Art in a general sense is the expression of a subject, its ideas, feelings and visions of the world. Likewise, an artist rooted in his culture, has the opportunity to express the mental mechanisms of his culture, its origins and his interpretative processes of the world. For this reason intercultural studies are of fundamental importance, and art is one of the best means of investigation because it can give a genuine image of its culture of origin. This could apply to modern art, traditional art, or to that which has suffered foreign influences. Any form of art in any situation is the mirror of the culture from which it comes from and is imbued with its aesthetic ideas. Therefore, the study of art from different cultures and historical periods will enrich the artist’s expressive abilities. The vision of nature, the vision of man in the world and the aesthetic ideas of Western and Chinese culture are often almost the opposite, but this does not exclude the possibility of dialogue. We strongly believe that Western art can be enriched through knowledge of the latter. At the same time, however, we must be careful about what it brings and how it is imported, and above all, we must not allow external culture to prevail over indigenous culture. For this reason, dialogue must be undertaken with wisdom and in full knowledge of the facts, not only by transferring information, but also by having a deep knowledge and understanding of both cultures in order to find an appropriate mean of communication. This is the most difficult aspect of intercultural exchange, as we are living in the age of globalization and international capitalism. In the so-called “global village” we believe we have unlimited cognitive possibilities with minimal effort and we are led to believe that communication is within reach and almost automatic, for example via the Internet or the ease of trade of goods, and this inevitably leads to superficial and mostly wrong communication. This vision is decidedly wrong, because it leads to shallow false knowledge, spread of prejudice and cultural arrogance. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution for the intercultural communication problem, therefore it requires an intellectual and cognitive effort, a desire to study and gain deeper knowledge. Thus, our goal is to create a language suitable for establishing a cultural dialogue that is structured and not superficial.

This magazine aims to give a voice to the contemporary Chinese and non-Chinese scholars and artists with a background of studying in China. Our purpose is to create a cultural bridge between two great cultures, in order to establish a rich and fruitful dialogue in the sphere of Chinese painting. Chinese mountain and water painting is one of the main artistic expressions in China, characterized by more than 1500 years of evolution and revolutions, and has found a new golden age of creativity and expression in the contemporary times. This magazine will introduce some modern and contemporary Chinese artists, the theories of Chinese painting and the views of environmental aesthetics, in a way that is reachable for everybody, from the academic world to any curious mind interested in the field of Chinese art and culture.

Our hope is to popularize an artistic expression that could have a positive impact on our lives, enabling us to cross certain limits subconsciously imposed by the western culture, from the very roots like the concept of reality, our existence, our place in this world and how we relate with it. Every cultural system has replied to these basic questions, but the answers are all different, and art is one of the deepest expressions that embody all of these diverse conceptions.
One is all and all is one

“Transform Heaven and Man into one” 天人之际，合而为一. It is ideas such as these, influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, that prompted some to flee the vain pleasures of this worldly life and make their abode in the mountains.

Reclusive culture in Chinese mountain and water painting

In Chinese traditional thinking, isolation is often a prerequisite for the landscape painter in order to fully understand and express the characteristics of the subject he paints, as merely the external observation would be insufficient to comprehend and clearly describe the natural scenario. By analysing the texts of two fundamental Chinese traditional artists, Zong Bing’s Introduction to Mountain and Water Painting, 《画山水叙》 and Guo Xi’s Essay on Mountain and Water Painting, 《林泉高致》, and some paintings, we see how the realization of a mountain and water painting is not only an artistic practice delivering aesthetic pleasure, but it is also an experience of self-cultivation and spiritual improvement, thanks precisely to a life in harmony with nature.

On the innovation and transcendence of contemporary Shan Shui Painting from the compromise spirit 折衷精神 of Lingnan School of Painting

This article attempts to analyze the compromise spirit 折衷精神 of Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派 from Gao Jianfu’s 《绘画现代化观念》 to the absorption and practice by the pioneers and followers of the Lingnan School of Painting, tries to discuss that the road of “compromise spirit” should be based on the emotion and creative of local culture and their own dialectical concept. This paper analyzes and explores the significance of the spirit of Lingnan School of Painting at present and in the future.

Gao Jianfu: Painting Style & Signatures

An analytical study of the works of one of the most influential painters of republican china, by one of the most prolific art scholars of contemporary china.
Our Approach
From the Figure of the Chinese Intellectual Artist to Contemporaneity.

During the eighth century China, a new figure of intellectual artist was born: this figure would become topical in the Chinese cultural panorama and made its way to the present day.

Wenren Hua, is the one who, following the humanistic values and teachings of the tradition, updates and applies them to the artistic-intellectual needs of his time. This process has never stopped, and still persists in the contemporary world.

The Wenren Hua encompasses the poet, the painter, the calligrapher, the theorist, the scholar and the intellectual in general in a single figure and sees the cultivation of the spirit and mind as one of the main purposes of his/her work.

In this way, a close link is established between practice and artistic theory; at the same time there is no separation between the arts, and there is a common thread between intellectual practice and material application.

Of course this figure is closely linked to Chinese cultural heritage, but this does not make it less compatible with the artistic-cultural needs of Westernized contemporaneity.

It also fits naturally into the trend of Environmental Aesthetics, which is an expressive channel of contemporary art of fundamental importance, given that the biggest problems that afflict our society are often linked to the environment and the destructive approach that contemporary men have towards it.

Respect for nature and the need to preserve it by living with it in harmony are intrinsic elements of traditional Chinese thought and that of the Wenren Hua, which see man and nature as two elements that are part of the same system: in these terms, in order to preserve human life natural existence must also be protected, or else we would go towards the decay of both.
We find ourselves living in the era of globalization. Thanks to the infosphere that we live in, with just one click we can be in Togo, with two clicks you can be studying Sanskrit, with three you’re already updated on what’s going on in Bhutan, and with four more clicks you’re listening to a piece played with the duduk, and immediately after we could be looking at two whirling der-vishes. In half a day we become experts in Armenian music, Sufi spirituality, Himalayan geopolitics and in any other aspect of world culture.

Fantastic. Finally, a world without cultural barriers, devoted to exchange and access to mutual knowledge. In this global village without borders, we dance to the beat of superficiality, sloppy culture and of cultural arrogance, where ignorance is adorned with two-dimensional images, where the concept of “knowing that you do not know” has been abolished, although without knowing.

Ah I forgot, in this Village the chief is western, the customs and habits are mostly western, the linguistic and material means of communication are western, like almost every intellectual expression and world view of its inhabitants. The inhabitants tend to ignore what is found outside the Village, not by choice, but by condition, not out of lack of curiosity, but because of the limited means. The Village is truly global on a physical level, it truly embraces the entire earth’s surface, but in fact it remains on the surface, it does not deepen, and if it deepens it does it in its own way, as it would in the centre from which it developed. In fact, the Village is ancient and full of History and histories, it has always had to do with multiculturalism, always in expansion and translation, but only recently has it reached global status.

The Village is now global, so everyone is welcome but the rules to follow are those of the village head. Everyone can bring something to the table, but it will still have to be adapted to the matrix of the Village.

With these premises, it is possible to face and analyse infinite issues concerning the actual state of the alleged globalization. Of how, for instance, it is believed to know different cultures, but that in reality this knowledge is based only on a store of empty images which are then filled with the world view of the aforementioned head of the Village. The same goes for that mercantile capitalism that has come to every corner of the globe, but that manages to give the best of itself only if it follows the needs of the Village.

We as Sino-artists (mostly of non-Chinese origin, who live in China, who devote themselves to the study and practice of Chinese painting, even without having a structured training of Western origin behind them), will focus on the areas concerning our cultural sphere, precisely that of Chinese art. Especially those related to painting, with a particular eye for landscape painting, which from now on we will call according to the Chinese denomination, mountain and water painting.

“shanshui hua 山水画”

The main will is to communicate with the Village through our art and our words, trying to present one of the many shaded areas with which it is scattered. Our task is to find a language that is intelligible to the Village as well as faithful to the original meaning. Without smoothing its diversity, without avoiding clashes, without sweetening the pill. In this way it will be the Village that will make the effort to understand, and only in this way will the communication be successful. In fact, we trust in the Village’s ability to understand languages not forged by itself.

The reasons that drive us in this campaign are varied and erudition is not one of those. At best it can be a side effect.

One of the biggest problems of the Village is that he believes that only movements of progress or evolutions exist inside it, only he has reached the status of “modern”, and those who are not indigenous come from a static culture, backward and anchored to the past; without the use of the means forged by the Village and without its revolutionary spirit no one can participate in the dialogue of contemporaneity. So, to finally get into the subject, in the Village Chinese painting is traditional, therefore linked to the past, unable to evolve, something good just for the art history books and museums, worthy of respect, but with the same respect that is given for archaeological finds.

There is no conception of a modern or contemporary Chinese painting, also because when the term Chinese painting is pronounced, for some reason it is always accompanied by the adjective “traditional”, which clearly denies the concept of modernity. Chinese art can only be defined as modern if expressed through the means and processes of modern western art.

Revelation! There is modern and contemporary Chinese art; mountain and water painting has been evolving for at least 1500 years, and continues to evolve, and other painting expressions are even older. As obvious as it seems, China is extremely large, therefore there are many centres of cultural irradiation, and for this
reason there are various schools within China that follow different pictorial expressions. Consequently there is not just one movement of contemporary Chinese painting.

Our main objective follows:

To spread the knowledge of contemporary Chinese painting outside of China, and to give voice to the great artists of the last century as well as to the new young artists.

Why is it important you may ask? For starters, in order to make sense of the term globalization. But above all, to enrich the Village and to redefine its ideas of intellectual absolutism.

Chinese art, together with all the other intellectual expressions of China, refers to a system of values that has come down to the present day from ancient times. This great apparatus of knowledge and ideas has influenced and is still influencing the world view of Chinese people and of course also their artistic expressions. The same discourse can be re-proposed in a general way also to the evolution of the western mind, a process that probably was less coherent than the Chinese one, which however led to the formation of various expressions of thought rooted in the conception of the world that the Village forged during its evolution. And this is exactly the key point of our reasoning, once the world interpretation system is established, it is almost impossible to get out of it, as it is invisible, and its boundaries are not recognizable. Because it being the only view you know, you believe that it is the only view that exists. Just to clarify, it’s like those unfortunate people who were chained in the platonic cave. It wasn’t until someone came in from the outside, did they realize the condition they were in.

This was also the case for China until the mid-nineteenth century. China behaved like the Village, just another Village that did not see those who were outside of it, except of course through its own modalities. And even though external cultural influences were accepted, it was always retranslated in Chinese terms, just like the Village does. As a consequence, there was a sense of cultural superiority compared to that which was not Chinese. Until one terrible day, when the barbarians arrived with cannons and rifles and destroyed the armies of the great empire. On that day, besides the fall of many lives, many certainties also fell in terms of value. Their system had not protected them from catastrophe, as it once did since the dawn of Chinese culture. This was not the first time that China fell into the hands of foreigners, and every time the foreigners were sinicized. Thus, their cultural continuity persisted. However, the value system was still slowly collapsing to the point where it almost disappeared. Since then it has rebuilt itself, but the system of the other foreign villages took a hold as well, strong of its modernity.

Accordingly, in contemporary China it can be said that there are two systems, the original and the imported one. The same could be said for the world of art, but art can be applied at will on any area. This has created a unique situation where the two worlds communicate with each other, sometimes one taking over the other, creating conflicts but also a very fertile ground for creativity.

It is exactly for this reason that we want to make this new system of thought known to the Village, only then will it be able to see its own boundaries, so that it will be able to ask new questions and give itself new answers.

Let’s take a concrete example. The ancient western visual arts and the Renaissance up to modernity, basically acted in the field of mimesis. In painting, all the techniques to represent the visual aspect of the surrounding world comes together. Now coming back to the Village, to top it all, there was this terrifying yoke called Albertan’s perspective. The Village gave a great deal of value to the sight, making it almost the only tool for perceiving reality. Establishing invisible perceptual borders because they were all-encompassing. However, at a certain point artists and intellectuals got tired of this conception and thus historical avant-garde was born. Unfortunately, not knowing any other way of perceiving the world other than the anthropocentric one of the gaze, they found themselves in a rather uncomfortable position, so much so that the path ended with destruction of the form and that of the painting itself, and having to resort to new media to be able to express themselves. It is precisely for these reasons that in contemporary era we refer to paintings as an “old lady” who keeps up with new artistic expressions with great difficulty.

So where is all this getting at? In China, the influence of western art came between the late 1800s and early 1900’s. The first to arrive was via Japan, the realistic techniques of the Barbizon school. And what were the most shocking innovations for the Chinese? Mimesis, focal perspective, chiaroscuro, and all those techniques which at the time in the West were considered regressed, representatives of a system that in those years the avant-gardes despised because of its anti-contemporary expressions. Why was this seen in China as revolutionary and innovative? Because traditional pictorial theories disgusted the view and representation of form as perceived by our eyes, therefore it was an almost completely unexplored area.

China has had the good fortune of meeting and accepting a different way of interpreting the world, so why should the Village be deprived of it?

Just how much could a new way of understanding reality help the old painting of the Village? A whole world would open up, which should not mimic the Chinese one, but be inspired by it. So, we also take sides against the supremacism of sight and consequently against anthropocentrism. Our desire is to introduce these new visions, these new conceptions, and these new values. Not that the Village is completely unaware of it, but this knowledge is hidden in academic publications, accessible to those interested in the subject, but very far from the world of contemporary art or anyone else.

To conclude, we will introduce one of these intrinsic aspects of Chinese art which can be of great help and source of inspiration for our beloved Village. Why is mountain and water painting of great value in the contemporary world and why should the Village re-evaluate it? In the great pictorial experience of the Village, landscape painting as an independent genre was born late and died early. The fact that in China it is already the higher form of painting and has a millennium and a half of history should make us ask
questions about how it has probably been underestimated. Well, in reality it has not been underestimated, in fact there is no right and wrong in art, it has been evaluated according to the means that the Village head, according to the conceptions and ideas, precisely for this reason, I repeat, we must open the doors to new value systems.

Art cannot be alienated from the reality in which it is produced, and one of the most important themes for us is that of ecology, in fact this hyper capitalist Village has massacred the world in which we live and does not seem to want to take steps back. Many have already set in motion to counter this destructive madness, but there is no contest. In the Village there has recently been talk of environmental aesthetics that lashes out against anthropocentrism to concert on environmental beauties, therefore going against one, the axioms of western aesthetics since ancient Greece, against that conception that sees man as the superior creature and dominant in the ecumene. This new point of view, at least for the Village, is one of the basic aspects of Chinese ethics, philosophy and aesthetics, is found in the texts at the base of Chinese culture, at the basis of Confucian philosophy and Daoist thought and continues to be repeated until modern times, conception that does not just appreciate environmental beauties, but its holistic conception of the universe puts man on the same level as any other creation of nature. In Yi Zhuan 易传 (5th century BCE), a commentary on Yi Jing 易经, it is written that "the greatest virtue of heaven and earth is life" (天地之大德曰生), that is to say that the greatest virtue is to create an environment where all life forms and natural elements can coexist in harmony.

For this reason, too, the category of still life does not exist in Chinese painting, in fact for the Chinese artist it would be absurd to paint lifeless subjects.

For these and other reasons, the Village and the artists that reside in it will benefit from learning Chinese art. Mountain and water painting will inspire them, the beauty of nature will awaken the minds and set the minds in motion. The boundaries of the Village will begin to appear and we can finally begin to break them down.

“who discusses painting in terms of form likeness, has the understanding of a child”

Su Dongpo
Origins of the Reclusive culture

Reclusive culture *yinshi wenhua* is an important branch of Chinese traditional culture with distinctive characteristics and far-reaching influence, till the contemporary times. The reclusive culture has basically taken shape in the pre-Qin period, in particular in a historical phase that includes the period of Springs and Autumns (722-481) and of the Warring States (453-221). The latter was a period of violence, characterized by political and social instability, but also of great cultural richness and creativity, which led to the birth or theoretical formalization of the many currents of thought, giving light to the Hundred Schools of Thought (诸子百家). Confucian and Daoist will become fundamental pillars of Chinese culture. Since this historical moment there are relevant records of hermits, both from Confucian and Daoist sources, characters such as Chang Ju 长沮 and Jie Yong 桀溺, who rejected the throne for a simple and carefree life. At a time when taking up a government post could be a dangerous choice for one’s own safety, retirement from social life became a choice by the intelligentsia of the time. Even in the Confucian context, where social participation was one of the fundamental aspects of the intellectual’s life, the choice of the hermitage was accepted, naturally always following the teachings of Confucius, therefore for the purposes of self-cultivation, ethically and morally, but always with the idea of returning to participate in socio-political life with a deep commitment of social responsibility. Otherwise, the Daoist hermit, while always having the purpose of self-cultivation, saw the secular world as a world from which to move away, in order to enter into a relationship of communion and contact with nature, developing the most intimate aspects of his personality, preferring spontaneity, therefore acting free from utilitarianism. This vision also includes the Daoist concept of *wuwei*, or acting without effort, from which the topical association with water was born, which has no shape, has complete freedom of movement and despite being weak it can erode the stone. Concept close to that of carefree wandering, conceived by Zhuangzi himself, a carefree existence requires goal-free wandering, only by forgetting the boundaries of the object and self, reaching the realm of selflessness, futility and anonymity is possible to reach the real “carefree travel”.

One of Zhuangzi’s Daoist tales in the section of *The Floods of Autumn* tells us:

Zhuangzi was (once) fishing in the river Pu, when the king of Chu sent two great officers to him, with the message, ‘I wish to trouble you with the charge of all within my territories. Zhuangzi kept on holding his rod without looking round, and said, ‘I have heard that in Chu there is a spirit-like tortoise-shell, the wearer of which died 3000 years ago, and which the king keeps, in his ancestral temple, in a hamper covered with a cloth. Was it better for the tortoise to die, and leave its shell to be thus honored? Or would it have been better for it to live, and keep on dragging its tail through the mud?’ The two officers said, ‘It would have been better for it to live, and draw its tail after it over the mud.’ ‘Go your ways. I will keep on drawing my tail after me through the mud.’ (Legge, 1891)
This episode in addition to illustrating the character of the hermit who moves away from the burdens and honors of secular life, describes Zhuangzi while fishing, which clearly recalls the figure of the fisherman who will become of great importance in the panorama of reclusive culture. The fisherman, a solitary figure closely linked to water, is the natural hermit, so his vision of the world and lifestyle is the one to follow. In 《楚辞·渔父篇》, a text traditionally attributed in part to Qu Yuan (c. 340-278), a Chinese poet and politician who lived during the Warring States period, relates an episode when the exiled Qu Yuan complains with a fisherman of the secular world:

The fisherman: “Sages do not cling to things, but can move on with the world. The world is turbid, why don’t you stir up the mud and spread the waves?” (Legge, 1891)

Qu Yuan then replied him, but the fisherman goes away singing and smiling without answering. This episode illustrates the wisdom of the fisherman who finds no interest in the affairs of the secular world or in complaining about it. The same can be said of the figure of the mountaineer/woodcutter樵夫, who, like the fisherman, spends his life in the isolation of the mountains surrounded by nature, giving no importance to the secular world. The figure of the fisherman and the woodcutter will acquire a great deal of importance in the imaginary of reclusive cultures, so much so that they become topical figures.

Reclusive culture and the rising of mountain and water painting

In 221 BCE the phase of instability ends with the establishment of the Qin empire 秦朝, which after only 15 years will be replaced by the Han dynasty 汉朝 (202BCE-220CE), which will be in power for about 400 years, apart from a brief interruption from 9 to 23 when the Xin dynasty 新朝 took over. These four centuries of Chinese history were characterized by a Confucian-based ideological setting, which as we have said gave great importance to the political and social participation of the individual, therefore the ideals of the reclusive culture, but also more generally the Daoist teachings became minorities in the intellectual scene of the time. Things began to change in the years of the decline of the Han dynasty and after its fall, when a situation of instability and violence due to conflicts returned, there was a revival of the Daoist and reclusive culture. This period, which ends with the establishment of the Sui dynasty at the end of the sixth century, was another era of cultural innovation and creativity. Buddhist thought had entered China during the Han dynasty, and during the following era it had its first true development in China, which then among other things will lead to the birth of Chan (Zen) Buddhism 神宗 Chanzong, which was greatly influenced by Daoist teachings. Characteristic of the Wei-Jin 魏晋 period (220-420) was the philosophical movement called Xuanxue 玄学, which had a great influence, which took up the texts of the origins of Daoism and the Yijing 《易经》and reinterpreted them according to the needs of the time taking into account also Confucian teachings and in particular the Buddhist ones, a form of thought that among other things gave importance to reclusive culture and the figure of the hermit. Wei-Jin period was a turbulent period in China’s feudal society. National contradictions intensified, wars were frequent, dynasties changed constantly, Confucian ethics collapsed, sectarian struggle was cruel, high ranked were killed one by one, scholars were precarious and anxious, the wind of Xuanxue flourished and Buddhism and Laozi thought prevailed. At this time, the hermit thought and culture had a great development, so the literati who avoided disaster began to face the nature, went into the mountain forests and countryside, enjoyed the beauty of the woods and springs.

The revival of reclusive culture and the appreciation for wild nature led to the birth of mountain and water painting, shanshui hua山水画 as an independent genre, abandoning the ancillary position towards figurative painting, which at the time was the highest form of painting. Mountain and water painting as an independent genre was born in close relation with the Daoist theories, Xuanxue thinking and of reclusive culture.

Life in the wilderness inevitably led to isolation from society, but at the same time it led to a liminal environment that lies between the material and spiritual world, where one can meet supernatural or immortal beings, the shenxian 神仙 who live following the “Way” (the Dao 道) naturally, fully applying the concept of carefree wandering. The mountains and wild forests become places of threshold where the concepts of space and time disappear, where the existential modalities of reclusive culture can be fully applied, in order to reach higher levels of union with the natural world, an intimate relationship, which leads to another fundamental concept of Daoist thought, but also Buddhist and Confucian, that of the tianren heyi 天人合一 that is the unity between man and the sky, a holistic vision of the universe that sees man and nature on the same level, without one having supremacy over the other, where the well-being of the elements that form the universe acting in communion is greater than that of the individual elements taken separately. Secularism is also based on this: the compatibility and integration of man and nature, and the mutual connection. Daoism thinking believes that this kind of harmony eventually leads to the Dao, the “Way”, and only with a clear mind can it fit in and reach the highest aesthetic realm. Harmony has become the basic requirement of Chinese art.

The first theorists and artists who dedicated themselves to mountain and water painting moved in this context. The first theorist was Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-443), with his Introduction to Mountain and Water Painting, Hua shanshui xu, 《画山水叙》an extremely dense short text, which reveals the secrets of mountain and water painting, which will lay the foundations for the development of this practice as artistic. Zong Bing is himself a hermit at Mount Lu, Lushan庐山 devoted to Buddhism, disciple of Hui Yuan 慧远 (334-416), a great master of the Chinese Buddhist tradition who also founded the White Lotus society Bailian she 白莲社 on Mount Lu, dedicated to translating and studying the Buddhas sutras. The cultural environment of Lushan at the time, but also in subsequent eras, was of great importance, in fact the area was inhabited by various hermits or in any case it was a stop for scholars and itinerant sages, where they met and
exchanged their philosophical ideas, both whether they were of Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist training. These exchanges were very important for the subsequent development of Chinese philosophical thought, so much so that the meeting between Hui Yuan, Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 (352/365-427) and Lu Xiujing 陆修静 (406-477), called Three laughs at Tiger Brook, Huxi sanxiao 虎溪三笑, became idiomat-ic. These three exponents of the three main currents of thought of the time had one day met and had a long and fruitful conversation, so fruitful that it lead Hui Yuan to cross the Huxi, a stream that he never crossed, but they were so absorbed in their talk that they did not realize they had passed it. This story is important because it describes the fervent intellectual activity of the time, characterized by cultural syncretism, where the reclusive culture that was at the basis of the theory of mountain and water painting flourished.

In fact, Tao Yuanming with his pastoral poetry was one of the greatest spreaders and supporters of the reclusive culture of the time, and of the withdrawal from society for a quiet life, so much so that his works and himself became one of the topoi of the artistic expression of the wen-ren 文人, the literati, when they emerged in the Chinese cultural landscape, made the theories of reclusive culture their own.

Zong Bing follows and spreads the teachings of Hui Yuan, whom he considers a shengren 圣人, that is a sage who has reached the highest level of knowledge, who naturally lives according to the "Way", who lives in the Dao without effort, like the immortals who eventually populate the wild mountains. Zong Bing considers himself a xianzhe 贤者, a wise and virtuous man, who follows the teachings of the shengren but who cannot follow the Dao effortlessly but must seek it, and it is precisely for the purpose of this search and will to reach the "Way" who dedicates himself to painting of mountains and water, through life in the mountains, even itinerant, and the painting of the environment that surrounds him manages to experience and enjoy the benevolence ren 仁 and the highest wisdom zhi 智, status that the shengren can reach naturally simply by living in the mountains. This is the core of Zong Bing’s text, which explains the motive and purpose of applying to mountain and water painting. The Dao is invisible, but it is present, through the pictorial practice, the form of the natural environment that is represented, is only a means to represent it, so you must not be a slave to visual perception, otherwise it would be like reading a metaphor literally, ignoring its true meaning, which goes beyond the words used. The invisible but perceptible element, that which has no form, becomes fundamental, characteristic and essential in the painting of mountains and water, which less than a century later will be standardized as qiyun shengdong 气韵生动, the resonance of the spirit, the first of the six rules of Xie He 谢赫 (5th century) which became and is the main focus of the Chinese painter. Hence a long and rich speculation on the concept of image beyond the image xiang wai zhi xiang 象外之象, that the essence of what surrounds us goes beyond its image, and its material perception. Another important aspect that transpires from Zong Bing’s text is that of the importance of the state of mind with which one approaches nature and then in the practice of painting. Fundamental is the tranquility of heart (mind, soul), the heart that unites external vision and internal perception, the state of tranquility, which is more easily reached in a situation of isolation from society, creates a synchrony and harmony between the environment (the world)
New political stability and mountain and water painting

At the end of the sixth century China regained its stability and political unity, first with the brief phase of about 40 years of the Sui dynasty (581-618) and then with the period of the Tang dynasty (618-907), characterized by peace and prosperity, which favors the flourishing of the arts. The first works of mountain and water painting that have come down to us come from the Sui-Tang phase, the first technical form was that of blue-green mountain and water painting qinglù shanshui 青绿山水, the hermit practice had lost the momentum of the preceding period, precisely because of the rediscovered social peace, but its themes and purposes had remained and will always remain present in the contents and pictorial theory of mountain and water painting.

The first works characterized by the use of green and blue, have a great formal care and often we find themes that recall the life of immortals or supernatural beings in the wild mountains, which are clear references to Zhuangzi’s carefree wandering. With peace and prosperity, the material needs to choose a life far from society had declined, but the ideals remained, even at the level of the imperial court, where palaces with gardens were built that reproduced life among unspoiled nature. A similar process is the one that accompanies the birth of the gardens of the literati or wenren, which served to re-propose the hermit experience within the secular world. Wang Wei 王维 (701-761) (Fig.1), poet, musician, man of letters, painter, but also a statesman and adept of Chan Buddhism, gave rise to the figure of the literate painter wenren hua 文人画 or School of South Nanzong hua 南宗画, who stood out from the professional painter, technically much more formal and academic, who most often was a court painter, called School of the North Beizong hua 北宗画. This new conception of painting fully expressed the theories of reclusive culture, even on a technical and formal level, with the use of broken ink pomo fa 破墨法 it gave more expressive freedom to painting, and inaugurated the taste of monochromatic mountain and water painting, which characterized much of the production of wenren hua.

Another very important figure of the period who contributed to the theoretical structuring of mountain and water painting was Wang Wei 王維 (414-453), who in his Xuhua 《叙画》 expresses the need to have a more emotional, intimate and personal aesthetic approach towards the environment and in artistic expressions.

It is in human nature to feel the hustle and bustle of society and desire to see spirits and immortals hidden in the clouds. In times of peace, under a good emperor and excellent parents, it would be wrong to leave to be alone, because there are duties and responsibilities that cannot be ignored [...]. The dream to retreat in the forests and springs and to find oneself in the company of clouds and mists is always there, but the eye and ear are deprived of it. Now a good hand has reproduced them for us. Without leaving your room you can imagine yourself sitting on the rocks in a gorge and listening to the screaming of monkeys and birdsongs; while the light of the mountains and the colors of the water dazzle the eyes. Isn’t it a joy, a realization of a person’s dream? This is why mountain and water paintings are so in demand.
Approaching these paintings without the necessary mood would mean ruin ing this magnificent view and clouding the refreshing breeze. (Lin Yutang, 1967)

世之笃论，谓山水有可行者，有可望者，有可游者，有可居者。画凡至此，皆入妙品。但可行可望不如可居可游之为得。

pictures may reach these standards and enter the category of the wonderful; but those fit to walk through or to contemplate are not equal to those fit to ramble in or to live in it. (Siren, 1963)

Furthermore, Guo Xi in his text re-presents the fisherman and the carpenter as topical figures of the reclusive culture, the one that the noble man seeks through the arts, since he is unable to do so by the secular world:

Why is it that a gentleman loves nature? The reason is that he usually lives in a house and garden, enjoys whisking over rocks and streams, loves to see fishermen, woodcutters and recluse scholars, and enjoys the company of monkeys and cranes. (Lin Yutang, 1967)

君子之所以爱夫山水者，其旨安在？丘园养素，所常处也；泉石啸傲，所常乐也；渔樵隐逸，所常适也；猿鹤飞鸣，所常亲也。

The four greatest mountain and water painters of the Yuan dynasty, yuan sijia 元四家, were all four literati and more or less followers of Daoism, all chose a secluded lifestyle, trying as much as possible to keep away from the world secular. These four great artists were Huang Gongwang 黄公望 (1269-1358), Wu Zhen 吴镇 (1280-1354), Wang Meng 王蒙 (1301-1374), Ni Zan 倪瓒 (1301-1374), and, who through their works re-proposed themes and topoi of the reclusive culture, such as the fisherman, became Wu Zhen’s favorite theme (Fig.4), as for the woodcutters, Wang Meng signed himself as the "woodcutter of Huanghe shan" 黄鹤山樵, where he spent his years as a hermit. The lonely trees and thatched cottages xushë 茅舍, traditionally were narrative topoi that recalled the hermits world, and are often found in the works of Ni Zan, who besides being a great painter was an excellent response of the Chinese intelligentsia to the socio-political crisis was the choice of a secluded life away from the active society. In the Yuan era 元朝 (1271-1368) the painting of mountain and water had reached its splendor, the literate artists had imposed themselves on the Chinese cultural landscape, naturally the turbulent historical moment had awakened hermit desires, the union of these elements led to the creation of a large amount of works that refer to the reclusive culture, as the painters chose a hermit lifestyle. This lifestyle was no longer as easily attainable as it was during the Wei-Jin period. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries China was much more urbanized than during the Wei-Jin, and leaving the secular world was a more difficult choice to make. However, the painters of the Yuan era, even if they were unable to have a completely secluded lifestyle, strongly used the types and ideas of the reclusive culture. At the end of the Song dynasty, a new period of instability begins, for about a century the Chinese empire was led by the Mongolian populations, who engaged in a bloody struggle for power. Chinese intellectuals and writers, on the one hand, felt culturally uprooted because a foreign population was at the head of their civilization and therefore began to no longer appreciate political participation, both for ideological factors and for the material risks that were run in the hold official positions. Once again, the

Revival of the reclusive culture in Yuan dynasty

Later on, again in the first chapter of Linquan gaozhi, Guo Xi exposes how the mountain environment should be experienced and lived, he wrote four different ways of relating to it, or sike 四可, four ways of experiencing and expressing it. Guo Xi writes:

It has been truly said, that among the landscapes there are those fit to walk through, those fit to contemplate, those fit to ramble in and those fit to live in. All

pictur...
calligrapher and poet, in the full spirit of the wenren hua. Also in Huang Gongwang’s works we find all the themes of reclusive culture, in his famous Dwelling in the Fu Chun Mountains, Fuchunshan ju tu 《富春山居图-无用师全卷》 (Fig.5) which is a work that is the result of years of study and four of painting of the area in which Huang Gongwang had retired, the painting represents the mountain and river area of Fuchun mountain, the use of ink and brush reflects the mental state of tranquility reached by the painter thanks to a life in solitude. In the painting it is possible to find all the topical elements of the reclusive culture, the fishermen, a thatched cottage with a man of letters intent on admiring the landscape. The lightness of the lines, the wide empty spaces and the delicacy of the ink communicates a feeling of peace and silence, expressing the artist inner world. The observation of this work puts us in the state of the hermit, making us relive his experiences, transporting us between the mountains and the waters, as indicated by Zong Bing or Guo Xi.

Conclusion

We see how reclusive culture is extremely important and present in the Chinese cultural landscape, at least since the Spring and Autumn period, where the figure of the Chinese hermit is structured, who sees his adversity to government and public life as the first fundamental characteristic. Therefore automatically, everything that entails, such as social utilitarianism, the thirst for power and wealth, and all elements that ultimately lead to a life of trouble strays from the main purpose, which is essentially the pursuit of happiness. The aversion to social life is clear in moments of political instability, where the reclusive culture becomes a sort of protest of the intellectual towards the system, literate artists who from the period of the Wei-Jin lived far from the secular world, but did not live in complete loneliness, indeed they almost created a new cultural network alternative to that of the governments, which opposes the struggles for power and materialism, a cultural network that is very rich and dynamic, much more dynamic than the one that gravitates around the secular world, which when shaken by instability and violence, becomes arid and monolithic. This is even more evident in the last period taken into consideration, namely that of the Yuan dynasty, where a high level of social evolution made it more difficult to reach the status of the hermit, a factor that gave great strength to the hermit topoi born during the Chinese cultural history and were used by writers as symbols against the political situation of the time to spread the conceptions and ideas of reclusive culture. The case of mountain and water painting is of particular interest, since it sees the birth of a genre and its evolution within this cultural class, from which it took its theoretical-philosophical bases and carried them forward to the contemporary age, profoundly influencing a class of intellectuals, the wenren, who have written a fundamental part of the cultural and artistic history of China, and who continue to do so in the contemporary world, clearly adapting to the times, but pursuing ideals that perhaps have never been more vital than now. The search for communion and balance with nature and attention to the feelings of the individual is of utmost importance. Therefore, we need a strong sense of humanity and the abandonment of utilitarianism and materialism, and the stigmatism of the race for power, the accumulation of riches, which are the root causes of what’s destroying the world we live in.
Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1358)
Dwelling in the Fu Chun Mountains, Fuchunshang ju tu (Master Wuyong Scroll) 《富春山居圖-無用師全卷》
Ink and color on paper
Full roll 965.67X33.64 - Picture core 652.4X33.64 cm
Taipei Palace Museum
"The artist should not only paint what he sees before him, but also what he sees in himself. If, however, he sees nothing within him, then he should also refrain from painting what he sees before him."

Caspar David Friedrich
The bifa concept in Jing Hao’s Bifaji
A brief study of its continuity and significance in Mountains-and-waters painting (Part II)
By; Claudio D. Lucchi

2.4. Bifa’s universal character

As it sets out to explore Jing Hao’s bifa concept, what may strike a Western mind more than anything else might well be its universal character. It relies on the cosmic vision developed by Chinese philosophers since ancient times, which has greatly influenced Chinese aesthetics and arts up to our present day.

It is important to grasp the essence of the Chinese worldview, given that it strongly differs from the Christian one and has thus given birth to a system of thought which might be described as "subtly different" since it sometimes appears to reach results and conclusions similar to those proposed in the West and yet does so while relying on very disparate fundamentals.

It might here suffice to cite two extracts, the first from Lao Zi’s Daode Jing, and the second one from Liu An’s Huainanzi:

The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. 1

One is the origin of all creatures, it is the Dao under its absolute form.

According to this philosophical vision, the origin of all things and of the world itself proceeds from the Absolute One (yì①), which, according to Pierre Ryckmans, stands for the Absolute in its original state before it divided, thus giving birth to the myriad things (wǎnwù万物) that fill the universe. As already noted above, something analogous to cosmic creation happens in painting: starting from plain silk or paper, the painter “reenacts” the creative process by gradually dividing heaven and earth and giving life and shape to all things within his microcosm, i.e., his painting. According to François Jullien, Chinese painters “do not invent a world other than this one”. They take care not to “alter or even disturb its coherence” but rather "join with that coherence through painting".2

Jullien goes one step further and concludes that having “carefully balanced” and perfected Chinese painting over the centuries, Chinese painters now see content to simply maintain and perpetuate it, constantly reasserting its guiding principles.3 To further illustrate this point, Jullien draws on some selected statements by the famous 20th century painter Qi Baishi 齐白石 (1864-1957).

From a purely painterly standpoint, one may wonder why Jullien chose to cite Qi Baishi instead of Huang Binhong 黄宾虹 (1865-1955), whose impressive literary corpus on Chinese painting certainly surpasses that of his contemporary. If this might additionally demonstrate how Huang Binhong’s oeuvre still seems to tarry in a state of half-light both in China and abroad, while Qi Baishi’s work enjoyed (and still does enjoy) greater and more widespread reputation already during both men’s artistic career, Jullien’s choice of reference may still be viewed as a minor detail which does not undermine the correctness of his statement. However, a few explanatory words might be added to offer ampler insight into a topic that could be described as rather entangled, especially from a Western stance, particularly now that China is readjusting its values while attempting to reconcile thousands-year old concepts with Western ideals.

Despite the subtle changes and contributions that Chinese artists introduced (and are still introducing) in Chinese painting over the last centuries, one point cannot be denied: the key concepts lying at the foundation of Chinese painting remain unchanged. Hence, the repetitions seen by François Jullien are in a way inevitable. This is illustrated, among others, by the endless reiterations that may be found in numerous treatises whose authors simply quote or paraphrase ancient texts so as to assert their adhesion to the tradition and demonstrate that they, too, understand and follow the ancients (shīfā gùrén师法古人). But accomplished Chinese painters do not restate concepts established by the ancient masters out of mere pedantry. They do so because before making a contribution of their own, they deem it necessary to first absorb the ever-growing heritage that has been passed down to them since Antiquity.

Given that according to Chinese philosophy, everything finds its source in the Absolute One (yì ①), theoretically, practitioners of Chinese painting must be conscious that painting, far from being an end in itself, belongs to a system of thought that encompasses all aspects of human life and that, more than an art form, is what François Cheng describes as an “art of life”.4

The same ideals apply to Jing Hao’s bifa concept, which he did not create, so to speak, out of the blue. His whole treatise may be described as the result of a life-long process of self-cultivation and gradual absorption of philosophical and

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1 James Legge (tr.), The Texts of Taoism (Part I), Dover Publications, New York, p. 85.
2 (老子・第四十二章)
4 Ibid.
6 François Jullien, p. 117
artistic concepts. Kiyohiko Munakata saw in Jing Hao's Bifa the attempt to propose a balanced synthesis of Taoist and Confucian principles.

It is relevant to note that this very attempt, as well as some of the concepts it discusses, all reveal a clear analogy between the Bifa and Liu Xie's Wenxin Diaolong (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons). In his work, Liu Xie drew upon the same philosophic fundamentals as did Jing Hao, a fact which further illustrates the universal character of Chinese arts and of the bifa concept.

Since its inception, Jing Hao's bifa concept has been handed down from one generation of painters to the next, each painter first receiving it and then enriching it through his own artistic philosophy and creation. Hence, Jing Hao's bifa may also be found in Shitao's 石涛 treatise on painting Kugua Heshang Huayu Lu 《苦瓜和尚畫語錄》, reasserted, and further developed and expanded through Shitao's own concept of the Unique Brushstroke (yihua 畫一) . In modern times, Jing Hao's bifa concept lives on in the art view of Huang Binhong, among others, who greatly emphasised the importance of carrying out artistic innovation through tradition.

Here, I consider it worthwhile to expand a little on Huang Binhong's artistic views, especially since Huang Binhong may be regarded as the most prolific and influential Chinese painting theorist of 20th century China. Although widespread recognition of his oeuvre and writings came rather late, in the early 1980s, Huang Binhong may be regarded as the most accomplished Chinese masters of the 20th century.

One does not need to go beyond the opening lines of The Essence of Painting (Huafa Yaozhi 画法要旨) to find, neatly expressed, Huang Binhong's personal view of the bifa concept and its role in Chinese painting.

The art of the brush (bifa 筆法), ink (mofa 墨法), and composition (zhangfa 章法) are the three main points [to be observed in painting]. No one can possibly expect to disregard brush-and-ink (bimo 筆墨), relying solely and blindly on composition, yet improve and establish oneself, and set a long-lasting example for posterity.

In the opening remarks of his essay, composition comes as a mere third (after brush and ink) and is one aspect painters should not trouble themselves with until they have not fully mastered the art of brush-and-ink. Students should first devote their attention to the careful copy of ancient masterpieces, perfecting their brush-and-ink and ipso facto assimilating the compositional traits of the original works. Incidentally, it becomes obvious that here, ancient masterpieces are not treated as a mere source of technical training, but as actual spiritual nourishment.

Jason C. Kuo has argued that in so doing, Huang Binhong actually liberated brush-and-ink from its conventional subject matter, thus allowing later generations of painters to engage themselves with the world of abstract forms. In theory, anything — i.e., not just mountains and streams — as the heart and soul of Chinese painting. In his oeuvre, brush-and-ink (bimo 筆墨) becomes the painter's language, the vessel of his emotions, imbued with the painting's spirit.

If the brush is flawed (i.e., handled improperly), the whole painting is lost. In the opening remarks of his essay, composition comes as a mere third (after brush and ink) and is one aspect painters should not trouble themselves with until they have not fully mastered the art of brush-and-ink. Students should first devote their attention to the careful copy of ancient masterpieces, perfecting their brush-and-ink and ipso facto assimilating the compositional traits of the original works. Incidentally, it becomes obvious that here, ancient masterpieces are not treated as a mere source of technical training, but as actual spiritual nourishment.

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tains and waters, or animals and plants — may be depicted as long as brush and ink are handled properly. Huang Binhong himself illustrated this point, as he virtually kept on painting the same mountain scapes decade after decade, with little variation in terms of composition. In this, he partly redefined what had been asserted by Shitao in his famous treatise. The latter laid great emphasis on the individualistic quality of the painterly act, as may be seen in the seventh chapter of his *Kugua Heshang Huayu Lu* 《苦瓜和尚画语录》:

At this point, even though the brush, the ink, the painting, everything would abolish itself, the Self would still subsist, existing by itself.  

Within Huang Binhong’s art view, Shitao’s idea doesn’t work anymore, since the painter’s ego now finds itself embedded in the brush-and-ink concept. Through this brief outlining of the evolution and transformation of the bifa concept at the hand of various painters in different eras, one may see how Chinese painting and bifa have kept on developing unto our day, untouched by any revolution or schism. This is also how one should understand François Jullien’s above-mentioned assertion: no new development, change or contribution introduced by contemporary painters should in any way unsettle the already established system of Chinese painting which, like a delicate clockwork, has been kept on developing since ancient times following the same principles and attributes which do only concern this earthly life.

Furthermore, one must keep in mind that Chinese painting and the Chinese system of thought have kept on developing since ancient times following a broader outlook on life and the universe in general, built on harmony and balance, and the preservation thereof.

Man is tranquil when born, and this is his divine nature (*tianxing 天性*). As he is activated by sensation, his nature is injured. As he perceives matter (*wu 物*) and responds to it with the spirit (*shen 神*), knowledge is activated. When knowledge and matter meet in conjunction, the passions are awakened. When passions assume form (*xing 形*), man recognizes external stimuli. He will not be able to deny this in himself. Thus, divine principles (*tianli 天理*) perish. Those who arrive at the Tao do not permit themselves to deviate from the Divine. Though externally they transform as do natural phenomena (*wu 物*), internally they maintain clarity of mind (*qing 情*).  

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In these concepts lies one major difference between Western thought, which quite naturally influenced the development of Western thought and arts. Men are born into the world defiled by sin and there is nothing that they may do or say that will in any way alter their state. This is why Christian thought recognises that only Divine (i.e., external) intervention may bring about spiritual redemption (Solo Gratia). One short passage from the Holy Scriptures may well illustrate this point:

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? (Luke 9:24, 25)

Men should first and foremost care about spiritual salvation. Everything earthly should be of little concern, for life on this earth is but “a shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:17). Blaise Pascal clearly expressed this idea in the Pensées:

The immortality of the soul is one thing which matters so much to us, and which touches us so profoundly, that one must needs have lost all sentiment in order to be indifferent about it.

This is also why longevity and old age are not viewed as something “desirable” since these too are bodily attributes which do only concern this earthly life. Furthermore, one must keep in mind that Chinese painting and the Chinese system of thought have kept on developing since ancient times following one single and uninterrupted line, unperturbed by any revolution that might even come close in scope to what the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce described, in his assessment of the position of Christianity within Western culture, as the “greatest revolution ever accomplished by humanity, so great, so comprehensive and profound, so rich in consequences, so unexpected and irresistible in its taking place [...].”

The forsaking, or rather, the voluntary casting away of an ideology or concept deemed redundant or even harmful lies at the heart of the Christian spirit. As one reflects on the Christian fundamentals, it may become easier to understand why history, although an important source of teachings and information, may become easier to understand why history, although an important source of teachings and information, may become easier to understand why history, although an important source of teachings and information,
Information, is not regarded as something whose continuity must be carefully preserved (as may be seen in the handing down of the Chinese painting tradition). Every man must individually learn to “know” God and “walk in His ways”. Despite the historical corpus of theological writings slowly accumulated through the centuries, beginning with the first written Law given to Moses and the teachings of Jesus Christ, all the way through Paul the Apostle, the Doctors of the Church, until the Protestant theologians and reformers, the concept of faith (that is, not the body of teachings normally referred to as the Christian Faith, but that very and unique strength to believe in God and follow in His ways) is something that is totally impossible to impart or inherit. In this sense, every generation, every individual must start anew. Seen from this angle, and transposed to painting, it becomes easier to understand the Western painter’s individualistic stance, as opposed to the collective viewpoint of the Chinese painter.

Perhaps more important still is the Christian worldview, which recognises the universe as the calculated and conscious creation of a Being superior to man, i.e., God, who is absolutely not a part of His Creation but exists outside time and space, having created them too. This implies that the universe as we know it may have an end, an idea which Chinese philosophers appear to have left untouched (since the Dao is treated as a “principle”, or “self-winding mechanism”, there is indeed no need to foresee such an issue). While Chinese painters concentrate their attention on the principles (li 理) that underlie creation, Christian thought focuses on understanding the Mind that shaped it. In the words of Paul Cézanne (in a discussion on painting with Émile Bernard): “Je me tourne vers l’intelligence du Pater Omnipotens”.

Following such a line of thought, the idea of attuning oneself with the universe (which, as a part of creation, is inferior to the Creator) loses its meaning and the painting brush becomes nothing more than a tool with which the painter expresses his thought.

3. Conclusion: bifa’s transmission and self-regeneration

The technical mastery of the brush is but a part of Jing Hao’s much broader bifa concept. The handling of the brush itself does not rest on simple painterly needs, but on philosophical views.

One anecdote from the Lidai Minghua Ji may further illustrate the unique importance attributed to the brush by Chinese painters and critics:

There was a clever painter who said of himself that he could paint cloud vapors. I said to him: “The ancients never reached this final subtlety in their painting of clouds. If one moistens silk, dotting and filling in here and there with a light powder blown from the mouth, this is known as blown clouds. Such a technique is in accord with the principles of Heaven, but, though it may be called a subtle solution, one cannot see the brushstrokes in it, therefore it cannot be called painting.

Characterised by its dual philosophical-technical nature, the bifa concept can be regarded as an indispensable element in Chinese painting. This does also make it quite difficult to accurately define its essence, given that it belongs as much to the world of visible forms (xing 形) as to that of the spirit (shen 神). Huang Binhong once remarked:

As one abandons the rule, it becomes impossible to fully unfold the brush’s exquisiteness (miao 妙); as one allows himself to be restrained by the rule, one cannot fully use the brush’s divine (shen 神) essence.

As it draws on fundamental philosophical concepts, Jing Hao’s bifa concept finds its source outside the world of Chinese painting. Handed down from one generation of painters to the next, bifa has come to us enriched, expanded, and yet unchanged in its essence. And just as Chinese painting, so will bifa be further enriched and developed by our generation of painters before being passed on to the next one.

Huang Binhong (1865-1955) Imaginary travel among Mountains and Streams

《山川卧游卷》

405x305 1952
One is all and all is one
By An Haifeng 安海峰

As representatives of ancient Chinese philosophy, the two masterpieces Confucius 孔子’s Analects 《论语》 and Laozi 老子’s Dao De Jing 《道德经》 are, in my opinion, two vehicles proposing solutions to the problems faced by humanity since times immemorial. I do, however, prefer the former to the latter. While the former is much like a ladder, aiming to provide solutions to specific problems that we may encounter in our daily lives, and that can be conquered through learning, the latter may be compared to a switch, whose core value is to seek a form of controllable freedom. “Perception”, the final solution suggested by the Tao De Jing, is not so specific and explicit in nature as the teachings proposed by the Analects. I kept a copy of the Tao De Jing with me during my stay in the US, a few years back, because to me, it is a revelation, a beacon in the dark.

Janet, my American landlord, is one person who left a deep impression on me, and with whom I had many deep and unexpected conversations. As I settled down in what was to be my new home for the following year, I soon found out that she was fond of tiny things, like feathers of little birds shed on the roadside, and nests blown down from trees by the wind. Even the wild flowers blossoming at a wall’s corner could arouse great interest in her.

“Why do you always notice these tiny things?” I once asked.
“I do not expect to see bigger things.” she replied.
“This is why you find true happiness, which is the biggest thing.” I said.

Later, through our conversations, I gradually came to realise her strong love for Chinese culture. I found to be very well read in such ancient classics as the Analects, the Tao De Jing and Sunzi’s Art of War 《孙子兵法》. I was quite surprised to discover her love for Laozi, the philosopher of the Spring and Autumn Period and founder of Taoism, as well as for “blanks”, or empty spaces intentionally left in Chinese paintings. When she told me that such empty spaces are not void at all, but that they are rather the expression of the painter’s ideas, I gladly acknowledged her good taste for Chinese paintings. This is how we became friends. In return, she taught me about the Bible. Surprisingly, I could sense something very close to me in the scriptures she introduced me to. They reminded me of the teachings of some Chinese thinkers, such as Laozi and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1529). I find the similarity among them and humanity they try to convey. While Jesus teaches us to love one another (“love thy neighbour as thyself”, Mark 12:31), emphasising and literally demonstrating that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s own life for one’s friends, Laozi advocated that the highest virtue is like water: “The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike.” 上善若水，水善利万物而不争. What a similarity! A common concept of love flourishes in their teachings, exhorting us to be kind to each other, to love one another. I’m fully convinced that love can bridge divides and make people live on friendly terms with each other. Likewise, Confucius remarked: “The wise delight in water; the humane delight in mountains.” 知者乐水，仁者乐山. Mountains and water are symbols of a wise man’s spirit rather than a realistic landscape, and thus come close to Christ’s words, “love thy neighbour as thyself.”

In his Preface to Mountain and Water Paintings 《画山水序》, Zong Bing 宗炳 (375-445) asserted that “mountains and rivers have a material form, and yet intrigue the spirit” 山水以形媚道. This clearly emphasised the purpose of Chinese mountain and water painting — intrigue the spirit. As for the Qing dynasty painter Shi-tao (石涛 1642-1707), he put forward a revolutionary painting method: The One-Stroke Method 一画之法. “This is because when the primordial uncarved block was dispersed, the principle of oneness of strokes emerged, and ten thousand things were manifested. Confucius said: ‘My doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity.’ This proves that oneness is not merely idle talk.” 盖自太朴散，而一画之法立矣；一画之法立，而万物著矣。我故曰：“吾道一以贯之.” My own studies have gradually brought me to believe that in 1 James Legge (tr.), The Texts of Taoism (Part I), New York: Dover Publications, 1962 p. 52.
In ancient times, one who intended to carry forward all the inherent virtues in the world and to rid people of material desires had to first rule his state well. To rule his state well, he had to first educate his family. To educate his family, he had first to cultivate himself. To cultivate himself, he had first to set his heart right. To set his heart right, he had first to be sincere and honest.  

From cultivating oneself to “carrying forward all the inherent virtues in the world and to rid people of material desires” — this is to complete the thinking transformation from the individual to the world. This transformation is abstract and difficult, but was regarded as a popular rule in ancient China.

The second, i.e., the “unity of man and heaven” 天人合一, is a concept so important that main schools of thought in China have been discussing it ever since its inception. As Zhuangzi put forward: “Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me.”

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Some readers may be surprised to discover that quite similar views have been put forth in the West. The famous English poet William Blake (1757-1827) expressed himself in the following way: “To see a world in a grain of sand”; the German architect Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe (1886-1969) “less is more”; the contemporary British poet Allan Taylor likewise composed a song is, All is one. Therefore, “one” is the wise way that can help us to clearly see the world through and despite its complexity.

“One is all and all is one” means to observe the big through the small, and the small through the big. In my eyes, this is the key to the study of Chinese mountain and water painting, shanshui hua 山水画. This key does however compose itself of two points. First of all, the Confucian classics are the most influential, beginning with The Great Learning 大学

7 Qian Mu, Wang Shouren, Shangwu Yinshu Guan Press,1939, p.44.
8 According to Zhuangzi 莫子 (369 - 286), “all things are born at the same time and heaven and earth were born at the same time I was.”
An Haifeng 安海峰 Ze
Xuan paper and chinese ink, 80x180, 2018
On the Innovation and Transcendence of Contemporary Shan Shui Painting from the Compromise Spirit 折衷精神 of Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派

By: CHEN Ye (Ph.D. candidate at Graduate School of Chinese National Academy of Arts; assistant research fellow at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts)

Modern Chinese Painting Revolution

This is a movement that Chinese painting related to the word “change” in the twentieth century. The modern transformation of Chinese society has brought about the predicament of the traditional Chinese painting which has been handed down for thousands of years under the vision of modern society. Guangdong—as the birthplace of China’s democratic bourgeois revolution, Western factors are the catalysts in the process of Lingnan cultural transformation—In art, there is a force of change: Gao Jianfu 高剑父 (1879—1951), Chen Shuren 陈树人 (1884—1948) and Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889—1933) took the lead in raising the banner of “political revolution” and “art revolution” in the modern Chinese painting world, has rapidly changed the pattern of Chinese culture and art, leading Chinese art into a new era of transformation from tradition to modernity.1 This power has had a profound impact on Chinese painting, including Shan Shui painting 山水画, in the 20th century, and some scholars even consider it as a catalyst for the transformation of Chinese painting.2 Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派, led by the pioneers of Gao Jianfu, Chen Shuren [Fig.1] and Gao Qifeng, jointly explored and transformed the new face of Chinese painting along with art pioneers in other areas of China. The transformation of Shan Shui painting reached its peak during this time as well.

The founders of the Lingnan School of Painting have a broad mind about art. They, especially Gao Jianfu, proposed the way to change the new Chinese painting, and “compromise” 折衷 is the core: as he said in his book My View on Modern Chinese Painting 《我的观点：关于现代中国画》.

1 Chen Jichun: Fusion of Chinese and Western New Art, Nanjing Normal University, 2002. 陈继春:《融合中西新艺术》, 南京师范大学, 2002年
2 This view comes from the exhibition ”Dawn-The Transformation of Guangdong Chinese Painting in the Early 20th Century“ 《曙光——二十世纪前期广东中国画变革之路》, Lingnan School of Painting The memorial 岭南画派纪念馆, March 2017.
3 This view is quoted from Li Jinkun’s 李劲堃 interview in the exhibition “Dawn of Light-The Road to Change in Guangdong Chinese Painting in the Early 20th Century“曙光——二十世纪前期广东中国画变革之路".
Chinese painting. After the "modern Chinese painting" was gradually established, the original intention was expanded to the exploration of innovation, which still brought progress to the development of Chinese painting. Among the characteristics of the Lingnan School of Painting, what has always been implemented to this day should be the concept of "Compromise Spirit" (2nd characteristic above), and this is also the essence of the spirit of the Lingnan School of Painting.

"Compromise spirit" was able to condense into an emerging force at that time, enabling fellow and followers to discuss innovative art and truly reflect the spirit of the times. It can be seen that the pioneers of Lingnan School of Painting had advanced artistic views. The core of the "Compromise Spirit" is analyzed following in two aspects (from content and form)

**New Content - The Spirit of the Times**

"The emergence of a new force in the painting world is beyond reproach. Is it true that our national skills will not change for thousands of years?" Gao Jianfu pointed out the importance of the time quality of art. He opposed being complacent. He encouraged painting from life and expressing the reality of modern themes and urban life, especially emphasizing "painting motivation": "in the turbulent era of the 20th century, if your works can't have relations with the country, society and the people, they will be eliminated by the times. ". "Painting is to represent the times and progress with the times." Gao Jianfu led to paint the things of reality, the new era, such as bridges, cars, dilapidated buildings, even airplanes and artillery, he brought many new things from society to light in Shan Shui painting. Guan Shanyue (1912-2000), Li Xiongcai (1919-2001) and Lin Fengsu (1939-) have been exploring how Shan Shui painting can express the country's new life and show the spirit of the times. The contents of these new things were not found in the creation of traditional Chinese painting. Therefore, when Gao Jianfu's The

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**Huang Zhijian 黄志坚** summarized the characteristics of the Lingnan School of Painting as follows: 1. Advocating "art revolution" and establishing "modern Chinese painting" as its purpose; 2. Compromise the arts of Chinese and the West, integrating the essence of ancient and modern arts; 3. Taking both form and spirit as the ideal, both elegance and popular appreciation; 4. Fusing of fine brushwork and freehand style, and equal emphasis on color and ink. In my opinion, the third and fourth points of the characteristics are generalizations with the context of the current era. The former includes the changes in artistic aesthetics during the transformation of the modern society, and the latter summarizes the creative tendency of works at that time - interest in color, while Lingnan School of Painting has experienced changes in social forms and development of aesthetic standards, and has gradually acquired a richer and multi-layered appearance. The purpose of the "art revolution" is "modernization, and he also opposes "giving up the "old brand"(ancient traditional painting)." It seems that the style of new art must be reported most faithfully in accordance with the inherent spirit of the east, indicating the most reasonable spirit of mutual love and mutual assistance among human beings, and to the extreme peak of the beauty of human life. This is the spiritual core pursued by Lingnan School of painting in the content of creation. Under the guidance of this spirit, the followers of Lingnan School have produced many excellent works, which have achieved many masterpieces in the history of Chinese Art: Guan Shanyue's 《Newly Highway》 (Fig. 3, 1954), Li Xiongcai's 《Flood Prevention in Wuhan》 (Fig. 4, 1956) showing the spiritual outlook of the characters in the new era.

**New Method - Compromise from Tradition and West**

The "combination of Chinese and Western painting" is Gao Jianfu's method to explore the new Chinese painting. However, it needs to be treated dialectically. He does not agree with the total westernization, and he also opposes "giving up all the western painting and holding the "old brand"(ancient traditional painting)." Therefore, compromise is the key point. What is the compromise? How does one compromise? This is what artists need to think about. And Gao Jianfu gave...
the answers below: 1. Broad vision; 2. Comprehensive performance. He often emphasizes in his manuscripts that the vision should not be limited to western Europe, but should be extended to all kinds of Arts in the world, such as India, Egypt, Persia. "If they have any advantages, you should absorb and adopt, turn it into the nutrition of Chinese painting." In his "fifteen-year-plan" (including the "ten-year-plan"), he also fully reflected his broad vision of various arts. This kind of broad vision can make the expressions of "compromise spirit" have a solid foundation. As Gao Jianfu wrote, "Learning from ancient and foreign countries in art is an important principle for reforming Chinese painting". For the performance of the new Chinese painting, Gao Jianfu explored the expression of "compromise" from the aspects of theme, atmosphere, tone, material, composition and subjects. From the works of the pioneers of Lingnan school of painting, it is not difficult to feel their new representation, unique composition, emotional atmosphere and so on. Their exploration has influenced later followers. For example, Guan Shanyue and Li Xiongcai created new composition models, and Yang Zhiguan 杨之光(1930-) combined the techniques of watercolor and oil painting with traditional Chinese painting.

However, "The new Chinese painting (new Shan Shui painting) does not need formalism at all". What the Lingnan School of Painting advocates is not simple techniques or styles that followers have been embracing and creating rich artistic features with, but their original intention of innovation and the concept of compromise. "With the spirit of traditional Chinese painting and the scientific techniques of Western painting, this school of painting can win a lot of sympathy in the art world." Compromise spirit really opened a new chapter in the exploration of new Chinese painting.

Inheritance and development

Gao Jianfu was far-sighted. He had high hopes for Lingnan School of Painting, and this high hope is with a development perspective, he said: "In the 20th century, science has progressed, transportation has developed, and the cultural scope has expanded from the country to the world. Painting also expanded to the world. I hope that this new Chinese painting will become the painting of the world." Their followers did not fail to live up to this expectations, they passed it on with practical actions. In this process of inheritance, the spirit of Lingnan School of Painting has also developed. How to combine the spirit of the times and expressive techniques, to explore them dialectically is a difficult problem faced by the followers, and it is also the current and future goal of Lingnan School of Painting. How should they practice the problem of the "Compromise Spirit"?

Before discussing this issue, let’s take a look at the contemporary inheritance of Lingnan School of Painting. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, some followers of Lingnan School of Painting continued to create their art in various regions overseas, and insisted on passing on its spirit. Many teachers and educators have made followers spread all over the world. In the meanwhile, Lingnan School of Painting in Guangdong Province was exploring new Chinese paintings, it also set up apprentices. Among them, Fang Rending 方人定 (1901-1975), Guan Shanyue, Li Xiongcai and other generations of artists inherited the spirit of Lingnan School of Painting. Many of them developed not only in Guangdong, but also all over the country. A big branch inherited by artists such as Guan Shanyue and Li Xiongcai was closely combined with Guangdong art education through Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts 广州美术学院(formerly known as mid-south academy of Fine Arts 中南美术专科学校). The spirit of Lingnan School of painting has been continuously carried forward with great achievements. Nowadays, a number of outstanding Guangdong artists active in the Chinese art scene are from this academy: Chen Jinzhang 陈金章(1929-, Fig.5), Liang Shixiong 梁世雄(1933-), Fang Chuxiong 方楚雄 (1950-),
Chen Yongqiang, Zhang Zhian, Liu Shumin, Chen Xinhua, Su Baijun, Li Jinkun, Zhu Yongcheng, Fang Chuqiao, etc. Their creations have different styles, diversity and uniqueness. It is precisely these artists who demonstrate the spirit of Lingnan school of painting with practice.

Here are some examples: Chen Jinzhang, Liang Shixiong, and Lin Fengsu paid attention to paint from life and depict the rivers and mountains of the motherland, created a series of masterpieces showing the new style of the times -- Harbor Morning, The Early Snow in Zaoyuan, Common Holidays etc.; they used new visual languages to express their understanding of the simplicity of life, and expressive angles full of life. They established a new form of Chinese painting. On the way of innovation of traditional Chinese painting, these artists show a strong flavor of life, which is based on the internal transformation of local culture. Each of them has a new expression of "compromise" giving the "compromise spirit" a deeper connotation.

The overall aesthetic characteristics of the Lingnan School of Painting is precisely the word "change". Under the guidance of the "compromise spirit", the artist insists on inclusiveness and innovative practice. They practice by themselves and use their creation to show the spirit of the new era. Artists who have inherited the spirit of the Lingnan School of Painting, teach and educate people, and pass it on. Huang Zhijian believes that the Lingnan School of Painting is a kind of "ism", not a model; Wei Chenghong also said in her book that Lingnan School of Painting is "more like a trend of thought, a kind of -ism". From the above, it can be seen that what Lingnan School of Painting inherits is a spirit, and this spirit is still meaningful today.

1. Thinking of change:

    Chen Zhenguo once mentioned his views on the compromise between Chinese and Western techniques in an interview: "I have always admired some scholars in the period of the Republic of China. They not only have a solid foundation in traditional culture, but also can look at the world to absorb the rich nutrition of Western culture. I think that traditional artistic techniques and modern modeling concepts can be well combined."

    Chen Zhenguo's thinking about "compromise spirit" is deep-seated, thinking about the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. In addition to the differences in the expression methods, he hopes to observe the world with the idea of "equal to the same kind". This is precisely the reflection of the current era. The exchange between China and the West has begun to reverse the western-input and established a platform for dialogue in the context of the world. The artists of Chen Zhenguo's generation reflect the thinking in the context of this era. A group of his creations about Europe, Australia, Korea and other places also reflect this trend of thinking. The "ordinary heart" of Chinese and Western cultures can be said to be a contemporary development of the spirit of "compromising Chinese and Western". China and the West have begun an equal dialogue, and the development of Chinese painting should also be on this equal platform. And this is also the speculation of "change" and "compromise" in the context of the current era.

2. Foreign knowledge to serve China

    Li Jinkun's Shan Shui paintings show a unique artistic conception and have a modern visual aesthetic tension. Works such as The Twilight of the Desert and Frosty Dawns have changed the traditional perspective of Shan Shui.
paintings, bringing the expressive perspective and aesthetics of Western painting. He has been adhering to the artistic propositions and spiritual ideas of the Lingnan School of Painting, and this inheritance has developed and evolved in his understanding. From learning and absorbing Western art, to focusing on the improvement of expressive techniques, and then he realized that “to make foreign knowledge serve China, we must take root in tradition, and at the same time, we can get rid of the tradition”, this process of comprehension of the “Compromise Spirit” also reflects the understanding of different levels of Chinese culture, a reflection of cultural confidence and the spirit of the times. “Adhering to the Chinese culture, adhering to artistic ideals, strengthening cultural self-confidence, and persisting in innovation” is the current development path of New China. The guidance of the spirit of the Lingnan School of Painting has opened up new horizons for the artistic development of Chinese cultural revival.

3. The expansion of Chinese culture:

There are many examples of the young generation of artists who innovate and develop from their own national culture. Such as Yu Li’s creation focuses on the delicate emotions between Chinese characters of different ethnic groups in their own cultural context. Her works are exquisite and full of tension. She especially likes to decorate delicate and complicated accessories and clothes. In her special research on the techniques and colors, she radiates the feelings and beliefs in the spirit of the characters, in order to develop an aesthetic of Contemporary meticulous figure painting.

10 Excerpts from an interview with Li Jinkun, reported by Nanfang Daily, September 26, 2019. (李劲堃采访摘录,《南方日报》2019年09月26日报道)
ing. On the other hand, Chen Peng, who also got inspiration from the South-West ethnic minorities, expressed his artistic features in a different way. He explored freehand style with a high inspiration in his ink and brush creation.

Li Jinkun believes that “change” is the eternal theme of art, and also the best inheritance of the innovative spirit of the predecessors of Lingnan School of Painting. "Change" takes the spirit of compromise as the path, and the future of art development requires local culture as the emotional creative motivation to be valuable. The above-mentioned inheritors of the Lingnan school of Painting all reflect their concern and associate their own culture with their works. It is this emotional foundation that makes their works become classics. Under the guidance of the compromise spirit, how should the younger generation of artists explore creation that reflects the spirit of the times and based on local culture? Nowadays, some artists are trying to advance with practice. They have the courage to make breakthroughs and look for new artistic language; some artists seek "changes" in experimental ink painting and modeling, or express the modern emotions of urban living beings. The entangled identity consciousness and self-spirit mapping gives artistic creation a more universal value. Under the international vision of the global community, some artists have expanded the dimensions of creation, and their works have taken a new leap; some artists have broken the boundaries of painting, conveyed the value orientation of ideas from images, deepened the ideological value of creation, and presented the creation expressively with ideological depth.

Afterthought: Innovation and Transcendence

Gao Jianfu’s "modern concept of painting" and the compromise spirit of Lingnan School of Painting were born in the early twentieth century when Chinese society was facing tremendous changes, but this does not mean that his artistic concept and guiding spirit belonged only to the last century. At that time, they were facing the modernization transformation of traditional art. They absorbed nutrients from foreign art theories and concepts, and carried out painting changes in the "form" and "idea" of painting. These concepts are dialectical. Even if the art of painting has developed far, and has completed the modernization transformation of traditional art, they are still in the "form" and "idea" of painting. These concepts are dialectical. Even if the art of painting has developed far, and has completed the modernization transformation of traditional art, it does not mean that the spirit of the Lingnan school of painting needs to exit the scene. On the contrary, the founder of Lingnan school of painting, headed by Gao Jianfu, has great artistic ideals and far-sighted artistic vision, which makes the compromise spirit have the characteristics of keeping pace with the times. This spirit can still reflect the guiding significance of innovation and development with the development of the times.

Contemporary artists have “compromise spirit” from the beginning of their concepts. Their compromise and fusion transcends regionalism and timeliness. Looking back on the spirit of Lingnan Painting School along the way, what must be affirmed is the influence and positive attitude of the spiritual guidance of it. "We feel that the wheels of the times are constantly being launched and rotated. Today, we have reformed and created. We will soon become obsolete. New methods and new theories will emerge. At that time, we will reform it again, recreate it again, we will always revolutionize and create forever, so that we can evolve forever." This spirit of never slackening and always "innovating" is the driving force for the continuous advancement of artistic creation, and the inclusive and compromise approach has a broad perspective. Many studies define the Lingnan School of Painting as the aesthetic characteristics of the times and geographic area. This is biased. What they inherit is not a technique or style, nor a similar aesthetic or visual pursuit, but a creative spirit of innovation and change. The current value and significance of the spirit of Lingnan School of Painting is a spirit that goes beyond the school, and this spirit should be valued. This is the quality of innovation and transcendence in contemporary painting.

11 Excerpts from an interview with Li Jinkun, reported by Nanfang Daily, September 26, 2019.

My heart in middle age found the Way.
And I came to dwell at the foot of this mountain.
When the spirit moves, I wander alone
Amid beauty that is all for me....
I will walk till the water checks my path,
Then sit and watch the rising clouds --
And some day meet an old wood-cutter
And talk and laugh and never return.

Wang Wei
Gao Jianfu: Painting Style & Signatures

By; Zhu Wanzhang 朱万章
Translated by; Giacomo Bruni and Claudio D. Lucchi

Gao Jianfu 高剑父 (1879-1951), born in Panyu (Guangzhou) in Guangdong province, was one of the founders of the Lingnan School of Painting 岭南画派. His birth name was Lin 麟, but he would later use various literary names, such as Lun 倫, Jue Ting 爵廷, Lao 剑润, Jian Lu 剑庐. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Guangxu (1892), he studied painting under the flower-and-bird painter Ju Lian 居廉 (1828-1904), and began to learn the painting methods of flowers and plants 花卉, wild grass and insects 草虫, thus acquiring the foundations of traditional Chinese painting. In the twenty-fifth year of Guangxu (1899), Gao Jianfu continued his studies under the guide of his close friend and former learning companion, Wu Deyi 伍德彝 (1864-1928). The Wu family was a prominent family in Guangzhou in the late Qing Dynasty, and Wu Deyi’s father, Wu Yanliu 伍延鎏, was also a painter. He had the possibility of study pictorial and calligraphic works of famous masters of the past. Gao Jianfu’s study under Jian Lu enabled him to master the flower-and-bird painting mogu 没骨 (boneless) technique, developed by Yun Nantian 權南田 (1633-1690) in the early Qing Dynasty. However, Gao Jianfu was not satisfied with the sole learning of traditional painting. Later, with his brother Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889-1933), Chen Shuren 陳樹人 (1884-1948) and others, he moved to Japan to continue his artistic studies. During the short time they spent in Japan, they familiarised themselves with the unique pictorial techniques of Nihonga 日本画, also commonly known as Japanese painting, and applied them to Chinese painting. This undoubtedly innovative artistic exploration made it the forerunner in modern art history and established its position in the history of art. They combined the rendering of the environment and the contrast of light and shadow of Nihonga painting with traditional Chinese painting in order to create a fresh and natural artistic style. This kind of Chinese painting with unique visual effects was at that time called “new school of painting” 新派画 or “eclectic painting” 折衷画. That particular paint-

1 A painting movement born at the end of the 19th century who attempted to oppose Meiji Japan’s infatuation with Western culture such as the Yanghua 洋画, “Western-style painting”. Nihonga painters weren’t insensitive to Western pictorial ideas.

After Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng returned to China, they started to promote this emerging form of Chinese painting in various ways in order to expand its influence, among others through the establishment and publication of the True Pictorial 真相画報 and other related editorial projects, and began for the first time to hold exhibitions in China. Just as the emergence of many new things always meets with all forms of resistance, Gao Jianfu’s artistic attempts were attacked and criticised by various forces from the beginning because of the evident influence of Nihonga painting to be found in it. Some people went as far as to call it the “opposite force”, deeming that it deviated from the orthodoxy of Chinese painting, thus insulting the academic tradition of Chinese painting. However, as the number of members of the Lingnan School of Painting continued to grow and their painting styles matured, their innovative spirit set on improving Chinese painting and the tireless promotion of the Gao brothers and their followers gradually caused Gao Jianfu to become more and more popular. The attention of the artistic world gave the Lingnan School of Painting a relevant historical status. To this day, when we investigate Chinese painting in the first half of the 20th century, the Lingnan School of Painting established by Gao Jianfu, Chen Shuren, and Gao Qifeng, has become an indispensable and important school. The key role they held in the context of the artistic innovation movement in the 20th century is commonly recognised in modern art history.

Most of the extant works by Gao Jianfu that are now on display were made after
his return from Japan, at a time when
his style had already begun to change.
Therefore, it can be said that these works
testify to an already stable artistic style.
But when examining Gao's style of paint-
ing, we cannot ignore the influence of his
early Ju School style. In Gao Jianfu's
early works, a traditional artistic tenden-
cy is evident. Some examples from this
period are Two birds and crape myrtle
双鸟紫薇 (1899), Flowers, birds and insects in
the manner of Luo Liangfeng 仿罗两峰花
鸟虫, Narcissus, Crab and Stone in the
manner of Yun Shouping 仿恽寿平水仙蟹
石, Bird and Flower 花鸟 (1900), Copy of the
Song Painting Lotus Pond and Grasshop-
per 临宋藕塘芙蓉蚱蜢 (1901) and Portrait
of a Wealthy Person 富贵图. These works
draw their influence from various sources,
such as Yun Nantian's boneless flowers
and Luo Pin's 罗聘 (1733-1799) "weird"怪异
flower-and-bird paintings, and the style of
rendering flowers and plants through Ju
Lian's techniques of zhuangfen 撞粉 and
zungshui 撞水 — two different ways of
applying washes of ink, water and colour
on paper. Others are copies of ancient
masterworks and as a result, they embody
profound traditional skills. For example, in
Narcissus, Crab and Stone in the manner
of Yun Shouping 仿恽寿平水仙蟹石 (Fig.1),
the daffodils are painted with mogu tech-
nique and light colours, the brushwork is
precise, the outline of the stone is exqui-
site, executed with a meticulous brush-
work reflecting the brushwork of ancient
masters. In the works of this period, we
may see the elevated artistic skills of a
Chinese painter and his ability to under-
stand and assimilate ancient paintings.
It is obviously unscientific to assert that
so-called "eclectic painting" is completely
unrelated to "orthodox Chinese painting".
The academic system that attacked Gao
Jianfu's works, accusing him of forgetting
his ancestors, denotes a fundamental lack
of understanding of Gao's early works. Of
course, had Gao Jianfu been satis-
fied with such works, perhaps modern Chinese painting history
would merely treat him as one more
mediocre Chinese painter since, artis-
tically speaking, the above-men-
tioned value is only reflected inside
the sphere of Chinese painting, in
the cultivation of traditional paint-
ing skills and techniques.

Generally speaking, Gao Jianfu's
works from this early period are
often signed "Gao Lin"高麟, "Noble
Hall", "Jue Ting"爵庭, "Magpie Pav-
ilion", "Que Ting"鹊亭, "Lin" 麩. During
this period, other people would
often add the colophons on Gao's
works, offering them gifts, mostly
using in such cases the name "Jue
Ting"爵庭. The seals appearing on
the works of this period are: "Gao
Lin" 高, "Jue Ting"爵庭, "Lin's Seal",
"Lin Yin"麟印, "Gao Lin's Seal", "Gao Lin
Zhi Yin"麟之印, "Xiao Yue Qin Guan"啸月琴馆
carved in (i.e., not in relievo)
characters on square-shaped seal;
"Long Live Gao Lin", "Gao Lin Chang-
shou"高麟长寿,"Jue Ting"
爵庭, "Lin's Seal", "Lin Yin"麟印, "Que
Pavilion", "Que Ting"鹊亭, "Addicted
to painting", "Hua Pi"画癖 in relievo
characters on square-shaped seal;
and "Gao"高, "Lin"麟 featuring both carved in and in
relievo characters. A connoisseur
cannot fail to know these seals.
If divided by time periods, these
works were created roughly before
1905, especially while he practiced painting under Ju brothers 居氏. Compared with Gao
Jianfu's other periods, such works are relatively rare, hence more valuable to collectors.

Gao Jianfu's early calligraphy was also more rigorous. His calligraphy is dignified and
beautiful, and his individual inscriptions even show some traces of guange ti 馆阁体
(official script), which concord with his painting style of the same period.
What really established Gao Jianfu's dominant position in the painting school is that he
combined the painting language of Japanese painting and the influence it had ab-
sorbed from Western painting concepts, in order to transform and revolutionise Chinese painting, thus forming a relatively stable style. This style was followed and passed on by his students.

Gao Jianfu’s works may be roughly divided into two stages: The first stage lasted from about 1905 to the late 1920s. During this period, Gao Jianfu studied in Japan and was influenced by the artworks of neighbouring countries, where painting was shaken by these new styles and techniques. He tried to apply such techniques to his own creation. Therefore, in his works, the Japanese painting style is the most obvious, and it was also the most attacked by his “political enemies”. Most of these works are based on realism, with bright colours. The figure painting *Luofu Fragrant Dream Beauty*《罗浮香梦美人》(Fig.2) and the mountains-and-waters painting *Kun-lun after the Rain*《昆仑雨后》(Fig.3) are typical examples. The clothes patterns, hair buns, costumes, and the hazy moods of the characters in the first are typically Japanese in their rendering, while the latter shows the mist, water vapours, mountains, streams, and the damp and refreshing breeze after the rain. The atmospheric representation is a technique commonly used by Japanese painters since the 19th century. Some scholars pointed out that the paintings of this period were entirely influenced by one particular Japanese painter, or a part of a certain painting was directly copied from a work of a Japanese painter, as some expressional methods were exactly the same as created by these painters. Some even thought that many of Gao Jianfu’s paintings are in fact “patchworks” of the paintings of one or more Japanese artists. Some of his enemies also suggested out that some of these works were actually paintings without inscriptions bought on the streets of Japan, which were “used” by Gao, who simply added his own inscriptions and name. Of course, constructive criticism demonstrates that such assertions are unreasonable. The traces of copying in Gao Jianfu’s works of that time are obvious. As for the accusations of so-called “plagiarism”, in addition to Gao Jianfu himself, many people also wrote articles to clarify this point, believing that history would eventually do Gao Jianfu justice, which is why I will not repeat them here. Of course, these “problems” are all “searchings” or “weaknesses” that a painter in the stage of innovation and exploration cannot avoid, but they do not hinder our understanding of his status and correct evaluation of his painting skills.

Gao Jianfu’s second stage was from the late 1920s to the 1950s, and saw his artistic activities concentrate mainly in Shanghai, Guangzhou, India, and Macau. This period saw large social turmoils (such as the Sino-Japanese War, the Civil War, etc.) — historical changes which undoubtedly exerted a certain influence on his artistic style. In terms of technique, he abandoned the dominant expressionist techniques of Nihonga painting, and returned to a limited extent to the Chinese tradition, and blended the two organically. Therefore, in the mountains-and-waters paintings, we can see both the brushwork and the environmental and atmospheric effects of Japanese paintings as well as the axe-cut texture stroke, 劈皴 和 hemp-fiber strokes, 披麻皴 of the Song Dynasty, such as in the *Lonely Fishing in the Wind and Snow*《风雪独钓图》, now in the collection of the Guangdong Museum, the close-up view of the old man, the trees and the misty atmosphere bear a Japanese mark, while the distant mountains are rich in traditional dotting and texturing techniques. The flowers, the stones and grasses used as the lining of the scenery are smudged with water-colours and gouaches. At the same time, they are also mixed with water and ink, and the flowers display the use of Yun Nantian’s mogu technique. The subjects of figure paintings from the previous period, which mainly focused on meticulous depicted ladies and focused on expressing the environment and atmosphere have now disappeared. In their stead, there are now mainly freehand Buddhist figures. The brushwork appears careless, but is in fact imbued with great originality, as may be seen in the figure paintings Gao Jianfu created after returning from India, such as Bodhidharma, Luohan, Guanyin, etc.

In terms of painting themes, the repertoire has become more extensive. There are not only mountains and waters, flowers and birds, and characters that express traditional themes, such as *Begonia*《海棠图》, *Ink Bamboo*《墨竹图》, *Autumn Mountain Master*《秋山高士图》, etc. (all collected by the
Guangdong Museum), but also modern lifestyles that reflect realistic care themes that traditional Chinese painters pay less attention to, such as wars, famines, or realistic tourist destinations, such as Cold Smoked Isolated City (Collection of the Guangdong Provincial Museum), Flame of the East Battlefield (Collection of the Guangzhou Art Museum), Burmese Buddhist Relics (The Cultural Relics Collection of The Chinese University of Hong Kong), etc.

In terms of artistic conception, the author now uses freehand brushwork 大写意 to show a reckless, unrestrained and incisive attitude. Some commentators believe that his paintings are more tense than Gao Qifeng's and Chen Shuren's, mainly referring to the style of painting of this period. Among these may be mentioned-looking afar from the tower《倚楼极目》(Fig.4) (collected by the Tianjin Museum), Remnant Lotus and Wagtail《残荷鹡鸰图》 (Collection of the Guangzhou Art Museum), Two Eagles《双鹰图》 (all collected by the Guangdong Museum), etc. Obviously, regardless of technique, subject matter, or artistic conception, the painting style of Gao Jianfu during this period has matured, and he has become familiar with the handling of his painting environment, gradually forming a qualitative and unique character. Gao Jianfu set up apprenticeships in Guangzhou, Macau, Hong Kong and other places, and served as a tutor of Chinese painting at the Sun Yat-sen University, which allowed him to spread his painting style and become famous, thus becoming a leader of the Lingnan School of Painting.

The calligraphic style of this period is also completely different from the earlier period. His calligraphies appear in vivid cursive scripts in inscriptions, couplets, plaques and even books inscribed for friends. The strokes vary from thick to thin, and ink tones from thick to light. Vertical brush strokes are like old vines, while horizontal brush strokes are like dying branches. The brush appears clumsy, but in fact it is lively and unique. Gao Jianfu's calligraphic style, which appeared in the middle and late stages of his career with a weird and crazy mood, has been defined "withered vine" 枯藤体 by some commentators. Although it is said to be "dry," it does not lack in vitality, thus forming a vigorous and unique personality. Although Gao Jianfu is not famous for his calligraphy, his unique withered vine style is not uncommon even if it is placed in the group of modern calligraphers.

The signatures he used during this period are also different from his earlier ones. They mainly include "Panyu Gao Lun"番禺高=search","Gao Lun"高=sen,"Gao Jianfu"高剑父,"Jianfu"剑父[1-2 in Fig.6], "Lun" lun,"Jian"剑父,"Sword," Ajian"阿剑,"Master Jian"剑公,"Kunlun Mountain Dweller"昆仑山民,"Kunlun Mountain Farmer"昆仑山农,"Old Jian"老剑, etc. The commonly used seals are also richer than the earlier ones. In addition to the general name and character size, there are still many decorative seals (xianzhang 闲章) that record personal mood, behaviour, and interests. According to the author's preliminary statistics, these seals have rectangular shape and the characters are carved in [i.e., not in relief, 朱文], "Gao Lun" 高 lun,"Jianfu"剑父[4] and "Gao Lun's Seal"高仑之鈢; carved in and in square shape:"Gao Lin"高 lyn,"Cheerful Gao Lun"高仑高兴, "Lingnan Jianfu"岭南剑父,"Pick up the brush and look around the world"提笔四顾天地窄,"Master Jian"剑公,"Jianfu's Work after Twenty (years)"剑父二十以后之作,"Jianfu's Work after Thirty (years)"剑父卅以后所作,"Jianfu's Poems, Paintings and Calligraphy"剑父诗词书画,"Jianfu's Seal"剑父之鉨(5), "Immortal Jianfu"剑父不死(3) etc.; in reliefo, on oval-shaped seal: "Old Jian"老剑; in reliefo on round-shaped seal: "Lun"仑; in reliefo on square-shaped seal "Jianfu"剑父,"Jianfu's Seal"剑父 etc.; in reliefo on rectangular-shaped seal "Gao Painter"高画士,"Gao Jianfu Conversion Record"高剑父皈依记(9), "Buddha disciple"佛弟(10) etc. featuring both carved in and in reliefo characters:
Gao Jianfu's painting style has been carried forward through the inheritance of his followers. Like his master Ju Lian, he exerted a huge influence in the Lingnan painting circle. Among these disciples, many later became the backbone of the 20th century Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao painting circles, such as Fang Rending 方人定 (1901-1975), Su Woonong 苏卧农 (1901-1975), Li Xiongcai 黎雄才 (1910-2001), Guan Shanyue 关山月 (1912-2000), Si Tuqi 司徒奇 (1904-1997), Yang Shanshen 杨善深 (1913-2004), etc. Although their style of painting is far from the original "Eclectic School" period, as the artistic descendants of Gao Jianfu, they have become the main representatives of the contemporary Lingnan School of Painting.

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Zhu Wanzhang is also known as a painter and reputed for his depictions of gourds. Various albums regarding his works have been published like: *One Gourd and One World: Zhu Wanzhang's Painting Collection* 《一葫一世界:朱万章画集》, and *Study and Art: Zhu Wanzhang and His Art World* 《学·艺:朱万章和他的艺术世界》.
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