil drawing bimo 筆墨 (“brushstroke and use of ink”) and shuwei 書味 (“calligraphic taste”), both of which techniques were important aesthetic criteria in the literati painting of the late Qing period.

This phenomenon of “identifying Chinese elements in European art” recalls what Joseph Levenson (1920–1969) argues in the case of late-Qing bureaucrats, who looked for precedents for Western learning in pre-Modern Chinese history. As Levenson points out, this strategy of

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32 Li Shuchang assumed diplomatic posts in European nations, including England, France, Germany, and Spain, from 1877 onward. His record is more detailed than other visitors. He paid more attention to the subject matters of the paintings. For example, in the entry about his visit to the Prado, he described seeing one Madalana huiguo tu 馬達拉納悔過圖 (“the repentance of Magdalene”). For a brief introduction to Li, see Li Shuchang. Xiyang zazhi 西洋杂志 [Assorted Notes on the West], ed. Yu Yueheng and Zhu Xinyuan (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981), 5–19.
33 Li, 107.
privileging Chinese over Western art was so prevalent that it was adopted by those who both rejected and supported the introduction of Western learning into China.\textsuperscript{34} Similar to their contemporaries who located precedents for Western mathematics and physics in Chinese texts, Chinese viewers interpreted European art with Chinese aesthetic categories. In the fields of science and technology, this strategy was hardly persuasive: colonial powers had already demonstrated to the Chinese, with their gunboats, the superiority of European learning. The same, however, did not apply to visual arts. Chinese visitors’ perceptions of Chinese art elements in European art revealed strong confidence in their art tradition, and the seemingly neutral analogies of the late-Qing travelers were, in fact, highly critical. As expressed by Wang Tao, among major differences between Chinese and European art were the emphases on \textit{xieyi} 繪意 (“painting the spirit”) and \textit{xiexing} 繪形 (“painting the form”) respectively. To the late-Qing visitors who were well-versed in the literati tradition, this assignment of European art as \textit{xiexing} had already relegated it to a subordinate status in relation to Chinese art. Without a doubt, the ability to achieve the perfect resemblance of a form is a feat to be celebrated; however, the Chinese ideal always prioritized the spirit, to the extent that the appearance of the actual objects could be sacrificed.\textsuperscript{35} Li Shuchang’s further comments on European art are representative of this approach:

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\textsuperscript{35} The inferiority of \textit{xiexing} to \textit{xieyi} was regularly reiterated in Chinese art writings after the Northern Song dynasty. The most well-known and direct manifestation of this preference is Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037–1101) famous line that “If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness/his understanding is nearly that of a child.” Slightly after Su Shi, the poet Chen Yuyi 陳與義 (1090–1138), in a poem about ink plums, spelt out the same idea by means of the mythical story of Jiu Fang Gao 九方皋, who, as stated in \textit{Liezi 列子}, focuses on the inner spirit of horses rather than its external attributes. The lines, which read “When the idea is complete he does not seek for resemblance in colors / He was an incarnation of Jiu Fang Gao, the horse searcher” (意足不求顏色似，前身相馬九方皋) were so popular that it was frequently cited in Chinese art writings.
When Western painters decided to paint human figures and landscapes, they always strived to have their objects represented to attain physical resemblance; this differs from the approach of the Chinese who paint only the gist. [Western painting] could record a general resemblance, yet it could not convey the essence of the object. This is what Zhuangzi means by “to use this finger to show how a finger is not a finger [is no match for using not-this-finger to show how a finger is not a finger].”

西人作畫，往往於人物山水，必求其地其人而貌肖之，不似中國人之僅寫大意也。所記略得仿佛，惜乎其神妙之處皆不能傳，莊生所謂「以指喻指之非指者」也。36

Using a metaphor about metaphors in Zhuangzi, Li Shuchang dismisses the Western approach for its reliance on physical resemblance to convey spiritual transcendence of the actual landscape. In his opinion, this is no match for the Chinese approach, which neglects physical resemblance to convey spiritual transcendence. A similar, but less condescending, view can be found in the travelogue of Xue Fucheng 薛福成 (1838–1894):

Painting has existed in China for thousands of years. The emphasis is always on capturing the spiritual essence rather than the physical form, and it is those who show detachment, spiritual haughtiness, and simplicity that were praised as “divine.” Examples are Ni Yunlin [Ni Zan 倪瓚, 1301–1374] and Tang Baihu [Tang Yin 唐寅, 1470–1524], who painted with monochromatic ink. Their emphasis on capturing the ideas entitled them to be regarded as the most elegant among painters. Such is also the case for Wang Shigu’s [Wang Hui 王麓] landscapes and Yun Nantian’s [Yun Shouping 惇壽平, 1633–1690] flowers. Although their paintings were colored, these painters aimed at capturing the elusive spirit and foregrounding the transcendental savor, and their artistic achievements are inspired mainly by the non-physical. On the other hand, oil paintings by Westerners are strong at capturing the physical. Their early paintings show nothing remarkable–only 400 years ago the Italian Raphael invented a geometric method, which distinguished the depth from the shallow, the far from the near, the light from the dark, the concave from the convex, so precise that the representation does not miss a bit, and all layers appear to stand out and be suspended in the air. Viewed from tens of steps away, it is like looking at real mountains and rivers, real human figures, real buildings and terraces, and real forests. The frontal and profile views, brightness and shade, are well-layered, accurate and majestic in their variety. The Western method can also

capture the brightness of the rays of the sun, the colors of the clouds, and the forms of water and fire.

It is not certain what Xue means by the “geometric method” of Raphael; however, to modern art historians, his description, of course, suggests the Renaissance’s linear perspective. Similar to Wang Tao and Li Shuchang, Xue Fucheng was also drawing from his knowledge of xieyi and xiexing as a way of understanding the relation of Chinese art to European art. Although he described European art in more favorable terms than Li Shuchang, what he appreciated is Chinese art’s illusionistic power and ability to capture the ephemeral, rather than focus on form. Xue does not mention the artistic and emotional power of European art at all.

Xue Fucheng’s comments reveal traces of the ti-yong 體用 (“essence-function”) formula that was influential to his generation. Under the ti-yong formula, it was acceptable for foreign learning to be absorbed by the Chinese, but only in a limited sense for practical functions. Chinese learning (or more precisely, Confucian) remained the essence, or core, of China. To Xue and

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37 Xue, Chushi Ying Fa Yi Bi si guo riji, 320–21.
38 Li Chao, Zhongguo zaoqiyouhua shi [A history of oil painting in the early periods of China] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2004), 314.
39 Jonathan D Spence, The Search for Modern China (New York: Norton, 1990), 806.
others, European art was just one of the branches of Western learning that the Chinese could appreciate, but only for its practical values.

This subordination of European art to Chinese art by the Chinese can be located even earlier, with its appearance in the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644). While the illusionistic effects of European art techniques were attractive to the Chinese, these were conceptualized as being the result of a craft, not art. For example, the famous court painter, Zou Yigui 鄒一桂 (1686–1772), includes a short section in his Xiaoshan huapu 小山畫譜 (“The Painting Manual of Xiaoshan”) on xiyanghua 西洋畫 (“Western painting”):

Westerners are good at geometrics. Thus the light and dark, and spatial relationships in their painting, are precise to the utmost extent. The figures, buildings, and trees that they paint all have shadows. The pigments and brush they use are different from those in China. When painting shadows, they start from the wide side and proceed to the narrow, and the measurements are done with triangles. The palaces and chambers they painted on walls tempt viewers to enter. If learners of painting adopted a few of their techniques, it could be pleasing to the eye. However, it does not have any brushwork, and despite its meticulousness, it is more akin to the work of the craftsman, and thus it does not have a place in the hierarchy of painting.

A bureaucrat in the Beijing court for almost three decades, Zou Yigui had cooperated with the Italian painter, Giuseppe Castiglione (or Lang Shining 郎世寧, 1688–1766), under the command of the Qianlong emperor on multiple occasions, and was one of the few who had

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firsthand knowledge of European art. While he was not outright dismissive, in his opinion, European art did not even deserve to be classified as art; it was instead, at best, an eye-pleasing trifle.

Zou Yigui's contemporary, Ding Gao 丁皋 (d.1761), offered a similar view in his famous treatise, Xiezhen mique (also called Chuanzhen xinling 傳真心領, “Secrets of conveying truthfulness”) was included as the fourth volume of the highly popular Jieziyuan huapu 芥子園畫譜 (“The Painting Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden”)

[Ding Yi] Cheng asked: “About the gist of portraiture: is it nothing besides the contrast of yin and yang?”

“Yes.”

“If yes, then there is no better way to capture yin and yang than the Western method. When it is used to paint buildings and terraces, multiple layers can be shown; when it is used to paint waves, a thousand miles can be covered. Even when it is used to embellish wares and cauldrons, or diagrams and books, all of them look refined and delicate and attain artistic mastery. Isn’t it that although yin and yang are always the same, there are multiple ways of visualizing them?”

“The Western method is mainly inspired by kun [the earth], and its law governed by yin. Be it square or corrugated, be it shadowy or deep, it cannot exceed the [capturing of] the external and internal shapes [of the object], and everything is boiled down to specific lines. So, layers and spatial distances are shown by enhancing the concave areas, and wares and books are represented by emphasizing shadows. It can be adopted at will and arranged arbitrarily. Through the representation of corrugations, the effect of refinement is achieved; through the representation of depth and obscurity the effect of delicacy is achieved. By the crafty representation of lines and shadows in all their detail, the ideas of spatial distance and depth are thus conveyed. But the law of portraiture is drawn from qian [the heavens]; its law is manifested by the yang. It is circular and staunch; it is in motion and animated. Although the faces of every individual under the heavens consist of the same facial features, their positions, their forms and shapes vary in the thousands…”
While he is not as well-educated as Zou Yigui, Ding Gao’s justification is surprisingly metaphysical. The Western method, according to Ding, emphasizes shadows, and thus represents the *yin* 陰, the passive half of the *taiji* 太極, which is the ultimate metaphysical existence from which the world originated. Similar to Zou, his views on Western art are not entirely negative: Ding Gao does recognize its strength in capturing static, inanimate objects. However, when it comes to spiritual essence (*shen* 神), Western art fails. Spiritual essence is instead the realm of Chinese art, whose principles are derived from the *yang* 陽, the creative force of the metaphysical universe. The superiority of *yang* and *qian* 乾 (activeness and creativity) over *yin* and *kun* 坤 (passivity and subservience) is self-evident. The *yin* way may at times amaze viewers through its intricacies, but it is only a gimmick, one that should exclusively be used when representing inanimate objects. Where animation, or the spiritual, is concerned, the traditional Chinese way is the best choice.

42 Ding Gao, *Chuanzhen xinling* 傳真心領 [Secrets of Portraiture] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1992), 168–69. Ding Yicheng 丁以誠 (abbreviated as *Cheng* 誠 in the quotation) was Ding Gao’s son. It should be noted that *yin* and *yang* in Ding Gao represent a set of dichotomies. In the beginning of this dialogue both terms are relatively neutral—*yin* basically indicates “shadow” (*yinying* 陰影). It is only in Ding Gao’s reply that the superiority of *yang* over *yin* becomes the principle.
This confidence in Chinese art, as expressed by Zou Yigui and Ding Gao, was not only inherited by the late-Qing dynasty travelers but also persisted after the Xinhai Revolution, and could be found in those who already had a significant amount of exposure to European culture. In an article entitled “Zhong De huaxue zhi yitong” 中德畫學之異同 [Similarities and Differences between Chinese and German Painting], first published in the pro-German newspaper, Xiehebao 協和報, and later in the popular Dongfang zazhi 東方雜誌 [Eastern Miscellany] in 1912, the author Yao Baoming 姚寶名 continued to use Chinese categories to understand German art.43 Yao was a teacher of German at Peking University, whom we could assume with certainty to have better knowledge of European culture than most of his contemporaries.44 However, when he describes the art of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), he claims that:

The two paintings of John and Peter, Paul and Mark (painted in 1526) [the two panels of The Four Apostles] in the old gallery [the Alte Pinakothek] of Munich–they are just like the immortals and Buddhas by Wu Daozi of China.

在門心老畫院之約翰彼德及巴盧馬庫二圖（一千五百二十六年畫）直如我中國吳道子仙佛像。45

Not content with merely a visual analogy, Yao continues, stating that Chinese and European styles, too, share many similarities regarding pictorial techniques:

Some Western painting methods are similar to that of Xu Xi (boneless, but with color). But sometimes outlines are done with brush and ink; in that case, the Huang Quan style is also combined (ink outline with wash). As for the outlines, sometimes the traces of ink are still visible, but sometimes they are conveyed by color. It is only different when

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44 For example, Yao published a translation of the prologue of Heinrich Heine’s Lyrisches Intermezzo in Xin Jiyuan Xingqi Bao 新紀元星期報 [The New Era Weekly] in late 1912. See Xin Jiyuan Xingqi Bao, vol. 1, no. 2 (1912), 71.

the outlines are completely invisible. It is called *gou le* (“outlining”) if only ink is used. It is called colored *gou le* if color is applied afterward, and it is the same as Huang Quan. Furthermore, there is a “black and white” method, which is like that of Li Gonglin.

Finally, Yao suggests that even German and Chinese art shares similar trajectories in their development:

The painting of Germany is modeled according to that of Greece and Rome. German painting in the fifteenth century was in its nascent period, yet in the works by painters such as Dürer and Holbein a spiritual taste of splendid richness emerged, and they became the foundation of German painting. Although painters in the nineteenth century made much progress and put forward inventions, they could not escape from the limits that were already laid out. This setting of limits is similar to what the Chinese masters of the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming did—although painters in recent times display individual styles, they still cannot escape from the limits that had been laid down.

Even the title of the article suggests that Yao is comparing both similarities and differences between the two art traditions, while his conclusion implies that Chinese and German art are not that different. It should also be added that Yao demonstrates in the article that he was aware of the latest trends in European art, including the significance of the European Impressionists.

46 Yao, “Zhong De huaxue zhi yitong.”
47 Yao, “Zhong De huaxue zhi yitong.”
The faith of the Chinese in their art did not waver after the Xinhai Revolution. In the Chinese art world, it appeared as if nothing unusual had happened. Traditional art activities, such as poetry writing, calligraphy, and painting, remained an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the educated, regardless of political commitment. Although some forms of European art education, such as geometric drawing and watercolors, were incorporated in the new Chinese education system, they were only designed to prepare students by offering a better foundation for their future study of technology, and to a lesser extent, to nurture the aesthetic instincts of young people. Similarly, while art schools that provided instructions in European painting emerged in Shanghai, they were mainly vocational. The primary goal of these schools was to train students to paint stage decorations, commercial calendar cards, or posters. European art was thus still largely appreciated for its practical function, rather than its aesthetic value. It was not until 1918 that these views changed.

II. The “Decline” of Chinese Art

In the first half of 1918, two texts denouncing Chinese art, namely Kang Youwei’s 康有為 (1858–1927) Wanmu Caotang huamu 萬木草堂畫目 [Catalogue of the Painting Collection of

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48 Many high-ranked individuals who served both the Qing and the Republican government were themselves collectors, connoisseurs, and occasional practitioners of Chinese art. The best example was Xu Shichang 徐世昌 (1855-1939), pseudonym shuizhu cunren 水竹邨人 (“the villager of the water and bamboo”). Not only was he an accomplished artist himself, but he sponsored artistic activities in the North as well. For more about Xu Shichang, see Zhang Yongxiu, Zongtong huajia Xu Shichang 总统画家徐世昌 [President and painter, Xu Shichang] (Nanchang: Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 2009).

On the other hand, individuals who were more radical in politics also engaged in similar cultural activities. This was most typical among the members of the popular Nan she 南社 (The South Society). Instigated by the poet Liu Yazi 柳亞子 (1887–1958) and adopting the format of yaji 雅集 (“elegant gathering”), the members of Nan-she consisted of many who were involved in revolutionary activities and assumed important posts later in the early Republican government.
Wanmu Caotang] and Chen Duxiu’s 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) article, “Meishu geming–zhi Lü Cheng” 美術革命–致呂澂 [Art Revolution–in Response to Lü Cheng], were published.\(^49\) Despite the disparities between the loyalist, Kang, and the radical, Chen, in terms of political orientation and attitude towards traditional culture, their views as expressed in these texts were surprisingly similar in many respects. Both Kang and Chen believed that something had gone astray in Chinese art, which led to its “decline” and its current plight. Both suggested that European art could serve as a solution to this problem.\(^50\)

Written first, but published second in order, Kang’s catalog is a record of his collection of paintings. After the failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform (1898), Kang went into exile, extensively touring Europe, where he developed an idiosyncratic theory about the development of art. Written in October 1917 after the unsuccessful restoration, his catalog was published in June 1918, in the first issue of Zhonghua meishu bao 中華美術報 [Chinese Art News], the official magazine of the China Fine Arts School 中華專門美術學校.\(^51\) In the concluding passage, the author confesses that the details of the catalog were worked out basically from memory (which explains the brevity of each entry, containing only the name of the artist, the title of the painting, and the medium). The entries in the catalog are arranged chronologically, according to dynasties, and before each section, Kang elucidated his views on the art of each dynasty. From an artistic point of view, his painting

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\(^49\) *Wanmu caotang*, literally “the thatched hall of ten thousand trees,” was the name of Kang Youwei’s study.

\(^50\) From a historical point of view, the view that Chinese art was in decline was itself nothing new. For instance, the early Qing artist Wang Hui had already bemoaned the degeneration of the art of his time, with an equal urgency as that of Kang Youwei.

\(^51\) Established by the mainly self-taught Zhou Xiang 周湘 (1871–1933), it was the first art school in China that taught art using Western media.
collection was of little value: many were fakes, and his inclusion of paintings by his concubine, He Zhanli 何旃理 (1891–1915), also adds a less-than-credible aspect to the catalog.

Kang’s position is made direct at the beginning of the catalog: “Chinese art of recent times has declined to its very extreme!” However, he does not mean that Chinese art has always been in decline. Kang believed instead that the zenith of Chinese art could only be found in the court style of the Song Dynasty, and that there was nothing comparable to the art of China before the fifteenth century. The fortunes of Chinese art had only decreased with the rise of the xiéyi tradition since the time of the Northern Song:

It was in the Early Modern period that China began to import Zen ideas into painting, as in Wang Wei’s (701–761) *Banana Tree in the Snow*, which has been mistakenly overvalued. Afterwards, Su Shi (1037–1101) and Mi Fu (1051–1107) rejected the pursuit of verisimilitude and endorsed the literati taste instead. In the Yuan and the Ming dynasties, boundary painting was attacked as mere “craftsmanship” and was rebuffed. As the literati painter is neither trained nor specialized in observing and representing objects, he has only “spiritual attainment” to boast, and thus keeps painting landscape, or occasionally flowers or bamboo. His representations are all simple and careless, and the literati are complacent about his “spiritual resonance.” This kind of painting could be practiced sometimes, but to specialize in the representation of objects requires a craftsman to spend his whole life on it. But China looks down on craftsmanship, and this is why Chinese art declined in recent times. There is an anecdote that Huang Quan (903–965) was mocked for painting a bird that was craning its neck and stretching its leg at the same time: it was said that when a bird cranes its neck, it never stretches its leg, and vice versa. If even a dedicated craftsman such as Huang Quan could make these mistakes, how could we trust the literati painters, who painted as amateurs in their pastimes, to represent objects at their best? Isn’t it ridiculous to champion literati taste as orthodox?

惟中國近世以禪入畫，自王維作《雪裡芭蕉》始，後人誤尊之。蘇、米撿棄形似，倡為士氣。元、明大攻界畫為匠筆而擅斥之。夫士大夫作畫安能專精體物，勢必自寫逸氣以鳴高，故只寫山川，或間寫花竹。率皆簡率荒略，而以氣韻自矜。此為別派則可，若專精體物，非匠人畢生專詣為之，必不能精。中國既擯畫匠，此

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Kang’s use of the term *jiehua* ("boundary painting") requires explanation. While *jiehua* is commonly understood as a style for the representation of architecture in Chinese art, Kang equated it instead with the court style of the Northern Song. This liberty he takes with this term, however, does not alter his argument. In his opinion, it was the rise of literati painting, which emphasizes the expression of the spiritual, which led to the decline of Chinese art. This emphasis on *capturing the essence* was merely an excuse of the literati painters to justify a deficiency in their techniques and an amateurish approach. This artistic indolence, in Kang’s view, not only led to bad art, but also encouraged copying other paintings.

Despite these views about the decline of Chinese art, Kang Youwei still hoped that Chinese art could right itself. To do so, he believed that Chinese art had to revive a long-neglected emphasis on verisimilitude if it were to compete with the art of Europe and Japan:

Here I pronounce the solution: verisimilitude should be taken as the goal, not “capturing the spiritual essence”; colored *jiehua* should be the mainstream while monochromatic ink painting should be the variation; literati taste is valuable, but the court style is to be orthodox. This solution could help to neutralize the wrong theory that was prevalent in the last five hundred years, and Chinese art could be cured and have a chance to make further progress.

今特矯正之：以形神為主而不取寫意，以著色界畫為正，而以墨筆粗簡者為別派；士氣固可貴，而以院體為畫正法。庶救五百年來偏謬之畫論，而中國之畫乃可醫而有進取也。\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\) Kang, “Wanmu Caotang huamu.”

\(^{54}\) Kang, “Wanmu Caotang huamu.”
Although Kang mentions the Northern Song court style as the ideal throughout the preface to his catalog, he likely thought it both more realistic and convenient to learn from European art instead. Towards the end of his article, Kang suggests that his fellow Chinese artists follow the example of Castiglione, who synthesized Chinese and Western styles during the early Qing dynasty.

While Kang’s ideal “new Chinese art” still held a place for Chinese styles, Chen Duxiu took a more negative view. His “Meishu geming–zhi Lü Cheng” was not a formal article, but a response to an enthusiastic reader of Xin Qingnian [New Youth], Lü Cheng 呂澂 (1896–1989). Lü’s letter was, in fact, not really concerned about painting: he was more worried about how the term meishu 美術 (“fine arts”) was misused by some artists and societies as a term to attract viewers; he was afraid such misuse of the term might mislead those who could not tell what meishu really was. Lü touched little on painting in his letter. He explained, however, that meishu includes painting, sculpture, and architecture. His suggestions were more or less Kantian: Chinese intellectuals, he asserted, should, first of all, define the limitations, substance, and development of both Chinese and European meishu.56

In his response, Chen Duxiu paid little heed to what Lü Cheng had called for, and shifted his focus instead to an open attack on Chinese painting. Similar to Kang Youwei, Chen identified the

55 Lü Cheng was the younger brother of Lü Fengzi 呂鳳子 (1886–1959), who later gained considerable fame as an artist and art educator. Lü Cheng later turned to the study of Buddhism and was not involved much in art. It has been pointed out that Chen’s reply was actually not an answer to what Lü proposed. See Wang Yang, Yishu yu shidai de xuanze: Cong meishu geming dao geming meishu 艺术与时代的选择: 从美术革命到革命美术 [Choices of Art and Times: from Art Revolution to Revolutionary Art] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2011), 17.
56 Chen Duxiu, “Meishu geming–zhi Lü Cheng,” in Gu and Li, Bainian Zhongguo meishu jingdian wenku, 1:3.
predominance of the xieyi tradition as the culprit, but he was more specific in identifying the Qing painter, Wang Hui, as the cause:

To reform Chinese painting, the first thing to do is to get rid of Wang Hui, as we will need to adopt the realistic spirit of Western painting. Why is it so? Take the writer as an example. After a writer has adopted the realist idea, he can then use the devices of the ancients to express his talents and create his works, and does not have to worry himself with copying the ancients. Similarly, a painter must adopt realism to express his talent and paint his works, but at the same time not become trapped by the ancients. In the Song and the early Yuan, the painting of the various genres in Chinese art—human figures, animals, architecture, flowers, and trees—were still somewhat in the track of “realism.” It was the scholars who later rejected the court style and were dedicated narrow-mindedly to the pursuit of spiritual essence. This trend was first espoused by Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang [黃公望, 1269–1354], in the late Yuan, and furthered by Wen Zhengming [文徵明, 1470–1559] and Shen Zhou [沈周, 1427–1509], in the Ming, and it became even worse in the hands of the three Wangs in the Qing. Wang Hui’s painting is even recognized as the zenith of Chinese painting—but I think he is the conclusion of the evil tradition that could be traced to the likes of Ni Zan, Huang Gongwang, Wen Zhengming, and Shen Zhou.

Chen’s understanding of the time when the decline had begun was similar to that of Kang Youwei, except that he was more rhetorical and critical. His prescription was equally radical: he was calling for a complete Westernization of Chinese art, just as he had proposed for other branches of Chinese culture. He further criticized some prevalent practices in Chinese painting:

I have seen no fewer than two hundred paintings by Wang Hui from my family collection and elsewhere: fewer than one-tenth of them have a proper “title.” Most of them are products of the four artifices to remake old paintings, namely “copying,” “reproducing,”

57 Chen, “Meishu geming.”
“imitating,” and “mimicking [another’s style].” There is almost nothing created by him. This is the most negative influence that Wang Hui and his school left in the world of painting.

我家所藏和見過的王畫,不下二百多件,內中有“畫題”的不到十分之一,大概都用那“臨”、“摹”、“仿”、“擬”四大本領,複寫古畫,自家創作的,簡直可以說沒有，這就是王派留在畫界最大的惡影響。58

From the perspective of art history, the practices of *lin* 臨 (copying the original), *mo* 莫 (reproducing), *fang* 仿 (imitating the style of an earlier master), or *yi* 擬 (simulating one’s style) are theoretically viable in the pedagogy and production of Chinese painting. At the same time, in an age when many Chinese were suspicious of their own culture, these practices also were laden with the negative implications of being repetitive, or uncreative, and their prevalence was self-evident proof of the stagnant state of Chinese art.

As Li Weiming suggests, the actual influence of these two articles is hard to ascertain.59 However, Kang Youwei was crucial in the education of two artists who were important for the next generation: for instance, Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994) both looked up to Kang as their mentor in the late 1910s. As discussed further in the following section, Xu was very close to Kang, not just in his ideas, but in his use of art terminology as well. In contrast, Chen Duxiu’s manifesto was likely more influential amongst the populace. His article had been

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58 Chen, "Meishu geming."
59 See Li Weiming, “Kang Youwei Yu Chen Duxiu - 20 shiji Zhongguo meishushi de yi zhuang ‘gong’an’ ji qi xiangguan wenti 康有为与陈独秀 - 20世纪中国美术史的一桩“公案”及其相关问题 [Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu: A Case Study on 20th-Century Chinese Art History and Related Questions],” Meishu yanjiu 美术研究 [Art Research], no. 3 (1997): 47–51. Li downplays the significance of these two articles by pointing out that neither of them was included in Yao Yuxiang’s 姚漁湘 Zhongguohua taolun ji 中國畫討論集 (1932). I agree that Yao’s compilation was an important one and indicates the desire of the Chinese art world to keep a record of debates about Chinese art up to that point; however, Yao’s emphasis was on articles with a stronger academic tone rather than preserving historical documents. Clearly Kang and Chen’s would not qualify.
published in the highly popular *New Youth*. In addition, the perspective that he established about a lack of creativity in Chinese art was later picked up by many artists, continuing as one of the most powerful claims against traditional Chinese art.

By the time Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu announced their views, there were already others outside of China who had reached a similar conclusion. As Benjamin Elman notes, the negative view regarding Chinese art was a by-product of the fall of the Chinese empire on the global stage.60 The best illustration of this view could be found in Stephen Wootton Bushell (1844–1908), the English sinologist. In his *Chinese Art* (1904), Bushell divided the development of Chinese painting into three periods, namely the “Primitive Period” (up to 264 C.E.), the “Classical Period” (265–960 C.E.), and finally the “Period of Development and Decline” (960–1643 C.E.).61 Bushell’s claim for this gradual decline was based on his view that Chinese art in general had displayed a lack of innovation since the Ming dynasty. In his opinion, this “decline” continued into the contemporary period:

The general decadence of art which set in towards the close of the Ming dynasty is declared to have become *un fait accompli* under the Manchu line, and there is no room here to search for any exceptions to the rule; nor is there yet any renaissance in sight.62

It is obvious to most art historians today that Bushell’s periodization is overly simplistic and ambiguous; Chinese critics at the time also pointed out that his understanding of Chinese painting was superficial.63 Take as an example his discussion of the Ming dynasty: Bushell raises only Lin

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60 This was suggested by Elman in his 2015 Hu Shih Distinguished Lecture entitled “The Great Reversal: China, Korea, and Japan in the Early Modern World,” delivered April 10, 2015.
61 Bushell, *Chinese Art*, 117.
62 Bushell, *Chinese Art*, 144.
63 For a detailed discussion on periodization in Chinese art history texts, see Duan Hanwu, “Minguo shiqi Zhongguo huihuashi xushu moshi yanjiu” 民國時期中國繪畫史敘述模式研究 [Study on the Narrative Modes of Chinese Art Histories Published in the Republican Period]” (PhD Diss, Zhejiang University, 2006).
Liang 林良 (1436–1487) and Qiu Ying 仇英 (c.1494–1552) as the representatives of painting this dynasty that lasted for 276 years. From an art history perspective, even though Lin and Qiu were not to be ignored in any art historical narrative of the Ming, their artistic achievements and historical significance were hardly comparable to masters such as Shen Zhou or Wen Zhengming, who were absent in Chinese Art. Despite its flaws, Bushell’s history was highly regarded in China for its theoretical completeness. It was first translated in part in Beijing Daxue Rikan 北京大學日刊 [Peking University Daily] in 1918, and then prefaced by the headmaster Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940) and published by Commercial Press in 1923.

A similar understanding regarding the development of Chinese art was shared by those in Japan. The most vociferous supporter of “the decline” in Chinese art was the American philosophy teacher Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). In the preface of his Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design (1912), he includes a diagram to illustrate the fortunes of Chinese and Japanese art as mapped over time (fig. 3). When describing its recent development, Fenollosa’s wording closely follows that of Bushell:

The decay of modern Chinese art, already foreshadowed by the middle of the Ming dynasty, is most conspicuous in pictorial art—in all forms of art, in fact, that involve high imagination.

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64 See the book review “評白謝爾 S. W. Bushell 著的中國美術” by an individual with the penname Guanjun 冠軍, published in Zaoxing meishu 造型美術 [Plastic Arts], (1924).
65 It was translated by a certain Dai Yue 戴嶽. The book version was based on Dai’s translation and further edited and reviewed by Cai Yuanpei.
A sense of contempt for Chinese culture can be detected in Fenollosa’s tone. In addition to this publication (which appeared posthumously in 1912), his thoughts were disseminated among the younger generation of Japanese scholars through other avenues. For example, in a speech that he gave in 1882 at the Museum of the Ministry of Education (today’s Kokuritsu Kagaku Hakubutsukan 国立科学博物館), he also stated that Chinese art had begun its decline after its peak during the Tang and Song dynasties. Fenollosa’s Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art was also translated in Peking University Daily in the late 1920.

Although Japanese scholars after Fenollosa were more positive about Chinese art, a similar bias lurked in their narrations of Chinese art history. This bias is exemplified in Shina Kaigashi 支那絵画史 (“History of Chinese Painting,” 1912), co-authored by Nakamura Fusetsu 中村 不折 (1868–1943) and Oga Seiun 小鹿 青雲 (active twentieth century). In the introduction to the chapter on the Qing dynasty, the authors state that after the reign of Emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1760–1820, r. 1796–1820), art in China had “faded” in obvious ways, and little progress could be noted after that. This short art history was later used by Chen Shizeng 陳師曾 (1876–1923) and Pan Tianshoup 潘天壽 (1897–1971), two painters committed to traditional Chinese art, as the basic reference for their teaching and writing.

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67 As the Japanese scholar Kohara Hironobu 古原宏伸 argues, Fenollosa’s negative view was largely conditioned by the mediocre Chinese art works from the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty imported to Japan. See Kohara Hironobu, “Riben de Zhongguo huaxu yu yanjiu” 日本的中国画收藏与研究 [The Collection and Research of Chinese Paintings in Japan], Duoyun 朵云, no. 40 (January 1994).
68 See Bijutsu shinsetsu 美術真說 (Tokyo: Ryūchikai, 1882).
69 It was translated by the obscure Li Sijie 李四杰 but not published as a book.
To describe the development of an art tradition with such a judgmental term as “in decline” is odd to contemporary art historians, yet this idea was widely accepted by the Chinese for the larger part of the twentieth century. Although a few voices denied a decline or even argued for the contrary in the first half of the twentieth century, the declinist thesis was so powerful that a list of those ascribing to this view encompassed the most prominent names in the Chinese art world. While the exact details of the “decline” might differ, most of the arguments did not depart notably from the benchmark initiated by Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu. In many cases, the predominance of literati painting was blamed as the cause, and the common shortcomings of Chinese art included a lack of verisimilitude, creativity, a tendency for repetitiveness, and amateurism.

III. The Rise of Figure Painting in the “Decline” Discourses

Among Chinese artists, the young painter Xu Beihong was likely the first to respond to the purported decline of Chinese art. In his lecture, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa” 中國畫改良之方法 [Ways to Improve Chinese Painting], later transcribed and published in Beijing Daxue Rikan (May 1918), Xu, then an instructor in the Huafa Yanjihui 畫法研究會 (“Painting Methods Research Society”) of Peking University, discussed how Chinese art could rise above this condition. Xu’s tone in the first part of his lecture, as evidenced in his statement of the problem, and the solution he proposed, and even his wording, were influenced by the ideas of his then

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71 A list of significant artists subscribing to this belief of “decline” was compiled by Yu Yang in his dissertation. For a more detailed list, see Yu Yang, “Jibian yu shouhu de xiandai qiusuo” 激變与守護的現代求索 [Seeking for Modern in Progressive or Conservative] (PhD Diss, Central Academy of Fine Arts, 2007). The most notable painter who held the opposite view was Huang Binhong, who claimed that there was a “revival” in Chinese art from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century.

72 The lecture was given at Peking University on May 14, 1918 and was published on May 23 to 25, 1918.
mentor, Kang Youwei. It is only in the last two sections, which were devoted to landscape and figure painting respectively, that Xu Beihong revealed his painter’s acumen. Although Xu also criticized Chinese landscape painting, he still affirmed its achievements. He praised Yun Shouping’s art as being *chunhou* (“mellow and rich”) and was positive toward other masters of the literati tradition, such as Ni Zan, Wang Meng 王蒙 (1308–1385), and Shen Zhou. The weaknesses in Chinese art that he pointed out were correctable, he believed, and he provided precise instructions about how they could be tackled. For example, he suggested that Chinese painters should represent clouds with ink wash instead of lines, and that they should be more specific about the types of trees they paint. In the concluding remarks for this section, he even suggested that Chinese landscape represents a set of aesthetics different from that of its European counterpart:

> In Chinese art shadows are not represented, thus its taste is very different from that of European painting. Yet attention should still be paid [to this aspect], for fear that the interior might look indistinguishable from the courtyard or the window side [under light].

> 中國畫不寫影，其趣遂與歐畫大異。然終不可不加意，使室隅與庭前窗下無別也。

Xu’s tone toward Chinese landscape painting is mild and his criticism indirect. In contrast, he was unequivocally critical of figure painting in China up to his time. In his opinion, recognized

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73 As Xu Beihong puts it, Chinese art should “retain those that are good in the tradition, continue those waning, correct those not good, implement those not enough, and integrate those that can be absorbed from Western painting” (古法之佳者守之，垂絶者繼之，不佳者改之，未足者增之，西方畫之可採入者融之). See Xu Beihong, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa,” in Gu and Li, Bainian Zhongguo meishu jingdian wenku, 1:5.

74 In his words, “landscape has always been the prominent genre in Chinese art, and each school has its characteristic ways of representing mountains and rocks” (吾國古今講求山水，故於山石，各家皆有獨到處). Xu, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa.”

75 Xu, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa.”
figure painters in Chinese history, such as the legendary Wu Daozi 吳道子 (c.680–759) or the individualistic Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598–1652), were all flawed in one way or another:

Wu Daozi was obsessed with his own imagination, and his representations of the people of India are all too short, and the body form does not follow the measurements in particular—[from this perspective] the “saint of painting” is over! Chen Laolian [Hongshou] is someone famous for his figures, too. He always painted his beauties with large chins, maybe this he deemed as “beautiful,” yet we cannot agree. His old men are all dwarfs: not the dwarfs from China, but those from Japan. The figures are always draped in raw silk garments, regardless of the season. The eyes are always small and squinted, and the two halves of the faces resemble one another; the nostrils are only represented with one stroke. But he never intended to set himself as an example for later ages. Although painters after him abandon their wisdom willfully and copy Chen Hongshou slavishly, that has nothing to do with him.

Xu does not mention anything positive about Chinese figure painting. Its characteristic strengths, such as the use of calligraphic brushwork for draperies, and the concern for the spiritual, are simply ignored. Surprisingly, Xu is mute on late-Qing figure painting specialists, such as Ren Bonian 任伯年 (1840–1895) and Wu Youru 吳友如 (1850–1893), both of whom he held in high regard later in life. His suggestions to improve figure painting were also of little practical value. Interlaced with an attack on the ills of the less-than-naturalistic representations of the human body

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76 Xu, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa.”
77 As Xu Beihong recalled later in his life, he showed a painting by Ren Bonian to Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852–1929), one of his teachers in the Académie, and the latter was impressed. In his autobiographical article “Beihong zishu” 悲鴻自述 [Xu Beihong’s Story as Recounted by Himself], he claims that he made a copy of Wu Youru’s print every day when he was young. See “Beihong zishu,” in Liang You, no. 46 (1930), 12.
are his views that painters should follow fadu 法度, rather than the style or schemata of any particular school.\textsuperscript{78} What he called fadu likely meant proportions, yet Xu did not even care to define, not to mention elaborate, this term. In short, if the purpose of this lecture was to suggest solutions to improving Chinese art, the young Xu Beihong likely believed that the condition of landscape painting was much better than that of figure painting. While it was true that both were “in decline,” figure painting was the area that required much more effort. However, Xu did not provide any concrete advice at this point. Though ambitious, it was only later, in Europe, that he would encounter another figure painting tradition that would ultimately inspire him.

The negative opinion about Chinese figure painting held by Xu Beihong did not dissipate after his departure to France in 1919. Chen Shizeng, a renowned champion of traditional Chinese art in the 1920s, also realized that figure painting was an issue to be tackled. Coming from a prominent family, and having been educated in Tokyo, Chen was one of the few artists in the 1920s who believed that Chinese art was not inherently backward, although he was not against reform.\textsuperscript{79} In late 1921, he gave a public lecture in Beijing entitled “Zhongguo renwuhua zhi bianqian” 中國人物畫之變遷 [The Transition of Chinese Figure Painting].\textsuperscript{80} This historical outline given by Chen was brief and conventional, yet he intriguingly began his talk by suggesting a link between Chinese figure painting and the development of Chinese art in general:

\textsuperscript{78} Xu, “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa.”


\textsuperscript{80} This talk was transcribed and published in \textit{Minguo Ribao: Juewu} 民國日報 覺悟 [The Republican Daily–Awakening] on September 1, 1921 and \textit{Dongfang zazhi} in September 1921. The talk was probably delivered in late August. See \textit{Minguo Ribao: Juewu}, vol. 9, no. 1 (1921), 1–2; \textit{Dongfang zazhi}, vol. 18, no. 17 (1921), 117–120.
I think the development of Chinese figure painting is a topic that is worth researching. The more I research it, the more interesting I find it is. Figure painting is the most developed in painting, as it is most related to human life.

When Chen states that “figure painting is the most developed in painting,” it is hard to discern if he means that Chinese figure painting was the most developed genre or that figure painting in general was the most developed because of its affinity with human life. In 1921, Chen wrote another article entitled, “Huihua yuanyu shiyong shuo” [On the Practical Origin of Painting], where the discussion is not limited to Chinese art. However, Chen still concluded that Chinese art was progressive, using figure painting as an example:

Now it has been claimed that Western painting is “progressive,” whereas Chinese painting is not—but I would say that Chinese painting is progressive as well. As I have demonstrated, the progress made in figure painting from the Han to the Six Dynasties was huge; and from the Six Dynasties to the Sui and Tang, there was also discernable progress; it was only from the Song to the modern times that this genre came to a standstill.

It is interesting that Chen used figure painting to defend Chinese art against the claim that it was in decline, especially because he had to concede that the development of this genre had stalled

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81 Chen, “Zhongguo renwuhua zhi bianqian.”
82 It was published in the first issue of Huixue zazhi [Painting Studies Magazine] in 1920.
83 Chen, “Zhongguo renwuhua zhi bianqian.”
since the Song dynasty.\textsuperscript{84} It might be a stretch to conclude that Chen was responding directly to Xu Beihong’s speech, but if Chen’s proximity with Xu in the late 1910s is taken into account (both of them were instructors for \textit{Huaxue Yanjiuhui} at Peking University), his apology for Chinese art with the example of figure painting seems to be related to the young Xu’s ideas.

Notably, in a following article entitled “Zhongguo huihua shi jinbu de” [Chinese Painting is Progressive], which was published in \textit{Huixue zazhi} [Painting Studies Magazine], a magazine published by \textit{Huaxue Yanjiuhui} in November of 1921, Chen again quotes figure painting extensively in support of his claim that “Chinese art is progressive.” At the beginning of this article, he reminds his readers that he discussed this same topic briefly the previous winter (1920) in a lecture at Tsinghua School (later Tsinghua University). Chen had thus defended Chinese art publicly at least three times and had done so each time using examples taken from figure painting, which, as Chen had also admitted, had not progressed within the previous eight hundred years. It is reasonable to surmise, then, that the sensitive Chen Shizeng must have felt a strong urge to defend Chinese figure painting at this point, which was likely in response to the pessimistic view as represented by Xu Beihong’s “Zhongguohua gailiang zhi fangfa.”

Aside from a response to Xu, Chen’s repetition of his views on figure painting can be explained further with the increasing popularity of the practice and discourse of \textit{renxi} [People].

\textsuperscript{84} In cases when he was discussing landscape and flower-and-bird, the two other major genres in Chinese art, concepts such as \textit{decline} or \textit{progress} were nowhere to be found. In the first issue of \textit{Huixue zazhi} published in June 1920, Chen Shizeng contributed two articles, \textit{Qingdai shanshui zhi paibie} [The Various Schools of Landscape Art in the Qing Dynasty] and \textit{Qingdai huahui zhi paibie} [The Various Schools of Flower Painting in the Qing Dynasty]. These articles were descriptive rather than argumentative.
體寫生 (“life model drawing”) in China. As the Taiwanese scholar Wu Fangzheng points out, the loftiness and artistic value of the nude was gradually established and accepted towards the early 1920s in Shanghai, which was marked by the efforts of Liu Haisu and his associates in particular. In their writings and speeches, artists and art educators justified to the public the necessity of the nude with ideas such as “the pursuit of beauty,” “signs of civilization,” or “progress,” which were understood to be at the core of the strength of European civilization. For example, during the foundation of the Fine Arts Research Society 美術研究會 (meishu yanjiuhui) in the Jiangsu province, as early as in 1918, the chairman of the society, Shen Enfu 沈恩孚 (1864–1944), gave a public defense of the nude in his opening speech:

Drawing from a life model is at the basics of painting in all nations, but it is not the case here in China: it is thought to be corrupting public morals. People who are against this practice have no idea that it is the nude—with the texture of the muscles—that is the most difficult to be approximated and represented; that is why all other countries emphasize drawing from the nude, as they think that it could convey real beauty. Here in China this is believed to be the most dangerous threat to public morals. These different attitudes show that there is a huge divide between China and the West, and that is how the standard of civilization is judged.

例如人體寫生，為各國畫學上之基本法術；而在吾國，則以為有關風化。殊不知人的裸體，其肌肉凹凸，最難摹仿，最難繪出，是以各國均注重於裸體寫生，以為裸體畫最能顯出真美，而吾國以為此種裸體寫生最為敗壞風化之事，此東西之思想高下之不同，而文野之程度亦由是而高下也。86

85 Wu Fang-Cheng, “Luo de liyou: ershi shiji chuqi Zhongguo renli xiesheng wenti taolun” 裸的理由－二十世紀初期中國人體寫生問題的討論 [The Reason for the Nude: Questions Concerning Nude Figure Drawing in China at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century], New History 新史學 15, no. 2 (June 2004): 70–87.
86 See “Meishu yanjiuhui chengli jishi” 美術研究會成立紀事 [Report on the Foundation of Fine Arts Research Society], Shenbao, October 8, 1918.
According to Shen Enfu, the nude was not only the epitome of artistic mastery, but it also represented the pursuit of truth and beauty in European art.\(^{87}\) It was a symbol of civilization that the Chinese should learn to appreciate. While the nude does not equal figure painting, the popularity of this European practice inspired more artists to reflect on the perceived lack of development of this genre. One of them was Zhu Yingpeng 朱應鵬 (b. 1895), an oil painter, who also worked as an editor for important newspapers, such as *Shenbao* and *Shibao* 時報.\(^{88}\) In April 1923, in his column in the *Shibao Tuhua Zhoukan* 時報圖畫周刊 [Shibao Pictorial Weekly], Zhu bemoaned the fact that figure painting in China had never developed theories as exquisite and refined as that of landscape:

> When I compare the various genres of Chinese painting, I always come up with the following idea: I feel that, in the research and endeavors of our ancestors, there are aspects in the genre of landscape that have been well-developed. In contrast, it is figure painting that is the most deficient. Figure painting before the Song and the Yuan is mainly schematic. The more recent ones such as Gai Qi (1774–1829) and Fei Danxu (1802–1850) and their respective followers began to pay more attention to gestures, but they did not research the structures of the human body and muscles or the representation of actions and emotions, and not even the distinction between male and female bodies. From a historical point of view, not only have there been fewer masters in figure painting than in landscapes, but theories on figure painting are also not as well-developed as those on landscapes—this is a real disappointment.

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\(^{87}\) It should be noted that this discourse of the loftiness of European art based on an emphasis on the nude appeared in China much earlier. Julia Andrews included an example from *Shibao* in July 1917. See An Yalan 安雅蘭 (Julia F. Andrews), “Luotihua lunzheng ji xiandai Zhongguo meishushi de jiangou” 裸體畫論爭及現代中國美術史的建構 [Debates on the Nude and the Construction of Modern Chinese Art History], in Li Zhao and Yu Ding (eds.), *Zhongguo youhua wenxia 1542–2000 中國油畫文獻 1542–2000*.

\(^{88}\) Zhu is, in the main, only remembered now for his argument with Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936). However, it should be remembered that he was very active in art circles before the Second Sino-Japanese War and maintained close connections with the Nationalist Party. For a brief biography, see Fei Peng, “Zhu Yingpeng de zanyang yu piping - Lin Fengmian yanjiu zhi jiu 朱應鵬的赞扬与批评—林凤眠研究之九 [Zhu Yingpeng’s Praise and Critique: Studies on Ling Fengmian, part IX],” *Rongbaizhai* 荣宝斋, no. 6 (2007): 268.
Zhu Yingpeng further proposed that the revival of Chinese art should begin with the study of the human figure in *renti xiesheng*. By *renti xieshang*, however, Zhu did not just mean drawing from the nude, but the study of the representation of human motions and emotions in a more general sense. In his opinion, once this was mastered by Chinese artists, art in general (landscape and flower-and-bird inclusive) would also be revitalized:

To reform Chinese painting we should start with the drawing of the human body: to use Chinese ink and brush to represent the bodies and figures of the Chinese, that is the type of new art that we should have. When the research on the representation of the figure is complete, the art of landscape and flowers will also receive new impetus. Therefore, in future artworks the taste can be infinitely enriched from scratch, and the horizon can be infinitely expanded.

革新國畫，當然應從人體寫生入手。用中國的筆墨，表現中國人的體格，正是藝術界應有的新運動。若人體畫研究完備以後，山水花卉，必也受一種新影響。那末未來的作品中，就能平添無限的趣味，擴充無限的境界。90

Zhu Yingpeng’s view was echoed by Liu Kaiqu 劉開渠 (1904–1993), who later departed for France to study sculpture. In an article entitled “Lun renwuhua zhi nan yu xiantiao de zhongyao” 論人物畫之難與線條的重要 [On the Difficulties of Figure Painting and the Importance of the

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Lines], published in the popular *Chenbao Fukan* 晨報副刊 [Chenbao Supplement] in 1926, Liu argues that the neglect of figure painting had contributed to the current plight of Chinese art:

> According to art history writings, figure paintings counted for about 80% of the oeuvre of painters during the Jin, Tang, and the Six Dynasties. In those days painters did landscape only occasionally. But since then, most artists have ignored ever-changing figure painting and focused on subjects like landscape instead, thus in terms of pictorial forms these artists could not make discoveries, and in terms of techniques they could not open up new realms; they devoted all their energies to “pursuing the past,” “copying the past,” and thence the once illustrious Chinese painting tradition diminished day after day, and now, not even the slightest spark could be seen.

我國晉唐六朝的畫家，據畫史上的記載，他們一生的作品，人物要佔十分之八，山水等不過偶然為之而已。自此直到現在，一般學畫的人捨去了變化無窮的人物畫，專探山水等畫，以致在形式不能有所發現，技巧上不能另闢新方面，一天盡在「追古」、「仿古」，結果光焰萬丈的中國繪畫史，愈來愈微，到了現在，油燭大一點火光也看不見了。91

In Liu Kaiqu’s opinion, the stagnant state of figure painting in history went hand in hand with the overall loss of vitality of Chinese art. For this reason, Liu, like Zhu Yingpeng before him, urged artists to devote themselves to the research of figure painting. While Zhu and Liu were both trained in Western art, they did not simply propose the study of the nude as the solution. What they asked Chinese painters to work on instead was the representation of the human body, which, as they understood it, was a universal requirement for all artists regardless of artistic commitment.

Aside from the debate on the artistic value of figure painting, there were also Chinese artists who saw the neglect of the genre in Chinese art as a sign of its lack of social engagement. This view originated from the discourse that Chinese art was *in decline* because of the predominance of literati art. To many Chinese, mainstream literati artists paid no heed to what happened around

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them in the real world, but instead continued to paint their spiritual cultivation in ways that they inherited from the previous masters. This view was expressed by Ni Yide 倪贻德 (1901–1970), an oil painter who studied painting in Japan and was active in avant-garde circles in Shanghai:92

But what they are representing in their paintings are still the remains of the ancient: the same figures in scholarly headgear and costumes, the same boats with sails, and the same pavilions in the willow trees: we certainly could still feel these things now, but is there anything new besides these?

而他們在繪畫上所表現的，卻仍舊是些古代的遺留品，方巾寬衣的人物仍舊是方巾寬衣，撐風篷的船仍舊是撐著風篷，綠楊影裡的樓臺亭閣仍舊是樓臺亭閣，固然這些東西我們現在還可以感到，但除此之外莫非再沒有新的事物感到了嗎？

For Chinese art to become relevant for the twentieth century, Chinese painters had to depict contemporary events and sentiments that could resonate with viewers. A key figure, who supported figure painting for its potential to engage with its contemporary period, was Fang Rending from the Lingnan School. In 1935, soon after he returned from Japan, he wrote:

An idealistic bias has always haunted Chinese painters: it is worth the effort to paint scenes of lavishness and extravagance, but not lives in the marketplace and the slummy alleyways. This bias condemns works depicting customs and lives of modern times as “vulgar.” This bias is a feudal burden; we should know that this view has obstructed the advances of modern practitioners of national painting.

向來在國畫家當中，以描寫豪華富貴為貴，以描寫市井陋巷的生活為卑的一種理想主義的思想。這種思想，對於以現代風俗生活做題材的作品，皆視為卑俗，這明明是封建的遺產，這種遺產，是把現代國畫家的藝術思想的進步，顯著地妨碍的東西，我們應該知道的。

92 For a basic biography of Ni Yide, see Sullivan, Modern Chinese Artists, 119.
If the technical skill to capture the verisimilitude of the body is what Chinese art lacked artistically, the motivation to paint human affairs is what Chinese art lacked from a social perspective.

The discourse of the decline of Chinese art and its association with figure painting had gradually built up by the 1920s. On the one hand, Chinese figure painting was perceived by Chinese artists to be stagnant, and this lack of development was connected with a perception of an overall decline of Chinese art. On the other hand, while most Chinese only had a vague understanding of European art, the status of figure painting was on the rise, promoted by the Chinese as a symbol of European progress.

IV. European Figure Painting for China

Chinese artists’ experimentation with figure painting had begun even before the decline discourse emerged in 1918. Scholars always quote Chen Shizeng’s Customs of Beijing 北京風俗圖 (1914–1915) as an example.93 Consisting of thirty-four leaves, each work in this series offers a separate episode of the lives and customs in Beijing. With regard to concept and format, Customs of Beijing was a reinterpretation of the tradition of peasantry representation that could be traced to Zhou Chen 周臣 (1460–1535) of the mid-Ming. Despite his urgent defense of Chinese figure painting, Chen was, for the most part, not a figure painter. His premature death in 1923 also brought a halt to further possibilities.

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93 It has also been argued that Chen Shizeng was incorporating certain European techniques (such as modeling) in this set. For a comprehensive study on Beijing fengzu tu, see Lu Hsuan-fei 呂宣妃, “New Insights on the Evidence of Japanese Influence in Chen Shizeng’s Beijing Customs Album” 陳師曾《北京風俗圖》中的日本啟示, Taida Journal of Art History, vol. 28 (2010), 185–246.
Artists committed to European art were more active in introducing foreign figure painting into China. By the 1920s, figure paintings by Chinese oil painters were confined to single-figure compositions, such as nude studies or portraits. Because of a lack of systematic training in the techniques, history, and theory of oil painting, most artists were still experimenting with the proper use of materials and naturalistic representations of the body. However, there were some who endeavored to break this deadlock. Li Yishi 李毅士 (1886–1942), one of the earliest Chinese painters to receive training in Europe, is counted among them. Although he joined Peking University first as a teacher of mathematics, in 1918 Li was hired as an instructor in the Painting Research Society. He became entirely involved in art and art education thereafter. Besides his contribution to art education, Li Yishi is remembered as the arbitrator of the famous debate between the painter Xu Beihong and the Romantic poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897–1931), with his article “Wo bu ‘huo’” 我不「惑」 [I am Not “Confused”], which was written for the First National Exhibition held in 1929.

Existing work suggests that Li Yishi was more ambitious than other oil painters of his times. In his early life-size portrait of Chen Shizeng (1920), Li already sought to represent the inner world of the sitter by associating him with objects that symbolized Chen’s interest in Chinese culture (fig. 4). Li Yishi also ventured into narrative scenes and more sophisticated compositions. An example is Dream of the Red Chamber 紅樓夢圖 (1918), which depicts the fateful encounter of the lovers, Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, in the namesake novel (fig. 5). Pictorially speaking,
the human figures are represented convincingly in terms of proportion, only that the overall treatment is awkward. The lovers are cast in profile, with their backs facing the viewers, thus forfeiting the possibility of conveying more emotional content via their countenances. Moreover, the composition gives an impression of a snapshot from a theatrical stage, a feeling that is heightened by the empty foreground. Another oddity is the over-emphasis given to decorative objects, from the tea table (or stool) in the center of the foreground, to the array of objects that includes a table screen, hat stand, and statue whose facial features and postures resemble those of Lady Shi 史太君 by the window.

Li Yishi’s most well-known attempt in figure painting was his series *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* 長恨歌畫意 (1926–29), which could be found amongst a wealth of portraits, landscapes, and still lifes in the *xihua* 西畫 section (“western painting”) at the First National Exhibition of 1929. As its title suggests, the thirty small-scale paintings (measuring 22.5 × 17 cm each) were episodes from Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772–846) namesake poem. Much like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the representation of the figures in this set appears static and unnatural. However, Li’s endeavor to create diversity through postures, costumes, types, and compositions should be given credit. Moreover, while the majority of the episodes were structured according to a theatrical setting, Li also tested with new ideas. For instance, he merged the nude with a historical episode by including the protagonist Yang Guifei 杨貴妃 naked in a bathing scene; one might also note

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96 The set was conceived even earlier. In an article published in *Chenbao fukan* in 1923, a certain Huang Zhonghui 黃仲晦 was defending a number of *heibaihua* 黑白畫 by Li Yishi against the critic/writer Xu Qinwen 許欽文 (1897–1984). A number of works by Li Yishi was mentioned, and their titles were taken from lines in *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. *Heibaihua* should have been drafted in pencil. See “Duiyu Xu jun Qinwen ‘Kanle Yaboluo zhanlanhui youdu Qian jun Daosun dui zhe hui de ganxiang yihou’ wen de ganxiang”對於許君欽文看了「阿博洛展覽會又讀錢君稻孫對這會的感想以後」文的感想, *Chenbao fukan*, 25 January 1923.
that several scenes were rendered in two-point perspective, which was not common in art (fig. (fig. 6 and 7). Reception to Song of Everlasting Sorrow was polarized: while the work was highly praised by notables such as Cai Yuanpei and Yu Youren 于右任 (1879–1964), it was also dismissed by the cynical Lu Xun, who condemned it as a symbol of philistinism. 97 Li Yishi was to continue his experimentation, with varying degrees of success. 98

Liang Dingming 梁鼎銘 (1898–1959) was another painter who challenged conventions in the realm of figure painting. Due to his connections with the Nationalist government, he had enviable material resources that allowed him to paint scenes featuring recent events, with sizes comparable to European history paintings. His first attempt was Bloodstains at Shaji 沙基血跡 (1926), a huge painting that dramatized the atrocities of the Shaji Massacre (fig. 8). On June 23, 1925, foreign troops stationed in the leased area of Shamian 沙面 in Guangzhou opened fire on a group of protestors on the opposite shore of Shaji in support of the May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai, causing fifty-two dead and another 171 heavily injured. 99 Liang, who had just joined the Huangpu Military Academy as the editor of its official periodical, painted a large-size canvas memorializing this event. The painting contains a variety of figures with individual expressions

97 This set was highly popular in the 1920s. According to the research of the Taiwanese scholar I Lo-fen, this set was republished seven times by 1932. See I Lo-fen. For a negative contemporary critique, see Xu Guangping 許廣平, Xu Guangping yi Lu Xun 許廣平憶魯迅 (“Memories of Xu Guangping about Lu Xun”), (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1979), 108.
98 Besides Zhou shao seng duo 粥少僧多 (“Too little congee, too many monks,” 1930), Li Yishi also submitted a sketch for The Battle of Dongyang 當陽之戰 for the Second National Exhibition in 1937. The subject matter from the popular novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms, this painting was probably focusing on the individual heroism of two generals loyal to Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223), Zhang Fei 張飛 (168–221) and Zhao Yun 趙雲 (168–229). It should also have been a composition with a large number of figures.
99 See “Sheng gang da ba gong” 省港大罷工 (“The great strike in Canton and Hong Kong”), in Zhang Xianwen, Fang Qingqiu and Huang Meizhen (eds.), Zhonghua minguo shi dacidian 中華民國史大辭典 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2001), 368.
and gestures, as illustrated by the victim at the center of the foreground, who is rising his fist in rage despite the fact that he is dying. The painting was carefully composed; the bodies of the victims were placed horizontally, which, coupled with the West Shamian Bridge in the background, lead the viewer to focus on the protestors who were compressed on the right, thus highlighting the drama of the event.

Liang’s interest in the power to reproduce the dramatic moment intensified in his most important project, a series of five war paintings documenting victories of the nationalist army that began in 1930.100 Funded by the government, the paintings were wall size (one of them, the Battle of Huizhou 惠州之戰, measures approximately 20 m × 6 m), intended to be displayed in monuments. Liang paid attention to the actual viewing experience: not only did he design and build a “perspective machine” to transpose the sketch onto the canvas, but he also prescribed instructions about the ideal situation for his works to be viewed. To further escalate the immersive experience, he claimed that the figures were organized in a way that best suits the “line of movement of the eyes,” a set of rules that he had been researching for a decade.101

Their efforts and adventurous spirit notwithstanding, neither Li Yishi nor Liang Dingming succeeded in attracting a large following with their experiments. It was only in the hands of the artists who were trained in Europe, most notably Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, that figure painting in European idioms began to take root in China. The two artists were not only

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100 This aspect of large-scale painting in oil, especially panoramas (which were always confused with oil painting in Chinese texts), had captivated the Chinese imagination since the late-nineteenth century. The best Chinese record of viewing panorama can be found in Xue Fucheng’s diary, which was later retitled as “Viewing Oil Painting in Paris” 觀巴黎油畫記 (Guan Bali youhua ji).

101 For a thorough description about the preparation, execution, and rationale of Battle of Huizhou, see Liang Dingming, “Huizhou juhua wancheng jinian zengkan” 惠城巨畫完成紀念增刊 [Supplement Commemorating the Finishing of the Huge Painting about Huizhou], Wen Hua 文華, no. 33 (1932).
distinguished by their ability to represent figures more expressively, but they were also capable of manipulating large compositions.

As mentioned, before his departure to France, Xu Beihong was already concerned about the neglect of figure painting in Chinese art. After nine years in Europe, studying mainly at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, he was still preoccupied with this concern. His first serious attempt at figure painting was the gigantic *Five Hundred Followers of Tian Heng* 田横五百士 (1928–30) (fig. 9). As his student Ai Zhongxin 艾中信 (1915–2003) later recalled, this painting was Xu’s response to Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (c. 145–87 B.C.E) outcry in *Shiji* 史記 that no painters ever captured such a scene of courage and self-sacrifice:

[As for] Tian Heng, isn’t it because of his virtue that his supporters would commit suicide for him? That is why I have his biography included [after those of his brothers]. There has never been a lack of painters, yet this episode has not been captured. Why could this be?

田横之高節，賓客慕義而從橫死，豈非至賢！余因而列焉。不無善畫者，莫能圖，何哉？

While Sima Qian was lamenting the lack of respect paid to this display of heroism, Xu was likely impelled by the lack of attempts in Chinese art to visualize these subjects. His response was

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102 The brothers Tian Dan 田儋 (d. 208 BCE), Tian Rong 田榮 (d. 205 BCE), and Tian Heng (d. 202 BCE) were descendants of the royal family of the state of Qi 齊 in the Warring States Period (476 or 475–221 BCE). When the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) disintegrated, Tian Dan declared himself king of the former Qi region (modern-day Shandong). In the course of their leadership, the two older Tians were killed and Tian Heng became the *de facto* leader afterwards (it was Tian Rong’s son Tian Guang 田廣 who was the nominal leader). Eventually defeated by the Han general Han Xin 韓信 (230–196 BCE) through treachery, Tian Heng and five hundred supporters hid in an outlying island from the Chinese mainland. Upon being summoned by the emperor Liu Bang 劉邦 (256–195 BCE) to the capital city, Tian Heng decided to commit suicide en route. After learning of the death of their leader, his supporters decided to commit suicide *en masse.*

103 Sima Qian, “Tian Dan liezhuan” 田儋列傳 [Biography of Tian Dan] in *Shiji.*
a complex composition featuring an array of figures displaying diversity in the history painting tradition that he learned in France. The moment that Xu chose was the departure of Tian Heng, which Xu rendered as a confrontation between him and the guests. On the left, the guests, together with their families, were imagined as a large group composed of different sexes and ages, either clothed or nude, showing diverse actions and reactions to the impending death of their lord. On the other hand, Tian Heng, in a red robe, was undisturbed, as reflected by his serene countenance and stately gesture of farewell.

While the thought of responding to Sima Qian’s remark might appear rather haphazard, Xu Beihong harbored a more comprehensive plan with his expertise in figure painting. As retold by the playwright Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968) in an article in 1930, Xu once disclosed his other projects to him when they were going to form Nanguo she 南國社 (“the Southern Society”), a group which aimed to promote fine arts outside the existing channels. These subjects included the aforementioned Five Hundred Followers of Tian Heng, as well as some other new subjects such as Awaiting the Deliverer 待我後 (1930–33) and Yu Opening up Longmen 禹鑿龍門. Although Yu Opening Up Longmen no longer survives, from the title it is clear that this painting would have focused on the scene of the sage king Yu 禹 when he was digging up Longmen Mountain to channel the flood waters that had afflicted the people for years. It was this feat for which Yu was later elected king, which marked the beginning of the Xia 夏 dynasty (c.2070–c.1600 B.C.E.), the first dynasty according to traditional Chinese historiography. Awaiting the Deliverer was the second history painting in oil that Xu Beihong finished, and its subject matter

was also taken from the legendary “three dynasties” in Chinese history (fig. 10). Xu conceived a scene filled with peasants looking forward to the arrival of Tang 湯 of the clan of Shang 商, who rebelled against the corrupt king, Jie 桀, the last king of the Xia dynasty. After a decisive victory at Mingtiao 嘹條, Tang founded the Shang dynasty (c.1600–c.1046 B.C.E.), the second in Chinese history.

If both Awaiting the Deliverer and Yu Opening up Longmen were related to the founding of legendary dynasties, some unfinished projects indicate that Xu looked for “founding stories” in other historical periods as well. Among his surviving sketches are The Overlord Bidding Farewell to his Concubine 霸王別姬 (c.1931) and Qin Qiong Selling his Horse 秦瓊賣馬. The first of the two depicts the demise of Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 B.C.E.), who played a central role in the period after the end of the short-lived Qin dynasty (fig. 11). While Xiang was the most valiant general of his times, he lost the contest for power to Liu Bang 劉邦 (c.256–195 B.C.E.), who, though a peasant, won more support from other warlords and the people alike with the help of resourceful advisors and generals. Legend had it that after departing from his beloved concubine Yu Ji 虞姬, Xiang Yu attempted an unsuccessful escape and committed suicide. His death marked the beginning of the Han Dynasty, the dynasty under which China witnessed stability and prestige in the pan-Asian context. The second sketch, Qin Qiong Selling his Horse, is an episode from the life of Qin Qiong 秦瓊 (571–638), who, according to legend, was so poor and unrecognized that he had to sell his beloved horse for food and lodging (fig. 12). Despite these adverse circumstances, Qin went on to become a distinguished general, helping Li Shimin 李世民 (later Tang Taizong 唐太宗, 598–649, r. 626–49) to establish the Tang Dynasty 唐 (618–907), which has long been
accepted as the zenith of imperial China’s influence in terms of culture and its prowess in Asia. The selection of subjects related to the founding of dynasties, from the mythical *Awaiting the Deliverer* and *Yu Opening up Longmen* to the historical *The Overlord Bidding Farewell to his Concubine* and *Qin Qiong Selling his Horse*, could hardly be explained as coincidence. If *Five Hundred Followers of Tian Hang* indicated that Xu Beihong was aware that Chinese art lacked representations of historical subjects, these paintings featuring “founding stories” could be understood as attempts to fill the lacuna. It is uncertain if Xu harbored a plan to paint one for each dynasty; however, as the above discussion has shown, at least he envisioned a painting about the more influential ones, including the legendary Xia and Shang or the historically powerful Han and Tang.

When compared to Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian was mute on the significance of figure painting, and the role that the genre played in the early years upon his return has received much less attention from researchers. Two of his most renowned works after his return were *Groping* 探索 (1924) and *Agony* 痛苦 (1929), which were both monumental canvases with humanist themes (fig. 13 and 14). From a stylistic point of view, Lin was influenced more by post-Impressionist art in Europe. His use of horizontal composition, together with humanist themes, alludes to the art of Paul Gauguin, as in *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897–98). If the subjects of *Groping* and *Agony* were universal, Lin could also combine this European style with a Chinese subject in *Ten Years for Nurturing Trees, A Hundred Years for Nurturing Talents* 十年樹木 百年樹人 (1931), which celebrated the achievements of Peking University and its founders (fig. 15).
The scale and power of these works inspired awe from his colleagues, such as Jing Youlin 荊有麟 (1903–1951), and more critical viewers, such as Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 (1895–1979). As an article in *Ya bo luo* 亞波羅 (“Apollo”) reported in 1932:

Those who have visited the Western painting section would be hard to forget Mr. Lin Fengmian’s figure compositions and Ms. Cai Weilian’s portraits. Mr. Lin’s composition has long been recognized as a consummate skill within the new East Asian art world, and that needs little elaboration.

凡是參觀過美展西畫部的遊客，大概總忘不了林風眠先生那幾幅人物和蔡威廉女士那幾幅肖像。林先生的人物構圖早被公認為東亞新藝壇之絕技，可無須再贅述的了。105

Delivered by the mouthpiece of the Hangzhou National College of Art 國立杭州藝術專科學校 where Lin was the headmaster, this praise in *Apollo* did perhaps contain unwarranted flattery, yet there is little doubt that his contemporaries widely acknowledged his mastery in large-scale figure painting compositions.

Besides producing figure painting himself, Lin infused his interest in this genre into art pedagogy when he oversaw the Hangzhou National College of Art. The works of graduating students in a special issue of *Yaboluo* entitled *Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao di si jie biye jinian zhuankan* 國立杭州藝術專科學校第四屆畢業紀念專刊 [The Memorial Issue for the Fourth Graduating Class of the National Hangzhou Art School] (1936) are revealing. The first part of this issue is designed to present the graduating class, with each student’s photo paired with a reproduction of his/her work on each page. As expected, most of the graduating students studied

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oil painting, as many as sixteen out of a total of eighteen. Interestingly, twelve of the sixteen graduating pieces were large figural compositions in European styles alluding to the early works of Lin Fengmian discussed above (fig. 16 and 17). The choice of works of figure painting to represent students’ achievements suggests that figure painting was not only taught in Hangzhou, but also regarded as the ultimate goal of art pedagogy under the directorship of Lin.

An article by Li Puyuan 李朴園 (1901–1956) in Ya bo luo further supports the notion that figure painting was prioritized in the curriculum. Li was an active member of the teaching staff and was also a close follower of Lin Fengmian. In an article entitled Guohua de chulu 國畫底出路 [The Way Out for Chinese Painting], Li Puyuan laments the underdevelopment of figure painting in China and encourages his readers to devote themselves to developing this genre:

As for figure painting, the progress of our predecessors was spoiled only half the way by the literati artists, and we can easily finish the remaining progress. This does sound a bit opportunistic, yet from the perspective of accomplishing what our predecessors could not, isn’t it something that we should do?

繪人物畫，我們底先賢只走了一半便不幸為文人畫家所破壞性，餘下的半條路豈可容我們大步地走。這，雖然跡近取巧，如果在完成古人未竟之功這一點上說，豈不是應該的？

Other teaching staff that Lin recruited shared a similar vision. Among the instructors in oil painting, Wu Dayu 吳大羽 (1903–1988), Fang Ganmin 方幹民 (1906–1984), and Ye Yun 葉雲 were enthusiastic about figure paintings. Some of the figure compositions by Wu Dayu and Fang Ganmin appeared to be experiments with Modernist styles, while Ye Yun, in contrast,

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107 The other two were Li Chaoshi’s 李超士 (also called Li Xiang 李驤, 1894–1971) and Cai Wailian’s 蔡威廉 (1904–1939). Li’s oeuvre consists mainly of landscapes and still lifes, and Cai was famous for her portraits.
appeared to be more attracted to genre scenes of a conventional manner (fig. 18, 19, and 20). Wu Guangzhong 吳冠中 (1919–2010), who received his first formal art training at Hangzhou Art College, also recalls that the impressive paintings, such as Wu Dayu’s Retreat of General Yue Fei 岳飛班師, Cai Weilian’s The Maid Fei Zhen’e Stabbing the Rebel General Li Hu 費宮人刺虎, and Fang Ganmin’s Prime Minister Sun Yatsen Relating his Will 總理授遺囑圖, were displayed in the campus museum (fig. 21). Although only the last survives as a reproduction, it is self-evident that they were all figure paintings that emphasized a dramatic moment. It could be said that figure compositions assumed a central role in Western art education in the National Art College of Hangzhou, and that it was with Lin Fengmian’s support that such an emphasis was present.

V. Conclusion

The power of European figure painting made some Chinese artists believe that the Chinese medium of ink-and-brush might be inherently unsuitable for figure paintings. This claim was supported by the view that landscape art was more “Chinese,” whereas figure painting was more “Western.” As Xie Haiyan 謝海燕 (1910–2001) of Shanghai Art College states in a special issue

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108 As Wu recalls, he realized that Wu Dayu’s Retreat of Yue Fei demonstrated the strong influence of Eugene Delacroix’s Entry of the Crusaders in Constantinople (1840) when he was at the Louvre many years later. The subject matter of The Maid Fei Zhen’e Stabbing the Rebel General Li Hu was adopted from a popular legend about the virtuous Fei Zhen’e 費貞娥, who was said to be a maid servant to the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen 崇禎 (1611–1644, r. 1627–44). After the emperor’s suicide, Fei urged the princesses to go into hiding while she pretended to be a princess and stayed in the palace to confront the rebel Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606–1645); he awarded her to one of his generals, Li Hu 李虎. On the night of their marriage, Fei stabbed Li Hu to death and hanged herself afterwards.
on Chinese and Western landscapes in *Guohua yuekan* 國畫月刊 [National Painting Monthly] in 1934:

The West, with its humanistic realist spirit, succeeded in creating a tradition of figure painting for a thousand years; China, with her naturalistic idealistic spirit, succeeded in creating a tradition of landscape painting for a thousand years. Both were conditioned by their history, and by their inescapable temporal and geographical constraints, and thus assumed different outlooks.

西洋本著人間本位的寫實精神，造就了千餘年來人物畫發達的歷史，中國本著自然本位的理想的精神，造就了千餘年山水畫發達的歷史，其歷史的背景，都有其不可飛越的時間的與空間的條件，形成其各別的面目。109

However, not every Chinese painter was going to surrender easily. In the following chapters, we will see how painters of the Lingnan School struggled to foster new traditions of figure painting with the Chinese medium of ink and brush.

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Chapter Two

Gao Jianfu: The Unrealized Figure Painting

The previous chapter treated the revival of interest in figure painting among Chinese artists as a nationwide phenomenon. Haunted by the concern that their art was “in decline,” Chinese artists and critics came to invest hope in figure painting to rejuvenate Chinese art. The first followers of this idea were painters with training in European art, especially those who had received formal training in European art schools. Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian stand out as representative of these artists: not only were they competent in painting individual bodies, their ability to devise large-scale figural compositions was remarkable to many at a time when knowledge about European art was still limited.

As Xu and Lin were adapting what they had learned abroad to a Chinese context, painters who were stylistically committed to Chinese art also gradually realized the potential of this genre. However, painters with aspirations in figure painting soon realized this was not an easy task. The need to innovate meant that they had to look beyond the existing idioms in the Chinese figure painting tradition, which, as we know, were quite limited due to the neglect of this genre in previous centuries. At the same time, the popularity of European art had set the bar high for Chinese painters. To many Chinese, “European art” was not only more truthful to nature, but also signified European painters’ commitment to the beautification of humanity and society. Even painters of the brush could not ignore the benchmarks of European figure painting when they were working on the genre.

The remaining chapters in this dissertation will investigate the experiments in figure painting by three painters of the Lingnan School within the above context. The first painter to be focused
on is Gao Jianfu, who was not only pivotal in establishing the Lingnan School as a force in the Republican art world but was also one of the most controversial painters in twentieth-century China.

I. The Belated Champion of Figure Painting

Although Gao Jianfu was acknowledged together with Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren as the founders of the Lingnan School, it is not an exaggeration to say that without the mastermind of *laojian* ("old sword") the school could never have come into existence.\(^\text{110}\) The older Gao was a natural-born leader with exceptional organizational ability and inexhaustible energy. While his experience as an early revolutionary already granted him an aura to which few contemporaries could measure up, his panache for blatant self-promotion was remarkable for his time.\(^\text{111}\) For instance, to demonstrate his aspirations, he climbed the Himalayas during his trip to India, a feat that was widely reported back home; to show that he was committed to the masses, he held exhibitions at the newly-built housing complexes of the *pingmin cun* ("Commoners’ Estate") in Shanghai.\(^\text{112}\) These efforts at maintaining a high profile continually kept him in the limelight and attracted followers to his atelier. Under his tutelage and inspiration, many of his recruits developed into competent artists, which in turn added to Gao’s fame and influence. Even

\(^\text{110}\) “Old sword” is a sobriquet with which Gao Jianfu often used to sign his paintings.

\(^\text{111}\) As Li Weiming has verified with his extensive research, Gao Jianfu’s excellent revolutionary track record, though not completely fake, is highly questionable, especially in his participation of some key events that he kept stressing throughout his life (such as his participation in the Huanghuagang Uprising). See Li Weiming, “Yishu yu zhengzhii er wei yi ti de jiazi moshi - er Gao yanjiu zhong yi ge nai ren xunwei de wenti” 艺术与政治二位一体的价值模式——二高研究中一个耐人寻味的问题 [Art and Politics: A Two-in-One Value Model], *Yishushi yanjiu* 艺术史研究 [The Study of Art History], no. 1 (1999): 391–444.

\(^\text{112}\) These “Commoners’ Estates” were housing built by the Shanghai municipal government and part of the central government’s plan to provide residences for the poor. According to *Shenbao*, after his exhibition ended in June 1936, Gao contacted the municipal government and arranged the exhibition to tour four commoners’ estates in Shanghai for four days (one each day). See *Shen Bao*, 1 July, 1937.
though some of his followers grew weary of his patriarchal approach, they could hardly have flourished without him.\textsuperscript{113}

In addition to being the uncontested leader, Gao was also the theoretician of the Lingnan School. He might not have been the most original thinker; however, he was arguably the best synthesist of his time. He was sensitive to ongoing social and ideological trends and was always ready to incorporate the latest ideas while revising his existing ones. Beginning from the \textit{zhezhong} 折衷 (“eclectic”) principles that he imported from Japan, Gao absorbed new ideas and expanded his theoretical scope steadily over the next two decades; his speech “Wo de xiandai huihua guan” 我的現代繪畫觀 [My Views on Modern Painting] (1941, which was expanded and published posthumously as \textit{Wo de xiandai guohua guan} 我的現代國畫觀 [My Views on Modern Chinese Painting] in 1955) was the most authoritative summation of his vision and theories for a modern Chinese artist.\textsuperscript{114} While there were other contemporary painters and theoreticians of significance in Gao’s time, few could combine these two roles as he did.

As a painter, Gao is most well-known for his flower-and-bird, animal, and occasional landscape paintings. Figure painting, in contrast, appears to be out of his area of expertise. Of the 164 paintings included in \textit{Gao Jianfu huaji} 高劍父畫集 (“Collected Paintings of Gao Jianfu,”

\textsuperscript{113} The “Re-creation Society,” founded by his followers in Hong Kong during the heat of the Sino-Japanese War in 1941, was, at least to some senior followers such as Fang Rending, a “rebellion” against the patriarchy of Gao Jianfu. For more information about the origin of the Re-creation Society, see Dade Huang, “Guanyu ‘Lingnanpai’ de diaocha cailiao” 关于‘岭南派’的调查材料 [Research Materials about the Lingnan School], \textit{Meishu shilun 美术史论} [Art History Theory], no. 1 (1995): 17–21.

\textsuperscript{114} According to Li Weiming, the later \textit{Wo de xiandai guohua guan} is an expanded version of the original \textit{Wo de xiandai huihua guan}, which was a speech delivered in a seminar in Hong Kong on January 15, 1941. For more about the dating of these two works, see Li Weiming, “Gao Jianfu he qi Xin Guohua lilun” 高剑父及其新国画理论, in \textit{Gao Jianfu, Gao Jianfu shiwên chubian 高剑父诗文初编} [Collection of Gao Jianfu’s poems and writings], ed. Li Weiming (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 7–12.
one of the most comprehensive catalogs *raisonnés* of Gao Jianfu to-date, only eleven entries contain some forms of human figures. It is pointless to dismiss the achievement of an artist merely because he was not perfect in every genre; however, there are hints that Gao himself considered this lack of figure painting to have marred his career. His uneasiness on this matter heightened particularly during the last few years of his life. For instance, he frequently raised the subject of “figure painting” in his lectures at the South China Art School, in a last-ditch effort at art pedagogy. In this small art school, he repeatedly sermonized on the significance of figure painting in the art of China’s past, as well as its centrality in the art of the present.

The most telling moment of his concern for figure painting was in one of his last public speeches, “Ribenhua zhi Zhongguohua” [*Japanese Painting is Chinese Painting*] (1948). Halfway through the speech, Gao explained the rationale behind his attraction to the “Western painting” (*xihua* 西畫) that he had viewed in Japan:

I decided to learn Western painting because I was motivated by the realistic effect of its human figures, and I felt the need for this genre deeply, especially the indispensability of painting that is built on the observation of real life. On the other hand, Chinese figure painting has not done enough in this aspect. [For these reasons] I thought of reforming Chinese figure painting with Western painting. I also learned sculpture to strengthen my knowledge of the anatomy of bodies.

我學西畫的動機，因見西畫人物最佳，同時深感人物畫的需要，尤其是現實生活的人物畫為不可缺少，而我國人物畫，尚覺其不滿足，就想用西畫來改造我國人物畫，學雕塑，並增強人物的透視。


116 This speech was not dated. As Li Weiming points out, the exhibition that Gao mentioned at the beginning of this speech was a joint one delivered by six artists of the Lingnan School, and held in April 1948. See “Ribenhua zhi Zhongguohua,” Gao, *Gao Jianfu shiwen chubian*, 336.

117 “Ribenhua zhi Zhongguohua,” Gao, 337.
As will be demonstrated in this chapter, Gao Jianfu’s status in modern Chinese art was built primarily on his efforts to reform Chinese art by introducing elements of Western (or more precisely, a Japanized version of Western) painting traditions. In the above excerpt, however, he claimed that it was due to his interest in Western figure painting that he began this reformist enterprise. In other words, he was attempting to relocate the origin of his career in figure painting; however, as discussed, work in this genre only represents a very small fraction of his oeuvre.

One can argue that this speech represented just another instance of Gao presenting himself as a visionary far ahead of his contemporaries. However, it still reflected that the master was obsessed with figure painting during the last few years of his life. This chapter will thus investigate how a flower-and-bird specialist ended up with a preoccupation with figure painting, a genre with which he was unfamiliar. As will be demonstrated, Gao’s relationship with figure painting was continually changing, as he regularly adjusted it according to his plans to reform Chinese art. If the role of figure painting in his artistic production was marginal in the first two decades after his return from Japan, Gao Jianfu came to notice its potential in the 1930s as he sought to find a more expressive form of art. It was then that he began to seriously explore the possibilities of figure painting. Unfortunately, limited by his lack of training, his experimentations were mostly unsatisfactory.

II. Gao Jianfu’s Eclecticism: To Reform Chinese Art with Flora and Fauna

As the disciple of the Cantonese master Ju Lian 居廉 (1828–1904) and later his senior follower Wu Deyi 伍德彝 (1864–1928), Gao Jianfu was well-connected with the local circle of painters, and he was already an active figure in Guangdong before the Xinhai Revolution of
1911. However, his role in the Guangdong art world was largely overshadowed by his more senior colleagues. It was only in the last few years before the Revolution that Gao distinguished himself with the eclectic ideas and art that he introduced from Japan, where he spent several years (1905–08). Interestingly, Gao Jianfu's initial reputation as a reformist of Chinese art depended heavily on his mastery of flower-and-bird, animals, and to a lesser extent, landscape painting.

A few months after Gao Jianfu returned with his brother Qifeng from Japan, a short notice in *Current Affairs Pictorial* introduced them as follows:

Mr. Gao Jianfu is a specialist in pencil drawing and watercolor, and he can eclecticize various painting methods; Mr. Pan Tiecang specializes in bird-and-flower; Mr. Gao Qifeng specializes in oil painting, watercolor, and various other painting methods. He is a specialist in birds and animals as well; Mr. Yin Diyun is good at landscape and figure painting. The art of China is making progress day by day, which is indeed something to be celebrated.

The use of the term “zhezhong” 折衷 in the excerpt is worth noticing. “Zhezhong,” meaning “to eclecticize,” had a long history in Chinese texts and could also be found in common parlance.

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118 It should be noted that when Gao Jianfu entered the studio of Ju Lian, the master was already in his dotage and Gao might not have received much direct instruction from him. On the contrary, Wu Deyi, whom Gao studied closely later, might have had a larger impact on Gao’s art. For Gao Jianfu’s study under Wu Deyi, see Zhuang Su’e, “Yishujia yu fushen - cong Gao Jianfu he Wu Deyi de guanxi tanqi 艺术家与富绅 - 从高剑父和伍德彝的关系谈起 [Artist and Gentry - the Relationship between Gao Jianfu and Wu Deyi],” *Meishu xuebao*, no. 1 (2012): 24–38.
119 For a detailed (and laudatory) account of Gao Jianfu’s early activities, see Youwen Jian, “Geming Huajia Gao Jianfu - Gailun He Nianbiao (Zhong) 革命画家高剑父 - 概论及年表 (中) [Gao Jianfu the Revolutionary Painter: A Survey and Chronology (II)],” *Zhuanji Wenxue* 傳記文學 [Biographical Literature] 22, no. 2 (1972): 84–85. His earliest notable activity was his participation in the *Shishi huabao* 时事畫報 [Current Affairs Pictorial] (published in Guangzhou from 1905 to 1913), an illustrated journal that set out to “enlighten the masses and inspire their spirit.” This series was prefaced by his “Lun Hua” 论画 [On Painting] in the fourth issue of *Shishi huabao* (1905), which shows that he had great faith in the edifying power of visual art.
120 *Shishi huabao*, vol. 19, no. 96 (1908).
However, it had not been used in the realm of Chinese art before.\textsuperscript{121} Gao Jianfu provides further details about what he meant by “zhezhong” in another note, and it can be seen here that this term embodied his ambitious plan to reform Chinese art:

I will draw from these two extremes, fuse and eclecticsize them, to use the old brushwork of China to paint the latest ideas from the West. The strengths of Chinese art lie in its brushwork, ideas, structure, and spiritual resonance, whereas those of Western painting lie in its verisimilitude, spatial relationship, and coloring. [I will] adopt the strengths of Western painting to complement the insufficiencies of Chinese painting, thus creating a Western painting imbued with brushwork and spiritual resonance, or, that is to say, a Chinese painting with verisimilitude and spatial relationship.

吾擇兩途之極端，合爐而治，折而衷之，以我國之古筆，寫西洋之新意。夫中國畫之妙在用筆，思想，結構，氣韵，西洋畫之長在形似，遠近，用色，以彼之長，補我不足，而成一有筆墨氣韵之洋畫，即有形似，遠近之中國畫。\textsuperscript{122}

Gao’s characterization of the respective strengths of the art traditions, such as the ability of European art to capture verisimilitude and to represent spatial relationship convincingly, did not depart from views accepted by most Chinese of his time. The significance of Gao Jianfu’s work lies in his adaptation of eclecticism as the theoretical foundation from which to build a new form of Chinese art. This approach, however, was not his own but something that he borrowed from Japan, where he stayed for some time.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} The term is sometimes written as zhezhong 折中. Its uses could be traced to early texts, such as with Sima Qian’s praise of Confucius in \textit{Shi ji}.

\textsuperscript{122} “Minchu huaxue biji shuze” 民初畫學筆記數則 [Entries on Painting in the Early Republic] in Gao, \textit{Gao Jianfu shiwen chubian}, 61. This excerpt is one of the notes among the surviving writings of Gao Jianfu that are now in the possession of the Guangzhou Museum of Art. According to Li Weiming, these notes were likely made around the first decade of the Republican period. The title “Minchu huaxue biji shuze” was given by the editor.

\textsuperscript{123} Gao Jianfu’s stay in Japan is still a point of contention among scholars. Not only are his whereabouts unknown (there is clear evidence that Gao exaggerated his qualifications), but even the time that he studied was unclear. According to Li Weiming, Gao should have travelled to Japan several times from 1903 to 1907. On the contrary, based on a source documenting the presence of the Japanese painter Yamamoto Beigai 山本梅崖 (1852–1928) in Guangzhou, the more critical Huang Dade (Huang was the son of Huang Bore 黃般若 (1901–1968), who was a major opponent of Gao in Guangzhou in the 1920s) argues that the older Gao might have stayed there for only ten months.
When Gao Jianfu first set foot on Japanese soil, the trend of *setchū* 拆衷 (the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese *zhezhong*), or eclecticism, was in its heyday. In the Japanese context, the emergence of eclecticism could be conceptualized as a reaction to the growing popularity of European painting after the Meiji Restoration (1868). With governmental support and the leadership of such figures as Kuroda Seiki 黒田 清輝 (1866–1924), yōga 洋畫 (“Western-style painting”) was well-established by the late nineteenth century.\(^{124}\) This influx of foreign art gave rise to an impulse to create an art that could represent Japan’s identity, and its origin was usually attributed to the American philosopher Ernest Fenollosa.\(^{125}\) In his epoch-making lecture at the Ryūchikai 龍池會 (“Dragon Pond Society”) in 1882, Fenollosa urged his Japanese audience to break free from both Chinese and European painting traditions and to create an art that is “Japanese.”

Fenollosa’s call spurred many painters to revisit and further explore the possibilities of traditional Japanese techniques and styles; this experimental painting came to be known collectively as *nihonga* 日本畫 (“Japanese-style painting”) by the early twentieth century.\(^{126}\)

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126 For more about the tension between *yōga* and *nihonga* and the efforts of (as well as myths promulgated by)
While *nihonga* was initially intended to be a distinctively Japanese style of painting, the lure of European art was too hard to resist. Some of the recognized features of European art, such as its attention to verisimilitude and the ability to represent spatial relationships according to fixed perspectives, were already recognized by the Japanese as essential requirements for art. The idea that a new form of art for Japan could arise through blending techniques of both the European and Japanese traditions in painting gradually gathered momentum. While it was accepted that these two traditions represented distinct aesthetic values, it was also believed that in the hands of Japanese painters these could be synthesized to create a new art.\(^{127}\)

It was amid this atmosphere that Gao Jianfu arrived in Japan. For someone who was attracted to the potential of European art but unwilling to abandon the Chinese brush, the eclectic approach appeared a reasonable choice. Besides, the existing successful examples of *Setchū* by Japanese artists also provided Gao Jianfu with convenient starting points in the genres of flower-and-bird, animals, and landscapes.

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\(^{127}\) This approach became more popular after the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). With its hard-won victory over a European power, the Japanese nation’s need for an art to represent its new identity became more urgent; thus, many notable painters and ideologues were keen supporters of this eclectic approach. One painter was Fenollosa’s erstwhile pupil and colleague, Okakura Tenshin 岡倉 天心 (1863–1913), who led the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō 東京美術學校 (Tokyo School of Fine Arts), and later the Nihon Bijutsuin 日本美術院 (Japan Art Institute). Under Tenshin’s direction, many painters endeavored to assimilate the characteristics of European art while using the Japanese medium. This earned them the controversial label of *Mōrōtai* 習毫體 (“the hazy style”), which was denounced by some critics as just “doing oil painting with Japanese materials.” For more about the controversy of *mōrōtai* in Japan, see Victoria Louise Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His Circle*, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies; No. 45 (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004).

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Considering his previous training in flower-and-bird painting back in Guangdong, it does not come as a surprise that he showed an interest in similar subjects by Japanese artists.\(^{128}\) This advantage also enabled him to understand and assimilate such subjects and treatments without close supervision.\(^{129}\) One painter’s work he was attracted to was Imao Keinen’s 今尾 景年 (1845–1924). Stationed in Kyoto, Keinen was one of the most successful painters of his age. A master of flower-and-bird, he was celebrated for his depiction of a variety of birds in different seasonal settings.\(^{130}\) Comparatively, Keinen’s style was more elaborate and visually compelling than the delicate and reserved one of Ju Lian in which Gao was trained.\(^{131}\) Besides flower-and-bird, Gao also expanded his subject matter to the realm of animals. The animal painting that attracted him was that of wild and predatory animals, including horses, foxes, lions, and tigers, or more elaborate,

\(^{128}\) There was a practical incentive for Gao Jianfu to refine his skills in this genre. Like many of his generation, Gao believed strongly that the rebirth of China depended upon industrial development. Mastery of flower-and-bird, which could be applied to industrial production, was deemed crucial. It is known that Gao Jianfu moved to Jingdezhen, Jiangxi trying to improve porcelain production in 1913. Surviving pieces now in the possession of the Hong Kong Museum of Art indicate that the Japanese training in sketch paid off. See Kao Mayching, “Gao Jianfu yu Zhongguo xiandai taoqiye” 高劍父與中國現代陶藝 [Gao Jianfu and the Procelain Industry in Modern China], in Huang Yongxian, ed., Dajiāng de zuijī: Gāo Jiānfù xiănshēng dānshèng yībāi érshí zhōuntiān jīnjiàn ji [The Path of the Master: Essays Published to Celebrate the 120th Anniversary of Gao Jianfu’s Birthday] (Hong Kong: Far East Culture and Art Exchange Center, 2000), 26–35.

\(^{129}\) Japan offered Gao the opportunity to learn this genre almost anew. Through short-term classes, he strengthened his basic skills in sketching, especially in the realm of flora and fauna. As Li Weiming suggests, Gao might have enrolled in short-term drawing classes at the Private Nawa Insects Research Institute 私立名和昆蟲研究所, and some of his surviving sketches of insects showed a degree of accuracy required for taxonomy. For a study on Gao Jianfu’s study in Japan, see Li Weiming, “Gāo Jiānfù liūxué Rìběn kǎo” 高劍父留學日本考 [A Study on Gao Jianfu’s Experience in Japan], in Li, Chuántóng yù bījiāng, 9–50.

\(^{130}\) Imao Keinen was one of the Japanese artists to participate in international expositions, and his flower-and-bird paintings or designs won several awards. He additionally received a series of imperial commissions, such as for designing ceremonial dresses for the prince consort.

\(^{131}\) Many years later, Gao Jianfu lent the young Yang Zhiguan a copy of Imao Keinen’s Keinen kachō gafu 景年花鳥畫譜 [Keinen’s Painting Manual of Flower-and-bird] and urged him to copy it. See Yang Zhiguan’s “Píngshèng zuìjì shì cǎngèng – Yang Zhiguan huìyi lu” 平生最忌食残羹 – 杨之光回忆录 [I detest to feed on leftovers the most in my life – A Memoir by Yang Zhiguang] in Editorial Board of Lingnan huaxue congshu, ed., Yang Zhiguan sishínián huigu wènji 杨之光四十年回顾文集 [Collection of Papers Celebrating the Fourtieth Anniversary of Yang Zhiguan as an Artist] (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 1995), 111.
fierce birds, such as peacocks and eagles. His surviving works also suggest a link with contemporary Kyoto painters, especially those associated with the Maruyama-Shijō School. This school was famous for its animal paintings, starting with its founder, Maruyama Ōkyō (1733–1795), who was distinguished for his ability to capture verisimilitude. Ōkyō’s nineteenth-century successors in Kyoto not only inherited his skillset in depicting the texture of furs and feathers, but also enforced significant anatomical accuracy for animals. An example is the Kyoto master, Kishi Chikudō (1826–1897), who was famed for his obsession with the tiger (fig. 22). Similar to Imao Keinen, Chikudō attained much fame in his lifetime and was one of the “big three” of the Kyoto art world in the late Meiji Period. Gao Jianfu was particularly fond of the tiger: while he would adopt an expressive approach later, his tigers in the 1910s were always painted meticulously, following Japanese models in their treatment of texture, posture, and anatomy (fig. 23). Other masters in Kyoto, such as Takeuchi Seihō, served as a continuous inspiration. An oft-quoted example of Gao’s imitation of Seihō is his The Strong Devouring the Weak, which is based on the latter’s Wild Fox 野狐 (1898). 

Another genre that appealed to Gao was landscape, and as with wild animals, he had not been particularly well-trained in it before. The landscape that he learned from the nihonga painters was episodic, focused on a scene in nature, and was pictorially akin to the conventional European landscape. This marks a sharp contrast with the panoramic landscape, as typified in the Chinese

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132 Kishi Chikudō was a student of Kishi Ganku (1749–1839), who was also famed for his representations of the tiger. The Japanese government commissioned a painting of a baby tiger from Chikudō. An anecdote about Chikudō’s obsession with his creation is recorded in Kanritsu Kida, Gaka Itsujidan 画家逸事談 [Anecdotes of Painters] (Ekiyido, 1903), 107. It was penned by a painter and art educator.

133 Ralph C Croizier, Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 45.
handscroll, which presents a series of progressive views as the scroll unrolls. Many nihonga painters utilized this feature as an opportunity to combine European linear perspective with the unique expressive power of the ink and brush. A typical example is Takeuchi Seihō’s Moon over Venice, which creates a perspectival space with good use of the elusive nature of ink shade (fig. 24). His fellow Kyoto painter, Yamamoto Shunkyō, preferred using pure elements from nature to achieve a similar effect, as typified in Desolate Village, Evening Snow 寒村暮雪 (fig. 25). Gao Jianfu’s Kunlun Mountains after Rain 崑崙雨後 (undated) is a work that is modeled after Yamamoto Shunkyō (fig. 26). Similar to its model, the spatial relationship in Kunlun Mountains after Rain is conveyed by the arrangement of the trees in the lower half and is accentuated using aerial perspective. While Gao Jianfu’s version might not be as subtle as the original (the layers and elements in Shunkyō’s painting are blended into a whole), the transition between layers in Kunlun Mountains after Rain is more pronounced, thus making viewers more aware of its perspective.  

Not long after his return to China, Gao Jianfu left Guangzhou and eventually settled in Shanghai for almost a decade (1912–21). As his reputation grew steadily, he also chose a new name, xinpaihua 新派畫 (“new painting”), for his art. Despite this new moniker, the subjects and treatments of xinpaihua were still based on what Gao learned from the Japanese. This is best illustrated in Xinhua xuan 新畫選 (“Selection of New Paintings”), a compilation of the Lingnan trio’s paintings that were published by their own publishing house, Shenwei Bookstore, in 1916.

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For instance, in the first volume, four of Gao Jianfu’s works were included: *Autumn Morning* 秋曉, *Sudden Rain* 驟雨, *Mountainous Village in Morning Rain* 山村曉雨, and *Autumn Delight* 秋趣. The two autumn paintings feature birds, while *Mountainous Village in Morning Rain* is a landscape in a horizontal format, characterized by strong color contrast and subtle handling of the landscape elements; *Sudden Rain* is an animal painting that focuses on a galloping horse, which was later retitled *The Noble Steed in Storm* 風雨驊騮 (fig. 27). A similar emphasis on landscape and animal paintings is also suggested in the contents of the second volume.¹³⁶

III. The Marginalized Figure Painting in the *zhezhong* Repertoire

Interestingly, even though animals and landscape formed the core of his repertoire, Gao Jianfu was not completely unaware of the possibilities of figure painting.¹³⁷ The third volume of the compilation contains a painting entitled *Budai the Monk* 布袋和尚 (1916), which was the only figure painting in the three volumes (fig. 28). Budai is a common subject in Chinese and Japanese art. He is an important figure in popular folklore, and believed to be an incarnation of the Buddha.

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¹³⁶ The list of paintings to be published for the second volume of the collection was included at the end of the first volume. Four paintings by Gao Jianfu are listed, namely *After the Rain* 雨霽, *Kunlun Mountains after Rain* 崑崙雨後, *The Withering Lotus* 殘荷, and *Sound of Autumn* 秋聲.

¹³⁷ It might be interesting to note that the genre of figure painting received special attention in Tokyo, where Gao Jianfu stayed during his study in Japan. As Hirota Takashi’s research has shown, the proportion of students to submit a figure painting as the graduating piece at the Tokyo Art School was much higher than that in the Kyoto Municipal Arts and Crafts School, the oldest art school in the city of Kyoto. Hirota Takashi, “Kyōto gadan kindaika no ichiyōzō: Biko kara kaisen e 京都画壇近代化の一様相: 美工から絵専へ [The Kyoto School: An Aspect of the Modernization: from Biko to Kaisen],” *Bigaku* 美学 [Aesthetics] 40, no. 1 (1989): 37–46. Okakura Tenshin, the ideologue of *nihonga*, who was active in Tokyo, was allotted a special status in history painting, and painters under his sway were more enthusiastic in this genre. This was particularly the case for the *Mōrōtai* painters; in the hands of Yokoyama Taikan 横山大観 (1868–1958) and Hishida Shunsō 菱田春草 (1874–1911), human figures always feature significantly, either as the sole subject, or incorporated into their landscapes. See also Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity*. 
Maitreya. In visual representations, he is identified by his round belly, his laughing face, and, as his name suggests, his sack (budai, literally meaning “cloth sack”).

Gao’s version retains the first two of these key features. His Budai is portrayed with a comical visage and a voluminous body; instead of carrying a sack, he is playing a flute. Compositionally speaking, Gao chose a close-up with an emphasis on the upper half of the body, which departs from the convention of representing Budai in full. His face is modeled slightly, but the body is represented with broad and daring ink strokes. The left arm is a virtuosic display of skills. On top of the dark ink line that defines the left arm, Gao applied similarly broad ink strokes that are lighter in gradation, to approximate the appearance of a diaphanous cassock wrapping over the limb. In contrast to this impressive display of skill, however, is the awkwardly-erected middle finger of Budai’s flute-playing hand and his abnormally massive lower body (which is suggested by the light ink strokes), not to mention the distortion of the visage of the monk to the point of being comical. Compared with his mastery of the naturalistic animals, Gao does not seem to be very comfortable with representing the human body and its gestures.

As the Taiwanese scholar Chen Chun-chi suspects, the conceptualization of the monk Budai in Gao Jianfu’s version might have been inspired by Japanese precedents. A commercial publication from the Shenwei Bookstore further reveals that contemporary Japanese figure painting was a source for the older Gao. This publication is an untitled postcard featuring a female figure in traditional Chinese costume (fig. 29). The postcard itself contains minimal information

139 See Chen Chun-chi, “A Study of Figure Paintings of Kao Chien-fu”, in Cai, *Jinian Xinhai 100 zhounian liang’an baijia shuimo dazhan xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, 47.
about its subject, but there is little doubt that it was an adaptation of Terasaki Kōgyō’s (1866–1919) *Fairy of Luofu* 罗浮仙 (*Rafusen*, c.1902) (fig. 30). The postcard is not signed; but given his similar treatment of the same subject three times in repaintings from the 1930s, it could have been painted by Gao Jianfu himself (fig. 31).

The story of the fairy of Mount Luofu can be found in *Longcheng lü* 龍城錄 [*Records of Longcheng*], a collection of short stories attributed to the Tang poet and essayist, Liu Zhongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819). According to the story, a man named Zhao Shixiong 趙師雄 visited Mount Luofu (which is located not far from Guangzhou), where he met a beautiful lady who gave off a fresh fragrance. Zhao invited her for a drink in a tavern nearby, but he was soon drunk. When he woke up, he found himself resting under a plum tree and the tavern was gone. He thus realized that the beauty he met was a plum fairy.

From the late nineteenth century onward, the Luofu story was a popular subject for both Chinese and Japanese artists. Most Chinese artists chose to represent the fairy in the tradition of the *shinü* 仕女 (“court ladies”), which renders her as a slim and elegant female figure, with a schematic visage and posture. This convention was already established as the norm in the mid-Qing in the hands of artists such as Fei Danxu 費丹旭 (1802–1850), and was followed by many

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140 Huang Dade suspects that this postcard was not painted by Gao Jianfu but was a reproduction of a not-yet discovered piece of *nihonga*. However, as discussed, the postcard modified Terasaki Kōgyō’s *Rafusen* (consider the omittance of the fan, for example, and the enhancement of the body volume). Even the possibility that Gao Jianfu reproduced another version of Kōgyō’s *Rafusen* cannot be ruled out. It is more likely that the postcard version was executed by the older Gao. For Huang Dade’s view, see Huang Dade, “Gao Jianfu renwuhua chutan: cong sanfu Luofu xiangmeng tanqi” 高剑父人物画初探：从三幅《罗浮香梦》谈起 [Investigation on Gao Jianfu’s Figure Painting based on the Three Versions of Dream in the Luofu Mountain], *Meishu xuebao*, no. 04 (2015): 39–48.
contemporaries of Gao Jianfu. In contrast, while Japanese painters also conceptualized the fairy as shinü at first, there were artists who used this theme as a testing ground for the representation of the human figure by the late Meiji. When compared to other interpretations of the Luofu fairy, Kōgyō’s version—which was one of the earlier of its kind—immediately stands out in terms of its treatment of the body. While most nihonga painters represented the female figure in frontal and static poses, he chose a three-quarter view from the back. This twist of the body significantly emphasizes the body’s materiality, which is further enhanced by the draped left arm that appears larger than normal. Contrary to this emphasis on the body, the face of the fairy is schematized and rendered only in profile. The facial features received only minimal treatment, with ink lines that end up pallid and emotionless. Gao Jianfu might have been interested in Kōgyō’s version for its emphasis on materiality; this aspect is strengthened in the postcard version. The draped arm of the fairy is not proportionate but voluminous, and thus looks as if it has been inflated. Gao also stresses the sense of movement in the figure: he omits the fan, which was standard paraphernalia in earlier representations, and makes her appear to be reaching slightly to the left.

*Budai the Monk* and the postcard featuring his reproduction of Kōgyō’s *Luofu Fairy* both point to the fact that Gao paid attention to figure painting. Regrettably, his interest in the genre did not develop as fully as that in other genres. When exactly he lost interest in figure painting is

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141 For example, Zhang Daqian submitted *Luofu Mengxing* 羅浮夢影 [Dreamy Shadow of Luofu] for the exhibition of Zhengshe 正社 (“the orthodox society”) held in Nanjing, December 1934. While the rendition of the female is Zhang’s own, the painting follows conventions featuring a reserved court lady as the fairy. See *Zhengshe Shihuahui zhanlan zhuanhao* 正社書畫會展覽專號 [Special Issue of the Exhibition of Zhengshe] (Nanjing: 1935), a special issue of the magazine *Zheng Lun* 正論 in January 1935.

142 Prominent Japanese painters who tried to interpret the Luofu story included Arai Kanpō 荒井 寛方 (1878–1945), Koyabashi Kokei 小林 古徑 (1883–1957), Kitano Tsunetomi 北野 慶富 (1880–1947), Yasuda Yukihiro 安田 敬彥 (1884–1978), as well as the aforementioned Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō.
uncertain, but there is evidence that, when in Shanghai, Gao Jianfu preferred to collaborate with painters who were competent in figure painting, rather than try his luck with this unfamiliar genre. One of these figure painters was Xu Beihong, who was still unknown, as well as poverty-stricken, in the 1910s. Thanks to the Gao brothers’ help, Xu did eventually sustain himself with commissions, and an existing postcard shows that Xu helped to paint female figures in modern costume, in the format of postcards published by the Shenwei Bookstore (fig. 32). The Gao brothers also worked with Zheng Mantuo 鄭曼陀 (1888–1961), who was already one of the most renowned painters of commercial calendar cards. Zheng was particularly known for the invention of the “rubbing technique” (chabi 擦筆), which he borrowed from watercolor painting to emphasize modeling on the face of female figures.¹⁴³ Not only did the Shenwei Bookstore serve as the contact point for Zheng, but his works were published, advertised, and sold through the bookstore. Working with these figure painting specialists helped the publishing house to produce a complete array of products, but at the same time it was a division of labor: in modern parlance, the Gao brothers “outsourced” figure painting to specialists, rather than painting them.

IV. “New Painting” and the Neglected Human Figure

Figure painting was further marginalized in Gao Jianfu’s art in the next decade, which began with the Gao brothers’ returning to Guangdong in the early 1920s.¹⁴⁴

This decade was crucial in the older Gao’s career; it was in Guangzhou that he came up with the most famous innovations in his art. First, he refined his mastery of animal paintings and made

¹⁴⁴ Wang, “Chetui huanshi zhuanyi.”
good progress with the tiger. His tigers from the 1920s onwards are marked by a stronger emphasis on expressiveness and spontaneity. Consider, for example, *Tiger Roars* 虎嘯 (fig. 33). Gao cast the animal in an artificial pose, with an abstract visage, thereby amplifying its forcefulness in a stance that scares even the moon. An extreme example of Gao’s turn is in *The Hungry Tiger* 餓虎 (undated). In the painting, colors are abandoned; the animal is represented impressionistically, with a combination of light ink shades and solid strokes (fig. 34).\(^{145}\)

Gao was equally creative with landscape. One of the variants he devised is the “monument in landscape,” in which he focuses on a monumental structure within landscape, with the time, or climatic condition, clearly indicated. His *Zhenhai Tower* 鎮海樓 (1926) serves as the best example (fig. 35). The five-storied tower has been an icon of the city since its construction in the early Ming Dynasty. Sitting strategically atop the Yuexiu Hill 越秀山, the tower and its associated fortifications overlook the city and its surrounding area. By the early twentieth century, however, it had fallen into disrepair. Gao Jianfu’s rendition of the landmark of the city is simple. The tower is placed to the left, with the hill represented as a shade of green. The scene is immersed in a wash of ochre, implying that it is sunset. By juxtaposing a desolate human construction with nature, *Zhenhai Tower* invokes a sentimental air that is associated with the common leitmotif of nostalgia, of *huaigu* 懷古 (“reflecting on the past”), in Chinese culture.\(^{146}\)

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\(^{145}\) In his surviving notes, there are descriptions of a variety of subjects that centered on the tiger Gao intended to paint, indicating that he explored possible meanings that the animal tiger could carry. See “Huahu biji” 畫虎筆記 (“Notes on Painting Tigers”) in Gao, *Gao Jianfu shiwen chubian*, 159–66.

\(^{146}\) Besides *Zhenhai Tower*, another example with a similar rationale was *Leifeng Tower* 雷峰塔 (1926), depicting the landmark by the West Lake in Hangzhou.
Gao Jianfu also builds on the genre of landscape in his attempts to capture the contemporary by incorporating technological advances in his paintings, which were always done in a clever manner. The first example is his *Flying in the Rain* 雨中飛行 (1925) (fig. 36).\(^{147}\) The painting is simple in terms of composition and execution, with the added twist of a small aircraft on the upper right-hand side. This representation of a modern technological advance, with ink and brush, was unprecedented in Chinese art. A large area of light ink wash acts as the background, with Gao’s signature broad strokes that imply boulders and layers of vegetation. Another modern object that appeared regularly in Gao’s paintings in the 1920s were telegraph poles, as in *Lonely City in Chilling Mist* 寒煙孤城 (1928) (fig. 37). Broad, sketchy strokes dominate the lower half, forming a stark contrast with the gradation of color above, which is almost empty. Erected on the city wall was a telegraph pole, implying that it was a city gate of his times that he was painting. Like *Flying in the Rain*, the painting was simple in pictorial terms, and the modern object is relatively insignificant. From a review of the painter Wu Zifu 吳子復 (1899–1979) in 1930, it is known that Gao had also painted other modern technological advances besides the plane, with some of them focusing on domestic objects. Wu mentioned *The Highway* and *The Radio*, which were paintings with a similar modern rationale.\(^{148}\)

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\(^{147}\) Gao Jianfu averred that he began to paint modern technological advances early on. He claimed in both *Wo de xiandai huahua guan* and *Wo de xiandai guohua guan* that he painted a vertical scroll entitled *Two Monsters in the World* 天地兩怪物 that portrayed a fighter plane and a tank during the height of the First World War in 1915. This painting, however, was nowhere to be found, nor was it ever mentioned by anyone. As tanks were only introduced onto the battlefield in September 1916 and only made an impact in the last few months in 1917, this claim remains somewhat dubious, although the possibility that he confused tanks with armored cars could not be ruled out. For Gao’s account about *Two Monsters in the World*, see Gao, *Gao Jianfu shiwen chubian*, 230, 261.

\(^{148}\) Wu Hanshan, “Chunshui huayuan zhanlanhui gei wo de ganxiang” 春睡畫院展覽會給我的感想 [Feelings that the Exhibition of the Chunshui Atelier has Given me], *Guangzhou Minguo Ribao* 廣州民國日報 [Guangzhou Republican Daily], November 1, 1930.
In this creative decade, only one figure painting by Gao Jianfu has been documented. This one-of-a-kind is *Awakening of the Afternoon Dream* 午夢初回 (dated 1923) (fig. 38). The quality of reproduction prevents one from analyzing this painting closely; however, the interplay of ink wash and wet brush strokes are still observable. The body of the monk is painted in ink wash that diffuses slightly around the edge, with fine details, such as his fingers and facial features, including the details of his mouth, highlighted with concrete ink strokes. The gestures are well-balanced and persuasive. From a compositional perspective, the division of a vertical scroll into two registers, with the inscription in the upper half and the pictorial in the lower, is the norm for Zen figure paintings. Comparing *Awakening of the Afternoon Dream* with *Budai the Monk*, one can argue that the earlier *Budai* was even more daring in terms of its conceptualization. If *Awakening of the Afternoon Dream* demonstrates Gao’s mastery of the brush, he was still largely following established conventions. While the two decades after Gao Jianfu’s return to China witnessed his development from importing Japanese art to forming subjects and styles that were his own, all these advances were achieved without figure painting.

V. Interest Revived: Gao Jianfu and the Japanese Aggression in the 1930s

With the repertoire developed in the 1920s, Gao Jianfu and his followers enjoyed unrivaled success in China in the years after the Northern Expedition (1926–28). The unification under Chiang Kai-shek ensured national stability (albeit limited) that the Chinese had not seen for decades, and the Nanjing government was eager to rebuild culture after the warlord era. The enthusiasm of the Nanjing government created an opportunity for Gao Jianfu. Two national events in 1929 were noteworthy in his rise. In April, the First National Exhibition was held in Shanghai, which was the first public exhibition on a national scale in Chinese history. This was immediately
followed by the West Lake Exposition in June: while the exposition encompassed a multitude of themes, a special pavilion was built for the display of fine arts, which was divided into sections on Chinese and Western art.

Gao Jianfu and his group were highly successful on both occasions. He and three of his followers, together with Gao Qifeng and his followers, participated in the First National Exhibition. No other group could match their display in either quantity or quality. This recognition is reflected in a review in the official magazine, *Meizhan* 美展 (“Art Exhibition”), penned by the critic and painter Chen Xiaodie 陳小蝶 (1897–1989), who identified the “eclecticizing school” led by the Gao brothers as one of the six major art schools of modern Chinese art.149 In the West Lake Exposition, the older Gao was assigned the task of reviewing the paintings exhibited in the Western art section (for which the organizing committee adopted a bizarre cross-examination system). Considering the fact that it was Lin Fengmian, the headmaster of the National Hangzhou School of Art, who reviewed the Chinese art section, it can be said that Gao was treated as representative of Chinese art, and he was also viewed as an equal to the headmaster of the most important art institution in China.150

Concurrent with the favorable circumstances for Gao Jianfu and his school, however, was the deterioration of the relationship between China and Japan. As an early revolutionary, Gao was one of the first artists to respond to Japan’s aggression with his art. His engagement with patriotic

150 However, Gao Jianfu’s review report on Western painting was not published in the post-event report. It was only stated that he did not present because of late arrival. See “Yishupin yanjiu baogao” 藝術品研究報告 [Research Report of the Art Objects] in *Xihu bolanhui zong baogaoshu* 西湖博覽會總報告書 [General Review of the West Lake Exposition], in Jing Li and Chen Zhanqi, eds., *Zhongguo zaoqi bolanhui ziliao hui bian* 中国早期博覽會資料編 [Compilation of Sources related to the Early Expositions in China] (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2003), vol. 6, 401.
subjects began when the Shanghai incident (also known as the January 28 incident) broke out in 1932. It has generally been accepted by historians that this incident was a self-directed attempt by the Japanese military to extend its influence far into the heartland of China. After a series of anti-Japanese events in mid-January of 1932, the Japanese military swiftly accumulated a large regiment outside of Shanghai and made harsh demands on the Chinese. While the Shanghai municipal government was willing to concede to those demands, the Japanese military took action at midnight on the 28th of January and started an offensive that involved both ground and air forces. The fighting took place in many areas of Shanghai, but it was the bloodiest in the Zhabei 閘北 district, which is in the north of the municipality. An industrial district, Zhabei was also home to several cultural and educational organizations, and most importantly, the printing facilities of the Commercial Press 商務印書館, then the largest publishing company in China.\footnote{Yeh Wen-hsin, \textit{Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism} (University of California Press, 1996), 246.} At midnight on January 28, the region witnessed what was likely the first-ever air bombing of civilians in Chinese history. The Commercial Press, together with its library, was destroyed; many colleges and universities were ravaged or obliterated, affecting half of the 14,000 students in the city.\footnote{Donald A. Jordan, \textit{China’s Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 194–95.}

Fortunately, Gao was not in Shanghai when the incident broke out (he was most likely in Guangdong). However, his residence in Shanghai was close to the combat zone and was ultimately burnt to the ground; his paintings and collection of old masters were destroyed. His family also endured much hardship during the flight. His wife fell ill and never recovered; his only son, Gao
Limin 高勵民, was lost, and then found—only to be lost again.153 Gao’s reaction to this incident was *Flames in the East Battlefield* 東戰場的烈焰 (undated), which was his first painting with explicitly patriotic overtones (fig. 39).154 Different from his clever additions of modern objects in earlier examples (such as the tiny airplane in *Flying in the Rain*), the monumental ruins in *Flames in the East Battlefield* are visually prominent and captured in unprecedented details. The collapsing buildings and the rubble are positioned in perspective; light and dark are indicated to enforce their physicality (this treatment is most prevalent in the rubble in the foreground). Gao did not neglect verisimilitude; he used a mix of ochre, ink, and unpainted white space for the fire and smoke. To approximate their textures, he chose both broken and short brushstrokes for the bombed walls and rubble.

Gao Jianfu also assimilated *nihonga* elements in *Flames of the Eastern Battlefield*. The diagonal composition reminds one of Shunkyō’s *Desolate Village, Evening Snow*, which Gao had already adapted to a variety of subjects. The palette and overall atmosphere find their precedence in Kimura Buzan’s 木村武山 (1876–1942) *Abō gōka* 阿房劫火 (1907), which was taken from the burning Epang Palace 阿房宮 (Abō in Japanese) by the warlord Xiang Yu (fig. 40). Gao Jianfu must have known Buzan’s *Abō gōka*: his *Burning of the Epang Palace* 火燒阿房宮 (1930) is almost a reproduction of Buzan’s original, with the exception that the composition was modified to a horizontal one. By transposing elements from *Abō gōka*, Gao certainly saw the connections between the destruction of culture in the burning of Epang and the bombing of Shanghai.

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154 Chen Jichun believes it is the first war painting of the Lingnan School. Chen Jichun, *Aomen yu Lingnan huapai* 澳門與嶺南畫派 [Macau and the Lingnan School] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing HK, 2013), 50.
Pictorially speaking, *Flames in the Eastern Battlefield* is a synthesis of Gao Jianfu’s successful formulae of the previous two decades that combined the composition and techniques of *nihonga* with the representation of contemporary subject matter.

Despite this impressive start, Gao Jianfu’s subsequent attempts in representing patriotic subjects could hardly meet the standard he had set with *Flames in the Eastern Battlefield*. Contemporary accounts indicate that he painted other facets of the anti-Japanese effort, but the subjects gravitated predominantly to representations of modern military advances. This is not to reject depictions of national defense episodes as necessarily prosaic, however, Gao could hardly offer anything new with his existing expertise. A report about an exhibition celebrating the anniversary of the Huade Orphanage 花地孤儿院 in Guangzhou exposes Gao’s limitation. According to the report, among the paintings displayed, many featured modern armaments: there were paintings about battleships, fortifications, artillery batteries, and searchlights, either by Gao or his followers. There was a whole gallery dedicated to aircraft, for which Gao was well-known:

> Among the galleries there is one with many aircraft paintings, showing them bombing, dueling, or flying in the rain, in snow, under the moon, or in the mist, in different modes and types.

中有一室陳列飛機數十幅，或轟炸，或空戰，或飛行於雨中、雪中、月中、霧中的種種式式，不一而足。

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155 It is surprising that very few of them were reproduced in journals, or even survive in collections.
156 Huade Orphange was an orphanage founded in Guangzhou. Its first director was Pan Dawei 潘達微 (1881–1929), who, like Gao Jianfu, combined the roles of the revolutionary and painter. For more about the orphanage, see Pan Guohua, “Huade gu’eryuan he Pan Dawei xiansheng” 花地孤儿院和潘達微先生 [the Huade Orphanage and Mr. Pan Dawei], in Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang hui 《辛亥革命前後反帝愛國運動會議》 (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Shi Fangcun Qu zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 1988), no. 2, 41-45.
157 News about this exhibition was reported in *Da Han Gong Bao* 大漢公報 [The Great Han Newspaper], a Chinese newspaper published in Canada. See “Gu’eryuan zhanlanhui meishushi minghua” 孤兒院展覽會美術室名畫.
Gao Jianfu probably had exhausted all possibilities that he knew to invoke diversity with the motif of aircraft. On the contrary, interpretations by his followers were never short of creativity. A bold attempt can be found in Warfare at Zhenru 真茹灰劫圖 (dated 1931), which was painted by Gao’s favorite follower, Li Wengui 李文珪 (b. 1901), and similarly inspired by the January 28 incident (fig. 41). Located next to Zhabei, the Zhenru district was also severely damaged during the Japanese attack. Contrary to the static Flames of the Eastern Battlefield, Li’s painting encapsulated the moment when Japanese fighter planes bombed the Zhenru International Radio Broadcast Station. It is obvious that this painting was a variation of Gao Jianfu’s “aircraft landscape,” yet rather than representing the aircraft as frozen in the sky, Li depicted them as objects in motion. The two aircraft in the foreground were painted with much more detail, with one of them sinking sharply, leaving behind a long trail of thick smoke. Additionally, the young Li Wengui turned the picture into a spectacular interplay of ink and brushwork. The twin towers were painted with repetitive and meticulous touches, while the clouds of smoke were represented by ink shades of varying intensities. Another creative rendition of the “aircraft landscape” is He Binguang’s 何炳光 (d. late 1940s) Pitiful City of Shenyang 可憐的瀋陽城 (fig. 42). A senior member of the Chunshui atelier, He Bingguang also highlighted the dynamism of the fighter planes, with one of the planes appearing to be flying toward the viewer.

[Famous Paintings in the Art Gallery of the Exhibition at the Orphanage], Da Han Gong Bao, March 26, 1935.

According to Zheng Danrang 鄭淡然 (1911–1997), Li Wengui was Gao Jianfu’s favorite disciple who sometimes acted as a ghost-painter for the master. Unfortunately, he passed away early. Zheng Danrang recalled that Gao wore a piece of black cloth on his arm as a sign of grief for a whole week. See Huang, “Guanyu ‘Lingnanpai’ de diaocha cailiao.”

According to Wang Yujun, the Zhenru International Radio Broadcast Station was where the transmitting tower was built. See Yang Zhenxing, Huatong Li de Taiwan: Cong Mosi Dianbao Dao Zhihuixing Shouji 話筒裡的台灣：從摩斯電報到智慧型手機 [Taiwan in the Mouthpiece: From Morse Code to Smartphones], 2016, 297.
Some followers were even more daring in their interpretation of themes devised by Gao Jianfu. Fang Rending’s modification of *Flames in the Eastern Battlefield* provides the best example. In his *Sorrows after the Battle* 戰後的悲哀 (1932), Fang’s conceptualization of the ruins alludes to Gao Jianfu’s, but the focus is shifted to the fleeing mother who is protecting her child in the foreground, highlighting the hardships of the common people during the war (fig. 43). Another follower who modified *Flames in the Eastern Battlefield* was Situ Qi 司徒奇 (1904–1997), who was trained in oil painting before joining the Chunshui atelier. Situ Qi also regarded the ruins as the backdrop, adding figures of suffering peasants in front of the rubble (fig. 44). If Li Wengui and He Bingugang added a sense of motion and dynamism to Gao’s creations, Fang Rending and Situ Qi intensified the emotional appeal by modifying the master’s motifs into figure paintings. Compared to his followers’ innovations, Gao could hardly offer something new. A look at one of his later versions of the aircraft landscapes shows that the only difference from his earlier versions lies in the number of fighter planes (fig. 45).

To make the situation worse, the monotony in subject matter and treatment was not the only challenge that Gao Jianfu encountered. Even at his best, to use flower-and-birds or animals for the sake of the anti-Japanese effort was too tortuous and tiresome a task, particularly for expressing more sophisticated ideas. An example that exposed the constraints of Gao’s limited repertoire was *Destruction of Civilization* 文明的毁滅 (undated), a painting inspired by the war in Europe (fig. 46). The painting appears relatively straightforward. The upper part is dominated by a massive cross rendered in Gao’s characteristic broad strokes, with lilies of two colors, white and red.

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160 This painting is also known as *Catastrophe on Civilization* 文化浩劫.
blossoming at its base. The cross is splintered in the middle under the effect of a squall, which Gao Jianfu suggested by adding diagonal ink strokes. The lilies at the bottom are affected as well, as if they will be blown away in the next moment.

While the combination of a cross, a symbol of Christianity, and lilies, which is not a common subject in Chinese art, is unconventional, the message of the painting is spelled out explicitly in its title. The cross is a symbol of civilization, probably European, which is showing signs of crumbling in the face of a squall; in this context it could mean nothing but the ongoing war. The lilies at the base of the cross might be for an ornamental purpose, or they could be interpreted as the “flowers” of civilization, which were also threatened by the squall. According to Jian Youwen, however, the message of The Destruction of Civilization is far more complicated—and there is the possibility that Gao Jianfu told him so. As retold by Wong Shiu Hon 黃兆漢, who worked under Jian’s supervision in the 1970s, the latter explained that the cross is a universal symbol of peace and civilization. The complexity is, surprisingly, in the flowers. According to Wong, the red lilies symbolize the Communists and the white ones the Nazis.\footnote{Shiu Hon Wong, Paintings of the Lingnan school: an annotated catalogue of slides at the Centre of Asian Studies from the collection of Jen Yu-wen 嶺南画派作品幻燈片目錄提要：原畫乃簡氏斑園鑑藏 ([Hong Kong]: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1972), 18.} Therefore, the lilies are not the victims of the squall, but like the ferocious wind, they, too, are threats to civilization. To comment on the international situation, Gao Jianfu tried to invent symbolic meanings for the lilies, which had been under-represented in Chinese art. However, without the painter’s elaboration, few could grasp this layer of meaning.
VI. Figure Painting as Solution

Gao Jianfu was sensitive to his limitations. A piece of writing in early 1933, not long after the success of *Flames in the Eastern Battlefield*, can provide some insight into his changing mind, which, unexpectedly yet reasonably, led to his later inclination towards figure painting.

In February 1933, the First Exhibition of the City of Guangzhou 廣州市第一次展覽會 was held in Guangzhou. This event was organized by the Guangzhou municipal government to celebrate the recent developments of the city and to promote the industries and commerce of the province of Guangdong.\(^{162}\) The exposition also reserved a section for fine arts, which displayed both objects from local collectors and works by contemporary artists. Gao Jianfu and his Chunshui atelier participated. Besides submitting artworks, they also prepared a small pamphlet for the occasion, which contains reproductions of their paintings and articles written by members of the group. As the leader of the atelier, Gao drew up a long article entitled “Dui Riben yishujie xuanyan bing gao shijie” 對日本藝術界宣言並告世界 [Manifesto to the Art World of Japan and to the World].\(^ {163}\) After spending the first half of the manifesto condemning the recent provocations of the Japanese and explaining why China was impossible to subdue, he returned to art and recounted the artistic exchanges between China and Japan in history. Towards the end, he even called Japanese painters to action. Besides asking them to pressure the government to halt all aggressive actions immediately, he also urged them to paint the sufferings that the recent offensives in

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\(^{162}\) The exposition opened on the same day as the Haizhu Bridge 海珠橋 that still connects the two sides of the Pearl River 珠江 (zhu jiang). The exposition contained ten sections, with art being one of them, and objects displayed included loans from local collectors and works by contemporary artists.

\(^{163}\) The article was published first in *Guangzhou shizhan Chunshui huayuan chupin tekan* 廣州市展春睡畫院出品特刊 [Special Issue of the Works by the Chunshui Atelier in the Guangzhou Municipal Exhibition] (Guangzhou: Chunshui huayuan, 1933), and later in *Yi Feng*, vol. 1, no. 5 (1933).
Manchuria and Shanghai had brought to the masses. He concluded by enumerating a list of benchmark examples that he hoped painters would follow:

Therefore I entreated the masters [of Japanese art] to beautify people’s lives [with art], unite the art world and related groups, rise up and call on a movement for a humanitarian and peaceful cause, and invoke the government to stop the army advancing in China. You could also paint the plights and cruelties of the recent battlefields in the Northeast or Shanghai, for the sake of waking heroes from lethargy or showing the right path for men of courage. When Wu Daoxuan painted *Scenes of the Hell*, butchers were moved to drop their butcher’s clavier; Raphael’s *Portrait of Christ* could mitigate the bestiality of demons drastically. Other examples such as Zheng Xia’s *The Homeless Peasants*, Kalamusiji’s *Weeping for the Army*, Maolong’s *Rescue Ship*, Ge’er’s *Judgment Place*, Meili’s *Signing the Death Sentence*—the transformative power of these works has been praised around the world. Here I hope the artists of Japan—and those from around the world as well—will bear in mind the spirit of peace, and utilize their miraculous techniques [to create works] and take up the responsibility to save the world. [If this is done] it would be as relieving as if a lotus emerged from a pit of fire. It is not just for the sake of improving the future diplomatic relationship between China and Japan, but I hope it can act as a model for the world in the future.

In this text, Gao quoted a bizarre and incoherent list of examples of famous and obscure Chinese and Western painters. The Chinese painters Gao quoted were the legendary Wu Daozi 吳道子 (c.680–740) of the Tang and Zheng Xia 鄭俠 (1041–1119) of the Northern Song.
According to *Tangchao minghualu* 唐朝名畫錄, Wu Daozi was commissioned to paint a series of murals depicting the suffering of sinners in hell in a Buddhist temple in the capital Chang’an 長安. The representation was so vivid that, upon viewing the work, many butchers and fishers repented and abandoned their professions as they realized the punishment waiting for them in the afterlife for the slaughtering of animals.\(^{166}\) The story of Zheng Xia was another one about how art influences people’s minds. Not a painter by profession but a middle-rank official during the reign of the emperor Shenzong 神宗 (1048–1085, r. 1067–1085), Zheng was known to have submitted a handscroll, commonly known as *The Homeless Peasants* 流民圖 (*liumin tu*), with a petition to the emperor denouncing the reforms of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086). In the petition Zheng claims that Wang’s stringent policies exacerbated the plight of peasants during a famine in northern China, which was captured in the scroll. According to *The History of the Song* 宋史, Shenzong was so touched by the hardship of the people captured in *The Homeless Peasants* that he repealed many of Wang’s policies the next day.\(^ {167}\) This scroll might be far from a consummate piece of art, but Zheng and *The Homeless Peasants* have been venerated as examples of how art can fulfill its social obligation with its visual power.\(^ {168}\)

Among the list of European painters, the only one whose identity could be affirmed was Raphael. Since the early twentieth century, the Renaissance master symbolizing the apex of Western art had regularly been raised in China.\(^ {169}\) The painting that Gao singled out is hard to

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\(^{167}\) *Song shi*, vol. 321.

\(^{168}\) This legacy of “refugees” remained an ideal for Chinese painters, and occasionally one could find the theme of refugees revisited, the most famous being the Ming painter, Zhou Chen’s namesake.

\(^{169}\) Kang Youwei, for instance, claimed that he admired Raphael the most.
determine, and it is uncertain to which anecdote in Raphael’s life Gao was referring. As for the other painters, their actual identities are impossible to trace because of the alternative transliterations used. Nevertheless, the titles of the paintings suggest that they were episodes involving violent actions (for example, Rescue Ship), intense emotions (Weeping for the Army), or dramatic moments (Signing the Death Sentence). It is reasonable to surmise that these paintings were akin to history painting in European art, which depended heavily on the expressive power of human figures through bodily gestures and facial expressions.

Even though this assembled list from Chinese and European art could have been another occasion when the older Gao tried to impress his readers by dropping names, this repeated quotation of works that he was not familiar with indicated a significant shift in his mindset. On the one hand, Gao Jianfu must have felt the constraints of his specialization in genres such as flower-and-bird and animals, which did not allow him to directly convey messages with social significance. On the other hand, as the clash with Japan was becoming increasingly imminent, he must also have recognized the need for an art that could efficiently inspire emotional responses from the audience. As the above has shown, it was figure painting that Gao Jianfu identified as the solution.

The older Gao would have had plenty of opportunities since the late 1920s to experience the visual power of figural compositions in European styles. Besides the numerous exhibitions in Shanghai and Guangzhou, there was the West Lake Exposition in 1929, in which Gao acted as the reviewer of Western paintings. In the exposition, Lin Fengmian received a commission from the organizing committee for two paintings in the “Memorial Pavilion for the Revolution,” which were entitled Martyrs of Huanghuagang 黃花崗烈士 (1929) and The Massacre of the 30th May 五月
According to the official brochure, these two paintings were displayed prominently on both walls in the room commemorating “Father of the Nation” Sun Yat-sen. Despite the poor quality of the reproduction of *Martyrs of Huanghuagang*, it can still be seen that it was a narrative figure painting in the direction of Lin’s famous large canvases, where human bodies were figurative. Gao would have paid more attention to this painting than any of the others, as he had always claimed himself to be a survivor of this self-sacrificial uprising. Lin Fengmian’s other famous paintings, including his masterpiece, the grand figural composition, *Suffering*, were also displayed in the Western painting section. Gao must have had the opportunity there to experience how the human figure can be used as a vehicle to express actions and emotions to impress viewers.

**VII. Belated Experimentations**

Gao Jianfu was a man of action. Around the same time that he published “Manifesto to the Art World of Japan and a Letter to the World,” he picked up figure painting again after a decade of neglect. By the 1930s, several figure painting specialists had already established themselves in China, and Gao Jianfu was acquainted with many of them. For instance, he worked with Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, who were both noted for painting large-scale figural compositions. Meanwhile, Gao was connected to those who preferred ink and brush. Two painters of the younger

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171 For the arrangement of the Memorial Pavilion for the Revolution, see “Guansuo gaikuang” 館所概況 [Overview of the exhibition spaces], in *Xihu bolanhui zong baogaoshu*, Jing and Chen, *Zhongguo zaoqi bolanhui ziliao hui bian*, vol. 5, 488.

172 For Gao Jianfu’s participation in the uprising and his promotion of himself as a survivor, see Li, “Yishu yu zhengzhi er wei yi ti de jiazhi moshi.”

173 It should be noted again that Gao’s report for the West Lake Exposition was not published. See n.149.
generation of the Lingnan School, Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang, had established their reputation with figure painting, demonstrating strong personal imprints. If it sounds implausible for the self-confident Gao Jianfu to look for inspiration from his juniors, there were many others with whom Gao had connections. One of them was the Cantonese painter Bao Shaoyou 鲍少游 (1892–1985).\textsuperscript{174} Bao received formal training in Japan, and his repertoire was similar to that of Gao, with the exception that he was much more competent in figure painting. Bao was most noted for his classical beauties, which were akin to the delicate and decorative shinü tradition, but he was also mindful of historical details and spatial accuracy in his works. The objects and architectural structures are not only meticulously painted, but also match their historical context; the spatial relationship of the pictorial space is always clearly defined. A typical example is his *Viewing the Moon on the Western Mansion* 西樓望月 (fig. 48).

Besides figure painting from Europe and China, Gao was exposed to Indian figure painting, something that fairly few painters noticed at that time. As a delegate to the All Asia Educational Conference held in Benares, India (1931), Gao took the opportunity to travel to various cities in India. Aside from making headlines by meeting the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and climbing the Himalayas, he paid a visit to renowned archaeological sites in Ajanta (in central India) and Sigiriya (in modern-day Sri Lanka). These two sites are noted for their Buddhist cave paintings that possibly date to around 5th century CE. The frescoes in the Ajanta caves are narrative in nature, while the ones in Sigiriya feature mainly female deities. During his visit, Gao made copies of the frescoes in these caves, some of which he eventually colored and made into finished paintings (fig. 174).

\textsuperscript{174} It has been said that Gao travelled to Japan to accompany him back to China and offered him a teaching post at the Foshan Municipal Art School in 1927. Even Bao moved to Hong Kong afterwards; he was active in the Guangdong art world, and maintained contact with the older Gao.
He also had a chance to encounter figure painting by contemporary Indian artists. In “My Views on Modern Painting,” he recollects and speaks highly of the painter Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), the nephew of the poet Tagore, calling him “master of the New School” of Indian art. It was probably through the Nobel laureate that Gao came into contact with the art of Abanindranath Tagore and other painters of his circle. One of these painters who may have inspired Gao was Jamini Roy (1887–1972), Tagore’s pupil. His work demonstrated a strong interest in blending traditional Indian visual language with the European avant-garde and is characterized by the simplification of forms. Gao’s Meditation 打坐圖 (undated), which features a monk-like figure whose body is simplified to the point that it looks like a child’s painting, could have been directly inspired by Roy’s simplification of the human body (fig. 50).

Nevertheless, Gao Jianfu showed only occasional interest in the new styles of his contemporaries, preferring to experiment with the limited vocabulary that he learned in the 1910s. His surviving figure paintings from the 1930s number only four (excluding his repainting of them), and all feature anachronistic figures, such as poets of the past or beauties in traditional costumes, which were seemingly irrelevant to the present. Under this apparent anachronism in subject and style, however, Gao was tackling some fundamental issues in the representation of the human figure with a Chinese medium, such as the naturalistic representation of the human body and its conveyance of actions and emotions.

Gao Jianfu’s tenacity to represent the physical human body was manifested by his renewed interest in Terasaki Kyōgō’s Luofu Fairy. In the 1930s, Gao repainted The Fragrant Dream of the Mount Luofu three times (fig. 51). It seems that he had somehow regarded this version of the Luofu
fairy as his creation. He likely used it as a prototype for his followers to study as well.\textsuperscript{175} As mentioned, Kyōgō’s \textit{Luofu Fairy} was a compositionally simple painting; it differed from the versions of his contemporaries in the sense that the plasticity of the fairy is highlighted through her posture and the massiveness of the upper part of the body, and it is possible that it was this emphasis that attracted Gao. In the 1930s versions, the most significant modification was the feet of the fairy, which were blurred with a cloud of rising mist. This modification indicates that it is the moment when the plum fairy is materializing into a physical and concrete being, which further complicates the representation of the physicality of the figure. Otherwise, the three versions that Gao repainted were startlingly similar in terms of composition and gesture, with the posture and the original emphasis of the physical body retained. They differed only in their respective treatments of the hair and the intensity of the plum at the bottom.

This emphasis on the representation of the physical body can also be found in \textit{Pitying Herself in the Mirror} 顾影自憐 (dated 1937), which, like \textit{Fragrant Dream of the Mount Luofu}, could have been painted by Gao Jianfu several times (fig. 52).\textsuperscript{176} The current version focuses on an elaborately-dressed female figure against a blank background. Her hair is untied and hangs down loosely; it appears the lady is about to remove her makeup and ornaments. She is cast in a pose, with her back facing the viewers; this pose, which is enhanced by the flowing band of her drapery, accentuates the three-dimensional presence of the figure in the pictorial space. While the physical body of the lady beneath her drapery is not implied, Gao uses long, continuous, but jarring, ink lines to approximate the folds of the garment, thereby giving the figure a sense of materiality.

\textsuperscript{175} Su Wonong, a follower who joined the Chunshui atelier in the mid-1920s, made a copy of this painting.\textsuperscript{176} Fu, “Yu gujin duihua,” 11.
The pose of the figure denies viewers a complete look at the beautiful lady’s face, which is compensated for by the addition of a mirror in her left hand showing the reflection of her face. It is not uncommon in Chinese painting for a beautiful woman to be represented in this manner; a famous example is Gu Kaizhi’s *The Admonitions Scroll* in the British Museum. As for Gao Jianfu, he probably borrowed a prototype from his master, Ju Lian (fig. 53). In the original, the facial features of the female figure are completely omitted, but in *Pitying Herself in the Mirror*, Gao retains the slightest hint of her eyebrow and corner of her eye. Under the brush of Ju Lian, the beauty looking into the mirror was intended to carry an admonitory (and misogynist) message, warning people against the charms of the female, which are not only illusionary, but fatal as well. In contrast, Gao’s remake replaced this message with a sentimental one, as is suggested by the title and its inscription.

Besides the representation of the physical body, Gao was also experimenting with painting more complicated gestures and emotions, as in *The Poet of the South* (1935), which is arguably his most important figure painting (fig. 54).

The way that *The Poet of the South* was executed already sets it apart from others. Three preparatory drawings of this painting survive, and according to Situ Qi, the drawings were based on a life model. He Lei 何磊 (1916–1978), one of Gao’s last recruits, acted as the model for the drawings.177 Admittedly, the body of the poet is concealed under a white robe, yet one physical attribute is emphasized prominently: the poet’s protruding belly. It should be noted that the face

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also shows individual characteristics. As Gao’s contemporary Feng Boheng 馮伯衡 remarked, the visage of the poet resembles Gao Jianfu himself, which implies that the painting may have been intended as a self-portrait.  

The poet’s type of hair dress and shining, white, long robe indicate that he is a poet of the past, but his costume does not provide us with any hints about the actual period, and the identity of the poet remains obscure. The romantic Li Bai 李白 (701–762) of the Tang dynasty (618–907) would be a good choice; but Li Ming 黎明 (b.1901), a late follower of Gao Jianfu, claims that his master was painting Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (673–740) of the early Tang dynasty. While Zhang might be less renowned than Li Bai, he was the first famous Chinese poet to have hailed from the Lingnan southern region, and his Cantonese identity might have attracted the older Gao. Zhang was also connected to the moon: his *Viewing the Moon and Thinking of Someone Afar* 望月懷遠 is one of the most well-known verses about the moon in Chinese literature.

Aside from the poet, only two other elements are present in the painting to indicate the time of day and season. The face of the poet is once again cast in a profile; it is basically flat. Although a limited degree of modeling can be found around the back of the ear, it is not enough to create an illusion of relief. The facial features are simplified—the poet’s eye, eyebrow, and nose are painted with a single stroke of the brush. Despite this simplified treatment of the facial features, Gao gives

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179 Zhang was arguably the first successful Cantonese in Chinese history according to Confucian standards. He led a successful political career and was the last of the able chancellors (*zaixiang* 宰相) to the emperor Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (Li Longji 李隆基, 685–762, r. 712–756), whose early and mid-reign was marked by unprecedented prosperity. He was praised for his moral rectitude when serving in the court, which stood as a sharp contrast to his successors, Li Linfu 李林甫 (d. 753) and Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (d. 756). In addition, Zhang was celebrated for his effort to reform contemporary poetry and literary styles, which he understood to be “corrupt” and “weak.”
the figure both facial expression and emotion. The poet’s mouth opens slightly, suggesting that he is chanting a new line he has just conceived; his eyes are closed, emphasizing that he is in the midst of a poetic trance. His beard also appears to be fluttering slightly in the air, echoing the upward motion of the poet’s head.

The folds of the figure’s drapery are captured with short, strong, and angular strokes, especially around the midsection of the body. These lines allude to the “sketching methods” (miaofa 描法) in Chinese figure painting, although Gao’s strokes do not conform to any established type. The ink strokes that define the folds of the drapery are directional, all pointing to the lower left corner, thus resulting in a sense that the poet is inclining to the right in this moonlit scene. This sense of leaning to the right is also enhanced by the tip of his right foot, which emerges from his robe. It is true that the figure is static, but with a masterful use of lines, Gao successfully suggests a sense of movement.

As mentioned earlier, Gao Jianfu, however, sought to achieve something more than merely representing the face and the body in a convincing, vivid manner. It is impossible not to pay attention to the poet’s hands, in which he grasps a book, or more precisely, his long, tarnished fingernails. A close examination of this detail shows that Gao was careful not to neglect the contours of the actual fingers, which appear below the nails. From surviving sketches, this abnormally-long fingernail was emphasized in the final painting (fig. 55). To a modern eye, such an overly-naturalistic detail might appear disruptive, however, it was common for Chinese men of letters in the past to keep their fingernails long, which would facilitate their turning the pages of thread-bound books. While it might not be Gao’s original idea, the emphasis of this detail does show his effort to convey historical accuracy. Jian Youwen, who had close ties with Gao and his
followers, also admiringly discusses this detail in his review “Haojiang duhua ji” [Viewing Paintings in Macau].

As Fu Licui has discussed, a visual source that Gao Jianfu would have had in mind is *Li Bai Strolling and Chanting a Poem* 李白行吟圖, an ink painting that is attributed to the Southern Song master, Liang Kai 梁楷 (active early thirteenth century) (fig. 56). The face and body, together with the suggestion of movement with the right foot, all speak to Gao’s borrowing from the Southern Song master. Therefore, even Gao borrowed the conception of the “chanting while strolling” type, and *The Poet of the South* was his first original attempt to reconcile body form, action, and emotion with Chinese brushwork, in a single human figure with individual attributes.

Because of the ambition that he invested in it, Gao Jianfu was very cautious with this painting. As he recounted in 1948, he did not carry this painting to Nanjing, when, in 1935, he was invited by his former protégé, Xu Beihong, to teach at National Central University, because in his opinion “its subject matter is too old, even though its technique is new in some aspects.” Gao would have known some of Xu Beihong’s recent works, such as *The Foolish Old Man Moving the Mountains*, or his *Jiu Fang Gao*, which were Xu’s attempts at large-scale narrative episodes with the Chinese brush. Gao was likely worried that some of his audience, who were used to visually-compelling canvases, might dismiss *The Poet of the South* as trivial. Nor was *The Poet of the South* exhibited in major cities, such as Shanghai or Guangzhou. It was only in 1939 that it was shown to the public in Macau. Despite Gao’s caveats, painters who were close to him understood the

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181 Fu, “Yu gujin duhua,” 22.
182 Fu, 22.
significance of this painting immediately. As Fu Licui conjectures, *The Poet of the South* was chosen by his followers as the cover image when *My Views on Modern Painting* was published posthumously, a fact that speaks to his followers’ consensus about its paramount status. In contrast, the restless Fang Rending, the protagonist of next chapter, responded quickly with his well-calculated *Grieving over Autumn* 悲秋 (fig. 57). It does not require much explanation to see that Fang borrowed many pictorial elements from *The Poet of the South*, but there are also equally many aspects that were deliberately the opposite. This is particularly the case in the costume. Fang’s poet is dressed in a long scholar’s gown (*changpao* 長袍), a distinctive costume that originated with Manchu dress but that survived into the twentieth century. Coupled with the fact that the queue is absent, Fang’s poet was a contemporary one. The trousers of the poet are tied just above his ankles, which indicates that this is a pair of trousers in the traditional Chinese style (vis-à-vis common trousers as understood nowadays, which are imported from the West).\(^\text{183}\) Tying up one’s trousers would have been part of a tidy appearance, yet there was another practical reason. In Northern China, it was a widespread practice to keep warm by tying up the trouser legs. Fang Rending’s painting thus implies that his poet is a northerner in modern times, vis-à-vis *The Poet of the South*.

How Gao Jianfu thought about his follower’s response is unknown. Curiously enough, the master chose the same title, *Grieving over Autumn*, for his next major figure painting. Created

\(^\text{183}\) While there is no concrete evidence, it was highly probable that tying up one’s trousers at the ankle was originally part of the Manchu costume. To tie up trousers neatly was regarded as a requirement of a good appearance. Zhang Qin, *Beijing Xiangshan jiaoxia qiren de mingyun: koushu lishi fangtan lu* 北京香山腳下旗人的命運: 口述歷史訪談錄 [*The Fate of the Banner People at Xiangshan of Beijing: An Oral History*] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji, 2012), 126.
around 1935 for Li Xiangen 李仙根 (1893–1943), a revolutionary in the late Qing dynasty and later regional bureaucrat, Gao Jianfu’s *Grieving over Autumn* borrows several elements from *The Poet of the South* (fig. 58). Like earlier paintings, *Grieving over Autumn* features a male character with a generic, ancient costume set against a blank background. Gao Jianfu includes falling leaves to indicate the time of the year. While the character appears to be emotionless, his visage is similar to the poet in *The Poet of the South*; coupled with an also protruding belly, it is possible Gao was reusing the same model for these two paintings.\(^{184}\) Finally, one should note that the idea of “grieving over autumn” 思秋—that is, being saddened by the melancholic, desolate feeling brought by the arrival of autumn—is a very popular motif in Chinese literature. Not only are *The Poet of the South* and *Grieving over Autumn* pictorially similar, but they are also related to the same literary theme.

The size of *Grieving over Autumn* is considerably smaller than *The Poet of the South*, which might imply that the former is not as ambitious. However, the details in *Grieving over Autumn* indicate that Gao was equally concerned about it. The color in the painting is detailed, and the costume of the figure is depicted carefully (note the translucence of the hair dress). Gao also made an unprecedented attempt to devise a complicated posture to suggest the melancholic mood designated by the title, *Grieving over Autumn*. He is sitting on the ground casually resting his legs. This positioning of the legs may have been derived from Buddhist imagery, except the mood is even more relaxed in *Grieving over Autumn*. The figure’s flabby body is in harmony with the mood;

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\(^{184}\) Like *The Poet of the South*, there is also a connection with classical Chinese types in *Grieving over Autumn*. The composition of this painting may have been derived from *The Portrait of Zhuge Liang* 諸葛亮像 by the mid-Ming painter Zhang Lu 張路 (1464–1538), as Gao may have seen the painting in Japan. See Fu, “Yu gujin duihua.”
his back is slightly curved, with his belly popping out. Physically speaking, holding this posture would shift the body weight backward, and to balance this, the left hand of the figure rests on the ground, partly supporting the reclining body. In contrast to the momentary joy that is expressed in the visage in *The Poet of the South*, in *Grieving over Autumn*, Gao Jianfu seeks to evoke a sense of melancholy through posture.

VIII. Conclusion: The Unrealized Quest

If one excludes the repainting of earlier works, *Grieving over Autumn* is the last important figure painting by Gao Jianfu that survives to this day. He must have been contented with *Grieving over Autumn*: it was the only figure painting that was included in his *Jianfu huaji* 劍父畫集 (“Paintings of Jianfu”), which was published in 1935. This, however, does not mean that Gao Jianfu abandoned figure painting afterward. He must have continued even after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was reported that he showed a painting entitled *The Typical Northerner* 典型北方人 in an exhibition held at the University of Hong Kong in 1938. Its title not only sounds like a figure painting, but it also appears to be a reference to his masterpiece, *The Poet of the South*. This painting, however, remains a mystery. Nothing about *The Typical Northerner*, except its title, survives.185

With the event of the Sino-Japanese War, Gao Jianfu eventually fled and stayed in Macau until September 1946. During his time as a refugee, he was active in organizing exhibitions and other activities, either for charity or other war causes. These activities may have left him with little

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186 The focus of the review is Xu Beihong, and little is mentioned about Gao Jianfu.
time to continue to pursue his quest for figure painting. It is also possible that Gao was appalled by the achievements of his followers, especially those of Fang Rending, with whom his relationship had deteriorated sharply after the latter’s return from Japan in 1935. Even in “My Views on Modern Painting,” which can be viewed as a summation of his ideas on art, he did not touch on the significance of figure painting. Gao merely raised specific subjects to be painted, encouraging painters to work on subjects such as “the inviolable and self-sacrificing soldiers fighting in the thickness of smoke and bullets”; “fighters defending our nations with their blood and flesh”; or “the sufferings of the people, children, workers, farmers, the lives of the people.” Undoubtedly, these subjects are best represented with human figures; however, he did not discuss figure painting as a separate category.

Had it not been for Gao’s lectures after the war, we would never know that his ambition to create a new figure painting increased during the twilight of his career. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Gao Jianfu regularly brought up the issue of figure painting to his students at the South China Art School, which was set up in 1946, immediately after he returned to Guangzhou. From the transcripts of his speeches in weekly assemblies, one can see that Gao’s mind was preoccupied with figure painting, with his opinion on it significantly modified and theorized.187 For instance, in December 1946, after encouraging students to make the best use of their leisure time, Gao discussed the significance of figure painting from a historical perspective:

> We should not just limit ourselves to the representation of birds and animals. We have to concentrate more on human figures as well. We should paint more human figures; [to do so] we need to practice drawing with plaster busts and human bodies. Practice first with plaster busts; do not practice with live models from scratch. There is not a nation in the world that does not emphasize figure painting. In Chinese history, the art of the

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187 These speeches were given on Monday, which was the weekday required by the Nationalist government to commemorate Sun Yat-sen.
Six Dynasties, the Tang, or the Five Dynasties, all emphasized figure paintings. Now we should focus on real lives, also paying attention to history and customs. China has thousands of years of glorious history, together with the magnificent customs of the various ethnicities and regions.

In January 1947, Gao elaborated on the possibilities of figure painting when advising students on how to prepare for their upcoming examination. He concluded with a note on the “hierarchy of genres”:

[Only the art that] represents the spirit, the material, [or the art that] has content and meaning, [or the art that] contains poetic ideas, philosophical ideas, or is related to life: only art of the above types are worthy. [As to the creation of] artworks that have content and meaning, figure painting is certainly the genre that is most possible; second [to figure painting] is landscape, whereas flowers-and-birds, fish-and-insects are the most difficult.

Not only does Gao Jianfu praise the expressive potential of figure painting, but he even prioritizes it over flower-and-bird and animals—the genres that he had previously been most known for. In a talk in April 1947, he linked his plan of reviving Chinese art with figure painting, after he described art education in Japan and India according to his experience:

As discussed, all nations prioritize figure painting. In the Han, the Tang, the Song, and the Yuan, human or Buddhist figures represented the majority of paintings produced. If

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189 This speech is dated January 6, 1947. Gao mentioned at the beginning that “the semester is going to end and the examination will be held soon.” This was probably the last speech for the first semester at South China. See Gao, 295.
we are to revive Chinese art now, we need to revive figure painting first, with our emphasis fixed on modern figure painting.

從這來看，各國都是注重人物的。漢、唐、宋、元都是以人物或佛像佔了繪畫產量的大宗。我們現在要復興中國藝術，就先要復興人物，尤其要注重現代的人物畫的。

In the following week, Gao Jianfu explained what he meant by “modern figure painting,” and he also pointed out how the curriculum of South China was perfectly designed to cater to his vision:

To revive Chinese art, “creativity” has to be revived, which could only be achieved through the proper learning procedures. So, the painting departments of our school emphasize figure painting, those in real life in particular, but not those with loose robes, broad belts, and ancient costumes, or those copying piecemeal from here and there, or those with ancient tastes as in leisurely subjects. What we need is modern figure painting with blood and flesh, with muscles and bones, those that can be dissected biologically, and meaningful to life, with content. This type of painting is [derived from the practice of] sketching plaster busts and life models, which is not only the basis of figure painting, but also the basic requirement of all painting.

The subjects that he dismissed—figures in ancient costumes or engaged in leisurely activities—had ironically made up his figure painting. Throughout his career, he had not even attempted to paint the “modern figure painting” for which he advocated so strongly until his last few years. Again, however, it is unfair to criticise Gao Jianfu for not being able to fulfil this ideal, and as analysed in the previous section, the seemingly anachronistic The Poet of the South and

Grieving over Autumn were Gao Jianfu’s attempts to realize this ambition of figure painting. In any case, the determined Gao was not satisfied with himself; and, surprisingly, there is an instance in his December 1946 lecture to students at the South China Art School where he potentially reveals his self-negation:

When we paint historical subjects, we should not be satisfied with capturing details such as the loose robes, broad girdles, the tip of the shoe protruding from the robe, or the fingernail sneaking out from the sleeves: we should paint them fresh, naked, with spirit, with resonance. They should be accurate in anatomical and perspectival terms; they should be figures with bones and flesh. Express and represent as much as possible; it should animate history, and uplift the spirit of our people. Figure painting and history painting are the types that badly require our efforts.

我們寫歷史畫，不是只畫寬袍博帶，衣角露出鞋尖、袖口長出指甲，便算了事，須赤裸裸地，有神、有氣，合乎解剖，合乎透視，有骨、有肉的人物，盡量表現，令人讀活歷史，發揚我們民族的精神，這是很需要的。人物畫、歷史畫，是急待我們表現的繪畫部門。192

Gao’s description of both “the tip of the shoe protruding from the robe” and the “fingernail sneaking out from the sleeves” points to the figure of the poet in Gao’s The Poet of the South. Could his remarks be understood as Freudian slips-of-the-tongue, wherein Gao Jianfu betrayed his inner feelings that he was not satisfied with the most important figure painting of his career? While this conjecture can never be confirmed, the only thing one can say is that figure painting played a special role in Gao’s career—even though he could not create a style in this genre of his own.

Chapter Three

Fang Rending: A Quest for Contemporary

The previous chapter on Gao Jianfu’s career and his relationship with figure painting attests to the significance of the genre in twentieth-century China. Unfortunately, the elder Gao’s realization of the potential of figure painting came at a time when his creativity declined with his health. Even though he struggled to break out of his comfort zone at times, his figure painting received little notice outside of his immediate circle.

The remaining chapters will probe into the art of two figure painting specialists of the Republican period who happened to be followers of the Gao brothers. Despite their masters’ lack of training in this genre, these two painters were aware of figure painting’s potential in their formative years and combined this interest with their initiatives to reform Chinese art. The first to be examined is Fang Rending, who was irreplaceable in the history of twentieth-century Chinese art not only for his conflicting roles in the Lingnan School, but also for his his unique approach to creating a figure painting with characteristics of shidai 時代 (“the times”), which will be the focus of this chapter.

I. Fang Rending: The Special One

Though not wholly forgotten, the reputation of Fang Rending today hardly compares to that of Guan Shanyue 關山月 (1912–2000), Li Xiongcai 黎雄才 (1910–2001), or Yang Shanshen 楊善深 (1913–2004), all of whom have been recognized as successors to Gao Jianfu.¹⁹³ Undoubtedly,

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¹⁹³ Yang Shanshen’s status was unique Gao Jianfu’s followers. Unlike the others, he did not follow the official rites to become a follower of Gao Jianfu. From a traditional Chinese perspective, he was not a “follower” (menren 門人) in the strictest sense. That said, Yang maintained a very close relationship with Gao Jianfu from the 1940s onwards.
Guan, Li, and Yang were all crucial for consolidating and propagating the legacies of Gao Jianfu; however, scholars have neglected the fact that the discourse and repertoire central to the Lingnan School were already well-formulated when they became Gao’s followers in the early 1930s. For most of the Republican period, they were primarily understood to be followers of their larger-than-life master. In contrast, the now relatively less-known Fang Rending was a crucial player in the development of the Lingnan School, but in ways that can be considered both constructive and destructive.

In the early years of the Lingnan School, with his combination of roles as the leading disciple and spokesperson for Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending could justifiably be called his right-hand man. By following his master’s examples of “New Painting,” Fang was one of the first disciples of the older Gao to win national acclaim. A painter who did not pick up the brush until his early twenties, Fang quickly assimilated his master’s repertoire in only six years and stood amongst the Lingnan masters in national and international events. While Gao Jianfu’s younger brother, Gao Qifeng, and regarded him as his teacher. This master-follower relationship was recognized by other followers as well.

194 According to Zheng Danrang, who became a follower of Gao Jianfu in 1930, Li Xiongcai entered the atelier six months after she did. Guan Shanyue met Gao Jianfu even later: it was in 1936 when Guan started to study with Gao Jianfu. For Zheng Dunrang’s interview, see Huang, “Guanyu ‘Lingnanpai’ de diaocha” [On ‘Lingnan School’]. For Guan Shanyue’s, see Chen Xiangbo, “Guan Shanyue Nianbiao” [A Chronology of Guan Shanyue], Zhongguo shuhua [Chinese Painting & Calligraphy], no. 10 (2012): 60.

195 Li Xiongcai and Guan Shanyue attracted only limited attention in the Republican period. Fu Baoshi singled out Fang Rending, Rong Dakuai, and Li Xiongcai after visiting the group exhibition of the Chunshui atelier in 1936, yet little was heard about Li Xiongcai in the remainder of the Republican period. The name of Guan Shanyue was little known until the early 1940s; his fame grew steadily thereafter.

196 Fang Rending was one of the followers to appear with the Lingnan trio in the Liege Exposition of 1930. As reported in Shenbao, the three masters were awarded a “special prize.” Zhang Kunyi 張坤儀 (1895–1969), Zhao Shaoang, and Wu Peirong伍佩榮 (1910–1979) were awarded with a “golden medal,” Fang Rending and Huang Shaoqiang a “silver medal.” See “Bi bohui jiangping zuo zai shishanghui banfa” [Prizes of the Belgian Exposition Awarded in the Municipal Chamber of Commerce Yesterday]” in Shenbao, November 29, 1931. Fang was also one of the three followers of Gao Jianfu to appear in the First National Exhibition in 1929. He submitted five paintings, namely Mandarin Ducks in the Cloud 雲裡鴛鴦, Sung Wong Toi, Kowloon 九龍宋王台, Herds Returning from Mountain Village 山村歸牧, Huanghuagang in Sobbing Wind and Bitter Rain 淒風苦雨的黃花崗,
could boast of his outstanding disciples in Zhao Shao’ang and Huang Shaoqiang by the late 1920s, it was in Fang Rending that China found its successor to the older Gao’s art.  

Interestingly, it is not Fang Rending’s art, but rather his role in defending the discourses of the Lingnan School that is mostly remembered today. Before he had matured as a painter, Fang was handed the enviable opportunity of speaking on behalf of “New Painting” in the paper war with the National Painting Research Society that broke out in February 1927.  

In the current literature, the Fang-Huang Controversy is always dated to 1926, which follows Fang’s own account in the 1960s. According to Fang, it was in that year that his master Gao Jianfu goaded him to wage a war against the “conservative” National Painting Research Society. He recalled that he published immediately an article entitled “Xin guohua yu jiu guohua” 新國畫與舊國畫 (“New National Painting and Old National Painting”), which kickstarted the debate. However, the earliest surviving one that could be found, “Xi npai hua shi Zhongguo de yiguan ma? 新派畫是中國的衣冠嗎?” appeared in Guangzhou Mingguo Ribao, April 15 and 20, 1925. In this piece, Huang describes that he was responding to an article “Zhongguo zhi xinpai hua yu jiupai hua” 中國之新派畫與舊派畫 [New Painting and Old Painting in China] by Fang Rending, which was published a while ago in his absence from Guangzhou. Interestingly, in “Zhongguohua yu ‘guohua’ you denbie ma? Zhi xiyanghua yanjiushe Lu Lü Bo Cheng liang jun” 中國畫與‘國畫’有分別嗎? – 致西洋畫研究社鹿綠伯澄兩君 [Are there any Differences between Chinese Painting and “National Painting”?] to Mr. Lu Lü and Mr. Bocheng of the Western Painting Research Society that appeared in July 1927, Fang also recounted that it was his “New Painting and Old Painting in China” that began the controversy. With these contextual clues, we can assume that the controversy began in February 1927 with Fang’s article “New Painting and Old Painting in China,” but not in 1926.
Painting and Old Painting,” that led to what is now known as “the Fang-Huang Controversy,” arguably the first public art debate in modern Chinese history. Heated exchanges continued for six months, while Fang battled almost singlehandedly against many other competing perspectives on modern Chinese art.

While, in the beginning, Fang’s art, ideas, and fame relied on the older Gao in many ways, his career was later marked by his departure from, and eventual rebellion against, the same master. After his successful appearances at two national exhibitions, Fang shocked everyone by departing to Tokyo for further study. Perhaps even more annoyingly, he began to display a desire to compete with his master using what he had learned in Japan. This was epitomized by Fang’s Grieving the Autumn, which, as discussed in the last chapter, could be read as a well-calculated antithesis to Poet of the South. If Grieving the Autumn could still be understood as a follower’s aspiration to emulate the master, his acts during the Sino-Japanese War exceeded the acceptable limits of the traditional Chinese master-follower relationship. For reasons that will be discussed

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199 The “Two Xus Dispute” was the most famous paper war between the painter Xu Beihong and the poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897–1931), which broke out during the First National Exhibition (April 1929).
200 Rong Xingzhe contributed one article in support of Gao Jianfu during the controversy. The article, “Differences between New National Painting and Japanese Painting” (新國畫與日本畫的區別), is lost, but its title was restated by Fang Rending in his “After Reading ’We have Fallen in to be Instructed by the Revolutionary ’New National Painting’ Painters’” (讀了我們站好讓革命的新國畫家來指教後, published in Guomin xinwen 國民新聞 [Citizens News] on July 15, 1927.
201 Fang’s decision to study in Japan was a risky one. For someone without any previous formal training in an art school (i.e., no certificates from an accredited art school), he was to start from scratch in a foreign land, with little knowledge about its language, at approximately thirty years of age. According to the register of Chinese students in Japan published in 1931, he enrolled in the Nippon Art School 日本美術學校 (Nippon bijutsu gakkō) first as a bekka 別科 student, which demanded a lighter course load. See Nikka gakki, Ryōnichi chūka gakusei meibo 留日中華學生名簿 [Register of Chinese Students in Japan] ([Tokyo]: Nikka gakki (Gakuhōbu), 1931), 195.
later, Fang united eleven followers in the Chunshui atelier and organized the Zaizuoshe 再造社 ("Re-Creation Society") in 1941, which he staged as an attempt to counter the patriarchalism of the master. This rebellion, though short-lived, drew in almost every member of the Chunshui atelier. Even though Gao Jianfu survived this crisis, the event erupted as an anti-climax, threatening the reputation of the master as well as that of the Lingnan School, which had been on the rise nationally since the late 1920s.

Fang Rending was one of the few in the Republican period to achieve star status by specializing in contemporary figures painted with the brush. From his earliest days as a painter, he was obsessed with the possibilities for representing the modern age, or to use the terminology of his day, shidai (meaning “times” or “epoch”). Not only did his most well-known paintings feature contemporary scenes and characters, but the term shidai appears regularly in his writings, from his earliest that were written during the Fang-Huang Controversy, to his satires of Gao Jianfu in the

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202 The relationship between Gao Jianfu and the Re-creation Society has been raised occasionally in discussions about art in Guangdong. On the one hand, Fang’s biographical article published in the special issue for the exhibition of the Re-creation Society is strong proof: he stated explicitly that he did not have any master and complained that the early teachings he received were patriarchal. Another source attesting to the tense relation between the master and the followers is Fang’s comments thirty years later in a short note written in 1941, in which he claimed that the Re-creation Society was an organization against the “patriarchy” of Gao Jianfu, and later collapsed because of the master’s scheming. On the other hand, Chen Jichun, the latest biographer of Fang Rending, argues that the Re-creation Society was an event that was “approved” by Gao Jianfu himself. Admittedly, there was evidence that Fang and Gao might have buried the hatchet afterwards: it is known that Fang Rending attended Gao Jianfu’s 70th birthday celebration. That said, the activities of the Re-creation Society must have caused a tense moment between the older Gao and his followers. An interesting piece of evidence is that the name “Gao Jianfu” is only mentioned once causally in the whole special issue of the Re-creation Society. Even Situ Qi 司徒奇, who turned to ink and brush after meeting Gao Jianfu, did not mention his master’s name in his article. For Fang Rending’s original note and its comment, see Fang, “Guanyu Zaizuoshe” 关于再造社 [About the Re-creation Society] in Huang Xiaogeng and Wu Jin, eds., Guangdong xian dai hua tu shilu 广东现代画坛实录 [Records of the Modern Guangdong Art World] (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 1990), 214. For Chen Jichun’s positive view, see Chen Jichun, Liangjie gaofeng: Fang Rending xiaozhuan 亮节高风：方人定小传 [Lofty Virtue, Noble Style: A Concise Biography of Fang Rending] (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2015).
late 1940s. His contemporaries also noted Fang’s preoccupation with *shidai*. In the art writings of the day, critics often referred to him as *shidai huajia* 時代畫家 (“painter of the times”).

*Shidai* was a catchword in early twentieth-century China. As Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, the sense of living in a new epoch gave rise to the popularity of the term *shidai* in China from the 1920s onwards. This progressive spirit endowed many Chinese artists and writers alike with a sense of a mission to innovate, so that their creations could express this new epoch. In the realm of visual art, the pursuit of *shidai* intertwined with the collective belief that Chinese art had been stagnant in subject and style ever since the Qing dynasty. To critics, Chinese painters over the past few centuries were contented with following the conventions passed down from generations, fixated on a handful of subjects (such as landscape and flower-and-bird), and showed little interest in reflecting in their art the changing realities around them, nor did they explore new representational methods.

This concern for *shidai* was shared by many painters in the Republican period, who attempted to work from multiple angles to have their painting be in sync with the new age. Some tried working with subject matters that were considered “new” or “modern,” such as technological inventions and scenes indicative of contemporaneity. Gao Jianfu’s “new painting” comes to mind immediately; his witty addition of contemporary objects in his landscapes was typical of this time.

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203 In 1948, Fang Rending published an article “Guohua ticai lun” 國畫題材論 [On the Subject Matter of Chinese Painting], in which he satirizes “the eclectic school that he once belonged to” for repeating the old tricks over and over again. The article was originally published on June 20, 1949 in the Zhongshan newspaper *Kaiming Bao* 開明報. For a reprint, see Liang Jiang, ed., *Fang Rending jinian wenji* 方人定紀念文集 [Essays in Memory of Fang Rending] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2011).

204 For instance, Xu Shiqi contributed a short review entitled “Shidai huajia Fang Rending” 時代畫家方人定 [Fang Rending, Painter of the Times] to the popular magazine *Yi Feng*, vol. 3 no. 12, 51.

Alternatively, some painters experimented with new representational methods. Again, the older Gao’s assimilation of European compositional devices to create rational space and perspectival effects is representative of this effort, but painters who did not belong to the Lingnan School also worked to create the same. In Shanghai, for instance, Tao Lengyue 陶冷月 (1895–1985) similarly embedded perspectival effects in his landscapes, which were warmly received by his contemporaries. Further north in Tianjin, Liu Kuiling 劉奎齡 (1885–1967) was noted for his realistic animal paintings, which attained a high level of verisimilitude as well as anatomical accuracy in their wild animals with the traditional Chinese gongbi 工筆 (“meticulous brush”) technique.

From a practical perspective, to follow the Realist approach—that is to say, to focus on the everyday lives of the socially humble—was perhaps the safest path for representing shidai in the realm of figure painting. This was the path that many contemporaries pursued, including Huang Shaoqiang (the protagonist of next chapter), Jiang Zhaohe, and Zhao Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906–1977), to name but a few. Fang, however, opted for a difficult alternative. His subject matters were far more diversified, arguably more so than any of his contemporaries who painted with the Chinese brush. While he also portrayed the lives of laborers or those belonging to the lower social stratum, Fang worked more often on other topics of contemporary life. At the same time, he was not to be mistaken as an objective recorder of social realities. For most of his career, his episodes were suffused with a peculiar air of calmness and detachment. Carefully delineated with fine brushwork and colored with a delightful palette, any traces of hardship, toil, woe, or emotions in general were purged. Fang’s interest appears to lie solely with the aesthetic potential of the various aspects of modern lives.
What further distinguishes Fang Rending from his contemporaries is his stylistic diversity. One can find within his body of work traces from a variety of seemingly irreconcilable visual sources, ranging from Japanese bijinga to European avant-garde motifs, and from traditional Chinese miaofa 描法 (“sketch methods”) to occasional experiments with ink and lines. All these styles are intermingled within a time span of one and a half decades from his return to China in 1935 to the Communist takeover in 1949.

This chapter will trace Fang Rending’s struggle to rebuild Chinese figure painting, with attention paid to his changing approaches to capture the characteristics of the “modern times.” By reconstructing his exhibition activities in the period from his return from Japan (1935) through the end of the Republican period (1949), I will analyze how his approach to figure painting evolved with each exhibition in which he participated. In analyzing these exhibitions chronologically, I also argue that Fang’s path followed an “anti-modern” trajectory despite his obsession with the characteristics of shidai: even though he began by imitating avant-garde art, he successively adjusted each exhibition, and, eventually devoted his energy to the rebuilding of a figurative painting style with historical subjects.

II. Importing Modernities from Japan: The Returning Exhibition and First Solo, 1935

In September 1935, the Chunshui atelier, under the leadership of Gao Jianfu, organized an exhibition in Guangzhou. As its exceptionally long title Chunshui huayuan huanying Fang Su Yang Huang guiguo huazhan 春睡畫院歡迎方蘇楊黃歸國畫展 (“Welcoming Exhibition by the Chunshui Atelier for the Return of Fang, Su, Yang, and Huang to China”) suggests, it was held to celebrate the return of four artists, Fang Rending, his wife Yang Yinfang 楊蔭芳 (1902–1990), Huang Longping 黃浪萍 (d.1939), and Su Wonong 蘇臥農 (1901–1975), who had just returned
from Japan where they had received further instruction in their art.\footnote{Yang Yinfang was not a member of the Chunshui atelier. She was Fang’s wife whom he met when he was in Japan. Like Fang, Yang was a native of Zhongshan. According to the Ryōnichi chūka gakusei meibo published in 1928, she was a student of shishū 刺繡 (“embroidery”) at the Private Women’s School of Fine Arts 女子美術学校 (Joshi bijutsu gakkō) in Tokyo. By 1931 when Fang entered the Nippon Art School, she was a first-year student in the painting department. Huang Longping was one of the first followers of Gao Jianfu to have Western art training before joining. It was said that he was a friend of the oil painter Zhao Shou 趙獸, one of the young artists who was interested in Euro-American avant-garde styles. Huang Longping’s interest focused mainly on sculpture. As Wu Yuen reported in his review of the Chunshui exhibition in 1930, several sculptures were listed; the sarcastic critic singled out a piece called Love of Reading 愛讀 which he thought was structurally “clumsy and crude.” Huang departed for Japan in 1933, but it is unclear what school he enrolled in. For Wu Yuan’s critique, see Wu Hanshan, “Chunshui huayuan zhanlanhui gei wo de ganxiang” 春睡畫院展覽會給我的感想 [Feelings and Thoughts that the Chunshui Exhibition Has Given Me], in Guangzhou Minguo Ribao, November 1, 1930. Su Wonong came from a farmer’s family and did not receive any training in painting until his mid-twenties. According to his memoir, he decided to pursue an artistic career after visiting an exhibition of the Lingnan trio. He then entered the Foshan Municipal Art School in 1926, when Gao Jianfu was the headmaster briefly, and eventually joined Gao’s studio in 1928. Among the followers, Su kept a very low profile. Following Fang Rending’s example, he studied in Japan from 1932 to 1935 (the school that he enrolled in is unclear).} In addition to the returning artists, this show also featured works by Gao Jianfu and his other followers; some of Gao’s close associates, his wife, and even his daughter, were also participants.\footnote{Gao Jianfu’s wife Song Minghuang 宋銘黃, as well as his daughter Gao Lihua 高麗華, had two works on view. The original catalogue of the exhibition was reproduced in Liang, Fang Rending jinian wenji, 80.} In terms of the number of artists represented, this was the largest group exhibition ever led by Gao Jianfu in the Republican period. Taking into consideration the older Gao’s ostentatious character, the exhibition might have been planned as an occasion to flaunt his influence in the Chinese art world.

Regardless of the older Gao’s intentions, Fang Rending was the focus of the show. With 80 works on exhibit and occupying the first room of the gallery, the overall number of Fang’s exhibited works far exceeded that of any other artist present. Aside from his recent works, a visitor could find several sketches of the nude, as well as some of his better-known paintings from his early years, such as Sung Wong Toi, Kowloon 九龍宋王臺 and Huanghuagang in Sobbing Wind.
and Bitter Rain 凄風苦雨的黃花崗, both of which were accepted for the First National Exhibition in 1929.208

His works during his stay in Japan (1931–35) were automatically the focus. Most of them were figure paintings, yet neither the conceptualizations nor the styles were ones that an average Chinese viewer would expect in an exhibition of the Lingnan School. These paintings could be divided into two major groups according to the treatment of the human figures. The first included some of his most visually compelling works, such as Leisurely Day 閑日, To The Fields 到田間去, The Fruit Ripens 果熟, The Nurse 護士, Beside The Pond 池畔, and Painter And Model 畫家與模特兒. Figures in these paintings are characterized by gigantic proportions and enlarged limbs. Modeling is absent, with no apparent intention to represent the body as a three-dimensional form. Facial features are schematized to the point of being comical; emotions and movements are minimal. Almost no contextual or narrative clues are given.

The treatment of the bodies, as well as the absence of narrative in these paintings, appears to allude to the art of the European avant-garde. While Chinese painters of the brush were mostly disinterested in modernist idiom, the situation was different in Japan. At the Nippon Art School 日本美術学校 (Nippon bijutsu gakkō) where Fang studied for most of his time in Japan, several teachers of nihonga were attracted to the possibility of combining European styles with the brush. One of these teachers was Kawasaki Shōko 川崎 小虎 (1886–1977), who represented a new generation aiming to bring new light to nihonga. His early works, such as Hama ni tatsu onna 浜に立つ女 (“Woman on the Seashore”) and Udonge no hana wo ueru onna うどんげの花を植え

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208 See n.195 on p.135 of this dissertation for the works that Fang submitted for the First National Exhibition.
る女 (“Spirit of Dayfly,” 1912) are marked by a strong expressionistic element alluding to Edvard Munch (1863–1944) (fig. 59). The Pre-Raphaelites, who were influential in Japan in the twentieth century, was another group whose work attracted Shōko. For example, his Kodama こだま (“Wood Spirit”) was a Japanese version of the Pre-Raphaelite nymph, whereas Ofiriya オフィリヤ (“Ophelia,” 1929) was a remake of the masterpiece by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) on a Japanese folding screen (fig. 60 and 61).

Many of Fang Rending’s paintings completed in Japan bore unmistakable connections with Shōko. Leisurely Day, which is one of Fang’s iconic paintings, is representative (fig. 62). Its similarities with Shōko’s A Chinese Beauty in Black 黒衣の支那美人 (1912–14) is evident; Fang had borrowed the subject and its composition, but further simplified the body and the facial features of the original (fig. 63). On the other hand, Fang’s version introduces a naturalism in the white rabbit that sits quietly on the girl’s lap, which contradicts the overall abstracted treatment of the painting. Whatever Fang intended to convey with Leisurely Day is debatable, but it most likely was an artistic exercise based on the visual vocabulary and painting techniques that he had recently acquired.


According to Su Di 蘇艇, who was Fang Rending’s follower since the 1960s, the intense, shimmering darkness of the beauty’s dress required special treatment with black pigment, a skill that Fang learned in Japan.
Another painting that could be traced to Shōko is *To the Fields* (1932) (fig. 64). In this scene of farming life, Fang chooses to avoid any suggestion of labor or hardship, allowing the innocence of the child and the flourishing sunflower to convey an air of lightness and joy. Like the girl in *Leisurely Day*, in *To the Fields*, the child’s countenance is abstracted, only the contour of the face is more rounded. This treatment was likely inspired by Shōko’s *Singing Girls* 踊歌 (1914), which depicts six girls on a folding screen with costumes alluding to the Tang dynasty (fig. 65). The dabbing of paint that decorates the drapery of the mother and the lower section of *To the Fields* also resembles Shōko’s treatment in *A Journey to the West Seeking for the Buddhist Doctrine* 西天求法 (1926) (fig. 66).

The Nippon Art School, however, was not the only source of inspiration for Fang Rending in his pursuit of modernist art. As he recounted in his semi-autobiographical article, “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuandan” 我的寫畫經過及其轉變 [My Painting Career and its Changes] (1941), he attended classes at two other locations in addition to the Nippon Art School, namely the Kawabata Painting School 川端画学校 (Kawabata Gagakkō) and the Surugadai Western Painting School 駿河台洋畫學校.211 The Kawabata Painting School was a popular destination for young Chinese artists, who regarded it as a preparatory school for more prestigious art institutions. At the school, open classes on the drawing of busts and the human figure were available; Fang may have enrolled to refine his mastery of the human body. Meanwhile, the Surugadai Western Painting School was not a formal school but held informal evening classes that were offered by a loose

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211 The article was the first in the brochure of the exhibition, published as *Zaizao she yi ci huazhan teji* 再造社第一次畫展特輯 [Special Issue for the First Exhibition of the Re-Creation Society] (Hong Kong: Re-creation Society, 1941).
alliance of oil painters interested in *avant-garde* art styles. Instigated by Tōgō Seiji 東郷 青兒 (1897–1978) in 1933, this group called itself “Avant-garde Western Painting Research Institute” アヴァンガルド洋画研究所 (*Avangarudo yōga kenkyūsho*); from time to time its members invited instructors, such as the internationally renowned Fojita Tsuguharu 藤田 嗣治 (1886–1968), to give short-term classes. Many young painters, including some from China, were attracted to the school.\(^{212}\)

Admittedly, the scarcity of sources fails to provide a full picture of what Fang Rending learned at these schools; however, they do attest to the fact that he sought training in European modern art from multiple channels. *The Fruit Ripens* (reproduced in 1934) demonstrates that Fang responded to a European master directly (fig. 67). While the face of the female figure is reminiscent of Shōko, her bare breasts and the tropical setting suggested that Fang’s paintings might be imitating Paul Gauguin’s (1848–1903) Tahitian paintings.\(^{213}\) Although the reproduction of *The Fruit Ripens* is monochromatic, the dark complexion of the girl is still evident, thus further supporting the contention that the work might have been inspired by Gauguin.

*Painter and His Model* (signed 1931) reveals Fang’s interest in a theme that has fascinated European artists for ages, namely the relationship between the artist and the model (fig. 68). The painting’s seated male painter is most likely an image of Fang himself; the nude could be an actual model or a symbol of artistic inspiration. A fine detailing brush rests between the fingers of the

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\(^{212}\) One such painter was Liang Xihong 梁錫鴻 (1912–1982), who was Fang’s lifelong supporter.

\(^{213}\) Another case in point is *Cat’s Friend*. The combination of a reclining female figure with a cat in a domestic setting directly alludes to Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). It is true that the female character in the *Cat’s Friend* is clothed and appears to be much younger than Manet’s courtesan, but Fang portrayed her with heavy makeup uncharacteristic of a young girl. The visage and pose of the girl are even more pointed about her sexuality: her eyes turn white and have lost focus, her body is cast in a posture that suggests she could no longer exercise control over it. Fang manipulated the iconography without altering the erotic overtones in the original.
painter as if he has just made (or is about to make) the last touches to the painting. The painter is so absorbed that his body inclines slightly forward; contrastingly, the model stands upright. She is self-assured, and her exaggerated lower body endows her with a statuesque quality, while she shows no signs of modesty about her nudity. Perhaps, in *Painter and His Model*, Fang made the statement that his artistic inspiration came from the human body.

European modernist art was no longer a new sight in China by the mid-1930s. Not only did many young artists imitate these styles, but art societies and exhibitions promoting modernist art also proliferated. The most representative of these young artists was the Storm Society 決瀾社 (*juelanshe*) in Shanghai. The group held four exhibitions from 1932 to 1935; their activities were reported in *Liang You*, the most widely read pictorial in Republican China. That said, despite the increasing popularity of modernist art, Chinese painters still considered such styles to be the exclusive realm of oil painters. In light of this, Fang Rendi's modernist paintings were not anticipated by his Chinese audience, who, as the reviews show, had nothing to say about them.

The only critic who appreciated these modernist works was Liang Xihong 梁錫鴻 (1912–1982), whom Fang had known in Japan. In his review, Liang contextualized Fang and his art within global trends; in his opinion, *Besides the Pond* has a Surrealist flavor, *The Painter and His Model* echoes the work of the Dutch artist Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958), while *The Leisurely Day* refers to Moïse Kisling (1891–1953).

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214 *Liang You* reported three exhibitions of the Storm Society. See *Liang You*, no. 82 (1933), no. 95 (1934), no. 111 (1935).

215 The exhibitions of the Storm Society were received in a similarly lukewarm fashion. See Ralph Croizier, “Post-Impressionists in Pre-War Shanghai: the Juelanshe (Storm Society) and the Fate of Modernism in Republican China,” in John Clark, ed., *Modernity in Asian Art* (Broadway, NSW, Australia: Wild Peony, 1993), 135–54.

216 Liang Xihong, “huajiá Fang Rending Ge Zhan” 畫家方人定個展 [Solo Exhibition of the Painter Fang Rending], *Yi Feng*, vol.3 no. 12 (1935), 44–46.
Reviewers were more enthusiastic about another type of painting in the exhibition, those of the female beauties modeled according to bijinga 美人画 (“painting of beauties”), an art style that was purely Japanese. The representation of bijin 美人 (“female beauties”) has a long tradition in Japan. By the late Meiji (1867–1912) and Taishō eras (1912–1926), the focus started to shift from the depiction of the women in pleasure quarters to that of the ideal Japanese woman.217 During the ninth Bunten 文展 (“Ministry of Education Art Exhibition,” the official national exhibition in Japan) (1915), a separate gallery was assigned for bijinga paintings.218 Aside from official recognition, as Elizabeth Lippit discusses, the bijinga had also become a focal point for the discourses on Japanese aesthetics in the Taishō period. The artificial, ephemeral bijin was considered to be the embodiment of the Japanese idea of “beauty,” and had become a counterpart to the European nude for many Japanese.219

Current sources do not indicate connections between Fang Rending and any specialist in bijinga; however, the popularity of this genre meant that he might have encountered it through other channels.220 For instance, Stepping on the Snow 踏雪 (1931) is a standard bijinga, prototypes of which Fang could have viewed in many exhibitions (fig. 69). A female figure, holding an umbrella (a standard accessory in bijinga) with a reserved, detached visage, is captured in her


220 As Yang Yinfang recalls, Fang was generous in purchasing volumes and sets of art books during his stay. See Huang, “Guanyu ‘Lingnanpai’ de diaocha cailiao.”
physical charm and adornments in a sweet, colorful palette. The titles of some other paintings listed in the exhibition brochure, such as *Red Shoes Treading the Remaining Snow* 紅鞋踏殘雪 and *Elegant Lady* 麗影 (both lost), suggest that they were likely painted in a similar style.

While Fang’s modernist paintings were mostly derivative of existing works, he was more comfortable with *bijinga* and could, at times, remake its vocabulary creatively. A typical example is his *In the Midst of Wind and Rain* 風雨途中 (1932) (fig. 70). The figure’s posture may have been derived from Itô Shinsui 伊東深水 (1898–1972), one of the *bijinga* masters of the period; however, the imitator transformed the original delicate beauty into an unyielding Chinese mother instead (fig. 71). Dressed in the clothes of the commoners of the day, she is protecting her child while battling the wind and rain with a broken umbrella. A more sophisticated example is *The Sorrow After the Battle* (see fig. 43). Like *In the Midst of Wind and Rain*, this painting focuses on a mother and child. The pair is set within war-trodden ruins, with the treatment (such as the remains on the left and the walls with a window in the center) alluding to Gao Jianfu’s famous painting, *Flames in the East Battleground*. The mother’s face is emotionless; her neck is bent at an awkward angle, which suggests dejectedness and despondency after witnessing the ruins that were once their home. Again, the palette is mellifluous and the coloring well-applied, both of which are typical of the treatment of *bijinga*.

There were other Chinese painters who became specialists in beauties after receiving training in Japan. Bao Shaoyou, who was introduced in the last chapter, was one of them. Trained first in crafts, and then in painting in Kyoto, Bao was recognized as a figure painting specialist and noted for his beauties in classical Chinese costume. Another lesser-known painter was Zheng Jin 鄭錦
(1883–1959), who is now mainly remembered for being the first headmaster of Beijing Art School 北京美術學校 in 1918, the first public art institution in modern China. As a painter, Zheng was of limited talent, but his birds (mainly mandarin ducks) and beauties garnered a degree of fame in the early Republic. Despite specializing in human figures, however, Bao and Zheng only cast the beauties in classical Chinese costumes and settings. Traces of Japan were also not as visible as they are in the art of Fang Rending.

Fang Rending’s focus on figure painting, as well as his use of styles unfamiliar in China, could be attributed to his negative opinion about Chinese art in general. His article "Xiandai Zhongguohua de fan shidaixing" 現代中國畫的反時代性 [The Anti-Contemporaneous Nature of Contemporary Chinese Painting] (1935) illustrated his aspirations. In this short piece published in Winds of Art 藝風 two months before the exhibition, Fang singled out several fundamental aspects of the practices of Chinese painters, which he rejected as symptomatic of Chinese painting’s anachronism. He began by lambasting Chinese painters collectively for their prejudice, which constituted the plight of the art in China:

An idealistic bias has always haunted Chinese painters: they prefer to paint scenes of lavishness and extravagance, but not lives in the marketplace and the slummy alleyways. This bias condemns works depicting the customs and lives of modern times as “vulgar.” This bias is a feudal burden; we should know that this view has obstructed the advances of modern Chinese painters.

向來在國畫家當中，以描寫豪華富貴為貴，以描寫市井陋巷的生活為卑的一種理想主義的思想。這種思想，對於以現代風俗生活做題材的作品，皆視為卑俗，這明明是封建的遺產，這種遺產，是把現代國畫家的藝術思想的進步，顯著地妨礙的東西，我們應該知道的。

From an art historical perspective, Fang’s claim that Chinese painters favored “lavishness and extravagance” was misfired; on the contrary, it was always qualities such as pingdan ("blandness") or tianzhen ("naturalness") that were prioritized. Presumably, his emphasis was in the latter half of the lead sentence. In his opinion, Chinese painters always held in disdain subjects around them, and, rather than looking for new subjects, they preferred to repeat those that were passed down. He singled out religious subjects as an archetype of this lethargy:

[Chinese painters] prefer religious subjects that are outmoded and repetitive, such as “Bodhidharma Meditating Facing the Wall,” “Meditating in an Ancient Monastery,” “Buddha Tathāgata,” or group portraits of deities, etc. From a modern perspective, these paintings are too distant from real lives and do not have to exist anymore.

Fang’s dislike of religious subjects as “distant from real lives” revealed that he believed that religion was an obstacle to progress, a prevalent view accepted by the generation baptized by the May Fourth. After blaming the painters, Fang moved to the representational conventions of human figures in Chinese art:

The form of Chinese painting is, unbelievably, not making any sense. Our painting seems to be playing the wrong part in our times; nine out of ten human figures are ancient figures with ancient costumes. These figures always appear within the landscape, and look like that they are hoping to benefit by way of performing within it; their actions are elegant and leisurely. Examples include “Enjoying the zither and playing the flute,” “Appreciating the moon and admiring flowers,” “heating tea and drinking wine,” “watching the waterfall,” “washing one’s feet,” etc.

Fang, “Xiandai Zhongguohua de fan shidaixing.”

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222 Fang, “Xiandai Zhongguohua de fan shidaixing.”
223 Fang, “Xiandai Zhongguohua de fan shidaixing.”
Despite Fang’s rhetorical tone, the two issues that he raised, namely the popularity of characters in ancient costumes and the prevalence of stereotyped representations, hit at the characteristics of Chinese figure painting. Admittedly, characters in ancient costumes were still the norm for Chinese figure painters in the twentieth century. Brushwork formulae (*miaofa*)—the essential vehicle to convey spiritual transcendence for figure painting in Chinese art—were a set of techniques tailor-made for the representation of traditional Chinese costumes. To stop painting figures of the past was equivalent to abandoning this legacy of the brush. Throughout the Republican period, painters even explored how brushwork techniques could be applied onto contemporary dresses; the results were hardly satisfactory. If Chinese painters retained this preference for figures of the past, then they had no choice but to keep the context and subjects for them—that is, as Fang condemned, the stereotypical leisurely activities within landscapes, the standard environment for such actions.

"Xiandai Zhongguohua de fan shidaixing" reveals that Fang held an utterly negative view of Chinese brush painting of his times. From subject matters to representational methods, every practice in this tradition was not suitable for the modern age. The only way to rescue Chinese brush painting was to introduce new elements: towards the end of the article, he mentioned in a complimentary tone that oil painters in China had already made considerable progress by absorbing newly emerged styles from Europe to reflect the spirit of the times. Obviously, with his figure paintings of unconventional styles, Fang regarded himself as someone who was breaking new ground for Chinese art with the brush.

Fang’s enthusiasm for introducing new elements into figure painting was warmly received in China. After the group exhibition in Guangzhou, he organized his first solo show in Nanjing within
two months’ time. This exhibition was a documented success and elicited responses from across
the artistic spectrum. Held in the grand hall of the YMCA building, this show sometimes attracted
more than a thousand spectators a day, including prominent guests. Surprisingly, many of his
ardent fans were influential intellectuals who had not previously been enthusiastic about non-
traditional art. One such admirer was Chen Wuwo 陳無我 (1884–1967), a journalist revered in
Shanghai for his work in the last years of the Qing. After visiting the solo exhibition in Nanjing,
the euphoric Chen penned a review, “Guan Fang Rending huazhan hou” 觀方人定畫展後 [“After
Visiting Fang Rending’s Exhibition”] (1935), claiming that Fang’s figure painting represented a
considerable step forward for Chinese art:

The primary reason for the lukewarm reception of recent Chinese art exhibitions held in
Berlin and Paris is that audiences in Europe do not regard the subject matters of Chinese
art as significant enough to be represented. Imagine an average visitor—who has seen
masterpieces in the Louvre, including March of Napoleon, Coronation at the Notre
Dame, Marriage of Henry, King of France, the Last Supper, or Sinking Ship—suddenly
exposed to the flowers, cocks, birds, or animals in Chinese art! If one knows something
about Chinese art history, one will mourn the utter loss of the great spirits of Gu Kaizhi,
Zhang Sengyou, Lu Tanwei, and Wu Daozi; or one will laugh off Chinese art as trifling
and decorative (as the Europeans used to see these subjects on their furniture). Therefore,
the gradual decline of Chinese painting has nothing to do with technique, but with the
wrong selection of topics among Chinese painters.
I always insist that figure painting in China must be revived. Today, I was overjoyed
when I first stepped into Mr. Fang’s exhibition at the YMCA because I see another mind
thinking alike! I take him as my good comrade for sure, and I know that he is an
incredibly talented painter. All his paintings center on the human figure, his
representations are sharp, his choice of subject matter is well thought out. He gets into
the essence of modern society and represents the consciousness of human life; as for his
extraordinary skills, these are only of secondary importance.

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224 The exhibition lasted from November 12 to November 18, 1935. Notable guests who visited include Sun Ke 孫科 (1891–1973, the only son of Sun Yat-sen, the then president of the Legislative Yuan), the German ambassador Oskar Trautmann (1877–1950), the Japan ambassador Suma Yakichirō 須磨彌吉郎 (1892–1970). Trautmann and Suma were both lovers of modern Chinese art. See Central Daily News, November 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 1935.
225 Chen Wuwo, also known as Chen Fuxiang 陳輔相, was an active journalist in Shanghai during the early Republic. Chen was more inclined to traditional Chinese cultural activities, such as poetry writing or calligraphy. He was also a devout Buddhist who contributed many articles to Buddhist journals.
近年來在柏林巴黎舉行的中國美展，沒有相當的成功，最大的原因，是中國畫的題材，歐人根本看不起為偉大，我們試想一想，一般人在巴黎魯佛宮，看了法國的油畫如「拿破崙出征」、「聖母堂加冕」、「法皇亨利大婚」、「聖晚餐」、「覆舟」等傑作，以及歐人日常所見的新進畫派如野獸派立體派超現實主義新寫實主義等，多以人物為題材的作品，忽然看見中國畫的花雞鳥獸，在他們知道中國美術史者則嘆惜中國現代畫人已完全失卻了顧愷之張僧繇陸探微吳道子等的偉大精神，否則，只說中國畫是不關重要的裝飾畫（因為這類題材，歐人在家具上面是見慣的）所以現在中國畫日漸衰落，決不是技巧上的關係，完全是由於各國作家取材錯誤。

我向來是主張要復興中國人物畫的，今日踏進青年會看方先生的畫展，喜出望外，英雄所見略同，我當然認他是一位好同志，而且明白他是一位絕頂聰明的作家，全部作品，以人物為中心，具有尖銳的表現，深刻的取材，描寫現代社會的深刻化，表現人生的意識，至於技巧的純熟，為其餘事而已。226

Chen’s view regarding the lack of figure painting in Chinese art recalls what was discussed in the first chapter: it was common amongst twentieth-century Chinese to link the lack of figure painting in Chinese art with its “decline.” In this light, Chen Wuwo was overjoyed as Fang took the initiative to take up this lack, although towards the end of his review he confessed that it was not the right time to conclude whether Fang was successful or not.

Gu Tianxi 顧天錫 (b. 1891), another journalist and cultural critic who went by his pen name, Zheyuan 蘆園，was more assertive of Fang’s achievements. Gu was active in the cultural sphere during the Nanjing decade and was a frequent contributor to the literary supplement of the Central Daily News 中央日報，the official mouthpiece of the Nationalist Party, with his articles focusing mainly on historical anecdotes or antiquities.227 In his “Xiandai mei yu gudian mei” 現代美與古

227 Gu Tianxi used many pseudonyms in his lifetime. For a study of his identity, including his collaboration with the Japanese after the war broke out, see Yun Huang, Qiushui Mati 秋水馬蹄 [Waters of the Autumn, Hoof of Horses] (Beijing: Jincheng Chubanshe, 2013), 132–39.
Gu claimed that Fang Rending’s figure painting represented a new type of beauty, that of the modern:

Unfortunately, most of the human figures in Chinese painting lack the character of its epoch. No matter which scroll we unroll, it is impossible to date it according to the human figures represented. Since the Song dynasty, painters have been dedicated to learning from the past, and have neglected the beauty of their times completely. Mr. Fang takes the modern times as the background for his paintings. The beauty and the sensibility are both from our times, and from the perspective of the contemporary, the work is sincerer and more meaningful—his figure painting in particular. In his paintings such as *Morning Dew*, *Grieving over Autumn*, *Hearing the Rain, the Sound of the Cicada*, or *the Blind Girl*, I could see the inspired beauty of modern times, and these are characteristics that are remarkable!

Gu spoke highly of Fang’s focus on contemporary subject matters, which he thought was more suitable for modern viewers to appreciate. In addition to Chen and Gu, one can also find an unexpected admirer in another journalist, Bo Shaofu 卜少夫 (1909–2000), who was fascinated by the style of Fang Rending’s paintings. Like Chen and Gu, Bo Shaofu was also a well-known journalist. In *Fulan Ribao* 扶輪日報 (Bo was responsible for its coverage), he contributed a review in which he expresses his admiration of Fang’s “radicalism”:

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Regarding the use of colors, Mr. Fang prefers erotic, voluptuous, and bright colors; his touches reveal a thick Japanese flavor. In every painting, there is a fresh and stimulating emotion. This represents a type of recent, radical culture. When confronted with his art, we are easily enraptured by each of his paintings.

在色彩方面，方先生都是用著色情化的非常刺激的鮮艷色素，而筆觸又是染上極濃重的日本風，一種新鮮潑刺的情感，浮泛在每幅畫上。這很可以代表近代型的一種尖端文化。我們在這些畫的面前，不知不覺的意念便會被每幅畫所攬去。229

From Bo’s point of view, the “radicalism” of Fang was manifested primarily in the use of colors, while he had no comments about the nude or the abstraction of forms.

III. Patriotism in Ink and Brush: War Painting Exhibitions in Shanghai and Hong Kong

Despite the growing fame that his figure painting brought him, Fang Rending recalled in 1941 that he felt confused in the years after he returned from Japan. In his own words:

I was still at a crossroads after I returned to China. I was sometimes pessimistic, sometimes optimistic; the question “how I should paint?” never left my mind, whether strolling or resting. Doubts overwhelmed me even when I was holding a beauty [meiren] in my arms…

歸國後，仍在歧路徘徊中，關於自己寫畫的前程，有時悲觀，有時樂觀，「要怎樣呢？」這五個字，行一步坐一刻，都時時記著，其至擁抱著美人的時候，也不會忘卻…230

230 Fang, “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuandian.” What deserves attention is Fang Rending’s awkward declaration that his commitment to art was such that he did not forget it even as he was holding meiren 美人 (“beautiful women”), which was the same as bijin of bijinga in Japanese, in his arms. It was awkward for a married man to make such an utterance. This claim could have been Fang’s rhetorical way of referring to his over-specialization in the representation of beauties.
This anxiety was well-justified. The provocations from Japan that had been intensifying ever since the mid-1930s made it clear to every Chinese that a crisis with their neighbor was imminent. While the Japanese origin of Fang’s novel approaches could still be tolerated when he first returned to China, within a couple of years, this Japanese connection turned against him. It should be noted that even though many Chinese artists studied in Japan, no one was as indebted to Japanese art as Fang Rending: not only had he studied in Tokyo, but he was also a student of nihonga who closely followed its latest developments. In addition to his connection with Japan, Fang’s over-aesthetic art would have also appeared problematic during a time of national survival. Until then, his reputation was inseparable from his paintings of beauties within contemporary contexts. Even in cases when he painted episodes related to the Sino-Japanese conflicts, such as *The Sorrow after the Battle* or *The Nurse*, the soft palette and the abstract treatments of figures overshadowed the patriotism within.

Fang’s attempts to forge a new pictorial language happened in his second solo exhibition in 1937, only a month before the Second Sino-Japanese War erupted. The exhibition was held in the Sun Company Building 大新公司 in Shanghai. The Sun Company Building was one of the key exhibition venues in China during the Republican Period. Before Fang Rending, at least two other exhibitions were held at the same site during the same year that referred to the recent Sino-Japanese conflict in the Suiyuan 綏遠 region (now part of Inner Mongolia) in the northwest. In January,

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231 For instance, his admirers Bo Shaofu and Xu Shiqi had to mention Fang’s indebtedness to Japanese art despite their praises in their reviews.
232 In November 1936, the Nationalist general, Fu Zuoyi 傅作義 (1895–1974), scored a victory at Bailingmiao 百靈廟 over the troops of the Mongolian princes, who, under the agitation of the Japanese, were struggling for independence from China. Many Chinese deemed this victory as the first successful resistance by China to Japanese imperialism. See Justin Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan: The Politics of Northwestern Territory and Development in*
Chen Qiucao 陳秋草 (1906–1988) held a show entitled “Yuan Sui Huazhan” 援綏畫展 (“Painting Exhibition In Support of Suiyuan”) and in April, Shen Yiqian 沈逸千 (1908–1944) organized the “Meng-Sui Huazhan” 蒙綏畫展 (“Mongolia-Suiyuan Painting Exhibition”). In contrast to these two exhibitions, Fang’s show evaded explicit patriotism in the title. Entitled simply the “Fang Rending Renwu Huazhan” 方人定人物畫展 (“Exhibition of Fang Rending’s Figure Painting”) the exhibition displayed around 100 works, representing another grand effort on the painter’s part. Both Lu Danlin 陸丹林 (1897–1972) and an obscure critic, Zhensheng 振聲, referred to the works entitled Qu Lingjun 屈靈均, Zhang Zifang 張子房, Su Ziqing 蘇子卿, and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥, together with another Farewell at the River Yi 易水別. The first four paintings could have been a set, portraying four well-known historical figures in Chinese history, namely Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 B.C.E.), whose courtesy name was Lingjun, Zhang Liang 張良 (i.e., Zhang Zifang, d.187 B.C.E.), Su Wu 蘇武 (i.e., Su Ziqing, c.140–60 B.C.E.), and Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283). Qu Yuan, Su Wu, and Wen Tianxiang have long been hailed as embodiments of loyalty in Chinese culture. On the other hand, Zhang Liang, the major advisor to the emperor Liu Bang, and

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233 Chen Qiuchao’s exhibition opened from January 2 to 10, 1937. Chen’s exhibition provides us with an illuminating case about the number of visitors in the Republican period. After nine days of exhibition, Chen said that 1,875 tickets were sold in the nine-day period, with on average around 208 visitors per day. See “Huazhan yuan sui jieshu” 畫展援綏結束 [End of the “Supporting Suiyuan” Exhibition], *Shenbao*, January 16, 1937.

Shen Yiqian’s exhibition opened on April 13, 1937. Originally it was planned to close on the 19th, but it was extended to the 25th, probably because of its popularity. According to *Shenbao*, the exhibition recorded more than a thousand visitors a day. For a brief summary, see “Dapi menggu zhanggu zuo canguan mengchasui huazhan jueding mingwan bimu” 大批蒙古長官 昨參觀蒙古長官 昨參觀蒙古画展 决定明晚闭幕 [Large Group of Mongolian Officers Visited the Mongolia-Chahar-Suiyuan Exhibition Yesterday / Exhibition to be Closed Tomorrow Night] in *Shenbao*, April 24, 1937.

the assassin Jing Ke 荊軻 (d.227 B.C.E.), the protagonist of *Farewell at the River Yi*, were both anti-tyrannical icons in Chinese history. Without a doubt, Fang’s choice of these historical icons was made for patriotic reasons, which were also gaining popularity in other art forms.

Interestingly, in sources discovered so far, there is no mention of paintings depicting female historical characters in the Shanghai exhibition. Though fewer in number, there were heroines that could have fit this patriotic purpose, and they were equally popular in China in the mid-1930s. The most well-known heroine is the legendary Hua Mulan from the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589). According to the *Ballade of Mulan*, Hua disguised herself as a man and enlisted in the army on behalf of her aged father. A valiant fighter, she won high merit, but she refused all rewards after the campaign and returned to her original life. As early as the late 1920s, there were already two films about Hua Mulan that had been made, with a third one that came out at the height of the Sino-Japanese War in 1939. As a recognized specialist in female figures, it is reasonable to surmise that Fang may have avoided Mulan by choice, especially because he had used his expertise in the female figure to comment on the disaster of the war in *The Sorrow After the Battle* a couple of years prior.

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235 For example, Lin Wenzheng 林文錚 (1903–1990) of the National Hangzhou Art School wrote a play called *Farewell by the River Yi* in 1933, whereas the writer, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, staged his play *Qu Yuan* in 1942. The playwright Wu Zuguang 吳祖光 composed a five-act play, *Song of Righteousness*, about Wen Tianxiang, which was later adapted into a movie. According to the Chinese scholar Shao Yingjian, Wu’s *Song of Righteousness* was staged around 180 times in five months from December 1943, with more than 130,000 watchers. See Shao Yingjian, “Cong Zhengqi Ge dao Wen Tianxiang 从《正气歌》到《文天祥》 [From the Song of Righteousness to Wen Tianxiang],” *Xiandai Zhongwen xuekan 現代中文學刊*, no. 06 (2010): 58–59.

236 Other possible choices of heroines included Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉 (1102–1135) of the Song dynasty, who fought alongside her husband, the general Han Shizhong 韓世忠 (1089–1151) who fought against the Jurchen invaders, or Diaochen 貂蟬 of the Three Kingdoms Period, who used her beauty as a weapon to get rid of Dong Zhuo 董卓 (d. 192), a reckless warlord who threatened the survival of the court. The figure painter Xu Yansun includes many episodes of patriotic heroines in his immensely popular compilation, *Xianghonglou Huasheng 霜紅樓畫賸 [Painting Compilation of Xianghonglou]* (1943).
Unfortunately, Fang’s historical portraits do not survive in any form, and none of his reviewers discussed them from a stylistic perspective. However, from two other short reviews in *Tao Sheng* 漸聲 [Sound of Waves], a popular magazine focusing on culture, it is known that Fang reacted to the war in another way in this exhibition. These two reviews mentioned three other paintings that portray soldiers on the front, *Cavalryman* 騎兵, *Snow Heaping on the Bow and the Sword* 大雪滿弓刀, and *Sentry Guards* 前哨兵. These war paintings revealed that Fang sought to abandon Japanese styles and turned to the exploration of the effects of line and ink, two elements that are considered to be central to Eastern art.

*Cavalryman* serves as an example of this change of mind (fig. 72). At first glance, the square painting appears to be a snapshot. The cavalryman with his horse is depicted from behind, with a group of weeds on the left that acts as a *repoussoir* to frame the picture. For this patriotic subject, Fang chose a somber and limited palette, which departed from the mellifluous one that he was usually known for. The shapes and volumes were created with a variation of ink tones (most notably in the belly and the thigh of the horse).

The most exceptional aspect of *Cavalryman* is the use of lines to define shapes. The lines are no longer fine and unmodulated but are drawn in a sketchy manner, reminding viewers of the hasty movement of the brush. The ones that define the upper body of the soldier started with a slight pressing of the brush and lingered with decreasing pressure. Here, Fang may be alluding to the “line methods” in traditional Chinese art. To be honest, the effect is far from satisfactory from an aesthetic point of view. The “head” appears to be lumps of congealed ink, and the “tail” lacks elegant finishing. Comparatively, thanks to his training in flower-and-bird under Gao Jianfu, Fang
was more adroit in painting the weeds in the foreground. The varying thickness of the line adds a sense of motion to the plants, as if they are dangling in the wind.

*Sentry Guards* was an experiment of another sort (fig. 73). This painting captures an episode on the frontline, presumably beside the trenches. The viewer’s attention is naturally drawn to the three soldiers in the foreground, who are represented as silhouettes in solid ink shapes, resembling one another. Underneath the seemingly schematic handling, the contours of the soldiers are not entirely solid, but slightly blurred and diffusive with much-diluted ink, to approximate the fluidity of moonlight on physical bodies. If in *Cavalryman* the lines played a significant role, it is ink as shapes and effects that one sees in *Sentry Guards*.

From what is known so far, these emotionally detached but stylistically experimental war paintings counted only as a minority of the works at the exhibition in Shanghai. Nonetheless, they were to become the focus in a year’s time. In May 1938, Fang held a three-day exhibition titled “Kangzhan Huazhan” 抗戰畫展 (“Painting Exhibition for the War of Resistance”) at the St. Francis Hotel in Hong Kong, showing a total of 54 paintings. The exhibition was a high-profile event. Not only was it covered by the major English newspapers in Hong Kong, it also attracted prominent visitors, including Sir Geoffrey Northcote (1881–1948, in office October 1937–September 1941), who was then the governor of the British colony. He purchased one painting, *The Crossing* 渡河 (now lost).

It is possible that all 54 paintings in the Hong Kong exhibition were in the same experimental style. According to a review in *Hong Kong Sunday Herald*, the works exhibited were

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237 “Break Away,” *Hong Kong Sunday Herald*, May 8, 1938
238 “One Man Show: Pictures of the Current War by Fong Yan-ting,” *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 1938.
representations of “soldiers, refugees, horses, and guns, placed in surroundings which are only vaguely suggested”; in terms of treatment, they were dominated by “monotones of grey, tan, and a sad green.” Similarly, the review written by the Hong Kong painter, Luis Chan (also called Chan Fuk Sin 陳福善, 1904–1995), states that Fang’s works included the “commanding officers directing operations, ‘dare-to-die’ corps attacking enemy’s positions, workmen repairing bridges or railway tracks, or constructing highways to facilitate transportations, destitute refugees, etc.” One of the exhibits, *Night Attack*, was reproduced (fig. 74). Despite the mediocre quality of the reproduction, one can still see three soldiers marching under the moon with bayonets, their silhouetted bodies repeating one another, reminiscent of *Sentry Guards*.

While the Hong Kong exhibition lasted for only four days, a newspaper reported that Fang was planning exhibitions with these paintings in other cities in mainland China, such as Guangzhou and Hankou. Fang Rending invested high hopes in his newly-devised style, which was manifested in a short poem he wrote for the exhibition:

> For a thousand years painting has been decadent,  
> Its content empty: stuffed with idle flowers and wild grasses.  
> On the day when the enemies tread China,  
> Heroes of the war of resistance are captured in painting.

繪事千年靡靡風，閑花野草內容空。  
敵人踐踏神州日，抗戰英雄入畫中。  

In Fang’s opinion, his war paintings offered a solution to the national and artistic quests simultaneously. To depict soldiers at the front was not only an initiative to boost the morale on the

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239 “Break Away.”
240 Luis Chan, “War Paintings: Art Revolutionised by Mr. Fong Yan-ting,” *South China Morning Post*, May 7, 1938.
241 “方氏畫展閉幕” 方氏畫展閉幕 [Mr. Fang’s Exhibition Closed], in *Public Herald* 大眾日報, May 10, 1938.
242 This poem is reproduced in Liang, *Fang Rending jinian wenji*, 6.
home front during the time of crisis, but it also provided him with a testing ground for new forms of representation in ink and brush. However, his war paintings contrasted sharply with contemporary expectations of how “war paintings” should be. When compared to the more conventional depictions of the war (such as the ones by Chen Qiucao or Zhao Wangyun), Fang Rending’s conceptions appeared too artistic and lacked the power to elicit patriotic pathos from viewers. Even his admirers had to defend his paintings for this abnormality; an instance can be found in a review by Luis Chan, who carefully reminded his readers that Fang chose this style intentionally. As Chan emphasized in the review quoted above, “Mr. Fang has advisedly adopted a simple colour scheme; he has avoided heavity of treatment.”

This cautionary comment embodied Chan’s fear that the audience might overlook the patriotism in these peaceful and emotionless paintings.

V. Encounter with European Art: The Re-Creation Society, 1941

If Fang Rending once had the plan to tour China with his war paintings, he soon abandoned it. Nine months later, a short notice in a Hong Kong newspaper announced his sudden departure to the U.S.; it was added that he might go to Europe afterwards. Why he abandoned the plans for his war paintings is uncertain; from a practical perspective, the ongoing war had rendered extensive traveling dangerous. However, a more likely reason was that Fang soon realized the limitations of his latest creations. As he recounted later:

After the War of Resistance began, my art ideas changed once more. I took the war as my subject matter. In the summer of 1938, I held a solo exhibition of war painting in Hong Kong, but I know that these works were not concrete. I was just stimulated by my

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243 Chan, “War Paintings: Art Revolutionised By Mr. Fong Yan-ting.”
244 “Fang Rending zuo fu Mei” 方人定昨赴美 [Fang Rending Departed to the US Yesterday], *Wah Tsz Yat Po* 華字日報, February 3, 1939.
patriotism and wanted to rid myself of decadent trends: but my attempts were not as successful as those who sell their works.

While the war was to drag on for seven years, he was never to practice this style again. It was probably out of his discontent that he decided to leave for the U.S. to seek new opportunities and inspiration. He did not travel unprepared: he left Hong Kong with around 100 paintings of different genres, which he used to organize exhibitions on the other side of the globe. Besides participating in the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco (1939), he held three shows in different locations in California, first at the San Francisco Museum of Art, then at the Central Library and the department store J. W. Robinson in Los Angeles. By the end of the year, he had already moved to the west coast; it was reported that he had an exhibition at the Delphic Studios in New York in December.

245 “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuanguan,” Zaizaoshe di yi ci huazhan tejì.
246 Fang’s older brothers emigrated to the U.S. for many years. They were industrious workers and ended up quite successful in California. At the same time, the U.S. was a destination to which his master Gao Jianfu had always wanted to go.
248 The exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art was held in May. Heinz Berggruen (1914–2009), one of the most prominent art collectors of the twentieth century, introduced Fang’s paintings among others in “The New Local Exhibits” in the San Francisco Chronicle, May 21, 1939. The exhibition at the Central Library might have been held for almost the whole of July; it was reported from July 7 to 28 in Los Angeles Times. It was also promoted as a “must-see” show in an article titled “Chinese Artist Welds Life and Tradition” in the newspaper (Los Angeles Times, July 9, 1939). The exhibition at J.W. Robinson assumed a low profile and the article only briefly mentioned that it ended on September 30. See “Exhibits,” Los Angeles Times, September 17, 1939.
249 This exhibition was described briefly in Carlyle Burrows, “Notes and Comment on Events in Art,” New York Times, December 17, 1939. News about it reappeared in an advertisement on December 24, 1939.
As Fang recalled, he spent much of his time in museums in the U.S. His itinerary is impossible to trace; the only one that we know he visited was an important retrospective of Picasso in New York in 1939. Entitled “Picasso: Forty Years of His Art,” it showed over 300 works and claimed to be the “most comprehensive presentation of works by the great Spanish artist ever shown” at the MoMA. His limited understanding of Picasso did not stop him from being an admirer of the Spanish master. After returning to China, he penned the article “Bijiasuo huazhan huiyi” (Reminiscences of Picasso’s Painting Exhibition) (1942, published 1948), in which he tried to explain Picasso’s career. The article is crammed with jargon and names of paintings and may have been based on the English text in the exhibition catalog. His commentary, however, exposed gaps that are inexcusable for someone with basic knowledge of Picasso. For example, there was no mention of *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, which, ironically, happened to be one of the highlights of the MoMA exhibition. Perhaps what inspired Fang Rending was Picasso as a prototype of a restless artist-hero who never settled on any previous artistic achievement. Interestingly, his next major exhibition in February 1941 indicated that Fang’s interest had turned in a more figurative direction.

This exhibition, however, also marked his complete face-off with his master. As his wife recalled, when Fang returned to Hong Kong in late 1940, several followers of Gao Jianfu complained to her husband about how the master had maltreated them. Not only did Gao dictate how and what they should paint, but he also relegated them to subordinate roles in exhibitions to

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250 The exhibition was held from November 15, 1939 to January 7, 1940.
251 The article was published in two parts. See *Da Guang Bao* 大光報, July 6 and 7, 1948.
252 Huang, “Guanyu ‘Lingnanpai’ de diaocha cailiao.”
increase his standing. These one-sided accusations were impossible to verify; however, some hints suggest that Gao Jianfu was a patriarchal master who demanded strict obedience from followers. As a senior follower, Fang must have had a better understanding of the master’s approach than anyone else. According to his wife, Fang was indignant about Gao’s abuses of others and decided to act. In February 1941, Fang and thirteen other painters announced the founding of the Re-Creation Society and organized its first exhibition in Hong Kong. Of the thirteen members, eleven were Gao Jianfu’s followers in addition to Fang. Some of them, such as Rong Dakuai 容大塊 (1900–1963) and Li Fuhong 李撫虹 (1902–1990), were among the earliest recruits; a few others, such as Zhao Chongzheng 趙崇正 (1910–1968) and Luo Zhuping 羅竹坪 (1911–2002), were relatively new. Another member, Li Gemin 黎葛民 (1882–1978), was affiliated with Gao early on; he was so close to the Chunshui group that he was often mistaken as a follower.

In the pamphlet published for this exhibition, Fang’s three-page autobiographical article “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuanchuan” happened to be listed first and was his de facto declaration of independence from Gao Jianfu. Fang unleashed his dissatisfaction with his master at the very beginning:

If one says that I learn from a particular individual or a particular school, I must deny it, because I have Chinese and foreign teachers at times, and have never just learned from one particular individual…. Before 1929, my works were all landscapes, animals, birds, and flowers, and I followed closely the style of the “new painting.” Later, my thoughts changed, and I realized that this outdated mode of “passing the mantle” leads only to the

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253 Yang Yinfang named Li Fuhong, Luo Zhuping, Huang Xiachuan, Huang Dufeng, and Wu Peirong among those who complained. See Huang.
254 For instance, many of his followers’ works were shockingly similar to Gao’s paintings in terms of subject matter, conception, and treatment. While Gao Jianfu was well-known for his inclusion of modern technological advances in his painting, his followers never included any other new objects, except for those that had already been worked out by the master. Taking into consideration the followers’ talents and varying backgrounds, this phenomenon could hardly be explained as their lack of innovative spirit, but more likely as Gao exercising control over their subject matter.
extinction of individuality. Art will then degenerate generation after generation and will be repetitive and archaic. This contradicts the original aim of “art revolution”: a new path must be found.

假使說我的畫，是專學某一人或某一派的，我必否認，因為我的師，有中國人也有外國人，愧我始終未有專學某一人的…民國十八年以前，我的作品，通通是山水走獸翎毛花卉，且跟足當時的新派畫的一貫作風。後來思想突變了，深知所謂傳衣鉢一語，結果，滅絕個性，藝術必一代不如一代，欲求其新，必反變為因襲陳舊，於藝術革命的本旨，大相徑[sic]庭，非再尋新路不可。255

No one was named, but Fang’s contemporaries could hardly miss that it was Gao Jianfu that he was targeting in the article. His explicit refusal to admit that anyone was his master, coupled with his description of his disillusionment about and departure from “New School Painting”, was nothing but a scathing critique of his master. Nevertheless, Fang did not dwell on grievances for long and jumped to elaborate on his view about figure painting and its significance in a new Chinese art. It should be noted that, while he was already famed as a figure painting specialist by that time, he had never discussed the genre in a detailed and systematic manner. In the article, Fang contextualized the fortunes of figure painting within a Chinese socio-historical context:

Figure painting was the predominant genre in Chinese painting before the Tang Dynasty, and thus many great works were produced. But after the Southern Song, Yuan, and Qing dynasties, the Han people were gradually dispirited and went into decay. The intellectuals could feel the pain of the people as they were trampled and the nation was destroyed, but most of them were passive and harbored transcendental ideas. This transcendentalism contaminated art, and therefore painters preferred nature in the last several hundred years, and many of them painted subjects that are irrelevant to human life; even worse was the literati painting of the Qing dynasty. The literati painters were people of letters; they came up with specious theories, and cared little for figure painting. Even those who were interested imitated only the looming hairdress and the loose robes of the past, following the examples of their predecessors; at its best it was a kind of nostalgia. Moreover, [in the Qing period] China was ruled by non-Chinese who banned traditional Chinese dress. Painters despised the costumes of the ruling Manchurians, whom they regarded as barbarians; however, they were also not to paint the nude because

255 Fang, “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuanguan.”
of social mores. Eventually, figure painting became marginalized and went into decline. From the Yuan dynasty up until now, landscape has replaced figure painting in the mainstream. Although painters have succeeded in creating a pure painting in landscape and flower-and-bird, that made art further removed from life and its content even more hollow. I strongly feel that we are now at a time when the nation is struggling for independence, survival, and revival, and the art we need should not be reclusive but more about human life. Figure painting is the art form that is closest to human life; it is also more profound and direct in its representation of ideas.

According to Fang, the decline of figure painting was related to the loss of the vitality of Chinese culture, which was further linked to the larger historical narrative of Chinese history. A succession of dynasties in which the culturally dominant Han people were oppressed led to an escapist tendency in art, which prioritized landscape and flower-and-bird but neglected figure painting. This theoretical outline finds echoes in many of his contemporaries. For example, the argumentation of Yao Yuxiang’s 姚漁湘 “Zhongguo renwuhua de biaoxian yu beijing” 中國人物畫的表現與背景 [Representations and backgrounds of Chinese Figure Painting], which was

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256 Fang, “Wo de xiehua jingguo ji qi zhuanbian.”
included in the compilation Zhongguohua taolun ji [Debates on Chinese Painting], was similar to Fang’s, except that Yao, who examined the development of figure painting dynasty by dynasty, was more systematic and specific.\(^\text{257}\) The ebb and flow of the various Chinese genres are also a central leitmotif in Zheng Wuchang’s 鄭午昌 (1894–1952) Zhongguo Huaxue Quanshi [Complete History of Chinese Painting], a history that the author claimed to be written from the perspective of Chinese art.

Fang’s stress on the degeneration of Chinese culture under the non-Han conquerors (such as the Mongols and the Manchurians) was undoubtedly related to the overall nationalistic sentiment during the Sino-Japanese War. Surprisingly, this sentiment was absent from this exhibition. Surviving sources revealed that the paintings Fang Rending chose for the Recreation Society exhibition were predominantly those that he finished in America, with subjects related to his experiences there. A review in the Hong Kong newspaper National Times 國民日報 described them:

Mr. Fang specializes in painting human figures. In his Dance and Hula Dance, the sense of action is arrested on paper through the swift and agile movement of the painter’s brush. The Scene on a Bus depicts passengers; his feelings and understandings are deep. The coloring in Girl in Hawaii is bright and gorgeous, but it is not affected by the vulgar practices of the present. On the other hand, Golden Gate Bridge and Dawn in the City of Chicago break new ground by representing Western architecture in the style of Chinese painting.

方君長于人物，如「舞」和「草裙舞」，運筆靈快能把舞的姿態整個活現在畫面上。「車上所見」描寫乘客，體會入微。「夏威夷的賣花女」傅色鮮麗，卻無時

\(^{257}\) Debates on Chinese Painting was an anthology edited by Yao Yuixiang consisting of a total of 29 essays. Little could be found about Yao. It is known that he contributed essays on Chinese art, including one entitled “Zhongguohua de jishu yu paijie” 中國畫的技術與派別 [Styles and Schools of Chinese Painting] to Guowen zhourao 國聞週報 in 1933. He was also a zealous supporter of the Nationalist Party, writing many articles about important leaders such as Wu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879–1936).
Unfortunately, none of these paintings survive. Other paintings that Fang finished in America could provide us with more clues about his latest conception of figure painting. *The Beloved Puppy* 愛犬, which was reproduced in the exhibition brochure, serves as an example (fig. 75). The painting depicts a white female figure with blonde hair and blue eyes, accompanied by a dog that is captured with a vigorous naturalism. The female figure’s facial features are crafted with fine but firm ink lines, while her pink cheeks result in a cheerful atmosphere. In contrast, her blue dress is delineated by calligraphic strokes and modeled with graduating colors, which create a sense of physical presence. The posture further enhances this physicality: the figure is positioned close to the picture plane in a diagonal manner.

The stress on the physical presence of the figure was rarely seen in Fang’s works before. Up until then, illusionism was not Fang Rending’s concern, nor was he interested in reproducing the physical appearance of the body. Oftentimes, he preferred to apply colors flatly to minimize three-dimensionality, a treatment that could be found in his early paintings, such as *The Leisurely Day* and *To the Fields*, or in his war paintings such as *Sentry Guards*. This preference for flatness was sometimes enhanced by his compositional practice of situating figures in the center of paintings, which detached the figures from the viewers. In some cases when figures were close to the viewers, Fang would arrange them horizontally by depicting them in postures parallel to the picture plane. A typical illustration of this horizontal composition is *The Sick Bird* 病禽 (fig. 76). While the

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258 Li Ming, “Zaizuoshe huazhan xuanli” 再造社畫展巡禮 [An Overview of the Exhibition of the Re-creation Society], *National Times* (Hong Kong), February 24, 1941.
beauty seems to touch the “fourth wall,” the bird and the action of the painting are horizontal without any sense of protrusion.

This strategy of flatness and detachment was replaced by an emphasis on physicality and the representation of body forms in his American paintings. Besides the example of The Beloved Puppy, Alcoholics also offers a good example (fig. 77). Two white men, apparently drunk, were painted in the center, leaning on one another. The title appears to be mildly critical of the depicted, only that the men appear to be calm and quiet; perhaps they had already become callous to social cruelties because of the effect of alcohol. The social message aside, Fang endowed the two figures with a sense of substantial mass. Their flesh is modeled with ink, and strong and intense ink strokes are used to define the body. While some of these represent folds on the drapery (such as the short and angular ones on the pants of the figure on the left), others appear as ink blotches that stand for shadows. Circus offers another illustration when Fang uses both brushwork and composition to enforce the physical aspect of the human figure (fig. 78). As in Alcoholics, the lines defining the female acrobat are inky and thick; the figure and the horse are positioned close to the viewer. The horse appears so massive that it seems it is pushing the acrobat out of the picture, but the female figure maintains a fragile equilibrium, her folded leg further accentuating her physicality.

One might suspect that the stress on the physical presence of human figures was related to Fang’s experience during his U.S. sojourn. While he seldom discussed whom he met and what he saw in the U.S. in detail, it is known that during his stay there he spent much of his time in museums. Even though he had substantial knowledge of European art before (thanks to his study in Japan), his interest was mainly in art styles after Impressionism—not to say what he saw were mainly
reproductions. The sojourn in the U.S. would provide Fang with the opportunity to experience the grandeur of European art in earlier periods; the vividness in the depiction of body forms, as well as the sense of engagement with the viewers in these oil paintings, must have given him a strong impression.

Some paintings could provide visual clues about Fang’s interest in this aspect. Condensed Thought 凝思 serves as the best illustration (1942, fig. 79). The painting is painted after the U.S. sojourn; however, there is little doubt that it was inspired by European portraiture. Perhaps its iconography and composition were borrowed from John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), the American portraitist. The sitter in Condensed Thought was a white woman of the upper class, with the setting and costume typical of Sargent’s. She also engaged her viewers through her direct gaze, which was characteristic of many of Sargent’s portraits.

The Stare 凝視 is Fang’s attempt to reproduce the typical Sargent’s style using his wife as a model (fig. 80). In terms of the figure, there is little departure from the others that he painted around this time. The treatment of the hair in The Stare is similar to that in The Beloved Puppy, and the body is crafted similarly as well. The sitter is aware of being looked at, and she returns the gaze confidently. One should also note that Fang has distorted the pictorial space in the foreground: the carpet in the front is tilted steeply, bringing the portrayed figure closer to its viewers.

Fang’s American paintings marked an interesting instance in the history of modern art: a painter who made his fame through avant-garde and aesthete styles abandoned such stylistic pursuits and turned to experiments with more figurative and naturalistic ways of painting the human figure. The mutiny of the Re-Creation Society was short-lived, however. The exhibition was later restaged in Macau, yet the Society did not last to see its second exhibition. Many years
later, Fang blamed Gao Jianfu for estranging his colleagues in the Re-Creation Society one by one, winning them over to his side.\textsuperscript{259} Fang’s exploration in figure painting continued; he was to take one last step before the Republican Period ended.

\textbf{VI. To Arrest the Transitory: Guangzhou, 1948}

Wartime difficulties forced Fang and his family to relocate from Macau to Zhongshan, Guangdong province, their native place. He stayed there in the countryside after the war with Japan ended.\textsuperscript{260} While he still organized a few exhibitions in provincial Zhongshan, this backwater could hardly satisfy his ambitions.\textsuperscript{261} He returned to Guangzhou in February of 1948, when he held a four-day exhibition in the newly-founded Guangdong Provincial Document Bureau, which was one of the most important venues in the city.

His contemporaries followed his return closely. Two newspapers, \textit{Jianguo Ribao} 建國日報 and \textit{Huanqiu Bao} 環球報, published a special supplement for the exhibition.\textsuperscript{262} \textit{Daguang Bao} 大光報, another popular newspaper in Guangzhou, also included reviews of Fang’s figure paintings.\textsuperscript{263} As he had done thirteen years ago, the oil painter Liang Xihong contributed a review, which provides us with crucial information about the paintings that were shown. In addition to a selection of paintings finished in the United States (such as \textit{Circus} and \textit{Dissolute Woman in New

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{259} Fang, “Guanyu Zaizuoshe,” in Huang and Wu, \textit{Guangdong xiandai huatan shilu}, 214.


\textsuperscript{261} For his activities in Zhongshan, see Chen, \textit{Liangjie gaofeng}.

\textsuperscript{262} The exhibition opened on February 27th and closed on March 1st, 1948. See \textit{Jianguo Ribao}, February 27, 1948, \textit{Huanqiu Bao}, February 29, 1948.

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The paintings singled out by Liang Xihong all featured characters in contemporary costumes. These works presented a multitude of styles (for example, one finds a rare instance in *Impoverished Girl* when Fang reproduced his earlier *bijinga* style), with most of them in the style of American paintings. The major departure lay in the subject matter: Fang had chosen subjects that concerned the plight of the poor, thus taking a more critical stance towards social reality. Under his brush, these characters from the lower social stratum were depicted as being responsive to, or more precisely resentful of, their adverse conditions. Concurrently, this choice offered Fang another opportunity to perfect his figure painting. To convey a more forceful message about these subjects, Fang spent considerable effort on the representation of the emotions, or the states of mind, of his characters. As the previous sections have demonstrated, this aspect of conveying emotion was limited in Fang’s earlier paintings.

A notable attempt to convey a character’s inner state is in *The Drought* (fig. 81). In the lower right of the painting, its inscription states that it was inspired by the Guangdong drought of April 1946. The painting features a single male character against a background of fields that are dried

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264 Liang Xihong, “Yi zhong dute de, zhanxin de guohua: Fang Rending jinzuo zhan” 一種獨特的、嶄新的國畫：方人定近作展 [A Unique and New Type of National Painting: Exhibition of Fang Rending’s Recent Paintings], *Huanqiu Bao*, February 27, 1948.

265 Guangdong was hit by a series of disasters from spring to autumn. The drought happened in the spring and switched to a flood in the summer. Hurricanes occurred in autumn. It was reported in June that five million people in Guangdong were affected, with 600 starved to death in the city of Guangzhou. See Li Wenhao et al., *Jindai Zhongguo zaihuang*
up. The figure’s flesh is handled softly, with small areas of light ink added all over to create the impression of three-dimensionality. This delicate treatment is contrasted with the strong lines in the representation of the dress: the lines that define the contour of his shorts are exceptionally intense, reminding us of his similar handling of his U.S. paintings, such as *The Circus*.

Fang worked carefully to highlight the emotion of the figure by depicting the farmer’s visage. His eyes are portrayed as looking upwards, with his lips tight, and his left hand resting on his waist. This conveys a sense of the farmer’s desperateness and resentment, as if he is protesting the tragedy that has left his fields withered. This stress on the character’s inner state contrasts sharply with *Laboring Couple* 劳動夫妻 (1941), a painting that can be dated to the time of the Re-Creation Society (fig. 82). Both paintings capture ordinary laborers; however, in *Laboring Couple* the characters are given unexplainably docile looks, even though their skin is tanned because of working under the blazing sun, with their backs bending under the weight of their labor.

While *The Drought* refers to a specific disaster, in other paintings Fang was responsive to the growing pessimism of post-war China in general. Despite the victory over the Japanese, the atmosphere was gloomy in China after the war. The disastrous economic policies of the Nationalist government were on course to collapse; at the same time the nation was also embroiled in a civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, which was no less atrocious than the war with the Japanese. Under these dual pressures, the lives of those of the lower social stratum were especially miserable. *The Unemployed* offers an example of this type of subject matter, in which Fang stresses the emotional depth of his characters (fig. 83). The painting is a remake of *The
While, in *The Unemployed*, more Chinese-looking figures replace the blue-eyed ones, and the postures are similar, the details of the costumes from *The Alcoholics* are reproduced (note the pants with straight stripes and the whitening treatment on the collar). The most notable departure from the original is the stress on emotion in *The Unemployed*. The figure on the left is portrayed with a confused look, with his head resting on his chin and eyes downcast, suggesting his troubled state of mind. His companion’s visage, however, looks calm, but the carefully depicted, clutched hands add an emotional dimension to this figure, suggesting that he was equally worried about their plight.

Fang experimented with multiple devices and motifs to enhance the emotional appeal of his works. An example is *Sun Setting, Roads Afar* 日暮途遠 (fig. 84). In contrast to the two paintings mentioned above, Fang denies the viewers a look at the character’s face. The traveler (as indicated by his accessories, the bag, and the hat) is placed in a barren landscape, staggering in solitude on railway tracks. The setting sun, leafless tree (which appears too short), and the barren hill evoke a forlorn air, reminding one of similar sentiment in *The Unemployed*.

The contemporary episodes described above, however, constituted only a portion of paintings shown in 1948. According to reports in newspapers, in addition to these, there was another group of works that depicted episodes from Chinese historical and literal texts. As early as the exhibition that was held in Shanghai in 1937, Fang had already tried his hand at painting portraits of historical figures that could strike a chord amongst his audience because of the patriotic overtones. In contrast, the subjects for the Guangzhou exhibition were more diversified. A handful of these paintings were Fang’s reformulation of existing themes from the Chinese repertoire, such as *Hanshan and Shide* 寒山拾德, which were reproduced in *The Universal Daily*. Others were new
inventions, including Qu Yuan 屈原 (also titled *The Song of the Fisherman* 漁父辭), *The Evening* 暮景 (also titled *Pondering with the Book Closed*, 掩卷沉思), and *The Unwelcoming Wife Not Getting Off the Sewing Loom* 妻不下繭. Zheng Chunting 鄭春霆 (1906–1990), who wrote an article praising Fang in a special issue of *Huanqiu Bao*, listed others, such as *Fisherman Rejecting the Sword* 漁父辭劍 (dated 1945) and *The Overlord Bidding Farewell to his Concubine* 霸王別姬. It is uncertain if all the paintings listed by Zheng Chunting were shown in the exhibition of 1948; however, they were probably painted around the same time. Together with some others that are dated within the same period, these paintings of history subjects constituted a substantial proportion of Fang’s paintings in the two years following the Re-Creation Society. More importantly, these paintings shared similar concerns with Fang’s contemporary episodes: not only are the inner states of mind emphasized in these paintings, but the characters are often cast in confrontational or dramatic contexts.

*Qu Yuan* serves as a perfect example (fig. 85). It was the second time that Fang had painted the poet, who was a favorite subject of both Chinese and Japanese painters. The moment that Fang chose to depict, however, required subtle handling of the facial features. Unlike Yokoyama Taikan or Fu Baoshi, who focused on a Qu Yuan wandering along the coast, Fang visualized the instance when the anonymous fisherman persuaded the exiled Qu Yuan to compromise with the corrupted nobles in the court, a scene described in the poem *Yu Fu*, 漁父 [Fisherman]. In Fang’s version, Qu

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Zheng Chunting was a poet, painter, and collector who was related to many important Republican artists in Guangdong. His *Lingnan jindai hua ren zhuan lüe* 嶺南近代畫人傳略 [Brief Biographies of Modern Lingnan Painters] (Hong Kong: 1987) is an important text about the Cantonese art world by an eye-witness.
Yuan’s head turns slightly towards the fisherman, his eyes winking, his left cheek raised slightly, as if he is stimulated by what was just said to him. In contrast, the fisherman is arrested amid his jabbering. He is gesturing to himself, hoping to convince Qu Yuan to compromise out of his good intentions. Qu Yuan captures the very moment when these actions and emotions confront each other.

Fang used lines with different patterns of modulation to heighten the confrontation of these two figures. The lines that define the drapery of Qu Yuan are long and curvilinear, which is achieved by a gentle application of pressure onto the brush at the beginning, creating a leaf-like shape along the movement of the brush. In Chinese art terms, this type of brush strokes, or *miaofa* 描法 ("sketch methods") is referred to as *liuye miao* 柳叶描 ("willow leaf sketch," alluding to the shape of such a leaf). In contrast, those used for the fisherman are short, abrupt, and angular. It is akin to either the *mahuang miao* 马蝗描 ("locust sketch," probably referring to the hindlegs of the locust) or the *kuchai miao* 枯柴描 ("withered firewood sketch"). In short, through his use of differing lines for the representation of the painting’s emotions and actions, Fang created two distinct personalities in *Qu Yuan*.

*The Unwelcoming Wife Not Getting Off the Sewing Loom* is a display of finesse of another sort (fig. 86). It pictures an anecdote of the young Su Qin 蘇秦 (d. 284 BCE), who turned out to be an influential political strategist in the Warring States Period (476–221 BCE). After an unsuccessful attempt to persuade rulers of his time to offer him a post, Su returned home.

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267 A complete set of Fang’s studies of these eighteen “sketch methods” survives, indicating that he was interested in traditional brushwork around this time. His version was probably not intended to be displayed as finished works but as personal exercises: seventeen out of a total eighteen are imitations of the ones available in drawing manuals.
impoverished and dejected, where his whole family snubbed and ignored him, and his wife did not even get off the loom. This story would have little connection to contemporary social or political issues, and the audience would have just taken the painting as a representation of a historical anecdote.

The handling of the bodies in *The Unwelcoming Wife* is extraordinary. The painting captures the dramatic moment when Su Qin greets his unwelcoming wife. Waiting with his hands raised in front of the chest (zuoyi, 作揖 in Chinese, which is a polite gesture), the standing Su Qin looks at his wife, expecting her to respond. His body is rendered with strong brushwork and ink wash, which helps to create its three-dimensionality. Contrastingly, Su’s wife is treated as if she is planar. Colors are applied evenly, without gradation, and her drapery is delineated by dry and stiff lines. Her face is depicted in profile, with her eyes downcast on the loom, indifferent to the politeness of her returning husband. Within a single painting, Fang combines two types of treatment that were possible with the Chinese medium (ink wash and lines), and at the same time, he also heightens the dramatic confrontation of the characters.

Among these historical paintings, there are several that involve only one figure, but the same concern for psychological depth and the dramatic moment can still be seen. One of the most successful is *Shi Qian* 時遷 (dated 1947) (fig. 87). Shi Qian was a character in the novel *Shuihu zhuang* 水滸傳 [Outlaws of the Marsh] and was noted for his skills as a thief. Here, Fang also chose to depict Shi Qian in the act of stealing. According to the novel, Shi Qian once stole and cooked a cock when he and two other outlaws stayed in the stronghold of the Zhu family 祝家庄. While

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268 According to his student Su Di, this painting was probably executed when he was in Zhongshan, where he heard a story about a thief who could steal chicken with his foot alone because of his long toes.
this was not one of Shi Qian’s major feats in his career as a thief, this reference to him stealing the cock was coined by Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598–1652) of the late Ming dynasty, upon which Fang’s conception may have been based. The body type in Chen Hongshou’s work may also have inspired Fang, as his Shi Qian appears taller than average. However, Fang injects into his version a stronger sense of naturalism and psychological depth. The face of his version of Shi Qian is realistically modeled, with his hair and eyebrows treated in a blurry manner to approximate their texture. Shi Qian is depicted in a precarious instance during his act of thievery. He is captured at the very moment when he was physically leaving the stable and is shown striding across the fence with ease, while also cautious, turning his head back to check the treacherous surroundings.

Another example that involves one character is Ji Kang 稽康 (1947) (fig. 88). Ji Kang (c. 223–263) was an important figure of the “Zhulin Qixian 竹林七賢 (“Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove”) of the Western Jin Dynasty, who were noted for their liberal lifestyle. The historical Ji Kang was a virtuous individual, and also a legendary player of the Chinese zither (Guqin 古琴). From the story of this colorful character, Fang selected a relatively neglected anecdote. According to legend, a spirit came to visit Ji Kang when he was playing the zither. After staring at it for a while, Ji Kang decided to blow out the candle out of pride: in his own words, he “felt ashamed to compete with ghosts for the same light.” While the historical figure of Ji Kang can be interpreted as a projection of Fang’s ideal self, pictorially he emphasizes the instant when Ji Kang was pursing his lips to blow out the candle.269

269 More examples can be found in The Fisherman Rejecting the Sword and Trimming the Wick by the Window of the West Chamber 西窗剪燭 (1947), which is a visualization of the line from the Tang poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858); he chose to render the line literally, with one of the figures reaching out to trim the wick.
Even in his remakes of well-known subjects that display established pictorial conventions, Fang Rending would not miss the opportunity to test the dramatic moment. An interesting example can be found in *The Three Tasting Vinegar* 三酸圖 (fig. 89). The story behind the painting is based on a popular anecdote about three important figures of the Northern Song, including the literary giant Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), the poet and calligrapher Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), and the monk Foyin 佛印. The story is simple: Foyin invited Su and Huang to taste some “peach blossom vinegar” that he had made. However, after taking a sip, they each found the vinegar so sour that none of them could bear it. Several versions of the same story have been documented in Chinese art writings, and Fang may have personally viewed some of them, most likely one by Cantonese artist Su Liupeng 蘇六朋 (1791–1861) or Japanese artist Kaihō Yūshō 海北友松 (1533–1615). In some versions, the three characters Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and Foyin were conceptualized as representatives of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism respectively, and this vinegar tasting is understood as an occasion upon which the three cultural systems interact with one another.

Fang would have known this symbolism; however, his focus is on the contrasting reactions to the extreme stimulus. The three figures are all given scrunched visages with their eyes squinted, which is the usual reaction to the tasting of something that is too sour. A close reading reveals that Fang was careful, however, to differentiate their reactions. Su Shi and Huang Tingjian are depicted as if they are recovering from the tasting. Su is leaning back slightly, his hand holding the spoon; Huang is delicately holding a small cup (which likely contains the vinegar). They are both looking in the direction of Foyin, awaiting his reaction: the monk has just dipped some vinegar in his mouth, and his reaction is even more intense than the other two.
As aforementioned, while some of these historical paintings may have a link to the painter himself (such as the self-projection in Ji Kang), most have little relevance to Fang’s contemporaries. It can be imagined that upon stepping into Fang’s exhibition, one would be confronted by two types of paintings: on the one hand, those with strong social messages; on the other hand, history paintings that had little connection to the present. Nevertheless, these two types of paintings were united by similar pictorial concerns, with the historical paintings demonstrating more complicated compositions concerning the drama they capture. The complacency or deliberation depicted in some of them, such as the pursed lips in Ji Kang or the different reactions in The Three Tasting Vinegar, tempt us to believe that these paintings functioned mostly as experiments for Fang Rending.

VII. Epilogue: The Unwanted Figure Painting

With 101 paintings on view, the 1948 exhibition was Fang Rending’s last large-scale show during the Republican period, and sadly, his lifetime. It is known, however, that he was harboring even more ambitious plans. According to his account in 1956, it was around 1948 and 1949 that he began to conceive of Ballad of the Pipa 琵琶行, a series of panel paintings inspired by the poem by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) of the Tang dynasty. Ballad of the Pipa was Fang’s first attempt to represent a complete story. The set consists of sixteen panels, each of which illustrates one passage of the original poem. The set was finished in 1956. Stylistically, they are similar to Fang’s history paintings, only that the style is still more restrained (fig. 90).

When the Communists took over the mainland in 1949, Fang decided to stay with his family in China. As Gao Jianfu had left for Macau, Fang suddenly became one of the most well-known Cantonese artists—as well as the most senior painter with reformist ideas—in the new Communist
state. Because of his status, he was one of the targets for co-opting by the new regime. During the first decade, he was well respected by the government. In addition to posts in art institutions, he was given political roles, such as his appointment as a committee member for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at the municipal level.270

Fang continued to paint after 1949, and in some instances, his earlier experimentations persisted. As discussed, towards the end of the Republican period, his attention shifted significantly to the representation of the actions and emotions of his figures, which were used to tell sophisticated stories. His unfinished Peng Pai Preaching to the Farmers澎湃向農民宣傳 (1952), a collaboration with Li Xiongcai, is an attempt at large-scale narrative painting (fig. 91). Peng Pai was an early Communist martyr active in Guangdong and was known for his activities among the farmers there. In the painting, Peng is depicted as giving a speech at the center. Rather than conceptualizing him as a passionate orator, Fang painted him with an amicable countenance. The farmers surrounding him are arranged in a circle, showing a multitude of gestures and visages that indicate paying attention.

At the same time, however, a younger generation of figure painters, who were trained more systematically in both Chinese and European art, was coming to the stage. Not only could they represent historical scenes more provocatively, but they were also better at visualizing the optimism of the new state. In contrast, Fang’s figure painting—which was an accumulation of

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270 The significance of Fang Rending is reflected in one incident. Together with Guan Shanyue (who showed sympathy with the Communists early on), he sat on the funeral committee for the death of Qi Baishi in 1957, which consisted of prominent individuals from various cultural sectors. Other members included the Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩來, famous writers Guo Moruo and Luo She 老舍, painters Yu Feian 于非闇, Guan Shanyue, Wu Zuoren 吳作人, and He Xiangning 何香凝, to name but a few. See “Qi Baishi shishi” 齊白石逝世 [Qi Baishi Passed Away], Renmin Ribao, September 17, 1957.
experimentations in the Republican period—could hardly compete with the emerging one even though the message was politically correct. Interestingly, Fang probably felt that he and his art were marginalized. Since the mid-1950s, there was a significant increase of works of flower-and-bird, and even in his figure paintings, flower-and-bird elements play a much more significant role.

This marginalization, unfortunately, turned into oppression during the Cultural Revolution. He even distanced himself from politics, as his position in institutions automatically rendered him a target. He was stripped of his teaching post, and many of his paintings were destroyed. A figure painting that emerged gradually out of a series of experimentations was not only forced to stop but withered and sank into obscurity.
Chapter Four

Huang Shaoqiang: Figure Painting for the People

While Fang Rending’s struggle to build a figure painting reflecting the characteristics of “the times” was examined in chapter 3, the concluding chapter of this dissertation will turn to Huang Shaoqiang, another figure painting specialist of the Lingnan School, who was noted for his devotion to picturing the experiences of the poor and the socially neglected. As will be demonstrated, Huang was not only exceptional in his efforts to expand the pictorial potential of figure painting with the brush, he was also more dedicated among his contemporaries to the mission of “painting for the people”—which, unfortunately, led him into structural difficulties that he was unable to solve.

I. When Art Meets “the People”

In Republican China, there was no subdivision of the arts that was not affected by debates about “popularization” or “massification” (“dazhonghua” or “pingminhua”): that is, making art more related to the “people” or the “masses.” While this anti-elitist concern to establish a connection between art and the “people” grew exceptionally robust with the popularity of socialist art theories in China around the 1930s, an earlier and more immediate motivation could be traced to the Chinese encounter with European arts since the late Qing period. Impressed by the vitality of the liberal arts in the Western world, many intellectuals came to believe that, in the past few centuries, the arts in China was neutered as a pastime for the literati and had neglected its responsibility to enlighten the masses and beautify their lives.

Individuals involved in literature and drama responded first to the needs of “popularization.” As early as January 1919, the writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967) published an article
“Pingmin wenxue” 平民文学 [Literature of the Common People] in the widely circulated magazine *Meizhou pinglun* 每週評論 [Weekly Commentary] in which he called for a “democratic literature” that focused on the experiences of the common people.\(^{271}\) Theorists and practitioners in other realms such as drama, music, and cinema, promptly followed suit and reacted to this trend of “popularization” in varying degrees.\(^{272}\) This reaction to “popularization” could also be found in visual art, even though this initiative lacked strength at first. However, by the 1930s, a consensus

\(^{271}\) One might push this popularization in literature slightly earlier to 1917, with Hu Shi’s promotion of *baihuawen* 白話文, which he argued was the language of the common people. In 1917, Hu Shi published “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文學改良芻議 [Tentative suggestions for literary reform], which argued for the use of the vernacular rather than *wenyanwen* 文言文, the literary language that Hu denounced as “dead.” Chen Duxiu responded to Hu Shi with an article, “Wenxue geming lun” 文學革命論, in which he urged his readers to “overturn the ornate, sycophantic ‘noble literature’ and build a simple and expressive ‘national literature.’” That said, Zhou Zuoren’s article is more comprehensive in the sense that it discusses both the means and the subjects of a democratic literature. For Hu Shi’s “Wenxue gailiang chuyi,” see *Xin qingnian*, vol. 2 no. 5 (January 1917). For Chen Duxiu’s “Wenxue geming lun,” see *Xin qingnian*, vol. 2 no. 6 (February 1917). For Zhou Zuoren’s article, see Zhongmi 仲密, “Pingmin wenxue,” *Meizhou pinglun*, no. 5 (January 19, 1919).

\(^{272}\) Long before the leftist playwrights Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968) or Xia Yan 夏衍 (1900–1995) were active nationally, an earlier initiative for *xiju dazhonghua* 戲劇大眾化 (“Popularization of Drama”) could be found in the *Minzhong xiju she* 民眾戲劇社 “People’s Drama Society” in Shanghai in 1921. Worried by the prevalence of low-quality *wenmingxi* 文明戲 (“Civilized Drama”) that they thought was popularizing feudal values under the cover of modernity, the members of *minzhong xiju she* promoted *aimei de xiju* 愛美的戲劇 (“Amateur Drama”) that resists the corruption of commercialism. An important member of this group was Xiong Fosi 熊佛西 (1900–1965), who not only put his ideals in practice in the villages in Dingxian 定縣 in Hebei but also summarized and published his ideas and experience in *Xiju dazhonghua de shiyian* 戲劇大眾化的實驗 [Experiments in Popularizing Drama] (1947). For an introduction to *wenmingxi* and *aimeiju*, see Houqing Shen and Mohan Zhang, “Jiawang guozheng: cong wenmingxi dao ‘aimeiju’ kan zhongguo zaoqi huaju shangyehua fenzheng 矫枉过正:从文明戏到‘爱美剧’看中国早期话剧商业化纷争 [Overdoing in Righting a Wrong: from wenmingxi to aimeiju, a dispute over commercialism in early Chinese drama],” *xiju yishu* 戏剧艺术 [theatrical arts], no. 03 (2013): 91–98. For a discussion of Xiong Fosi’s theatrical experiment, see William Huizhu Sun, “The Peasants’ Theatre Experiment in Ding Xian County (1932-1937)” (PhD Thesis, New York University, 1990).

In the realm of music an iconic figure was Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880–1942), who received training as a painter in Japan. Li saw the advantages of music in nurturing young people; he composed many songs for schools. On the other hand, his younger contemporary Li Jinhui 黎錦暉 (1891–1967) was representative in popular music. Dubbed “the father of popular music in China,” Li was originally an educator who turned to write many popular tunes in the twentieth century. See Li Jinhui, “Wo he Mingyue she” 我和明月社 [the Mingyueshe and I], pts. 1 and 2. *Wenhuashiliiaocongkan* 文化史料丛刊 [Collection of Historical Sources on Culture], no.3 (1982): 90–127; no.4 (1983): 206–46.
emerged among Chinese artists that the relationship with “the people” or “the masses” was an entity that they had to reckon with.\(^{273}\) One of the better known initiatives was the woodcut movement that has been chronicled by Tang Xiaobing in his *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (2007). As Tang demonstrates, these woodcutters, who harbored left-wing ideals, presented new subject matter with a simple yet powerful visual language inspired by European woodcut artists such as Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). Ideologically, these Chinese artists aimed to elevate the level of artistic appreciation of the masses, at the same time leading to a collective political awakening.

Another example of an artist whose art was inseparable from “the people” was Jiang Zhaohe, who has received more attention from Chinese scholars than his counterparts in English-speaking academia. Active mainly in Shanghai and Beijing, Jiang’s fame climbed with his realist renditions of peasants from the late 1930s onwards. His achievements are epitomized in the gigantic (yet controversial) *Refugees* 流民圖 (1941–43), which perhaps was the most remarkable single figure painting in twentieth-century China.\(^{274}\) Measuring around two meters by thirty meters, *Refugees*

\(^{273}\) Visual artists benefited from several revolutionary technological and social innovations imported from the European world that stimulated and facilitated the pace and possibilities of this "popularization." On the one hand, modern printing techniques enabled the image to be mass produced, meaning that it could not only reach an audience on an unprecedented scale but also with much better quality. On the other hand, the popularity of public exhibitions provided an occasion for artists to engage the masses directly. Even though purposely built museums were scarce in Republican China, other public spaces—department stores, convention centers, and schools—could function as exhibition venues.

\(^{274}\) The debate about *Refugees* was reignited between two established art historians in China in 2015. In September 2015, the art historian Lin Mu 林木 published an article, “Jiang Zhaohe *Liumin tu* chuangzuo shimo ji beijing” 蒋兆和《流民图》创作始末及背景 [About the history of the creation of *Refugees* and its background], which condemns *Liumin tu* as a pro-Japan painting. With sources from newspaper reports in the 1940s, Lin shows that Jiang Zhaohe was a friend of Yin Tung 聂同, a collaborator with the Japanese, as well as held exhibitions in Japan during the heat of the Sino-Japanese War. Responding to Lin Mu’s accusation, Liu Xilin 劉曦林 penned “*Liumin tu* shi” 《流民图》析 [Analysis of *Refugees*], which confirmed the patriotism of Jiang Zhaohe by claiming that the “traces” that Lin raised were expedients on the painter’s part during a time of Japanese occupation. For Lin Mu’s article, see *Zhongguo*
captures the sufferings of the Chinese from different walks of lives within a panorama of interlocking figures with an astonishing degree of verisimilitude. From an artistic point of view, Jiang Zhaohe was the first Chinese painter to reconcile verisimilitude and the medium of ink and brush by devising a set of techniques to approximate the sketch with brushwork and ink effects. This set of skills was to become the foundation for art pedagogy in mainland China after 1949 and continues to hold sway nowadays.

Huang Shaoqiang, the protagonist of this chapter, was another painter in the Republican period whose career was inseparable from "the people." His status in the academic literature might not be as highly esteemed as Jiang Zhaohe or the woodcutters; however, he was not only the first but also arguably the most important painter in the Republican period to enter the mainstream with such a pursuit.

Huang was a key figure among the Lingnan School cohort soon after the Nanjing decade (1927–37) commenced. Together with other followers of the Gao brothers, he first made his...
name in the two national exhibitions, namely the First National Exhibition and the subsequent West Lake Exposition. From thence to his inopportune death in 1942, Huang remained one of the most active figure painting specialists in the Chinese art world. He traveled extensively in China, holding exhibitions in key cities from north to south, including Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, and Guangzhou. As a painter from the south, his activities were extensively reported by media in the north, which included widely circulated newspapers such as Ta Kung Pao 大公报 or pictorials such as Beiyang huabao 北洋画报 [The Beiyang Pictorial].

His art also attracted attention from Chinese and foreign critics alike. Huang Shaoqiang’s status could be attested to indirectly by prominent individuals who endorsed his art during his lifetime. For example, Shaoqiang huaji 少强画集 [Paintings of Shaoqiang], a selection of his paintings published in 1935, contained inscriptions by eminent politicians Lin Sen 林森 (1868–1943), Wang Jinghui 汪精衛 (1883–1944), Dai Jitao 戴季陶 (1891–1949), and Sun Ke 孙科 (1891–1973), as well as cultural celebrities like...
Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) and Xu Beihong. There is also his *Hua Zhong* 畫塚 [Grave of Paintings] (1937), which was preceded by an excessively long list of 172 individuals from multiple fields, attesting to the wide support of his art.

As a painter, Huang was most recognized for his representations of *minjian jiku* 民間疾苦 (literally “ills and hardships of the people”). Ironically, this reputation has an adverse side effect for the painter from an art historical perspective. Because of this reputation, researchers have fixated on Huang’s humanistic subject matter and overlooked his innovations to reform Chinese art. For instance, no scholar has noticed Huang’s responses to the changing social and pictorial conditions that accompanied the arrival of European art. The paintings that were most warmly received during his lifetime were the large-scale ones (such as *Homeless of the Flood* 洪水流民, 1932) that combine several vertical scrolls, ranging from four to six. Paintings of such large size were rare in Chinese art but more common in Europe. More importantly, as will be discussed in depth in the second section, Huang did not just magnify the sizes of his figures to fill up the space, but he also made use of gestures, emotions, and compositional arrangements to generate a theatrical experience.

It is also overlooked that Huang was perhaps the first Chinese painter to incorporate the female nude with the brush. An early example is the appalling *Origin of the Blood* 血的泉源 (1927), which portrays a mother as a nude in a classical pose undergoing a violent death. Another adaptation is the anti-Japanese *Whose Mother, Wife, or Daughter?* 是誰慈母誰妻女 (undated), in

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278 See *Shaoqiang huaji* 少強畫集 ([Guangzhou:] Minjian huaguan, 1935).
which a fragmented female body was used to suggest the atrocities of the invaders (fig. 92).\(^{279}\)

*Coexistence of Form and Emptiness* 色空同屏 (1932) is even more daring in the sense that Huang represented the nude with a Buddhist theme (fig. 93). While other Chinese painters were still mimicking the European convention of the nude by conceptualizing it as a symbol of beauty and high-mindedness, Huang Shaoqiang was already adapting this symbol of European art according to his needs.

Huang was also well-known for his penchant for pessimistic scenes that focus on sorrow and distress, a feature that critics sometimes dismissed as “ghostly” or “ghastly” (\(\text{gui qi}\)).\(^{280}\) Not only are his characters always depicted in adverse circumstances (such as poverty or disasters), they are also endowed with exaggerated facial expressions and bodily gestures.\(^{281}\) This preference for intense emotions and actions contrasted sharply with Jiang Zhaohe, who chose to be objective by keeping his characters restrained and motionless.\(^{282}\) Huang’s choice might appear similar to that of the left-wing woodcutters, who also added strong emotions and actions to highlight social oppression or inequality. Nevertheless, except for condemning the Japanese invaders, Huang Shaoqiang never tried to expose the origin of the social inequalities that his characters were suffering. Oftentimes he was more inclined to reprise literary tropes that could be found in

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\(^{279}\) *Whose Mother, Wife, or Daughter?* was reproduced in *Central Daily News*, September 8, 1946.

\(^{280}\) The comment by Huang’s contemporary about the painter’s “ghostly” flavor was quoted by Li Weiming in his “Huang Shaoqiang (1901–1942) de yiwen shiye – jian lun 20 shiji qianqi Zhongguohua yishu Zhong de minjian yishi” 黃少強 (1901–1942) 的艺文事業 – 兼論 20 世紀前期中國畫藝術中的民間意識 [The Cultural Enterprise of Huang Shaoqiang – and a Discussion on the Popular Awareness in the Art of Chinese painting in the Early 20th century], in *Huang, Danqing fajiefen*, 22–23.

\(^{281}\) An extreme example was his *Singing Aloud in the Mountain Dan Xia* 丹霞放歌 that was reproduced in *Hua Zhong*, which combines action (the painter running in the woods) and emotion (Huang is represented as wailing).

\(^{282}\) Examples of the typical treatment of Jiang can be found in his *Refugees*: it is true that one could still find figures lamenting visibly (an example is the interlocking bodies on the right); however, the majority of the depicted figures are calm and quiet, as epitomized by the treatment of the mother with her dead child at the front.
traditional Chinese culture. An example is *Singing with Whirling Tears in the Wayside* 殘歌載道淚飄蕩 (1936). As will be discussed, it is one of Huang’s large compositions towards the end of his career in which the composition is more experimental in nature. However, the accompanying poem reminds us that what is depicted is another version of a beauty past her prime, which has been a common theme in Chinese literature.\(^{283}\)

This chapter will contextualize the evolution of this “ghostly” figure painting of Huang Shaoqiang within the “decline” discourse in Republican China. In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was mentioned that Chinese critics and intellectuals recognized in their art of the last few centuries two major deficiencies in the discourse of decline. On the one hand, it was widely accepted that Chinese art was stagnant and could not catch up with “modern times”; on the other hand, Chinese art was also rejected as an art of the ivory tower that was unsympathetic to social realities and tastes other than those of the literati. This chapter will focus on how Huang dealt with the second of these two deficiencies of Chinese art by tracing how he developed a set of personal iconographies and narrative strategies to “paint for the people.” As will be made clear, Huang’s iconographies and narrative style were the product of a long refinement of the repertoire that he developed from his misfortunes. This chapter will also examine how Huang Shaoqiang’s obsession with a populist ideal motivated him to assume an image of “painter of the people” that was inseparable from his art, which I propose originated from the anxiety regarding the viability of his pursuit. Accordingly, this anxiety surfaced from time to time in Huang's painting, which is typified by the structurally complex *Appreciating the Tune* 賞音 (1931), or in his preference for the subject

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\(^{283}\) The most notable precedence of this trope in Chinese literature is Bai Juyi’s *Ballad of the Pipa* 琵琶行.
of the lonely musician, or in his *Hua Zhong*, his selection of paintings that was unique in the twentieth century.

II. **Young Painter at the Crossroads**

Foshan, Huang Shaoqiang’s hometown, had been a famous city in Guangdong since the Ming dynasty. Besides its rich cultural tradition, it was a city with an established culture in martial arts. Interestingly, Huang’s early career was intermingled with a martial arts society, the Foshan Jingwu Athletic Association 佛山精武會, which was the local branch of the national network spearheaded by the legendary master Huo Yuanjia 霍元甲 (1868–1910). This society published a monthly entitled *Foshan jingwu yuekan* 佛山精武月刊 [Foshan Athletic Monthly], which, in addition to news and materials about martial arts, contained articles of varied interests, such as novels, sheet music of popular tunes, and even visual arts. Huang Shaoqiang was responsible for the graphic design and illustrations as well as served as a regular contributor of articles from the time of the magazine’s founding until late 1926.

Huang Shaoqiang’s traces in *Foshan jingwu yuekan* reveal that he was attracted to both Chinese and foreign art ideas. Take his writings as an example. In the founding issue, he contributed a short article called “Yishu qianshi” 藝術淺釋 [Introduction to the Arts], in which he

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284 Foshan had been famous as one of the national centers producing metal wares since the Ming dynasty. It was also one of the commercial centers in Guangdong. In the Qing dynasty, it was well-known not only for its role as an iron-working center but also for its textile industry. It was estimated that by the time of Qianlong, there were 30,000 families registered in Foshan, not including the non-locals who moved in looking for jobs. See Jiang Zuyuan and Fang Zhiqin, *Jianming Guangdong shi* 简明广东史 [A Concise History of Guangdong] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2008), 221–23, 236–37, 324–28, 332–37.

285 Foshan was the hometown of the famous martial arts master Huang Feihong 黃飛鴻 (1847–1925), who is still an icon of Kung Fu in the public imagination nowadays.
tried to define and classify the various subcategories of fine arts. The initiative to redefine and reclassify “fine arts” was fairly common in the Republican period; writers and critics, based on their respective backgrounds, had introduced a variety of theories and taxonomies. Huang’s definition of art as “emotional” in essence, as well as the classification of fine arts using neologisms such as “liberal arts,” “spatial arts,” “plastic arts,” or “temporal arts,” followed the system of the Japanese art theoretician Kuroda Hōshin 黑田鵬心 (1885–1967), whose *Basics of the Study of Fine Arts* 藝術學綱要 (published in Chinese in 1922) was widely read in China. However, in an article entitled “The Painter and the Artisan” 畫家與畫工 that appeared two issues later, Huang’s tone and vocabulary switched suddenly to that of the traditional Chinese art critic. In this short piece in which he discussed the characteristics of “great” art, he reiterated the dichotomy between the creative genius of the “painter” (huaji 畫家) and the imitative “artisan” (huagong 畫工), which had a long tradition in Chinese art that dated back to the Northern Song dynasty. Besides, he also transposed traditional Chinese art terminologies, such as the classifications of *yi pin* 逸品 (“leisurely class”), *shen pin* 神品 (“divine class”), and *neng pin* 能品 (“capable class”) to describe the different levels of artistic achievement.

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287 In Republican journals one could find many articles on this theme. For instance, Li Puyuan at the Hangzhou Art School wrote “Yishu de fenlei” 藝術底分類 [the classification of art], which explains the various classification systems in Europe. See *Zhejiang Qinignian* 浙江青年 [Zhejiang Youths], vol. 1 no. 8 (1935), 150–57.
288 Kuroda Hōshin’s *Basics of the Study of Fine Arts* 藝術學綱要 was translated by the painter and art educator Yu Jifan 俞寄凡 (1891–1968) and published in Shanghai in June 1922. *General Theory of Fine Arts* 藝術概論, another work by the same author, was translated by the painter Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975) and was published in May 1928. See Beijing Tushuguan, ed., *Minguo shiqi zong shumu* (1911-1949) 文化科学・艺术 [Index of Publications in the Republican Period (1911-1949): Cultural Science, Fine Arts] (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan Chubanshe, 1998), 145.
289 The three classes of “neng pin,” “miao pin” 妙品, and “shen pin” could be traced to Chinese art writings of the
Huang’s bifurcation of interest in both Chinese and European art was also observable in his painting practice, which could be reconstructed from the reproductions of his works in the monthly. On the one hand, he was well-versed in the skillset of the Chinese brush. *Huabiao Rock* 華表石, for instance, is painted with landscape techniques on a Chinese fan at the request of a friend (fig. 94). Be that as it may, Huang was also committed to new mediums and methods. Besides his graphic designs, many of his drawings or compositions in charcoal or steel point were reproduced there, including *Tragedy in Elgin Road* 愛而近路慘史, which narrates the death of Huo Yuanjia (fig. 95). His interest in newly imported methods and media was also noticeable in his first solo show, which was held in Foshan in July 1926. Only eleven out of about 160 works displayed were painted in the brush, and their titles suggested that they were conventional in subject matter. On the other hand, Huang also fashioned himself as a practitioner of *xiesheng* 寫生 (‘drawing from life’), which was, to many Chinese, synonymous with European art in early twentieth-century Southern and Northern period. “*Yi pin*” was a new class appeared in the Tang.

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290 *Huabiao Rock* is a landmark in Zhaoqing, Guangdong.

291 While the earliest biography of Huo Yuanjia (dated 1916) (which, as the author Xiao Yulin 蕭汝霖 mentions at the end, was based on materials from Huo’s close friend Nong Jinsun 農勁臻) records that Huo did die suddenly after meeting a Japanese doctor named Akino 秋野, the author did not suspect that he was poisoned. In the account about Huo Yuanjia in *Foshan jingwu yuekan* (dated 1927), however, a Japanese doctor was accused of poisoning the master. This tale that “Huo Yuanjia was poisoned by a Japanese doctor” persists to our day, as in *Fearless* (2006) starring Jet Li as Huo. For the biography of Huo Yuanjia by Xiao Yulin, see “Dali shi Huo Yuanjia zhuan” 大力士霍元甲傳 [Biography of the Herculean Huo Yuanjia], *Qingnian zachi* [Youth Magazine], vol. 1, no. 5 (1916), 78–81. For the later account, see “Huo Yuanjia xiansheng zhuan” 霍元甲先生傳 [Biography of Mr. Huo Yuanjia], *Foshan jingwu yuekan*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1927), 8–9.

292 The exhibition was held in the venue of the Foshan Jingwu Society, July 10–13, 1926. The exhibition was divided into five sections in five rooms: the first showed Huang’s “old works” (probably his early works) and “trends of modern art” (with reproductions of modern European masters), the second “pencil sketches,” the third “color pencils, pastels, steel point drawings, charcoal drawings,” the fourth “watercolors and oil paintings,” and the last “national paintings.” Of the eleven “national paintings,” three were depictions of birds, five of flowers. See Chun Zhi 續之, “Huang Shaoqiang geren huazhan jisheng” 黃少強個人畫展記盛 [Splendor of Huang Shaoqiang’s Solo Exhibition], in *Foshan jingwu yuekan*, vol. 1 no. 11 (1926), 76–87.
China. In a long article titled “Lücheng xiesheng ji” [Record of my Sketching Trip], he minutely documented his xiesheng activities in an eight-day trip to Wuzhou.\(^{293}\)

Huang kept a close eye on the more recent art trends in Europe. As he recounted in an article published after his first solo exhibition, he displayed reproductions of European paintings in the venue for comparison, which, in his opinion, were stylistically akin to his own. These paintings included those of “Italy’s Futurism, France’s Post-Impressionism, Germany’s Expressionism, France’s Cubism.”\(^{294}\) He also included the works of two Qing painters, namely Shitao (1642–1707) and Jin Nong (1687–1763).\(^ {295}\) The inclusion of these two Chinese painters suggested that Huang was aware of contemporary art discourses in China. Since the 1920s, artists and critics had begun to reevaluate these two artists (Shitao in particular), who were always considered to be eccentric and individualistic, with reference to European art. For example, Liu Kaiqu claimed that Shitao was an “expressionist” that should be examined separately from literati art.\(^{296}\) Later Liu Haisu (1896–1994), whom Huang was connected to remotely, also argued that these two painters were spiritually close to European expressionistic trends.\(^{297}\)

These traces in *Foshan Jingwu Monthly* reveal that Huang Shaoqiang was not very different from other young artists of his time. On the one hand, he was attracted to novel art ideas, but on

\(^{293}\) Huang, “Lücheng xiesheng ji,” *Foshan jingwu yuekan*, vol. 1 no.9 (1926), 23–32.


\(^{295}\) The only European painter that he named was Vincent van Gogh.

\(^{296}\) Liu Kaiqu, “Shitao de hualun” [Painting Theories of Shitao], *Xiandai pinglun*, vol. 4, no. 95 (1926), 10–13.

\(^{297}\) According to the chronology compiled by Huang Zhijian and Huang Zuanxu, Huang studied under Liu Haisu in 1920. In his inscription in *Hua Zhong*, Liu also addresses Huang as his “follower.” However, as Li Weiming argues, Liu and Huang could have little opportunity to see each other in the 1920s: Liu was basically in Shanghai and Huang in Guangdong. It was more likely through correspondence courses that the two were connected. See Li, “Huang Shaoqiang de yiwen shiye,” Huang, *Danqing fa jiefen*, 24–25.
the other hand he was not repulsive to the traditional art of China. With training in Chinese and Western art, he could try his hand at different forms. This situation only changed in 1927, when a series of deaths in his family transformed Huang Shaoqiang—the person and his paintings.

III. Personal Misfortunes and the Development of a Pessimistic Painting

In his “Zhilu zizhuan” 止廬自傳 [Autobiography of Zhilu] that was penned on his deathbed in 1942, Huang divided his life into six phases, each with a duration of seven years.²⁹⁸ He named the fourth of these phases daixie shiqi 代謝時期 (“supersession phase”), which dated from 1921 to 1927.²⁹⁹ This was a period when he experienced a series of births as well as deaths in his family. Within these seven years, his wife gave birth to four sons, but his family was also struck by a series of deaths, which included those of his parents, grandparents, aunt, younger brother, younger sister, and daughter.³⁰⁰

Huang’s life had been relatively trouble-free up until then. Coming from a well-off family, he could afford to study at various art schools in Guangzhou and Hong Kong and to pursue a career as a painter without any financial burden. This unimaginable series of alternating births and deaths in his close family circle meant that Huang was suddenly expelled into a vacuum. As a painter, Huang decided to struggle against this loss with his art, but it was to become the prominent theme in his painting during the next couple of years.

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²⁹⁸ “Zhilu” 止廬 (literally “hut of stillness”) was Huang Shaoqiang’s style name (hao 號). This autobiography was reprinted in Shaoqiang Huang, Huang Shaoqiang Shichao 黃少強詩鈔 [Collected Poems of Huang Shaoqiang], ed. Liang Yaoneng ([Foshan]: Nanhai Huang Shaoqiang jinian guan, 1995), 89–91.
²⁹⁹ Huang, “Zhilu zizhuan.”
³⁰⁰ Huang, “Zhilu zizhuan.”
In addition to visualizing his distress, these paintings were also testing grounds for Huang Shaoqiang. For instance, *Drifting Leaves 飄零的舞葉* depicts an imaginary episode featuring his daughter and is accompanied by a long inscription in free verse.³⁰¹ On the other hand, in *Love and Death in the Desolate Path 客道蕭條生死情*, he cast the departure of his dying sister to his brother-in-law's family in a setting that alludes to the stone carvings of the Han dynasty.³⁰² The characters dressed in ancient costumes, and the carriage in which they are situated, appears flat and planar (fig. 96). It was the death of his mother in 1927 that dealt the heaviest blow to the young painter, and it was his representation of this loss that was typical of Huang’s early experimentations with figure painting.

From an art historical perspective, “motherhood” was not a common theme in Chinese art.³⁰³ Paintings about the relationships between parents and children existed, yet they were mainly edifying in nature to illustrate the proper conduct according to Confucian standards, and were not intended to represent the sentimental connection between mothers and children. The extremely influential “Twenty-four Filial Exemplars” 二十四孝, which painters of different generations reinterpreted regularly, serves as the perfect illustration.³⁰⁴ Representations of these stories of filial piety always adopted the format of handscrolls. Like most representations of narrative scenes in Chinese art, each episode is compartmentalized, figures are relatively small, and painters paid little attention to the representation of actions and emotions.

³⁰¹ A photo of *Drifting Leaves* survives in the materials that Huang Zhijian donated to the Guangdong Museum of Art.
³⁰² *Love and Death in the Desolate Path* was reproduced in *Hua Zhong*, 242.
³⁰³ On the contrary, in European tradition “Madonna and child” was a very common theme. Other frequently depicted mothers include Hagar of Genesis and Medea and Andromache from classical mythology.
³⁰⁴ An example was Xu Yansun’s long scroll painted in the 1930s, which is now in a private collection. See Xu Yansun, *Xu Yansun ershisi xiao tuce 徐燕孙二十四孝图册 [Xu Yansun’s Album of the Twenty Four Filial Exemplars]* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 2011).
At times, Chinese painters would capture the relationships between mothers and their children outside the model of filial piety. In such cases, the paintings were conceived predominantly as portraits. Ren Bonian’s *Mother Playing with her Son* 弄璋圖 stands as an example of this type (fig. 97). The technique aside, the arrangement of the characters (such as posture and placement) conforms to the standards of portraiture of Ren’s times. While the child’s action is captured vividly, the mother, with an emotionally detached look, shows little care to her son, but gazes frontally at the viewers. Interestingly, the Lingnan master Gao Jianfu once tried to break convention by capturing the sentimental aspect of “motherhood”; however, limited by his training, he opted for an indirect approach using symbols.305 This attempt is *Motherly Love* 母愛, in which the older Gao used his specialty in flower-and-bird to picture a hen sheltering its chicks, thus highlighting the role of the mother as protector (fig. 98).306

Rather than relying on the convention of portraiture or using symbols, Huang Shaoqiang adopted a direct approach to visualize his experiences during his mother’s death. In doing so, he had an advantage that his masters lacked: Huang had substantial training in rendering the human face naturalistically, and the illustrations of the martial art moves in the Foshan Jingwu Monthly indicate that he could handle actions as well as gestures.307 His first attempts were scenes of

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305 Gao Jianfu’s notes indicate that he was cognizant of at least one Western precedent of the theme of “motherly love.” In a note that was probably written between 1910 and 1920, Gao describes a painting by Millet (Gao calls him “Mi Lì” 咪利) that depicts “three children sitting on the doorstep, a mother feeding them with a hen close by,” which matches the French master’s *La Becquée* (c.1860) currently residing in Palais Beaux-Arts Lille. For Gao’s note about Millet, see “Minchu huaxue biji xuce” 民初画学笔记数则 [Collection of Gao Jianfu’s Notes on Painting in the Early Republican Period], in Gao, *Gao Jianfu shiwen chubian*, 60.

306 Zhou Shuya submitted a painting of the same title for the first national exhibition (1929).

307 Huang was trained in charcoal portraiture in his early years. He also had experience in composing narrative scenes: *The Tragedy in Elgin Road* serves as the best example. It involves characters with contrasting states of mind, such as the suspicion of the nurse or the treachery of the culprit.
mourning, as illustrated by *The Empty Armchair* 塵榻空留 and *Candles Howling in the Wind* 殘燭號風 (fig. 99 and 100). Both paintings are vertical in format and contain a female figure in funeral garb; they should have been inspired by what the painter witnessed in the funeral. *The Empty Armchair* portrays a domestic space set in perspective. A female character, probably a young relative of Huang, is depicted from the back; her body is positioned at a horizontal angle, which accentuates the spatial illusion. The coarseness of her hair indicates her distress, which is stressed by her downcast lips and the tear that is sliding down her face. The only other element in this painting is an armchair at the back. As the title implies, it was the chair in which Huang’s mother used to sit. The contrast between the sculptural presence of the mourner and the absence of the deceased is enhanced by textual means. Above the empty armchair, a strip that resembles the auspicious *fai chun* 揮春 was added, which reads “as strong as the pine and the cypress” (*laoru songpai* 老如松柏). This is a common blessing to the aged for longevity during festivals, which has now turned ironical as it could not be fulfilled.

If in *The Empty Armchair* grief is conveyed mainly by facial expression, in *Candles Howling in the Wind* it is bodily gestures that play the leading role. The female figure, dressed in the funeral garb suitable for daughters (as indicated by the white linen and hemp), is weeping with her hands covering her face. Huang utilizes compositional arrangements to visualize the psychological state of the figure. Unlike *The Empty Armchair*, the pictorial space in *Candles Howling in the Wind* is not clearly defined. The figure floats in the upper part of the scroll; though she is sitting with her knees bent, her belt curves downward in an S shape and connects to the tip of the flame of the burning candle, which rests on a lump of dripping wax with a tilted base. She appears to be unanchored in a vacuum, which enhances the feeling of loss and confusion.
Huang must have painted several other scenes of the funeral. Eventually, his focus shifted from what he witnessed to memories as well as reflections about motherhood. *Mother’s Tears*, which is reproduced in *Hua Zhong*, captures a scene of his mother taking care of him when he was ill, in which the emotions and actions are meticulously represented (fig. 101). The most daunting attempt, however, is *Origin of Blood* in which Huang depicts a pessimistic scene between mother and son (fig. 102). At first glance, the subject matter of the surviving scroll is difficult to conceptualize. The scene is set within a rocky landscape; on the left the lower half of a naked woman is visible. Blood gushes out from her pudendum and turns into a small waterfall along the cliff on which she rests. A child jumps towards her; his pose is awkward as if he was catapulted from the other side of the hill.

Huang added a long inscription in the lower half of the scroll ten years later, which includes the history of this painting as well as a poem written when the painting was finished. As Huang puts it, the surviving scroll is only part of the original. Fortunately, the reproduction of the painting in *Hua Zhong*, though altered, provides us with hints of what the original was like (fig. 103). The pristine *Origin of Blood* was very likely twice as wide, and the iconography was even more disruptive. The female body was portrayed in full, with the stomach ripped open. Coupled with the blood that stains the bodies of the female and the child, *Origin of Blood* is probably a scene of obstructed labor. The poem attests to this hypothesis:

> Just as one is saddened by the withering flowers that once flourished;  
> the births and deaths of human lives are equally lamentable.  
> The mother’s heart is broken; she could hardly rest in peace.

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308 A third of the same subject matter is reproduced in the first scroll of his large-scale *Appreciating the Tune*. This unnamed scroll used similar pictorial elements (the mourning daughter and the candle), only it contains a long inscription rendered in free verse rather than traditional formats, indicating Huang’s attraction to new culture.

309 *Hua Zhong*, 238.
The son’s tears dried up; his despair is all in vain.
[The mother] Prolonging her last breath, just to take a last look [at the son];
[The son] who is just born for a moment is to mourn in the setting sun.
This finished painting could hardly satisfy the commoners’ taste;
Blood staining the silk, the sorrow is yet to end.

花落花開空感傷，新陳代謝足悲涼。
母心碎矣難瞑目，兒淚枯兮枉斷腸。
忍死須臾望弱息，才生一瞬弔殘陽。
圖成知莫能諧俗，血染緋緑恨正長。

While the first couplet describes Huang’s state of mind in his “supersession period,” the second and the third ones are tailor-made for the theme of obstructed labor. The coherence of the message, however, was disrupted by unreasonable details in the surviving scroll. The child appears too old for a newborn, and his posture of jumping towards the dying mother implies that he comes from elsewhere rather than being recently born. Huang Shaoqiang must have noticed these inconsistencies later. In the version of Hua Zhong, these flaws are rectified to conform to the theme of “obstructed labor.” A baby replaces the boy, and his pose is revised, which makes him appear to be ejected from the mother’s body.

Grave in the Soughing Wind 蕭蕭墓門 (signed 1928) was another attempt to represent his psychological struggle with a variety of imagery and artistic treatments (fig. 104). Some signature elements of the Lingnan School could be found. The rendition of the texture of the pine tree, the crescent moon, together with the howling crow atop the branch, all allude to the repertoire of the Gao brothers. The painting is also rich in symbolism. The crow is a well-known symbol of filial piety in Chinese culture; it is said that the young crows have the habit of feeding the aged ones. 310

310 Bai Juyi’s Crow Cawing at Night 慈烏夜啼 is a typical example of this theme.
Huang Shaoqiang also invented his own symbolism: a small star, which is depicted schematically, is added next to the grave. Separated from the moon, it is trivial that it stands for the painter’s separation from his mother.

The pictorial space in *Grave in the Soughing Wind* is well-structured. The mound and the pine trees form interlocking layers and recede to the back. The only character in the painting is the artist himself. Dressed all in white, he kneels in front of a tombstone that reads “Alas: the soil where the remains of my dead mother lie.”\(^{311}\) His head is bowed down, his face clouded by sorrow. Even though the pose and the mournful facial expression are both vividly captured, Huang was not satisfied to represent his feelings with gestures and facial expressions, but added an eccentric element to indicate his belief that his mother, though deceased, was still watching over him. Above the tombstone, a pair of hands—his mother’s—reaches out from the grave. The sobbing painter holds the cadaverous one close to his face, while the other, which has already turned to bone, is moving to pad Huang’s head to console him. Though original, this idea of a cadaver responding from the grave might appear creepy rather than touching.

The loss of his family within a short period of time pushed Huang to develop a set of original yet macabre iconographies and narrative strategies. Gradually he applied this vocabulary to other subjects with broader significance. For instance, *Eternity and Disillusionment* 不朽與幻滅 (1928) is a painting that commemorates Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the father of the Republic of China (fig. 105). The viewer’s attention is drawn immediately to the domineering mound on the summit, which appears as a massive bust of Sun. The inscription “The First Among the Five Mountains”

\(^{311}\) It should be noted that the way the tomb is inscribed in the painting is abnormal. A Chinese tombstone for a married woman would list first the surname of the husband of the deceased, then the woman’s original surname.
(五嶽獨尊) indicates that it is Mount Tai 靈山 that is depicted. The weird rendition of “the father of the nation” in the upper part of the painting contrasts with a void below, in which a skeleton dives downwards as if it is reaching out to catch a falling feather. Few would miss Huang Shaoqiang’s allusion to a famous line in Sima Qian’s “Bao Ren Shaoxing shu” 報任少卿書 [Reply to Ren Shaoxing], which reads “Though death befalls all men alike, it could be weightier than Mount Tai or lighter than a feather.” By literally associating Sun Yat-sen with Mount Tai, Huang praises the father of the nation, whose virtue is unimaginable to the “skeletons,” which chase after things of little value. However, the overall atmosphere of this painting appears comical; the depiction of Sun as an ochre lump of rock is hardly appealing in an aesthetic sense.

IV. From Personal to Universal Suffering

The First National Exhibition (1929) was the first occasion when Huang’s figure painting entered the sight of a national audience. For the exhibition, he submitted four paintings, which included The Empty Armchair Remains, Yellow Leaves and Red Sheep 黃葉紅羊, Awaiting Death 待斃, and Appreciating Oneself at a Dead End 窮途自賞 (1928). Yellow Leaves and Red Sheep could have been a painting following the style of the Gao brothers, although the title suggests unconventional colors for plants and animals; Awaiting Death was certainly another grim and pessimistic painting inspired by his loss of family. The last one, Appreciating Oneself at a Dead End, was noteworthy as the theme of “the lonely musician” was to recur in the art of Huang Shaoqiang. It depicts a lonely and old female musician playing the string instrument erhu 二胡.

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312 Huang Shaoqiang worded the inscription as “Wu yue du zhuan” 五嶽獨尊 rather than “Wu yue du zun” 五嶽獨尊. It might have been a mistake on Huang’s part: these two characters sound differently in Mandarin but the same in Cantonese.
within an environment that conjures up a desolate aura (fig. 106). The leaves swirling mid-air in the background indicate that it is autumn, the season of distress in Chinese culture, while the musician is playing in an old graveyard surrounded by fallen tombstones. Besides being aged, the musician is blind (she is holding a walking stick in her left arm) with her feet laid bare, indicating her impoverishment. In sum, three of his four submissions were paintings with gloomy imageries, which were not only out of tune with those of the Lingnan trio and their followers, but also contradicted the overall optimistic sentiment of the exhibition, the first-ever national exhibition in Chinese history.

The subjects that interested Huang expanded considerably after the national exhibitions, but his angle and iconographies continued to be grim and macabre. This attitude could be seen in his responses to the Mukden Incident that broke out on September 18, 1931. Huang reacted swiftly to this aggressive act of the Japanese with a pair of vertical scrolls entitled *The Patriotic Girls* 熱血之女 and *Supporting the Campaign in Heilongjiang* 援黑之役 respectively, which featured young people eliciting support from the populace (fig. 107 and 108). However, they were conceptualized as mourners rather than determined fighters. The predominant white of the costumes of the protestors reminds viewers of the funeral grab, while the tear on the female student’s face alludes to the funeral scenes.

It was in Huang’s response to another event in 1931 that his vocabulary was successfully transformed for the general public. The said event was the Yangzi-Huai Floods that plagued China in 1931, which was one of the deadliest natural disasters in the twentieth century. Since the early

313 To highlight her piteous situation, Huang added a weird detail to the painting: between the musician’s legs flows a stream of tears.
months of the year, sporadic floods had been infesting China along the Yangzi and Huai rivers. They reached their climax in August, hitting several provinces, with key cities such as Nanjing, Shanghai, and Wuhan affected. According to some researchers, the number of deaths could have reached three million, with other millions scattered.\textsuperscript{314}

Huang’s reaction to this disaster was \textit{Homeless of the Flood}, a painting that only survives in reproduction (1932) (fig. 109). It was not only a watershed work in the painter’s career, but also to a certain degree that of the history of Chinese painting. Joined together by four vertical scrolls, \textit{Homeless of the Flood} was arguably the first large-scale figural composition in ink and brush to receive nation-wide attention in twentieth-century China. Undoubtedly, there are figure paintings of even larger sizes in the history of Chinese art. An example is Ren Bonian’s \textit{Immortals Celebrating the Birthday of the Queen of the West} 群仙祝壽圖, which, on twelve vertical scrolls measuring 206.8 \texttimes 714 cm, depicts the story of the eight immortals on the way to celebrate the birthday of the Queen Mother of the West (fig. 110). However, attempts at portraying contemporary events on such a scale were rare in the history of Chinese art. As discussed in chapter one, large-scale compositions were the exclusive realm of oil painters, and successful examples in ink and brush were still absent by the early 1930s. Up until then, the largest figural composition in Chinese medium by a notable painter was perhaps Xu Beihong’s early versions of \textit{Jiufanggao} 九方皋, with the first datable to 1928.\textsuperscript{315} However, its scale is relatively small (joined together by


\textsuperscript{315} Xu Beihong repainted the story of Jiu Fang Gao multiple times in his life. As his student Ai Zhongxin 艾中信 (1915–2003) claims, the most widely circulated version (currently in the collection of the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing) was his seventh attempt. An earlier version could be found in \textit{Beihong huiji} 悲鴻繪集 [Collection of Beihong’s Paintings] (1936). The earliest version that I could trace is the one in the collection of the Tsinghua Art
two scrolls) and its composition simple, not to say that the message was mainly of personal
importance (fig. 111).

In addition to its scale, Homeless of the Flood was ambitious in its conceptualization. The
handling of the same subject by his contemporaries offers provocative comparisons. An example
was Zhang Shanzi’s 張善孖 (1882–1940) The Deluge of 1935 乙亥水災圖, which pictured
another flood a few years later with the vocabulary of landscape painting (fig. 112). The mountains
lead to a zig-zag path slashing downwards from the upper left and eventually reaching the walled
city on the lower right. With the vocabulary of Chinese landscape, Zhang emphasizes the
overwhelming power of nature at the expense of the significance of the victims, whose plight is
further downplayed by the boat that enters from the lower left that summons the image of the
carefree fisherman common in Chinese landscape. Alternatively, the younger contemporary Zhao
Wangyun 趙望雲 (1906–1977) was more concerned with the conditions of the victims under the
flood by capturing their lives as snapshots (fig. 113). However, by foregrounding this aspect, the
destructive power of nature was not as pronounced.

Homeless of the Flood synthesizes the destructive power of nature and the sufferings of the
peasants in a panorama of theatrical experience. The painting was divided into two sections
diagonally. The upper section portrays a scene of victims struggling under the relentless power of
nature. The houses in the background are almost under water; two men are waiting for rescue on
the roof on the left. The characters on the two flotillas illustrate how the flood tore families apart:

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316 Chengguang Tan and Pengfei Du, “Xu Beihong Jiu Fang Gao Tu Jiedu 徐悲鴻《九方皋圖》解讀 [Deciphering
the husband on the left is reaching out to the wife, who is holding their son in her arms. In the left foreground, a female character carrying an old woman on her back is about to arrive at the shore.

The other section highlights the fate that awaited the survivors. Contained by thick vegetation, seven characters occupied this section, all absorbed in his/her sorrow that was indicated by their actions or facial expressions. Huang created a panorama with diversified body types, which are organized into a balanced composition. These survivors consist of members from different age groups and sexes, which are paired up according to their body types and actions. Two female weepers are placed one on each side facing different directions, their gestures echoing each other. The two old male characters in the center and the two females on the right foreground, which are dressed similarly, are situated in proximity.

Huang transposed several figures from his previous paintings to create this multitude of characters with diverse but interconnected actions. The most recognizable one is the young man in the foreground. His pose, facial expression, and gestures were all derived from the figure of Huang Shaoqiang in *Grave in the Soughing Wind*, only that in the later version the sadness is lessened. The weeping female on the right is a reproduction of the figure in *What Paints the Maple Red*; the old male character on the left could be found in *None to Tell His Wants* 無告者, whereas the other was from an untitled work that is reproduced in *Appreciation* (fig. 114 and 115).

Besides the recycling of earlier figures, the pictorial arrangement of the characters might appear too deliberate to the modern eye. Such flaws, however, were overlooked when it was presented. This large and synthetic painting was first shown in the “Mutual Aid Exhibition for the National Disaster” (國難共濟書畫會) in Guangdong in Spring 1932, which aimed to raise money
for national relief against Japanese aggressions, either in the northeast in 1931 or more recently in Shanghai.\(^{317}\) Although the subject of the painting did not align precisely with the anti-Japanese sentiment of the exhibition, it still received wide acclaim. As reported, *Homeless of the Flood* was sold for the amount of 2,000 dollars, which was the highest in the exhibition.\(^{318}\) Contemporaries saw in this painting Huang’s reactivation of a glorious tradition in Chinese art. As many critics commented, this painting followed the example set by Zheng Xia in the Northern Song dynasty. A government official, Zheng was most known for submitting a scroll to the emperor that depicted the hardships of the homeless in a drought; the emperor was impressed and dismissed the reformer Wang Anshi from his post. At a time when Chinese art was withstanding steady pressure, the Zheng Xia anecdote was brought up regularly by painters and critics alike as a reminder that social concerns did exist in Chinese art.\(^{319}\)

Huang reprised his role as the “modern Zheng Xia” two years later in *The Hardships and Sufferings of the People* 民間疾苦圖 (1934) (fig. 116). The generic title aside, pictorial clues (including the barren landscape with withered vegetation and the “congee pot” that indicates relief groups) suggested that it was about the plight of the common folk under a disaster, most likely a drought. This drought could have been the one that victimized the Yangzi valley in the summer of

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317 Details about this exhibition are yet to be unearthed.
319 As discussed in chapter two, Gao Jianfu also quoted this anecdote in his “Manifesto to the Art World of Japan and a Letter to the World.”
1934, which was another major disaster that struck thirteen provinces, including some of the wealthiest areas in China.\textsuperscript{320}

*The Hardships and Sufferings of the People* is presumably lost, but reproductions suggest that it was similar in scale to *The Homeless of the Flood*. Like its precedent, the composition is carefully balanced. The characters, divided into groups, are positioned to create an illusionistic effect of pictorial depth. The two families on both sides are situated closer to the viewer, while a third family in the center retreats slightly into the pictorial space, and is further supported by another group of newly arrived refugees in the back. Making use of the large scale, Huang created an illusion of a curvilinear panorama that enveloped the viewers. Such emphasis on illusionistic effects reminds us of similar endeavors by other Chinese painters such as Li Yishi or Liang Dingming, who were among the first to notice the significance of figure painting in China.

The three families in *The Hardships and Sufferings of the People* were designed to represent the experience of victims with different financial means under the drought. The family on the left is better off as indicated by their clothing, which is cleaner than that of the others. The female figure is gobbling with a worrisome look, which suggests that this family still has enough nourishment for the time being. In contrast, the other two families, which are of even lower social status, are not as fortunate. For example, in the group at the center, the mother is feeding her child, but she is probably starving, as indicated by the empty bowl next to her. This group of mother and son is reproduced in *Hua Zhong* under another title, *Decimating Mother and Growing Nestlings* 母瘦雛漸肥 (fig. 117). It is not clear if the painter extracted this group from *The Hardships and
Sufferings of the People and turned it into a separate painting or vice versa, but the title suggests that the mother sacrificed herself for her son.\(^\text{321}\) The family on the right is the most impoverished of the three. Without any nourishment, the mother could only stare hopelessly into the empty bowl, her child wailing in front of her. By synthesizing the three situations of the victims, Huang Shaoqiang composed a panorama of the disaster that affected the peasants universally, sparing no one.

The painting was first shown in Guangzhou, but it was in a group exhibition in the Republican capital of Nanjing that it received national acclaim.\(^\text{322}\) Featuring two other Cantonese artists, namely Zhao Shaoang and Chen Jinhong 陳荊鴻 (1903–1993), the exhibition attracted influential politicians, most notably Wang Jingwei and Lin Sen, the chairman of the Executive Yuan and the Nationalist government respectively.\(^\text{323}\) The latter highly praised The Hardships and Sufferings of the People, and Huang seized the opportunity to connect with one of the most influential figures of his times. According to The Central Daily a month later, he called on Lin Sen and donated The Hardships and Sufferings of the People to him.\(^\text{324}\)

\(^{321}\) The title of this painting comes from Swallow Song 燕詩, another famous poem by Bai Juyi. The poem mourns that swallows leave their parents alone after they have grown.

\(^{322}\) The painting was first shown in “Solo Exhibition of Paintings for the People by Huang Shaoqiang” 黃少強民間繪畫展覽會 held in Guangzhou from August 1–8, 1934. See “Liumin tu” 流民圖 [People without their Homes] in Zhonghua tuhua zazhi 中華圖畫雜誌 [China Pictorial Magazine], no. 30 (1934). See also “Huang Shaoqiang yishu huodong nianbiao” 黃少強藝術活動年表 [A Chronology of Huang Shaoqiang’s Artistic Activities], Meishu xuebao, no. 01 (2005): 35.

\(^{323}\) “Zhao Huang Chen shuhua zhanlanhui” 趙黃陳書畫展覽會 [Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition of Zhao, Huang, and Chen], Central Daily News, October 31, 1934.

\(^{324}\) “Huang Shaoqiang hua minjian jiku tu zuori xianzeng Lin zhuxi” 黃少強畫民間疾苦圖 昨日獻贈林主席 [Huang Shaoqiang’s Hardships and Sufferings of the People presented to Chairman Lin Yesterday], Central Daily News, November 25, 1934.
Homeless of the Flood and The Hardships and Sufferings of the People counted among the most well-known paintings in Huang’s lifetime. Aware of the power of large-scale figural compositions and perhaps relishing the reputation that such paintings brought him, Huang continued to explore the potential of paintings of a similar scale in the next couple of years. Six large-scale works finished in the years of 1935 and 1936 survive, each of them composed of at least four scrolls. Hardships of the people continued to be Huang’s favorite subject matter. Blood Kin Separated Along the Road 骨肉流離道路中 (1935), Stoncutters 打石工 (1936), and Singing with Whirling Tears in the Wayside 殘歌載道淚飄瀟 (1936) belong to this category. The first depicts a scene of human trafficking that Huang witnessed during his sojourn in Tianjin. While human trading was prohibited, it was not uncommon in China, especially during times of disaster (such as famines), when victims sold their children to the wealthy for a living rather than seeing them starved to death. Stoncutters features a group of miserable stoncutters carving tombstones in a messy space with empty steles piling up one over another. Compared to the earlier scenes depicting victims in natural disasters, Huang simplified the treatment of the characters as well as their actions in these two large-scale compositions. For instance, in Blood Kin Separated Along the Road the buyers who are carrying the children away in baskets are depicted with a similar posture from the back, while the five figures are of basically the same type in Stoncutters. Huang was certainly hoping to magnify the visual power of these compositions by repeating similar postures and actions. It should also be noted that the Chinese elements (such as the use of

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325 This is not to say he did not paint works of smaller scale: Paintings and Poems of the People 民情書畫 (1936) is a perfect example of such an attempt. This set consists of a total of eight album leaves, each featuring an episode that might have been inspired by what Huang saw.

326 The inscription, however, says the painting was finished in Guangzhou.
brushwork in *Blood Kin Separated Along the Road* and the long inscription in *Stonecutters*) are emphasized in these two compositions.

*Singing with Whirling Tears in the Wayside* (1936) is the largest surviving painting by Huang Shaoqiang that features blind female singers, a favorite subject of the painter (fig. 118). Blind female singers were common in Guangdong in the early twentieth century; most of them were born blind and were sold by their parents to music teachers (sometimes also blind), who trained them in Cantonese tunes (“naam yum” 南音, literally the “southern tunes”). While some performed in teahouses and brothels, which were immensely popular in Guangzhou, others had to head to the streets to make a living. Two groups are depicted in this painting of five scrolls, each comprising one young song girl accompanied by a motherly figure. Rather than filling up the pictorial space, Huang introduced into the center a large area of emptiness that divides the two groups. This emptiness, or *liubai* 留白, was an essential concept in Chinese art for generating a sense of spatial and spiritual levity and is always seen in landscapes.

Huang also tried his hand at painting less miserable scenes of everyday life on a large scale. These large scenes of daily life, namely *Qingming Times* 清明時節, *Children Sweeping Leaves* 掃葉娃, and *Dusty Path* 塵途, were all finished in 1936. Although they were not as famous as the ones discussed above, they were more innovative from an artistic perspective. For instance, *Qingming Times* adopts a daring composition that positions a large tree trunk in the foreground, cutting the picture diagonally into two halves. The scene is carefully balanced, with three children distributed on either side of the tree.

Huang must have encouraged his followers to explore the potential of large-scale compositions as well. He was the first among the second generation of the Lingnan School to
recruit followers by himself. In 1935, Huang founded his studio, “People’s Atelier” 民間畫館 in Guangzhou, in which he recruited many young followers and provided instruction to them either free of charge or for a very low tuition.\textsuperscript{327} For the next seven years until his death, Huang held a total of twelve exhibitions with his followers under the name of the People’s Atelier.\textsuperscript{328} Sources on the third exhibition of the atelier held in June 1937 reveal that his followers not only inherited Huang’s humanistic concerns, but also his preference for large-scale compositions. For example, Rong Jingduo’s 容景鐸 Who that Struggles to Save Food for Three Days 役役誰儲三日糧, as well as Liang Rui’s 梁銳 Dreaming of the Son Repaying Herself in the Future 他年反哺徒空想, were both paintings consisting of four vertical scrolls.\textsuperscript{329} The former focuses on a farmer who is harvesting, and while the treatment of the figure is to be improved (note his rigid posture), it was a highlight of the exhibition (fig. 119). Other works shown in the exhibition might not have been as large as these two, yet they would have been in sizes larger than normal. It is reported that Li Zhang’s 李章 Huqin and Tanban in Sad Tunes 胡琴檀板帶悲歌 was made up of a pair of vertical scrolls, while Chen Shiqiong’s 陳士炯 (1912–1985) Playing Gongs and Drums for Others 聲聲鑼鼓替人忙 is said to be huge in size (fig. 120). A couple of months after this exhibition, Huang and his followers appeared again in the “National Disaster Exhibition” 國難畫展 in August

\textsuperscript{327} “Huang Shaoqiang yishu huodong nianbiao”, 35.
\textsuperscript{328} For a list of Huang’s exhibition activities with his followers, see Li, “Huang Shaoqiang de yiwen shiye,” in Huang, Danqing fa jifen, 38.
\textsuperscript{329} “Huang Shaoqiang shi lingdao zhi minjian huazhan kaimu” 黃少強氏領導之民間畫會開幕 [Opening of the Exhibition of the People’s Atelier led by Huang Shaoqiang], Guangzhou qingnian 廣州青年, vol. 24 no. 26 (1937), 2.
They collaborated in a ten-scroll-wide painting called *Preparing for the Battle* 應戰圖, which depicted soldiers marching for the war (fig. 121).

V. The Difficulties of “Painting the People”

By the time the Sino-Japanese war broke out, Huang Shaoqiang’s fame as a figure painting specialist was firmly established in China. However, besides his artistic and pedagogical activities, his self-constructed public image, as well as his obsession to maintain it in the public, also played an important role in his fame.

The Republican period witnessed a plethora of artists with distinctive public personas. Gao Jianfu offered an exceptionally successful example: he was skillful in maintaining his status as a “revolutionary artist” in the public imagination. Alternatively, many young Chinese painters were attracted to the European notion of the artist as an individual more inspired than the rest of humankind—someone who challenged conventions and accepted values. Fang Rending, for example, branded himself as such when he denounced his master Gao Jianfu during the mutiny of the Re-creation Society. The best model was probably Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994), dubbed “the art rebel” by his enemies, who displayed unrelenting courage and diplomatic skills in declaring war against the bureaucrats in Shanghai during the nude crisis in the 1920s.

Huang Shaoqiang chose a different type of image for himself. On the one hand, he carefully eschewed the label of a highbrow artist who pursued art for art’s sake. He mentioned twice in his

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330 “Ti tongmen guonan hua shichao,” 题同門國難畫詩鈔 [Poems for Paintings about the National Disaster by Followers], *Guangzhou qingnian*, vol. 24 no. 35 (1937), 3.

331 See “Ying zhan tu” 應戰圖 [Preparing for the Battle], *Guangdong Pictorial*, no. 2 (1937), 5.

poems that he had no desire to compete for a place in the “palace of art,” as in a long one that commemorates the near completion of his compilation *Hua Zhong*:

The Palace of Art I am never interested in,
It was the people’s lives that I sketched for so long.

藝術之宮曾未戀，民間描寫卻多時。\(^{333}\)

“Palace of Art” was a term that Huang invented to refer to the elitist realm of art that he rejected, even though a lot of people sought after it. On the other hand, he tried to present himself as a suffering individual in the public through a recognizably melancholic and distress look, an image that resembled the poor and dejected ones he painted. Such an image was captured in others’ portrayals of him. Several artists painted Huang Shaoqiang before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. One of them was Yu Ben 余本 (1905–1995), who chose a somber palette for the melancholic painter in his oil painting and focalized his penetrating eyesight—it is as if he is frowning at an unpleasant sight (fig. 122). Another example is the bust by the Cantonese sculptor Li Jinfa 李金髮 (1900–1976), which cast Huang as gazing upwards with a worrying visage, as if he is imploring the heavens—thus alluding to the common Chinese saying of 悲天憫人 beitian minren (literally “bemoan the state of the universe and pity the fate of mankind”) (fig. 123).

Huang’s image as a tormented individual impressed many people whom he was acquainted with. The Cantonese art writer Li Jian'er 李健兒 (1895–1941) provides us with a detailed account

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\(^{333}\) The poem was entitled *Poem to Commemorate the Sorrows of Hua Zhong, which is Going to be Finished in Autumn 1935* 乙丑新秋《畫冢》將成，詩以述哀. See Huang Shaoqiang, *Huang Shaoqiang Shiwen Ziliao Xuanbian* 黃少強詩文資料選編 [Selection of Poetry and Writings of Huang Shaoqiang], ed. Guangdong Museum of Art, Xiandangdai Meishu Wenxian Congshu (Macau: Edições Macau, 2006), 86–87.
of his experience with Huang Shaoqiang in his *Biographies of Modern Cantonese Painters* 廣東現代畫人傳 (1942).\(^{334}\)

Before making his [Huang Shaoqiang’s] acquaintance, I had the opportunity to observe him among the crowd. He is a middle-aged man, with his hair unkempt and facial hair left growing. Slouching like an old man, he looked depressed and weary. As distraught as he looked, I guess he must have been a man struck by poverty and misfortune. Only now that we have become friends do I know that he is not what I thought. He is an upright person, lonely yet determined. While he is not the social type, his filial piety is well-known. His despondency, moodiness, and pessimistic sensitivity are not the type that originate from hunger, poverty, or homelessness.

This description gives a sense of the repulsive and unsocial individual that Huang Shaoqiang appeared to be to strangers. And even though Li Jian’er eventually accepted that this melancholy stemmed from the painter’s disposition, at the end of his biography, he was still doubtful about Huang’s choice:

> In the past there were individuals who worried about the world and were troubled about the times; their minds set them apart from the commoners. As for Huang Shaoqiang, he has the means to live a leisurely and carefree life as well as a good reputation as a painter. What makes him harbor uncomfortable thoughts and appear as if he is at a loss all the time?

古有憂世傷時之士，懷抱異人；今觀其平居所處，優游裕逸，復有令名，更何有不適於其中，而落落若不適意者何也？\(^{336}\)

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\(^{334}\) Li Jian’er was a Canotnese journalist who once served as the editor of *Qishier xing shang bao* 七十二行商報 [Commercial News of the Seventy-Two Trades] in Guangzhou. He was related to many artists, and his *Guangdong xiandai huaren zhuan* 廣東現代畫人傳 [Biographies of Modern Cantonese Painters] (Guangwen shuju, 1941) is an important source about Republican artists in Guangdong written by a contemporary. He died during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong.

\(^{335}\) Li Jian’er, *Guangdong xiandai huaren zhuan*, 76.

\(^{336}\) Li, 76.
It should be noted that Huang’s image, as well as his persistence to maintain it, was so well-known that even people not related to the art world got wind of it. This is attested to by the diary of the young Pan He 潘鶴 (b. 1925), Huang’s disciple who turned out to be a sculptor. Shortly before becoming a follower of Huang, Pan remarked in his diary that his would-be master was not as “pretentious” as his uncles and older relatives had told him, indicating that this image of a “sufferer” was already well-known among the ordinary people of his hometown of Foshan.337

It sounds cynical to accuse Huang of “fishing” for fame with such a persona. It is, however, reasonable to suggest that this obsession was related to his mission to “paint for the people.” As mentioned above, Huang came from a well-to-do family, and he must have felt anxiety when he proclaimed himself a representative of the poor and the socially marginalized. This anxiety of “painting the subaltern” (the term “subaltern” is borrowed from Spivak) haunted Huang from the very outset of his career. Soon after his first-ever solo exhibition in Foshan, one could find comments that visitors left in the guestbook, both appreciative and critical, published verbatim in Foshan jingwu yuekan.338 Even though Huang was not the editor of the magazine, it could hardly go to print without his consent; such an act could only be understood as Huang’s justification that his art was meaningful to the masses, as evident in their own words.

As Huang’s fame grew, this anxiety intensified and found its way into his paintings. As touched on earlier in the discussion of Appreciating Oneself at a Dead End, “the lonely musician”

338 The comments were included in the long article by Chun Zhi. See Chun Zhi, “Huang Shaoqiang geren huazhan jisheng,” Foshan jingwu yuekan, vol. 1 no. 11 (1926), 77–80.
was a recurring theme of Huang’s art. These musicians, either male or female, are always depicted in solitude with melancholic visages; sometimes the title or the inscription would suggest that their performance was unattended. In addition to *Appreciating Oneself at a Dead End* and *Singing with Whirling Tears in the Wayside* mentioned above, those that can be traced include *The Wild Singer* 狂歌人 (1930), *Returning After Singing* 歌罷歸來 (1931 or 1932), *The Sentimental Chord* 哀弦 (1933), *Playing the Pipa by the River* 江上琵琶圖 (1935), its cognate, *The Court Lady with Pipa* 琵琶仕女 (undated), and *For Whom Shall the Lady Sing* 金縷歌殘 (1936). While one might argue that these paintings could have been Huang’s record of the plight of musicians he witnessed, it should also be noted that in Chinese the term *zhiyin* 知音 (“one who appreciates the sounds”) is not limited to the appreciation of music, but could also be applied to other arts or even more general contexts. In other words, these paintings about “appreciation” could be interpreted as Huang’s self-projection of his anxiety that his art was not actually appreciated.

Interestingly, Huang alluded to this theme of “appreciation” in a more positive context in *Appreciating the Tune*, which was not only a favorite of the painter but also one of the most structurally sophisticated works ever produced in the Republican period (fig. 124). It is composed of six vertical scrolls (of which only four are extant); it was first displayed in his third solo exhibition held in Foshan in 1931 (fig. 125).339 This large-scale composition depicts a scene of an exhibition of Huang’s works. Huang was not the first painter to paint the relatively new sight of a public exhibition in the Republican period. Chen Shizeng, his earlier contemporary in Beijing,

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339 The exhibition was held in the Normal School in Nanhai, from December 20 – 23, 1931. *Appreciating the Tune* was listed as no. 36 in the catalogue. See “De san hui Huang Shaoqiang geren huihua zhanlanhui chupin mulu” 第三回黃少強個人繪畫展覽會出品目錄 [Catalogue of Exhibits of the Third Solo Exhibition of Huang Shaoqiang’s Paintings], Special Collection, Guangdong Museum of Art.
already captured such a public event in Viewing Paintings 畫圖 (1917) in the late 1910s (fig. 126). Chen, however, might not have treated the subject very seriously. The pragmatic perspective, the sketchy use of ink, and the comical treatment of figures indicate that he was merely interested in the spectacle of “exhibition,” which had recently been introduced to and had become popular with Chinese audiences. In contrast, Appreciating the Tune was a highly calculated painting. Across the space of six vertical scrolls, Huang faithfully reproduced seven of his works, including their long calligraphic inscriptions. Due to this attention to detail, the paintings can be identified, although not all of them survive. The scroll on the far right is probably The Candle that Welcomes the Returning Soul 迎魂之燭 (1927, now lost), one of the scenes depicting his mother’s funeral similar to those above The Empty Armchair and Candles Howling in the Wind. The third from the right is Heading to the South with Paper Offerings on Shoulder 半肩冥鎻望南 (1929, also lost); the fourth, also lost, is Dream of Returning Home 天涯歸夢 (1929). The fifth is Remaining Bones Decimated by Hunger and Coldness 飢寒留賤骨 (1929). The following two were reproduced in Hua Zhong; the one on the right is Refugees in the Blizzard 風雪哀鴻 (1930, now lost), whereas the work on the far left is Wild Singer (fig. 127 and 128). The arrangement of these paintings generally followed a chronological order according to the time of their completion, with the earliest on the right.

It is tempting to think that Appreciating the Tune was inspired by an actual exhibition that featured these paintings. However, these works, which were finished from 1927 to 1930, were unlikely to be shown side by side on the same occasion. On the one hand, the prolific Huang was not inclined to show paintings with strong personal overtones later in his life; it is not stated in any
existing source that an early work such as *The Candle that Welcomes the Returning Soul* was shown after the winter of 1930 (the same time when *Refugees in the Blizzard* was finished).\(^{340}\) On the other hand, the three paintings finished in 1929 might have been shown for the first time only in the 1931 exhibition, which means that they were not actually “appreciated” before. It is very likely that the exhibition setting in *Appreciating the Tune* was a product of the artist’s imagination.

Besides reproducing his paintings, Huang also added visitors in *Appreciating the Tune*. The girl on the right, who is dressed fashionably, appears to be a female student. The pictorial similarities between her and the mourning figure in *The Candle that Welcomes the Returning Soul*—that is, the painting in front of her—are intriguing. Both are depicted from the back, while the scarf of the viewer, drooping on the right side of her back, resembles the mourner’s hair. This pictorial similarity is more than a coincidence; probably Huang was conceptualizing the mourner in the painting as a substitute of the viewer, and thus ascertained his ability to speak (or paint) for his anonymous audience (that is, “the people”). Even though *The Candle that Welcomes the Returning Soul* was inspired by his personal misfortune, his audience was able to identify with what he painted and be moved by its content.

Compared to the hustle and bustle in Chen Shizeng’s *Viewing Paintings*, only three visitors are depicted in *Appreciating the Tune*; yet Huang is careful to imply that different ages, sexes, and classes are represented in the mix. If the female student discussed above could be interpreted as a symbol of an urban woman, the other female figure on the far left symbolizes a woman from a rural background, as indicated by her wide-brimmed hat. Even though the whole painting contains only one young male visitor, he views a painting that depicts an old man appreciating paintings in

\(^{340}\) It was first shown in his second solo in 1928.
another exhibition containing Huang’s work. The long inscription contains a poem that is regularly quoted about the painter:

I laugh off my fate that predestined my inability to attain high glory,
Neither will I pursue worldly riches in my floating life.
A worn brush I use to evaluate lives,
The sufferings and languishing of the people I paint.

慢笑封侯無骨相，嬾隨名利逐浮生。
一枝禿管衡身世，描寫民間疾苦聲。

In sum, *Appreciating the Tune* captures Huang Shaoqiang’s optimism regarding his mission “to paint for the people.” Such a display of confidence was rare, however. In most cases, Huang’s devotion to his mission to paint for the people was inseparable from his uncertainty about it. This coexistence of confidence and insecurity was epitomized in *Hua Zhong*, which was Huang Shaoqiang’s publication featuring his selected works. It was common for Republican artists to publish selections of their own works, only that Huang’s version was unique in the twentieth century. Literally “grave of paintings,” *Hua Zhong* contains reproductions of fifty of Huang Shaoqiang’s works. Preceding the paintings is a large number of prefatory materials. In addition to two portraits of the artist, a four-page collage consists of inscriptions of “Paintings of Shaoqiang,” with another 177 items and inscriptions by 172 eminent individuals, which were reproduced in their original hand-written forms. The contributors of these prefatory materials included prominent calligraphers, novelists, politicians, painters, poets, scholars, and even medical doctors. Such a list could only be understood as the painter’s idea to show off the endorsement of his mission and approach by prominent individuals.

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While some works were modified in the woodcut versions (such as *Origin of Blood* discussed above), the reproductions were intended to be as meticulous as possible, including the replication of original inscriptions and seals. While Huang claimed that the paintings are arranged in a chronological order, the first one, *My Brush is My Life* 問我生涯筆一枝, does not follow this rule (fig. 129). Most likely finished in 1929, it may be understood as a summary of his lifelong endeavors in the arts. A young man, with brush and paper in hand, is depicted as passing by a group of peasants who are sitting on the ground. The man is without doubt Huang Shaoqiang documenting the hardships of the peasants, whose visage suggests that they might be impoverished or even victims of a disaster.

As Huang also claimed in the preface, the paintings were selected from the period between 1927 and 1937. In other words, he traced the beginning of his career to 1927, the time when his pessimistic repertoire began to take shape. Several paintings relating to the loss of his family, such as *Origin of Blood* and *Love and Death in the Desolate Path*, are identifiable. Others that followed encompassed his signature themes, which included the lives of poor peasants or lonely musicians. Probably because of the difficulties of reproducing the large compositions in full, Huang did not include his famous paintings. 

Towards the end, there are a few landscapes, which documented Huang’s travels to Nanjing and the area around Beijing and Tianjin. It should be noted that not even one of Huang’s beauties in modern costume was included. Rather than reflecting his achievements as an artist, *Hua Zhong* is Huang Shaoqiang’s attempt to reconstruct and summarize his career as a “painter of the people.”

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342 Except for *Decimating Mother and Growing Nestlings*, which was discussed above.
One could certainly ask why Huang adopted such a grim title as “Grave of Paintings.” While it could be argued that such a collection of paintings was intended to act as a “grave,” or a monument, to Huang’s career, the true meaning is explained in the painter’s own preface. As he puts it, these paintings were originally planned for burial. This act is visualized by the namesake work, which is the last in this selection: the painter kneels in front of a pit, literally burying his works (fig. 130). Rather than attributing this self-denial to dissatisfaction due to the pursuit of perfection, it is more reasonable to suggest this as another instance of his lack of confidence in his own achievements, which haunted him since his first exhibition. That said, Huang did not choose to burn his own creations, which was not uncommon among writers during the mid-Ming dynasty. As the inscription of the painting suggests, he was still hopeful that these paintings, after decaying, could help flowers to flourish in the coming spring.

VI. Epilogue

The publication of Hua Zhong marked the last important artistic activity of Huang Shaoqiang. Soon afterwards, the Sino-Japanese War broke out and Huang departed to Hong Kong. From the sections of his diary that were published, it appears his life in the colony was acceptable, and sometimes even leisurely.

The situation worsened in 1941 when the war became more intense. Huang made the decision to return to his hometown of Foshan, where, after a series of misfortunes, he died in poverty. The subsequent turmoil in China had cast Huang’s reputation into oblivion. Although some of his followers flourished under the new regime, Huang’s realist approach did not survive after his death. While the new Communist state liked to see painters focus on the lives of common folk, they preferred the representation of the joys of liberation under its regime. In cases when the sufferings
of the peasants in the past could be painted, the peasants were not allowed to be depicted as being submissive to vicissitudes, but needed to be shown as resentful individuals who were hostile to class enemies.
Conclusion

Farewell to an Era of Freedom

In four chapters, this dissertation has traced the rise of figure painting within the art discourses in China, and with three unique painters from the Lingnan School, namely Gao Jianfu, Fang Rending, and Huang Shaoqiang, has demonstrated how Chinese painters responded to this rise and used figure painting as the means to reinvigorate Chinese art. Even though these three painters were interrelated and shared a common geographical heritage, they focused on different aspects of Chinese art and ended up with distinctive figure paintings that few could have predicted at the very beginning.

The randomness and diversity displayed by the three Lingnan painters are also typical of the figure painting of the Republican period, a feature that could be better illustrated if we have a quick look at the other artists who devoted their careers to the genre. If, as discussed in chapter one, it was the oil painters who took the lead in the first two decades of the Republican period, more and more who were committed to ink and brush became aware of the possibilities of the genre by the 1940s, with a handful of them entering maturity while developing a variety of techniques and subjects. The most notable ones were undoubtedly Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, both raised in chapter one as examples of “returning painters” who imported European conventions and styles into China. Interestingly, they both turned away from their early specializations and devoted their energy to the Chinese brush in the 1930s. Xu's gigantic *Foolish Old Man Removing the Mountains* (finished 1941) marked his successful transplant of the idiom and working method of European painting into a Chinese context. It should be noted that besides incorporating Chinese techniques (such as brushwork or ink washes) into his rendition of the human body, Xu also exploited other
parameters in Chinese art in his figure paintings. *Sichuan People Drawing Water* 巴人汲水 (1938) and *Rejoicing Over the Liberation of Nanjing at the World Peace Council* 世界和平大會上聽到南京解放 (1949) are two works that could illustrate Xu’s efforts in this respect (fig. 131). Rather than rendering the scene horizontally, in these two paintings, Xu used the format of the vertical scroll to represent a longilineal space rationally, thus creating a vertical composition rarely seen in European art.

Lin Fengmian opted for a different path. Perhaps because of his teaching and administrative duties at the Hangzhou Art School, he lost interest in painting large narrative episodes and turned to figure painting of a smaller scale beginning in the late 1930s. The female figure was his favorite, and while the early ones still bear an unmistakable link to the European nude, he started to turn to the depiction of beauties that remind viewers of the *shinü* tradition in the 1940s (fig. 132). It is true that the body forms of his *shinü*, especially the visage, are abstracted in ways alluding to the art of the modernist painters of Europe (Amedeo Modigliani in particular); yet, as he recounted years later, they were inspired by his understanding of Chinese aesthetics, which he thought were epitomized by Chinese porcelain pieces.  

Jiang Zhaohe continued his focus on the poor and the socially marginalized, as well as his approach of deploying the brush in the realist idiom. It was only after the Sino-Japanese War that his *Refugees* was recovered and exhibited again to the public, which was interpreted immediately as an icon of suffering under Japanese aggression. *Deluge* 大洪水 (1947), a much-neglected painting currently residing at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the

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United Nations, reveals a more experimental aspect of the figure-painting specialist (fig. 133). Not only do the proportions of this painting resemble that of a square (the painting measures 300 × 270 cm), but Jiang elevated the emotional message using body language, which struck a contrast with his earlier depictions of the poor that were diffused with a sense of detachedness.

In contrast with Xu, Lin, and Jiang who looked to European art via various means, Fu Baoshi was representative of those who sought to reestablish figure painting for the Chinese by looking back to the traditions. Fu began to paint figures in the 1930s, through which he began to distinguish himself in the next decade. During the heat of the Sino-Japanese War, he stayed on the home front of Chongqing and finished a series of scenes featuring figures in ancient costume. Some of them were representations of iconic figures in Chinese history, such as Qu Yuan and Wen Tianxiang, who were both personifications of loyalty. Besides these paintings of patriotic icons, Fu also painted a series of historical stories that were apparently unrelated to the struggle for national survival. The historical period that particularly interested him was the tumultuous Six Dynasties Period (222–589 C.E.). An illustration of this type was *Wash Your Hands* 洗手圖 (1943), which visualized an anecdote of the warlord Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404 C.E.) demanding his guests clean their hands before viewing his collection of paintings (fig. 134). 344 As the Chinese scholar Wan

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344 Huan Xuan usurped the throne for a short time, and therefore has not enjoyed much fame in Chinese history. However, Huan was a lover of painting who tried to collect and seize paintings when he had the opportunity. Besides, he was careful about protecting his collection, and demanded that his guests clean their hands before viewing his paintings. It was this love of art that Fu Baoshi was impressed with. See “Renwu Chongqing huazhan zixu” 壬午重慶畫展自序 [A Few Words for the Painting Exhibition in Chongqing, 1942] in Fu Baoshi, *Fu Baoshi meishu wenji* 傅抱石美术文集 [Fu Baoshi’s Writings on Art], ed. Ye Zonghao (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1986), 465–66.
Xinhua argues, these episodes epitomized Fu’s vision of China’s cultural superiority and thus could be understood as a form of cultural patriotism.\(^{345}\)

Another painter who was interested in reviving Chinese traditions in figure painting was Zhang Daqian. Unlike Fu Baoshi, Zhang was more interested in actual traces of paintings in the past and cast his eyes on the rediscovered treasury of ancient paintings, the murals in the grottoes at Dunhuang that could be dated to the Tang and the Song dynasties. During the heat of the war in 1941, Zhang embarked on a long journey to the site, in which he copied the murals under dire circumstances. The Dunhuang experience was chiefly manifested in the representations of the female figure later in the painter’s career, who conceptualized them as healthy and confident females reminiscent of the “golden age” of China.

In addition to the “big names” mentioned above, several others have sunk into oblivion despite their contributions to figure painting. Only one more example will be raised here: a largely neglected painter, Xu Yansun 徐燕孫 (1899–1961) was active in the area around Beijing and Tianjin in the 1920s. Like Fu Baoshi and Zhang Daqian, Xu was interested in reviving the Chinese tradition, only his commitment was to the *gongbi* technique. Xu’s early fame was built on his expertise in court ladies and the ghost-eater Zhong Kui 鍾馗, and his work did not depart significantly from established conventions; it was only in the late 1940s that he began to turn to new subjects of a much larger size. A typical example was his *Ballade on an Army Procession* 兵車行, which was among the paintings in the Second National Exhibition in 1951 (fig. 135). While

\(^{345}\) Wan Xinhua, “Zhongguo huihua zai da shidai – Fu Baoshi kangzhan shiqi renwehuaxi zhi minzu yixiang yanjiu” [Chinese Painting in a Grand Age: A Study on the National Imagery of Fu Baoshi’s Paintings of Historical Figure Painting during the War of Resistance], *Arts Review* 藝術評論 (Taipei National University of the Arts), no. 20 (2010), 179–81.
the impact of Xu’s paintings was limited, he found another way of popularizing his historical figures through *lianhuanhua* 连环画 (“serial comics”), which was omnipresent in the early PRC. Together with his followers, such as Ren Shuaiying 任率英 (1911–1989) and Wang Shuhui 王叔晖 (1912–1985), they were central to the production of *lianhuanhua* in the first decade of Communist rule.

These artists, together with the three Lingnan painters discussed in this dissertation, constituted a generation who identified and explored the potential of figure painting in the Republican period. From a structural point of view, while some traditional aesthetic categories (such as the significance of brushwork or the attainment of spiritual likeness) were transformed or retained, their experimentations departed from the norms in China that had dictated how human figures should be painted for centuries. Of the end of the Republican period, one could say, without exaggeration, that Chinese figure painting had a bright future.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, the Communist government embarked on a grand plan to remake its version of figure painting immediately after its takeover of the mainland. While many painters responded to this trend by continuing their figure painting before 1949, the Lingnan School (and its followers) was not as fortunate. Even though some of the followers of Gao Jianfu continued to be active in the mainland, their experimentation in figure painting came to a halt. The short-lived contributions of the Lingnan School to figure painting could partly be blamed on the painters’ vicissitudes, yet some of their original strengths rendered them structurally unsuitable for the post-Republican world, even if the circumstances of the painters had been more favorable. One reason was the problematic national identity of the Lingnan School. From the very outset, its art, including figure painting, had an intimate connection to contemporary Japanese painting. As
discussed, the early figure painting of Gao Jianfu (such as *Fragrant Dream of Mount Luofu*) was derivative of the works of *nihonga* artists, while Fang Rending was arguably the most “Japanized” artist in the Republican period. Even though Japan could provide handy examples as well as inspiration, the art of Japan was, to most Chinese, only an expedient: the Japanese tradition was neither as “old” nor as “established” as the European and Chinese traditions, and its role was further disregarded because of the rising tensions between China and Japan beginning in the 1930s.

The Lingnan painters were aware of this dilemma, yet their subsequent remedies did not bring them closer to what Chinese audiences were accustomed to. For example, after his trip to India, Gao Jianfu reiterated the idea of eclecticism: that a new Chinese art should not reject any foreign elements, no matter if they were European, Japanese, or Indian. Fang Rending was also looking for novel styles and approaches to be absorbed into Chinese figure painting in 1937. Such efforts were to be appreciated, but also turned figure paintings into hybrids that lack connection with the Chinese. Huang Shaoqaing’s figure painting might have been the most “Chinese” of all, yet he was not interested in highlighting the “Chinese-ness” of his painting. Despite the artists’ innovations, the lack of national characteristics was to be fatal in the post-1949 world when the Communists sought to develop an art form that could represent their vision of modern China.

Another reason for the Lingnan School’s marginalization was, paradoxically, its dedication to reforming Chinese art specifically. As discussed in the chapters, the Lingnan painters, Fang and Huang in particular, fixated on issues specific to the decline of art in twentieth-century China; the development of their figure painting was driven by their changing conceptualization of the same issue. If the relatively liberal atmosphere under the Nationalist government could still tolerate their visions, such individualistic experimentations would soon be restricted after
1949. More importantly, their experimentations could hardly endure the influx of the Russian social realist ideals that the Communists looked up to, which prescribed both ways to represent “the times” as well as “the people.” The flourishing and eventual marginalization of the figure painting of the Lingnan School offer a miniature of the Republican period, a time when various paths to modernization clashed.
Fig. 2. Zhang Zhiying, “Bali Shenggai” [Scenic Views of Paris]. From Wang Tao, *Manyou Suilu Tuji* [The Illustrated Jottings from Carefree Travels] (Shanghai: Dianshizhai, 1887).
Fig. 3. Diagram comparing the development of Chinese and Japanese Painting. From Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese & Japanese Art, an Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (London: W. Heinemann, 1912), vol. 1, xxx.
Fig. 4. Li Yishi, *Portrait of Chen Shizeng* 陳師曾像, 1920. Oil on canvas, 70 × 130 cm. Museum of Chinese Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.
Fig. 5. Li Yishi, *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢, 1918. From *Huaxue zazhi* 畫學雜誌 [Painting Studies Magazine], no. 2 (1921).
Fig. 6. Li Yishi, “In early spring she was bathed in Huaqing Pool / which warmed and smoothed her creamy-tinted skin” 春寒賜浴華清池 溫泉水滑洗凝脂 from Song of the Lasting Sorrow 長恨歌畫意, 1926–29. Gouache on paper, 22.5 × 17 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.
Fig. 7. Li Yishi, “War-drums, booming from Yuyang, shocked the whole earth / broke the tunes of The Rainbow Skirt and the Feathered Coat” 漁陽鼙鼓動地來，驚破霓裳羽衣曲 from Song of the Lasting Sorrow, 1926–29. Gouache on paper, 22.5 × 17 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.
Fig. 8. Liang Dingming, *The Blood Stains at Shaji 沙基血跡圖*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 213.6 × 549.3 cm. Destroyed during the Second Sino-Japanese War.
Fig. 9. Xu Beihong, *Five Hundred Followers of Tian Heng* 田横五百士, 1928–30. Oil on canvas, 198 × 355 cm. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 10. Xu Beihong, *Awaiting the Deliverer* 待我后, 1930–33. Oil on canvas, 318 × 230 cm. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 11. Xu Beihong, Sketch of *the Overlord Bidding Farewell to his Concubine* 霸王別姬, 1931.

Oil on canvas, 46 × 58 cm. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 12. Xu Beihong, Sketch of Qin Qiong Selling his Horse. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 13. Lin Fengmian, *Groping* 摸索, mid-1920s. Oil on canvas. Destroyed. Reproduction from *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 [Eastern Miscellany], vol. 21 no. 16 (1924), 1.
Fig. 14. Lin Fengmian, Agony 痛苦, late 1920s. Oil on canvas. Destroyed. Reproduction from *Liang You 良友 [the Good Companion]*, no. 38 (1929), 35.
Fig. 15. Lin Fengmian, *Ten Years to Nurture Trees, Hundred Years to Nurture Talents* 十年樹木
百年樹人, early 1930s. From *A dan na* 阿丹娜 [Athena], vol. 1 no. 5 (1931), 4.
Fig. 16. Lu Zhiyuan, *Rest 休息*, 1937. Oil on canvas. Adapted from *Ya bo luo 亞波羅 [Apollo]*, no. 17, “Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao di si jie biye jinian zhuankan” 国立杭州藝術 專科學校第四屆畢業紀念專刊 [The Memorial Issue for the Fourth Graduating Class of the National Hangzhou Art School] (1937), 49.
Fig. 17. Xue Bai, *Agony 痛苦*, 1937. Oil on canvas. Adapted from *Ya bo luo*, no. 17, “Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao di si jie ye jinian zhuankan,” 50.
Fig. 18. Wu Dayu, *Summer 夏*. From *Dazhong Huabao* 大眾畫報 [People’s Pictorial], no. 6 (1934), 2.
Fig. 19. Fang Ganmin, *Song of Autumn* 秋曲, 1930s. From *Wenyi chahua* 文藝茶話 [Tea Conversation on Art and Culture], vol. 2, no. 8 (1934), 7.
Fig. 20. Ye Yun, *In the Café* 咖啡館中, 1930s. From *Yi Feng* 藝風 [*Winds of Art*], vol. 2 no. 7 (1934), 33.
Fig. 21. Fang Ganmin, *the Prime Minster Dictating his Will* 總理授遺囑圖. From *Shaonian Huabao* [the Youth Pictorial], no. 6 (1938), 7.
Fig. 23. Gao Jianfu, *the Fierce Tiger* 猛虎圖, 1918. Ink on paper, 117.5 × 56.7 cm. Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou.
Fig. 25. Yamamoto Shunkyo, *Desolate Village, Evening Snow* 寒村暮雪, n.d. Ink on paper.
Fig. 26. Gao Jianfu, *Kunlun Mountains after Rain* 崑崙雨後, n.d. Ink on paper, 111.5 × 56.5 cm.

Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou.
Fig. 27. Gao Jianfu, *Sudden Rain* (later known as *Noble Steed in Storm* 風雨驊騮), on or before 1916. Included in *Xin hua xuan* 新畫選 [Selection of New Paintings], vol. 1 (1916).
Fig. 28. Gao Jianfu, *Budai the Monk* 布袋和尚, 1916. Ink on paper, 119.5 × 40.5 cm. Included in *Xin hua xuan*, vol. 3 (1916). Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Fig. 29. Postcard published by Shenwei Bookstore, Shanghai, late 1910s.
Fig. 30. Terasaki Kōgyō, *Rafu sen* 羅浮仙 [Fairy of the Luofu], n.d. From Kōgyō Shū 広業集 (Tokyo: Gahō sha, 1910).
Fig. 31. Gao Jianfu, *Fragrant Dream of the Mount Luofu* 羅浮香夢, 1934–38. Ink on paper. 116.5 × 39.5 cm. Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Fig. 32. Xu Beihong, *Congealing Fragrance* 凝香圖, 1910s. Postcard published by the Shenwei Bookstore, Shanghai.
Fig. 33. Gao Jianfu, *Tiger Roars* 虎嘯, 1925. Color ink on paper, 129 × 55.5 cm. Guangzhou Museum of Art, Guangzhou.
Fig. 34. Gao Jianfu, *Hungry Tiger* 餓虎, n.d. Ink on paper. From *Liang You*, no. 25 (1928), 6.
Fig. 35. Gao Jianfu, Zhenhai Tower 鎮海樓, 1926. Color ink on paper, 80 × 42 cm. Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Fig. 36. Gao Jianfu, *Flying in the Rain 雨中飛行*, 1925. Ink on paper. From *Beiyang Pictorial 北洋畫報*, vol. 17 no. 842 (1932), 2.
Fig. 37. Gao Jianfu, *Lonely City in Chilling Mist* 寒煙孤城, 1928. Color ink on paper, 95 × 43 cm.

Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou.
Fig. 38. Gao Jianfu, *Awakening from the Afternoon Dream* 午夢初回, 1923. From *Beiyang Pictorial*, vol. 17 no. 842 (1932), 2
Fig. 39. Gao Jianfu, *Flames in the East Battlefield* 東戰場的烈焰, early 1930s. Ink on paper, 166 × 92 cm. Guangzhou Museum of Art.
Fig. 40. Kimura Buzan, *Abō gōka* 阿房劫火, 1907. Color ink on silk, 141 × 240.8 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki, Japan.
Fig. 41. Li Wengui, *Warfare at Zhenru* 真茹灰劫圖, 1931. Ink on paper. Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Fig. 42. He Binguang, *The Pitiful City of Shenyang* 可憐的瀋陽城, early 1930s. Ink on paper.

From *Guangzhou shizhan Chunshui huayuan chupin tekan* 廣州市展春睡畫院出品特刊 [Special Issue of the Works by the Chunshui Atelier in the Guangzhou Municipal Exhibition] (Guangzhou: Chunshui huayuan, 1933).
Fig. 43. Fang Rending, *Sorrows after the Battle* 戰後的悲哀, 1932. Color on Paper, 156 × 93 cm.
Fig. 44. Situ Qi, *Ma Ma!* 媽啊！, n.d. From *Jinri Zhongguo* 今日中國 [Today’s China], vol. 2 no. 14 (1940), 24.
Fig. 45. Gao Jianfu. *Flying in the Rain* 雨中飛行, 1932. Color ink on paper, 46 × 35.5 cm. Art Museum of Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
Fig. 46. Gao Jianfu, Destruction of Civilization 文明的毀滅, n.d. Color ink on paper, 176 × 95 cm. Art Museum of Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
Fig. 47. Lin Fengmian, Martyrs of Huanghuagang 黃花崗烈士, 1929. Oil painting. From Jing Li and Chen Zhanqi, eds. Zhongguo zaoqi bolanhui ziliao huibian 中国早期博览会资料汇编 [Compilation of Sources related to the Early Expositions in China] (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2003), vol. 5, 231.
Fig. 48. Bao Shaoyou, *Viewing the Moon on the Western Mansion* 西樓望月, n.d. Ink on paper.

Fig. 49. Gao Jianfu, *Copy of a Mural in Sirigiya, Ceylon* 獅子國其蘭利雅寺壁畫, 1932. Color on paper, 66 × 33 cm. Collection of Mr. Li Shiyou.
Fig. 50. Gao Jianfu, *Buddha* 佛像圖, c.1930–32. Color ink on paper, 37 × 27 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 51. Gao Jianfu, *Fragrant Dream of the Mount Luofu: a Beauty* 羅浮香夢美人, 1930s. Color ink on paper, 114 × 44 cm. Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
Fig. 52. Gao Jianfu, *Pitying Herself in the Mirror* 顧影自憐, 1937. Color ink on paper, 102 × 43 cm. Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Fig. 54. Gao Jianfu, *Poet of the South* 南國詩人, 1935. Color ink on paper, 212.5 × 94.5 cm.

Collection of Mr. Li Shiyou.
Fig. 55. Gao Jianfu, Sketch for *Poet of the South*, c.1935. Ink on paper, 73.7 × 36 cm. Private collection.
Fig. 56. Attributed to Liang Kai, *Li Bo in Stroll* 李白行吟圖, 13th century. Ink on paper, 81.1 × 30.5 cm. Tokyo National Museum.
Fig. 57. Fang Rending, *Grieving over Autumn* 悲秋, 1935. 184.5 × 93 cm.
Fig. 58. Gao Jianfu, *Grieving over Autumn* 悲秋, 1935. Color ink on paper, 73.5 × 34 cm.

Guangzhou Museum of Art.
Fig. 59. Kawasaki Shōko, *Hama ni tatsu onna* (浜に立つ女, “Woman on the Seashore”), 1914.

Color on paper, 119 × 44.5 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.
Fig. 60. Kawasaki Shōko, *Kodama* こだま ("Echo"), 1930. Color on paper, 225 × 180 cm. The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.
Fig. 61. Kawasaki Shōko, *Ofiriya* オフィリヤ (“Ophelia”), 1929. Color on Silk on a Six-fold Screen, 168.4 × 361.2 cm. The University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts.
Fig. 64. Fang Rending, *To The Fields* 到田間去, 1932. Color ink on paper, 181 × 94 cm.

Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou.
Fig. 65. Kawasaki Shōko, *Singing Girls* 鳥歌, 1914. Six-fold Screen, dimension and whereabout unknown. From *Bijutsu Gahō*, vol. 38, no. 1 (June 1915).
Fig. 66. Kawasaki Shōko, *A Journey to the West Seeking for the Buddhist Doctrine 西天求法*, 1926. Water and ink on Paper of a Six-fold Screen, 177.5 × 363 cm. The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.
Fig. 67. Fang Rending, *The Fruit Ripens* 果熟, c. 1934. From *Yi Feng* 藝風, vol. 2 no. 10 (1934).
Fig. 68. Fang Rending, *The Painter and Model* 畫家與模特兒, 1931. Color on Paper, 183 × 120 cm.
Fig. 69. Fang Rending, *Stepping on the Snow* 踏雪, 1931. Color on Paper, 175 × 63 cm.
Fig. 70. Fang Rending, *In the Midst of Wind and Rain* 風雨途中, 1932. Color on Paper, 75 × 91 cm.
Fig. 71. Itō Shinsui, *Fubuki* 吹雪, n.d. Woodblock print. Sumpu Museum, Japan.
Fig. 72. Fang Rending, *Cavalryman* 騎兵, 1937. Ink and color on paper 81.4 × 86.4 cm.
Fig. 73. Fang Rending, *Sentry Guards* 前哨兵, 1937. Ink and Color on Paper, 66 × 77 cm.
Fig. 74. Fang Rending, *Night Attack*, 1937. From *Hong Kong Sunday Herald*, May 8, 1938.
Fig. 75. Fang Rending, *Puppy* 愛犬, 1941. Color on Paper, 103 × 67 cm.
Fig. 76. Fang Rending, *Sick Bird* 病禽, c. 1936. From *Zhongguo Meishuhui Jikan* 中國美術會季刊 [Quarterly of the China Art Club], vol. 1.
Fig. 77. Fang Rending, Alcoholics 酒徒, 1940. Color on paper, 68 × 82 cm.
Fig. 78. Fang Rending, *Circus 馬戲*, 1940. Ink and color on paper, 68 × 83 cm.
Fig. 79. Fang Rending, *Condensed Thought* 凝思, 1942. Color on paper, 130 × 68.5 cm.
Fig. 80. Fang Rending, *The Stare* 凝視, 1941. Color on paper, 137 × 67 cm.
Fig. 81. Fang Rending, the Drought 大旱, 1946. Color on Paper, 146 × 81 cm.
Fig. 82. Fang Rending, *Laboring Couple* 勞動夫妻, 1941. Color on Paper, 168 × 102 cm.
Fig. 83. Fang Rending, *The Unemployed* 失業者, 1946. Color on Paper, 78 × 93 cm.
Fig. 84. Fang Rending, *Wandering into the Sunset* 日暮途遙, 1945. Color on Paper, 87 × 96 cm.
Fig. 85. Fang Rending, *Song of the Fisherman* 漁父, 1946. Ink on Paper, 177 × 94 cm.
Fig. 86. Fang Rending, *The Unwelcoming Wife not Getting off the Sewing Loom* 妻不下繡, 1946.

Color and Ink on Paper, 128 × 67 cm.
Fig. 87. Fang Rending, *Shi Qian* 時遷, 1947. Color on Paper, 130 × 67.6 cm.
Fig. 88. Fang Rending, *Ji Kang* 稼康, 1947. Color on Paper, 127 × 68 cm.
Fig. 89. Fang Rending, *The Three Tasting Vinegar* 三酸圖. Ink on Paper, 119 × 67 cm.
Fig. 90. Fang Rending, “Coming out after one thousand calls, she still covers half of her face with the *pipa*” 千呼萬喚始出來 猶抱琵琶半遮面, from the series *Ballade of the Pipa* 琵琶行, 1948–56. Color on Paper, 176 × 92 cm.
Fig. 91. Fang Rending and Li Xiongcai, 澎拜向農民宣傳, 1952. Ink on paper, 118 × 218 cm.
Fig. 92. Huang Shaoqiang, *Whose Mother, Wife, or Daughter?* 是誰慈母誰妻女, n.d. From *Central Daily News*, September 8, 1946.
Fig. 93. Huang Shaoqiang and Zhao Shao’ang, *Coexistence of Form and Emptiness* 色空同屏, 1942. Color ink on paper, 180 × 100 cm. Guangzhou Museum of Art.
Fig. 94. Huang Shaoqiang, *Huabiao Rock* 華表石, 1926. From *Foshan Jingwu Yuekan* 佛山精武月刊, vol.1, no.8 (1926).
Fig. 9. Huang Shaoqiang, *The Tragedy in Elgin Road* 愛而近路慘史, 1925. From *Foshan Jingwu Yuekan*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1925).
Fig. 96. Huang Shaoqiang. Reproduction of *Love and Death in the Desolate Path* 客道蕭條生死情 (1928). Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong* (Minjian huaguan, 1937), 242.
Fig. 97. Ren Bonian, *Boy-Bearing Mother* 弄璋圖, 1892. Color ink on paper, 107 × 42.8 cm.

Tianjin Municipal Art Museum.
Fig. 98. Gao Jianfu, *Motherly Love* 母愛. Color ink on paper, 37 × 52 cm.
Fig. 99. Huang Shaoqiang, *The Empty Armchair* 墓榻空留, 1927. Color ink on paper, 140.5 × 26 cm. Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 100. Huang Shaoqiang, *Candles Howling in the Wind* 殘燭號風, 1927. Color ink on paper, 140.3 × 25.9 cm. Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 101. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *Mother’s Tears* 萱枕淚 (c.1927). Woodblock print.

From *Hua Zhong*, 239.
Fig. 102. Huang Shaoqiang, *Origin of Blood* 血之泉源, 1927. Color ink on paper, 74.5 × 27 cm.

Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 10. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *Origin of Blood* (1927). Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong*, 238.
Fig. 104. Huang Shaoqiang, *Grave in the Soughing Wind* 蕭蕭墓門, 1928. Color ink on paper, 131 × 64 cm. Guangzhou Museum of Art.
Fig. 105. Huang Shaoqiang, *Eternity and Disillusionment* 不朽與幻滅, 1928. Color ink on paper, 171 × 92 cm. Private Collection, Hong Kong.
Fig. 106. Huang Shaoqiang, *Appreciating Oneself at a Dead End* 窮途自賞, 1928. Color ink on paper, 99 × 47.5 cm. Private Collection, Hong Kong.
Fig. 107. Huang Shaoqiang, *The Patriotic Girls 熱血之女*, 1931. Color ink on paper, 137 × 34 cm.

Nanhai Museum of Art, China.
Fig. 108. Huang Shaoqiang, *Supporting the Campaign in Heilongjiang* 援黑之役, 1931. Color ink on paper, 109 × 33 cm. Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 109. Huang Shaoqiang, *Homeless of the Flood* 洪水流民圖, 1932. From *Beiyang Pictorial* 北洋畫報, vol. 18, no. 861 (1932).
Fig. 110. Ren Bonian, *Immortals Celebrating the Birthday of the Queen of the West* 群仙祝壽図, n.d. Twelve-fold screen, 206.8 × 714 cm. China Art Museum, Shanghai.
Fig. 111. Xu Beihong, *Jiu Fang Gao* 九方皋, 1928. Color ink on paper, 178 × 85.5 cm. Tsinghua Art Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 113. Zhao Wangyun, *Waiting for Rescue* 待援者, 1935. From *Zhao Wangyun Luxing Xiesheng Huaxuan* 趙望雲旅行寫生畫選 [Selecions of Sketches by Zhao Wangyun] ([Tianjin?]: Ta Kung Pao, 1935).
Fig. 114. Huang Shaoqiang, *What Paints the Maple Red* 曉來誰染楓林醉, 1930. Color ink on paper, 127.2 × 30 cm. Memorial Museum of the Lingnan School, Guangzhou.
Fig. 115. Huang Shaoqiang, *None to Tell His Wants* 無告者, 1930. From *Shehui Yuebao* 社會月報 [Social Monthly], vol. 1, no. 6 (1934).
Fig. 116. Huang Shaoqiang, *Hardships and Sufferings of the People* 民間疾苦圖, 1934. From *Meiyu zazhi* 美育雜誌 [Art Education Magazine], no. 4 (1937).
Fig. 117. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *Decimating Mother and Growing Nestling* 母瘦雛漸肥 (c.1933). From *Hua Zhong*, 272.
Fig. 118. Huang Shaoqiang, *Singing with Whirling Tears in the Wayside* 殘歌載道淚飄瀟, 1936.

Color ink on five hanging scrolls, 133 × 313 cm. Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 119. Rong Jingduo, *Who that Struggles to Save Food for Three Days* 役役誰儲三日糧, 1937.
Fig. 120. Chen Shiqiong, *Playing Gongs and Drums for Others* 聲聲鑼鼓替人忙, 1937.
Fig. 121. Huang Shaoqiang and Followers, *Preparing for the Battle 應戰圖*, 1937. Ink on ten hanging scrolls. *Guangdong Huabao 廣東畫報* [Guangdong Pictorial], no. 2 (1937).
Fig. 122. Yu Ben, *Portrait of Huang Shaoqiang* 黃少強像, c.1936. Oil on canvas, 47 × 39 cm.

Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 123. Li Jinfá Making a Bust of Huang Shaoqing. From *Beiyang Pictorial*, vol. 32, no. 1584 (1937).
Fig. 124. Huang Shaoqiang, *Appreciating the Tune 賞音*, 1931. Color ink on four hanging scrolls, 134.8 × 189.8 cm. Guangdong Museum of Art.
Fig. 125. Huang Shaoqiang, *Appreciating the Tune*. From *Yi Feng*, vol. 3, no. 1.
Fig. 126. Chen Shizeng, *Viewing Paintings* 讀畫圖, 1917. Color ink on paper, 87.7 × 46.6 cm.

The Palace Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 127. Huang Shaoqiang. Reproduction of *Refugees in the Blizzard* 風雪哀鳴, 1930. Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong*, 252.
Fig. 128. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *Wild Singer* 狂歌人, 1930. Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong*, 250.
Fig. 129. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of *My Brush is My Life* 問我生涯筆一枝. Woodblock print. From *Hua Zhong*, 235.
Fig. 130. Huang Shaoqiang, Reproduction of Grave of Painting 畫塚. Woodblock print. From Hua Zhong, 284.
Fig. 131. Xu Beihong, *Rejoicing Over the Liberation of Nanjing at the World Peace Council* 世界和平大會上聽到南京解放, 1949. Color ink on paper, 352 × 71 cm. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 132. Lin Fengmian, Beauty Playing the Flute 吹笛仕女, 1940s. Color ink on paper, 33 × 33 cm.
Fig. 133. Jiang Zhaohe, *the Deluge* 洪水, 1947. Color ink on paper, 300 × 270 cm. Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.
Fig. 134. Fu Baoshi, *Wash Your Hands* 洗手圖, 1943. Ink on paper, 110 × 62.2 cm. Private Collection, USA.
Fig. 135. Xu Yansun, *Ballade on an Army Procession* 兵車行, 1956. 88 × 163.2 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.
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