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

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## Chapter 4 The Appearance and Disappearance of Canons: Canonization in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Art History

Since the 1980s, the discussion of canons has been a dominant theme in the discipline of Western art history. Various concerns have emerged regarding “questions of artistic judgement”, “the history genesis of masterpieces”, “variations in taste”, “the social instruments of canonicity”, and even “how canons disappear” (Gotlieb 2002: 163). Western art historians have considered that the canon’s appearance in Western visual art embodies aesthetic, ideological, cultural, social, and symbolic values. The decline of academic style and the ascendancy of Modernism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe are two much favoured examples (Barker 1999: 169-87; Gotlieb 2002). More recent research has been concerned with what Anna Brzyski has termed “the mechanics of the canonical system” to explain how the maintenance and change of local canons function in the production of specific meanings under particular circumstances in different geographic locations (Brzyski 2007: 3-4).

In Chinese art history, the idea of a canon including masterpieces, important artists, and forms of art, dates back to the mid-ninth century when Zhang Yanyuan wrote his painting history *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*. Not only does the title of the book suggest Zhang’s canonical attitude towards Chinese painting history, but, as a companion work to Zhang’s writing on calligraphy *Essential Record of Calligraphy Exemplars* (*Fashu yaolu*), his text on painting history promotes the theory that painting is comparable to the long privileged tradition of calligraphy. For the first time in Chinese history, painters were as crucial as calligraphers in scholars’ accounts. Even before this moment, within the painting field, canonization existed in the sixth century. Quoted in *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*, a treatise entitled *Classification of Painters* (*Guhua pinlu* or *Huapin*) was written by the scholar and portrait painter Xie He. Xie used a grading system to rate painters’ quality (Bush and Shih 1985: 23). Since then, the processes of canon construction through collection, theorization, and publication have continued in China.

Faced with quite different political, economic, and social conditions amid the instability of the early twentieth century, Chinese scholars attempted to discover new canons for cultural orthodoxy and authority. Joan Judge notes that the late Qing publicists of reform attempted to institute a new canon of national culture, which was a mix of “Western civic educational values” and selected Chinese “established works”. Part of their aim was to educate Chinese citizens (Judge 1996: 104). Prasenjit Duara suggests that Chinese historians, such as Gu Jiegang, “recovered counterhistories buried under the canonical

histories of the Confucian establishment”. Duara notes that Gu Jiegang—and others—emphasized the Eastern Jin state, that is the Jiangnan region in the fourth century, for its contributions to the rejuvenation and preservation of Chinese culture. Notably—as Duara also suggests—Lu Xun chose the same period in his highly acclaimed project to write a new history of Chinese literature. This tendency to search for an early moment of cultural passage has an interesting parallel in China’s art history. As this chapter shows, Chinese scholars attributed the decisive and founding moment of Chinese art to the Han dynasty. Whether or not this kind of historical retrospection to a slightly earlier epoch was accurate, it opened up vital new possibilities in education. Through an analysis of the scholar and publisher Di Baoxian’s (1872-1940) art publishing, Richard Vinograd summarizes the leading function of artistic canons as stressing aesthetic education as a national symbol. Not only could canons help to construct a national art history, they could serve as the structural axes of art school curricula, as well as models for art and design production (Vinograd 2007: 19).

Modern means for canonization, such as museums and exhibition displays, cultural and academic institutions, and massive art publications with image reproduction in good quality, brought the process up to an unprecedented speed. It is true that most of these means have comparable counterparts in pre-modern times. However, their enormous scope and overwhelming influence are far beyond the reach of their imperial counterparts.

Through an intertextual reading of the publications on Chinese art history in early twentieth-century China, this chapter explores the transformation of canons in order to shed light on why and how canonical formation happened in Republican China. Canonization in Chinese art at that time organized old and new information of Chinese art into usable knowledge for the field of Chinese art history.

Despite the diverse styles and strategies which Chinese writers used in their narratives, Chinese art historical books produced during the Republican period canonized and de-canonized artworks of the past. The following discussion of these texts with reference to other art historical works comprises three parts: 1) canon formation of artistic forms within the new ideas of fine arts and Chinese art; 2) canonization in the historical temporal structures established by modern Chinese art history writing; 3) canon construction and deconstruction of artists and artworks under the influence of contemporary art production.

## 4.1 Histories of Various Art Forms

### Notions of the fine arts

Neither discourse on the fine arts nor theories of the fine arts had featured prevalently in China before the twentieth century. In classical Chinese no single word conformed to the twentieth-century Western concept of the fine arts. The Chinese dictionary *Ciyuan* first published in 1915, in Shanghai, did not contain a collective term such as *meishu* which was exactly equivalent to the fine arts. Instead, a related concept phrased as *yishu* existed. However, the denotation of *yishu* prior to the late nineteenth century was very different from the present meaning of *yishu* as art. *Yi* had a basic meaning of “to plant”, and it was conceptually linked to the traditional idea of the Six Arts (*liuyi*), which include ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics. *Shu* with a basic meaning “path”, was associated with medicine, astrology, prophecy, and necromancy. Its stress was more on the technical. Consequently, the term *yishu* in classical Chinese referred to all kinds of skills and techniques, and it includes also a sense that some of these might be cultural attributes. Based on the *wenyuange* edition of *Siku Quanshu*, the most comprehensive collection of Chinese scholarship available in the mid-eighteenth century, *yishu* as a sub-category of the *zi* division (*zibu*) encompassed calligraphy and painting, musical scores, seal carving, and acrobatics. With new usages at the turn of the twentieth century, linguists also understand *yishu* as a “return graphic loan”. It is a classical Chinese compound that was “used by the Japanese to translate modern European words” and “reintroduced into modern Chinese” (Liu 1995: 305). The modern notion of *yishu* was borrowed from *geijutsu*, the Japanese translation of a Western concept of art. In 1932, “New Dictionary of Fine Arts (Xin meishu cidian)” by Ni Yide, began its ultimately incomplete serialization in *Art Tri-monthly*. Its dictionary definition identified art as a term “summing up literature, fine arts, music, and drama, which are different from science” (Ni 1932: 9).

It is noteworthy that *meishu* and *yishu* were sometimes used interchangeably in the first half of the twentieth century. *Meishu* imported from the Japanese *bijutsu* is similarly a “Sino-Japanese-European loanword” (Liu 1995: 289); it did not exist in classical Chinese. Actually, the combination of the characters *mei* and *shu* did appear once in an early text from the Song dynasty<sup>24</sup>, but the term conveyed a totally different meaning as good paths or methods in which *mei* was an adjective and *shu* was a noun. The eventual appearance of *meishu*, this novel two-character compound was a major stimulus to Chinese scholars’ thinking on art during the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>24</sup> The text is *Liu’s Explanations on Spring and Autumn (Liushi chunqiu yilin)* by Liu Chang (1019-1068), a Song historian and scholar.

According to existing textual evidences, the Japanese term *bijutsu* was coined in 1873 in a report about the 1872 world fair in Vienna. The Chinese version, *meishu*, first appeared twenty-four years later in *A Dictionary of the English and Chinese Language* (*Huaying zidian*, 1897) compiled by Feng Jingru (d. 1913) known as Kingsell, an activist who supported the revolutionary and political leader Sun Yatsen (1866-1925). Feng also managed a printing shop in Japan, which produced the dictionary, featuring “the fine arts” translated as *liuyi*, *meishu*, and *jinggong* (literally, “fine crafts”) (Ogawa 2003: 38-39). Not until the first decade of the twentieth century did several Chinese scholars start to use *meishu* in their writings. However, the boundaries of this term varied according to different users. In its largest sense, any human product was included. Liu Shiwei in his article entitled “On the Spatial Division of the arts (Lun meishu yuandi erqu)” (1907) included manipulation of weapons, such as the axe and the bow, in his notion of *meishu* (Liu 1907b: 3). In its narrowest sense, *meishu* meant just painting. In 1904, a Hong Kong newspaper *Something to Say* (*Yousuowei*) used *meishu* to indicate the study of painting exemplified by an important painter of the Lingnan School Chen Shuren (1883-1948). Neither the largest connotation nor the narrowest denotation was the commonly-accepted meaning of *meishu* in China. In fact, Wang Guowei’s pioneer interpretation of *meishu* became the widespread understanding of the term. Wang was an classical Chinese scholar with path-breaking contributions in several fields of the emerging humanities. He was the first Chinese critic to use *meishu* in discussions of literature and aesthetics. In his several treatises, for instance “Confucius’ Ideas on Aesthetic Education (Kongzi zhi meiyu zhuyi)”, he established the notion of *meishu* as architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature (Wang 1904).

From about 1910 onwards, *meishu* became a regularly used term in Chinese. It appeared in the titles of books and magazines and in the names of art academies. One example is *Fine Arts Series* (*Meishu congshu*), published from 1911. This compilation was published by the Chinese National Glory Company under the initial editorship of Deng Shi (1877-1951), a pioneer in the National Essence movement. Huang Binhong joined the editing team for the third set of the series. Although it was criticized for its unrefined proof-reading, this series was highly recommended to people who were interested in art (Yu 1932: 5). Deng Shi and Huang Binhong selected important Chinese writings about art throughout history in order to promote awareness of art in China. They chose diverse books according to a wide-ranging concept of art. In their view, calligraphy, painting, epigraphy, sculpture, craft, ceramics, textiles, stone, ink, music, literature, and even drama were all different branches of art. In a recent study, Ogawa Hiromitsu has re-emphasized the importance of the term *meishu*. Ogawa suggests that using the eye-catching new term *meishu* in the title guaranteed the success of *Fine Arts Series*. He compares this set with another contemporary

compilation *Art Series* (*Yishu congshu*) published in 1916, proving that the books chosen by *Art Series* were similar in content to the treatises from *Fine Arts Series*. However, *Art Series* was much less influential than *Fine Arts Series*, and Chinese readers soon ignored it (Ogawa 2003).

Moreover, in the 1910s, most art schools were no longer called schools of drawing and painting (*tuhua xuexiao*), and art departments were no longer named departments of drawing and handicrafts (*tuhua shougong ke*). In 1912, an art school named the Shanghai Drawing and Art School, later known as the Shanghai Art Academy, was established by Liu Haisu. Another example is the National Art Academy in Beijing founded in 1918. A number of magazines, some of which were edited by these art schools, also contained *meishu* in their titles, for instance *Meishu* issued by the Shanghai Art Academy from 1919<sup>25</sup>.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals' discussions of art often started explicitly or implicitly from the conceptualization of *meishu*, in all cases, however, demonstrating attempts to control the new usage of the term. In 1913, Lu Xun attempted to answer the question "What is *meishu*?" in the beginning of his article "Suggestions on Disseminating Art (Ni bobu meishu yijianshu)". Lu Xun indicated that sculpture, painting, literature, architecture, and music were different forms of art (Lu 1956). In 1918, Lü Cheng's article "Art Revolution (Meishu geming)" followed the Western view of art as architecture, sculpture, and painting (Lü 1918). In 1920, Cai Yuanpei proposed both broad and narrow senses of *meishu*. In his article "The Origin of Art (Meishu de qiyuan)", *meishu* in a narrow sense referred to "architecture, sculpture, painting (including drawing) and industrial arts (including decorations)" (Cai 1920)<sup>26</sup>. On the other hand, *meishu* in a broad sense extended its range to other expressive forms, such as literature, music, and dancing. Cai Yuanpei specifically claimed that the narrow notion of *meishu* was used in Western art history while the broad notion of *meishu* was used in Western aesthetics. As Feng Zikai summarized in 1935, the common usage of *meishu* appeared in two ways: *meishu* was used in exactly the same way as *yishu*, referring to any creation and expression of something beautiful; *meishu* only referred to the visual part of *yishu* (chiefly painting, sculpture, and architecture) which excluded music, literature, and drama (Feng 1935: 2). The impact of the term *meishu* in the art world of early twentieth-century China should not be underestimated.

### Ideas of Chinese art and hierarchy of categories

The notion of Chinese art also emerged related to the Western conception of the fine arts. In

<sup>25</sup> The earliest recorded Japanese art journal is *Nihon Bijutsu* issued from 1888 to 1943.

<sup>26</sup> What Cai Yuanpei meant by "industrial arts (*gongyi meishu*)" is similar to decorative arts or applied arts. My translation intends to show his emphasis on the function of art in industry.

1907, Liu Shippei published the first two parts of his article “On the Development of Chinese Art Studies (Zhongguo meishuxue bianqian lun)” in *The Journal of National Essence*<sup>27</sup>. Liu briefly summarized the different characteristics of Chinese art in various periods from ancient times to the Song dynasty. For example, Liu suggested that categories of art, such as dancing, singing, drawing, writing, and clothing in prehistoric times were limited by their practical uses; in the Western Zhou, art, if represented by bronzes, jades, music, pictures, and textiles, was closely associated with rites; in the Qin and Han dynasties, only epigraphy was worth discussing as art; in the Tang dynasty, because of religious and imperial influences, sculpture, architecture, calligraphy, and painting of Chinese art made great progress. Liu Shippei’s scope of Chinese art broadly encompassed any Chinese creation connected with such moral ideas as Liu termed “truth (*zhen*)” or “goodness (*shan*)” or “beauty (*mei*)” (Liu 1907a). Also in 1907, Wang Guowei, in his article “The Position of Classical Elegance in Aesthetics (Guya zhi zai meixue shang zhi diwei)”, suggested an aesthetic concept of “classical elegance (*guya*)” which differed from the philosopher Immanuel Kant’s idea of “the beautiful and sublime”. Wang enumerated distinct Chinese artistic forms from the West—“calligraphy, bronzes of the three pre-imperial dynasties, rubbings of Qin and Han, stone inscriptions from the Han to Song dynasties, and books in Song and Yuan times”—as art featuring “classical elegance” (Wang 1907). In 1912, “Records on Chinese Art (Zhongguo meishuzhi)”, an article serially published in *True Record (Zhenxiang huabao)*, a pictorial newspaper organized by founders of the Lingnan School in Shanghai, provided other evidence for the creation of the notion of Chinese art. It gathered short anecdotes about different forms of Chinese art other than calligraphy and painting. Most of these stories were about artworks which had been rarely recorded in Chinese formal historical documents of art, such as paper cutting and woodcarving.

The publication of these texts is a major manifestation of a structural transition from calligraphy and painting to the modern concept of Chinese art. Chinese scholars tried not to neglect any possible form of Chinese art from landscape paintings drawn by the literati to drinking vessels made by unidentified artisans. A similar phenomenon occurred in new histories of Chinese literature during the early decades of the twentieth century. Formerly, the orthodox discourse of Chinese literature had concentrated on prose in the classical literary style known as *guwen*. Poetry was the second most important genre in Chinese literature. Fiction and drama only gained their position in Chinese literary history in the late 1910s (Dai 2002: 176). The new histories of Chinese literature in Republican China, on the other hand, discussed not only political prose and poetry, but also other forms of fiction, drama, philosophical prose, and practical writings, such as personal letters.

<sup>27</sup> The remainder of this treatise cannot be found nowadays. So Liu’s opinion about the later dynasties is unknown.

The effort to enlarge the scope of historical studies concerning Chinese art beyond its erstwhile limitation to calligraphy and painting continued through the 1910s and up to the 1930s. The emphasis of Chinese scholars aimed to match the well-developed branches of the fine arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) in the West. Art historical texts applied the Western notions of art to discussions of Chinese art.

The new canonization of Chinese art affected new categories, such as architecture and sculpture. Scholars in late Qing and Republican China introduced the Western concepts of architecture and sculpture to re-categorize different forms of Chinese art. In 1920, the modern artist and art educator Yu Jifan (1891-1968) proposed a serious study of sculpture in China (Yu 1920). He argued that sculpture held a crucial position in art, and he deplored the lack of research on this art form in China. Yu saw sculpture as no less important than painting. He hoped that academic research on Chinese sculpture could be launched immediately. Teng Baiye (1900-1980), the modern sculptor and painter who studied art in both France and America, expressed a similar idea concerning architecture in his article “Art in China (Zhongguo de meishu)” (1934). Teng pointed out that the Western notion of art covered a wide range of activities, some of which had not attracted enough attention in Chinese history. In this article, he chose only to include architecture, bronzes, lacquer, ceramics, and other applied arts, such as glasswork, cloisonné, silk, and embroidery. Painting was not included in his inquiry because the same issue of the journal published an essay specifically addressing painting entitled “Painting in China (Zhongguo de huihua)” by Zheng Wuchang. Teng Baiye in particular noticed the different status of architecture in Western art and Chinese art. His explanation was that Chinese architecture before the Ming dynasty seldom possessed visible characteristics, except in some temples and tombs. In his view, architectural materials in China were easily destroyed, and could seldom last for a long time. Another problem was the replacement by one dynasty with another, an event which hardly ever preserved the palaces of the previous government. The usual actions after occupying a capital city were to destroy the old palaces and to found a new capital elsewhere. Teng believed that research on the history of Chinese architecture had not been developed, due to a lack of abundant working data. His suggestion for architectural studies was to use the existing buildings mostly dating to the Ming and Qing dynasties and to progress this research further on the basis of written documents (Teng 1934a).

Despite the difficulties raised by Teng Baiye, most art historical publications standardized a concept of fine arts in which architecture, sculpture (including epigraphy), and painting were three major elements. Teng Gu’s *A Brief History of Chinese Art* (1926) and Li Puyuan’s *Outline of Chinese Art History* (1931) only analyzed these major elements with small adaptations. Teng Gu used a paragraph shorter than seven lines to describe the



existence of stoneware, earthenware, carpentry, and other wares made of shell, carapace, bone, and horn in prehistoric China. None of these wares was mentioned again elsewhere in his book. Li Puyuan's strategy was quite simple. He envisaged epigraphy, bronze, jade, seal, and ceramics as subcategories of sculpture.

Beyond these three main elements, some histories embraced calligraphy, decorative arts, and crafts. *History of Fine Arts* (1917) by Jiang Danshu included a fourth chapter on applied arts involving ceramics, foundry productions, dyeing, and weaving, embroidery, lacquer, metalwork, and jades. Zhu Jieqin in *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (1936) added calligraphy to his narrative and regarded epigraphy and sculpture as one category. In addition, he analysed the special Chinese stationery of brush, ink, paper, and inkstone because of their key roles in Chinese art. Zheng Wuchang's *A History of Chinese Art* (1935) contained a chapter on calligraphy and separated the account of ceramics from sculpture to form an extra chapter. Shi Yan discussed painting, sculpture, and architecture in his book *Eastern Art History* (1936), and only touched upon calligraphy and decorative arts.

These choices are instructive. During the last two thousand years, the art of calligraphy has enjoyed the greatest prestige among the different forms of art, and painting has taken second place. Aesthetic theories on calligraphy even extended into the field of painting and influenced its development. On the other hand, prior to the twentieth century, little historical information about architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts had been available, in contrast to large quantities of treatises on calligraphy and painting. However, Jiang Danshu, Teng Gu, and Li Puyuan followed the priorities of Western analysis by deciding to make architecture the supreme topic of their discussions, to demote painting to secondary importance, and to omit any mention of calligraphy. Jiang's explanation was that architecture had led the development of the fine arts. Sculpture and painting were initially subordinate to architecture, and then became independent forms of the fine arts. The approaches of Zhu Jieqin and Shi Yan were less radical, in that both of them included calligraphy in their histories. Zhu put calligraphy between sculpture and painting. In the case of Shi Yan's book, the order of various artistic expressions was not absolutely fixed in the narrative of different periods. Nevertheless, painting and calligraphy constituted one larger group and always appeared before the other group of sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts<sup>28</sup>. His chapter on art in the Qin dynasty was an exception. His running order here was architecture, sculpture, calligraphy, and painting. The reason for this hierarchy can probably be explained by the fact that many more concrete records of architecture and sculpture in the Qin dynasty were available than those of calligraphy and painting. Zheng Wuchang adopted a new order: sculpture (including epigraphy, bronze, and jade),

<sup>28</sup> Within the two groups the orders of these categories were different.

architecture, painting, calligraphy, and ceramics. These authors' choices demonstrate their efforts to show the significance of Chinese art according to Western artistic values. They tried to position Chinese art in parallel with Western art, and to elucidate the comparability of Chinese art to Western art.

Imitating the research scope of Western art history, art historical studies on architecture and sculpture occupied an important position in Chinese scholarship concerning art. This new inclusion of architecture and sculpture, artefacts that were made by unnamed artisans, stimulated Chinese scholars to shift at least part of their attention away from paintings by famous scholar artists. Moreover, Western studies on Chinese art had, since the mid-nineteenth century, devoted most attention to ceramics, bronze, lacquer, and other decorative arts. Influenced by a Western focus, Chinese scholars also dedicated their energies to research on such art forms.

Images included in some of these Chinese publications also reveal a dramatic shift in emphasis. Illustrations produced by new printing techniques commanded respect in late Qing and Republican China. Even though no image was included in his *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* due to the expense of picture printing, Zhu Jieqin had planned to print images. He asserted that art historical books should have illustrations for reference and confirmation. Jiang Danshu succeeded in providing images for his readers. Jiang chose twenty-two pictures for his *History of Fine Arts* (1917): four for architecture, three for sculpture, twelve for painting, and three for decorative arts. In the twelve illustrations of painting, three images from the Han dynasty were anonymous works and the other nine pictures were paintings by famous painters of all periods of Chinese history. Transparently, painting of the literati was still the major object of Jiang Danshu's attention. Li Puyuan went one step further. In his *Outline of Chinese Art History* (1931), Li used sixteen pictures. Five of them are about architecture, including a miniature building discovered from a grave. Another five illustrations about sculpture comprise a vessel, a clay oxcart and ox for the dead, a figure of Buddha, and a stone statue from a mausoleum. The last six images of paintings contain three portraits. Among all these sixteen pictures, only five paintings are attributed to well-known artists. The remainder are all works by unknown artists. Wang Junchu's selection of pictures in *The Development of Chinese Art* (1934) was an even more extreme case. His eleven illustrations were either pictographs or patterns from the relics of prehistoric China. The choice of images in their works demonstrates the growing interest in artworks executed by unknown creators, and it implies that paintings by famous scholar artists were no longer the core of art history in China.

## 4.2 Time in Narratives of Chinese Art Historical Writing

Like in history, the shape of time is crucial in art history which makes historical narratives possible. Writing a history of art in China during the early decades of the twentieth century was closely associated with a new consciousness of time, which in turn affected the process to define a new canon for the national culture. The emergence of temporal frameworks in this period provided new structure and logic for canons in Chinese art.

A linear view of time was “derived from the Chinese reception of a Social Darwinian concept of evolution made popular by the translations of Yan Fu [(1853-1921)] and Liang Qichao at the turn of the [twentieth] century” (Lee 1999: 43). According to Prasenjit Duara, Chinese historians in the early twentieth century adopted the “Enlightenment mode” of a linear and progressive history to write the history of China (Duara 1995: 33-48). This linear and progressive mode also influenced the narratives of art historical texts in the standards of periodization which these writings employed.

While some authors still used the dating system according to the succession of imperial reigns, they also gave the dates in the Western calendar. Fu Baoshi, in his *Chronological Table of Chinese Art* (1937), puts both the Chinese and Western calendars in his table to indicate Chinese and Common Era dates. This dual temporal arrangement inscribes a modern organizational time scheme onto a traditional one. It indicates a new linear consciousness of time which was a founding construction of Chinese modernity, a point that Leo Ou-fan Lee emphasizes in his study *Shanghai Modern* (Lee 1999: 79-80). Both Zhu Jieqin in his *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* (1936) and Shi Yan in his *Eastern Art History* (1936) place the corresponding Western dates in brackets following the Chinese dates. Other authors, such as Li Puyuan, even chose only to provide Western dates. Rather than telling the dates according to different emperors’ successions, these texts adopted a unified and homogenous calendrical dating from beginning to end. This adoption suggests a new coherence in the history of Chinese art, for the relations between different dates are clearly shown without the cultural shading that dynastic nomenclature inevitably promotes.

### Terminology for periodization

According to Johan Huizinga, dividing history into a sequence of periods always “unites all the cultural products of an age and makes them homogeneous” (Huizinga 1984: 76). This strong tendency of periodization was what Chinese scholars of the 1920s and ’30s needed for a coherent narrative of Chinese art history. Through different ways to divide the history of Chinese art, these writers on art illustrated their understandings of the inner logic of

Chinese art development according to new standards.

In the initial stage of creating novel narratives of art history, a new consciousness of time was not evident. The division which Jiang Danshu adopted in his *History of Fine Arts* (1917) was based on different forms of art in China rather than historical episodes. Quite different from Jiang, Teng Gu demonstrated his philosophy of time in Chinese art history when he consciously chose an innovative standard of periodization. Teng Gu's first sentence in the preface to *A Brief History of Chinese Art* (1926) claimed that, under the instruction of Liang Qichao, he decided to study the history of Chinese art. Probably a partial influence from Liang Qichao was Teng Gu's appropriation of a linear and progressive notion of time, particularly visible in his periodization of Chinese art. Teng divided the history of Chinese art into four periods: growth (*shengzhang shidai*, from the emergence of art to Han), cross-fertilization (*hunjiao shidai*, Wei, Jin, and the Six Dynasties), the flourishing period (*changsheng shidai*, from Sui to Song), and stagnation (*chenzhi shidai*, Yuan, Ming, and Qing). The boundaries between different eras for him were not clear-cut. For example, the influence of foreign culture had already existed during the rule of Emperor Mingdi of the Han dynasty (Hanmingdi, 28-75 CE) when Buddhism started to spread in China. Cultural exchange started in his "growth" phase and it became more obvious in the later period of "cross-fertilization". Teng also stressed the last historical stage as "stagnation" rather than decline. His idea coincided with Liang Qichao's major concept of "*jinhua* (growth)". Although *jinhua* is often translated into English as evolution, Liang Qichao used it without a connotation of progress. For Liang, *jinhua* was a constant directional process towards the future. Similarly, Teng Gu compared the history of art to water running in a river: "Sometimes it became a rushing current and sometimes, unsurprisingly, it slowed down; but it never stopped". In his opinion, it was wrong to deny any accomplishment in Yuan, Ming, and Qing times, for unique artworks and artists did appear in these periods (Teng 1926a: 39). Still, art in these dynasties lacked a major break-through, and Teng was not satisfied with the constant recourse to the training technique of copying which had in his view hampered the initiative of creative minds (Teng 1926a: 50). Teng Gu canonized his cross-fertilization and flourishing periods on account of what he judged to be their tremendous innovations in art.

Likewise, Zheng Wuchang claimed in his introduction to *A History of Chinese Art* (1935) that Chinese art could be separated into four eras, exactly as Teng Gu had suggested. Zheng even drew a parallel between Italian art immediately after the High Renaissance, which he considered as "a disastrous decline (*yiluo qianzhang*)", and Chinese art from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. He identified the reason for the stagnation of Chinese art in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties with the cause of what he perceived as the decay

of Italian art in the sixteenth century (Zheng 1935: 9-10). Zheng's understanding of Italian art is problematic, however, the point he attempted to stress is the nature of history to alternate the flourishing period with stagnation. He believed that it was an opportunity for contemporary Chinese art to turn the stagnation of the previous centuries into a starting point of a revival.

The descriptive terminology for division invented by Teng Gu and shared by other Chinese scholars demonstrates their biological view of the past. Different from the European art historians, who by the end of the nineteenth century had already turned away from biological metaphors for the maturity of art history as an academic field (Ledderose 2001: 231), Chinese scholars in pursuit of a scientific discipline of Chinese art history utilized the well-founded and defined terms from natural science for their periodization of Chinese art history. Accordingly, such terms of periodization as “growth”, “cross-fertilization”, and “decay” appeared in Chinese histories of art.

Chinese historians also suggested other sets of terminology to unify the artistic changes of China's past. Zheng Wuchang's version of Chinese painting history in *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies* possessed a new theoretical framework in periodization which contemporary Chinese scholars considered highly original. The most impressive point Zheng made is his structural diagram of four large periods in his book: from the functional period (*shiyong shiqi*, prehistory before Xia times), the ritual period (*lijiao shiqi*, from Xia to Han), the religious period (*zongjiaohua shiqi*, from the Six Dynasties through Tang times), to the literary period (*wenxuehua shiqi*, from the Song dynasty onwards). Zheng's proposition argued against the usual concept of artistic decline during the later dynasties. Instead, he saw a shift of Chinese artists' attention from creating artworks with its practical uses in religious rituals to expressing their emotions in their art production. As Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi have suggested, Zheng's interpretation of Chinese painting history provided confidence and hope in Chinese art's potential. It opened up the possibility for Chinese painting to develop continuously along its age-old route in modern times (Andrews and Shen 2006: 25-30).

Zhu Jieqin's *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* mentioned four epochs in his preface: the practical epoch (*shiyong shiqi*), the ritual and ethical epoch (*lizhi/jiaohua shiqi*), the Buddhist and Zen epoch (*fafa/chan shiqi*), and the literati epoch (*wenren shiqi*). Zhu's division was analogous to Zheng Wuchang's idea, and in the same preface Zhu Jieqin acknowledged the influence of Zheng's work. Zhu accepted Zheng's periodization of Chinese painting and expanded its scope to the whole history of Chinese art (Zhu 1936: 1-2).

Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* (1936) dealt with a time span from prehistoric China

to the end of the Five Dynasties (960 CE). As mentioned in Chapter One, Shi Yan divided this duration into two large periods of “Remote Antiquity” (prehistory to the third century BCE) and “Middle Antiquity” (the third century BCE onwards). It is possible to infer a third period as “Recent Antiquity”. This division was familiar to the popular tripartite periodization in most narratives of general Chinese histories in the 1920s and ’30s (Hon 2004: 516). Within every large period, Shi Yan separated the narrative into dynasties. He explained that he had to employ the dynastic division because his intention was to write a history of Eastern Art, which included China, India, and Japan. Restrained by the complicated historical data of art in “diverse nations, times, regions, and styles”, Shi Yan preferred a simple technique of dynastic division which was easy for him to handle. However, Shi considered this dynastic division to be extremely limiting. He maintained in the first chapter of his introduction that division in writing art history should be based upon the changes of thoughts and styles in art instead of following the periodization of political history (Shi 1936d: 4). Unfortunately, his book did not achieve this aim.

### Abandonment of dynastic concepts

The problem of periodization is also manifest in the way Chinese art historians disassociated the narrative of Chinese art from the classic cycle of dynastic history. Unlike history, as Siegfried Kracauer has suggested, art history challenges the power of one unified chronological time (Kracauer 1969: 143-45). Art objects have their own peculiar sequence of time in terms of each other rather than the political chronological time according to dynasties. Kracauer’s point, which was not intended in the context of Chinese history, is a valuable one, since Chinese intellectuals writing on art endeavoured to break the dynastic concept in periodization. They attempted to define the history of Chinese art according to its own artistic time scheme.

In the introductory part of his book *A History of Painting from Tang to Song Times* (1933), Teng Gu regarded Ise Senichirō’s method of periodizing the history of Chinese painting as the only truly viable one. According to Teng, Ise Senichirō in his *Chinese Painting* (*Shina no kaiga*, 1922), divided the periods of Chinese painting into the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods (Teng 1933a: 2-4). Ise’s terminology for his periods was not innovative. What Teng Gu admired was that Ise disregarded any political name for Chinese dynasties. Using solely the Western calendrical system, Ise proposed that the ancient period of Chinese painting was from prehistory until 712 CE; the medieval period from 713 to 1320; the early modern period from 1321 to the present. The period around 712 CE is the beginning of Tang Emperor Xuanzong’s reign (712-756), but also the beginning of the Nara period (710-794) in Japan. This periodization allows for a degree

of synchronous development across both China and Japan. In Teng's view, breaking down the dynastic system, Ise's periodization showed the development of Chinese painting in its own schedule. Teng admitted the political influence on Chinese art, but it was not the only force for him to stimulate the development of Chinese painting. Teng believed that this periodization identified different phases of Chinese painting related to his proposition of style transformation.

Li Puyuan created a much more sophisticated system in *Outline of Chinese Art History* (1931), because he took the political, economic, and social conditions into consideration. Disregarding all the dynasties, Li treated the development of economics and changes in social structure as the standards for his division. Li also used the terms which indicated the political and social conditions to name his different periods. He discussed Chinese art in ten different epochs as Table 4.1 shows.

Table 4.1

Epoch	Time Span
Primitive Society ( <i>yuanshi shehui</i> )	late 27th century to middle 24th century BCE
Early patriarchal-clan society ( <i>chuqi zongfa shehui</i> )	middle 24th century to late 23rd century BCE
Late patriarchal-clan society ( <i>houqi zongfa shehui</i> )	late 23rd century to late 12th century BCE
Early feudal society ( <i>chuqi fengjian shehui</i> )	late 12th century to early 8th century BCE
Late feudal society ( <i>houqi fengjian shehui</i> )	early 8th century to middle 3rd century BCE
First transitional society ( <i>diyi guoduqi shehui</i> )	middle 3rd century to late 3rd century BCE
Early composite society ( <i>chuqi hunhe shehui</i> )	late 3rd century BCE to middle 12th century CE
Late composite society ( <i>houqi hunhe shehui</i> )	middle 12th century to middle 19th century CE
Second transitional society ( <i>di'er guoduqi shehui</i> )	1839 to 1918 CE
"Socialist" society ( <i>shehui zhuyi shehui</i> )	1919 to 1930 CE

This division is unique. In his preface to this book, Li explained that he had two theories to account for this division. He termed one as "materialistic dialectics (*weiwu bianzheng fa*)" and the other as "the theory of culture diffusion (*wenhua chuanbo lun*)". He considered them equally important (Li 1931: 6-9). In Li Puyuan's opinion, the same social and cultural background gestated the same style of art. Within a relatively constant society, the style of art should remain the same. However, Li's second theory pointed out that in a relatively constant society, its style of art attempted to spread and confronted other styles of

other contemporary societies. These styles definitely influenced and penetrated each other. As a result, the style of art in a society never stayed absolutely the same.

Li Puyuan tried to show dynamic trends by adding transitional epochs. Also, he illustrated that the later part of one period differed from its early part because of new, gradually accumulating, minor changes. However, the way he named these epochs— and his extremely uneven separation of them—buried any possible dynamics this division might have. The longest period Li separated was “the early composite society” lasting fourteen centuries, and his shortest period was “the first transitional society” lasting less than five decades. Fourteen centuries contained a tremendous amount of information to cover and Li Puyuan had no choice but to sub-divide his narratives of a lengthy epoch into dynasties. In contrast to Lu Xun, who was drawn to the chaotic period of the Wei and Jin dynasties (Duara 1995: 45-47), Li looked to the more socially stable periods in Chinese history for artistic achievements.

Nevertheless, Li Puyuan tried hard not only to provide a historical description of art in China, but also to answer why artistic changes in China occurred at certain periods and how these changes were disseminated and accepted by society. In the accounts of every period, Li first elucidated the meaning of the title chosen for each period, then described its material life and general culture—language, science, religion, philosophy, law, and morality—of the period, and finally analyzed its art. Li Puyuan’s dialectical rules of historical materialism in art history were revolutionary not only by Chinese standards at that time but by Western ones too. Lin Wenzheng, an art theorist trained in France, wrote a preface to this book, and he praised it as a milestone of art historical research in China (Li 1931: 2). Li’s book is probably the most radical one among modern Chinese art historical publications in the early decades of the twentieth century. Even the printing pattern of this book distinguished itself from traditional works. Its format was parallel to the Western standards. Instead of the normal vertical arrangement of characters from right to left, the text was in horizontal order reading from left to right.

*The Development of Chinese Art* (1934) by Wang Junchu was an exception in the case of periodization. Its narrative format was organized thematically. All twenty-one chapters in the main text of the book addressed different aspects of Chinese art ranging from patterns on vessels to the Southern and Northern Schools in landscape painting. There is no apparent connection between the chapters, each of which can be read as an individual essay. Arranging them in a vaguely temporal order, Wang Junchu attempted to offer some different insights into Chinese art throughout history.

Both Li Puyuan and Wang Junchu were quite eccentric that their methods of periodization did not gain immediate success in Republican circles of Chinese art. Their



ideas were too radical to be widely accepted at that time. In a bid to avoid being seen as eccentric, other Chinese art historians, such as Yu Jianhua, followed the longstanding dynastic periodization in their histories of Chinese art. The third group of scholars, including Teng Gu and Zheng Wuchang, was the most successful as their epics of Chinese art history were both novel and acceptable to contemporary scholars. Their publications during the early twentieth century discarded the rigid divisions of dynasties. Rather, they organized individual events in the history of Chinese art into a coherent flow. What had been the relative quiescence of the history of Chinese art changed into a temporal development which moved more continuously and more vigorously.

### 4.3 The Appearance of New Art Canons

Out of the mass of artworks and artists that emerged in each period only a small proportion of any category became reified as the objects and members of a canon. These lucky few absorbed the most attention from scholars and the public, while the residual remainder was usually consigned to oblivion. Even so, the process of canon formation never ends. Old canons may be reinforced by subsequent judgement and retain their canonical status. Alternatively, challenged by new standards, they may be demoted and replaced by new canons. In late Qing and Republican China, ideological changes took place gradually in the narratives of Chinese art, but they eventually amounted to a shift that converted pre-modern canons from theoretical guidelines into research objects of the past, and replaced them with canons constructed from new content and new categorical logic.

The following discussion will focus on: 1) the emerging canons of unknown artisans; 2) the growing disregard for a symbolic geography of North and South; 3) the canonical shift from the Orthodox School to the Individualist School; 4) the importation of foreign canonical standards.

#### The artists and artisans

The named artists were the axis of art historical treatises in pre-modern China. Traditional art historical accounts comprised textual descriptions, analysis of artworks, and biographies of their authors. Chinese scholars recorded extensively the names of canonical artists and their artworks. Admittedly, a few artworks whose creators were unknown were also mentioned in these texts. Zhang Yanyuan, for instance, noted mural paintings in the temples of Chang'an, the capital of the Tang dynasty. However, Chinese scholars prior to the twentieth century always considered these works of art to be secondary and relatively less important. A traditional belief in the close connection between the virtue of an artist and his

creation was also a significant factor in why emphasis was given to named artists. From the Tang period, Chinese scholars had been guided by the principle that a great artist “must be a man of superior character and attainments” (Bush and Shih 1985: 194). They encountered difficulties making value judgements on artworks without knowing the identities of authors.

Chinese classical works on art created in the Ming and Qing dynasties attached unique prestige to literati art and exclusively provided accounts of scholarly artists. Distinct from these texts, new histories of Chinese art in the early twentieth century paid more attention to artisans without names and their collective production in seldom discussed categories, such as architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts. Chinese scholars now gave artworks by unknown artisans the same status as “masterpieces” by famous artists in Chinese art history. A case in point is their discussions of art in the Han period. Han achievements in art became the indices of a founding cultural moment that endured through subsequent ages, and functioned historically as a moral and aesthetic reserve against which later art in China—and abroad—could be measured. The modern development of ideas concerning art in China often promotes pictorial values of Han art in a national history of Chinese art. While earlier scholarship addressed only the importance of Han objects for textual studies, researchers from the late nineteenth century onwards promoted Han art’s visual, aesthetic and cultural values.

The earliest record of Han art available today is not from a text on art but can be found in *Commentary on the Waterways Classic* (*Shuijing zhu*), an ancient geographical book describing rivers in China, compiled by the scholar Li Daoyuan (d. 527). In this treatise, Li described images on the stones of Han tombs (Li 1984: 291). Han artworks were first treated as art in Zhang Yanyuan’s *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*. Zhang listed six painting events at the Han court, nine titles of Han painting, and twelve Han painters. He recorded the didactic significance of mural paintings of virtuous historical figures in imperial palaces (Zhang 1963: 2). His interpretation of these idealized portraits followed a Confucian idea. Zhang also mentioned the art activities of Emperor Ming of Han. According to Zhang, Emperor Ming collected paintings and commissioned mural paintings of Buddha (Zhang 1963: 3, 75). Zhang Yanyuan also provided as much information as he could for the nine titles of Han painting, such as the authors, the creation times, the contents, and the reasons for production (Zhang 1963: 54-56). He stated that he had not actually viewed these paintings himself, but had gained the information from earlier documents (Zhang 1963: 25-26). Furthermore, Zhang Yanyuan recorded twelve painters in the Han dynasty. Eight of them were court painters, and the other four were officials of the Han government. Zhang began by providing biographical information for these painters and then remarked on their painting skills.

During the following eight hundred years, pre-modern Chinese scholars accepted Zhang Yanyuan's narrative concerning Han painting as the orthodox history. Subsequently, new developments emerged outside the orthodox histories of painting. Song scholars' interests in antiques and Qing epigraphic studies stimulated great attention for Han objects other than paintings. For example, the epigraphist Zhao Mingcheng's (1081-1129) *Records of Bronzes and Stone Carvings* (*Jinshi lu*, completed in 1117) included Han stone rubbings. However, the major focus of Song literati was on the inscriptions which accompanied the portraits in Han rubbings rather than engraved images (Wu 1989: 3-4, 38-42). These scholars and antiquarians treated Han stones as rare ancient objects, and they paid relatively little attention to their pictorial values. Likewise, in the eighteenth century, Qing scholars were still concerned with ancient inscriptions, although Qing epigraphic studies on Han objects collected abundant materials of Han bronzes, stones, and bricks from excavations.

A different orientation toward a synthesis of textual and pictorial data emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Wu Hung, *An Index to Bronzes and Stone Carvings* (*Jinshi suo*) written by the late Qing scholars Feng Yunpeng and Feng Yunyuan in 1821 was a turning point in the scholarship of Han art. In spite of its textual bias, this book attempted to explain both literary and pictorial materials from the Wuliang Shrine (Wuliang ci) in terms of their interrelatedness. The Wuliang Shrine, which dates back to the second century CE, in what is now south-western Shandong, is a traditional Chinese stone chamber dedicated to a family of Wu (Wu 1989: xxi, 45-46). As a result of this late-Qing research on the Wuliang Shrine, images created by unknown artisans were no longer converted into historical narrative destined only to be promoted by scholars many generations later. Neither did they serve merely as a supplement ready to be reproduced in support of textual sources. Rather, they appeared side by side with inscriptions, and they contributed as visual evidence to the understanding of the shrine.

Taking one step further in the canonization of Han art, researchers in late Qing and Republican China directly pointed out the significance of Han objects in the long history of Chinese painting. The Qing scholar Yang Han (1812-1882) held up stone engravings from the Han dynasty as vital evidence central to his argument that the history of Chinese painting did not begin with the emergence of scroll paintings in the Wei-Jin period. Instead, he suggested that images from Han objects should be viewed as an important foundation of Chinese painting history (Yang 2000: 71).

Modern scholars, unlike their predecessors, consciously promoted Han art not for its historical significance to textual studies but for its own artistic values. Zheng Wuchang claimed in his *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies* (1929) that it was a pity that no Han artisans had been recorded by texts of the past. They had disappeared from

the canons established around scroll painting from Song to early Qing. The Han dynasty, in Zheng's view, was the starting point when elite artists occupied the whole scenery of Chinese painting (Zheng 1929: 37-38). Zheng Wuchang demonstrated Han painting through images on stones and bronzes. He was amazed by the portraits in the Wuliang Shrine. He considered them to be successful and influential, and representative of the high artistic level of Han painting (Zheng 1929: 28-35). In his *Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting* (1931), Fu Baoshi attributed the root of beautiful lines in Chinese painting to the patterns on Han objects, to Han mural paintings, and to Han stone engravings (Fu 1931a: 41-42). He not only admired the simplicity in Han art, but also believed that Chinese painting established its tradition of lines in the Han period. Likewise, in 1936, the philosopher and aesthetician Zong Baihua (1897-1986) claimed that "the Eastern Jin [painter] Gu Kaizhi's painting absolutely emerged from Han painting" (Zong 1936). Meanwhile, Zhu Jieqin devoted a whole monograph to Qin and Han art. Zhu emphasized the great accomplishments of the Han dynasty in architecture, sculpture as bronzes and steles, and calligraphy. In particular, he noted the great influence of Han calligraphy on subsequent generations (Zhu 1936). The scholar Feng Guanyi singled out stone engravings of the Han dynasty for one chapter of his book entitled *Separate Comments on Chinese Art History* (*Zhongguo yishushi gelun*, 1941). In Feng's opinion, the stone engravings showed the prosperousness of Han wall painting and stone carving. He even enjoyed the special artistic delight of the ink rubbings, which he believed to be far superior to those created by later generations (Feng 1941: 348-49). Lu Xun was also interested in Han art, and collected stone engravings and rubbings of the Han Dynasty (now in the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing).

Most successfully, Teng Gu's research in the 1930s on Han engraved stones represents a modern trend in both Chinese and Western art historical scholarship on Han pictorial art. Applying formal analysis to his 1937 discussion of the engraved stones from a Han tomb in Nanyang, Henan, Teng established a Chinese artistic tradition in designing and carving pictorial scenes on stones. He concluded that two modes of Chinese stone engravings, which he labelled respectively as "bas-relief style (*ni fudiao de*)" and "painting style (*ni huihua de*)", coexisted in the Han period. Teng claimed that the Nanyang reliefs were the archetype for the bas-relief style, which should not be positioned in the category of painting. On the other hand, the painting style represented by the carvings in the Wuliang Shrine was much closer to painting. Teng Gu suggested that the second kind of carvings, radically different from the reliefs of Ancient Greece, Ancient Egypt, and Ancient Middle East, possessed an art historical value for research on Han painting. He also mentioned that brushwork in Han brick carvings was very similar to that of Han mural painting (Teng 1937c). Teng Gu's analysis led to discussions on Han mural art by Western scholars, such as

Wilma Fairbank, from the 1940s onwards. Fairbank developed the concept of two different artistic modes of Eastern Han stone carvings when she compared carvings from three Han sites in Shandong (Wu 1989: 56). Her explanation for the emergence of two distinct Han engraving styles laid the foundation for Martin Powers' studies on the patronage of Han art which emphasizes the social and political influence on styles of artworks (Powers 1991: 23-30).

Modern Chinese researchers provided detailed descriptions of artworks by unknown artisans. The Han objects mentioned above are part of these recovered canons. Similarly, scholars conducted academic research on other surviving works of art by unknown producers. Examples include the Buddhist caves of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, embroideries of the Tang dynasty, and ceramics from the Song and Yuan period. Their research was not concerned with the makers of these artworks. It was more important for them to analyze the style, form, and content of these objects in relation to other products in art history. Scholars in early twentieth-century China discovered unknown artists whom previous researchers had considered as unimportant artisans. Via various professional studies, they positioned these artworks as canons in Chinese art history.

### The Southern and Northern Schools

The idea of the Southern and Northern Schools, one of the crucial formulations in Chinese art history, appeared in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Ming artist and scholar Dong Qichang might not be the creator of this division, but he theorized it to the extent that most later Chinese scholars on art engaged with it either positively or negatively. Dong Qichang held a strong preference for the Southern School. While he promoted the Southern School which he considered flawless, the Northern School, for Dong, “slipped into unimportance” (Cahill 1987: 430). During the early Qing period, Dong and his “Southern School” dominated the Chinese art world. His followers echoed his aesthetic taste in their art productions. Only in the Republican period, did Dong's theory meet a severe challenge.

There have been discussions concerning two major uncertainties about the Southern and Northern Schools from the Republican period: the true originator of the theory and the existence of the South-North division. In 1932, Yu Shaosong was the first scholar to express doubt about Dong Qichang as the originator of the theory (Yu 1932: 22-23, volume 3). Instead, he declared another Ming scholar named Mo Shilong to be the creator. For the next thirty years, this view of the intermingling between the writings of Mo Shilong and Dong Qichang was described as “a near-consensus” by Wai-kam Ho (Ho 1976: 113).

As Tong Shuye recalled, in 1925 his painting tutor Wang Jihuan (1898-1936) told him that the division of the Southern and Northern Schools was unreal (Tong 1941: 178).

Wang's explanation for this was the distribution of artists' hometowns in these two schools. Artists in Dong's Southern School were mostly from the northern part of China, while artists in his Northern School were mostly from the South. This argument somehow misses the point. According to Wai-kam Ho, Dong Qichang "made it amply clear that in his theory the geographical origin of the artists was not taken into account" (Ho 1976: 115). A group of art historians, including Teng Gu, Yu Jianhua, Qi Gong (1912-2005), and Tong Shuye, found other problems. They came up with the more persuasive criticism that this late Ming product was "ahistorical and biased" (Cahill 1987: 429).

Teng Gu disputed the division between the styles of painting by the literati and those by the artisans. In his mind, it was problematic not only to divide Chinese painting into the Southern and Northern Schools, but also to divide Chinese painters into literati and court styles. He believed that most recorded Chinese painters were literati with different life attitudes and tastes (Teng 1931b). Thus, Teng Gu deconstructed the contradiction between the two schools. Yu Jianhua explicitly pointed out that Dong's division was entirely subjective and without historical evidence (Yu 1937: 132). Late in 1963, Yu published another book entitled *On the Southern and Northern Schools of Chinese Landscape Painting* (*Zhongguo shanshuihua de nanbeizong lun*), in which he claimed that Dong Qichang's theory reflected a contemporary struggle between "scholar-official circles and the inner court circles...dominated by eunuchs" (Cahill 1987: 442). James Cahill has found Yu's suggestion stimulating. Similarly, Qi Gong analyzed the reason why Dong Qichang and his contemporaries invented this division. His conclusion was that these initiators attempted to degrade their rival, the Zhe School (*zhe pai*) painters led by Dai Jin (1388-1462), and to promote their own lineage, the Wu School (*wu pai*) from Shen Zhou (Qi 1991 [1944]). Tong Shuye concurred with Qi Gong's opinion and even claimed a new division of the Southern and Northern Schools on the basis of geography and painting style. Scholars who showed sympathy to Dong Qichang, such as Deng Yizhe (1892-1973), also maintained that Dong's idea was a philosophical statement rather than a historical one.

The crucial motive for modern Chinese writers on art to object to the late Ming division of the Southern and Northern Schools in Chinese landscape painting was their efforts to support the more realistic style in old Chinese paintings. In their view, it was improper that the canonical status of the Southern School was superior to that of the Northern School. Disregarding the symbolic geographical division of North and South in painting, they sustained the equal importance of styles by both the literati and the so-called artisans.

## The Orthodox and the Individualist

One of the major shifts of art canons in early twentieth-century China is from the Orthodox School to the Individualist School. This transition took place in both art practice and art historical writing.

In late Ming and early Qing, the Loudong School, founded by Wang Shimin and Wang Jian, occupied the seat of Orthodoxy. It carried on the lineage of painting from Dong Qichang. Their version of Chinese painting history became the official account when the Qing emperor Kangxi (1654-1722) accepted this version and appointed Wang Yuanqi, the grandson of Wang Shimin and the legitimate successor to the Loudong School, artistic advisor to the court. According to James Cahill, the Manchu rulers supported the Orthodox landscape manner as the official style of Qing court painting (Cahill 1982: 190). These three artists, all with the same family name Wang, along with another established painter Wang Hui were called the “Four Wangs” by Chinese scholars. Their styles dominated the painting discourse in the Qing dynasty. Most elite followed this mainstream of Chinese painting. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, the literati still painted in the style of the Four Wangs. For example, landscape paintings by the official Wu Dazheng (1835-1902) were usually in the manner of Wang Jian and Wang Yuanqi.

From the late nineteenth century, in the southern part of China around Shanghai, the influence of the Four Wangs declined due to the rise of painters in Anhui and Yangzhou, and painters of the Shanghai School. Most ink painters no longer imitated the Four Wangs exclusively. They started by copying artworks by the Four Wangs but expanded to those by other ancient masters. Also, the contemporaries of the Four Wangs, who were Ming loyalists called *yimin* and represented by Shitao and Bada Shanren (1626-1705), attracted Chinese scholars and artists’ attention. Two decades later, Yu Jianhua recalled this change of the late 1920s as a time when almost everyone painted in the styles of Shitao, Bada Shanren, and other earlier Ming loyalists and painters, for instance Gong Xian (1618-1689) and Kuncan (1612-1673). Yu claimed that the prices of artworks done by Ming loyalists were extremely high, and collectors lost interest in the Four Wangs (Yu 1986 [1947]).

Under the rule of Manchu, Ming loyalists’ artistic influence was muted by the Orthodox School even though they gained their reputation locally in small circles. Late Qing and Republican scholars rediscovered these painters labelled as individualists. They employed the styles and methods of the Individualist School and opposed those of the Orthodox School, which they saw as responsible for the decay of Chinese painting in the Qing dynasty. These scholars believe that the individualists would breathe new life into Chinese ink painting.

Resonant with this switch in art practice, most histories of Chinese painting in

the Republican period reconsidered the Orthodox and Individualist Schools' positions respectively in Chinese art canons. Both Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu emotionally blamed the bad habits of endless copying in Chinese painting inherited from the Four Wangs at the end of the 1910s. In 1925, Teng Gu criticized the Orthodox School severely for its narrowness. He had no time for this school at all and, consequently, he made a terrible mistake about the kinship between Wang Jian, Wang Shiming, and Wang Yuanqi. Wang Jian had no blood relationship with either Wang Shiming or Wang Yuanqi. Teng mistakenly claimed that Wang Jian was the son of Wang Shiming and the father of Wang Yuanqi (Teng 1926a). Such an error was unforgivable in a professional historical study. However, this fault reveals that Teng Gu did not take the Orthodox School seriously. Pan Tianshou totally agreed with Teng Gu and even reproduced his mistake, repeating Teng's story in his history of Chinese painting (Pan 1926a). Yu Jianhua also denied that the Four Wangs' work had made any contribution to Chinese painting. In contrast, he praised the Individualist School highly (Yu 1937). Yu was very passionate about Shitao and the artist's creation while his attitude towards other artists was much calmer.

Admittedly, a few authors of Chinese art history, such as Zheng Wuchang, treated the Orthodox and Individualist Schools more objectively. The majority of early twentieth-century intellectuals on art engaged in promoting the Individual School to replace the Orthodox School's canonical position.

### The foreign and the native

The production of Chinese native canons in late Qing and Republican China also involved the importation of foreign canonical standards. Constantly paralleling Chinese artworks with famous foreign productions, Western masterpieces in particular, these art historical texts of the early twentieth century indirectly demonstrate the pre-eminence of certain Chinese artworks in an emerging Chinese canon, which Chinese scholars would expect to be adopted soon by scholars outside China as well. Teng Gu's *A Brief History of Chinese Art* (1926) is a good example. Teng proposed that the Yungang Grottos and the Longmen Grottos shared the same glory as the renowned sculptures in Florence and Venice, even though he did not specify which sculptures he had in mind (Teng 1926a: 18). He even drew a parallel between ancient Egyptian and Babylonian high towers and ancient Chinese high terraces to suggest the universal enjoyment of height in antiquity (Teng 1926a: 2). Teng's aim was not to carefully compare Chinese and foreign artworks but to illustrate the greatness of Chinese art in a universal scope.

Similarly, Zhu Jieqin regarded the art of the Qin and Han dynasties in China to be on a par with that of the Hellenistic age and the early Roman Empire in Europe, which



formed a connecting link between the preceding Zhou, Spring and Autumn, Warring States periods and the following era of the Six Dynasties (Zhu 1936: 5). His idea was that in both China and the West the preceding art styles were actually the progenitors of the following ones. He listed different Western schools as Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Neo-impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Neo-Idealism, Cubism, and New-Romanticism. In his view, painting in the Han period could be termed Classicism, since it fostered the emergence of painting in Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, a period of Romanticism (Zhu 1936: 141-42). Zhu suggested that the role of art in the Han dynasty, especially its influence on the art of the later periods, was as important as Classicism to Romanticism. Because his discussion of Chinese art was only about the Qin and Han periods, Zhu did not exploit his parallels for later Western schools.

Before his analysis of Chinese mural painting from the Han dynasty, Zhu Jieqin introduced the story of Altamira, a cave in Spain famous for its Upper Palaeolithic featuring drawings and polychrome rock paintings of wild mammals. He considered drawing as an activity common to primitive people around the world. He inferred that people in prehistoric China must have also created similar outline drawings to represent something which could not be expressed in language or by gesture. He claimed that according to ancient documents, mural paintings existed in the pre-imperial period and became popular during the Han dynasty (Zhu 1936: 129-31). Zhu actually used an example in the development of Western art to infer a developing stage of Chinese art without giving any concrete proof.

Zhu Jieqin also connected paintings from the Han dynasty with sculptures by the sculptor, Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), claiming that a parallel existed between Han paintings and Rodin's sculptures. Zhu suggested a similarity between two forms of art so wide apart in time and space. His aim was to bring discussions about Chinese art close to the Western artistic system. Zhu Jieqin's mention of Rodin can largely be explained by the contemporary popularity of Rodin in China. Several books and articles introduced Rodin's artworks and art theories, for instance, the translation of Rodin's *L'Art* into Chinese in 1930 (Zeng 1930) and the publication of "Art of Rodin (Luodan de yishu)" in 1933 (Yi 1933). Rodin, one of the most successful modern artists, occupied a unique position in any available Chinese account of contemporary Western fine arts. Zhu Jieqin must have read at least part of these texts on Rodin, which inspired him to compare this Western master with Chinese art productions. Zhu maintained that, in spite of its unsophisticated style, Han painting's naivety, just like Rodin's sculptures modelled on nature, possessed a certain artless beauty (Zhu 1936: 141-42). He achieved the same joy in his appreciation of Han paintings and Rodin's sculptures. In a sense, Zhu Jieqin raised the importance of Han painting and proposed a universal standard of beauty in art works regardless of their

different expressive forms.

Not only art productions but also art theories were compared. When talking about Ming painting, Li Puyuan in *Outline of Chinese Art History* (1931) investigated the relationship between painting and music suggested by the Ming scholar Shen Hao (b. 1586), in his *Painting World* (*Hua chen*). He explained that a French landscape painter, Constantine Troyon (1810-1865)<sup>29</sup> received a certain acclaim for being the first painter in France to possess a musical flavour. It was a surprise for Li to find a Chinese instance of a similar idea two or three hundred years before this Western one. Li Puyuan cited Shen Hao's words to demonstrate an innovative statement that great paintings had musical rhyme and lingering charm. He exclaimed it a pity that although art theories in the Ming period were in a leading position all over the world, they were not maintained in that high position by later thinkers. It seemed to him that they were so novel that later generations did not dare to mention them again (Li 1931: 175).

Through various comparisons between China and the West, these authors determined to show the achievements of Chinese art in terms of creativity and on the basis of theories in accordance with predominantly Western terms.

Beyond the attitude of general paralleling China with the West, these Chinese publications also focused on the influences from the geographical territory outside China in the history of Chinese art. An example given by Jiang Danshu was a style of columns in the Yungang Grottos. Jiang regarded these columns as Corinthian columns in Greek and Roman times, for they shared the same style. He believed that these columns were evidence of Western influence on Chinese art (Jiang 1917: 6). A more popular idea shared by these texts was the external impacts from India and West Asia in the history of Chinese art. In Teng Gu and Zheng Wuchang's narratives, Chinese art gained tremendous benefits from the internalization of Indian and West Asian influences from the third to tenth centuries. Wang Junchun also mentioned that Chinese art made progress when absorbing the Indian style with the introduction and spread of Buddhism.

The layout of Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* (1936) confirmed Shi's effort to demonstrate the relationship within what he called Eastern Art. He placed the descriptions of Chinese art, Indian art, and Japanese art in the same period together and emphasized the interaction between them.

Furthermore, these writings analyzed achievements in the history of Chinese art in order to understand contemporary Chinese art and to explore the possible development of Chinese art in the future. In Teng Gu and Zheng Wuchang's opinion, the prosperity

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<sup>29</sup> The information given by Li Puyuan in the book is not correct. The artist's real name is Constant Troyon, a French animal painter of the first rank who was born in 1810 rather than 1813.

of Chinese art in ancient times was associated with the internalization of nature and the external impacts of foreign art. Consequently, they expected that learning from Western art and the imitation of nature would expose a unique aura for Chinese art and ensure its survival in the future. Teng Gu applied an example from eugenics to verify this view. That is, since a person with his or her parents from different ethnic groups was often exceptionally endowed, Chinese art combined with foreign cultures would produce splendid outcomes (Teng 1926a: 15, 26).

Wang Junchu in Chapter Twenty of *The Development of Chinese Art* (1934) emphasized the complex situation of contemporary schools of Chinese art through different adoptions of external influences on Chinese art traditions. Wang reckoned that the emergence of woodcarving in Shanghai in the 1920s and '30s was a phenomenon of regeneration in Chinese art. According to him, woodcarving combined the indigenous techniques of carving and a preference for the Western styles to represent contemporary social life in the main cities of China (Wang 1934: 71). Also, Li Puyuan expressed in his last chapter “the Future of Chinese Art (Zhongguo yishu zhi jianglai)” that, based upon the future social and economic background of China, Chinese art would increasingly engage with the outside world, and would become one part of a universalized art. Li’s big hope for Chinese art was that rather than hang in the air, it might touch the solid ground of daily life (Li 1931: 212-16).

Innovations in writing the art history of China represented efforts by Chinese scholars to adapt to changes in society and to conserve Chinese tradition. This development provided new ways for Chinese scholars to reconsider Chinese art, its theories, canons, and functions. The extension of Chinese art to various categories shows the enlarged scope of Chinese scholarship on art. The linear time scheme indicates Chinese scholars’ efforts to forge a continuous national history of art. New canons represented by artworks of unknown artisans and of the Individualist School secure Chinese artists’ confidence in the future of Chinese art.

Chinese art historical publications in the early decades of the twentieth century applied these new paradigms in historical narratives of art in China so as to ensure a new access to China’s art historical past. They disseminated modern knowledge of Chinese art in China with the intention of enlightenment. This process of writing new histories for Chinese art contributed to the formation of a new canonical set of works for art history in early twentieth-century China.