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## Writing Chinese art history in early twentieth-century China

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## Chapter 1 In the Name of the Nation: Imagining Art History in Early Republican China under Japanese Influence

An early twentieth century imagination of art in China pitted reform against conservatism. Reform called to mind virtues located somewhere vaguely in the West; conservatism lurked just below the surface everywhere in China. At the beginning of 1918, Chen Duxiu (1880-1942), one of the leading figures in the intellectual movement known as the New Culture Movement, claimed: “If one wants to improve Chinese painting, the first thing to do is to revolt against the painting of the Wangs”. “The Wangs” refers to four painters<sup>3</sup> from the early Qing period who shared the family name Wang, and whose work was later regarded as emblematic of an early Qing canon. Chen continued: “To improve Chinese painting, one cannot avoid adopting the spirit of realism in Western painting” (Chen 1918). Similar ideas of a thorough revolution in the realm of Chinese traditional art emerged alongside the various social, political, and cultural activities of Westernization in the 1910s. As powerful as these ideas may sound, opposing notions were also active at the same time. In the art world of early twentieth-century China, traditional painting was still the mainstream of art practices (Shui 1997:44). Traditional rather than Western-style painting still dominated the art markets of China and Japan.

Recent research tends to divide the art world of late Qing and Republican China into two camps of reformists and conservatives. In fact, members of both camps strived for common goals, and the assumption of this kind of schism in Chinese art circles is problematic. For example, “reformists”, such as Xu Beihong (1895-1953), the Western-style painter and art educator who promoted Western realistic style in painting, supported younger artists using the traditional ink medium during the 1930s. “Reformists” no longer perceived the use of their own tradition as regressive. In the case of the “conservative” National Essence group, the concept of nation (*minzu*), to which national essence (*guocui*) was related, was a Western invention. Chinese intellectuals borrowed these terms from Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. As the usage of these new notions took hold, they started to transform China’s tradition for use in their contemporary political and cultural agenda. Despite shifting emphases, both camps were preoccupied with the processes of both nation and culture building (Liu 1995:241).

Reformism heralded a new sense of Chinese identity. Almost all fields of artistic and literary production in late Qing and Republican China experienced an accelerated promotion of “Chineseness” as national identity. In the art circles of early Republican

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<sup>3</sup> They are Wang Shimin (1592-1680), Wang Jian (1598-1677), Wang Hui (1632-1717), and Wang Yuanqi (1642-1715).

China, competing narratives of Chinese traditional art engaged with each other in the name of the nation. The Chinese historiography of art was not unaffected by this. The development of writing on art history in early twentieth-century China aimed to create a coherent national history of Chinese art. This emerging practice for the historiography of Chinese art occurred amid intense artistic exchanges between China and the outside world, and in particular Japan. Almost all Chinese historical works on art in China produced in the Republican period invested in the same paradigm of constructing a history of “Chinese art” to buttress China’s position as a cultural leader dealing with increasing pressures.

This chapter examines these ideas concerning nation within the art historical literature of Republican China. After describing some of the Japanese influences on the Chinese field of art history, I will discuss how Chinese scholars theorised the role of art history in their building of a national identity. I will then examine actual writing practices by exploring one of the innovative art historical treatises in the 1920s and ’30s, *Eastern Art History* (1936) by Shi Yan (1904-1994). While this text followed the general trend of art historical writing in Republican China, it is intriguing because its main focus of discussion encompassed China, India, and Japan. It is the only book during the first half of the twentieth century (and earlier) to survey the history of different art forms in such a broad geo-cultural region of Asia. Even its ambitions in this respect may have owed something to the intellectual climate in Japan.

## 1.1 The Japanese Impact

In the Chinese pursuit of modernization, Japan was one of the examples for China to follow from the end of the nineteenth century. The following discussion of the Japanese impact on Chinese art historical scholarship emphasizes two points: Chinese scholars’ deliberate choice to translate Japanese historical works on Chinese art; and their decision to embrace the Japanese mediation of Western notions pertinent to the project of creating Chinese national identity in art.

### Translations of Japanese works

After the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Chinese scholars and students began flocked to Japan to absorb Western learning. More than three hundred Chinese artists visited Japan in the first half of the twentieth century (Liu 2001:246). The country’s success in modernization inspired Chinese intellectuals to follow Japan in treating visual art as an important part of modern knowledge, especially at the institutional level. During the 1900s, art courses, including art history based on the Japanese experience, started to enter the educational

curricula at different levels in China. In addition, many Japanese publications on art were translated into Chinese. In the 1920s and '30s, more than half of the translated literature concerning art history published in China (see Appendix II) were translations of Japanese works. Surprisingly, none of these treatises were actually about Japanese art. Every one of them discussed either Western art theories or introduced histories of Western art. In fact, of all the art books produced at that time in China, only two focused on Japan: *New Impressions of the New Art of Japan* (*Riben xin meishu de xin yinxiang*, 1921) by the Western-style painter Liu Haisu (1896-1994), and *A Brief History of Japanese Art* (*Riben meishu yanjin xiaoshi*, 1934) by Chen Danya, a scholar who studied in Japan during the 1910s and '20s. In a sense, Japan was not the ultimate goal of Chinese intellectuals, but a bridge that linked China to the West.

The only field in which Japanese scholarship seemed to be more important than Western scholarship was the history of Chinese art. The Chinese translation of Japanese works on Chinese art outnumbered that of Western ones in Republican China. Among the Western writings, *Chinese Art* (1904) by Stephen Bushell (1844-1908) was the only book to have merited a complete Chinese translation, which will be discussed in Chapter Two. The number of translated Japanese books on Chinese art amounted to six in the 1920s and '30s as Table 1.1 shows.

Table 1.1:

Book	Author	Translator	Year	Publisher
<i>A History of Chinese Art</i> ( <i>Zhongguo meishushi</i> )	Ōmura Seigai	Chen Binhe	1928	Commercial Press
<i>Painting of Tang and Song</i> ( <i>Tang Song zhi huihua</i> )	Kinbara Seigo	Fu Baoshi	1935	Commercial Press
<i>Wang Mojie</i>	Umezawa Waken	Fu Baoshi	1935	Commercial Press
<i>A History of Chinese Painting</i> ( <i>Zhongguo huihuashi</i> )	Nakamura Fusetsu Kojika Seiun (Oga Seiun)	Guo Xuzhong	1937	Zhengzhong shuju
<i>A History of Chinese Architecture</i> ( <i>Zhongguo jianzhushi</i> )	Itō Chūta	Chen Qingquan	1937	Commercial Press
<i>A Brief History of Chinese Painting</i> ( <i>Zhina huihua xiaoshi</i> )	Ōmura Seigai	Zhang Yijun	?	Shanghai juzhen fangsong yinshuju

The Commercial Press was one of the most important printer-publishers in Republican China, and it frequently engaged with Japanese materials. Not only did this firm

publish four translated Japanese books (Table 1.1), but it also issued, on a regular basis, influential periodicals containing Japanese sources, such as the *Eastern Miscellany*, one of the earliest all-around Chinese journals published from 1904 to 1948.

Numerous Japanese sources appeared in the bibliographies of Chinese publications. Fu Baoshi's *Chronological Table of Chinese Art* enumerated fifty-four Japanese publications as important references to his research (Fu 1937a). Most Chinese scholars in the 1920s and '30s admitted that current Japanese scholarship on Chinese art history was superior to Chinese scholarship. For example, Guo Xuzhong, the translator of Nakamura and Kojika's book on painting (Table 1.1) and a disciple of the leading educator Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), mentioned in the preface to his translation that: "Japanese people know more about the culture of our nation than we do. ... They have already made achievements in those subjects that we neglect"(Guo 1937: 1-2). In early twentieth-century Japan, manifold historical and theoretical publications on Chinese painting appeared, ranging from general history to various topics on important artists and theories (Chen 2000:269-329).

Compared with scattered information on other Japanese references, these six translated books enjoyed great popularity among Chinese readers. Most striking is the choice that these Japanese surveys reflect, even in the face of many other options. This Chinese preference was the antithesis of those priorities reigning in either Japan or the West. Texts by important Japanese scholars, which absorbed most Japanese readers' attention, were not remotely considered by Chinese researchers. For instance, art historical works by Okakura Kakuzō (1862-1913, Okakura Tenshin) and by Naitō Konan (1866-1934, Naitō Torajirō) did not appear in Chinese during the early twentieth century. Okakura was the leading art educationalist, art administrator, and a pioneer among modern Japanese art historians. He was the key thinker in late Meiji Japan who defined a Japanese art which contributed significantly to formulating a belief in a Japanese nation-state. With the help of Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), the American scholar and educator who played a significant role in promoting Japanese art, Okakura discovered the function of Japanese art for the nation-state. According to Stefan Tanaka, Okakura claimed one essence for Japan's self-conscious art—a respect for ancient methods. This essence allowed Okakura to merge diverse past moments of Japanese art into a single history (Tanaka 1994:30-38).

Okakura was quite influential in the West. A volume that he wrote in English, *The Ideals of the East* (1902), was widely read by Western scholars. In *Chinese Art* (1904) Bushell quoted Okakura's words on fifth-century Chinese painting principles rather than use a Chinese source. By contrast, almost no one mentioned Okakura or Fenollosa in early Republican China (Wong 2006:40). Okakura had been to China twice at the turn of the twentieth century, and Chinese scholars must have been aware of his work by then.

However, Chinese researchers avoided introducing him and his scholarship to a Chinese audience. The reason was apparently that Okakura portrayed Chinese art as inherently provincial, as well as inferior, to Japanese art (Wong 1999:47-48; He 1995). No matter how dissatisfied Chinese scholars might be with contemporary Chinese art in the early twentieth century, none could accept Okakura's claims. They contradicted precisely the belief in Chinese culture which Chinese scholars were attempting to establish. Still, even though his work was not introduced to China, Okakura's strategy in building Japan's national essence was borrowed by Chinese scholars in the construction of a Chinese national identity. Prominent, for example, was *dongyang* as *tōyō* (Asia) and Shi Yan's use of it, an idea and an engagement to be discussed later in this chapter.

Naitō Konan's connection to China was even stronger than Okakura's. Naitō was the prominent sinologist in Japan whose research on Chinese history and Chinese art laid the foundation for the Kyoto School. According to Joshua Fogel, Naitō's work *On China* (*Shinaron*, 1914) is one of the most influential publications on Chinese history and culture of the twentieth century, and he is best known for his periodization of Chinese history (Fogel 1984: xv-xxiv, 165). Naitō was a close friend of Luo Zhenyu (1866-1940), the antiquarian and scholar who made epochal contributions to research on oracle bones and Dunhuang texts. As an advisor to Japanese collectors of Chinese art in the early twentieth century, Naitō saw many Chinese artworks sold to Japan. Based on these newly imported Chinese visual materials, Naitō delivered his lectures on the history of Chinese painting as part of the East Asian history syllabus at Kyoto Imperial University between 1922 and 1923. These lectures were published as a series of essays in a journal *Buddhist Art* (*Bukkyō bijutsu*) between 1926 and 1931. The book version of these lectures, entitled *A History of Chinese Painting* (*Shina kaiga shi*), appeared in 1938 after Naitō's death (Chen 2000: 277-79). Naitō's work was considered groundbreaking by Japanese scholars, such as his student and the historian of Chinese painting Ise Senichirō (1891-1948) (Wong 1999: 68-69). However, Naitō's nationalist attitude led him to maintain that Japan was then the centre of Asian culture rather than China, and that China should not protest against Japan's expansion (Shumpei 1976). In the 1920s and '30, Naitō's denigration of modern China's political role prevented Chinese scholars from considering it appropriate to translate his treatises in the era of China's nation-building and amid the growing perception of Japan's imperial ambitions.

Caution affected the introduction of these six Japanese works to a broad Chinese audience. In particular, two books were highly influential. They were *A History of Chinese Art*, the translation of Ōmura Seigai's work; and, *A History of Chinese Painting*, the translation of a joint history by Nakamura Fusetsu (1865-1943) and Kojika Seun.

Ōmura Seigai was one of the pioneers of Japanese research on Asian art history. He graduated from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1893, and became a teacher at the same school. Between 1921 and 1926, Ōmura paid five visits to China where he became acquainted with numerous Chinese artists and scholars. On his first trip in 1921, he was hosted by Chen Shizeng (1876-1923) who had studied in Japan, and who was now passionately keen to promote literati painting. In fact, Ōmura and Chen shared similar attitudes towards literati painting in both Japan and China. Excited about this common outlook, Chen translated one of Ōmura's essays into Chinese as "The Revival of Literati Painting (Wenrenhua zhi fuxing)". He published it, together with his own text "The Value of Literati Painting (Wenrenhua zhi jiazhi)", in a book entitled *A Study on Chinese Literati Painting (Zhongguo wenrenhua zhi yanjiu)* (Chen 1922). Scholars have analyzed the exchanges between Ōmura and Chen on literati painting as well as their activities (Andrews and Shen 2006: 9-15; Wong 2006: 54-76). It is clear that before the translation was published in China, Ōmura had already gained prestige in Chinese art circles. Furthermore, unlike most of the contemporary Japanese scholars who sometimes discussed Chinese art with contempt in order to emphasize Japan's own tradition, he treated Chinese art as an elevated object of study (Wong 2006: 40). Ōmura's research might have been perceived as old-fashioned in Japan, certainly compared to works written by Okakura and Naitō, but his writings appealed to Chinese readers. Chinese scholars discerned a particular value for the realization of a national consciousness in his scholarship. The reason why Ōmura was not popular among Japanese intellectuals was exactly the reason why he was popular in China. *A History of Chinese Art* was a partial translation of Ōmura's *A Concise History of Eastern Art (Tōyō bijutsu shōshi, 1906)*. According to the translator's preface to the book, Ōmura's original work was a compilation of his lecture notes from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, covering Japan, India, and China. Ōmura devoted the largest portion of his text to Chinese art, including detailed accounts of applied arts. The translator stated that this Chinese section was the essential part of Ōmura's book, dealing as it did with the longest tradition and the richest materials in Eastern civilization (Chen 1928: 2). With the publication of this translation and yet another of his *Shina bijutsushi*, Ōmura's reputation in China exceeded his fame in Japan.

*A History of Chinese Painting (Shina kaigashi, 1913)* by Nakamura Fusetsu and Kojika Seiun had already been influential in China before its Chinese translation appeared in 1937. About Kojika Seiun, nothing is known. Nakamura Fusetsu, the painter of both Western style and Eastern style, had studied academic oil painting in France. He was also interested in Chinese traditional painting, which he considered "the parents of Japanese painting" (Wong 2006: 45). In the preface to the first edition of this book, Nakamura

declared the deep impact of Chinese art on Japanese art: “It is impossible to study Japanese painting without the understanding of Chinese painting.” His statement, of course, fulfilled patriotic Chinese cultural expectations. Like Ōmura’s treatise, Nakamura and Kojika’s text gained greater recognition in China than in Japan.

*A History of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huihuashi, 1926)*, edited by the *guohua* painter and instructor Pan Tianshou (1886-1971), was a translation of Nakamura and Kojika’s 1913 book incorporating only minor changes (Yu 1932:34). Pan’s version was published as a textbook for his lessons on Chinese art history at the Shanghai Art Academy. Similarly, another book *A History of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huihuashi, 1924)*, based on the notes of Chen Shizeng’s class on Chinese painting at the Beijing Art School, was published by Chen’s student Yu Jianhua. Chen died in 1923. Yu published this text via his own publishing house as a memorial to his mentor. The structure of this book was the same as Nakamura and Kojika’s work with the exception of one section, based on Chen’s lectures on painting by women in the Ming dynasty (Andrews and Shen 2006:23). The 1937 translation of *Shina kaigashi* (1913) further increased the popularity of this book. It minimized the narrative of decline in Chinese painting to three paragraphs, in which the decay of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was described as being due to the mere imitation of previous masters. Chinese historians interpreted this decline with a call for a revival of Chinese painting (Andrews and Shen 2006:22).

Kinbara Seigo (1888-1963) is another example of Japanese scholarly influence in China. Fu Baoshi, whose own artworks and art historical writings will be discussed in Chapter Three, chose his Japanese teacher Kinbara Seigo’s work on Tang and Song painting for a Chinese readership. Fu translated two lecture notes “Painting of the Tang Dynasty” (*Tōdai no kaiga*, 1929) and “Painting of the Song Dynasty” (*Sōdai no kaiga*, 1930). He published them in one volume entitled *Painting of Tang and Song* with the Commercial Press in 1935. Fu Baoshi wrote a preface introducing Kinbara and his research on art. He described his teacher as an authority on Asian art studies in Japan, and explained his decision to unveil this work: firstly, the Tang-Song period was a crucial transition period for Chinese painting; secondly, Kinbara’s work, underlining three themes of colour, line, and ink in Tang and Song painting, was so innovative that it should inspire more energetic Chinese research on painting (Fu 1935d). In Fu’s view, this work provided an alternative direction for painting history, replacing the traditional engagement with lists of painters and painting schools.

In 1935, Fu Baoshi also translated Umezawa Waken’s (1871-1931) *Originator of the Southern School in Painting Wang Mojie (Nansō gaso Ō Makitsu, 1929)*. Fu again explained his motives in the preface. According to Fu, Umezawa was an expert in painting theories,

and his research was meticulous and profound. Fu suggested that Chinese scholars should emulate this kind of insightful foreign scholarship. Nevertheless, Fu also declared that the original work by Umezawa contained some inappropriate remarks, which he thought were untrue. Fu deleted or altered these remarks from his translation without hesitation. For instance, Umezawa claimed that the painting style of the Southern School (*nanzong*, see Chapter Two and Four), initiated in China, had only been preserved and enhanced in Japan. Fu Baoshi considered this to be an arrogant statement, although he concurred with Umezawa that no master of the Southern School could be found in contemporary Chinese painting (Fu 1935c: 1). Chinese readers, therefore, only encountered a version of Umezawa's work which Fu imagined was suitable for a Chinese audience.

Itō Chūta (1867-1954), the author of *A History of Chinese Architecture* (*Shina kenchikushi*, 1931), which was translated as into Chinese in 1937, was a pioneer in historical studies of Chinese and Japanese architecture. He was fascinated by Chinese traditions of architecture (Itō 1937: 7-11). Under the influence of Okakura Kakuzō, Itō conducted several field trips to China and other Asian countries from the turn of the twentieth century. During his first trip to Peking in 1901, he developed a method for measuring wooden architecture when investigating the Forbidden City (Itō 1990: 260). During his second trip to China between 1902 and 1905, he argued for the importance of the Yungang Grottoes in the East Asian history of architecture. Itō claimed that some features of Japanese architecture originated from Chinese styles in the Six Dynasties. His research influenced Chinese architectural studies led by Liang Sicheng (1901-1972), the American-trained architect and architectural historian, who established the first Chinese university department of architecture. The Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture (*Zhongguo yingzao xueshe*), the first Chinese academic research association devoted to China's architectural past, was formally launched in Peking on 16th February, 1930, by Zhu Qiqian (1872-1964), the industrialist and architectural historian. In 1931, Liang Sicheng joined the society and became the director of the Model Section (*fashi bu*), which was tasked with the investigation of surviving ancient constructions. The other section in the society, the Document Section (*wenxian bu*) was headed, from 1932, by Liu Dunzhen (1897-1968), the Japan-educated scholar on architectonics and historian of architecture. Liu and other members translated a number of Japanese essays for publication in *The Journal of the Society For the Study of Chinese Architecture* (*Zhongguo yingzao xueshe huikan*). Included in these were writings by Itō Chūta. In August 1930, Zhu Qiqian invited Itō to deliver a speech on Chinese architecture in Peking. Itō also became a member of the society, with which he maintained close ties until 1937. Chinese members of the society even met Itō in Japan. In April 1931, Que Duo (1874-1935), then the director of the

Document Section, paid a visit to Itō to consult him on translations of ancient architectural terminology into modern Chinese (Xu 1991: 116-22). In *A History of Chinese Architecture*, Itō Chūta provided a comprehensive account of the development of Chinese architecture, something which until then no Chinese scholar had accomplished. In fact, in 1933, the scholar, political activist, and supporter of reforms, Yue Jiazao (1870-1941) also published a book entitled *A History of Chinese Architecture* (*Zhongguo jianzhushi*). It was the first book in China about Chinese architectural history. However, a year later, the book was severely criticized by Liang Sicheng who accused Yue of a lack of historical research, and of providing only personal comments on different architectural designs (Liang 1934). As a result, Yue's book was ignored by most Chinese scholars in the Republican period, and Itō Chūta's book was considered to be the first complete history of Chinese architecture. Moreover, Itō saw a unique value in Chinese architectural traditions. He opened his book with a special section devoted to the discussion of Chinese architecture's position in the world history of architecture. In his opinion, Chinese architecture, which preserved its distinct ancient characteristics, was not inferior to that of the West, just different (Itō 1937: 4-10). Itō's text, with its positive attitude towards Chinese architecture, was much preferred by his contemporary Chinese scholars.

The position of the authors of these translated books was sympathetic to China, and this conformed with the Chinese project of nation building. Chinese scholars selected what to translate carefully, and they introduced Japanese interpretations of Chinese art which fitted well with their nationalist agenda.

### Adoption of Japanized modern concepts

Numerous modern concepts emerged in late Qing and Republican China by way of the expanding Japanese lexicon. These new linguistic resources were essential in securing "the nation as the subject of History" and in transforming "the perception not only of the past but also of the present meaning of the nation and the world" (Duara 1995: 5). Similarly, in art historical narratives, a new vocabulary entered the Chinese language associating the nation with the subject of art history. Two examples directly related to the idea of nation are *guocui* and *dongyang*, and both terms occupied Chinese scholars' attention in discussions of art during the 1920s and '30s.

*Guocui*, meaning national essence, was a loanword from the modern Japanese concept *kokusui*. At the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars and students in Japan began to adopt this term. Liang Qichao was probably the first Chinese writer to use the term during a trip to Japan in September, 1901 (Zheng 1992: 4). He wrote in his "Introduction to Chinese History II (*Zhongguo shi xulun* er)": "And based upon the national essence

of the Chinese nation, it is in vain to adopt forcibly the Western calendar” (Liang 1901). Liang used the notion of “national essence” as a reason to disavow the use of the Western calendar. At the end of the Qing dynasty, a group of Chinese scholars launched their own national essence movement following the Japanese nationalist movement in late Meiji. The National Essence group employed these ideas in their anti-Manchu propaganda. They proposed restoring a national identity from an ancient past to contemporary China. They believed that a true national identity for China should embody the cultural heritage and learning of the Han race. Their version of national essence which bore the implication of a modern nation “already carried the unmistakable imprint of the modern age”. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, the discussion of national essence remained intellectually fashionable, but its meaning had changed drastically. During the 1920s and ‘30s, placed in the hands of a group of American-educated scholars, national essence was interpreted as the humanistic essence of Chinese culture (Liu 1995:241-56).

Apart from the concept of national essence, a cluster of loanwords from Japanese associated with nation appeared in modern Chinese, namely national learning (*guoxue/kokugaku*), national character (*guomin xing/kokuminsei*), and national soul (*guohun/kunidamashii*). Other terms derived from the idea of nation emerged in a broad cultural discourse in late Qing and Republican China, for instance, national heritage (*guogu*), national goods (*guohuo*), national language and literature (*guowen*), national music (*guoyue*), and national drama (*guoju*). All these neologisms constituted a theoretical language that facilitated talk of “being Chinese in a modern world” (Liu 1995:240). At a more mundane level, the production of “national goods” brought a material reality to being Chinese—politically Chinese—in sharp distinction to being anything else (Gerth 2003: 5-9). Ironically, one of the targets of the patriotic National Goods Movement (*guohuo yundong*) was Japanese imports. “National art” would, ultimately, possess a different economic history, but it shared some of the same ideals.

Among Chinese specialists on art, the major debates took place in the field of painting. Connected to the National Essence Movement, the term “painting of national essence (*guocuihua*)” appeared in journalistic discussions of Chinese art in the late 1910s. In the journal *Fine Arts (Meishu)* published by the Shanghai Art Academy, three articles talked about *guocuihua*. The first one, entitled “The Origin and Development of Painting of National Essence (*Guocuihua yuanliu*)”, appeared in the first issue of this journal dated October, 1918. Here *guocuihua* referred to painting which originated and developed in the geographical area of China throughout history (Tang 1918). This discussion closely followed the general discourse of the National Essence Movement, displaying the author’s deep pride in the Chinese painting tradition. The other two essays appeared two years later,

suggesting a more critical view towards painting traditions in China (Huang 1920; Xu 1920). The laudatory implication of *guocuihua* was no longer present. From this point on, the term became interchangeable with another two more prevalent expressions—Chinese painting (*zhongguohua*) and *guohua*. The term *Zhonghua*, which also meant Chinese painting, had been used in the 1910s as well, but it was soon replaced by *Zhongguohua* or *guohua*.

*Zhongguohua* was the Chinese equivalent to the Japanese term Japanese-style painting (*nihonga*). Like *nihonga*, which had been coined in opposition to Western-style painting (*yōga*) and traditional Japanese decorative painting (*Yamato-e*), *zhongguohua* referred to traditional Chinese painting differentiated from oil painting, watercolour painting, and other kinds of Western painting (Andrews 1990: 557). *Guohua* also had a Japanese counterpart *kokuga*. Although both terms were two-character compounds of nation and painting, their practical meanings were distinct in the early decades of the twentieth century. The field of *Kokuga* included all categories of painting in Japan (Wong 2006: xxiii). *Guohua* was commonly an abbreviation of *zhongguohua*. More nationalistic than *kokuga*, *guohua* emphasized the native tradition of painting (Kao 1988: xxi). However, Shui Tianzhong does not accept that *guohua* was simply a shortened version of *zhongguohua*. He has pointed out a transformation in twentieth-century China from *zhongguohua* to *guohua* and then back again to *zhongguohua*. *Guohua*, with an emphasis on the idea of a modern nation-state, was tied to content and medium. It no longer referred to Chinese painting, but to the painting of a Chinese nation. It narrowly defined a specific genre of scroll paintings, and excluded other forms of Chinese painting, such as New Year pictures, woodblock painting, and mural painting (Shui 1986).

From the 1910s, these notions spread throughout the Chinese field of painting. Painting students in newly-established art schools majored in (*zhong*)*guohua*. Catalogues of art exhibitions divided painting exhibits into (*zhong*)*guohua* and Western-style painting (*xiyanghua*)<sup>4</sup>. A group of Cantonese painters determined to revolutionize Chinese painting into new national painting (*xin guohua*), an entity that they promised to be modern yet distinctively Chinese (Croizier 1988: 1-2).

No Chinese scholar at that time seemed to know or to be concerned with the exact origins of these terms. A 1926 comment in a collection of essays on *guohua* began with the statement that: “I could not tell since when the so-called ‘national painting’...had come into being...” (Tong 1932). Chinese researchers spontaneously followed Japanese scholarship and transferred these neologisms into the Chinese context. Some scholars questioned the

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<sup>4</sup> A few other names were given to Western-style painting in Chinese art that time such as *xihua* and *yanghua*.

absolute division between Chinese painting and Western-style painting. The Western-style painter, Ni Yide (1901-1970), in his introduction on *xiyanghua* claimed that, fundamentally, neither *xiyanghua* nor *zhongguohua* existed. However, these names entered common parlance and functioned well in colloquial discourse concerning art (Ni 1933: 1-2). It never occurred to Chinese scholars to strictly define these terms. They trusted in the self-evidence of these notions. Besides, contextual information could invariably help their readers to understand what they meant by these terms.

All these concepts, emerging as they did in early twentieth-century China, pinpointed the idea of a nation. Chinese intellectuals, supportive or not of the notions that they invented and identified as Chinese national essence, persisted in their efforts to legitimize Chinese art, whether old or new, as an expression of the nation.

The Chinese term *dongyang*, literally translated as eastern sea, referred traditionally to ocean area beyond China's immediate control. During the Qing dynasty, *dongyang* usually indicated the geographical region of Japan. It stood for locations east of China in distinction to *xiyang*, indicating mainly European countries and America. However, during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, under the influence of a popular Japanese concept *tōyō*, *dongyang* sometimes meant East Asia or Asia. Lexically identical, *dongyang* became the Chinese expression of the Japanese term *tōyō*, and its referential scope expanded accordingly to include both geography and culture from Japan to the rest of Asia.

From the mid-nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth centuries, *tōyō* was crucial to Japanese nationalistic discourse and an orientalizing one at that. Lectures and research on Asian history (*tōyōshi*) and Asian art history (*tōyō bijutsushi*) were widespread in Japanese universities and institutes. Stefan Tanaka's *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (1993) argues that Japan invented its version of the Orient to fulfil its patriotic and imperialist goals (Tanaka 1993). Aida Yuan Wong's PhD dissertation has studied both the Japanese and Chinese contributions to the conceptualization of the East in painting practice and theory from the 1890s to the 1930s (Wong 1999). During the early decades of the twentieth century, Chinese art researchers introduced Japanese works on Asian art to China in translation or through adaptation. Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* (1935) is a prime example which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Compared to the attractiveness of *tōyō* to Japanese scholarship on art, *dongyang* in early twentieth-century China was much less popular and less institutionalized. Chinese intellectuals preferred to position China in direct opposition to the West (*zhongxi*) on issues of art. They sometimes juxtaposed the East with the West (*dongxi* or *dongxiyang*), but what they actually talked about was China rather than Asia. They claimed a dominant position for

Chinese art in Asia at the beginning of their narratives. This excuse legitimized their next move which was to discuss solely art in China. For instance, Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), the Western-style painter and art educationist, published his article “The Future of Eastern Art and Western Art (Dongxi yishu zhi qiantu)” in *The Supplement to Morning Post* (*Chenbao fukan*) in June, 1926. This supplement was issued in Beijing three times a week from 12th October, 1921, and it became famous for promoting new literature. In his essay, Lin Fengmian affirmed that both Indian and Chinese cultures typified Eastern civilization. He continued: “Chinese art since the import of Buddhism from India has engendered a new trend. This trend definitely represents Eastern art.” In the remaining text, Lin did not mention India again, save for one sentence concerning Indian influence on Chinese art after Han times (Lin 1926a, 1926b). He generally equated Chinese art to Eastern art. Chen Binhe (1897-1945), an editor of *Shenbao*, the leading newspaper of late Qing and Republican China in Shanghai, translated Ōmura’s work into Chinese. In the preface to his translation, Chen maintained that the focus of Asian art was Chinese art. He believed that a narrative of art in China would be sufficient to provide a detailed outline of, as well as to show the spirit of, Asian art (Chen 1928:1-2).

Similarly, at the beginning of “Notes to the Reader (Xuli)” in *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (*Qinhan meishushi*, 1936), Zhu Jieqin (1913-1990) posited that “Chinese art enjoyed a prominent place in Oriental art” (Zhu 1936:1). Zhu was a historian who did his postgraduate research at Zhongshan University between 1933 and 1936. Two decades later, in the 1950s, being a professor of Zhongshan University and later director of the history department at Jinan University, he changed his research focus from the ancient history of China to the history of overseas Chinese and the history of China’s international relations. *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* was selected for inclusion in the *Small Series for History and Geography* (*Shidi xiacongshu*). This series was a group of publications by the Commercial Press in the mid-1920s. Shown by its title, this series focused on new knowledge in the fields of history and geography. Zhu Jieqin’s book was chosen because of Zhu’s new description of art during the Qin-Han period. The writer explored different forms of art in the Qin and Han dynasties with an additional chapter on the four treasures of the scholars’ studio as brush, ink, paper, and inkstone. Zhu argued that in order to summarize the outline of Asian art scholars only needed to conduct research on Chinese art (Zhu 1936:5). In these cases, the implication of *dongyang* was reduced to the same status as *zhongguo*.

Furthermore, most Japanese-trained Chinese scholars used the conception of *dongyang* to support China’s own nationalistic project. In their accounts, “Japan’s Orient” was transformed into a Chinese version of the East. In 1935, Fu Baoshi translated Kinbara

Seigo's theory of Asian art. Rather than mentioning Asia in the main title of his translation, Fu underscored what he termed as Chinese national characteristics reflected in art (Fu 1935a). This contrast between the content and the title of this article reveals Fu's adaptation of Asian art to a Chinese nationalist context.

A few articles concerning Asia art published from the 1920s to '40s focused on the painting theory of the Six Laws (*liufa*) originated by the painting theorist Xie He (active 6th century). In 1930, the *guohua* painter and cartoonist Feng Zikai introduced Kinbara Seigo's study on the Six Laws. Both Kinbara and Feng argued that the Six Laws were the enduring principles of East Asian painting (Feng 1930a). In particular, several artists and scholars at that time asserted that the first law "spirit resonance (*qiyun*)", fundamentally different from the ideas of Western painting, represented the essence of Asian art.

Gao Jianfu (1879-1951), one of the founders of the Lingnan School, even paralleled the Six Laws with the "Six Limbs (*liuzhi*)" declared by Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), the leading Bengali nationalist artist. Gao did so in his posthumously published book *My Views on Modern National Painting* (*Wo de xiandai guohua guan*, 1955), which Croizier believes to be a compilation of Gao's lectures at the National Central University in 1936 (Croizier 1988: 110). According to Abanindranath Tagore's original writing between 1914 and 1915, *Sadanga*—the fundamental rules of Indian painting—included *Rupabheda* (the knowledge of visual forms), *Pramānāni* (correct proportion, and structure of forms), *Bhāva* (action of feelings on forms), *Lāvanya Yojanam* (infusion of grace and artistic representation), *Sādrisya* (similitude and resemblance), and *Varnikābhanga* (artistic manner of using the brush and colours) (Tagore 1968: 19-20). In Gao Jianfu's interpretation, Tagore's Six Limbs of ancient Indian art were similar to the Six Laws. Although Gao realized the differences between these two sets of painting laws in their logical arrangements and ways of expression, what struck him was the similarities. He also claimed that three of the rules from the Six Limbs provided a clear explanation of Xie He's ambiguous first law "spirit resonance" (Gao 1991: 72-74). Gao did not elaborate on which three rules he meant, but they were probably *Bhāva*, *Lāvanya Yojanam*, and *Sādrisya*. Following Japanese scholarship, he connected Chinese art and Indian art to form an entity of "Oriental art" with reference to these two sets of painting principles.

Another direct contact between China and Japan in the case of Asian art was a lecture in 1923 at Beijing University delivered by Sawamura Sentarō (1884-1930), a professor of Japanese and Asian art history. The translation of Sawamura's speech was published in the only issue of *Plastic Arts* (*Zaoxing meishu*, 1924). This journal was issued by the Research Association of Plastic Arts (*Zaoxing meishu yanjiuhui*) of Beijing University. Sawamura's speech started with the famous statement by Okakura that "Asia is one". Then he moved

on to his own experience with Chinese, Japanese, and Indian art. Impressed by what he perceived as the inseparability of cultural trends in China, Japan, and India, Sawamura confidently claimed that these three cultures formed a single entity of Eastern culture, which differed from Western culture (Sawamura 1924). Likewise, the weekly publication *Art* (*Yishu*) printed a short talk entitled “Explaining the Original Meaning of Eastern Art (Chanfa dongfang meishu zhi benyi)” by Sugiura Katoshi<sup>5</sup> in 1924 (Sugiura 1924). This newspaper was issued by the Eastern Art Research Association (Dongfang yishu yanjiu xuehui) in Shanghai. The main contributor, Wang Yachen (1894-1983), a Tokyo-trained artist, was the interpreter of Sugiura’s speech. The speaker called for cooperation between Japanese and Chinese artists in order to create artworks representing the values of Eastern culture. Wang himself also wrote an article on the idea of Eastern art entitled “The Life of Eastern Art (Dongfang yishu zhi shengming)” in the first issue of a Shanghai monthly journal *Chats on Literature and Art* (*Wenyi chahua*) (Wang 1932).

Chinese scholars started to pay attention to Indian art in the 1920s. Subsequent to the Bengali writer, philosopher, and artist Rabindranath Tagore’s (1861-1941) visit to China in 1924, lectures and articles about Indian art emerged. A certain Dr. Nag from India gave a lecture on the revival of Indian art at Beijing University in 1924. Not long afterwards, under the influence of Japanese scholarship, Chinese artists started to travel to India in the 1930s. They found familiar elements in Indian art, and they tried to draw parallels between methods of Indian art and those of Chinese art. Starting in October 1930, Gao Jianfu travelled in South Asia from Ceylon to the Himalayas for almost a year. He met Rabindranath Tagore, and held exhibitions of his paintings, and imitated ancient Indian art at historical sites, such as the Ajanta caves. Gao was truly “open to influences from the ancient East” in the 1930s (Croizier 1988:121-22).

Although these activities and essays reveal an emerging transnational discourse concerning Eastern art in the early twentieth century, the efforts from the Chinese side were not as intense and passionate as those of the Japanese. The strong modern Japanese nation legitimized the Japanese discourse of an Asia centred in Japan. The weaker political conditions in China made it difficult for Chinese scholars to position the core of contemporary Asian art in China. Instead, these scholars envisaged a powerful influence of Chinese culture in the past and relied on this interpretation to create another version of Asian art.

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<sup>5</sup> I have found no information on this person.

## 1.2 Imaging Art History in China's Nation Building

Mitchell Schwarzer, in his article “Origins of the Art History Survey Text” (1995), has suggested that writing art history in nineteenth-century Germany “cannot be distinguished from nation building”. He has analyzed the early German survey texts of art history in the 1840s and '50s as “part of a great struggle to create modern German identity” (Schwarzer 1995). In modern Japan, Okakura Kakuzō used a framework to rearrange a history of Japanese art which was coterminous with social and national development. In this way, art played an essential role in the Japanese formulation of a strong belief in a Japanese modern nation (Tanaka 1994). “All societies in the era of nationalism desire collective memories for consolidation” (Wong 2006:43). The case of Chinese art history in late Qing and Republican China is very similar to that of Japan. In the mind of most Chinese scholars at that time, historical surveys of art, serving the purpose of supporting a modern nation, should indicate unambiguously the national greatness of China, and they should show a correspondingly distinguished tradition of Chinese art.

### The use of the past

The early decades of the twentieth century in China witnessed strong interest in a new narrative of China's past. China's confrontation with the Western countries and Japan, as well as its revolutionary changes in politics, economy, and culture, called into question the entire past as pre-modern Chinese scholars had conceived it. In this process, Chinese historians began to inscribe the past with new qualities that would help to build a modern nation with its own autonomy. Chinese modern nationalists in the early Republican period used historicization to legitimate the birth of a new nation. They trusted the power of a coherent history to inspire patriotism. Whether conservative or radical, on however it is that later generations of researchers have classified them, most Chinese scholars determined to utilize the history of China in the solidification of a Chinese national identity. In their view, the past of the nation newly perceived in the present pointed to the future.

Represented by the idea of “New Historiography (*xin shixue*)”, modern historiography ushered in a productive era of Chinese historical thinking. As early as 1902, Liang Qichao had harshly criticized the traditional approaches to history. Following his Japanese intellectual model Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), the thinker in mid-Meiji Japan, Liang Qichao proposed his “New Historiography” as part of a nationalist scholarship (Wang 2003). Liang insisted that China needed a new national history to restore the nation to the centre place of its collective past memories. Listing several fallacies in traditional Chinese historiography, Liang suggested that the traditional historiography was an obstacle to “China's

search for wealth and power in modern times”. Liang searched for a new history which would “help the nation-building goal” and respond to “the need of the present” (Wang 2001: 45-47).

Responding to the needs of modern historiography, many historical surveys in late Qing and Republican China prioritized a coherent narrative for national history. For example, Liu Yizheng (1880-1956), a historian associated with the School of Critical Review (*xueheng pai*), published a series of essays under the title of *A History of Chinese Culture* (*Zhongguo wenhuashi*) in 1926. These were based upon his course of the same title at the Southeast University in Nanjing from 1919 to 1921. Liu reworked *A History of Chinese Culture* as a book in 1928. He rearranged historical facts to construct an entire history of Chinese culture. In his mind, a complete narrative revealed an essential consistency of Chinese culture in its various forms. He hoped to correct some contemporary misconceptions of Chinese culture, and to provide a new image of China as a nation (Liu 1932: 1-2). Through a history of culture, he showed how China incorporated different ethnic groups and maintained its political integrity in a vast territory over a long period of time. He was not attentive to a neat chronological order. His division of chapters was topic-driven. By presenting his material in its entirety through simultaneously diachronic and synchronic engagement, Liu Yizheng merged the past and the present of the nation (Hon 2004; Kuo 2007).

Historiographical ideas and historical practices in the early twentieth century represent a growing realization of China as a nation. In the efforts of Chinese scholars at that time, history assumed a new role as a site of national identity construction (Tang 1996: 46-79).

Liang Qichao did not write a history of Chinese art, but he urged scholars to write specialized histories, which he termed *zhuanmenshi*, about law, literature, philosophy, and art. He also analyzed data for historical studies. He classified raw historical data as a special category worthy of distinctive treatment (Liang 1922). Liang’s “raw data” included material objects besides historical texts in the form of court records, chronologies, bibliographies, biographies, and local gazetteers. In his preface to *A Brief History of Chinese Art* (*Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi*, 1926), Teng Gu underlined the influence of Liang Qichao on Teng’s own art historical research. Teng finished *A Brief History of Chinese Art* in 1925 shortly after his stay in Japan. He published it with the Commercial Press in 1926 as part of its *Small Encyclopaedical Series* (*Baike xiaocongshu*). The publication of the series started in 1923, emphasizing the introduction of new knowledge from the West. It was continuously augmented over the next few years. By 1930, the series consisted of three hundred volumes covering a large scale of subjects. *A Brief History of Chinese Art* represented the direction

of this series. Teng's book used limited historical data to conceive a course of change and development in Chinese art from the earliest age to the Qing dynasty. Within fifty small-sized pages, Teng Gu managed to describe the main stream of development in Chinese art. Teng agreed with Liang that the deficiency of research data was the most difficult aspect of Chinese art historical studies. Without actual objects, they could only draw vague assumptions from the texts of surviving artistic treatises (Teng 1926b: 1). The same urgency also drove Chinese scholars to pay increasing attention to archaeological finds.

Lothar von Falkenhausen has analyzed the tense linkage between archaeology and history in China. Modern archaeology in China has been "closely enmeshed in a millennia-old living tradition of national history" since its birth. Text-based knowledge of Chinese history was challenged from the late 1920s onwards by Chinese historians, such as Gu Jiegang (1893-1980) who championed an absolutely ecological method of archaeology. Instead, archaeology with exclusively palaeographic ambitions served to trace a Chinese past to ancient times, and to sustain the integrity of a long Chinese tradition. Lothar van Falkenhausen believes that the first national long-term archaeological research project was deliberately chosen by Chinese scholars in order to further these goals. Excavations at Yinxu, a Bronze Age site in Henan, took place between 1928 and 1937, directed for the first time exclusively by foreign-trained Chinese scholars. Yinxu was alleged to be the last capital of the Shang period in Chinese history. The area possessed a special historical aura, since its oracle bones had been studied by the multi-talented Wang Guowei (1877-1927) to prove the correctness of textual records of Shang royal descent lines. Chinese archaeologists applied archaeological methods at Yinxu primarily in order to substantiate historical accounts. In their view, the Shang period, which they addressed as one of the earliest Chinese dynasties, was no longer mythical. With the support of archaeology, writings of the past could trace the origin of a Chinese nation to ancient times, even to the period when no original textual records were available. An uninterrupted continuity was easily achieved through these historical surveys. Disregarding divergent traditions, such as those of different ethnic groups, new historical works of this period aimed to reconstruct one distinctive tradition for a Chinese national identity (Falkenhausen 1993).

Consonant with the situation of historical studies in early twentieth-century China, the field of art history turned to archaeology for evidence of an equally coherent national history of art. Growing research on art history during ancient times in China depended increasingly on archaeological discoveries in the 1920s and '30s, as the written documents seemed to be vague and unreliable. Zhu Jieqin, in his book *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (1936), employed excavated objects from Han tombs in his discussion about painting in the Han period. He illustrated his point with three Han tombs excavated between

1925 and 1931, located respectively in Luoyang (1925), the capital of the Han during its late period; at Nangnang (1925), near present-day P'yŏngyang, by Japanese scholars from Tokyo Imperial University; and at Shawangtun (1931), a small town between Dalian and Lüshun in Northeast China (Zhu 1936:125-29). Zhu's choice of locations covering a large geographical area indicates his awareness of archaeological achievements in and outside China. He also attempted to create a material basis for a large territory of China in the distant historical past. During the same period, Wang Junchu (1904-1986), the art historian commonly known as Hu Man, wrote in the preface to *The Development of Chinese Art* (*Zhongguo meishu de yanbian*, 1934) that, in order to reveal the true face of art history in China, scholars should combine archaeological findings effectively with historical records and artistic treatises (Wang 1934:2).

### The use of art

In pre-modern China, scholars had long been concerned about the moral function of calligraphy and painting. One of the most important writers on art in the late Tang dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan, opened his *Records of the Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties* (847 CE): "Now, painting is a thing which perfects civilized teachings and helps social relationships" (Bush and Shih 1985:49). Later, when the literati dominated art in the Ming and Qing dynasties, calligraphy and painting were prime vehicles for self-expression and social intercourse. From the 1860s, the Chinese elite gradually categorized other roles for art. In 1920, Hu Peiheng (1892-1965), a landscape painter, wrote an essay entitled "The power of Art (Meishu zhi shili)", in which he listed the strength of art in four aspects: culture, morality, education, and industry (Hu 1920).

Comparison with Japan at this point is instructive. In Meiji Japan, the role of art changed from a utilitarian form to an expression of cultural heritage (Tanaka 1994: 27). Likewise, in late Qing and Republican China, art was a crucial part of the political, economic, and social agenda of Chinese leaders.

Those Japanese artists in the Meiji period receptive to Western influence believed that "Japanese and Chinese pictures served no better function than that of a hobby to be performed at drinking parties, whereas Western pictures, as models of reality, could be put in the service of the nation" (Guth 2006: 183). Western art, to be more specific, Western drawing, first caught the attention of the Chinese elite for its technical applications. During China's first attempt at modernization, the Self-Strengthening Movement, or the Foreign Affairs Movement (*yangwu yundong*, 1860s-1890s), Chinese thinkers advocated the idea of "Westernized utility with Chinese traditional substance (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei*

yong)”<sup>6</sup>. The Qing government established new schools and institutions predominantly for military and industrial purposes. Western artistic techniques, because of their potential for practical application, entered the curricula of these government-operated schools. Courses for mapping and designing named *huitu* and *huafa* appeared in various school regulations. A department of design also emerged at the Fujian Navy Yard School, following a formal suggestion in 1866 by Zuo Zongtang (1812-1885), the influential statesman in the Self-Strengthening Movement. In the operation of this school, the department of design, organised with more than fifty students, promoted industrial drawing, descriptive geometry, and the principles of perspective (Leibo 1985:114-15).

The inclusion of drawing at the Fujian Naval Yard School is particularly interesting when considered in the context of a discussion among government officials in 1880 and 1881. In his memorial to the throne, Li Shibin (1835-1913), an inspector sent by the central government to Fujian, talked about the lax discipline of this school. He claimed that it was a waste of time for students to study painting. In response to this condemnation, some other officials explained:

“Drawing is one important skill in a branch of Western technology. It is the beginning and foundation needed for accuracy prior to actual production. The school has a department of design which manages the study. The course is totally appropriate for the students.” (Gao 1992:302-03)

Chinese officials in the late nineteenth century identified the importance of art in its utilitarian value.

This sort of drawing course continued to appear in the curricula of technical and specialized schools, such as the Jiangnan Naval Academy in 1890 and the Tianjin Telegraph School in 1895. Cartography, anatomical drawing, and mechanical drawing would help China to build its own machines, ships, trains, and weapons, and ultimately contribute to Chinese industrial and military modernization. Within these terms, the point of drawing was its “practical skills with immediate vocational value for the youths of the nation”. For the Qing government, artistic skills were “instrumental in turning China from a weak and backward empire into a strong and wealthy nation” (Kao 1998:150-51).

In the 1900s, Chinese thinkers still associated the power of Western art with the West’s technical and industrial utility. In 1905, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), the Confucian scholar and leader of the modernization movement in late Qing, proposed that painting and drawing be the basis for all learning in his *On Material Strength to Save a*

<sup>6</sup> Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), the leading political and industrial figure in the Foreign Affairs Movement proposed this idea, which was very similar to the dictum of Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864), the samurai philosopher, “Eastern ethics, Western science (*tōyō dōtoku seiyō geijutsu*)”.

*Nation (Wuzhi jiuguo lun)* (Kang 1981 [1905]).

In a further development, from the 1910s onwards, Chinese scholars realized the aesthetic and spiritual connotations of art in society. The most important figure discussing these ideas was Cai Yuanpei, who served as the first minister of education in the Republican government. Kao Mayching has argued that Cai Yuanpei contributed the most to liberate art “from the tenacious hold of utilitarianism to acquire new significance” (Kao 1998: 153). With Cai’s promotion of aesthetic education (*meiyu*), art practice was no longer merely a tool but also the spiritual cultivation of an individual and a nation. According to Cai, aesthetic education with its characteristics of freedom and advancement could mould the sublime and virtuous sensibilities and tastes of individuals. He believed that such education would minimize avarice and other immoral feelings and cultivate the spirit to harmonize society (Teng and Fairbank 1979: 274-79). In practice, Cai Yuanpei supported the establishment of fine art academies and departments between the 1910s and ’30s. One of these academies was the Shanghai Art Academy. Liu Haisu, one of the organizers for the school, indicated clearly that:

“...we want to fulfill our responsibility of promoting art in a society that is callous, apathetic, desiccated, and decaying. We shall work for the rejuvenation of Chinese art, because we believe art can save present-day Chinese society from confusion and arouse the general public from their dreams...” (Kao 1998: 158)

Endorsing Cai Yuanpei’s proposals for art education, Lu Xun accepted an official post in the Ministry of Education in 1912. He was put in charge of the development of museums, libraries, galleries, exhibitions, literature, and drama. He also took responsibility for the preservation of ancient sites and monuments. Lu Xun claimed that literature and art were more important than modern science and technology for the modernization of a nation (Wang 1979: 258; Andrews and Shen 1998a: 231).

To most people in early twentieth-century China, “nation” was a vague abstract notion. Art then became one of the concrete carriers of the concept of nation. From the end of the 1920s to the 1930s, art’s nationality was a point that some Chinese scholars tried to advocate. A group of nationalistic thinkers close to the Republican government established the idea “literature and art for the nation” against the claim “literature and art for the mass” promoted by leftist figures, such as Lu Xun. Ye Qiuyuan, who studied in America for a master degree in sociology, was one of these nationalistic scholars. In 1929, he published a collection of his essays in a book entitled *Nationality and Internationality of Art* (*Yishu zhi minzu xing yu guoji xing*), which reiterated the most important title in the collection. In this essay, Ye realized that the appreciation of art was not limited to different nationalities, and that modern art was an international phenomenon. However, he was

even more convinced that nationality was clearly expressed in the modern art of different European nations. He attributed Cubism and Purism to France, Expressionism to Germany, Futurism to Italy, Primitivism to Russia. He quoted from a certain Professor Brinton<sup>7</sup> in English that: “Expressionism as Germanic Modernism is termed presents marked national characteristics.” In his view, modern art in Germany had its own features which differentiated it from modern art in France (Ye 1929: 17-21). Throughout the text, European art and literature dominated Ye’s argument. His final conclusion was that these experiences of European countries indicated the future of Chinese national art. He learned from these examples that a national spirit was the foundation of a nation’s predominantly international status. He hoped that his explanation of European conditions would persuade readers that what was needed in China at that moment was a nation-state with a national art (Ye 1929: 24). The idea of the nation-state became his sole standard to categorize modern art. Ye’s opinions of European modern art were simplistic, but they represented his fervour for a Chinese nation in China’s art.

Almost all the Chinese art historical texts produced in the early decades of the twentieth century pointed out the importance of art in a national culture. Zhu Jieqin in the preface to *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (1936) began with a Western idea on art with which he absolutely agreed. He thought that Westerners believed in art as an expression of national cultural heritage. In his opinion, an artist proceeded from his national characters to create artworks which reflected his national thought. Zhu repeated in the introduction that research on art was essential for the exploration of a national culture (Zhu 1936: 1-3). Guo Xuzhong in the preface to *A History of Chinese Painting* (1937) also claimed that painting was the cultural heritage of Chinese national spirit. He believed that Chinese art would change foreigners’ scornful opinion of China. Guo stated that exhibitions of Chinese art in Western countries successfully showed foreigners the greatness of Chinese art equivalent to Western art.

Chinese intellectuals who determined to conduct political and social reforms, employed art in their projects to strengthen the Chinese nation. Another group of Chinese scholars, the so-called “conservatives”, also invoked art in their pursuit of a distinctly Chinese nation. One of the key arguments they presented was that Chinese art was superior to Western art.

Here too a Japanese parallel is instructive. From the late Meiji period on, some Japanese scholars held the position that Japanese art was more advanced than Western art.

<sup>7</sup> Professor Brinton probably is Christian Brinton (1870-1942), the American art critic, curator, and collector, who promoted “an interpretation of modern art organized around the concept of ‘the nation’” (Walker 2001: 36).

This idea was initiated by Ernest Fenollosa. In 1882, Fenollosa asserted that “Japanese art is really far superior to modern cheap Western art that describes any object at hand mechanically, forgetting the most important point, expression of Idea” (Tanaka 1994: 30). Okakura concurred. After listening to a Beethoven symphony at a concert, Okakura commented that “only in that music is the West superior to the East” (Hashikawa 1979-1981: 483). It seemed to him that in other forms of art, the West was not superior to the East at all. From the 1880s, Okakura and Fenollosa worked together to promote the appreciation of ancient Japanese art.

Moreover, after World War One, Western intellectuals had developed a sense of pessimism about Western civilization, a change which did not go unnoticed by Chinese scholars. Liang Qichao, after his trip to Europe in 1919, was more conscious of his Chinese identity, and he now became interested in the values of Chinese culture which could contribute to the world. In a sharp contrast to his earlier harsh criticism of traditional Chinese historiography, Liang now praised aspects of Chinese historiography, and attempted to “bring up the traditional methods to the level of modern historiography” (Wang 2001: 103-05).

Probably inspired by these ideologies, Chinese scholars, especially those with experiences in Japan, proposed the superiority of Chinese art. One way to do this was to show the tendency of contemporary Western art to adopt some of the representational virtues of Chinese art. In 1921, Chen Shizeng claimed that Western avant-garde, like futurism and cubism, no longer pursued formal resemblance. In his mind, Chinese literati painting possessed the same inclination as the lately-developed Western painting schools. Fidelity to the shape and form of a real object, according to Chen Shizeng, was the initial stage of painting. Moving forward in history, verisimilitude was no longer necessary (Chen 1921). Chen’s analogy between spirit resonance in literati painting and abstraction in Western painting remained the major justification of traditional Chinese painting. Lu Xun in 1934 stated that it was reasonable to say Chinese painting and Impressionism had something in common (Lu 1934). Pan Tianshou also suggested that recently Western painting had become closer to Eastern taste by emphasizing the beauty of line and colour (Pan 1936: 294).

What makes this phenomenon more interesting is that Western-style painters who previously had indulged their enthusiasm for Western painting now consented to the superiority of Chinese art. In 1923, Liu Haisu published an article entitled “Shitao and Postimpressionism (Shitao yu houqi yinxiang pai)” in *The School Lamp* (*Xuedeng*), a supplement to the Shanghai newspaper *The China Times* (*Shishi xinbao*). From its first issue on 4th March, 1918, *The School Lamp* introduced new cultural and educational ideas to its

Chinese readers. Liu's essay was probably well received, for it was reprinted in the 1936 special issue of *National Painting (Guohua)*, which was devoted exclusively to the early Qing painter Shitao (1642-1707). Liu Haisu's article directly compared Shitao with Post-impressionists. He stated that:

“The so-called new ideas and new art nowadays in Western Europe had been suggested by Shitao as early as three hundred years ago in our country. It is such a pity that people in our country treated this amazing kind of art with such indifference. Instead, they blindly follow –isms and ideas of European artists, showing extreme admiration. What a shame!” (Liu 1936:6)

Since 1923, Liu had gained more faith in traditional painting than before. His school, the Shanghai Drawing and Painting School (later the Shanghai Art Academy), established a new department of Chinese traditional painting in the same year. Fu Lei (1908-1966), the translator of Western literature and an important art critic, remarked on this change that Liu's “national spirit (*guohun*)” and personality began to be roused (Fu 1932). Later, other Western-style painters, such as Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, took up traditional brush and ink to paint. Collectively, there were acts of retrospective affirmation of the Chinese tradition.

Even in the minds of scholars calling intensely for a revolution in Chinese painting, traditional painting was loaded as a precocious achievement incomparable once in Chinese and world history. In 1917, Kang Youwei claimed that late Chinese painting had declined terribly. However, he admitted that four or five hundred years ago Chinese painting was the best in the world. He also pointed out that contemporary European painting used the same principles as those developed in China during the sixth to the eleventh centuries (Kang 1917).

The most comprehensive explanation of China's superiority in art was given by Feng Zikai, who had been to Japan for ten months in 1921, to learn foreign languages, Western-style painting, and music. In 1930, in the special art issue of the *Eastern Miscellany*, Feng used a pen name Ying Xing to publish an essay “The Victory of Chinese Art in Modern Art (*Zhongguo meishu zai xiandai yishu shang de shengli*)” (Feng 1930b). After making some minor changes, Feng renamed this article “The Superiority of Chinese Art (*Zhongguo meishu de yousheng*)” for inclusion in his 1934 book *Painting and Literature (Huihua yu wenxue)*. He explained the advantages of Chinese art in two parts: “Modern Western Painting's Easternization (*Jindai xiyanghua de dongyanghua hua*)” and “Empathy and Spirit Resonance (*Ganqing yiru yu qiyun shengdong*)”. He deduced the Chinese influence on Western modern painting from the Japanese influence on Impressionism and Post-impressionism. He claimed that Japanese experts admitted that Japanese painting came

out of Chinese painting. Looking at technique, Feng Zikai analyzed the similarities between impressionistic—and post-impressionistic—painting and Chinese painting. In the composition of pictorial surface, the use of colour, and the application of line, he discovered “simplification (*dancun hua*)” and “grotesque (*jixing hua*)” exemplified respectively in Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Vincent van Gogh’s (1853-1890) artworks. He thought that these new developments in Europe were the exact characteristics of Chinese traditional painting. In genre, Feng suggested that landscape painting with a fifty-year history in the West became an independent category of painting in China one thousand and three hundred years ago. In the field of theory, he demonstrated the linkage between the German philosopher Theodor Lipps’ (1851-1914) empathy theory, the Russian artist and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky’s (1866-1944) painting theory, and the Chinese ancient idea of spirit resonance. Feng Zikai used the Japanese interpretation of this connection by Kinbara Seigo, Ise Senichirō, and the professor of Doshisha University and aesthetician Raizō Sono (b. 1891). He stated that spirit resonance and empathy theory shared the idea that the beauty of a painting relied on the spirit which the creator of the painting projected in it. In the process of creation, Feng described, the spirit would stem from the inner emotions of the creator and flow out naturally and freely. This could not be limited by verisimilitude. In his view, Kandinsky also emphasized the absolute pure spirit, a rejection of the realistic style which would obstruct the outpouring of emotion. Feng Zikai believed that spirit resonance was the universal criterion for art everywhere in all ages (Feng 1934).

In another essay “The Songs of Labourers IV” (Laozhe zige si, 1934), Feng Zikai reiterated: “It can be said that the transition of Western painting from the Renaissance to the present day has been moving step by step closer to Chinese painting.” (Feng 1992:219)

Through their albeit crude comparison between Chinese and Western art, Chinese scholars in the early twentieth century reduced genres, styles, and characteristics of Chinese art to the single feature of free spirit which they defined as a “Chinese essence”. They located this feature within a history of art in both China and the West in order to declare China’s parity with the West, or even its superiority.

### Writing Chinese art history: a competition

Between 1910 and 1930, Chinese scholars felt that they had a responsibility to conduct equivalent or even better research to compete with foreign scholars in the control of knowledge concerning Chinese art.

Pan Tianshou attempted to push his fellow scholars towards research in Chinese art. He wrote:

“While it is important to study art outside China, it is urgent to discover the origin and development of the art of our own nation. ... Chinese people have forgotten what they own until other countries flash their [other countries’] treasures in front of our eyes [Chinese people’s eyes], and only then do they [Chinese people] think of their own share, but then it’s too late! Is that not so?” (Pan 1926b: 1-2)<sup>8</sup>

The impetus to Liang Sicheng’s investigation of Chinese ancient architecture was a research competition with Japan. While studying in America during the early 1920s, he noticed that Japanese scholarship on architecture had started to pay attention to China. He thought that if he and his colleagues did not study the history of Chinese architecture, Japan would sooner or later occupy the entire field (Lin 1991: 29). Liang believed that a modern Chinese nation needed a history of China’s architectural past written by indigenous observers and critics.

In the preface to his book *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies* (1929), Zheng Wuchang stated his motive:

“When [Bertrand] Russell [1872-1970] and [Rabindranath] Tagore [1861-1941] visited China, they asked about Chinese art history and no one could answer. Recently Japanese and foreign scholars have enthusiastically studied Chinese painting, and published their scholarship in books and periodicals, which is more than Chinese scholars have done. Fujioka Sakutarō’s [(1870-1910)] *History of Early Modern Painting* [*Kinsei kaiga shi*] and Ōmura Seigai’s *Research on Literati Painting* are both well-organized and documented. Nakamura Fusetsu and Kojika Seiun’s *A History of Chinese Painting* was published in 1913. Even if we don’t discuss the contents, it is enough to see the Japanese lead [on us], so shame on us!” (Zheng 1929: 2)

Zheng accepted the achievements of Japanese scholarship on Chinese art. He respected its value as models of modern historiography for Chinese art. Unavoidably, he suffered embarrassment at the fact that Chinese scholarship on its own art fell behind Japan. Thus, he urged his Chinese companions to produce decent historical writings for Chinese art.

Fu Baoshi also sensed a threat from Japan, since Japanese research on art history exposed the lack of art historical knowledge in China. In *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* (*Zhongguo huihua bianqian shigang*, 1931), Fu illustrated the whole situation with the metaphor of a neighbour who knew exactly the amount of money the householder hid under his pillow. He wrote emotionally that it was a suicidal shame that Chinese scholars had to ask their neighbour—Japan—about their own art history. In Fu’s view, the fact that Japanese scholars during the 1910s knew art history

<sup>8</sup> Cited from Aida Wong (Wong 2006: 42) with minor alternations.

in China better than Chinese researchers should stimulate Chinese scholars to make greater efforts in art historical studies in order to exceed Japanese achievements (Fu 1931b: 2-3). He voiced what had become a psychological urgency to know and to study the history of Chinese art.

Fu Baoshi's practice in Chinese art history indicated his assertion of Chinese authority against Japanese scholarship on Chinese art. As Aida Wong has stated, Fu first challenged his teacher Kinbara Seigo, and then he criticised Ise Senichirō's work (Wong 2006: 51-52). Focusing on the interpretation of Gu Kaizhi's (ca. 345- ca. 406) artistic ideas, Fu Baoshi aimed to reassert Chinese authority. He turned to Gu Kaizhi, a painter of the Six Dynasties period, whose reputation soared in Tang times. One of the earliest Chinese texts on art available today "A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain (Hua Yuntaishan ji)" has been attributed to Gu from the same period. In 1933, Fu carefully studied this treatise along with existing Japanese research on Gu Kaizhi. He was deferential enough to negotiate his new reading of Gu with his teacher Kinbara, since some of his points were against Kinbara's position stated in *Research on Chinese Ancient Painting Theories* (*Shina jōdai garon kenkyū*, 1924). Taking on Ise Senichirō's writing, Fu became more aggressive. He accused Ise of seriously misreading Gu's text and of a careless use of evidence. Fu tried to publish his critique in a Japanese art journal entitled *The Country of Beauty* (*Bi no kuni*), but the journal rejected it. However, he published a Chinese version in an issue of the *Eastern Miscellany* on 10th October, 1935 (Fu 1935b). There will be more discussion of Fu Baoshi's work on Gu Kaizhi in Chapter Three.

During the 1930s, as China was threatened by Japan militarily, Chinese scholars felt embattled with Japanese researchers in academic areas which they considered to be China's own cultural territory. Chinese writers of art historical texts turned their extensive borrowing of Japanese sources into serious challenges against these sources. For their Chinese readers and themselves, their works were a tool of resistance against Japanese invasion.

### 1.3 Shi Yan and *Eastern Art History*

Shi Yan was born in 1904 in Yixing, Jiangsu. In 1924, he graduated from the art department of the Northeast Normal College in Shanghai (later Shanghai University). His interests in art techniques and theories led him to publish *Chromatology* (*Secai xue*) in 1932 with Zhonghua Books, *Modern Household Ornament* (*Xiandai jiating zhuangshi*) in 1933 with Dadong shuju<sup>9</sup>, and *The Theory and Practice of Painting* (*Huihua de lilun yu shiji*) in 1935

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<sup>9</sup> Dadong shuju was a Shanghai publishing house established in 1916. It ranked No. 4 after the Commercial Press, Zhonghua Books, and World Books in the publication of textbooks in Republican China.

with the Commercial Press. He also collected some illustrations to publish a book entitled *The Practice of Artistic Woodblock* (*Yishu banhua zuofa*) with Zhonghua Books in 1936. Then Shi Yan focused on the study of Chinese art history. The 1936 book *Eastern Art History* published by the Commercial Press was his first treatise on art history.

In 1940, he worked at the Institute of Chinese Culture (Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo) in the Private University of Nanking<sup>10</sup>. The Institute of Chinese Culture was established in 1930 by the first Chinese principal of the university Chen Yuguang (1893-1989), a chemist and educator, who used a donation from the American industrialist Charles Hall (1863-1914) secured through the Harvard-Yenching Institute. Shi Yan devoted his energy to research on Chinese sculpture, specifically ancient grottoes. Reflecting other interests, however, he wrote *A History of Woodblock* (*Muke shi*) in 1943. Shi became a researcher at the National Research School of Dunhuang Art (Guoli Dunhuang yishu yanjiusuo) after its foundation in February 1944. He stayed at Dunhuang for one year. His main task was to number the grottoes of Dunhuang and to record all the Chinese inscriptions in the mural paintings inside the caves (Chang 1947). Later he published an essay entitled “Chinese inscriptions in the Caves of Dunhuang (Dunhuang shishi huaxiang tishi)” (1947). From 1945 he taught at the National Art Academy. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Shi Yan worked at the Zhengjiang Art Academy (now the China Art Academy) as a professor of the history of Chinese sculpture. He investigated several grottoes and relics in China and wrote articles about them. His works after 1949 were devoted primarily to sculpture.

### *Eastern Art History*

Shi Yan planned to write two volumes under the title *Eastern Art History*. However, he only finished the first volume which dealt with the art of China, India, and Japan from about 2700 BCE to the tenth century. Shi mentioned that he would add a bibliography and index to the second volume (Shi 1936b: 2). Since the second volume never appeared, the exact information that he meant to provide for his readers remains unknown.

Shi Yan organized his first volume into two sections, which he termed “Remote Antiquity (*taigu*)” and “Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu*)”. Considering the popular triadic structure of historical writing in Japan and China during the early twentieth century, Shi might have selected “Recent Antiquity (*jingu*)” as his third section. If so, his second volume would likely have continued from the Song dynasty, however, it is still unknown when his third period would have started. This division was wholly grounded on the development of

<sup>10</sup> The predecessor of the Private University of Nanking was the Nanking University established by the American Methodist Church in 1888. From 1928, it registered with the Republican government and the Chinese side took the control of the university.

art in China regardless of the history of Indian and Japanese art. Shi's division differs from the usual way of dividing the history of Indian art. The Gupta period (320-600 CE) and before is generally recognised as the ancient period in the history of Indian art, according to Ananda Coomaraswamy's *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (Coomaraswamy 1965). However, Shi Yan separated "Remote Antiquity" from "Middle Antiquity" at the end of the Maurya kingdom (320-185 BCE). In the case of Japanese art, he considered that it only emerged during his "Middle Antiquity" period with its absorption of Chinese culture. Thus, he provided no accounts of Japanese art in "Remote Antiquity". Also, in his "Middle Antiquity" era, Shi Yan admitted that the periodical divisions for the histories of various forms of Japanese art should be different. Nonetheless, he argued that his book was a history of Asian art rather than a history of Japanese painting or sculpture. Thus, he assigned periods to Asian art according to a Chinese chronology which he believed to be the primary axis of Asian art (Shi 1936d: 385).

Shi Yan divided his two large temporal sections firstly into short periods and then again into chapters on separated regions. In the discussion of "Remote Antiquity", he started from a notional origin of Chinese art and continued up to the period of the legendary "Three Dynasties (*sandai*)". Within the history of China he addressed this early period as the glorious era (*canlan qi*) of Chinese ancient art. He moved on to describe the beginning and florescence of Buddhist art in Central India in two chapters. Then he returned to the geographical area of China with a chapter on art in the Qin dynasty. He regarded the Qin period as the transition from the old culture to a phase of new art creation. In his "Middle Antiquity" epoch, Shi Yan showed the connection between regions. He proposed influences on Chinese art emanating from the Western Regions (*xiyu*, now Central Asia) and the impact on Japanese art from China.

Within each chapter, Shi Yan first wrote the general historical information of a region, which he called the "main disposition (*dashi*)", before moving on to describe various forms of art in that region. He followed a fixed order for different media of art: painting, calligraphy, sculpture, architecture, and applied arts. He made minor changes to this sequence in some chapters. For example, due to his belief that the Great Wall was the greatest achievement of Chinese architecture, Shi positioned architecture at the start of his narrative for what he considered Qin art.

Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* covered a large geographical area in Asia. The triadic concept which he utilized was a geo-cultural division of China, India, and Japan. In choosing to organize his book around these three areas, Shi treated the art of other Asian countries, such as Korea, Java, and Sri Lanka, as sub-components within the main scheme (Shi 1936b: 1). For instance, he mentioned the input of Chinese Buddhist art—Buddhist

sculpture in particular—into the territory now called Korea<sup>11</sup> in the late fourth century, during a discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture of that period (Shi 1936d: 204). He considered only the Korean role in the Chinese influence on Japanese art, and dispensed with the need for an individual chapter devoted to Korean art. When he did examine a few ancient art items in Korea, he did so in such a way that they served only as the intermediate between China and Japan. Such discussions were included in his chapters on Japanese art. Moreover, he considered Chinese art to be the core of Asian art history. In Shi's opinion, Japanese art developed only under the influence of China. Although "India was once the centre of Asian thought" around the sixth century BCE, Shi claimed that the prosperity of India art lasted for such a short period of time that it could not compare with what he considered the uninterrupted vibrancy and success of Chinese art (Shi 1936d: 3-4).

In order to connect art in different Asian countries, Shi Yan emphasized the spread of Buddhist art to different locations. He claimed that Chinese art had occupied the key position enabling it to absorb Buddhist art from India, and to diffuse the Chinese version of Buddhist art to other parts of Asia (Shi 1936c: 3). In particular, he stressed a route of Buddhist expansion in art from China indirectly to Japan via Korea or from China simultaneously to Japan and Korea. Shi positioned Chinese art as the most important controller of any dynamics in Asian art.

Following the conventions of most art historical texts that he knew, Shi Yan limited the range of artistic forms discussed in *Eastern Art History* to spatial forms of art, namely painting, architecture, sculpture, applied arts, and calligraphy. Calligraphy was included in Shi's narrative because he realized its essential position in China and its influence on Japan (Shi 1936d: 4). Despite calligraphy not being an artistic form in India, he nevertheless claimed the importance of calligraphy in all Asian art.

Shi Yan's book was amply illustrated, with the number of images exceeding that of most other histories of art. This was quite unusual among Chinese art historical publications in the 1920s and '30s. It featured two coloured pictures and six black-and-white pictures before the main texts. It also contained 180 small illustrations within the text. Shi Yan emphasized the crucial role of these images, and insisted on including a large number of pictures in the publication in spite of the extra costs and technical difficulties this entailed. At the end of his preface to the book, he thanked Cai Yuanpei and the translator and manager of the Commercial Press Wang Yunwu (1888-1979) for their support in printing these illustrations. He also expressed gratitude to Zong Lianghuan, an editor at the Commercial Press, for his help in making plates for the illustrations. Shi Yan tried to

<sup>11</sup> Hereafter I apply the term "Korea" to the geographical area of the Korean Peninsula and part of Manchuria bordering Korea, instead of different kingdoms in the history of Korea.

provide as many images as possible, and in particular photographs of both Chinese and non-Chinese artworks from abroad, which ordinarily could not be easily accessed by Chinese readers. The book contained many illustrations of art pieces in Japanese collections, such as Hōryūji and Shōsōin in Nara and the Imperial Collection in Tokyo, from which Aida Wong has concluded that the majority of Shi Yan's sources were from Japan (Wong 1999:43). Shi Yan believed strongly in the importance of giving visual impressions of artworks to his readers.

In 1937, two years after the first publication of Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History*, an active critic of Chinese traditional art, Yao Yuxiang published a review. Yao admitted that a book on a history of Asian art was urgently needed in China. However, Yao was not satisfied with Shi's use of materials, sourced mainly from a Japanese text *Knowledge of Oriental Art* (*Tōyō bijutsu no chishiki*, 1930) by Nakamura Ryōhei (1887-1947), an art educator who had published texts on Japanese art and world art. Yao pointed out three major problems in Shi's book: the lack of pre-historical knowledge, the crudity of historical materials, and the unclear statement of sources. He urged the author to consult more Japanese and English references on art in Japan and India (Yao 1937). Yao's comments were based upon conventions of textual research especially favoured by Chinese scholars in the Qing dynasty. He made no mention of the philosophical ideas employed in Shi Yan's text.

### The position of Chinese art in Asia and in the world

Shi Yan's usage of *dongyang* is a typical example of the imitation of *tōyō*. His notion of *dongyang* even shared the same strong nationalistic connotations as *tōyō*. While *tōyō* in the Meiji period evoked a pride in Japanese national heritage (Wong 1999:1), *dongyang*, in the context of Shi Yan's usage, highlighted cultural and moral values of China as the centre of Asian thought.

Shi Yan claimed powerfully in his preface to *Eastern Art History*:

“With the influx of Western culture into our country in modern times, people's lives have gone through an unprecedented and huge revolution. As a result, Western art has become very popular. This opened a new situation that has led to a unbalanced imitation of Western styles and a tendency to abandon or even forget our own roots in Eastern culture itself...for those of us who live in the East, it is necessary from now on to understand first the trends of art in the East. It is also necessary to ascertain the path for the advancement of Eastern art from the standpoint of our Eastern nations.” (Shi 1936c: 2)<sup>12</sup>

Shi had an ideal plan for Chinese art in his dual world of the East versus the West. He was

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<sup>12</sup> Cite from (Wong 1999: 42) with minor alternations.

dissatisfied with the overwhelming Western influence on China and attempted to avoid the direct contrast between China and the West. Instead, he placed China back into the cultural territory of the East. He believed that a full understanding of the Eastern roots of Chinese art would confirm its future development.

Shi Yan continued at the beginning of his first chapter: “Generally speaking, it is China that constitutes the basic tone of Eastern art history. From the fifth century, Chinese people have controlled the dynamics of Asian art” (Shi 1936d: 3)<sup>13</sup>. In his view, the geographical and cultural scope of Asia was a perfect background to demonstrate the vigour of art in China. Shi admitted that Western art was dominant and influential to date. However, he hoisted in the great influence of Chinese art on other Asian countries. According to him, this unique cultural attribute of art in China solidified the viability of China’s traditional art in confrontation with Western art. Through his discussion of Asian art, Shi Yan established a Sino-centric network in Asia for his support of Chinese art and its cultural values.

In his narrative, Shi Yan devoted the first chapter of “Middle Antiquity” to the influence of Buddhist art from India and Central Asia on Chinese art during the Han dynasty. He continued to do so for the period from the Jin to Sui dynasties which he called “the florescence of Chinese Buddhist art (*Zhongguo fojiao meishu quansheng qi*)”. He noticed the effectiveness of Buddhist art in eliciting new inspirations. He cited a number of artworks from the Yungang Grottoes as examples. He suggested that the style and pattern of the wall reliefs in the Yungang caves were most likely imitations from the Ajanta Caves in India (Shi 1936d: 215). Still, he emphasized that Chinese art had established a native tradition from the Han dynasty onwards. For example, Shi talked of a type of Han stele named “Gaoyi Stele (*gaoyi bei*)” in Sichuan, which he regarded to be a pattern initiated in the Han period and prevailing from the Tang dynasty onwards (Shi 1936d: 99).

Shi Yan maintained that this Han tradition in different artistic genres remained unshakably the core of art in China. In his mind, foreign elements were sinicized and became coherent with the tradition. They helped its development rather than overthrew its central position (Shi 1936d: 69-70). Shi Yan underlined the indigenous features by entitling his chapters on Tang art and Five Dynasties art respectively “The Golden Age of Chinese National Art (*Zhongguo minzu yishu zhi huangjin shidai*)” and “The Silver Age of Chinese National Art (*Zhongguo minzu yishu zhi baiyin shidai*)”. He employed a number of examples from new archaeological findings in the Dunhuang caves. He located the originality of pieces of Buddhist art in China, claiming that they were the creation of Chinese artists rather than copies of Indian art. For instance, Shi Yan described the painting decorated on the skylight of No. 120 grotto of Dunhuang. He asserted that the central

<sup>13</sup> Cite from (Wong 1999: 42) with minor alternations.

drawing on the skylight was in the pure Chinese style of the Six Dynasties (Shi 1936d: 209). In his discussion on Chinese Buddhist sculpture during the fourth century, besides pieces from South and Central Asia and their Chinese copies, Shi pointed out unique methods to produce Buddhist statues in China, which had not appeared in India or elsewhere before. He described two special processes to create what he labelled as “movable statues (*xing xiang*)”. One was to mould copper by hammering it against clay models for certain shapes and patterns (*chuidie xiang*). The other process was quite complicated: artisans would firstly create an earth mould with wooden frames; secondly they would apply a cover of natural lacquer to the mould’s surface; then they would adhere two or three layers of flax fabric to the surface; after removing the mud inside, they would finally produce a light and hollow statue with inner frames to stabilize the whole structure (*jianingqi xiang*). According to Shi Yan, the artworks of the scholar and artist famous for Buddhist sculpture, Dai Kui (ca. 326-ca. 396), exemplified the second method. Shi believed that these two methods were invented in China, rather than learned from India (Shi 1936d: 205).

Shi Yan’s other argument for placing Chinese art above Indian art was purely qualitative: the huge presence of surviving materials from ancient China. According to him, India lacked antiques from ancient times, especially from the period before the Common Era. Wooden architecture in Ancient India had perished. He observed no similar phenomenon in China. Moreover, without a custom of burying the dead with grave goods, he expected that precious art objects were seldom found in Indian tombs. By contrast, a great amount of artistic production recovered in China provided sufficient research data to tell a detailed Chinese art history (Shi 1936d: 42-43).

The artistic exchanges between China and Japan had operated for a long time. Until the nineteenth century, these exchanges had been more or less in one direction from China to Japan. One branch of Japanese art in late Tokugawa and Meiji era in particular—Southern painting (*nanga*), also interchangeable with literati painting (*bunjinga*)—accepted some Chinese artistic prototypes and developed with reference to Chinese art.

Shi Yan pushed this idea of pre-nineteenth-century one-way exchange to the highest degree. His story of Japanese art history was a story of Chinese influence on Japanese art. He went to extremes in reiterating from the beginning to the end of his treatise that Japanese painting, sculpture, architecture, and actually the whole culture of Japan were direct or indirect imports from China (Shi 1936d: 3, 171, 204, 13, 38, 330, 53, 84)<sup>14</sup>. He named respectively the earliest two periods of Japanese art—the only two periods he discussed in the text—“the beginning of Japanese art during the infiltration period of Chinese culture

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<sup>14</sup> The pages listed in my citation here are just some examples. More places resonant with Shi Yan’s main claim are easily found in the text.

(*Zhongguo wenhua guanshu qi zhong Riben meishu zhi shuguang*)” and “the prosperity of Japanese art during the infiltration period of Chinese culture (*Zhongguo wenhua guanshu qi zhong Riben meishu zhi boxing*)”. In these two chapters, Shi constantly paralleled Japanese art objects with Chinese ones.

When he wrote about Chinese art production and artists, Shi Yan reminded his readers of their influence on Japanese art. In discussing the Dunhuang caves, he illustrated a painting *Beauties under the Tree* (*Shuxia meiren tu*, Figure 1.1). He suggested an apparent connection between this painting and Japanese painting in style (Shi 1936d: 330). Meanwhile, Shi Yan provided accounts of Chinese-born artists and artisans who travelled to Japan and stayed there for the rest of their life. Sima Da (or Sima Dazhi, Sima Dadeng; active the sixth century) is one example that Shi stressed. Sima Da had appeared in Chinese literature on Buddhism rather than any previous account of Chinese calligraphy and painting. Shi declared that Sima had played an essential role in transplanting Chinese Buddhist sculpture to Japan. He believed that Sima was the first Chinese expert to do so. In Shi’s view, Sima Da became the originator of Japanese sculpture in Japan after his arrival in 522 CE (Shi 1936d: 213).

Shi compared important Japanese artworks to contemporary Chinese art pieces or to those produced earlier. He usually concluded that these Japanese products imitated Chinese style. For example, he analyzed one piece from *Screen Panels with Ladies under Trees* (*Niaomao linü pingfeng*, Figure 1.2) in the Shōsōin collection. The face and hands of each woman featured in the screen panels were painted with colours. Their hair and dresses were glued with feathers, most of which had been lost. Shi claimed that this category of dress, contrived by a princess in the Tang dynasty, was very popular in the Tang period. He also suggested that the brushes used for the trees and rocks in this painting were similar to those used in works of Tang origin. He recognized too the facial ornaments and the hairstyles as Tang fashion. Shi Yan’s conclusion was that the subject, structure, stroke, and decoration of this painting all followed Tang style. He proposed that it clearly indicated a deep Chinese influence in Japanese art (Shi 1936d: 395-97).

Sometimes Shi Yan repudiated Japanese claims for certain inventions in art. While Japanese scholars assumed Japanese origins for inventing artistic techniques, Shi Yan asserted that these skills were actually used first by Chinese artists and artisans. One argument centred on a printing and dyeing method for cloth and silk textiles called *jiaxie*. Shi announced that it was nonsensical for Japanese researchers to state that the Japanese emergence of a polychromatic form of *jiaxie* predated its occurrence in China. Instead, not only was the monochromatic *jiaxie* method a purely Chinese creation, but so too was the polychromatic one. Shi’s proof comprised some textiles found in Dunhuang (Shi 1936d:

384). Interestingly, most debates between Shi Yan and Japanese experts concerned applied arts rather than painting and calligraphy. Despite unknown creators of these ancient pieces of applied arts, each side invested its conclusions with an edifice of national pride.

Similar to other contemporary Chinese authors of art history, Shi Yan highlighted the remaining Chinese artworks as key moments in the development of art. They were tangible objects, such as the items in the caves of Dunhuang. Art served as concrete evidence, from which Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century planned to construct a sense of Chinese cultural belonging.

In *Eastern Art History*, Shi Yan criticized Japanese scholars for their subjectivity in championing only Japanese art. However, Shi also turned Chinese art into a supreme paradigm, and treated art in other Asian countries as less developed. India and Japan could not compare with China's unique contributions to Eastern art. Needless to say, in Shi's conception, arts in Korea, Vietnam, and Java were nourished by either Chinese art or Buddhist art. Shi argued that art in other Asian countries possessed nothing outstanding in comparison to art in China. Shi envisaged art in China as the centre of Asian art. In his opinion, although it differed significantly from Western art, traditional art in China had its own influential territory in Asia. He expected that this proposition would reinforce China's identity as the mightiest cultural tradition in the world. Given the nationalist context of the 1920s and '30s, it is not surprising that he did so. This was the period when Chinese scholars attempted to arouse the awareness of China as a nation with its own self-sufficient culture.

Shi Yan had intended to deal with an ambitious scope of art in Asia. It was impossible for him to handle the topic completely, but it marked a good beginning for a survey of Asian art written in Chinese. However, because of the acceleration of the conflict between China and Japan, culminating in the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, the concept of *dongyang*, now tainted by Japanese imperialist aims, became unfavourable in China. Given the word *dongyang* in its title, Shi Yan's book failed to draw readers' attention. The infelicitous title could even be the reason why the second volume of this book did not appear. As Aida Wong has noted, nothing comparable to Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* was published in China until the 1970s when China and Japan regained a less hostile relationship (Wong 1999:45).

Stimulated by artistic exchanges not only between Western countries and China, but also within Asia, Chinese scholars during the early decades of the twentieth century realized the importance of promoting Chinese art in the East and in the world. China's position in Asia was crucial for them to buttress Chinese culture in a new and urgent competition with the West. Shi Yan's attitude was representative of this form of nationalist approach. Shi Yan,

through the scope of Asia, found another way in visual art to rescue China from Western influence (and dependence) and to establish a stable nationality by assigning China an essential and unique role in the East.

Following Japanese examples, Chinese researchers at that time presented art in China as a historical narrative of the development of a nation-state. Their art historical writings defined the nature of a Chinese nation via Chinese art. In their discourse, they advanced their agenda of China's nation building by equating the new nation with its ancient artistic traditions. Their strong nationalistic emotions created an oversimplified ideology of art history in China, which largely repressed and obscured alternative historical narratives of art in China.