10 IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINESE ART

THE PAST TWO CENTURIES have been among the most turbulent in China's long and often troubled history. The most epochal changes came in the political arena with the collapse of the imperial system and the founding of a Republic in 1912, and the establishment in 1949 of the People's Republic of China by the victorious Communist Party following civil war at the end of World War II. Those transforming events were embedded within a painful landscape of warfare, rebellion, and social dislocation reaching well back into the nineteenth century. Repeated encroachments, annexations, and invasions by foreign powers, of which the Opium War (1839–1842) and two Sino-Japanese Wars (1894–1895, 1931–1945) were only the most flagrant, alternated with equally devastating internal conflicts, among them the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Tens of millions of people died in these conflicts, and the further cost in destruction, dislocation, and human suffering was enormous.

Amidst all this turmoil, the cultural sphere was, if anything, even more complex, driven by multiple pressures and conflicting forces. Art was politicized and at times was turned into an instrument of warfare and class struggle. Traditional local modes competed with foreign styles and media. Art movements and theories clashed with the same intensity as the political debates of which they formed a part, while the art world was subject to the same economic disruptions and threats of physical destruction as society at large. Linking the discussion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century artistic developments does not deny the profound cultural consequences of the end of the imperial system and the establishment of a nation state in 1912. Reformist calls for repudiation of Confucian and traditional culture and its replacement by modern, Western, scientific thought and institutions, including a vernacular modern literature based on common speech and influenced by Western literary forms, as well as Western-style painting and other arts accompanied the new republic. Policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) were at times still more radical in seeking the destruction of traditional culture and elite authority, and in demanding an activist political agenda from the arts. While explicitly political art and avant-garde movements are twentieth-century phenomena, this chapter emphasizes cultural structures and concerns that link the last two centuries.

One of the most important of these ongoing themes involved changing power relationships between China and the West. As we have seen, relations between China and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were by and large cordial and mutually respectful. This was in part because the two regions maintained a benign distance and ignorance of one another, and also because of a general balance of power and prestige. During this era China was prosperous and

10-1 Liu Dahong (b. 1962), *Spring*
1991. One of set of four paintings, oil on canvas; 27½ × 15¾" (70 × 40 cm)

The contemporary painter Liu Dahong grew up during the Cultural Revolution years surrounded by an ever-present iconography of Chairman Mao as hero and savior. Here he appropriates a key icon of that era, the young Mao as labor organizer, and parodies the excesses of the era by showing the outright deification of Mao and the dubious quality of his followers.

a great military land force, with both its government and craft industries held in very high repute. At the same time Western European countries collectively were rising maritime and mercantile powers with increasingly impressive achievements in science and technology and were catching up with China, even in craft technologies such as porcelain manufacture. The German philosopher Leibniz (1646–1716) expressed a prevailing understanding of this cultural balance of power in his treatise "Latest News from China" of 1699. In his summary, Europe excelled in astronomy, military science, geometry, logic, and metaphysics, while China excelled in principles of civil life: ethics and politics, the tranquillity of public life, and in the understanding of natural religion.

That equilibrium of political and cultural power altered drastically, and to China's detriment, in the nineteenth century. A pivotal event, in both historical and symbolic terms, was the failed mission headed by Lord George Macartney in 1793 from the British East India Company to the court of the aging Qianlong emperor, seeking greater trade opportunities and diplomatic recognition. The mission arrived on an armed warship and brought examples of current British manufacture as unmistakable signs of developing European military and industrial capabilities. The goods, however, were taken as simply more tribute from abroad, and the diplomatic and trade initiatives that might have integrated China into an emerging modern world order were rejected. China, which had been the world leader during the Song–Yuan periods (tenth–fourteenth centuries) in science and technology, including metallurgy, armaments, and other military technology, and which had a considerable international maritime presence through the early fifteenth century, rapidly fell behind Europe in just those areas crucial to the projection of power: maritime technology, armaments, and the applied mathematics and technologies of mechanics and industrial arts. Most importantly, China lost ground in the economic infrastructures of prosperity and competitive advantage: industrial organization, machinery, and transportation. While it had pioneered the industrial scale of production and division of labor as far back as the lacquer industries of the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), it participated only lightly in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, primarily as a source of materials and cheap labor. As China's political and economic stature fell, so too did the reputation of its artistic and craft products, replaced by surrogates from the Wedgwood kilns in England or the French looms of Lyons.

The history of internationalism in China's nineteenth and twentieth centuries then became one dominated by exploitation and tragedy. The Opium Wars fomented by the British from 1840 to 1842 followed a quarter century of imports of opium into China by the British East India Company, which caused a long-term deficit in the balance of trade and consequent recession in China. The Treaty of Nanking of 1842, in which China ceded Hong Kong and was forced to open several port cities to opium imports, was just the first chapter in an ongoing saga of colonial appropriations. French and British expeditionary forces sacked Beijing in 1860, when the Yuanmingyuan imperial resort was looted and burned (see FIG. 9-44 above). The last half of the nineteenth century was filled with colonialist banqueting on the Chinese body politic and with concessions of extraterritorial rights and financial indemnities from China to the European powers, Russia, and Japan. Impoverished and diminished, the Qing imperial dynasty yielded to the Republic in 1912, but foreign intrusions continued unabated. Russia and Japan carved out spheres of influence in northeastern China and Outer Mongolia in the last years of the Qing empire, and Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 began a period of domination there that lasted until the end of World War II in 1945.

The troubles that beset China were of course not entirely or even primarily due to foreign interference. Corruption and incompetence in the ruling elites, overpopulation, poor financial policies, extravagant expenditure, and over-extension of China's own empire contributed to widespread impoverishment and discontent. The Taiping Rebellions that began in 1850 inaugurated an era of uprisings that lasted almost a quarter of a century, bringing enormous destruction and social dislocation. Likewise, the political and social tensions that led to the fall of the imperial system, the Civil War between Nationalists and Communists, and the Cultural Revolution that pitted devotees of Chairman Mao against the older generation and traditional culture were internal events (however much influenced by Western political discourses) that exacted an immense toll in economic stagnation, as well as in human lives and suffering.

Thus it would clearly be inadequate to portray China's recent political and cultural landscape primarily in terms of "China's response to the West." It would be equally misleading to deny the profound consequences of the weakening of the Chinese political, social, and economic fabric over the past two centuries, in which Western intrusions were both a cause and a symptom. In the cultural sphere, this took the tangible forms of imported Western styles, artistic educational systems, and art theories. More broadly, ongoing concerns with issues of identity and community might be seen as compensations for, or reactions to, a pervasive environment of political and cultural disintegration.

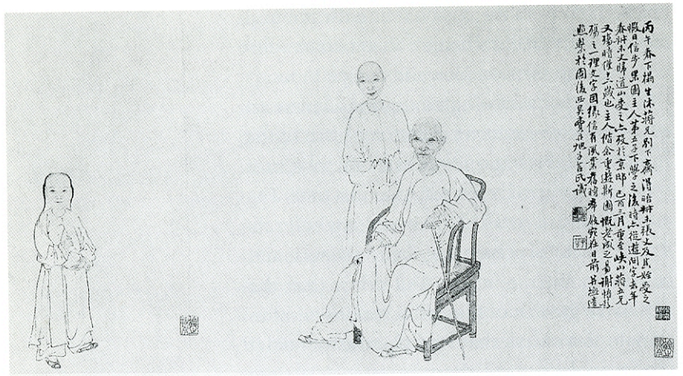
Issues of identity are everywhere in Chinese art of the last two centuries. Already in the nineteenth century the presence of foreign settlements in treaty ports such as Shanghai complicated the question of what Chinese cultural identity meant in a context of new media, audiences, and institutions. Meanwhile, the problematic nature of artists' and patrons' identities, caught between commercial motives and lingering literati values, emerged prominently in the genre of portraiture. Especially in the twentieth century, artists have been confronted with an international range of styles, schools, media, and thematic orientations, including traditional Chinese modes, in situations where choices carried political as well as aesthetic implications. Many artists had split or transnational careers, and others operated in overseas communities where the tension between Chinese cultural identity and local affiliations could be acute. For a twentieth-century China operating in an international arena structured around competing modern nationalisms, the problem of identity reached out from the personal into the political arena, as the visual arts became an important vehicle for group identification and competition.

The importance of community in Chinese art of the last two centuries is an outgrowth of the fundamental reorganizations of social structures that occurred repeatedly over that time. The end of empire in 1912 involved a wholesale displacement of aristocrats, their retainers, and court-appointed officials. Well before that, the explosive growth of Shanghai reshuffled relationships in ways that had significant social repercussions, particularly in the commercial cities of the southeast. The influx of population from many regions, the rising importance of banking and other kinds of financial systems, and the availability of modern communications and transportation modes altered the quality of human interactions. New institutions formed and old ones evolved in response to changed conditions. In the artistic sphere, artists' associations emerged that were less like literary clubs and more like trade associations, forthrightly promoting the careers and welfare of their members.

The restructuring of work, domestic life, social relations, politics, and culture under the Communist system after 1949 could hardly have been more complete. From the rearrangement of the agricultural economy into collective forms to the destruction of old economic and governing elites, traditional society was thoroughly transformed. The arts played a role in the formation of new communities through the bonds of shared cultural forms, from peasant prints to propaganda paintings. Already in the Republican era earlier in the century, artistic movements had forged communities of shared interest among groups of modernists or woodcut artists. Some of those communities reached across national boundaries to compatible artists in the West or to diaspora populations of Overseas Chinese around the world.

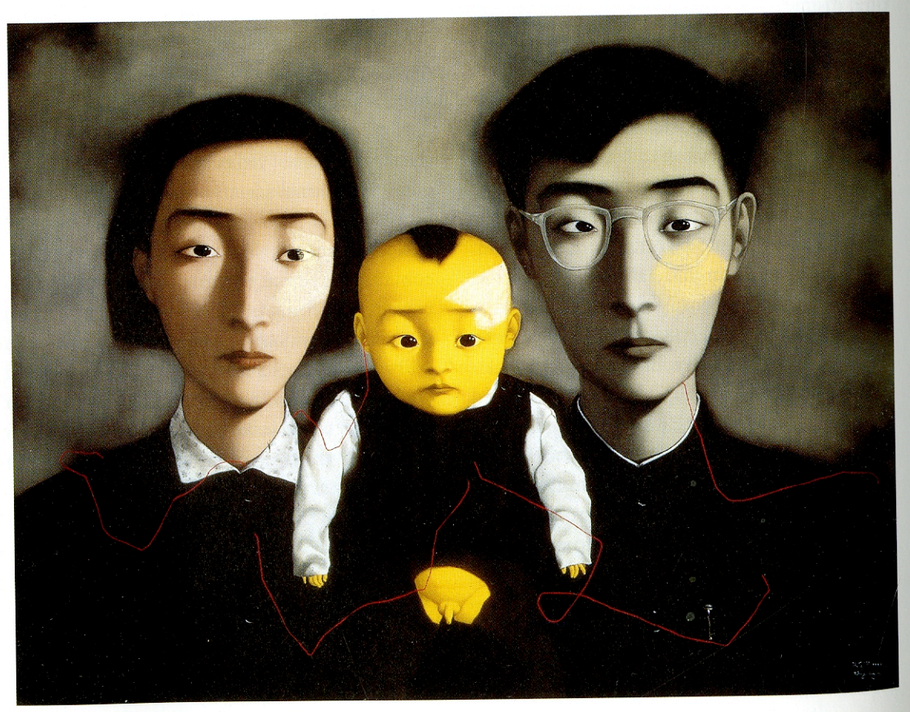
IMAGES OF THE SELF

The artistic genre most directly linked to issues of identity is portraiture, which became increasingly prominent in the last two centuries as it



10-2 Fei Danxu (1801–1850), *Feelings about Former Times in the Orchard Garden*
Qing, 1849. Detail of handscroll, ink and light color on paper; 11⅜ × 41½″ (29 × 105.4 cm). Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou

engaged questions of familial continuity, personal status, and gender or cultural roles. While many Chinese portraits depicted living individuals, an equally prominent function was the commemoration of deceased ancestors and the documentation of lineage continuity in group portraits. Elements of all these purposes are intermingled in the handscroll *Feelings about Former Times in the Orchard Garden* (FIG. 10-2) painted in 1849, just a year before the death of the painter, the southeastern professional artist Fei Danxu (1801–1850). It depicts an acquaintance named Mr. Zhang, seated in a chair in the position of seniority, along with two standing youths. The orchard setting evoked in the title, depicted in an earlier section of the handscroll, points to themes of familial continuity, of youthful fruit from the family tree. In fact, however, this is an elegiac scroll, commemorating the deaths of the two boys, Mr. Zhang's nephew and young son. Ordinarily memorial images portrayed a deceased senior member of a lineage, affirming a respectful continuity of familial roles. Portraits of dead children, made especially poignant by the empty length of handscroll separating the son from his father, seem a cruel reversal of natural order and a reminder of the bitter circumstances of much mid-nineteenth-century Chinese life. The entire painting, executed in a fine-line style, conveys both an air of refinement and, in the still unformed features of the departed youths, something of their fleeting presence and fading memory.



10-3 Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline: The Big Family No. 2*
1995. Oil on canvas, 5′9″ × 7′5½″ (1.8 × 2.3 m). Private collection

10-4 Ren Xiong (1823–1857), *Self-portrait*
Qing. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 5′8″ × 30⅞″ (1.77 m × 78.5 cm). The Palace Museum, Beijing

The fate of the family line under the very different circumstances of post-Mao China is suggested by Zhang Xiaogang's oil painting of 1995, *Bloodline: The Big Family No. 2* (FIG. 10-3). The lugubrious young couple, nearly stripped of personal and gender identity in what seems almost an anti-portrait, are literally draining their lifeblood via threadlike red conduits into their young son, who grows fat and ruddy even as the parents fade into a thin pallor. The hopes and focus of family identity and continuity in a generation of the politically mandated one-child family policy (where the ironic "big family" of the title should number no more than three) rest not so much on the shoulders as the sex organs of the infant, who seems prematurely aware of the solemnity of his role.

Many nineteenth-century portraits of individuals manage both to be intensely personal and to project an awareness of public roles. A *Self-portrait* (FIG. 10-4) by Ren Xiong (1823–1857) must be only a few years later than Fei Danxu's family group, but it is a world apart in presence and demeanor. The nearly life-size figure, rendered with thick, jagged clothing outlines and heavily stippled shading that models the facial features, confronts the viewer directly. Rather than the genial or formal expression of most Chinese portraits, Ren Xiong portrayed himself as both melancholy and aggressive. Like Chen Hongshou in the late Ming (see FIG. 9-10 above), Ren Xiong was a literate professional artist. Most of his prolific output as a painter and print designer was occasional or functional, done for specific patrons or markets, without strong projection of personal concerns. Ren's long inscription on his *Self-portrait* speaks of a world in turmoil and his sense of failing to have accomplished anything significant. He may be referring to the contemporary Taiping Rebellion and to political or military ineffectualness, or to a sense of artistic inadequacy, though either concern seems surprising in someone no older than his early thirties. This self-portrait makes powerful claims in both visual and social terms and may embody a new sense of public responsibility and stature among nineteenth-century professional artists.

The discontent manifested in Ren Xiong's self-portrait is more explicitly directed at the political sphere in a portrait of the artist Wu Changshi (1844–1927) as *The Distressed Official* (FIG. 10-5). The portrait was made by the Shanghai-based

10-5 Ren Yi (1840–1896), *The Distressed Official*
Qing, 1888. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 5′3″ × 29⅜″ (1.64 m × 74.6 cm). Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou

10-6 Jiang Xun (1764–1835), *Beauty*
Qing. One of a pair of hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper; 44 x 12⅞" (111.7 x 32.7 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City

professional painter Ren Yi (Ren Bonian, 1840–1896), who was Wu's painting teacher but was also an admirer of the better-educated Wu's performance of other aspects of elite culture, such as calligraphy in ancient styles (see FIG. 0-4 above) and seal carving. Wu had a very brief and unsatisfying career as an official, and this portrait, one of several that Ren Yi painted of him, may be a satire on his aspirations to a scholar–official's identity. The portrait originally carried a long inscription by Wu which detailed the discomforts and humiliations of a minor functionary's life, forced to endure long sessions at the government offices, rising in the morning cold and sweating in the midday heat while wearing the heavy official outfit depicted. Ren Yi's image diminishes Wu Changshi's stature by isolating him in an undefined middle-distance space, where the costume seems an awkward burden. In this and other portraits of Wu, Ren Yi seems to be negotiating his own identity in relation to his younger but more prestigious student.

The tone of passivity and complaint in Wu Changshi's poetic account of official life is one aspect of a broader pattern of feminization of Chinese male culture under the Manchus. The theme of the official as the spurned or neglected lover of the ruler had a history as far back as the pre-imperial period, in the rhapsodic poems of Qu Yuan in the third century BCE, who drowned himself in despair after falling out of royal favor. Feelings of emasculation were particularly acute in the Qing period, when foreign military conquest was reinforced by cultural restrictions, such as the compulsory shaving of the forehead and dressing of the hair in the Manchu-style queue, or "pigtail." In the nineteenth century a series of humiliating European annexations and forced concessions were superimposed on Manchu mechanisms of control.

In such circumstances, images of women painted by male artists can be complicated puzzles of identity, involving gender roles, ethnic identifications, and projections of male anxieties. Images of palace beauties from the eighteenth century (see FIG. 9-1 above) already harbored complexities, as the women, Chinese in appearance and costume, are presented in Manchu palace environments as objects of desire and emblems of cultural possession. In the early nineteenth century, the southeastern artists Fei Danxu, Gai Qi (1774–1829), and Jiang Xun (1764–1835) produced large numbers of images of a distinctive type of willowy beauty. The popularity of the type might be explained as a fashion for slender figures and delicate features, but it also suggests a response to contemporary masculine needs. At the very least, the type implies a compensation for concerns about male ineffectualness in the form of images of compliant, passive women, shown always available in the quiet precincts of the garden or inner, private quarters. The women are sometimes depicted in dutiful performance of domestic tasks such as spinning or sewing, but more often, as in Jiang Xun's *Beauty* (FIG. 10-6), they are portrayed as dreamy, acquiescent creatures, sometimes delicately seductive as is this maiden who touches her pinkie suggestively to her lips. Languorous poses and drapery lines combine with the glossy ink of piled hair and bust-length views to convey qualities of sensuality, promised intimacy, and invitation. The identity of such women is ambiguous. They might be portraits but more likely were idealized types of beautiful maidens or courtesans, where the production in multiples suggests something like the status of pin-ups. One of Jiang Xun's scrolls quotes a poem by the middle Ming painter Tang Yin, invoking a tradition of earlier images of beauties and courtesans and parallel ambiguities of identity and social status (see FIG. 8-37 above).

Early-twentieth-century images of women embodied still more complex issues of identity. The female artist Guan Zilan (1903–1986) in 1929 painted a *Portrait of Miss L* (FIG. 10-8) that evokes the approach of the French modernist painter Henri

10-7 Zhang Hai'er (b. 1964), *1989*
1989. Photograph

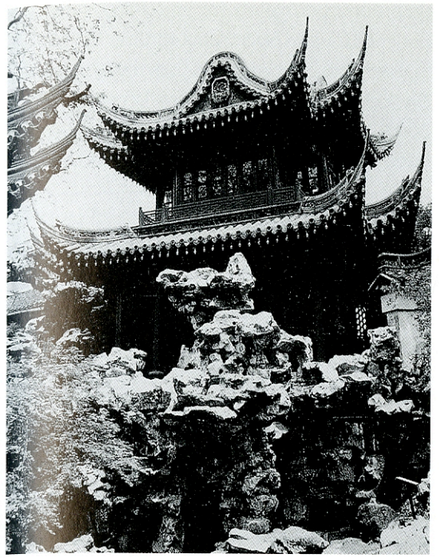
Matisse (1869–1954). The flat colors and strongly outlined design executed in oils make a formal experiment in visual presence and vivid colorism. Because Matisse was known for primitivist effects and for images of exotic, "Oriental" (in his context North African) women, however, this could not be an innocent stylistic choice. In part, Guan Zilan's painting is self-exoticizing. It presents a Chinese woman in the form of a Western vision of the exotic racial Other, while in Chinese terms the style is exotically Western and modern. For a Shanghai-based woman artist in the 1920s, the painting also made a claim on a local, Republican-era modernity of artistic and personal status. Conflicts between Chinese and Western identifications, while surely in play, could not be sharply drawn in the strongly international context of the 1920s and 1930s Shanghai art scene. Guan Zilan, for example, was the pupil of an artist who had studied in Japan with a Paris-trained teacher, and most modernist experiments were strongly shaped by the audiences and contacts provided by the presence of foreign communities in Shanghai.

10-8 Guan Zilan (1903–1986), *Portrait of Miss L*
1929. Oil on canvas, 35½ × 29½″ (90 × 75 cm). Chinese National Art Gallery, Beijing

The confusion of aspirations and identities that have been so much a part of the far more recent era of liberalization is captured in Zhang Hai'er's photograph *1989* (FIG. 10-7). Fashionability, sex appeal, consumerism, and even an updated, personal version of a century-old national self-strengthening movement are entangled in an image of the art and social worlds as self-conscious spectacle.

SITES OF COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC SPACES

The social bonding functions of art have been highly valued in many arenas and periods of Chinese culture. This is true not only of folk and popular arts but also in such modes as the painting and calligraphy of educated elites, where the making, inscription, and appreciation of art takes on the quality of a social ritual affirming



10-9 Yu Gardens, Shanghai
Qing

group identity. A wide range of art forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been concerned with ideas of community, or were deliberately communal in the case of the post-1949 PRC. These have a special significance in an environment where so many long-standing forms of community were threatened. Mass displacements engendered by wars and rebellions, rapid urbanization of populations in cities such as Shanghai, the breakdown of the imperial system of governance, and transformation to a socialist economy and Maoist political system all had profound impacts on economic structures, living arrangements, and population distributions.

Shanghai, which grew explosively in the later nineteenth century, relied on institutions such as native-place associations and merchant or trade guilds to manage that growth. Both types of institution formed communities based on professional ties or place of origin rather than on long residence in the new urban environment. Because such organizations had economic as well as social functions, they generated substantial building programs, and most of the urban and suburban growth of Shanghai in the nineteenth century was instigated by the associations and guilds. A typical compound might include office halls, temple buildings, theaters, gardens, dormitories, and cemeteries. Merchants also contributed to the reconstruction of civic buildings and spaces, such as the Yu Gardens (FIG. 10-9) in Shanghai, which was located in the midst of many common-trade organization headquarters. While gardens of earlier times constructed by private wealth certainly served social functions as elite gathering places, the Yu Gardens became more of a public or civic institution, even though independent of governmental support. The relative profusion and density of the Yu Gardens in comparison to the Suzhou and Yangzhou gardens of Ming and earlier Qing times (see FIGS. 8-3 and 9-29 above) in part embodies a widespread nineteenth-century taste for intricacy of design but may also have been a by-product of its communal sponsorship.

The Yu Gardens had a corporate, quasi-public status but retained the traditional garden architecture of enclosure and interiority. The Beijing-based contemporary artist Zhan Wang (b. 1962) inverts that culture of interiority by casting stainless-steel ornamental rocks (FIG. 10-10), which turn all of the labyrinthine hollows and dark recesses of traditional garden rocks into

10-10 Zhan Wang (b. 1962), *Ornamental Rock*
1996. Stainless steel, 6′8″ × 47″ × 47″ (2.07 × 1.2 × 1.2 m). Collection of the artist

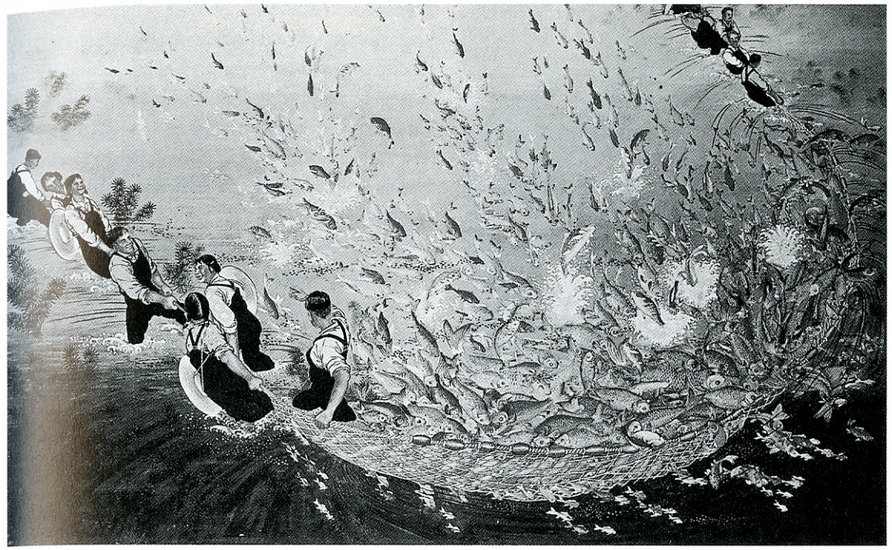
10-11 Zhencheng Lou, Yongding County, Fujian
1911

Circular or oval multistory communal living compounds are characteristic of the minority Hakka communities of southern Fujian and northern Guangdong provinces. The high-walled enclosures provide security, while the concentration of cooking, storage, and living spaces on separate levels encourages communal interaction.

mirrors of their surroundings. Typically situated amid an architecture of glass, steel, and concrete, his rocks acknowledge the materials of modernity and the high-rise isolation of urban communities instead of disguising contemporary environments with a false traditionalism. At the same time, the distorting curves of his reflecting surfaces offer an implicit critique of the dislocations brought by modern urban life.

A type of circular apartment building specific to southwestern Fujian and northeastern Guangdong provinces in southeast China is an architectural embodiment of communal social arrangements. Made mostly from clay with timber framing, the buildings are deliberately self-contained. This was due in part to their defensive purposes as stockades, with provisions around their outer perimeters for under-roof runways, designed for gun placements and easy circulation of defenders. The largest of these buildings were as much as four stories tall with diameters of some 260 feet (80 m), accommodating as many as four hundred households and a total population of up to 1,800 people (FIG. 10-11); they were further clustered to form communities. Most often associated with the Hakka people, a quasi-ethnic group supposed to have been descended from immigrants from the central plains centuries before, such round stockades embody local building techniques and a fondness for remote, hidden residences. Circular compounds were divided into residential bays, but the functional division into vertical levels, with kitchens on the ground floor, storage rooms above that, and living areas on top, ensured a communal experience. The centers of the compounds might be occupied by ancestral temples and other rooms in a double- or multiple-ring arrangement. The earliest such compounds were founded in the late Ming period around 1600, but most date from the eighteenth century up to the early twentieth-century Republican era. The example illustrated here dates from the early Republican era and is notable for its excellent preservation and for the impressive geometric simplicity of its design (FIG. 10-12).

10-12 Interior view of Zhencheng Lou, Yongding County, Fujian
1911



10-13 Dong Zhengyi (active 1960s), *Our Commune's Fishpond*
Gouache

The rural commune art movement in the PRC illustrates both the potential and the contradictions of an officially led popular art movement. Beginning with the period of the "Great Leap Forward" (a disastrously unsuccessful attempt to boost industrial and agricultural output through mass action) in 1958–1960 and continuing through the Cultural Revolution era (1966–1976), peasant painting was encouraged at rural communes as part of a policy to erase distinctions between city and countryside. Early in this period genuinely self-taught peasant artists produced large numbers of drawings, paintings, and mural images on themes of agricultural abundance in places like Pixian (Jiangsu), as part of a mass art movement. Art classes on the communes were often sponsored by Communist Party officials, however, who sometimes engaged teachers from provincial or national art institutes, so that even rural or folk styles became a standardized art-world product. The best known of the art-producing communities was Huxian near Xi'an in the northwest, selected as a model art commune by Chairman Mao's wife Jiang Qing in 1972. This meant that local origins were completely superseded by national goals, with professionals training commune artists who became involved in publicity and cultural programs directed from the highest levels. Many of the products of this system share markers of an evolved peasant style: strong outlines, bright colors, and designs with prominent repeated patterns, all elements that suggest linkages with New Year's print traditions (see FIG. 10-24 below). Themes focus on productive labor or political education, almost always with a straightforward ideological message of praise for the Communist Party or support for the Cultural Revolution. Dong Zhengyi's gouache *Our Commune's Fishpond* (FIG. 10-13) stays within this program, but the exuberant richness of the design, with sweeping rhythmic arcs of net-tenders and jumping fish that fill the nets and the sky above, moves beyond the conventional practices of the genre.

Communes in the PRC were ideologically based but involved real social arrangements. The notion of a transnational Chinese cultural community is more abstract but may be helpful for understanding art produced in Taiwan and Hong Kong or by Chinese émigré artists around the world, if used with a clear sense of its limitations. Taiwan had a long history of engagement with the mainland polity since the early Qing period in the late seventeenth century and became a bastion of Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) refugees, and of a particular concept of traditional high Chinese

10-14 John Thomson (1837–1921), *Hong Kong Painter at Work*
c. 1870. Photograph. Stanford Rare Book Collection, Stanford University, California

culture, after the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949. Hong Kong, ceded to British administration in 1842 after the Opium Wars, remains a multicultural society and international commercial center even after its recent restoration to PRC governance. Overseas Chinese communities elsewhere around the world vary widely in their size, cohesiveness, and visibility but often maintain a high level of concern for ideas of Chinese cultural heritage and identity. Any Overseas Chinese or émigré art that engages questions of Chinese history and identity or that makes use of traditional Chinese media, genres, or languages fits easily within this account. At the same time, we should not be captive to a museological or preservationist concept of Chinese culture, artificially divorced from multicultural environments or from contemporary media.

The ambiguities of Hong Kong identity and community are already conveyed in the photographic image of a Hong Kong painter at work made by the English photographer John Thomson around 1870 (FIG. 10-14). Thomson was an early ethnographic photographer whose images, collected in a volume called *China and Its People*, participated in the objectifying and exoticizing program of colonial photography aimed at a Western audience. The Hong Kong artist's audience is an international community, conveyed in the mixture of portraits and harbor scenes he is set to copying, translating photographs into paintings both for local customers and as part of a much larger industry of China trade pictures and souvenirs produced in quantity for the European market. Already in the mid-nineteenth century Thomson's image and the Hong Kong artist's products are locked into a complex series of mirrorings and translations, between photographic and painted media and Chinese and Western audiences.

Expressions of alienation and loss often accompany diffusions of communities, as in the photographic installations of the contemporary Taiwanese artist Chen Shun-chu (b. 1963). His *Family Parade* (FIG. 10-15) projects involve black-and-white serial photographs of relatives, arrayed in ordered, framed rows or inset into the walls of ruined buildings on his native Penghu Islands, offshore from Taiwan. The photographer's relatives are presented staidly in frontal, standing poses or, more enigmatically, directly from behind, suggesting both formal identification photos and memorial images of the dead. An effect of premature mourning is only increased by the insertion of photographs into the walls of ruined buildings, whose forms evoke the aboveground tombs in some Chinese family burials.

10-15 Chen Shun-chu (b. 1963), *Family Parade*
1995–96. Installation with framed photo-graphs, dimensions variable, each photo 11⅜ × 9½″ (29 × 24 cm). Collection of the artist

The outright destruction of community brought about by the economics of urban modernization has been the subject of a number of politically conscious contemporary artists. The 1995 performance by Lin Yilin (b. 1964) in the streets of the southern city of Guangzhou literally stopped traffic as he transported a cinderblock wall, brick by brick, across a major thoroughfare, from one construction site to another, in a parody of the seemingly endless cycle of demolition and construction caused by economic development, and a reminder that globalization has profound local effects. Installations by the contemporary artist Yin Xiuzhen (b. 1963) create an archaeology of absence from the detritus of Beijing's ongoing urban renewal, with arrays of salvaged roof tiles standing in for destroyed communities of traditional houses, conveying her sense of a pervasive process of social decay.

POST-LITERATI ARTS AND NATIONAL-STYLE PAINTING *(Guohua)*

Another kind of cultural community over the past two centuries that merits separate discussion because of its artistic importance involves practitioners of painting and calligraphy in traditional media—ink or ink and colors on paper using an animal-hair brush—focusing on painting styles and subjects associated with literati artists in earlier times: landscapes, birds and flowers, symbolic plants, or scholarly gatherings. These choices took on added significance when the alternatives were not just academic or professional styles but international media such as lithography and oil painting, and a vastly expanded range of possible themes. The term "post-literati" art is useful to reflect the dramatically changed social and cultural circumstances in which artists operated, in comparison to the literati of late Ming and earlier times.

In the twentieth century a further subcategory of post-literati art appeared in so-called *guohua*, "national-style painting." *Guohua* began as a programmatic movement in the early years

10-16 Qian Du (1763–1844), *Strolling in Moonlight by the Thatched Hall on Mount Yu*
Qing, 1813. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 54⅜ × 20⅞″ (138.2 × 53.1 cm). Osaka Municipal Museum of Art

of the Republic, in the term *xin guohua*—"new national painting" or "painting for the new nation." Originally a reformist counterpart to the "national language" vernacular-literature movement, it combined traditional brush and ink media and formats with contemporary and popular themes and some realistic representational techniques derived from the West. The movement had important political implications, as the painting of an emerging Chinese nation, and later at times became linked with nativist overtones as the painting proper to a Chinese ethnocultural complex, serving as an academic alternative to Western-style painting. Where post-literati painting conveyed an act of identification with imagined communities of past artists, *guohua* suggested a kind of cultural citizenship.

The political implications of the *guohua* movement were not unprecedented. The adoption and sponsorship of literati styles by the early-Qing-dynasty court (see FIG. 9-8 above) to constitute the Orthodox School was in some ways a parallel effort to borrow a culturally prestigious art form to promote the ideology of the state. Although *guohua* (along with the art of the communes) might also belong in a discussion of art and politics, the political content of many products of this movement was not especially prominent.

Among early-nineteenth-century artists, Qian Du (1763–1844) had definite connections with the literati painters of the past. He had inherited wealth from his prominent Hangzhou family, and his father was a friend of the mid-eighteenth-century painter–calligrapher Jin Nong (see page 347 above). Qian Du's *Strolling in Moonlight by the Thatched Hall on Mount Yu* of 1813 (FIG. 10-16) is evocative of the world of mid-Ming-period Suzhou scholar gentry such as Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming (see FIG. 8-33 above). Figures converse in a moonlit clearing in front of a garden compound with high walls and sheltered cottages that suggests a privileged, exclusive community. The dedication of the painting mentions the host making tea and inviting twenty-three guests to join him. Such personal dedications continued to be a means of establishing networks of association and, as in earlier times, certain styles, subjects, and literary or historical references also implied bonds of shared culture. Also as in earlier times, many such dedications were probably only formalities, and the literati-style works they accompanied were signs of status more or less openly for sale. In any case, the very existence of a market for such works of art testifies to the ongoing prestige of literati modes. The profuse textures, colorism, and densely patterned surfaces of the garden rocks are distinctive of Qian Du's own era, with something of the same taste for overwrought detail found in the Yu Gardens of Shanghai (see FIG. 10-9 above).

The careers of two painter–calligraphers active in the late nineteenth century demonstrate how ostensibly conservative modes could be vehicles for significant innovations. Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884) and Wu Changshi (1844–1927—see his portrait, FIG. 10-5 above) were from the southeastern coastal province of Zhejiang, and both were devotees of antiquarian script of the sort engraved on ancient bronzes and stone stelae (see FIGS. 0-4, 3-2 above). In addition to their literary and scholarly interests, both men had at least brief official careers. Their life-patterns thus fit the types of literati or scholar–artists in many respects, but with many marks of an emerging modern social environment. Although most of Zhao Zhiqian's works bear personal dedications, the evidence of contemporary letters makes it clear that he usually painted for money. Wu Changshi participated in broad networks of personal association and fellowship, but some of the artistic societies he participated in had publicity and marketing functions extending into the international arena, with students and collectors in Japan who organized exhibitions of his work in the 1920s. Active mostly in Suzhou, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, Wu, a founding member of the Yu Garden Charitable Association of Calligraphers and Painters and other societies of painters and seal carvers in Shanghai, became a director of the Xiling Seal Society headquartered at the West Lake in Hangzhou after 1913. The discomfort we perceive in the portrait of Wu as a discontented Qing minor official (see FIG. 10-5) may have arisen in part out of a related awareness of the disconnection between traditional roles and contemporary realities.

Zhao's and Wu's lengthiest artistic involvement was with calligraphy and seal-carving scripts, but both were influential and productive painters as well. Flowers, fruit, and symbolic plants were their most common subjects, along with occasional landscapes. The eighteenth-century Yangzhou School raised related genres of bird-and-flower or plant paintings to a central position, answering contemporary tastes for bold, showy execution and popular subject matter. Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshi added new qualities of saturated colorism and dense, surface-oriented compositions filled with overlapped patterns of unoutlined, blended colors and ink. Color and pattern are an undeniable part of the appeal of their paintings and suggest a response to contemporary popular art produced for urban markets and tastes. In the case of Wu Changshi, whose first painting teacher was the Shanghai professional Ren Yi (again, see FIG. 10-5), these links are easily discernible.

More subtle, but equally important, are the connections between script and image in both artists' works. This is partly a formal relationship, as the thick, slow-bending modulations of branches, vines, and leaves pick up rhythms of the blunt, wandering inscriptional texts. On a deeper level, pictorial motifs are often treated like characters in a Chinese text, combined on the basis of potential for meaning rather than the logic of real-world relationships. In Zhao Zhiqian's *Cactus and Oleander* (FIG. 10-17), one of a set of four hanging scrolls painted after a visit to a garden in the southeastern city of Wenzhou in 1861 to view exotic plants, Zhao's inscriptions point both to the novelty of the subject of cactus and the arbitrariness of the juxtaposition of oleander:

> [The subject of] cactus has never been painted. In a village at Rui'an, the largest grows to the height of twenty feet. In shape, it calls to mind strange goblins. In Wenzhou, oleander [grows] well, a tree with a hundred branches. In a spirit of playfulness, I've brought the two together...

Further on, he records the theoretical justification for such arbitrary combinations: "Since we are all acquainted, I need not tarry but can easily pick any subjects, the plants being metaphors of our friendship...." (Brown and Chou, *Transcending Turmoil*, pp. 262–63)

The metaphorical use of pictorial motifs had a long history that extended to rebuslike combinations of subjects for their phonetic readings, but such paintings usually had a naturalistic pretext. Plant paintings by Zhao and Wu often pack disconnected elements into a surface without background or context. In their work the use of the independent sign character of motifs to produce meaning, in what can be called a semiotic operation, is very prominent, though much disguised by the sensuous richness of surface. This foregrounding of the independent sign element is paralleled in other nineteenth-century collagelike image combinations and may have been based on a widespread archaeological awareness of conventional ancient script types and design motifs.

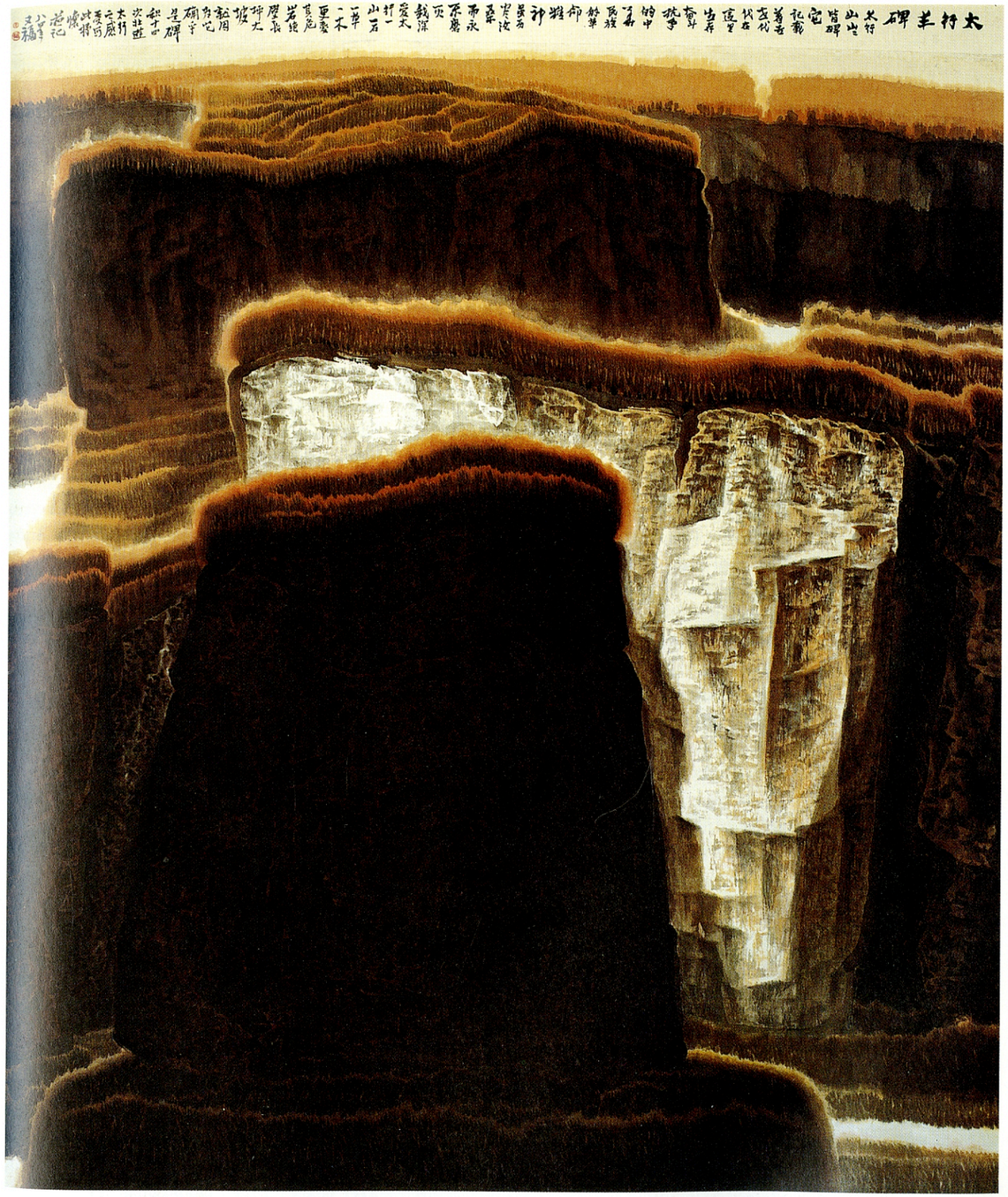
Throughout the last two centuries many post-literati and *guohua* artists grappled with the mixed blessings of traditional sources, balancing opportunities for allusion against the originality-stifling weight of the past. The continued vitality of a post-literati art depended on accommodation to changing social and cultural realities, rather than fossilized repetition of old modes. Important mid-twentieth-century painters such as Huang Binhong (1864–1955) from Anhui and Fu Baoshi (1904–1965) from Nanjing operated in modern modes of scholarship, teaching, and publishing while consciously exploring aspects of historical styles. Huang was an editor of the *Meishu congshu*, the major compendium of Chinese fine arts-related texts from all eras. Fu Baoshi was educated partly in Japan and wrote many instructional books about ink painting as well as scholarly studies of earlier artists such as Shitao (see FIG. 9-16 above). His attitude of ironic nostalgia for the past was shared by other post-literati artists, such as the internationally active painter, collector, and forger Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), perhaps the best-known twentieth-century Chinese artist in the international arena. Both Fu Baoshi and Zhang Daqian were immensely skilled technicians whose popularity led to risks of repetition and even self-parody. In many respects they represented not so much the

10-17 Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884), *Cactus and Oleander*
Qing, 1861. One of set of four hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper; 52⅜ × 12⅜″ (133 × 31.5 cm). Tokyo National Museum

10-18 Shi Lu (1919–1982), *The Banks of the Yellow River*
1959. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 38⅝ × 26″ (98 × 66 cm). China International Exhibition Agency, Beijing

particular subject matter of their paintings but rather a personally constructed, theatrical vision of the whole history of traditional Chinese painting.

While many post-literati and *guohua* artists settled for a skilled facility of technique, meeting well-defined genre expectations, the potential of *guohua* painting modes to achieve qualities unprecedented in the past and unmatched in non-Chinese media is amply demonstrated in the careers of other artists. Shi Lu (1919–1982), from the northwestern province of Shaanxi, had a remarkably diverse career as a political print maker and painter of epic propaganda pictures, as well as a calligrapher and landscape and flower painter



10-19 Jia Youfu (b. 1942), *The Taihang Mountains*
1984. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 39⅜″ × 5′5″ (1 × 1.7 m), Chinese National Art Gallery, Beijing

in *guohua* modes. His ink and light color hanging scroll *The Banks of the Yellow River* (FIG. 10-18) from 1959 is a deceptively simple bird's-eye view of steeply foreshortened boats on curling waves, a dramatic but not unprecedented composition. An adjacent turbulent mass of undulating dark ink lines, dots, and washes is much harder to comprehend. The title of the painting written just above suggests that this should be the river bank, but the very placement of the calligraphy encourages a reading as a great vertical cliff viewed straight on and radically disjunct from the adjacent river scene. The form of the dark mass recalls images of rocks from the seventeenth century that conveyed a physical intensity (see FIG. 9-15 above), and it is hard to avoid reading this inchoate but enlivened form in terms of embodiment, or perhaps even of psychic turmoil. The date of this painting in the midst of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward production policies (1958–1960) suggests other metaphoric possibilities or even political readings. Shi Lu's very identity as an artist was fashioned from internal contradictions. He constructed his artistic pen name out of the names of the seventeenth-century princely loyalist painter Shitao and the modern literary reformer and political activist Lu Xun (see pages 390–391). Shi Lu later became a victim of the Cultural Revolution, imprisoned and abused to the point of physical and mental illness.

Jia Youfu (b. 1942) devoted some fifteen years of his career to the subject of the *Taihang Mountains* (FIG. 10-19), which he visited on many painting study trips to Shanxi Province. This seems a curiously old-fashioned regimen, reminiscent of Wang Lu's obsession with Mount Hua in the late fourteenth century (see pages 306–309). Jia's composition in a huge 1984 version of the subject is also reminiscent in some ways of Northern Song monumental landscape, with overlapping planes of slablike cliffs and faceted rock faces (see FIG. 7-19 above). There are also many contemporary dimensions to this work. Since the Taihang Mountains were the site of military campaigns during the Sino-Japanese War, the painting embodies recent historical and patriotic associations. At the same time, the somber masses and stark simplicity of forms put notions of abstraction into play, with even more particular overtones of a Mark Rothkoesque reduction of form and inner luminosity of color. The potential of such *guohua* paintings for multiple interpretations and rich, unpredictable responses on the part of the beholder is at the farthest remove from the reduced potential of played-out traditions.

FUNCTIONAL ARTS

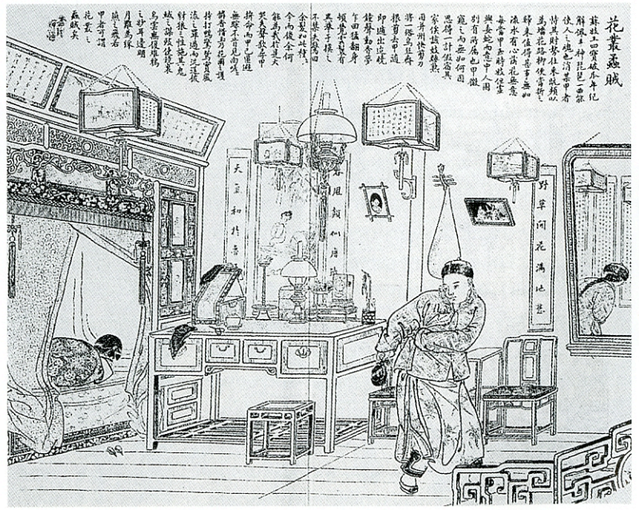
Functional modes of art are those in which the content and treatment are directly shaped by an external purpose or agenda, and often also by commercial contexts. Examples include: illustrational arts, where imagery is secondary to some story or narrative (though we will leave the large category of political art, propaganda, and wartime illustration for separate discussion); graphic design for book and periodical covers; commercial art for advertising; and some kinds of documentary or illustrational photography. Social functions likewise strongly determined the iconography and treatment of many kinds of portraiture and occasioned pictures such as birthday paintings. Often these modes of art making were the province of highly specialized professionals in earlier times, but, as we have seen, the distinctions between professionals, on the one hand, and amateur or scholarly artists, on the other, become much less clear and useful at the end of the imperial era. Many artists working in literati-derived modes straightforwardly engaged in art commerce in the Ming and Qing periods, even publicizing their prices in the eighteenth century. Moreover, with the establishment of formal art-education institutions in the early twentieth century, the concept of art as a profession took on a new significance, implying passage through an academic curriculum and elite status. A very large percentage of notable artists in the twentieth century have been professionally trained in art schools, and in the PRC for long periods most prominent artists were affiliated with art academies or artists' associations, receiving a set salary for their labor, whatever the orientation of their work.

Illustrational and Design Arts

The design of prints and paintings illustrating literary scenes from dramas, stories of heroes, and life episodes of cultural paragons was a stock-in-trade of so-called Shanghai School artists such as Ren Xiong (see FIG. 10-4) and Ren Yi (see FIG. 10-5). Ren Xiong's younger brother Ren Xun (1835–1893) had a long career as a professional painter in Suzhou, producing mostly bird-and-flower paintings but some narrative illustrations as well. His scenes from *The Romance of the Western Chamber* exhibit the slightly brittle, dynamic drawing style that was his signature, along with original twists on what had become long-established illustrative themes in paintings and prints (see FIG. 9-4 above). His album leaf depicting the episode of *The Interrupted Dream* (FIG. 10-20), in which the drama's scholar–hero dreams of his lover, the maiden Yingying, pursued by bandits, makes use of the old pictorial convention of the dream balloon to convey the dreamer's mental state. Ren Xun reinforces the contrast between real world and dream world by burying the faces of the scholar and his servant invisibly deep in the folds of their sleeves, a concrete image of the waking state submerged as subconscious desires arise.

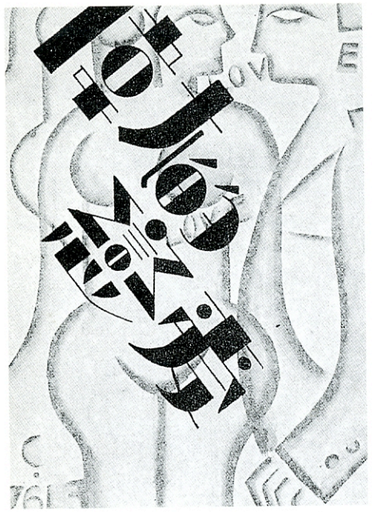
10-20 Ren Xun (1835–1893), *The Interrupted Dream*, from *The Romance of the Western Chamber*
Qing. Album leaf, ink and color on paper; 13⅜ x 14″ (34 x 35.5 cm). The Palace Museum, Beijing

Though much illustrative imagery dealt with knights-errant, martial exploits, and other masculine themes, the importance of themes of romance, desire, and the interiority of feminine spaces is notable, partly due to their centrality in the literary works that were so often the subjects for illustration. Toward the end of the nineteenth century an emerging journalistic arena of public representation was in part defined by the attention paid to the private, often secret and illicit, sides of contemporary life, carried out in brothels or boudoirs and manifested in crimes of passion. The *Dianshizhai huabao* (Dianshi Studio Pictorial), a lithographically illustrated pictorial published by the Englishman Frederick Major in Shanghai from 1884 to 1898, was one of the chief vehicles for such sensibilities and was soon joined by Chinese-published competitors such as the *Feiyingge huabao* (Fleeting Shadow Pavilion Pictorial). Wu Jiayou (who often signed his work as Wu



10-21 Wu Jiayou (d. 1893), *Thief in the Flower Garden*
Qing, 1891. Lithograph, 10 x 5″ (25.5. x 12.8 cm). Courtesy of Kuiyi Shen

The introduction of lithography in the late nineteenth century allowed large-scale distribution of images in illustrated periodicals in Shanghai, some of which were copublished by Europeans. Wu Jiayou was a prolific illustrator of contemporary urban life, including themes of romance and scandal such as the spurned lover who cuts and steals a courtesan's long hair.

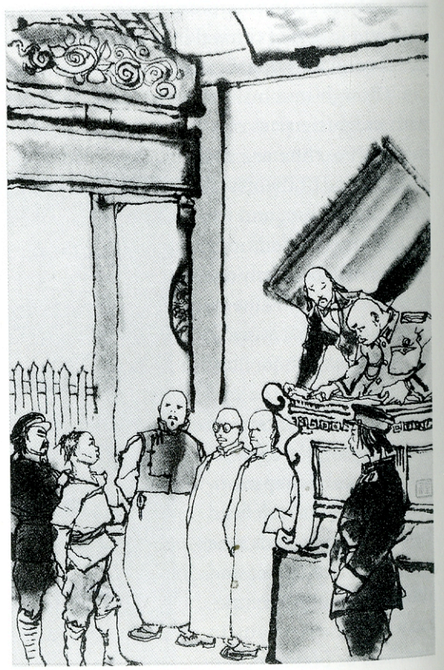


10-22 Qian Juntao (b. 1906), cover design for *Great Love*
1930. Collection of the artist

Youru, d. 1893) was one of the chief illustrators for both pictorials. Wu's lithographic illustration for the *Feiyingge huabao* of a scene of a spurned paramour exacting revenge on a courtesan by stealing into her bedroom and chopping off her hair (FIG. 10-21) is accompanied by a long descriptive text that places it firmly in the arena of contemporary life. The picture unfolds as a series of partial revelations of visibility. The female subject is turned away from the viewer, and her mirror stand is draped, but the spectator is offered several surrogates of visibility on the rear wall. The traditional hanging scroll of a beauty under trees above the dressing table stands in for an idealized view of the courtesan, and the adjacent framed photographs are at once explicit reminders of contemporary media and blatant advertisements for the courtesan's services. The large Western-style looking-glass to the right serves a different function, a stand-in not for the figures in the scene but for the spectatorial gaze of the pictorial-reading public, capturing the intruder in the act, even as he steals away with his fetishistic prize.

Along with lithographic illustrations for pictorials, book and journal cover design and typography were among the most publicly accessible modes of functional art. Graphic designers carried out some of the most interesting and successful modernist experiments in China. Here the intrinsic formalism of Chinese characters made for an easy transition to abstraction and new formats offered abundant opportunities for design innovation. The circle of the literary reformer Lu Xun (1881–1936) was the point of origin for many book designers. Lu (who is discussed in greater detail below, see pages 390–391) was an amateur woodblock print maker and cover designer himself, and he also supported or commissioned work from other designers. Among them was Qian Juntao (b. 1906), who met Lu Xun in 1927 and viewed some of his collection of ancient calligraphic rubbings. Qian was also supported by his teacher Feng Zikai, who acknowledged the commercial aspect and public appeal of work in book design. Qian's 1930 cover for *Great Love* (FIG. 10-22) integrates text and pictorial design in a quasi-Cubist mode. The lettering takes on an Art Deco look, with hints of forms from Roman alphabets, mathematical symbols of equivalence, and even abstract bodily figures. Less conspicuous English letters form parts of the word "love," bridging the gap between the simply outlined male and female figures behind the title text. Even the figures overlap and blend, in acknowledgment of Cubist practice and the theme of the story.

Among the most widely experienced of all functional arts are the serial illustrations known as *lianhuanhua*, ranging from comic-strip style to elaborate line drawings or even oil paintings, that accompanied stories and novels or were published as independent picture books, including Communist Party propaganda tracts illustrating the lives of exemplary heroes. Precedents for such linked illustrations appear in narrative paintings or prints and stone-carvings throughout most



10-23 Cheng Shifa (b. 1921), Illustration to chapter 98 of *The True Story of Ah Q*
5⅜ × 3⅜" (13.9 × 8.8 cm)

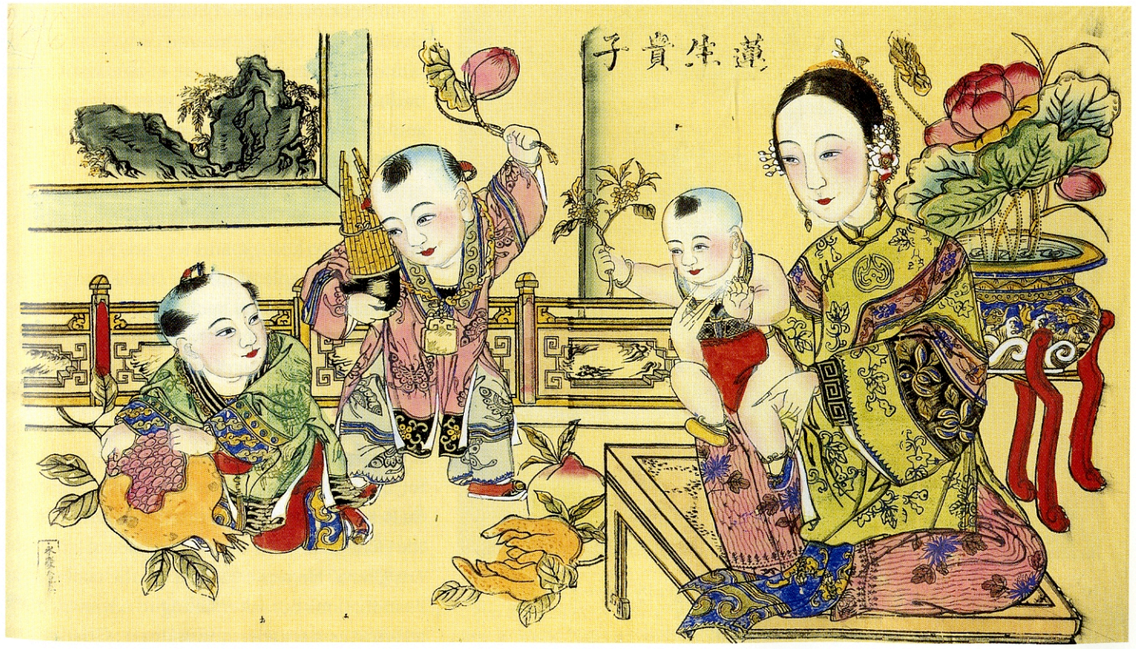
of the imperial era, but the narrower use of the term *lianhuanhua* refers to publications using modern printing techniques. As a group these sold in hundreds of millions in the PRC and engaged the talents of important artists and illustrators. The Shanghai artist Cheng Shifa (b. 1921) illustrated a number of literary classics, including a 1962 reissue of Lu Xun's modern vernacular novella *The True Story of Ah Q*. In Lu Xun's story, Ah Q is a passive and uncomprehending victim of the social turmoil at the end of the imperial period, who proclaims himself a revolutionary out of ignorance and ends up being executed for crimes he did not commit. In the chapter illustrated here, the illiterate Ah Q faces a revolutionary tribunal that looms over him replete with images of authority that are at once military and political, traditional and modern, and where he is coerced into making the false confession that will lead to his death (FIG. 10-23). Lu Xun's story is set in an earlier generation, but the conditions of social turbulence and state-sanctioned violence it recounts would be repeated within a few years of Cheng Shifa's illustrations in the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. The fate of the medium of serial picture books, which lost most of their audience in the 1980s, suggests that the contemporary arena for functional narrative imagery lies within film and television media.

Popular Arts

The genre of serially illustrated picture-books can be considered a popular mode of representation in terms of its mass audience and the vernacular cartoon or comic-strip styles often employed. While cinema and television are the contemporary inheritors of this tradition of narrative art, there are antecedents in popular prints and book illustrations reaching back many centuries. New Year's prints (*nianhua*) of gate guardians, calendrical themes, and auspicious imagery date back at least to the Southern Song era (twelfth–thirteenth centuries), and by the late Ming period, toward the end of the sixteenth century, there were established publishing centers for such prints at Tianjin in the north and Suzhou in the southeast, along with a dozen or so other cities in various regions. Most surviving New Year's prints date from the nineteenth century and after, when

10-24 Anon., *The Lotus Bears Precious Seeds (Mother and Three Sons)*
Qing. Woodblock print, 23⅜ × 41¾" (60 × 106 cm). The State Hermitage, St. Petersburg

Publishers produced richly colored popular New Year's prints of auspicious themes, protective deities, theater scenes, and the like in large numbers in the nineteenth century. Imagery and text captions combine to convey overlapping auspicious sentiments of prosperity, abundance, and familial success.



10-25 Su Renshan (1814–1850). *Leading the Phoenixes by Playing the Flute*
Qing, 1848. One of pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; 9′¼″ x 47¼″ (2.78 m x 120 cm). The Chinese University of Hong Kong

subjects and settings often became quite elaborate and complex. The simplest New Year's prints depicted frontal images of auspicious or protective deities, often with calendrical texts, but subjects ranged from symbols of good fortune and genre scenes to literary and theatrical themes. The latter types illustrated episodes from stories, but many such prints conveyed messages by non-narrative means. Texts were often part of the prints, usually in the form of formulaic sayings or maxims that might have been part of the aural culture of semiliterate viewers. Another non-textual way of conveying those messages was through rebuslike visual imagery, which when described in words and sounded out might form a homophonic phrase for an auspicious message or text. A basic form of such a pictorial rebus appears in the image of a mother with three sons, clearly associated with domestic prosperity (FIG. 10-24). The words for the prominent motifs of lotus, panpipes, cinnamon branch, and pomegranate seeds can be sounded out to form the printed sentence "The lotus bears precious seeds," which is a homonym for the underlying message "May eminent sons be born continuously." This surplus of significance, with doubles or multiples of image, pronunciation, text, and homonymic message, is characteristic of the genre and conveys in its very semiotic structure a message of abundance. The undulating chain of flowering or fruiting plants and figures is another visual marker of continuous fecundity.

New Year's prints often depicted immortals and deities drawn from the realm of popular religion, mythology, and legend. Similar subjects were a staple of nineteenth-century urban professional painters such as Ren Yi in Shanghai and Su Renshan (1814–1850) in Guangzhou. While in the New Year's prints such figures tend to be stereotyped, in the hands of urban painters deities are treated with clever idiosyncracies, as if elements of folklore were being appropriated for the appreciation of a sophisticated audience. Su Renshan worked in several towns and cities in the Guangdong and Guangxi regions of far southern China. He was educated for the civil service examinations but, after failing to advance, made a living as a teacher and painter. Guangdong

10-26 Chen Shizeng (Hengke, 1876–1924), *Beggar Woman*
1914–15. From *Beijing Customs*. Album leaf, ink and color on paper; 11¼ x 13½″ (28.6 x 34.6 cm). China National Art Gallery, Beijing

was outside the mainstream of the art world, and although Su may have had access to some local collections of old paintings, his chief sources were probably woodblock-printed painting manuals that illustrated a wide range of motifs and compositions, which may account for the strongly graphic quality of his painting style. The manuals popularized elite artistic culture, and Su's additional involvement with subjects from popular religion gave much of his work a dynamic directness. His *Leading the Phoenixes by Playing the Flute* from 1848 (FIG. 10-25) is one of a pair of large hanging scrolls with figures of female and male immortals riding phoenixes, their presence dramatically enlivened by surrounding large-character texts written in a range of forms from loose running script to archaic seal script. In contrast to the New Year's prints, where images could be read out like words, the calligraphy here challenges the pictorial forms. Large written characters pick up the dark, blunt rhythms and graphic energy of the painted figures and compete evenly with them for visual prominence and position, taking on a talismanic power. The crowded, somewhat chaotic placement of the inscriptions conveys a raw urgency and has something of the effect of a collection of graffiti. Su Renshan's painting also embodies some of the same archaeological interest in old script styles, and a related integration of picture and texts, as the painting-and-writing scrolls of antiquarian artists such as Zhao Zhiqian (see FIG. 10-17 above).

Another side of popular art involves genre scenes or subject matter drawn from commonplace and street life. Images such as Zhou Chen's mid-Ming *Beggars and Street Characters* (see FIG. 8-36 above) or the vivid street life from *Spring Festival on the River* (see FIG. 7-3) are precedents for such subjects, but in later Qing and Republican periods these are treated with a sharper sense of social class divisions. One of the most interesting examples, the album of *Beijing Customs* (FIG. 10-26) from 1915 by Chen Shizeng (known as Hengke, 1876–1924), suggests an ethnographic project of documenting local folkways before they disappeared in the face of social and technological changes. Chen Shizeng depicts many itinerant musicians, performers, street vendors, and a few performers of unique social roles among the thirty-four images, with brief ethnographic accounts included among some of the inscriptions. Most of the figures would not seem out of place in a Ming- or Qing-period picture, but the image of an old beggar woman supplicating a rickshaw passenger stages the encounter of the traditional and the modern in stark terms. The rickshaw itself was a modern conveyance, dependent on ball-bearing wheels as much as on muscle power. The passenger in Western dress casts only a fleeting glance back at the beggar woman as he speeds away and out of the frame, as if he were watching a disappearing culture. Ironically it is the modern man who is drab and almost effaced by the frame, while the beggar woman retains a bit of local color, even in her patched rags.

The world of street vendors, itinerants, and entertainers constitutes a community of its own, but one that could embody a threat to the broader social order. Many popular uprisings and full-scale rebellions throughout Chinese history fed on the discontents of physically and economically displaced groups. The social and systemic changes that have accompanied economic liberalization in the PRC in very recent years have been as wrenching in some respects as those of earlier times. Large

10-27 Fang Lijun (b. 1963), *Series II, No. 6*
1991–92. Oil on canvas, 6′5½″ x 6′5½″ (2 x 2 m). Private collection

numbers of workers pushed into unemployment by privatization of state industries, along with rural agricultural laborers in search of a better life, have flooded the coastal cities, giving rise to a substantial rootless population. Among these are the so-called *liumang*, vagrants or petty hoodlums, who seem to be a primary point of reference for the contemporary painter Fang Lijun (b. 1963). His group figure paintings are by no means documentary, and the precise identity or social class of his subjects remains elusive. Fang often represents males in groups, wearing clothing that takes on the character of a uniform, even if a stylish one in some cases, with their identically shaved heads and oppressively close-up presentation conveying the vaguely ominous effect of an approaching crowd (FIG. 10-27). The figures are idle, and their heavy-featured expressions, whether bored, taciturn, or smiling, are always veiled and carry an edge of threat. Fang's pictorial type has a counterpart in other contemporary media, such as the popular novels of Wang Shuo that focus on the language and culture of cynical urban operators, and related television soap operas which bring that social type before a mass audience.

POLITICAL ARTS

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese political thinkers have considered the visual arts to be a key component of social and cultural reform programs. In the PRC, politicization of visual arts extended to every facet of art education, production, and dissemination, to a degree difficult to comprehend by participants in societies where artistic autonomy is more highly valued. However, any adequate understanding of the careers of PRC artists or the visual products of that system must take that political control into account. Early in the century, the visual arts became instruments of propaganda and resistence in wartime, and vehicles of satire, protest, or critique during periods of social crisis and fragmentation. Public spaces, media, and art institutions also played important roles in an era of cultural conflict.

Images of War, Resistance, and Propaganda

In some images of urban life social discord is present only as a threatening atmosphere, but China in the past two centuries has been more strongly marked by outright armed conflicts, rebellions, and wars in exhausting succession. The functional arts that emerged in times of war were occasionally documentary and almost always propagandistic in nature, distinguished from other kinds of political art primarily by explicitly violent subject matter. The leaders of the Taiping rebels of the mid-nineteenth century, who hoped to establish their Kingdom of Heavenly Peace on a mixture of principles from Old Testament Protestantism and ancient Chinese ritual, decorated the walls of their palaces with conventional paintings of flowering plants and buildings in landscapes. More pointed were the battle paintings commissioned by the Qing leaders who suppressed the rebellion. A maplike overview of *A Battle Between Qing Forces and Taiping Rebels* (FIG. 10-28) clearly shows the disposition of forces and a bloody calculus of the battlefield, as the besieged Taiping rebels in the center are systematically annihilated by inescapable lines of cannon fire from the surrounding Qing forces on the battlements.

The appearance of mechanical and mass media such as photography and film projected war imagery into more public arenas, with broadened potential for direct political effects. Film could represent invasion as an event but could also embody it in its means of production, as in the staged battle scene of US cavalry assaulting the South Gate of Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion, where a tangible icon of Chinese authority was reduced to a cinematic backdrop for a battlefield adventure. One of the founders of Chinese literary modernism, who wrote under the pen name Lu Xun (1881–1936), was stimulated to turn from his medical studies in Tokyo toward a career in politically conscious literature in 1906 when he witnessed a newsreel documenting Japanese troops beheading a suspected Chinese spy for the Russians during the Russo-Japanese War. This event was made even more horrific by the presence of Chinese spectators, who were forced to witness the beheading, in a grim synopsis of the long-term dismemberment of the Chinese body politic through imperialist incursions.

Lu Xun channeled his energies chiefly into literature, cultural education, and the promotion of woodblock-print production as instruments of modernization and political activism. He was appointed to a pivotal position in the Ministry of Education just after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, taking as his mandate the development of public cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, theaters, and cultural monuments. After 1926 Lu had a falling-out with the Nationalist government and became increasingly sympathetic to left-wing and Communist causes. Lu amassed a significant collection of European woodcut prints, admiring especially those with social and political content. He published and exhibited his collection, and in 1931 he organized a printmaking workshop taught by the brother of a Japanese bookstore-owner friend in Shanghai named Uchiyama Kanzo, which was the nexus of the later Chinese woodcut movement. Although the movement was based on mixed European and Japanese sources, with a further background in traditional Chinese woodblock-print illustrations,

10-28 Anon., *A Battle between Qing Forces and Taiping Rebels*
Qing, 1860s. Ink and color on paper. Collection of Chaoying Fang