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SHANSHUI

Gao Qifeng 高奇峰's texts on Art

Giacomo Bruni

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By: Giacomo Bruni

Historical background

During the second half of the 19th century, the imperial court was facing decline as the Chinese territory was troubled by the imperial forces, facing threats both from the western countries and Japan.

In 1894 to 1895, China faced its worst defeat against the Japanese in the first Sino-Japanese War. China was not strong enough to take on their enemies, as they were still using “Second Industrial Revolution” technology. This tragic event made the situation between the population and the foreign dynasty¹ even worse.

The theorist of the revolution against the institutional powers of the time was Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) 孙中山 (1866-1925), the leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party *Guomin tang* 国民党. At the beginning of the Nationalist party, in order to remain free from the persecutions of the imperial government, their headquarters was based in Japan. It was during this time that Sun Zhongshan met the three founders of the Lingnan School of painting, Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889-1935), his brother Gao Jianfu 高剑父 (1879-1951) and Chen Shuren 陈树人 (1883-1949), who were all born in Guangdong province, the area most linked to the western world. The three artists, after joining Sun's nationalist party, actively participated in the renovation of their country. They believed the political, cultural and artistic renovations were extremely connected.

After the foundation of the new gov-

ernment, the first project was to mod-

ernise the country, to exceed the closure and conservatism of the previous government, and to open up to the external world, while also keeping their cultural roots in mind. However, following the death of Sun Zhongshan, the Guomin tang took a different direction, which was less interested in the renovation and cultural aspects. This was partly due to the fact that Gao Qifeng, Gao Jianfu and Chen Shuren were somewhat marginalised from political life.

In 1907, like many intellectuals of the time, Gao Qifeng had travelled to Japan to complete his art education, as Japan was the first country to introduce western ideas in east Asia during the Meiji period (1868-1912). However, their enthusiasm and openness to new ideas had put them at risk of forgetting their own cultural origins. A western orientalist named Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), along with other local intellectuals, played an important role in safeguarding the Japanese traditional art from foreign influences. They created a new genre of painting called *Nihonga* 日本画 “Japanese painting”, a pictorial expression that had already to some extent, merged with the techniques of both eastern and western art, and yet in opposition to other painting genres that followed and used western techniques and materials, which was called *Yoga* 洋画.

Educational background

Gao Qifeng studied Western art, in particular the techniques of Realism that had entered Japan through the Barbizon school, whilst also studying *Nihonga*. His education made his ideas about the relationship between renovation and tradition even

¹ Qind dynasty 清朝, they were Manchu people, a different ethnic group from the Han, the Man, in chinese manzu 满族.

stronger. Thus, Gao Qifeng, his brother Gao Jianfu (1879-1951) and Chen Shuren (1884-1948) founded the Lingnan school of painting, *Lingnan huapai* 岭南画派, with the purpose of creating a new national painting style, in order to reunify their own country. This new style was named *Xinguohua* 新国画, "New national painting"², and aimed to create a break from the formalism and the blind copying of the ancient masters, who had characterised much of the last period of the Qing dynasty. They hoped to create a new perspective in Chinese pictorial art, by looking at tradition with a critical eye, dialoguing, and adapting it to the historical, aesthetic and cultural needs of the time.

Following the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, the Gao brothers moved to Shanghai, where Gao Qifeng founded a pictorial magazine called *True Records* 《真相画报》, in order to spread their revolutionary ideas on Chinese art. During the first twenty years of the new Republic, the theories of these artists had a national resonance. Lingnan School became one of the principal sources of the renovation of Chinese art, and upheld a main role in the cultural life of the country until the Nationalist Party began to lose the approval of the population, in response to the motionless policies of Jiang Zhongzheng regarding the Japanese attempts at invasion which began during the 30's.

Gao Qifeng's art and theory

Gao Qifeng's novel painting method is the result of "unifying Chinese and Western and blending ancient with the modern" "折衷中西，融汇古今". Gao Qifeng established the use of brush and ink system of Chinese painting as the main body, and gave full play to the

² *Guohua* 国画 is the term used in China to refer to the Chinese painting, that is the use of traditional materials: paper, ink and brush





strength of Chinese painting with "vivid charm", "Boneless brush", and also extracted the characteristics of Western painting, which are accurate in rich colours, and the "science" of artistic expression, creating a harmonious and novel style. Gao Qifeng's brushwork has been influenced by the "Ju school" style of painting, their "boneless method", "hitting water" and "hitting powder" are the basic brush techniques that he uses to express his "naturalistic" painting.

Gao Qifeng's artistic production can be divided in two periods, the first comprehends his early studies with his brother and the influence of Julian 居廉 (1828-1904) painting style, his experience in Japan, the participation in the revolution and his time in Shanghai. This period was characterised by the influence of western painting learnt from the Japanese masters and finally the unstoppable editorial activity of spreading his news and ideas about painting in Shanghai. His artistic, editorial and revolutionary activities were deeply related.

The second period started when he returned to Guangzhou in 1918, when he began concentrating solely on the fields of creation and education. Overtime, he lost the influence of Japanese painting and began to perfect and adapt his artistic needs to the painting techniques of his old master, Julian. He grew closer to the literati painting, Confucianism ideas and the lifestyle, and it was in this period that he successfully created the new style of the Chinese Bird and Flower painting *huaniao hua* 花鸟画.

Even though Gao Qifeng had stopped all his political activities, he continued to spread his ideas about the new Chinese painting

with editorial and teaching activities. In 1925, Gao Qifeng was appointed as an honorary professor of Lingnan University 岭南大学, where he gave two important lectures on aesthetics and art education: the "Aesthetic feeling and cultural education" *Meigan yu jiaohua* 《美感与教化》 and "The Art of painting is not lifeless" *Huaxue bushi yijian siwu* 《画学不是一件死物》³.

These two texts of Gao Qifeng had great value, both in relation to the times in which they were written, and characterised by one of the biggest revolutionary processes of China, both artistically and culturally, and also in relation to contemporaneity. The harmony he proposed between tradition and contemporaneity, between national and foreign culture, were fundamental themes for the historical moment, and it can also be applied in our time. This thought would go on to become the *modus operandi* of the Lingnan school, and also of many other Chinese artists up until the contemporary times.

In the Chinese artistic and intellectual panorama, the relationship between national and foreign tradition is a much debated and important topic. The Confucian values Gao Qifeng promoted, and the role of art in the formation of the individual is highly topical in the contemporary world afflicted by desire for power and money, where humanitarian values are rarely taken into consideration and where even the figure of the artist links his production to mere monetary gain.

The need for an English translation of the two texts has also to do with the fact that Gao qifeng's vision of the world is a universal vision.

³ These two articles were published in Gao Qifeng's collection of paintings and in various magazines of the time



江 山 嘯 傲

山虎見雄姿
三十五年來
彭金山



自是雄姿
此澤一筆上嘯
氣紅勢

黃之先士亦為新歲奇
峰先師年事上休養理到
款 庚子年正月

彭金山

奇時先至山當見之用字

賦色法不同乃有歲年

早晚力必深察親見

百七名少至平 以口應之

山虎三見以巨金心險秋後
心既習子時節陽春景不
所好三治世大異同 萬福小

A theme that not only affects contemporary society, but also the global artistic panorama. Thanks to the revolutions of the last century, China has found various ways in which to relate to the Western society, which are still in constant evolution and have often brought benefits and new ideas. However, the situation is different when considering the relationship the West has towards the Chinese and other foreign cultures. The Western art scenes and its expressions have set themselves as the image of world art, oftentimes ignoring or knowing mostly superficially, other foreign traditions, thus, limiting its expressive possibilities.

Aesthetic feeling and cultural education - 《美感与教化》

By: Gao Qifeng 高奇峰

Translated by: Giacomo Bruni

美感原系人所同具的，与孟子所谓人性本善相同，但社会环境逼人，故多人随处忘不了利害的计较，把天然的美感及美德就供给那利害计较的牺牲，以至无论何事都渐渐丧失了天趣，所以不能不藉一种艺术去调剂，以激动其天然，兴复其美感。

The Aesthetic sense is a natural capability of all humans, just like Mencius used to say, the human nature is basically good and virtuous, but the threats to the social environment and their reckless striving after selfish interests have dissipated the natural aesthetic feelings and moral virtues. Selfish interests have gradually consumed the natural charm of life. Therefore, it is the role of art, to adjust, revive and rejuvenate that aesthetic senses, which is Nature's gift to us all.

美感者何？将见闻之事实或过去之印象加以一己之构思与及学力之丝验，融会贯通，不可方物。其藉工具以表露丁外，极

错综变化之能，由规矩准绳而达到神而明之的境界，则所谓美术也。

What is the aesthetic feeling? It is that thing that adds ones conceptions and imagination to the knowledge of facts or past experiences and impressions; as the understating of things can't be just through a comprehensive study of the elements. The only way to to understand and reveal all the various intricate variations is by starting from the basic norms to reach and understand the mystery of things, this is what is called art.

譬如见了一只荔枝，其鲜艳嫣红之色素，便想到他晶莹似玉的果实，亦清亦香的气味，联想到那荔枝丹砂万颗星缀树中，与绿叶婆娑相映成趣，及它生产地之粤岭风光，便发生无限诗趣，自然想到东坡谓“日啖荔枝三百颗，不妨长作岭南人”之句，同时又追想东坡之为人、之遭遇及其清高的才调，又想到韩元吉词“故人莫恨东南别，不寄梅花，千里寄红雪”的交谊如何高洁亲厚。又如见见忘忧的萱草，便感觉到诗经谓“焉得萱草，言树之背”，背是北堂，同时便感觉到母亲之慈爱，与及生我助劳，如天覆地教的罔极亲恩，当如何养志立身以冀图报于万一。那就是美感。

For example, when we see a litchi and its bright red color, we think of it being lustrous and transparent like a jade fruit, and its delicious taste and smell, thence we associate with countless trees full of red litchis like vermilion stars and dancing green leaves pleasingly in contrast with each other; from here we think about the scenery of the Lingnan in South China and infinite poems, that naturally takes the mind to the words of Su Dongpo: "Eating three hundred litchis every day, I would long live as a Lingnan man", these verses takes us back to the same time of the noble life of Su Dongpo, away from politics and material pursuit. Finally we arrive at the sublime friendship sentiments in

the words of Han Yuanji⁴: “old friend, don’t let us regret the parting in the southwest, if I can’t send you a plum blossom, vermilion snow I’ll send you for a thousand mile”. Or when we see the plant of forgetfulness (Orange Daylily), we think of the Book of Poetry where it says: “How shall I get the plant of forgetfulness? I would plant it on the north of my house”⁵, and at the same moment we feel the love of our mother and how she sacrificed for us, how she patiently taught us with kindness, and placed in us her ardent hopes. Then we begin to look forward to find a way to return, at least a little bit, from all the love she gave to us. This is the aesthetic feeling!

然而一人一时一地的美感，究属一人一时一地的事，倘欲与众兼善，则不能不纪载此种美感，以期普利群生。但是，传记是以叙其事，不能载其形；赋颂可以咏其美，不能备其象：惟图画之制可以兼之。昔人言之綦详，故有心世道者，多托花木，鸟兽，人物以比兴讽世，以兴复人之美感。如木兰蓓莽比志向的坚贞，翠竹苍松表凌寒之节操，以骐驎兰蕙喻君子，鹁鸪荆棘喻小人。写紫制枯荣，鹑鸽急难，冀兴起兄弟之友爱及群胞团结之精神。画慈乌反哺，孝羊跪乳，以增人子的孝思。务使人能接受美感，自能见善，足以戒恶；见恶所以思贤，见贤而又思齐矣。所以画虽一艺，其中存有大道，具有万理，古圣前贤非常注重的。有虞之世作绘事彰施，于是礼乐大阐，教化因之以兴，故能揖让而天下治，此其明证矣。又唐吴道子作地狱变相图，当时许多恶人惧罪改业。宋郑侠绘流民图，促使王安石变法，从根本推翻。宋亡，郑所南画兰不画土，令人兴起故国河山之痛，虽数十年后卒收攘夷光复之功，是知画的美感感人，其力最大。唐张彦远谓，画足以成教化，助人伦，与六籍同功，四时并运，真千古不移之论矣。

4 韩元吉 (1118-1187), famous poet of the Southern Song.

5 The poem continues: “Longingly I think of my husband, And my heart is made to ache.” 《诗经·卫风·伯兮》

However the aesthetic sense of each man from each place, the past and present, cannot be spread and perpetuated, unless its put down in record. However, a narrative form can describe the facts but cannot express the shape, poetry can evoke the feelings but cannot depict the form, only a painting can create it. The words of the ancients were extremely thorough, the social situation of their times was in their minds and hearts, they practiced the painting of flowers, trees, birds, beasts and figures in order to chant the life and to revive the aesthetic feeling of the people. Thus, the woody-orchid with its luxuriant growth represents ambition and determination, the verdant bamboos and evergreen pines stand for sober moral integrity, the gallant horse and the fragrant orchid are metaphors for the gentleman, while the cuckoo and thorns refer to a vile person. Depicting luxuriant and wither plants, wagtails and doves in danger, was to inspire the spirit of fraternal love and cooperation. Painting a mother crow feeding its nestling, or the lamb breastfeeding instills filial sentiments. When a man has aesthetic sentiment he can recognize the beauty and naturally can escape evil, when seeing the ugly he can recall the virtuous, and when the virtue can be seen he can level with it. For these reasons, painting is not just an art, but it incorporates the Great Way⁶ which is the intrinsic order of things, and this held a great value for the ancient masters.

During the Yu dynasty⁷, painting was generally taught accordingly to the system of *rites and music*⁸, for this rea-

6 *Dadao* 大道, the way of Dao.

7 Yu chao 虞朝, is an ancient Chinese dynasty of the beginning of the third millennium BCE, was mentioned alongside the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties in numerous historical Chinese works.

8 *Liyue* 礼乐, was a complete system of rituals and music during the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, to promote a moral and ethical education to maintain



son the cultural education⁹ prospered, and the society was ruled in peace and prosperity. During the Tang dynasty, Wu Daozi¹⁰ painted a picture of hell¹¹, and upon seeing the suffering evoked by the painting, plenty of evil people changed their way of living. During the Song dynasty Zheng Xia painted an exiled refugee, which inspired Wang Anshi¹² in his revolutionary institutional reforms. At the falling of Song dynasty, Zheng Suonan's¹³ painting of orchids without soil made the masses grieve over the loss of their national territory, and after ten years of resisting the foreign invasion, they finally reconquered their land; this is the great power of the aesthetic feeling. The Tang scholar Zhang Yanyuan said about painting: "[it] can accomplish cultural education, elevate the human relations, as the learning of the six classics and effects life like the changing of the seasons"¹⁴.

既知画足以兴复美感，又足以成教化，则绘事要旨自不可不作深刻的研求，否则所画杂乱无章，正如不和协之音律，嘈嘈杂杂，徒乱人心曲，不特不能兴复美感，而且将要发生一种反感了。绘事要旨为何？不外画法之“四格”“六法”“六要”

the harmony of social order.

9 Jiaohua 教化, refers to the Confucian education system that promotes social and ethical values.

10 吴道子 (680-759), was one of the most relevant painters during the Tang dynasty.

11 Naraka, the Buddhist hell.

12 Zheng Xia 郑侠 (1041-1119); Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086) was a politician, calligrapher, poet and prose writer. He served as chancellor and attempted major and controversial socioeconomic reforms known as the New Policies.

13 郑所南 (1241-1318), poet and painter, famous for his painting of orchids, after the fall of the Song Dynasty, all the orchids he painted had no soil and roots, as a metaphor of its land conquered by a foreign dynasty.

14 Is the first sentence of Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远 (ca. 815-after 875), the *Lidai Minghua Ji* 《历代名画记》 (*Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*), a precious historical document, as it is the main source of facts about artists from Tang and pre-Tang times.

。四格者，应物象形，创意立体，曰神格；笔简形具，得之自然，曰逸格；墨妙笔精，心手相应，曰妙格；雕模造化，学力深邃，曰能格。六法者，曰气的，曰用笔，曰象形，曰赋色，曰布局，曰模写。六要者，曰神，曰清，曰老，曰劲，曰活，曰润。明乎此绘事三昧，自可成竹在胸，挥酒如意。

Knowing that painting can revive the aesthetic sentiment and promote cultural education, we should next try to study the fundamentals of this art, otherwise it will be confusing and chaotic, like the noise of an untuned instrument that disturbs our sensibility, and instead of reviving the aesthetic feeling it's going to produce the opposite effect. The fundamentals of painting are the four manners, the six principles and the six essentials.

The four manners¹⁵ are: the divine, where the form can express a solid creative idea; the rare, when the shape is depicted with simple and natural brush strokes; the ingenious, the ink is exquisite and the brush full of life when there is a sympathetic response between the hand and the mind/heart; the skillful, which comes with profound knowledge and effort.

The six principles¹⁶ are: rhythm, the use of the brush, resemblance, coloring, composition and copy.

The six essentials¹⁷ are: spirit, clarity, ripeness, strength, vivacity and smoothness.

Knowing these three pillars the painter will have the mind ready to express its own ideas and a brush with no re-

15 *Liuge* 六格, from *Yizhou minghua lu* 《益州名画录》 *Famous Paintings from Sichuan*, a painting critique written by the Song period scholar Huang Xiufu 黄休復

16 *Liufa* 六法, established by Xie He 谢赫 on the 6th century.

17 *Liuyao* 六要, from the *Zhonglu huapin* 《中麓画品》 a text written by the Ming scholar Li Kaixian 李开先 (1502-1568). Not to be confused with the more popular *liuyao* of the Five dynasties period painter Jinghao 荆浩 (850-911), explained in its *Bifa ji* 《笔法记》.

strictions.

再本已饿已溺之怀抱，达已达人的观念，无论抒情寓意，寄托比兴，各体的画都足以兴复人的美感，而使贫夫廉，儒夫立，则于教化上殊非小补也。

We have to embrace other people's pain and take it as our duty to relieve others, with the idea of helping one another, with a sincere desire to serve humanity; any style of painting is enough to revive the aesthetic feeling of the masses, and make the corrupted honest. Confucianism established it, thus making a real contribution to the moral culture of mankind¹⁸.

***The Art of painting is not lifeless* - 《画学不是一件死物》**

我以为画学不是一件死物，而是一件有生命能变化的东西。每一时代自有一时代之精神的特值和经验，所以我常常劝学生说，学画不是徒博时誉的，也不是聊以自娱的，当要本天下有饥与溺若己之饥与溺的怀抱，具达已达人的观念，而致力于缮性利群的绘事，阐明时代的新精神。

I am of the opinion that painting is not lifeless, it is something full of life, with endless possibilities of change. Each age has its own characteristics, spirit and conceptions of the world, and for this reason I often warn my students that the practice of painting should not merely be for the attainment of personal renown or fame, nor for the aesthetic gratification nor as a pastime. The current world is afflicted by hunger and miseries, therefore the students need to embrace them as are their own afflictions, and then work hard in order to produce works that will benefit humans and nature and at the same time express the new spirit of its age.

18 The last two lines are a quote from Lin Zhengta 林正大, *Kuojiang Shenzi* 《括江神子》, a Song dynasty poem.

所以，我们学画除了解剖学，色素学，光学，哲学，自然学，古代的六法，画学的源流应当研究外，同时更应把心理学，社会学也研究得清清楚楚，明白社会现象一切的需要，然后以真，善，美之学，图比，兴，赋之画，去感格那混浊的社会，慰藉那枯燥的人生，陶淑人的性灵，使其发生高尚，和平的观念。庶颓懦者有以立志，都鄙倍者转为光明，暴戾者归乎博爱，高雅者益增峻洁。

We, who study painting, have to equip ourselves with the knowledge of anatomy¹⁹, psychology, sociology and understand them clearly. We have to comprehend the phenomena of our society, and then with the principles of truth, goodness and beauty²⁰. We can purify the turbid of our society, console the aridity of human life, and refine people's personalities, instilling an elegant and gentle way to see things. The ones who are hesitant will have firmness of purpose and determination, the ones who are despised will receive credit, the ruthless will embrace fraternity and the noble-hearted will shine forth even more brightly.

19 The application of western anatomy knowledge on Chinese art was very late, the first text that describe the application of anatomy at the art is the book *The uses of anatomy on art* 《艺用解剖学》 of Jiang Danshu 姜丹书 (1885-1962) dated 1930, five years later the lecture of Gao Qifeng.

20 Truth, goodness and beauty in literature and art are the aesthetic standard to evaluate the social significance and artistic value of a work. Truth *zhen* 真, is the authenticity of art, refers to whether the work correctly reflects the essence of life, and whether the author has the right feeling and understanding of the society. Good *shan* 善, is the tendency of art, that is, what is the significance and influence of the image depicted in the works on the society. Beauty *mei* 美, is the expressiveness of art, refers to whether the form and content



务使时代的机运转了一新方向，而后世观了现在所遗留的作品，便可以明白这时代的精神和美德及文化史事。这才是我们作画的本旨。

This means to make the current age turn in a new direction, so that when the position of the work are harmonious and unified, whether there is artistic personality, whether there is innovation and development.



terity looks back at our works of art, they may easily understand the spirit, the virtue, the culture and history of our time. These are the main purposes of our practice of painting.

我以前是单纯学习中国古画的，并且很专心去掌仿那唐宋各家的作品。后来觉得其优美之点固多，然倾向哲理也易犯玄虚之病，而且学如逆水行舟，觉得不集众长无以充实其进展之力。

In the past I had devoted myself solely to the study of the Chinese ancient paintings, and I primarily focused on imitating the great works of the Tang and Song dynasties. Later on I realized that even though these works have many exquisite aspects, they have the problem of having too much philosophic inclination and therefore they are too illusive and imaginary. Furthermore, studying is like sailing against the current, unless the scope of our research is wide and universal, our effort will lack creative power.

汉明帝时，西域画风输入，艺术上得了外来思想的调剂，于是画学非常发达，日臻昌盛，此其明证也。所以我再研究西洋画之写生法 及几何，光阴，远近，比较各法。以一己之经验，乃将中国古代画的笔法，气韵，水墨，赋色，比兴，抒情，哲理，诗意那几种艺术上最高的机件，通通都保留着。

During the reign of the Ming Emperor of the Han Dynasty²¹, paintings from the western regions were already introduced to China. Imported artistic ideas and models opened new ways to collaborate with the evolution of the Chinese painting, making it more prosperous.

For this reason, I took up the study of western painting, paying close attention to the practice of sketching from nature, expressions of light and shade, perspectives and other paintings

21 Emperor Ming of Han 汉明帝 (28-75), it was during Emperor Ming's reign that Buddhism began

techniques. Then I chose the finest aspects of western painting and applied them to the Chinese traditional brush and ink techniques, expressions of the tones and atmosphere, coloring, allegories, poetic flavor, philosophical meanings and emotional expressiveness.

至于世界画学诸理法亦虚心去接受，撮中西画学的所长，互作微妙的结合，并参以天然之美，万物之性灵，暨一己之精神而变为我现时之作品。尤望各学者扩而充之，口益孟晋。我所谓画学不是一件死物意在于此。

I tried to retain the best aspects of the Chinese art of painting and merge them with the best techniques and methods of composition of the universal art schools. Picking up the best aspects of the western and Chinese painting and blending them in a harmonious and delicate unity, following the natural beauty, the quality of all living things and my own spirit, to the result that is the current state of my works of art.

I hope that every scholar expands the scope of their research and try to be progressive at all times, because the art of painting is not lifeless.

to spread into China, and with it also its art expressions.