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Writing Chinese art history in early twentieth-century China

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Chapter 3 Painters as Art Historians: Inherited Tradition in Modern Chinese Art Historical Writing

Discussing the limitations of the lexicon which troubled Western art historians in the 1970s, Michael Baxandall affirmed that “a mature inferential vocabulary in full play can have formidable demonstrative precision and punch”. The example he gave was classical Chinese criticism for brushwork, which he considered as “envious language”. The only comparable example in Europe that he discovered is “Delacroix’s occasional remarks in his journals on the technique of Rubens—remarks addressed by a painter to a painter”. In Baxandall’s opinion, the reason for the activeness of Chinese language on art has been that creators and readers of the lexicon were themselves active practitioners of art so that they shared “the firm background of reference in everyone’s experience” (Baxandall 1979: 462).

Modern Chinese writers not only inherited the lexicon which Baxandall admired, but also maintained the old practice which was responsible for the formation of this vivid language. That important writers of treatises on art were also practising artists dates back to the Tang dynasty when the earliest surviving texts on calligraphy and painting appeared. Two more distinct components of the tradition in the Chinese historiography of calligraphy and painting are: 1) the frequent incorporation of art historical texts as inscriptions in artworks; and 2) the recurrent assimilation of script types into the aesthetic system of painting. Chinese scholars on art established relatively early a link between visual materials and textual documents.

In Western art history, Giorgio Vasari, founder of the Renaissance historiography of art, was also a painter and architect. However, leading Western scholars in the field of art history from the eighteenth century onwards have seldom been successful artists at the same time. In Britain, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) is a notable exception. Quite the opposite was true for a long time in China. Even during the early twentieth century, after the introduction of art history as a discipline based on the European model, either via Japanese adaptation or directly from European sources, no absolute separation between artists and art historians emerged. Most scholars on art in modern China combined at least two of these functions as producer, connoisseur, writer, teacher, collector, and even dealer in art. This chapter investigates painters’ engagement with the history of painting written during the emergence of China’s modern art historiography. It argues that the retreat of Chinese artists and scholars into what they perceived as a classic form of dual practice generated new insights into the history of art in China.

To discuss this idiosyncratic aspect of art historical writing in China, I will focus on the key figure of Fu Baoshi. Fu was a celebrated Chinese ink painter and a prolific

writer on art in the twentieth century. His art historical publications helped to establish a modern Chinese field of art history in late Qing and Republican China. Like the artworks he produced, his writings were influential in subsequent Chinese art circles.

Publication through metropolitan circuits of press distribution is one of the essential characteristics of modern scholarship, and it often provides a crucial gauge to examine Chinese artists' involvement in art historical studies. These publications include both academic periodicals and popular newspapers and magazines. By contrast, a more discreet means is the production of paintings with inscriptions that present opinions on art history. Inscriptions which stress the roots of painting styles, as Craig Clunas has suggested, are miniature art historical essays distinct from a dedication or a poetic accompaniment to the image (Clunas 1997: 208). This involvement by painters on the surface of works of art is of major interest to this chapter. I discuss not only artists' formal publications, but also inscriptions on their paintings and the subtle interaction between inscriptions and images. Admittedly, even when the artist, theorist, and historian are one person, his writing cannot be applied uncritically to his own paintings (Cahill 1982: 36-37). However, the gaps between the visual and the textual reveal painters' various struggles to come to terms with both theories and practices. These expressions provide information other than words to interpret the construction of Chinese art history in the Republican period.

This chapter will first introduce the condensed roles of collector, editor, connoisseur, teacher, artist, and art historian in the early twentieth-century art world of China. It will then explore the relationship between texts and images in writing Chinese art history via a detailed discussion of Fu Baoshi's artistic and art historical experiences. Lastly, in order to shed light on indigenous approaches towards Chinese art history, I will analyze the practice adopted by Fu Baoshi and other modern Chinese scholars.

3.1 Roles of Chinese Scholars in the Emergence of Art History

In the Western art world today, "the established structure of academic scholarship, with its ostensibly disinterested stance, is the supposed guarantor of probity and the honest search for that unattainable but much-to-be-desired truth"(Gaskell 2002: 146). This formation of scholarship emerged in nineteenth-century Europe with the independence of art history as an academic discipline. It provided scholars of art with the status of art historian, which distinguished them from artists, art critics, art dealers, and art collectors. According to Ivan Gaskell, modern European approaches towards art history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely iconological interpretation, cultural analysis, and social explanation, have largely rejected issues that might affect the objectivity of art historical

scholarship, such as concerns with art market application (Gaskell 2002: 147). With the emergence of art history as an independent field in the West, the division between art historians and other participants in the art world became clearer.

Although the situation is changing, the role of the market has been noticeably neglected by Western scholars. In an earlier period, art dealers and art scholars' interests intersected each other, most notably in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Gaskell has convincingly argued that the scholarly practices of art tradesmen enriched the academic field of art history. Four dealers in both Paris and London—Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774), Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1743-1813), John Smith (1781-1855), and Théophile Thoré (1807-1869)—are examples with which Gaskell has argued that the study and exchange of art were interdependent (Gaskell 2002).

In the case of Chinese art too, Hong Zaixin has exemplified the direct relationship between research on painting and the painting market during the early twentieth century. His leading example is Huang Binhong (1865-1955), who established strong relationships with both foreign and domestic art dealers. Prominent among them was Zhang Hong (1891-1968), the Cantonese ink painter, collector, and art dealer. Huang Binhong, in order to conduct his research on Chinese art, benefited from his exchanges with figures like Zhang Hong, and extended his influence through their familiarity with the Japanese and Western markets for ancient Chinese painting (Hong 2001, 2004). In modern China, not only have the study and exchange of art been closely allied with each other, but also the making, writing, collecting, teaching, and publishing of art have been intimately intertwined.

A majority of Chinese artists in the early twentieth century were born into scholarly families with long-standing collections of art and books and the requisite wealth to expand these collections. Especially in the art circles of Beijing, which were led by traditional artists, such as Chen Shizeng and Jin Cheng (1878-1926), participants perpetuated the mode of a literati artist as an amateur instead of a professional painter. They often pursued the traditional ideal to aim for perfection in liberal arts including poetry, calligraphy, and painting. Early twentieth-century professional artists in major Chinese cities, where merchants had become the elite of society, expanded the field of art to poetry, calligraphy, and seal-carving in order to match the taste of the rising new social elite as main patrons (Wan 2005: 83). Artists with a modest family background, such as Gao Jianfu, Yu Jianhua, Pan Tianshou, and Fu Baoshi, usually took teaching positions in schools or worked for publishing houses, and some pursued two careers at once.

Interdependency between the making, writing, and collecting of art

The most important feature of art in China which supports the multiple functions of scholars

is the interdependent exploitation of making and collecting art as well as writing about art.

Undifferentiated from Chinese masters of the past, noted modern ink painters began their artistic practice by copying old artworks. Artists, who inherited family collections of artworks, would start from careful studies of the paintings that they owned. Once they had gained technical assurance, and provided they could rely on dependable introductions, they sought contacts with famous collectors to view rarely unscrolled masterpieces. Later, if their careers flourished, they would probably establish their own collection of art items. Throughout each of these stages, which map only an ideal career path, they imitated masters of the past in order to absorb thoroughly the visual traditions, and, only after this long procedure of copying, did they define their own specific styles.

In a preface to his own exhibition of 1942, Fu Baoshi pointed out that he loved imitating masters at every step in painting. Every year he would do this exercise several times (Fu 1942). In Fu's opinion, copying contributed to his art historical research. He even drew a parallel between this practical engagement and the progress of painting history between two giant figures of the past: the Song painter Fan Kuan (active ca. 1023-1031) and the Yuan painter Wang Meng (ca. 1308-1385). This no doubt tenuous analogy borrowed in its turn from a commonly rehearsed scheme of transmission, already standardized by the Ming scholar Wang Shizhen (1526-1590), who wrote:

“Landscape [painting] transformed in [the painting of] Big and Small Lis [Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao]; Jing [Hao], Guan [Tong], Dong [Yuan], [and] Ju [Ran] made another deviation; Li Cheng [and] Fan Kuan changed again; Liu [Songnian], Li [Tang], Ma [Yuan], [and] Xia [Gui] deviated once more; [then Huang] Dachi [Huang Gongwang][and Wang] Huanghe [Wang Meng] (*Incoherent Words on Art*).” (Teng 1931b)

This scheme was cited yet again by none other than Teng Gu, the subject of the last chapter. Chinese scholars until now have generally accepted Wang Shizhen's idea, even though these concise sentences hint at an excess of information. How different is Fan Kuan from Wang Meng? What exact contributions did Song-Yuan masters Liu Songnian (ca. 1150-after 1225), Li Tang (ca. 1050-after 1130), Ma Yuan (active before 1189- after 1225), and Xia Gui (active early 13th century) make? Imitating paintings allegedly helped Fu to fully understand how these changes occurred in the hands of different masters. According to Fu, when viewing an original painting, an artist could only know the surface of the painting. As soon as he started to draw every stroke, the artist would know every detail of the original painting. Fu Baoshi expanded on this process by reference to the Yuan painter Ni Zan (1301-1374). Ni is one of the “Four Yuan Masters (*Yuan sijia*)”, whose paintings have been copied from the Ming dynasty onwards. Some agree that, in distinction with the work of the

other three artists Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), Wu Zhen (1280-1354), and Wang Meng, Ni Zan's paintings are extremely difficult to imitate. In Fu Baoshi's opinion, a scholar would never know this feature of Ni Zan's painting without attempting to copy.

Even in modern art schools modelled after Japanese or French art academies, students of traditional painting learned to paint through imitating old paintings. Zao Wouki, a student at the National Art Academy in Hangzhou, recalls learning through endless copying of masterpieces in classes of traditional painting. Although he disliked this method, he still enjoyed the atmosphere in the painting studio (Sullivan 1996: 49). This imitative method of studying encouraged Chinese artists to be well acquainted with the historical development of Chinese painting. As Xue Yongnian has summarized, although a large number of Chinese painters did not compose histories of painting, they conducted detailed research on painting history to benefit their art production (Xue 1996: 52). Copying artworks of the past is also a practice for Western artists. However, only in Chinese tradition, has copying been practised extensively by both novice and successful artists.

Before the emergence of museums and public exhibition in China, only a privileged few could view original artworks. Scholar artists, on the other hand, obtained much more visual access. Once privileged with financial advantage, they started to collect art and to establish their own art collections. Huang Binhong is the paradigm of a collector whose painting talent exploded in the last fifteen years of his life (Kuo 2004: 1-2). His activities in art viewing, collecting, and connoisseurship laid a solid foundation for his art historical writing and his later immense creativity in painting.

Huang Binhong was born in Jinhua, Zhejiang. His father, a merchant from Shexian, Anhui, collected old artworks, some of which dated to the late Ming dynasty. One painting was attributed to the Ming artist and scholar Shen Zhou (1427-1509) (Wang 2007: 279-80). Huang Binhong's own interest in Shen Zhou appears in his article "The Biography of the Ming Painter Shen Shitian (Mingdai huajia Shen Shitian xiansheng zhuan)" (1929), and it may have been stimulated by the memory of his father's collection. In his twenties, Huang gained chances to view the private collections of his clansmen in his ancestral hometown (Wang 2007: 284-85). Since a number of late Ming and early Qing painters, such as Hongren (1610-1664), the founder of the Xin'an School (*xin'an huapai*), had lived in the southern part of Anhui, Huang Binhong was very likely to have seen their paintings in these relatives' collections. In his late research, he paid close attention to this group of painters. The nostalgia for his hometown was clear in his studies.

In 1901, Huang Binhong bought a large number of seals once in the collection of a famous collector Wang Qishu (1728-1800) from Shexian (Kuo 2004: 25). This and other acquisitions for his growing seal collection stimulated him to compose his first publication

“On Seal-Engraving (Xu moyin)” which was serialized in *The Journal of National Essence* from 1907 onwards.

Since the dispersal of the Chinese Imperial collection in the late nineteenth century, domestic and foreign art markets had been extremely active in dealing in old artworks. From 1912, Huang Binhong opened an antique shop named Studio of Timeless Harmony (Zhouhe zhai) in the international settlement of Shanghai (Hong 2006: 527). It was a response to changes in the Shanghai art market. Huang Binhong recalled in his 1926 “Report on the Shanghai Antique Market (Hubin guwan shichang ji)” that before 1911 the Shanghai elite were only interested in contemporary painting and knew little about ancient art. Then the dealers from Beijing and Japan came to Shanghai to sell and buy ancient paintings, generating a new enthusiasm (Huang 1929b).

Because of the increasing number of fake items of calligraphy and painting in the market, collectors had to be careful in judging the authenticity of artworks. In order to acquire an ability to discern the fake from the real, Chinese collectors and artists had to be familiar with the history of Chinese calligraphy and painting. Huang Binhong’s 1925 article “A Brief Discussion on Authentication of Ancient Famous Paintings (Jian gu minghua lunlüe)” dealt with both painting history and connoisseurship (Huang 1925b). In Huang’s opinion, first-hand experience with artworks and the opportunity to form discriminating taste through connoisseurship were crucial for art historical scholarship.

Equipped with a profound knowledge of Chinese art history, Huang Binhong gained fame as a successful collector and connoisseur. He was even called by the prosecution to authenticate artworks during a case against Yi Peiji (1880-1937), the former head of the Palace Museum, who was sued for stealing artworks from the Palace Museum. Between December 1935 and April 1937, Huang Binhong authenticated more than 4500 artworks in the storage rooms of the Palace Museum in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing. He wrote a detailed record entitled *Records of Authentications in the Palace Museum (Gugong shenhua lu)* (Huang 2000). Both his art historical research and art production benefited from this close engagement with hundreds of canonized objects.

The painter and scholar Yu Shaosong’s career enjoyed similar advantages. When he was in Beijing during the 1910s and ’20s, Yu grasped the chance to see calligraphy and painting borrowed from the Forbidden City by a friend Chen Baochen (1849-1935) who was then the literary instructor to the last Emperor Puyi (1906-1967) (Mao 2006a: 91). Yu was also interested in purchasing antique calligraphy and painting. Antique shops in Beijing treated him as an important client and sent artworks to his house for him to choose. He had a social network among important art collectors and connoisseurs, such as Ye Gongchuo (1881-1968), with whom he viewed private collections and exchanged ideas on

connoisseurship. These experiences helped him to become familiar with old masterpieces and trained his ability in connoisseurship. In 1928, Yu Shaosong, following an invitation by Tianjin Nankai School, went to Tianjin to give a presentation of his “The Introduction to Methods of Connoisseurship in Painting (Chuxue jianhua fa)”. He believed that the combination of reading books and viewing paintings was the only way to sharpen one’s eyes for connoisseurship (Mao 2006b: 45).

Viewing, studying, and collecting not only prepared Chinese artists for a historical understanding of Chinese art, but also helped them to form their own historical narratives of Chinese art.

Teachers and editors of Chinese art history

Although the practice of writing calligraphy and painting history can be traced to the tenth century in China, its formation as a professional field happened centuries later. Only after the introduction of Japanese and European modern educational systems at the beginning of the twentieth century did art history secure its institutional roots in China. Through the curricula promoted by the Republican government, art history became a compulsory course in art academies and universities.

In 1912, the Ministry of Education enacted a national school system. “Art history” appeared as a course title for the first time in Chinese history, featuring in the normal school syllabus, which lasted for five years. Obligatory subjects named “Aesthetics and Art History”, “Art and Art History”, “Introduction to the Aesthetics and Art History” emerged in the university syllabus for students majoring in liberal arts (Tang and Qu 1991: 651-730). In the early 1910s, a course on art history was unlikely to become a reality, because of the lack of capable teachers and textbooks. Nevertheless, the government’s encouragement stimulated Chinese scholars to work on the history of art. In 1917, Jiang Danshu published his handbook *History of Fine Arts* when he was a teacher at Zhejiang First Normal School in Hangzhou. *History of Fine Arts* was a textbook for the drawing section of teacher-training colleges, which also accommodated the training of art teachers. The handbook consisted of two sections: one concerning Chinese art and the other concerning Western art. Jiang wrote clearly in his editorial statement that:

“This book is edited according to the standard curriculum of normal schools required by the Ministry of Education; [it] is suitable for the teaching of the third and fourth grades in the drawing section” (Jiang 1917: 1).

Although specialized publications on different forms of art—Chinese calligraphy and painting in particular—had long been available, this publication was the first synthetic art

historical text about various forms of artistic expression.

Following Japanese examples, Chinese art schools from the end of the 1910s recognized the history of Chinese art as part of a modern pedagogical structure for Chinese traditional painting (Andrews and Shen 2006: 8-9). Noted Chinese artists were invited by art schools and universities to conduct lectures on the history of art in China. For example, Chen Shizeng taught Chinese art history at the Beijing Art School and the Beijing Higher Normal School. Pan Tianshou taught a similar course at the Shanghai Art Academy. These teachers edited raw materials from ancient Chinese treatises on art; translated foreign art historical textbooks, mainly produced in Japan; or else, they authored completely fresh versions of the history of Chinese art.

Most modern art historical books at that time were lecture notes. One example is *A History of Chinese Art (Zhongguo meishushi)* edited in 1924 by Ye Han, then working at the First Normal School of National Beiping University. Seemingly unfinished, this book contained only one section “A History of Writing with Images (Tushu shi)”. The term “*tushu*” in modern Chinese means book. However, this volume is not on the history of books in China but about pictures in different media including those images carved on stones and bricks. It was not a formal publication but a set of unedited teaching materials. In 1925, dedicated to his late teacher Chen Shizeng’s memory, Yu Jianhua edited his notes from Chen’s class of Chinese painting history at the Beijing Higher Normal School. Yu published them as a book entitled *A History of Chinese Painting* with his own art publishing house Jinan Art Institute of Brush and Ink (Jinan hanmoyuan meishuyuan). In 1937, during the period when he taught at the Shanghai Art Academy, Yu Jianhua published his own book using the same title *A History of Chinese Painting* with the Commercial Press. Likewise, when teaching at the Yan’an Lu Xun Art Institute in the 1940s, the art historian Wang Junchu finished his version of Chinese art history entitled *A History of Chinese Art (Zhongguo meishushi, 1942)*.

These textbook surveys of Chinese art history comprised a neat pattern of teaching materials. They formulated two paradigms for writing general histories of Chinese art: the categorical narrative and the chronological narrative. Jiang Danshu’s *History of Fine Arts* represented the first narrative. Jiang divided the history of Chinese art into four artistic forms: architecture, sculpture, painting, and applied arts. Representing the second type of narrative was *A Brief History of Chinese Art* by Teng Gu, a concise but well-received publication in 1926. Teng based this book on his teaching notes at the Shanghai Art Academy. Recalling the discussion of Teng Gu’s work in Chapter Two, Teng divided the history of Chinese art into four periods which he termed: growth, cross-fertilization, the flourishing, and stagnation. Chinese art historians since then have used one or other of these

two narrative patterns in their general surveys of Chinese art. They divide their narratives either into chapters discussing different forms of art or into chapters devoted to different periods.

One exception to the formats pioneered by Jiang Danshu and Teng Gu was Wang Junchu's *The Development of Chinese Art* (1934). Wang's book was divided into neither categories of Chinese art nor clear ages of Chinese history. Instead, his chapters were organized in terms of different topics. Some chapters talked exclusively about one form of Chinese art, such as that on the origin of landscape painting and the Southern and Northern Schools. Other chapters were relevant to several branches of Chinese art. For instance, a chapter "Fine Arts in the Service of religions (Shifeng zongjiao de meishu)" discussed temples, statues, and wall paintings.

Nevertheless, imitating either Jiang or Teng's formats of division, teachers could organize their lectures with ease. Chinese authors realized the functional aspect of their art historical publications. They even took the teaching time into consideration. Jiang Danshu mentioned that his book was suitable for one school year at a rate of one hour's teaching per week. Fu Baoshi stated that his book entitled *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* (1931) could be used by art teachers over the same period with two hours' teaching per week (Fu 1931b: 3).

Teaching depended also on publishing. The early twentieth century witnessed a surge of interest in publishing albums of artworks. Publishing houses in Shanghai, such as the Chinese National Glory Company (Shenzhou guoguang she), Youzheng Books (Youzheng shuju), the Commercial Press, and Zhonghua Books, reproduced numerous volumes of traditional artworks. The Chinese National Glory Company and Youzheng Books were the earliest publishing houses to use the colotype technology for reliable images in publications devoted to the reproduction of artworks. In order to preserve ancient Chinese culture and to educate the public, these two publishers respectively launched bi-monthly periodicals *Chinese National Glory* (*Shenzhou guoguang ji*) and *Famous Chinese Paintings* (*Zhongguo minghua*) in 1908. Artists and art collectors were often associated with these publications. For instance, Huang Binhong was involved with both and his painting collection featured in *Chinese National Glory* (Wang 2005). Between 1928 and 1931, Huang was even in charge of the publication of *A Grand Prospect of China* (*Shenzhou daguan*), a sequel to *Chinese National Glory*. Working at Youzheng Books from the second half of 1925, he assumed the editorial responsibility for *Famous Chinese Paintings*. It is no coincidence that at the end of 1925 Huang finished a book entitled *Topics on Ancient Drawings* (*Guhua wei*) and published it with the Commercial Press. The ancient paintings which he encountered during his editorial duties assisted him with exploring the overall development of Chinese painting.

Reproduction of artworks in early twentieth-century China contributed substantially to Chinese art historical scholarship. For the first four decades of the twentieth century, the Commercial Press published more than a hundred painting volumes bound in traditional stitched covers. Zhonghua Books printed more than eighty. Editors of these volumes obtained an unparalleled opportunity to research, view, and appreciate original artworks before selecting and printing pictures in art albums. They saw much art firsthand. This kind of experience motivated their art historical writings. The painter and scholar Zheng Wuchang worked for Zhonghua Books from 1922. In charge of the publication of several albums, including *World Famous Paintings (Shijie minghua ji)* and *A Grand Prospect of Famous Paintings in the Jin, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties (Jin Tang Song Yuan Ming Qing minghua daguan)*, Zheng assembled, examined, and judged a large total of paintings (Wu 1980). Consequently, Zheng's 1929 treatise *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies* used a number of examples he found for the albums. From the readers' perspective, these reproductions provided "a visibility for works of art...in [the] public arena" (Wang 2005: 10). Reproduction of old paintings with modern techniques led to an unparalleled dissemination of visual knowledge.

With the establishment of a modern education system in China, an urgent need for new textbooks appeared. Trying to enter the market for textbooks related to art history courses, publishing houses eagerly requested artists, art teachers, and scholars to produce histories of art in China. The Commercial Press gained substantial profits in the publication of textbooks during the early decades of the twentieth century. From the turn of the twentieth century, the company had monopolized the market for textbooks until the establishment of Zhonghua Books. The first handbook for Chinese art history courses—Jiang Danshu's *History of Fine Arts*—was published by the Commercial Press in 1917. About half of the treatises concerning the history of Chinese art available in Republican China were produced by this publisher.

Zhonghua Books, the biggest competitor to the Commercial Press, made its publishing debut with a series of *China's Textbooks (Zhonghua jiaokeshu)* in 1912. Coinciding perfectly with the establishment of the Republican government, this publishing house even published textbooks adorned with the new national flag. The newly-established Republican government abolished the Qing system of textbooks, and announced its own policies for textbook publication in 1912. Zhonghua Books temporarily seized the chance to occupy the market. When the Commercial Press recovered from this setback, Zhonghua Books still held on to thirty percent of the textbook market. It published textbooks one after another, repeatedly consonant with the changing education system in the first half of the twentieth century (Reed 2004: 230-31; Zhou 2007: 98). This same firm asked Teng Gu

to write a history of Chinese art for its schoolbook series at the beginning of the 1930s. However, Teng was totally occupied by his research in Berlin. In the end, Zheng Wuchang, a former employee of Zhonghua Books, compiled *A History of Chinese Art History* in 1935. Its target readers were secondary-school students and others who were interested in Chinese art.

While the first generation of Chinese publishers at the turn of the twentieth century defined emerging new social practices with their reorganized political priorities (Judge 1996: 198-99), the second generation of publishers between 1912 and 1937 were driven by their awareness of both politics and markets (Reed 2004: 253). Publications concerning Chinese art and Chinese art history played an important role in the agendas of both these generations. Their strong interest in sales of artwork reproductions and art historical textbooks indicates the power of art in politics and markets. Delivered into the hands of a newly constituted readership, printed volumes diffused new formations of visual canons to an unprecedented number of the population in Chinese cities.

3.2 Words and Images: Fu Baoshi and Art Historical Writing

If the gap between words and images has ever been a problem, pre-modern Chinese scholars and artists responded to it positively. Gifted artists, such as Qian Xuan (ca. 1235-before 1307), according to Wen Fong, validated “the simultaneous practice of calligraphy, painting, and poetry as a single art form”(Fong 2003: 274). Words in calligraphy, as inscriptions, or as texts carved on seals, have long been part of visual images in Chinese art. Painters sometimes even treated the composition of a painting “as a flat manuscript page” (Fong 2003: 275). In turn, although the solutions were different, modern Chinese art historical scholarship resolved the tension between words and images via the cooperation of textual explanation and visual representation. Fu Baoshi is a case in point.

Fu Baoshi and his artistic experience in the Republican period

Fu is one of the most important Chinese ink painters in the twentieth century. He was born on 5th October 1904 in Nanchang, Jiangxi. One of Fu Baoshi’s ancestors at the end of the fifteenth century was a high official at the Ming court. However, when Fu Baoshi was born, the status of his family had descended dramatically. His father repaired umbrellas for a living. During his childhood, Fu spent most of his time at picture-mounting shops, second-hand bookstores, and seal-engraving stalls learning seal-making, calligraphy, and painting. His earliest recollected encounter with art was the painted decoration on ceramic bowls and plates at home, which he enjoyed copying when he was six. Jingdezhen, the porcelain

capital of China, lies in the northeast of Jiangxi near Fu's birthplace. Ceramics played an important role in Fu Baoshi's life.

In 1917, a certain Mr. Zhang, a member of the same neighbourhood, seeing Fu's potential, enrolled him at an elementary school, and four years later paid the entrance fee for Fu to enter the First Normal College in Jiangxi. Fu faced large financial problems when his father died. Under pressure to make a living, Fu used his carving skill to forge the seals of Zhao Zhiqian (1829-1884), an exponent of epigraphic style. The concierge at the college sold Fu's works as genuine seals by Zhao, paying Fu one fourth of the money he received. These seals fooled several members of the local gentry. After the truth was exposed, the principal of the school appeased the anger of those deceived and helped Fu to sell seals under Fu's own name (Shen 1994: 6-38; Zhang 1991: 30-33).

Before the age of twenty, Fu was already locally famous for seal carving and expanded his engagement to painting. He read and even copied by hand many ancient histories and theories of Chinese painting in the school library and second-hand bookstores. In 1925, he completed his first sustained piece of writing *The General Story of the Origins and Evolution of National Painting (Guohua yuanliu shugai)*, which remained unpublished until he later revisited it. Imitating old paintings, Fu's earliest surviving painting—a set of four hanging scrolls of landscape in the style of old masters—also dates to the year of 1925. In the autumn of 1926, Fu Baoshi graduated from the art department of the normal college and took a teaching position at an elementary school. In 1927, Fu Baoshi went back to the normal college which then became the First Middle School in Jiangxi. This time he was employed as an art teacher for ink painting and seal-carving (Zhang 1991: 32-33). During this year, he finished his manuscript *Seal-Engraving Studies (Moyin xue)*. From 1929, Fu also delivered lectures on Chinese art history. Consulting whatever histories of Chinese painting he could buy, he compiled a textbook *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* for his students based upon his earlier text *The General Story of the Origins and Evolution of National Painting*. In 1931, he published this book with the Nanjing Bookstore (Nanjing shudian) in Shanghai (Shen 1994: 38-48).

In June 1931, when Xu Beihong visited Jiangxi, Fu Baoshi was introduced to him by a local banker. They became close friends and Xu supported Fu to study abroad. With Xu's help, Fu Baoshi received a scholarship from the Jiangxi government, which allowed him to study applied arts and design in Japan. The plan was that he would use this experience to improve the design of ceramics in Jingdezhen. From September 1932 to June 1933, Fu Baoshi was in Tokyo, studying Japanese and preparing a report on Japanese crafts which he published in 1935 as "Some Points on Japanese Applied Arts (Riben gongyi meishu zhi jidian baogao)". During his stay in Japan, he became acquainted with Guo Moruo, who helped him in the coming years. Lacking funds, Fu Baoshi returned to China for the

summer (Ye 2004: 8-9; Zhang 1991: 34-35).

Realizing that his true concerns were about Chinese art history rather than design, and, luckily receiving more financial support from the local government, Fu Baoshi travelled to Japan again in October 1933. Among Japanese scholars on art history, Fu Baoshi admired particularly Kinbara Seigo, the leading Japanese expert on Eastern art. Back in Japan, he attempted to study art history under the supervision of Kinbara. He finally enrolled for a post-graduate program at the Japan Imperial Art School (*Nihon teikoku bijutsu gakko*, now Musashino Art University) in April 1934. His major was art theory and the art history of East Asia. Fu also took courses on sculpture with the sculptor and teacher Shimizu Takashi (1897-1981) (Zhang 1991: 35; Shen 2007: 15-16).

Fu Baoshi continued to produce art. With Kinbara's support, his first solo exhibition was held in Ginza, Tokyo, during 10-14 May, 1934. More than one hundred and seventy pieces of his art were on display. According to Kinbara's diary, this exhibition was a great success, and a number of accomplished Japanese painters visited (Kinbara 1994: 34). Meanwhile, Fu Baoshi translated Japanese works concerning art history into Chinese, especially the writings by Kinbara. Under Kinbara's guidance, following the success of his exhibition, Fu Baoshi completed several art historical works in both Japanese and Chinese over the coming year. In September 1934, he wrote a book entitled *Chinese Painting Theorie (Zhongguo huihua lilun)* and published it with the Commercial Press one year later. In May 1935, he published an article "The Future and Reconstruction of Chinese National Art (Zhonghua minzu meishu zhi zhanwang yu jianshe)" urging the governmental protection of cultural properties. His "Chronology of Shitao (Kuka washō nenbyō)" in Japanese was published by *The Country of Beauty* in March 1935 (Shen 2007: 17-19; Chen 2000: 257). Publication of this chronology marked the beginning of Fu's long-time enthusiastic research on Shitao.

Due to the unexpected news of his mother's illness, Fu Baoshi returned to China in June 1935. He still planned to go back to Japan to carry out further research with Kinbara. However, after the death of his mother, Fu was invited by Xu Beihong in September 1935 to work as a lecturer in the art department of the National Central University in Nanjing. He took the position and taught calligraphy, seal-carving and Chinese art history. Following the Japanese invasion in the lower part of the Yangzi River, Fu Baoshi brought his whole family inland, using the opportunity to travel in Anhui, visiting places associated with Shitao. In April 1938, Fu accepted a governmental position provided by Guo Moruo. When the Republican government retreated to Chongqing in 1939, he followed, re-assuming his duties as a teacher at the National Central University. He stayed in Chongqing for eight years, moving back to Nanjing in 1947 with the relocation of the National Central University. He remained productive in both writing and painting. Table 3.1 is a list of his art

historical writings from 1937 to 1949 (Shen 2007; Ye 1986, 2004; Zhang 1991; Wan 2008).

Table 3.1

Date	Title	Notes
1937	<i>Chronological Table of Chinese Art</i>	heavily reliant on Japanese materials Fu collected
June 1937	<i>General Discussion on Literati Painting (Wenrenhua gailun)</i>	translation of the art historian Taki Seiichi's (1873-1945) <i>Bunjinga gairon</i> (1922)
May 1939	<i>Biographies of National Artists at the End of the Ming Dynasty</i>	adapted from a Japanese book entitled <i>Detailed Biographies of Painting Masters in Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties</i> (Sō Gen Min Shin shoga meiken shōden, 1927)
June 1939	"History of Chinese Art: Early Period (Zhongguo meishushi: gudai pian)"	
June 1939	"On the Seal-Carver Huang Mufu (Guanyu yinren Huang Mufu)"	
April 1940	"The Development of Painting Theories in China"	first published in 1941
April 1940	"A Study of Jin Gu Kaizhi's 'A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain' (Jin Gu Kaizhi 'hua yuntaishan ji' zhi yanjiu)"	
Sept. 1940	"An Investigation of the History of 'Landscape' 'Freehand Brushwork' 'Ink and Wash' in Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huihua 'shanshui' 'xieyi' 'shuimo' zhi shi de kaocha)"	first published in 1943
Sept. 1940	"A Brief History of Chinese Seal-Engraving (Zhongguo zhuankeshi shulüe)"	first published in 1943
Nov. 1940	"Studies on Early Chinese Painting (Zhongguo gudai huihua zhi yanjiu)"	first published in 1943
May 1941	<i>A Chronicle of Master Shitao (Shitao shangren nianpu)</i>	
August 1943	"China's Applied Arts (Zhongguo zhi gongyi)"	unpublished manuscript
March 1944	"Chinese Painting during a Momentous Era (Zhongguo huihua zai da shidai)"	published in <i>The China Times</i> in 1944
April 1947	"Chinese Painting At the Turn of the Ming-Qing Dynasties (Mingqing zhiji de Zhongguohua)"	published <i>Nanjing and Shanghai Weekly (Jinghu zhoukan)</i> in 1947
August 1947	"The Spirit of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huihua zhi jingshen)"	a public address in Nanjing, published one month later

In his writings during this period, Fu Baoshi singled out the transitional period between the Ming and Qing dynasties. He focused on a group of Ming-loyalists and their painting styles, which he believed would represent the great spirit of the country then and now. Even in his narrative of the general history of Chinese art, he placed emphasis on Chinese artists' integrity, which he thought determined above all the content and style of their creative efforts. For instance, in his 1940 article entitled "The Development of Painting Theories in China (Zhongguo huihua sixiang zhi jinzhuan)", Fu attributed the loose brushwork in Southern Song painting to painters' deeply emotional resentment of the invasion by Northern tribes. Likewise, his explanation for the popularity of bamboo painting in Yuan times was that artists applied the image of bamboo to symbolize their unyielding resistance to the invaders' outright domination (Fu 1986 [1941]: 236-38). Fu Baoshi's propositions were closely related to the contemporary Japanese invasion of China. He drew obvious parallels between the alien overlords of Mongolia in the Yuan dynasty and Japan in the Republican period. He fully realized the social role of painting in China, insisting that the dominant aim for a history of Chinese painting was "to assist in publicizing the resistance against Japan and inspiring the People's patriotic spirit" (Shen 2007: 22).

Along with his art historical research and teaching, Fu Baoshi held six exhibitions in the 1940s (Zhang 1991: 38-40; Shen 2007). Throughout his life, Fu Baoshi's art production, art teaching, and art historical studies were well matched.

Visuality in Fu Baoshi's art historical writing

In his article entitled "Art-Historical Art: One Aspect of Ch'ing Painting", Max Loehr has persuasively pointed out the importance of the art historical aspect in Qing painting. He analyzes four distinct performances: "the copy made as a study by the beginner"; "the exact copy or reproduction"; "the free copy or paraphrase"; and "the alleged copy, which actually is a free creation". In the multi-layered notion "copy", Loehr challenges the negative status associated with the ubiquitous practice to copy or paraphrase ancient painting styles in the Qing dynasty. According to Loehr, the blurred boundary between copying and creating posed the danger of overlooking the actual objects of art history, simply because they were denigrated as copies (Loehr 1970).

The interest of Loehr's idea concerning art historical art is that it permits the notion of Chinese ink painting creating a visual narrative for the history of painting. To imitate ancient masterpieces or to make a free copy following old subject matters and styles are practices throughout almost the whole history of Chinese painting. This kind of artwork may not be the greatest masterpiece according to the standards of original composition and

style, but it can establish a unique visual strategy in the historiography of art. As Loehr has proposed, “copies are a way of contemplating the past or the art of the past”. They are “paintings about painting or ... painted art history” (Loehr 1970). In a sense, art historical narratives are no longer limited to textual explanation, but open to visual representation.

Fu Baoshi’s engagement in the practice of painting combined with his academic training as an art historian, which he received in Japan between 1933 and 1935, offered him the tools to switch effortlessly between visual and textual materials.

Fu Baoshi’s earliest surviving work from 1925 is a good example. This set of four hanging scrolls is his version of ancient masters’ styles. One painting is *Drinking Together near the Pine Cliff* (*Songya duiyin*, Figure 3.1), which imitates the manner of the painter Cheng Sui (ca. 1605-1691). The inscription in the painting is a short art historical statement, which reads

“Cheng Sui’s literary name is Jiangdong Buyi. His ainting follows the style of Dong Yuan [the tenth century painter]. [He] uses dry brushwork to draw landscape. I like his power and simplicity so I imitate [his style].”

Comparing this painting with one of Cheng Sui’s masterpieces *One Thousand Cliffs Contend for Beauty* (*Qianyan jingxiu*, ca. 1687, Figure 3.2), Fu’s idea of Cheng seems contradictory. The spirit of both paintings is similar, but, technically, few texture strokes that compose them look alike. Cheng’s painting represents his style in dry brush and “scorched ink (*jiaomo*)”. Fu Baoshi’s lines are much sharper and more moistly inked. It does not mean that Fu’s understanding of Cheng’s manner is wrong, not least because Fu Baoshi stated clearly in his inscription that Cheng Sui’s brush is dry. The reason why the inscription and the image do not seem to match each other is that Fu Baoshi aimed to achieve a spiritual similarity rather than direct technical resemblance to Cheng Sui. This practical example fits the paradoxical ambition of Chinese painting, in which, as James Cahill summarizes, “one could attain the closest resemblance to the old masters in works that did not seem to resemble theirs at all” (Cahill 1982: 37). As a result, Fu Baoshi’s interpretation of Cheng Sui was achieved via this work of art, not just through the image or the inscription, but by combining image and inscription together.

More importantly, Fu Baoshi demonstrated an interesting use of visuality in his art historical research. Concerning his concentration on Chinese painting history, Fu claimed:

“I am most interested in two periods of Chinese painting history. One is the Eastern Jin-Six Dynasties period (from the fourth to sixth centuries); the other is the transition from Ming to Qing (the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries). [My research of] the former [period] begins with Gu Kaizhi [the figure painter (ca. 345-ca.406)], and [it] covers the Six Dynasties. [My research of] the latter [period] begins with Shitao, and

[it] expands to [the reigns of] Long [Qing] and Wan [Li] of Ming and [the reigns of] Qian [Long] and Jia [Qing] of Qing. During the last ten years, I have made painstaking efforts on behalf of these two great artists [Gu Kaizhi and Shitao] ... These two periods have been always in my head. So the themes for more than half of my paintings belong to one of these two periods.”(Fu 1942)

Fu’s research did not influence only textual productions, but extended also to his painting. He ambioned a strong artistic impulse to paint the history of Chinese painting.

Fu Baoshi’s study of Gu Kaizhi began with Fu’s response to a text published by Ise Sen’ichirō (1891-1948), entitled *From Gu Kaizhi to Jing Hao: History of Chinese Landscape Painting (Shi Kō Kaishi chi Jin Hō: Shina sansui gashi, 1933)*. Ise was a researcher at the Kyoto Institute of Eastern Culture Academy (Tōhō bunka gakuin Kyoto kenkyujo) who conducted a project “History of Chinese Painting with a Focus on the Periods of Song and Yuan (Sōgen ni chūshin tosuru Chūgoku kaiga shi)” from 1929 to 1931. According to Fu Baoshi, Naitō Konan wrote four poems as the foreword of Ise’s book. In the last poem, Naitō praised Ise’s work highly describing Ise’s opinions on Chinese landscape painting as peerless. It was the main reason why Fu paid great attention to this book. After closely reading it several times, Fu produced a Japanese essay “On the Problems in the History of Chinese Landscape Painting from Gu Kaizhi to Jing Hao (Lun Gu Kaizhi zhi Jing Hao zhi shanshui huashi wenti)” in which he opposed Ise’s opinions. In particular, he pointed out Ise’s misinterpretation of eight sentences in the ancient text “A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain” attributed to Gu Kaizhi. Unable to publish it in Japanese journals at first, Fu translated his essay into Chinese and published it in Shanghai in 1935 (Fu 1935b).

Fu Baoshi’s article was prematurely launched at this moment (Shen 2007: 15). Still, after his professional training with Kinbara Seigo, Fu’s interests on Gu Kaizhi remained. He spent several years analyzing Gu’s mysterious text. He also discussed its ambiguity with friends, such as Guo Moruo and Teng Gu. In 1940, he completed an essay entitled “The Study on Jin Gu Kaizhi’s ‘A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain’”. In this essay, Fu reinterpreted the whole text of “A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain” sentence by sentence. Fu was not satisfied with his efforts as simply a textual projection. He designed a graphic plan according to his understanding of Gu’s text (Figure 3.3), because he believed that it was nothing less than a plan for a landscape painting based on real mountain scenery. Fu divided the pictorial space of a handscroll into five parts and marked the positions of trees, rocks, animals, and human figures mentioned in the text. Mountains occupied the major space of his composition, while human figures were comparatively tiny in the picture. In Fu’s hands, it turned out to be a draft of a landscape painting. Based upon this draft plan, between 1940 and 1941, Fu Baoshi painted two paintings using the same title *A Picture of*

the Yuntai Mountain (Yuntaishan tu). One was a painting in colour on paper (Figure 3.4). The other was an ink painting on paper (Figure 3.5). In both paintings, Fu wrote the whole “A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain” in the right-hand corner of the scrolls. Guo Moruo composed four poems as an inscription for the coloured version. He stated that Fu’s research on “A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain”, the new painting in particular, was a great achievement in painting history. Responding to Naitō Konan’s remarks on Ise Sen’ichirō’s book. Guo Moruo believed that Fu’s interpretation was better than Ise’s.

Fu Baoshi admitted that his painting was not a truthful reconstruction of Gu Kaizhi’s *The Yuntai Mountain*, supposing even that Gu had ever painted one. Fu knew that he should have painted with rich colours on silk instead of paper. Lacking materials during wartime, he had to use light colour, ink, and paper. However, he fulfilled his ultimate goal of proving that Gu’s “A Record of Painting the Yuntai Mountain” was paintable (Fu 1940). More importantly, he deduced from the excellent composition of Gu’s landscape that Gu Kaizhi was not only a figure painter but also a landscape painter. Fu’s reconstruction of the history of Chinese landscape painting thus traced the maturity of Chinese landscape painting back to the fourth century. Fu Baoshi’s conclusion, not to mention his method, is debatable. Later scholars in China and Japan challenged Fu with their understandings of the text. Nonetheless, Fu initiated the careful and thorough reading of Gu Kaizhi’s texts in Chinese art historical scholarship. His visual strategy, for all that it may be questionable, also influenced later studies. In 1968, the Taiwanese scholar Shen Yizheng attached his recreation of the painting *The Yuntai Mountain* to his essay on Gu Kaizhi’s text. In Shen’s version, landscape became the background and human figures occupied most of the picture surface (Shen 1968: 21). Although Shen’s picture is very different from Fu’s painting, Shen Yizheng’s idea to provide a visual representation has most likely been inspired by Fu Baoshi.

Similarly, Fu Baoshi’s scholarship on the late Ming and early Qing master Shitao (1642-1707) is represented not only by his publications, but also by his painting. Fu’s admiration for Shitao stimulated him to paint as he conceived Shitao had done, and to conduct thorough textual research on this artist.

Fu Baoshi’s approach to Shitao was largely influenced by Japanese scholarship. Shitao and his paintings became very popular in Japan during the early twentieth century. Japanese collectors bought many paintings attributed to Shitao. Academic research followed. Aoki Masaru (1887-1964), a scholar famous for his research on Yuan and Ming dramas, published an essay “Shitao’s Painting and Painting Criticism” in 1921. Before his trip to Japan, Fu Baoshi seldom had any chance to view authentic works by Shitao. In

Japan, he almost certainly enjoyed better opportunities to view Shitao's paintings²¹. At the end of 1934, inspired by Japanese scholarship, Fu wrote to Kinbara Seigo that he planned to conduct research on Shitao (Ye 2004: 22; Wan 2008).

Table 3.2

Title	Year	Notes
"Chronology of Shitao"	1935	published in <i>The Country of Beauty</i> Vol. 11 No. 3
"A Draft Chronology of Shitao (Shitao nianpu gao)"	1936	published in <i>Literature and Art Monthly (Wenyi yuekan)</i> Vol. 9 No. 1
"An Investigation of Shitao (Shitao congkao)"	1936	published in <i>Literature and Art Monthly</i> Vol. 9 No. 5
"Further Investigation of Shitao (Shitao zaikao)"	1937	published in <i>Literature and Art Monthly</i> Vol. 10 No. 6
"A Study of Shitao's Painting Theory (Shitao hualun zhi yanjiu)"	1937	unpublished manuscript
"A Revision of Shitao's Inscriptions and Postscripts (Dadizi tihua shi ba jiaobu)"	1937	unpublished manuscript
"A Third Investigation of Shitao (Shitao sankao)"	1940	manuscript; publication unknown
"Textual Research on Shitao's Birth and Death Dates (Shitao shangren shengzu kao)"	1946	completed in 1936; published in <i>Cultural Pioneers (Wenhua xianfeng)</i> Vol. 6 No. 12-13
<i>Chronicle of Shitao's Life</i>	1948	finished in 1941; serialised in seven issues of <i>Nanjing and Shanghai Weekly</i> in 1947; published as a volume in 1948

What is intriguing is that Fu's texts on Shitao reconstructed Shitao's life and art theory based on written evidence, including treatises, poems, letters, and inscriptions. Fu Baoshi's textual research on Shitao is very similar to the most meticulous category of Japanese hermeneutics. Table 3.2 is a list of Fu Baoshi's publications on Shitao. These nine treatises do not contain any illustrations; all of them are text-oriented. Fu analyzed a lot of inscriptions on Shitao's painting; but no detailed analysis of Shitao's artworks by Fu is available. Instead, he attempted to construct a chronological timetable of Shitao's largely undocumented life. Seven out of nine publications deal with this topic. The remaining two focus on Shitao's painting theory and inscriptions. *Chronicle of Shitao's Life (Shitao shangren nianpu, 1948)* was the final outcome of Fu Baoshi's fifteen-year research. Once

²¹ Zhang Guoying has suggested that it was unlikely that Fu Baoshi saw many of Shitao's original works even in Japan (Zhang 1991: 116-17).

more, Fu's vivid imagination enabled him to visualize an artist's words. His painting skill allowed him to estimate and discern how the artist achieved visual effects which had been described yet never visually devoted.

Fu Baoshi's paintings concerning Shitao visually balanced his textual studies. Fu often painted according to inspiration from Shitao's poems and essays or directly depicted Shitao's image and behaviour as he understood them. He even conceived of painting a history of Shitao's life, something he, unfortunately, did not achieve. In 1942, however, Fu painted more than ten paintings concerning aspects of Shitao's life. One example is Fu Baoshi's *A Painting of Dadi Thatched House* (*Dadi caotang tu*) painted in 1942 (Figure 3.6). He stated:

"In March [1942], I attempted to paint the whole life of Shitao...as an album of painted history in order to commemorate this great artist. Although my plan did not succeed, [I] still painted quite a few in succession... Most of them are visualizations based on my research achievements [on Shitao], and [I] tried my best to record my motivations in each inscription on every painting." (Fu 1942)

Although he painted several pictures concerning Shitao, Fu Baoshi only attempted to imitate an actual painting of Shitao once. This surviving work is *Landscape Painting in the Style of Shitao* (*Fang Shitao shanshui tu*, 1943, Figure 3.7), which copies Shitao's *A Picture of Travelling in Huayang Mountain* (*You Huayangshan tu*, ca. 1685-1695, Figure 3.8). Fu did not follow the model slavishly. Although the composition of his version is similar to Shitao's, Fu added a few misty peaks in the right-hand corner of the painting. He also reduced the complexity of the waterfall. His strokes are shorter than Shitao's, executed with a wetter brush and darker ink to create blur. Fu applied a few layers of ink wash for a foggy effect. This kind of brushwork developed into his unique style named "Baoshi Strokes (*Baoshi cun*)", often visible in his later work. Fu Baoshi freely paraphrased Shitao's spirit, rather than truly reproduced Shitao's picture. Once again, besides narrating Shitao's life and explaining the artist's style in words, Fu Baoshi constructed a visual demonstration of Shitao's spirit by exploring his own visual insights.

3.3 Chinese Ink Painters as Scholars

With a few exceptions²², early twentieth-century Chinese authors of histories of Chinese art received formal training in painting by either traditional or modern methods. Some of these writers, such as the philologist Yu Anlan (1902-1999), the historian Tong Shuye (1908-1968), and the pioneer anthropologist Cen Jiawu (1912-1966), did not become painters. They maintained their interests in art while actually devoting most of their energy to academic research on other subjects. For instance, in 1945, Tong Shuye who specialized in the history of the Spring and Autumn Period, took a position in the history section of the Shanghai Museum, in order to pursue his research on Chinese ceramics. *A Series of Essays on the History of Chinese Ceramics* (*Zhongguo ciqishi luncong*, 1957) is a collection of Tong's pre-1949 works on ceramics (Tong 1989).

More interestingly, two art historians Teng Gu and Hu Man were originally students of painting. Teng Gu learned to paint at his hometown and then in Shanghai during the 1900s and '10s before studying art theory and art history in Japan and later Germany. Hu Man learned oil painting first at the Peking National Art School from 1925 to 1929 and then studied Western oil painting at the painting department of the Leningrad Art Academy between 1935 and 1939. His interest in Chinese art history began in 1934, prior to his experience in the Soviet Union, when he published his first book entitled *The Development of Chinese Art*. After his return to China, Hu Man devoted his attention to the pre-twentieth-century history of Chinese art. In 1942, at Yan'an, the base of the Chinese communist leadership during the Sino-Japanese war, he completed a history of Chinese art.

All of these Chinese writers nurtured their interest in art through practical experience during their youth, even though they later abandoned art production, and none of their artworks survives today. Another group of influential writers on Chinese painting, who gained relatively equal fame for their research and their art, produced works that have survived. The connection between their visual and textual works is easier to trace.

²² As far as I know, there were only three exceptions in the first half of the twentieth century: Zhu Jieqin who received training to be a historian, Li Puyuan who was a professor of drama, and Chen Zhongfan (1888-1982), who graduated from Beijing University in 1917 and focused on the history of Chinese literature and philosophy. Chen Zhongfan's association with art history was indirect. He did not publish any book on art history, but evidently entertained a plan to conduct research on Chinese art, since he published an essay "A Plan for Research on Chinese Art History (Yanjiu Zhongguo yishushi jihua)" in December, 1936. Chen's plan did not succeed. At least, no results in the form of publication emerged. There is also an unclear case of Liu Sixun, a translator. He published a book entitled *The Development History of Chinese Art* (*Zhongguo meishu fadashi*) in 1946 with the Commercial Press. However, apart from his translation works in the 1920s and '30s, I found no information on him.

Yu Shaosong is a leading example. He was born into a literary family in 1883 in Quzhou, Zhejiang. After studying in Japan, majoring in law from 1905 to 1910, Yu took a position in the Administration of Justice of the Republican government. He lived in Beijing between 1913 and 1928. He owned a seal claiming that he “started to learn painting at the age of thirty-three”. In 1915, Yu Shaosong established the Xuannan Painting Society (Xuannan huashe)—the name of which indicated the society’s residence in Southwest Beijing—and, through founding the society, he learned to paint. The painting instructor for Yu’s society was the ink painter Tang Dingzhi (1879-1948), whose great-grandfather Tang Yifen (1778-1853) was one of the most important Qing painters of his generation. In 1918, Tang Dingzhi also became one of the teachers in the Research Institute of Painting of Beijing University (Beijing daxue huafa yanjiuhui). Members of the Xuannan Painting Society gathered regularly at Yu Shaosong’s house to watch how Tang Dingzhi painted. Chen Shizen participated in the events of this society as well, and his work provided another learning model for the members to follow. At the end of each gathering, society members chose a title as the theme of a painting to present at the next gathering. It was also the weekly occasion when members discussed each other’s work. The teachers would comment on them too, and deliver instruction on painting skills (Mao 2006b: 43-44).

Yu Shaosong derived much benefit from these activities. His ink painting skills improved, and he also made good friends with influential artists and scholars, not the least of whom was Chen Shizeng. In the 1920s, partly because of this association, Yu Shaosong’s paintings had already drawn the attention of people in Chinese art circles. His reputation reached its summit when the Japanese Empress Dowager bought his work. In his diary, Yu wrote that in 1931 the Japanese Empress Dowager spent a large sum of money to purchase a set of his bamboo paintings, which were four hanging scrolls respectively named *Wind (Feng)*, *Rain (Yu)*, *Snow (Xue)*, and *Moon (Yue)*. He even attached a cutting of an English report about this story in his diary, recording that, when she visited an exhibition of Chinese and Japanese painting in Tokyo, the Japanese Empress Dowager considered Yu’s set of painting the best among all the entries, and “offered the highest price to buy it for her palace”(Yu 2003: 636-37).

Yu Shaosong’s painting follows the so-called Southern School tradition which he believed represented the ultimate goal of traditional Chinese ink painting. His horizontal lines of ink are identical to “hemp-fibre strokes (*pima cun*)”, believed to have been invented by the landscape painter Dong Yuan (active ca. 937-976). His misty landscapes with loose dots are the result of imitating the noted calligraphers and painters Mi Fu and Mi Youren (ca. 1072-1151).

Meanwhile, Yu Shaosong gained fame as a historian of Chinese painting. In May

1926, he delivered a one-hour speech “The General Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting Studies (*Zhongguo huaxue yuanliu zhi gaiguan*)” at Yanjing Chinese School, a school which educated Westerners about Chinese culture in Beijing. One of the leading publications of the May Fourth Movement *The Supplement to Morning Post* published the entire talk. In the article, Yu added plum-and-bamboo painting—a genre in which he was skilled—to the standard categories of landscape, flower-and-bird, and human figure. In his account of Yuan painting, he emphasized the genre of ink bamboo painting (*mozhu hua*), which he believed first became truly fashionable during Yuan times. Yu’s narrative of Chinese art history reflected his passion for the Southern School in practice. For example, in the same talk, he claimed that the Southern School in different genres of Song painting developed later than the Northern School, but was superior to the Northern School (Yu 1926). Based on his empirical experience, Yu’s opinions of Chinese painting history were biased. Unlike Teng Gu, these painters did not intend to construct an objective history of Chinese painting.

Subjective judgement in art historical writing

Since these authors of Chinese painting history were also painters, they unavoidably identified emotionally with painting as the object of their scholarship. Like their ancestors—ancient Chinese scholars on calligraphy and painting—who always expressed their value judgement in their accounts, scholars in modern times combined art criticism with art history. Commenting on past or contemporary artworks, they seldom neglected to introduce the historical background. Telling a history of art in China, they always evaluated artists and expressed their preferences or dislikes.

Huang Binhong’s “Biography of Hongren (*Meihua guna zhuan*)” (1909) is an example of this indigenous style. Although it was only two paragraphs long, this essay united Huang’s historical accounts of and his comments on Hongren’s life. After the first paragraph on Hongren’s biographical story, Huang Binhong devoted the second paragraph to his admiration of Hongren’s moral integrity presented by the artist’s painting. Citing Xunzi (ca. 300-230 BCE) and Yang Xiong (53 BCE-18 CE), philosophers of ancient China, Huang praised Hongren’s loyalty to the Ming dynasty (Huang 1909).

Another example of an author incorporating a personal point of view into his history of Chinese painting is Fu Baoshi’s *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* (1931). Fu Baoshi told his readers that in order to rewrite a history of Chinese painting he applied the theme of promoting the Southern School to his narratives (Fu 1931b: 2). In his accounts of different periods, he saw a constant struggle between the Southern and Northern Schools which he considered respectively as literati painting and artisan painting.

He concluded his book with the idea that the Southern School had controlled the painting circle in the Qing dynasty for two hundred and seventy years (Fu 1931a: 188). Influenced by Chen Shizeng, one of the earliest Chinese scholars in the twentieth century to reinterpret and to promote literati painting (Andrews and Shen 2006: 9-12), Fu Baoshi proposed three essential elements of Chinese painting as character (*renpin*), knowledge (*xuewen*), and talent (*tiancai*), a triangular system of appreciation, which he employed to judge the merits of the painters in his book. Among these elements, character was the most important for Fu; knowledge was second and talent third. He believed that the character of a painter determined the spirit of a painting. In Fu's opinion, even if a painter did not possess talent, he could still produce good artworks by edifying his character and improving his knowledge (Fu 1931a: 10-26). His extremely traditional theory supported the idea that literati painting was superior to painting by artisans. Therefore, he discussed the whole history of Chinese painting in favour of literati painting represented by the Southern School. Despite this basic bias, his history was provocative and interesting. His students, for whom Fu wrote this text, were attracted to such an opinion that appealed no doubt to young intellectuals with a vested interest in education.

A more extreme case is in Fu Baoshi's essay "An Investigation on the History of 'Landscape' 'Freehand Brushwork' 'Ink and Wash' in Chinese Painting". Fu Baoshi suggested that in Yuan art, Wang Meng was the only one among the four Yuan masters who possessed nothing splendid (Fu 1943). His highly reductionistic argument was that Wang served the Yuan court, and for Fu this was akin to betraying one's own identity. In similarly extreme cases, other authors treated the process of writing a painting history little differently from drawing a painting, primarily as a means to convey a burst of emotion instead of as an exercise in academic thinking. These works may not be great achievements in the historiography of Chinese art history, but they are useful documents to analyze their authors' involvements in the art historical writing of a formative epoch.

While professional art historians tried to be objective, painters in Republican China made no attempts to hide their strong personal preferences towards certain canonically celebrated painters. Confident in their tastes, they did not pretend to be objective. Due to this prevalent approach, it is difficult to position a number of texts from the Republican period within a single category of art history or art criticism. As a result, scholars sometimes used the term "painting studies (*huaxue*)" in documents of late Qing and Republican China. Zheng Wuchang named his 1929 book *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies*. This text covered three kinds of documentation: artworks and collections, painting theories and criticism, and painters. Zheng connected these categories by their shared historical and cultural contexts (Zheng 1929). The painter Qin Zhongwen (1896-1974) implied a priority

for similar concepts in his 1934 book *A History of Chinese Painting Studies* (*Zhongguo huihuaxue shi*). “Painting studies” here referred to research concerning different fields of art history, art criticism, art theory, and artistic techniques.

Art histories associated with art practice

Even if they made subjective remarks rather than pursuing impersonal judgements, these painters as authors of art historical texts intended to guide the development of contemporary Chinese painting through their historical narratives.

One trend of Chinese ink painting in the early twentieth century was the embrace of calligraphic brush styles and movements. Most Chinese ink painters at that time supported efforts to revive Chinese painting in the direction of borrowing strokes from calligraphy. Learning from calligraphy is not a new phenomenon in Chinese painting history. However, twentieth-century artists now found new types of calligraphy to adopt as their models. Unlike Yuan painters, artists from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries no longer borrowed the technique of brush strokes from the refined calligraphy executed on paper or silk known as *tiexue*. Instead, they believed in following ancient script forms from stele inscriptions, a training that was called *beixue*. A strong faith in the authenticity of stele inscriptions guided this new enthusiasm. This transformation from *tiexue* to *beixue* in painting originated in a major shift in calligraphy fashions during the late Qing period. Chinese calligraphers now discovered the values of script types in ancient inscriptions engraved on stones (including steles and tiles) or cast in bronze vessels. In their mind, ancient script types were superior since these inscriptions were original works rather than later copies of early masterworks. They were also inscriptions associated with objects desired by many in a late Qing early Republican frenzy of collecting. Consequently, they integrated this coarse but powerful style into their long-existing aesthetic system (Ledderose 2001). Paralleled with the transformation of the calligraphic styles from refinement to monumentality, Chinese painters hoped to restore the early ancient styles of simplicity and monumentality in painting. Closely related to the studies of bronze and stone inscriptions, the Epigraphic School (*jinsi pai*) of Chinese painting had gained its predominant power gradually from the mid-nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, ink painters, for example, Wu Changshi and Huang Binhong, claimed that epigraphic expertise could fruitfully develop Chinese painting.

To sanction this appropriation, scholar artists adapted their narratives of Chinese painting history with the classic theory that calligraphy and painting derived from the same origin. Nine out of ten authors of art historical texts in late Qing and Republican China agreed with the so-called shared origin of calligraphy and painting (*shuhua tongyuan*).

For example, Fu Baoshi suggested that the original form of painting in China was “script painting (*wenzi hua*)”, a term he created (Fu 1931a: 27-29). Half of these histories listed ancient myths and old texts to buttress the shared origin of calligraphy and painting as one possibility for the birth of painting. Huang Binhong in *Topics on Ancient Drawings* (1925) stated that “Chinese scholars on art have all been saying that calligraphy and painting shared the same origin from the very beginning” (Huang 1925a: 1). Their usual argument traced the idea to Zhang Yanyuan’s statement in *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*, saying “at that time [the beginning of writing and painting] writing and painting were still alike in form and had not yet been differentiated” (Bush and Shih 1985: 50).

Of course, a few writers with strong backgrounds in archaeology or history doubted this origin of painting from calligraphy, due to the lack of archaeological evidence. Pan Tianshou wrote an article “No Evidential Proof for the Theory of Calligraphy and Painting’s Common Origin (Shuhua tongyuan lun zhi buke ju)” which challenged this theory. Still, he confessed that his challenge owed less to his own ideas and more to the impact of Western- or Japanese-trained archaeologists and historians (Pan 1926c). He concluded that this theory, based on what he termed “Eastern spirit (*dongfang ren de jingshen*)”, was a philosophical and conceptual idea rather than a scientific reality (Pan 1926c). Indeed, modern Chinese scholar painters did not literally mean that Chinese painting originated from calligraphy when they discussed the common origin of painting and calligraphy. Their implication was that the technical and aesthetic borrowing of calligraphy from painting was absolutely legitimized conduct, because calligraphy and painting not only used the exact same tools, but also possessed the same spirit.

To encourage their fellow painters to pursue epigraphic links between painting and calligraphy, Republican painters even suggested new canons in Chinese painting history. Labelled as “the last great literati painter”(Li 1979: 61) in China, Huang Binhong attempted to capture the spirit of literati painting through calligraphy. Not surprisingly, in the 1940s and ’50s, he put forward an original theory for the recent history of Chinese painting, canonizing paintings under new calligraphic influences. Huang emphasized a renaissance of painting in the reigns of Daoguang (1821-1850) and Xianfeng (1851-1861). He told the art critic Fu Lei in 1944 that:

“The paintings of the Ming dynasty are dry and those of the Qing dynasty are weak... The Kangxi [1662-1722], Yongzheng [1723-1735], and Qianlong [1736-1795] periods witnessed a decline. It was during the Daoguang and Xianfeng periods that...artists paid attention to the methods of the brush. Artists such as Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Rangzhi were good at brush-and-ink” (Kuo 2004: 34).

In the early 1950s, Huang Binhong reiterated a claim that painting of the mid-

nineteenth century was superior to that of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In one inscription, he wrote:

“...by the time of the School of Loudong [loudong pai] and the School of Yushan [yushan pai] [both painting schools were active during the early Qing dynasty. Their names were based on their originators’ hometowns in today’s Jiangsu], painting began to decline. The renaissance of the Daoguang and Xianfeng periods ensued; the painters’ ink method was far superior to that of their predecessors.”(Kuo 2004: 34)

His explanation was that the study of bronzes and stone inscriptions flourished during that period. The art of painting, then, was inspired by this epigraphic research, and it followed the painting production of the Tianqi (1621-1627) and Chongzhen (1627-1644) periods of late Ming, which he considered to be the true heir of the styles of ancient masters. According to Huang, brushing away the weak styles of the dominant schools in early Qing, painters at the time of the Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns achieved “solidity and density in structure and freshness and moisture in brush-and-ink.” Huang believed that the promotion of epigraphy “gave rise to a new and forceful painting style”(Kuo 2004: 33-35). His unspoken message was that the present generation should definitely follow this route to develop Chinese painting. To some extent, Huang Binhong modified the recent history of Chinese painting to justify and promote his own painting practice.

Heirs to the ancient tradition

Early twentieth-century Chinese writers on art history from the background of history, archaeology, and philology, along with those educated in Western countries, were open to Western theories and methodologies in their art historical research. For example, Wang Junchu’s writings were hugely influenced by Marxist ideas. He criticized the mythical legends of the origin of Chinese calligraphy and painting. He did not believe that a legendary figure, such as Fuxi or Cangjie, created calligraphy and painting in Chinese culture. Instead, he argued that art originated from human labour (Wang 1934). His training in the Soviet Union differentiated Wang from Chinese scholars. His art historical writings attracted many more followers only after the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949. In a sense, his work was the beginning of an approach towards a strongly socialist history of Chinese art during the second half of the twentieth century in the People’s Republic of China.²³

²³ Li Puyuan’s case is similar case to that of Hu Man with a strong materialist approach, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. However, Hu Man was much more influential in the People’s Republic of China than Li. Li Puyuan, on the other hand, did not produce any more art historical texts after 1949 and died earlier than Hu Man.

By contrast, Chinese painters in the early decades of the twentieth century were inclined to seek reorientation of Chinese art history into the remote past of China, at least in performances which they claimed had taken place in ancient China. The outcome of this tendency was sometimes innovation in the guise of returning to antiquity, as Ledderose has suggested (Ledderose 2001: 213).

These authors depended enormously on the surviving texts concerning art. Quotations from early written documents abounded in their writings. Their published monographs were usually detailed studies concerning individual artists or art schools based upon all kinds of available textual materials. However, the ways in which scholar painters during the late Qing and Republican period treated these old written texts were different from scholars of the past. Their attempt was to revitalize the ancient methodology which they decided had been lost in the Ming-Qing period. They considered that the authors of art historical works since the Ming dynasty had done nothing except copy available early documents and allow falsifications to accumulate. In order to avoid this weakness, these scholars researched multiple versions of famous texts, including many editions of Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*. They might not have achieved the same “modern, positivist art historical scholarship of oeuvre definition and biographical investigation” (Gaskell 2002: 158) as their Western counterparts did; nonetheless, they began to gather as much empirical evidence as possible for the objective treatment of each artist. For example, Huang Binhong's studies on Shen Zhou, unlike earlier scattered records, provided detailed materials from ten different perspectives for a full depiction of Shen's life and art, namely family background, behaviour and personality, teachers and friends, travelling experiences, living conditions, personal taste, connoisseurship, poetry and prose, paintings, and a painting chronology (Huang 1929a).

Furthermore, they did not stop at the construction of a history of one artist or one art school. They attempted to identify logic in the biographies of artists. They were no longer satisfied with listing old documents one by one. Instead, they conducted their narratives with major themes to connect different events in a logical sequence. Too often, they incorporated a personal historical point of view into the biographies of artists rather than an objective and scientific one. For example, in his *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* (1931), Fu Baoshi tried to search for a sequence of ideas from various materials and to find antecedents and consequences of artistic production. He presumed that the thread in the history of Chinese painting was “the promotion of the Southern School (*tichang nanzong*)” (Fu 1931b: 2). Huang Binhong's *Topics on Ancient Drawings* (1925) defined each epoch with one major feature of its painting and indicated the successive transformation from one feature to the next. In Huang's view, Tang painting “produced

resonance from its spirit (*you qi sheng yun*)”; painting from the Five Dynasties to Song created principles and worshipped them; Yuan painting advocated free expression; and Ming painting upheld simplicity. Addressing no social or political background, he simply summarized these characteristics observed in artworks. His focus was solely on painting. Concentrating on the aesthetic aspect of painting, Huang Binhong reiterated fundamental conceptions of Chinese painting that were largely ahistorical.

It is interesting that the only two Chinese chronological tables of art published in the 1920s and '30s were both composed by painters. One is Fu Baoshi's *Chronological Table of Chinese Art* (1937), and the other is Huang Binhong's *Chronological Table of Painting History* (*Huashi biannian biao*, 1939). Chronological tables had appeared in the traditional historiography of Chinese history but not in histories of Chinese calligraphy and painting from pre-modern times. Art writers in the early twentieth century who favoured Western thought most likely considered the chronological format to be monotonous. In the case of Fu Baoshi and Huang Binhong, this historical method borrowed from Chinese traditional scholarship was suited to a clear overall view of painting history, especially when directed at the tremendous amount of information that they gathered. Of course, Fu's book relied heavily on Japanese scholarship (Shen 2007: 19-20), but Fu would maintain that this approach had originally been learnt by Japanese scholars visiting China during the Tang-Song period. He treated the Japanese influence as a return to China's lost or unpopular past, all traces of which had survived only in Japan (Fu 1937b: 33).

In the Chinese art world, practice, criticism, theory, connoisseurship, and history have always been integrated through successive intellectual engagements. By means of a positive combination of the roles of art historian and other participants in the art world, a project that has not been seriously promoted in modern Western art historical traditions, the Chinese practice of art historical writing created a specific local interpretative strategy to connect visual products and textual histories. Because of the mutual benefits of this cooperation, it persisted even under the impact of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholarship. Chinese scholars then transformed the ancient tradition as they envisaged it to cope with modern challenges. The incorporation of their efforts within Chinese tradition was part of their effort to construct a discipline of Chinese art history in late Qing and Republican China.