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Figure 1. Wu Hufan, *Mountain Peaks in Mist*, 1956, *guohua* (MS 1956, 6:36).

Figure 2. He Kongde,
*Suspension Bridge on the
Dadu River*, oil on canvas
(collection of the artist).

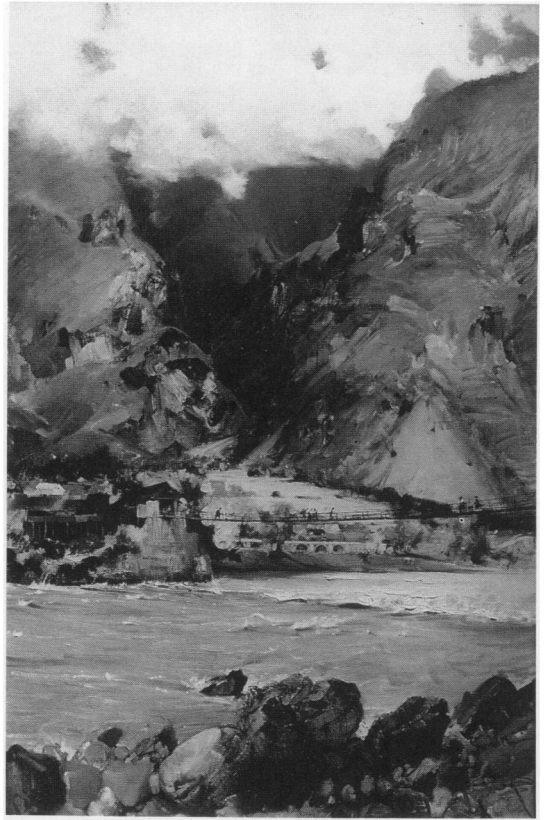


Figure 3. Wu Hufan,
Atom Bomb, 1965, *guobua*
(Shanghai Institute of
Chinese Painting).



Figure 4. Wu Qizhong, *Before the Meeting*, 1974, *guohua* (Guowuyuan 1975:n.p.).

Figure 5. Xu Beihong, *Horses*, 1940, *guohua* (Hua 3).

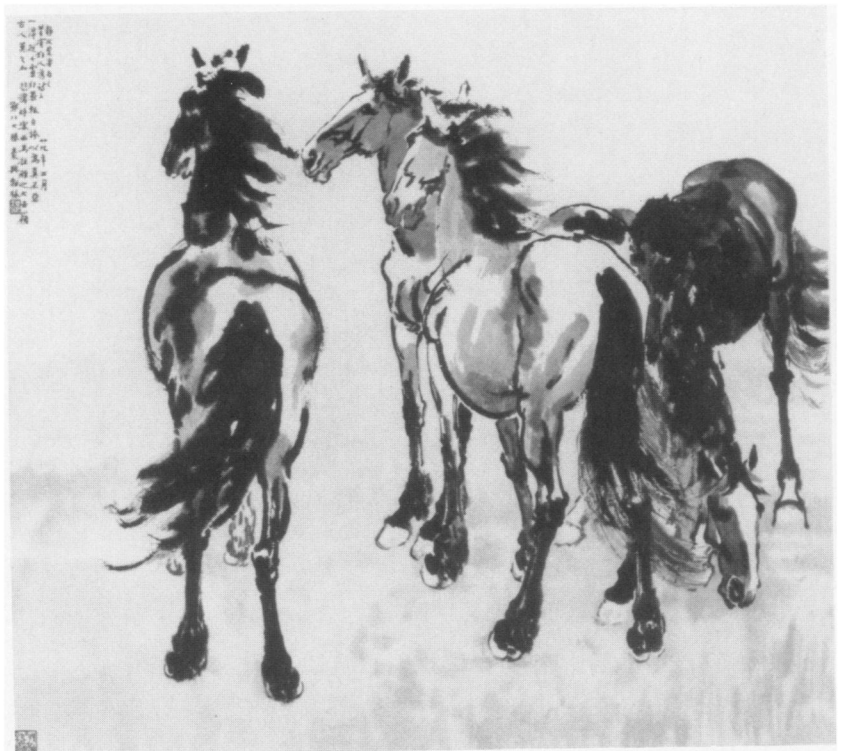


Figure 7. (right) Qi Baishi, *Shrimp*, for Ai Qing, 1949, *guobua* (CP, 1953, 2:16).

Figure 6. (below) Lu Yanshao, *Teaching Mama to Read*, 1956, *guobua* (MS 1956, 7: cover).

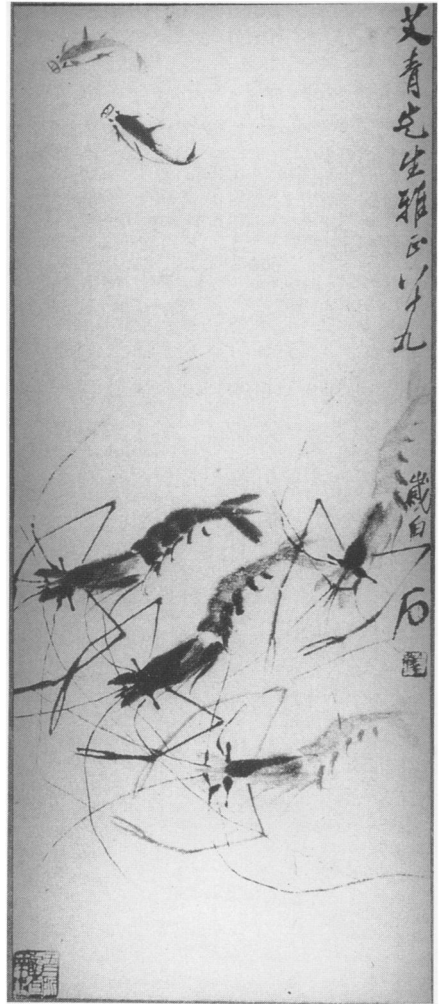


Figure 8. (left) Pan Tianshou, *Corner of Lingyan Gully*, 1955, *guobua* (MS 1956, 6:5).





Figure 9. Jiang Feng, *Kill Those Who Demand Resistance*, 1931, woodblock print (Jiang 1983:v).

Figure 10. Li Keran, *Model Workers and Peasants Enjoy a Day's Outing in Beihai Park*, 1951, new year's picture, 111 × 169 cm (CP 1952, 1:n.p.).

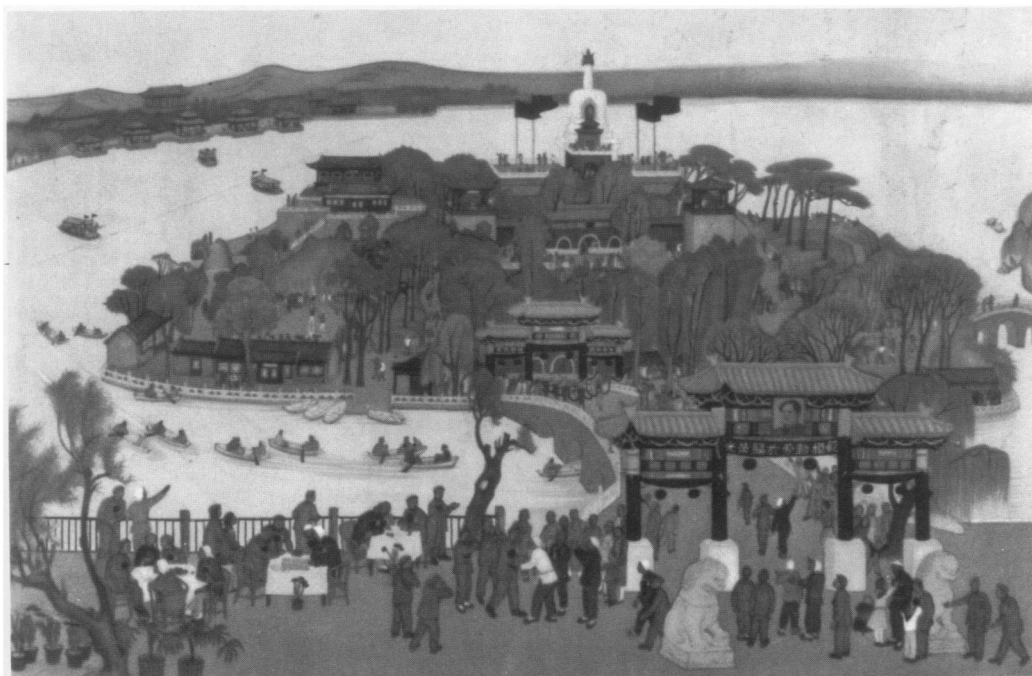




Figure 11. Li Keran, *West Lake, Hangzhou (Santan yinyue)*,
guohua, 111 × 169 cm (MS 1954, 10:26).



Figure 12. Fang Zengxian,
Every Grain is Hard Work,
 1955, *guohua* (CL
 1977, 10).

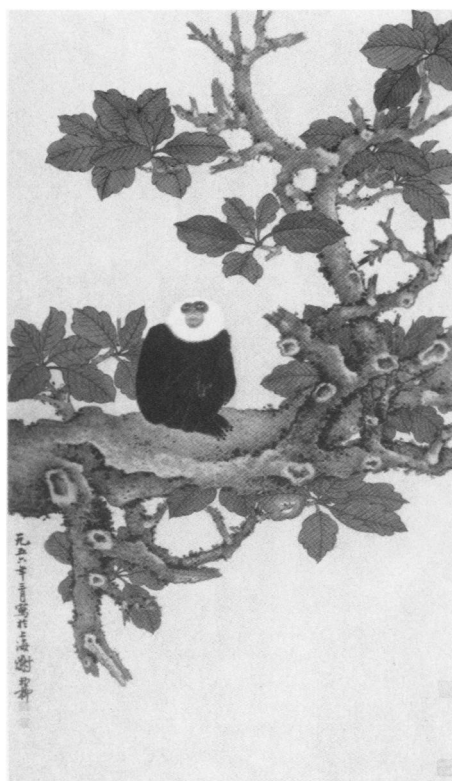


Figure 13. Xie Zhiliu, *Gibbon*,
 1956, *guohua* (MS 1956, 6:32).

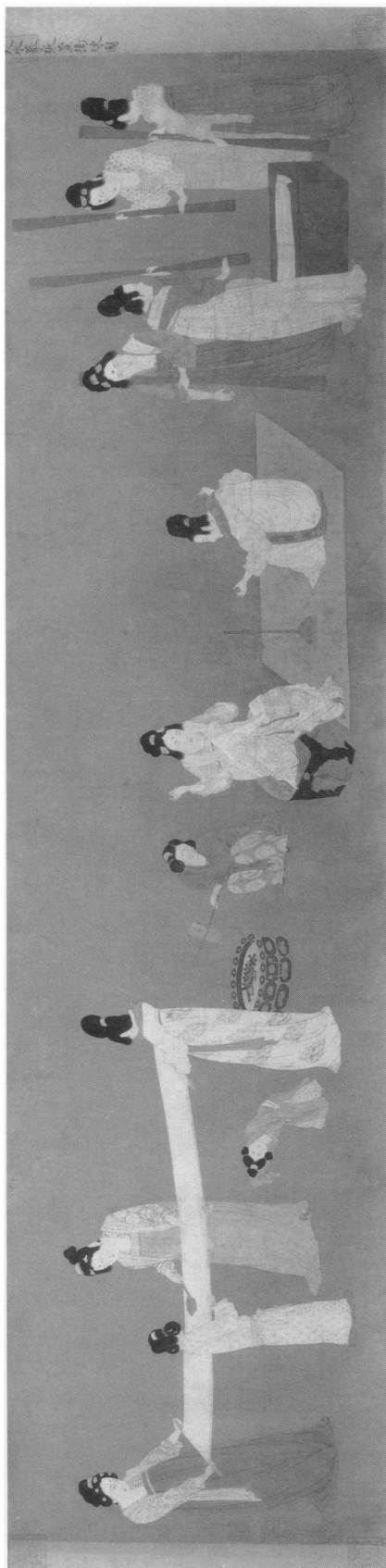


Figure 14. (above) Attributed to Emperor Huizong (1082–1135), copy after Zhang Xuan, *Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*, handscroll, ink, and colors on silk, 37 by 145.3 cm (Chinese and Japanese Special Fund, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).



Figure 15. (left) Ya Ming, *Peddler*, 1958, *guobua* on silk, 78.5 × 212 cm (collection of the artist).

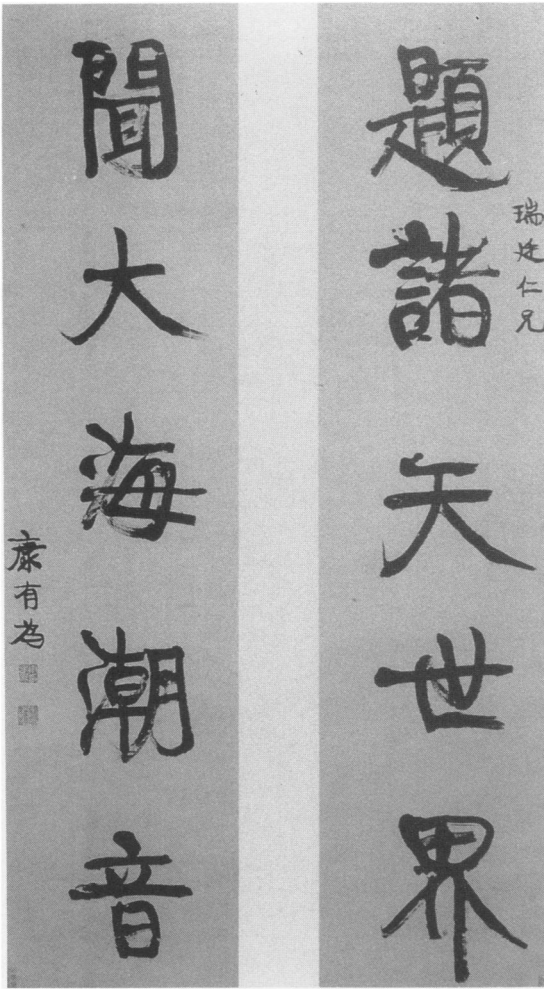


Figure A. Kang Youwei, Calligraphy, reproduced in Robert Ellsworth, *Later Chinese Painting*, vol. 3, p. 149.

Figure B (below). Hu Yiquan, *Ox and Plough*, 1943, color woodcut, reproduced in Li Shusheng, *Zhongguo meishu tongshi: jinxiandai meishu* (A General History of Chinese Art: Modern and Contemporary Art), 1988, vol. 10, plate 17.



Illustrations on this page are from books discussed in the following article by Ralph Croizier.

Art and Society in Modern China— A Review Article

RALPH CROIZIER

UNTIL RECENTLY, modern Chinese art attracted little scholarly attention, either in China or in the West. Western art historians might occasionally glance at the more traditional kinds of painting in the twentieth century, but their serious publications were on the great periods of Chinese art, Ming or before. The contemporary China-watchers—social scientists and modern period historians—trained their gaze on the harder stuff of politics and economics, ideology and organization. In the United States and the West in general, art seemed to slip through the crack between ACLS- and SSRC-funded research projects. In China, anything on the twentieth century, even art, was too sensitive politically for safe handling. The result was that throughout the Maoist years modern Chinese art could occasionally pique the interest of collectors or dealers outside China or draw carefully calculated praise from critics and publicists within, but it was not a promising area for critical scholarship. Michael Sullivan's pioneering survey, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, London and Berkeley, 1959—strong on developments in the later Guomindang period when

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- COHEN, JOAN LEBOLD. *The New Chinese Painting, 1949–1986*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987, 167 pp. (\$19.95 soft cover)
- ELLSWORTH, ROBERT. *Later Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 1800–1950*. New York: Random House, 1986, 3 vols. (\$850)
- KAO MAYCHING, ed. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988, 258 pp. (\$60)
- LAING, ELLEN JOHNSTON. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, 188 pp. (\$45)
- LI SHUSHENG, chief ed. *Zhongguo meishu tongshi: jinxiandai meishu* [A General History of Chinese Art: Modern and Contemporary Art] Ji'nan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988, vol. 10, 436 pp. (29.60 yuan)
- STRASSBERG, RICHARD E. *Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings from the People's Republic of China*. Pasadena, Calif.: Pacific Art Museum, 1987, 73 pp. (\$16.95 soft cover)
- ZHANG SHAOXIA and LI XIAOSHAN. *Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi* [A History of Contemporary Chinese Paintings]. Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1986, 364 pp. (5.90 yuan).

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he was in China, but understandably rather out of touch with the main currents in the People's Republic—remained for almost thirty years the sole monument in a neglected field.

In the 1980s, the situation began to change. The reasons are both peculiar to the art field itself and more generally part of China's remarkable internal and external changes in the post-Mao period. To mention the more general factors first, liberalization within China made possible a sudden upsurge of artistic activity with an accompanying new vitality in art criticism and history. Simultaneously, the opening to the West brought in new stimuli at every level, changing the way Chinese look at art and art history.

As for Western scholars, the open door and liberalization have permitted access to hitherto unavailable materials both from before and after 1949. This has been especially crucial for research on modern art history, where most of the primary sources (art works, artists, and criticism) remained within China. It might be possible to study Song or Yuan painting from museum collections in Kansas City or Taipei, and modern Chinese fiction could be read abroad, but to see and understand most of twentieth-century Chinese art you had to get to China. By the eighties, Westerners finally could do that, just as Chinese artists and art historians were themselves entering previously "forbidden zones."

Under these new circumstances, modern Chinese art has started to emerge as an intellectually respectable and aesthetically rewarding field of study. A number of Chinese art magazines regularly include material and criticism on both contemporary art and recent art history.¹ More striking is the proliferation of reproduction volumes, biographies, and memoirs, not all of high scholarly quality but in total providing more material than had been available before.² Less has been published in the West, but there, too, the products of the 1980s outweigh everything published in the previous thirty years. For this review, I will concentrate on those important works of the last few years that help to define an emerging field of modern Chinese art history.³ More specialized monographic literature, a few earlier books on the subject, and several unpublished dissertations are listed in the bibliography. It is a curious comment on the slow emergence of the field that some of the most important research in the United States, mainly by graduate students of Michael Sullivan and James Cahill at Stanford and Berkeley, has remained unpublished (Kao 1972; Sun 1974; Soong 1977; Lee 1981).

For the sample of easily available recent books under review here—two published in China, five in the United States—it seems less meaningful to arrange them by chronology (none appears to have been influenced by another) nor by language (Chinese or English), but rather by the degree to which they see modern

¹In the People's Republic *Meishu* (Fine Arts) and *Meishu yanjiu* (Fine Arts Research) are long-established leading art magazines, although many others cropped up in the 1980s. The most lively and controversial was the weekly *Zhongguo meishu Bao* (China Art Newspaper), 1985–1989. Outside of the mainland, *Meishujia* (The Artist) in Hong Kong, *Xiongsbi meishu* (Lion Art Magazine) and *Yishujia* (Artist) in Taiwan are important.

²The appended bibliography lists only those titles I believe to be most valuable and representative. It concentrates on recent scholarly writings and omits picture books.

³The new edition of Michael Sullivan's important book, *The Meeting of East and West in Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) should be mentioned. It is not included in this review because it is not an entirely new work and it covers most of Asia, not just China. Nevertheless, it remains the most ambitious attempt to put modern Chinese art in a broader comparative context. That promising approach will be pursued further at a forthcoming conference, "Modernism and Post-modernism in Asian Art," organized by John Clarke, to be held at the Australian National University, Canberra, in March of 1991.

Chinese art as the continuation and evolution of a great artistic tradition (mostly in painting) or as part of the general social and cultural history of modern China. In other words, among these recent studies some are most concerned with aesthetic standards, mainly the internal history of Chinese ink painting. Others take an approach which is more akin to the social history of art. For purposes of analysis as well as description, the seven books are arranged on an admittedly somewhat arbitrary spectrum, starting from the most purely artistic and ending with the most social historical.

Robert Ellsworth's three-volume set, *Later Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*, is in itself a work of art. It comes in a cloth-bound box, has gold-edged paper and full page color reproductions of excellent quality. Published by Random House in New York, and printed by Dai Nippon in Tokyo, it is probably the most magnificent reproduction volume ever produced on Chinese art of any period.

The lavishness of the production was important to the author's purpose of establishing modern Chinese painting as a worthy field of study and a valuable commodity. Ellsworth is a prominent New York collector and dealer in Chinese art. In recent years he has worked with the Chinese government to promote modern Chinese art in the American market. This is perhaps the most obvious instance where the economic aspects of the open door policy have been as important as its political implications for instigating scholarship on Chinese art, but it is not the only one. The burgeoning international market in Chinese art, the Chinese government's search for exportable commodities, and the emigration of Chinese artists in the 1980s have contributed to a sharp rise in both the availability and price of modern Chinese paintings. For the foreign or overseas Chinese collector, it may be difficult to buy authentic earlier works at almost any price, but there is no problem finding later Qing, Republican, or Communist-era paintings—if they are considered worth buying.

Ellsworth is convinced that they are, and his book is an attempt to convince others. From buying trips to China in the 1980s, plus earlier purchases in the international market, he was able to build a very large collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings and calligraphy (works modern enough that China's cultural authorities permitted, indeed encouraged, their export). In 1988, Ellsworth donated 471 of those paintings to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This single gesture has created what is now probably the largest and broadest collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese ink paintings available in any Western art museum. Experts may well argue about whether all the modern masters are represented by their best works, but to this reviewer's inexpert eye there seems no question that a valuable source has been made available for future researchers. Moreover, through publication of these admittedly expensive volumes, the collection is available for study outside of New York.

In the three-volume set, volume two reproduces all 471 paintings in excellent color and detail. Volume three has similarly excellent color reproductions of calligraphy by 267 artists starting with Qian Feng (d. 1795) and ending with Cheng Shifa (b. 1921). All seals and inscriptions are reproduced and translated in volume three along with biographical notes on the artists and two essays by Ellsworth. One is an interpretive history of painting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the other is a general history of calligraphy, the art form which Ellsworth sees as the key to a revival of Chinese painting that started in the nineteenth century and peaked in the early twentieth.

This strongly asserted case for calligraphy as the catalyst for a generally unrecognized modern renaissance in Chinese painting is the most striking and most con-

troversial aspect of Ellsworth's interpretation. Of course, the close connection between late nineteenth-century antiquarian studies (the *jinshi* scholarship of bronze and stone inscriptions) and the rise of such innovative modern movements as the "Shanghai School" has been noted elsewhere. It can be found, for example, in James Cahill's essay for the symposium volume, *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, which is reviewed below (Kao 1988, pp. 57–58). But no one else, to my knowledge, has so clearly and forcefully argued that new styles of inscription-derived calligraphy were the single most important factor in promoting a new creativity in late Qing-early Republican painting.

This is all the more remarkable in that Ellsworth does not read Chinese; his research and translation work was done by assistants. Perhaps, as he suggests, this had the advantage of allowing him to concentrate on the formal aesthetic properties of calligraphy without concern for its literal meaning. With an eye formed by exposure to the abstract expressionism of the New York School, he was struck by the rugged power and dynamic expressiveness of the calligraphy based on study of the old carved inscriptions. He argues that the most innovative features of modern Chinese painting—brighter colors, stronger brushwork, unusual compositions—are inspired by and act as a counterbalance to the new style of calligraphy. The "Shanghai School"—Wu Changshuo, Wang Yiting, and the Four Rens before them—are central to this development, but Ellsworth also applies his calligraphy-as-catalyst thesis to other modern masters such as Huang Binhong, Pan Tianshou, and, of course, Qi Baishi.

As for the art of the People's Republic, Ellsworth is circumspect, as one might expect from somebody doing business in Peking. All shortcomings are blamed on the terrors of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, his interpretive essay is short on post-1949 developments, although almost one-third of the paintings come from that period. He is also, with the exception of his enthusiasm for Shi Lu, "China's greatest twentieth-century painter," more restrained in his praise for the art. The implication is that the political constraints of the Maoist era did not foster great art and that the period from 1880 to 1950 marks the high point of Chinese painting's modern revival.

Ellsworth's ranking of Shi Lu above more famous masters will raise a few eyebrows among art historians and collectors, as probably was intended. His insistence on the artistic value of late Qing and Republican-era painting will also surprise some, although it continues a well-established "modernizing" trend in art history which has seen the respectable or vital periods of Chinese painting brought closer and closer to the present.⁴ But what will the art historians make of this calligraphy-led revival of painting interpretation?

In the first place, it takes us away from the common assumption that Western influence is the central dynamic behind any development, for better or worse, in modern Chinese painting. The calligraphy-inspired revival thesis clearly contradicts this, for even though Western-led archaeological discoveries (such as the oracle bones at Anyang and the Dunhuang cave manuscripts) fed into it, the "metal and stone" studies started earlier in purely Chinese scholarly circles. One advantage in turning to an internal dynamic in the development of modern Chinese art is that it avoids the problem so painfully obvious in one of our other books, the revisionist *History of Contemporary Chinese Painting* by Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, which has to uphold only Western-influenced painting as "pathbreaking" or innovative while

⁴Overall trends in Western studies of Chinese painting are summarized and analyzed in Jerome Silbergeld, "Chinese Painting Studies in the West: A State-of-the-Field Article," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46:4 (Nov. 1987) pp. 849–897.

admitting that the best art was produced by those who followed traditional lines. These two young Chinese art historians are not the only ones to be struck by the contradiction between progressive function and aesthetic appeal in modern Chinese painting. As Michael Sullivan, doyen of Western scholars of modern Chinese art history, notes at the conclusion of his essay in *Twentieth Century Chinese Painting*, “the art historian’s perpetual dilemma [is] that the work that is historically significant . . . may be of little or no aesthetic value; while works of high value . . . may lack any historical importance” (Kao 1988:20).

By relocating the central dynamic of Chinese painting, at least its mainstream ink-and-water branch, within Chinese tradition, Ellsworth offers a way around that dilemma. His internal explanation also is in line with the general revisionist trend in Western studies of modern Chinese history, which sees it more in terms of developments coming from within Chinese society and less purely as a “response to the West.”

So in some ways Ellsworth’s provocative views parallel general trends in historiography on modern China, but that does not mean that his relatively brief essays and personal taste in collecting, no matter how elegantly displayed, constitute a definitive, or even convincing, analysis of the relationship between calligraphy and painting in modern Chinese art. The in-depth research into Chinese sources, literary as well as visual, simply is not there. It is interesting that neither of the Chinese histories suggests that calligraphy triggered a revitalization of painting. In Zhang and Li, this omission is understandable because of their modernist and pro-Western bias, but it might have been expected that the more conservative and more nationalistic modern history volume in the Li Shusheng-edited series, *A General History of Chinese Art*, would have made some reference to so important a development. Admittedly, the volume deals with the twentieth century and not the nineteenth, but the relatively short chapter on calligraphy and seal carving, written by Wang Donglin, sees calligraphy as the most conservative of the arts in the modern period and disagrees completely with Ellsworth’s selections of the significant individual calligraphers of the twentieth century (Li 1988:161–75). Obviously, much more substantial research needs to be done before art historians inside or outside China will be persuaded to accept Ellsworth’s thesis, however appealing it might be to cultural nationalists in China and art collectors in the West.

Apart from that point of controversy, it should be noted that for all of its wealth of illustrations, Ellsworth’s is essentially a narrow treatment of a fairly narrow segment of China’s visual arts. There is nothing here beyond the traditional scholar’s view of the elite arts of the brush. Oil painting, woodcut prints, satirical cartoons, traditional folk arts—all have loomed large in twentieth century social, political and cultural history, and all are absent. Of all the recent books on modern Chinese art, this is the one furthest removed from its social basis, scarcely a criticism of the book on its own grounds but a reminder that there is more to the art history of modern China than meets the collector’s eye.

Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting is edited by Kao Mayching, Curator of the Art Gallery at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and an art historian who has done considerable research on the influence of Western art in modern China (Kao, 1972 and 1983). The various contributors, eleven in all, are artists, art critics, and art historians, mostly from Hong Kong and the United States. The wider range of expertise gives the book a focus that is broader, if somewhat more diffuse, than Ellsworth’s, but it, too, is mainly concerned with the “high art” of what in China is called “national-style painting” (*guohua*) or sometimes *shui mohua* (“water and ink painting”). This approach also reflects the development of the international art mar-

ket in the eighties: the 1984 symposium out of which this volume grew was sponsored by the Hong Kong art dealer, Hugh Moss, and his firm, Andamans East International, and Andamans also supported publication of the proceedings.

By any ordinary standards, it, too, is a handsome art book with twenty good color plates and many more clear black and white illustrations. In format and content, this volume puts an attractive face on modern Chinese art, although with somewhat more scholarly caution and less unabashed enthusiasm than Ellsworth's book.

As in most such collections, the essays vary widely in scope and quality although the editor, Kao Mayching, has done a good job in tying them together with an intelligent foreword and Michael Sullivan's "Art and Reality in Twentieth-century Chinese Painting" serves as "the keynote lecture of the symposium" (Kao 1988:ix). Kao, herself, goes deeper into the question of Western influence in an essay, "The Quest for New Art." It provides a somewhat broader and more secure foundation in the historical background of the first half of the twentieth century but, as in most of the other essays, she concentrates mostly on individual artists and particular works by them. This, of course, is a valid and perhaps necessary approach for art history but the cumulative effect in this volume is an emphasis on the art at the expense of the history. There is both new information and considerable reiteration of old themes in the various essays, which cover everything from the broad theme of "Tradition in the Modern Period" (by Arnold Chang) to recent Chinese painting in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and "overseas" (by Wucius Wong, Martha Su Fu, and Zeng Youhe, respectively) to earlier schools and movements (the Shanghai School by James Cahill; the Lingnan School by Laurence Tam).

Therefore, although this is an attractive and occasionally insightful book, it does not serve very well either as a general introduction to the history of modern Chinese art or as a contribution to scholarship in that field. Since the symposium was held in 1984, it may be unfair to blame the organizers for not including art historians from China, which certainly would have been possible a year or two later. Likewise, they cannot be blamed for the rapid pace of developments in China and the growth of studies on modern Chinese art in the late eighties. But one can legitimately point out that the four-year delay in publishing the proceedings of the symposium, after the publication of Cohen and Ellsworth in New York and the Chinese art historians in China, made its appearance less of an event than it otherwise would have been. In fact, the volume's greatest defect may be the lack of contact with the extraordinary developments in mainland art circles in the 1980s. This, too, can partly be excused by the difficulty in appraising absolutely contemporary developments, but it also reflects the symposium's focus on established, and marketable, movements and artists.

The weakness in handling contemporary art in the People's Republic is particularly evident in Edmond Capon's essay, which is titled with unconscious irony, "A Sense of Unreality." It certainly will convey that sense to anyone at all familiar with the past or present state of painting in China. We learn, for example, that "there seems to have been a change of emphasis from official support or at least tolerance of the kind of evolutionary, traditional art to the Soviet-inspired Realism or Social Realism around the mid-1950s" (Kao 1988:164). Actually, as perusal of Chinese journals from the period clearly shows, traditional-style painting began to be more widely publicized about 1954, although plenty of Socialist Realist oils survived. Or, for the 1980s, well into the most extraordinary period of ferment and new ideas since the late May Fourth period, the creators of that ferment are dismissed as

“. . . pursuing a pseudo-Western style of painting that, to me, seems both reactionary and inappropriate” (p. 176).

Here, of course, tastes may differ, but this seems a particularly striking example of the kind of silk fan attitude towards modern Chinese art that is so strong among many Western critics, collectors, and even historians. If it does not still look “Chinese” (i.e., traditional), it is not any good and not worth taking seriously. This may be good for the international market in Chinese art, but it is bad for modern Chinese art history. Popular art, Western-style art, political art—all are integral parts of that history and deserve study in their own right.⁵ Some of it may also, once we have abandoned preconceptions of what Chinese art must look like, even be good art.

Western readers can get some opportunity to judge for themselves the artistic merits of Western-influenced Chinese painting from the early and mid-eighties by looking at two rather different books, both published in 1987. *Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings from the People's Republic of China* is the catalog of a 1987 exhibition in the United States sponsored by ARCO Corporation which shows works by forty-six younger artists, most of them oil painters. A brief foreword by Henry Kissinger shows the extent to which art has become a commodity in Chinese-American political and economic relations. Kissinger also comments on the “extraordinary, indeed astonishing, nature of the paintings” (Strassberg 1987:7).

They are astonishing to those who think of Chinese art in terms of the old Socialist-Realist clichés or the even older literati brush styles, but it should not have come as a total shock to anyone who read about the controversies that surrounded unofficial art groups, such as Peking's “Star-Stars” (*Xing xing*) a few years earlier. In fact, these paintings, although they represent a wide gamut of previously prohibited Western styles from cubism to abstract expressionism, are not the most radical samples of China's avant-garde in either style or content. That is perfectly understandable in an exhibition organized with the approval of the Chinese authorities, even if 1986 was a very liberal year. For a broader look and deeper analysis of the new currents in Chinese art, one should turn to Joan Cohen's *The New Chinese Painting, 1949–1986*.

The “new” in the title is most appropriate, for Cohen's main interest is the avant-garde experimentation of the late seventies and early eighties. The periodization in the title, “1949–1986,” however, is slightly misleading. The book is not organized chronologically and, although Cohen provides a more coherent historical background than can be found in some of the other books, her real contribution is on the art of the immediate post-Mao period.

That was, indeed, an extraordinary period for political, intellectual, and artistic life in China as contact with the West opened new vistas and liberalization offered new possibilities. One of the first to reside in China for considerable stretches of time, Cohen was a supportive eyewitness to the outburst of creative activity and new honesty, mainly by younger artists, in the years between 1979 and 1983. It is her closeness to many of those young artists and unofficial art movements that makes this book so valuable as a source on that turning point of modern Chinese art and history. Indeed, no Western observer since 1949, and probably even before

⁵An encouraging example of what can be done with the more popular arts is Hung Changtu, “The Wartime Political Cartoons of Feng Zikai,” *Modern China*, 16:1 (Jan. 1990) pp. 39–83.



Figure C. Yuan Yungsheng, *Black Figure*, ink on paper. Reproduced in Joan Lebold Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting, 1949–1986*, p. 44.

then, has been so well informed and so keen to act as an intermediary between the new Chinese art world and the West. Her contemporary reportage, mainly in *ARTnews* and the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, first introduced the post-Mao avant-garde to the West, and she has subsequently organized exhibitions and promoted the careers of some of these artists in America (Cohen 1982). But this book is her major accomplishment in introducing the “new Chinese painting” to the West.

The long-term significance of that accomplishment will, of course, partly depend on the historical significance of this new painting. Was it just a series of faddish experiments by young artists dazzled by the sudden opening to the entire world of modern Western styles and “isms”? Or was it a new phase in the long and difficult process of China finding a place in modern world culture, the beginning of a vital synthesis of Western and Chinese artistic traditions? Even a decade later, those questions cannot be answered with any certainty.

One can note, however, that inside China the young radicals of the early eighties, were soon overtaken by an even more avant avant-garde which was less politically outspoken but even more radical in its stylistic experiments. Among other things, “the spirit of 1986” introduced performance art, minimalist art, and Dada to China. New faces along with ever newer styles also surfaced in the kaleidoscope of China’s modern art movement. Many of the original radicals found safe haven in New York or Paris, where their art has attracted more or less attention, but they have been separated from the latest developments in China.

This can be seen as a further stage along the trajectory from the take-off point of 1979 as Chinese art climbs from its previous isolation towards the heights of Western-defined modernism and post-modernism. Or it may simply be a display of flashy but evanescent fireworks which will fizzle out in the heavy atmosphere of national culture and social needs. Critics will question Cohen's enthusiasm for the artistic value of much of this art, especially those, both Chinese and foreign, whose aesthetic judgments are conditioned by more traditional Chinese canons of taste. However, Cohen herself recognizes that much of this new painting is experimental, transitional, or even half-baked. Her real enthusiasm is for the spirit shown by this new generation in breaking through political and cultural barriers. She shows that this spirit goes beyond copying Western styles by reserving her highest praise for artists such as Kong Boji and Yuan Yunsheng (Figure C), who strive to blend Western and Chinese techniques and modes of perception.

So this book—also handsomely produced, well illustrated, and much more affordable—serves as a sympathetic, not overly critical, introduction to an art movement (or movements) whose ultimate significance is not yet clear. Chinese art and Chinese history have been moving too fast for the volume to be absolutely up-to-date, but it is by far the most informative book on Chinese art in the eighties, either for the casual observer or the serious scholar. Whether the collectors will find much of interest here depends upon how flexible are their ideas of what constitutes “Chinese painting.”

One of Cohen's additional strengths is that, in addition to being an art historian and an excellent photographer (most of the illustrations are from her camera), she is also sensitive to China's complex political currents. One might wish that she had paid somewhat more attention to parallel currents in literature or philosophy during the crucial period after 1978, but Cohen is still ahead of most of her artistic colleagues in relating the art to other developments of the time. In that sense, her book stands halfway between Ellsworth's art-above-politics and Laing's art as related to politics approach.

The two Chinese surveys of the “modern period” (mainly understood as the 20th century) are also very much concerned with relating art history to the “sub-structure” of social and political change. But, as another indication of the intellectual as well as artistic “pluralism” of China in the eighties, they take very different political lines from one another.

A *History of Contemporary Chinese Painting* (*Zhongguo xiandai huihuashi*) co-authored by Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan could be called the first revisionist history of modern Chinese art in the People's Republic of China, except that there have been none before it, no histories of the entire twentieth century including Republican and Communist periods. But there has been enough written in art magazines, monographs, and biographies of individual artists to establish the Party line for modern Chinese art history. In painting, it favored “progressive” socially responsible art with a strong preference for the type of academic realism taught by Xu Beihong. This blended nicely into the approved Soviet-style Socialist-realism in the 1950s and continued to be the approved style in oil painting even after the eclipse of Russian influence. Supporters of Liu Haisu (the other great art educator and entrepreneur of the Republican era) were shoved aside, and their art, with its interest in Western modernist styles, was tarred with the brush of “bourgeois formalism.” Chinese-style ink painting, *guobua*, was caught in a tension between patriotic pride and demands for political relevance, with the big names of the twentieth century such as Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong, and Pan Tianshou, generally being

praised in periods of political relaxation and condemned when radicalism was in the ascendancy. In the graphic arts, there was nothing but praise for the left wing woodcut movement, which had been fostered by Lu Xun himself. Similarly, satirical drawings or cartoons, especially those showing correct patriotic and revolutionary consciousness, were also given an approved, if secondary, role in the development of China's modern arts. Finally, the populist basis of the new régime meant an elevated appreciation for all the folk arts, culminating in the state-assisted peasant painting of the Cultural Revolution period. And through all the art history of the People's Republic ran references to Mao's 1942 "Talks to the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature," with radicals citing his injunction to popularize art for the masses and scholars referring to his commendation of national forms and elevation of popular tastes.

Zhang and Li, two young critics and art historians at the Jiangsu Academy of Art, set all this orthodoxy on its head, or simply set it aside, in writing their book. In coverage it is somewhat broader than the title suggests, for included are examples of all graphic arts, such as woodcuts, drawings, cartoons, and serial pictures as well as paintings. Their book appeared at the very end of 1986 in humble paperback format with cheap paper and fuzzy black and white illustrations. It followed their irreverently iconoclastic article on modern Chinese art published in the journal of the Jiangsu Art Academy and should be seen as part of the "new tide" that swept over the Chinese art world, especially over its younger members, in that year.

The book itself is remarkably like the avant-garde art of the eighties—brash, polemical, contemptuous of established authority, at times long on opinion and short on scholarship. The racy, sometimes journalistic style can be irritating, and the absence of citations even for direct quotations is even worse. Still, in some ways this book is refreshing in its candor and boldness. There is a good deal of information that is new, probably for Chinese as well as foreign readers, as the authors dare to enter previously forbidden zones of modern art and politics. And it has the distinctive flavor of a book with a strong point of view whose authors seldom pull their punches.

In fact, more than a reference work for earlier twentieth-century Chinese art history, this book should be seen as part of the intellectual debate of the 1980s—a polemic on behalf of individualism, creativity, and "modernism" against the claims of national tradition, political restrictions, and conservative art styles. As such, it is as much a prescription for where Chinese art, society, and culture should go as it is a description of the recent past. On the issue of creating a new and modern Chinese culture, it is on the side of the reformers and cosmopolitanizers in the spirit of the slogan "going to the world," which would come into common use in art journals two years later, or even of the controversial television documentary, *He Shang* ("River Elegy") of 1988.

This modernizing, and modernist, line pervades the entire book. The authors divide twentieth-century Chinese painters into two types, "the continuers" and "the pioneers," with the former generally being water and ink, *guohua*, painters and the latter Western-trained oil painters. They admit that the aesthetic achievements of the ink painters are often superior, but it is the Western-inspired pioneers (*kaituo xing huajia*, literally "painters who open up a new model") who "act as the spearhead of the times" in response to the changing nature of China's society (p. 13). Thus, there is a kind of Marxist determinism behind their analysis but it is far removed from the old orthodoxy which saw progressive art moving through a brief bourgeois period to a heightened social function in building socialism. In this new book, the implied message is that a still backward and modernizing China needs the forms

and spirit of pluralistic modern art to encourage the diversity and creativity necessary for real modernization.

This means attacking not only stagnant national tradition but also the Western realist art that was so strongly entrenched in China's art academies. Perhaps out of political caution, perhaps out of a sense of fairness, Zhang and Li treat Xu Beihong with a good deal of respect, but they clearly do not like the kind of academic realism he foisted on the Chinese art world and they like its outgrowth, Soviet-style socialist realism, even less. They title their chapter on the realist-dominated 1950s, "A Mistaken Choice." Their heroes are the artists most affected by the stylistic innovations of European modernism—Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, and radical groups of the 1930s such as the "Zhue Lan She." For the present, they hail the "spring" atmosphere of the eighties and defend it against attacks on modernist styles and artistic freedom as represented in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement of 1983.

So their book gives a new perspective on the art history of the twentieth century and a vivid illustration of the new thinking about art and society within the People's Republic. As a balanced and objective history of the period, it leaves much to be desired. As a gust of fresh wind (actually part of a gale) in the Chinese art world, it is exciting.

The other history of the modern period recently published in China is less exciting but in many ways more substantial. This volume of the *Zhongguo meishu tongshi* (*General History of Chinese Art*) is published by the Shandong Educational Publishing House under the general editorship of the well-known art historian, Wang Bomin. The modern volume, which also starts in the early twentieth century, is under the editorship of the Peking art historian Li Shusheng whose previous major publication was on the woodcut movement (Li and Li 1981). He personally wrote a majority of the chapters, although parts are coauthored by Hua Xia, an expert on Western-style painting and associate editor for the entire project. There are also short chapters on specific arts (calligraphy, architecture, handicrafts) written by various specialists.

Unlike Zhang and Li, this book has the tone and appearance of an official, even somewhat traditional, history. The dominant interpretive analysis closely follows Party orthodoxy about modern Chinese history: Qing stagnation and oppression, imperialist exploitation, old and new democratic revolutions, reactionary Guomindang dictatorship, and the triumph of the people under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. Mao only appears for the Yan'an Talks. Otherwise it is the Party, the masses, and the artists. Fortunately for its scholarly value, the book also follows the more tolerant Dengist cultural line (or was it Hu Yaobang's?) that all art that is not politically harmful is permissible. This means that important figures who were on the wrong side of the Chinese revolution, such as the painters Zhang Daqian and Pu Xinyu, can receive due credit as artists.

The book's organization, not strictly chronological or topical, also is somewhat reminiscent of the old official histories. After a long, chronological first chapter, "The Rise and Development of Modern and Contemporary Art" (almost 40 percent of the book), there follow a series of specialized chapters on the various arts similar to the *liezhuan* (monograph chapters) in the dynastic histories. The book ends with the fall of the previous dynasty (Nationalist Government) although there is some spillover after 1949. This format leads to a certain amount of repetition, although it is minimized through cross-referencing, and it gives a somewhat bland and impersonal style to the entire book. Compared to Zhang and Li's outburst of hyperbole, such blandness is not entirely a drawback. Li's volume presents much more information, usually based on more extensive research, and the documentation is

more thorough, even if some citations still leave out such details as date, volume, or page number.

Finally, this volume is visually much superior to Zhang and Li's, printed in large characters on high gloss paper with many black and white illustrations scattered through the text and twenty-five color plates at the end. It will not qualify for the coffee-table trade, but for a scholarly book from a provincial press in China, this is an impressive production.

Although less blatantly a product of the new thinking of the 1980s than the Zhang and Li volume, this book, too, could not have been written in an earlier period. It still gives disproportionate attention to the leftist art movements (although that helps redress the balance with books like Ellsworth's and Kao's which ignore them) and it follows an outdated political line. But neither that emphasis on socially conscious art nor the political comments negate its solid scholarship and real value as a source for all the visual arts—high and low, traditional and modern—in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, the sections on cartoons and satirical art pull together material of considerable interest to political historians that had been mostly inaccessible outside of rare Chinese monographs or the original publications. And for architecture, the most socially relevant yet least discussed art form in modern China, the useful chapter by Xiao Mei, though somewhat lacking in theoretical sophistication, at least introduces the names and main works of twentieth-century China's most important architects.

In sum, although this volume is not likely to be accepted as a definitive comprehensive history of modern Chinese art either in China (unless the new currents of thought are suppressed much more thoroughly than seems probable) or in the West, Li and his colleagues have gone further towards laying the foundation for a social history of modern Chinese art than any of the other authors of the eighties.

In chronological coverage, Ellen Laing's, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*, fits nicely between Li Shusheng's history of the Republican era and Joan Cohen's emphasis on the post-Mao years. Laing has an introductory chapter on the pre-1949 woodcut movement and a short concluding analysis of the Mao Zedong Memorial Hall, but most of her material, like the symbolic owl of the title,⁶ comes from the Mao years, 1949–1976.

There is no doubt that this is the best book published on the art and politics of the People's Republic, although this may be inadequate praise for work in a field which the dust jacket accurately refers to as a "long neglected area." Laing, whose previous work was in more familiar areas of traditional Chinese art history, plunges into the heart of the most political era of Chinese art—where no established Western art historian has gone before. This, in itself, is remarkable. That she so skillfully navigates through the treacherous currents of Chinese politics and the virtually uncharted waters of People's Republic art, is little short of miraculous.

Yet, as might be expected in a pioneering study, the book is not without defects. Most of these stem from reliance on Chinese sources available in the United States, mainly art magazines and reproduction volumes. They are, of course, indispensable for research on this era but they can usefully be supplemented by the kind of direct contact with Chinese artists and scholars that has become possible in the 1980s. Personal impressions and verbal sources—the main strength of Cohen's

⁶In the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, the painter Huang Yongyu was added to the select list of Jiang Qing's reactionary "black painters" for a painting of an owl (inauspicious bird in China) with one eye closed. Allegedly, he was criticizing socialism or, at least, the new policies of the Cultural Revolution.

book—are noticeably lacking. This not only robs the book of some of the vivid anecdotal detail that otherwise might have enriched the text, it also distances the author from the latest Chinese scholarship, such as Zhang and Li's writings. Admittedly, it is difficult to keep up with the changes in Chinese art and art history, but closer contact might have given Laing more material to work with. As it is, the book has something of the flavor of pre-"open country" Western scholarship on China—insightful but somewhat abstract.

There is no question that Laing uses the published sources well and that her trained eye picks up things in the reproduced art that someone not well grounded in Chinese art history would miss. Her analysis of the "poetic" in Chinese-style painting during the ideological relaxation of the early 1960s is one example (pp. 42–45). The glorification of Mao in the Cultural Revolution, "Images of Mao as Leader, Pedagogue, and Diety," is another (pp. 65–67). Laing does not treat in detail all significant aspects of the arts in the Maoist era; the 1950s, for example, are relatively neglected. But wherever she casts her light, it illuminates both the art and the history.

It may, therefore, be somewhat ungracious to criticize a writer who has dared to cross the great divide between art and politics for not being always as subtle and penetrating in her analysis of the politics as she is in her treatment of the art. Yet at times one could wish for a little more explanation of the political background. For instance, when she notes without comment that the published commentaries by peasant painters were used "to contest Lin Biao's view that art was created in a flash of inspiration and was for amusement" (p. 84), she might also have noted that by 1974 all kinds of erroneous and elitist views were being attributed to Mao's posthumously disgraced heir apparent and that this one was as silly and transparently political as the charge that the longtime revolutionary and PLA commander had been a closet Confucianist. In other words, Laing is too good a scholar to make outright mistakes, but from passages such as the above, one is left with the impression that more direct contact with the post-Mao polity would have deepened and nuanced the treatment of Maoist politics.

This comment about the advantages of direct contact with the human sources in this field (Chinese artists, scholars, and cultural bureaucrats) should be balanced with one or two observations about the disadvantages, or hazards, to objective scholarship inherent in close personal or financial involvement. I have hinted at such problems in discussing the Ellsworth, Kao (because of the book's sponsorship), Strassberg, and Cohen volumes. Perhaps it should be addressed openly. Laing is the only author under review here who does not have some kind of extrascholarly involvement with the subject she is studying. She is not selling these paintings to Western buyers, is not a personal friend and promoter of the artists she discusses, and is not involved in the *guanxi* network of Chinese artists, critics, and bureaucrats. If one disagrees with, for example, her opinions about the aesthetics or motivations behind the Mao Zedong Memorial Hall, there is no suspicion that her opinions were colored by friendship with the architect or profit-sharing on the sale of admission tickets. Distance, the library approach to contemporary art history, has its advantages as well as its drawbacks.

This is not to impugn the scholarly integrity of authors who do have a direct interest, personal or financial, in the art they are studying. All of the authors reviewed here, whether they be full-time academics or not, have professional reputations to uphold and none have openly, or I believe consciously, tried to manipulate their source materials. But art is a commodity, as well as an artifact, and in the last decade not only has the market in recent Chinese art opened up to ordinary

scholars as well as international art dealers, but personal contacts and Chinese-style *guanxi* have become important to doing research in China. The problem is not peculiar to modern art history, for all who now do research in China have to balance personal relationships against the disinterested pursuit of truth. To try to create some kind of conflict of interest guidelines in this one field would be as undesirable as it would be futile. It simply should be recognized that the potential for such conflict is particularly high in this field, where market values of the art are rising rapidly and foreign scholars' accessibility to struggling Chinese artists is so recent. Art historians are more likely, by their training and experience, to be sensitive to this problem; those outside of art history, who may have their understanding of modern Chinese history and society enriched by the scholarship in this burgeoning field, perhaps need to be reminded.

To return to this review's main theme of art and society, writers who take Laing's approach, emphasizing library research and analysis of the social background, obviously put the safest distance between their scholarship and the art. Equally obvious, by now, is the fact that I find studies that emphasize the broader social, political, and intellectual background more congenial to my interests and, I believe, most likely to strike responsive chords among other scholars of modern China. But this does not mean that all modern Chinese art history has to dig deeply into the substrata of politics and society. There is also room, and need, for studies of brush techniques, artistic pedigrees, and stylistic changes—the stuff of connoisseurship and traditional art history. With the Chinese art world itself manifesting a pluralism unmatched since the 1930s, and with Chinese scholars still open to Western contact and collaboration (at least as of a visit in late 1989) there is no reason why Western scholars should not welcome a similar pluralism in our study of modern Chinese art.

In fact, there are signs that modern Chinese art history may be coming of age in the early 1990s. In China, Zhu Boxiong and Chen Ruilin's history of modern Chinese painting is reportedly going to press and other books are in the works. In the West, Michael Sullivan is preparing a new edition of his *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, which will provide an updated overview of the entire field. Just as significant, at least two younger art historians, Julia Andrews and Jerome Silbergeld, are working on new book-length studies dealing, respectively, with art academies in the Maoist years and traditional style painting in Sichuan province. As trained art historians with a command of the Chinese sources and good contacts in China, they should carry studies of modern Chinese art to new levels of sophistication.

So art historians are at last moving seriously into this field. Are social scientists and ordinary historians reciprocating this interest? So far, there are no parallels in the visual arts to the fascinating *Pianos and Politics in China* (1989) by the political scientist-cum-music critic Richard Kraus. But the diplomatic historian, Warren Cohen, is working on Chinese art as a factor in Sino-American cultural exchange and this reviewer has been investigating the parallels between modernism in the 1930s and its revival in China in the 1980s.

Although the events of June 1989 still cast a shadow over this and other fields of contemporary Chinese studies, it seems likely that the momentum generated in the eighties will carry forward the serious study of modern Chinese art and society. Difficulties of access remain, but the materials are available in Chinese publications, art collections, and artists' memories on a scale almost unimaginable only ten years ago. Moreover, the big questions remain largely unanswered—questions about the survival and development of the world's oldest painting tradition, about East-West

cultural conflict and synthesis, about art and revolutionary change. Prospects for cooperation and fruitful exchange between Chinese and foreign scholars are still good. Prospects for similar exchanges between art historians and nonart historians should improve. As a once dominant authority in Chinese art criticism (and everything else) said in another context, “the future is bright”—maybe.

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