

most of its practitioners saw the movement as entirely modern and European in origin. The personal carving and printing of wood blocks and the use of oil-based printing inks distinguished the products of the modern woodcut artists from traditional prints, with their water-based inks and division of labor between artist-designers, wood engravers, and publishers (see FIGS. 9-3). While the early woodcut movement mixed modernist and political themes and aims, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and bombing of Shanghai in 1931 turned much of the woodcut movement toward a leftist political and militant agenda. Hu Yichuan (b. 1910), the designer of *To the Front!* (FIG. 10-29), was only twenty-two when it was made in 1932, by then already an associate of Lu Xun and a member of the Communist Youth League and League of Left-Wing Artists, which was leading to his expulsion from the Hangzhou West Lake National Arts Academy. The print was exhibited at the Shanghai YMCA in 1932, as part of a group whose manifesto called for "Modern art... to become a powerful tool for educating the masses, informing the masses,

organizing the masses" (*A Century in Crisis*, p. 216). The urgency of the shouting main figure, crushed against the picture plane in broad slashes of white and black, both impelled on and followed by the masklike phalanx of figures behind, conveys the uncontrollable dynamics of a mass movement. The print aimed at fomenting resistance against the Japanese invaders while denouncing the inaction of the Nationalist government.

One of the most enduring figures in the modern woodcut movement was Li Hua (1907-1994), a native of Guangzhou in touch with the international communities of Hong Kong and Macao, and a youthful enthusiast for Parisian modernism. In 1934 while a teacher at the Guangzhou Municipal Arts College he organized the Society for Research on Modern Creative Woodcuts, which published the journal *Modern Woodcut* between 1934 and 1936 as a central vehicle for the movement, acknowledging the seminal inspirational role of Lu Xun by sending him copies of each issue for his response.

The militant art of the modern woodcut movement gave way in large measure under the art



10-29 Hu Yichuan (b. 1910), *To the Front!* 1932. Woodcut, 9 1/8 x 12" (23.2 x 30.5 cm). Lu Xun Memorial, Shanghai



10-30 Ye Yushan and team of sculptors from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Chongqing, *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, detail 1965. Dayi, Sichuan. Clay, life-size

system of the PRC to another international mode of military and propaganda art based on Western realist styles of oil painting and sculpture. The art produced under the PRC system of political control was far from monolithic, but it was subject to close direction and certain prohibitions (see "Ideological Control of the Arts," page 394). As we have seen, peasant and folk art styles, woodcuts with mixed European Expressionist and journalistic sources, *guohua* modes of traditional media and subjects, and Western realist styles were all practiced and countenanced in the PRC. Abstraction and most modernist styles were out of favor, either because of a lack of readily visible social content or because of being tainted with associations of bourgeois decadence and self-indulgence. By and large, artists saw versions of Western realist styles as the most suitable vehicles for socialist messages. Their narrative or representational content was accessible and easily understood, and realist styles were congenial to vivid representations of heroic figures with a powerful sense of drama and presence. Realist styles were suitable for many media. One of the most notable sculptural examples was a life-scale tableau of more than a hundred figures, made by a team of sculptors from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1965 and called *The Rent Collection Courtyard* (FIG. 10-30). Set up in a mansion formerly belonging to a Sichuan warlord and landlord, it vividly depicts the exploitation and oppression that had gone on there. Because of the real-world setting, this is

more like a theater frozen in clay than ordinary representation, and the poses of the figures are appropriately high-pitched and dramatic. This is unapologetic propaganda, unmodulated in its blunt naturalism and appeal to sentiment, but with at least the virtues of its emotions and sense of outrage. The artistic products of the Cultural Revolution years, especially after the ascendancy of Mao's wife Jiang Qing from 1970 to 1976, are more ominously formulaic. Smiling Socialist automatons play out their roles as workers, peasants, and soldiers in a sea of obligatory red color, their vacuously frozen expressions suggesting an enormous effort of repression.

While Socialist Realism generated many histrionic and almost palpably formulaic images of leaders, heroes, and exemplary figures, there were many hybrid variations of style and presentation, sometimes blending oil painting with the aesthetics of woodblock prints or traditional *guohua* painting. Shi Lu, whom we have encountered as an ink landscapist and printmaker (see FIG. 10-18 above), in 1959 undertook a huge picture in traditional media of ink and color on paper, as monumental as large oil paintings, but conveying an additional nationalist message through the choice of materials. *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi* (FIG. 10-31) reduces Mao Zedong to modest scale, seen from behind in a relatively unassertive, though unmistakable, profile. Mao overlooks a vast terrain of fissured bluffs stretching to the horizon, conveying both the difficulty of his military

Ideological Control of the Arts

The system of official control of the arts was a construction of the Communist Party, outlined by Mao Zedong himself in his famous Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art in 1942 as part of a forum held at the Communist stronghold in Shaanxi Province. The basic tenet of that doctrine is that art must serve the masses: the workers, peasants, and soldiers. While both Chinese traditional forms and modes borrowed from elsewhere are permissible, bourgeois individualism and self-expression are to be avoided. The goal of art is to "awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm, and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment." Mao's remarks are non-prescriptive in terms of style, making room for both native

traditions and foreign modes, specialist skills and high standards, but all should be subordinated to reflecting the life of the masses. He placed special emphasis on acknowledging folk art and popular art forms and using these to guide fine art production. Above all, art should be in the service of politics: "subordinated to the revolutionary tasks set by the Party in a given revolutionary period... [demanding] the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form." The mechanisms for enforcing the political disciplining of the arts are signaled in a further passage:

If everyone agrees on the fundamental policy [of serving the workers, peasants, and soldiers and of how to serve them], it should be adhered to by all our workers, all our schools, publications, and organizations in the field of literature and art and in all our literary and artistic activities. It is wrong to depart from this policy and anything at variance with it must be duly corrected.

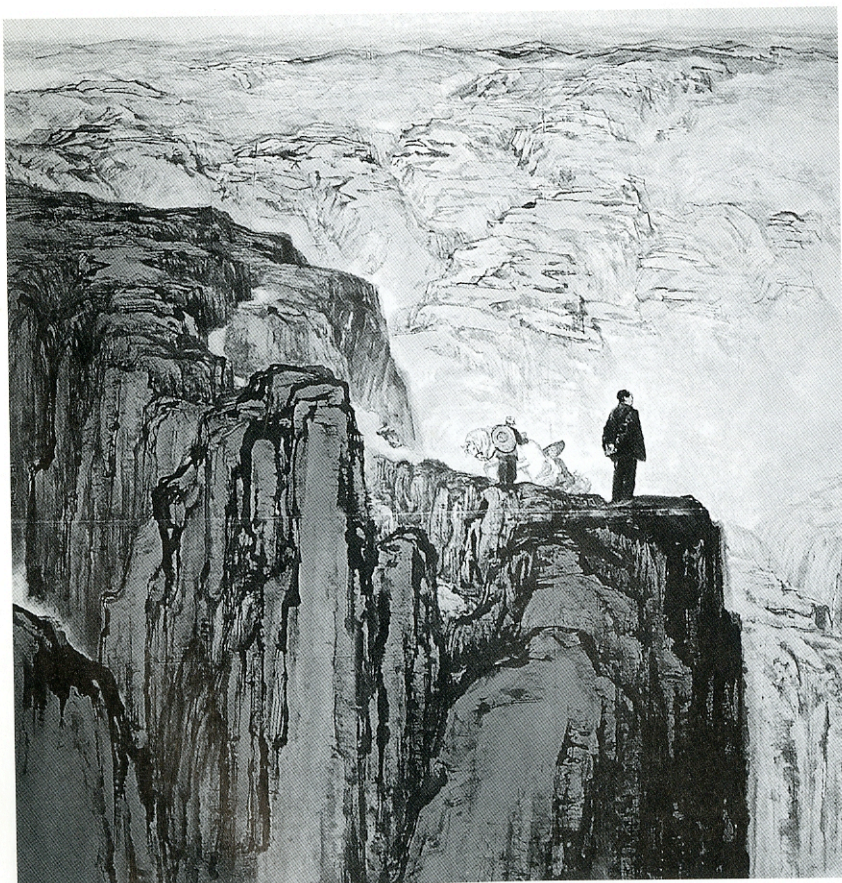
(Laing, *The Winking Owl*, pp. 3–4)

In practice, the Chinese Communist Party controlled artistic standards and policy in the PRC through such organs as the Department of Propaganda, the Ministry of Culture, and the Chinese Artists Association, which variously had charge of art education, publications, and exhibitions.

task during the Civil War years, with his own horse just struggling to join him at the top of the cliff, and an analog for the vast nation which Mao seems already to command. In a terrible illustration of the ways in which art and artists were prey to shifting political winds, Shi Lu was sent to a labor camp during the Cultural Revolution years because this painting was thought to show Mao "separated from the masses and hoping he would fall off the cliff" (Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*, p. 250). Shi Lu accomplishes the transformation of the landscape from a natural to a national political emblem in part by the reddening of the cliffs where Mao stands. Large-scale paintings such as these were mostly commissioned for public buildings. The most notable example was the monumental *This Land So Rich in Beauty*, a collaborative *guohua* work

10-31 Shi Lu (1919–1982), *Fighting in Northern Shaanxi*

1959. Ink and color on paper, 7'8" x 7' (2.38 x 2.16 m). Museum of the Chinese Revolution, Beijing



29.5 feet (9 m) long and 18 feet (5.5 m) tall, commissioned for the new Great Hall of the People legislative building on Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1959. In this explicitly political space, the panoramic landscape of mountains, rivers, and cloudy plains becomes an icon of the nation, in part because of its location as a backdrop for ceremonial events and also through its synopsis of China's geography, the title reference to a Mao Zedong poem, and straightforwardly symbolic devices such as a red rising sun.

Political Spaces and Art Institutions

Monumental paintings on public themes can activate imaginary and symbolic spaces inside the tangible political space of a government building. The most potent of such real political spaces is the Tiananmen area, now a great plaza south of the imperial palace in Beijing, originally a gated forecourt leading to the Gate of Heavenly Peace at the south entrance to the palace (FIG. 10-32). After the fall of the Qing and founding of the Republic, this area was the site of major political demonstrations. The date of the 1919 student protest against the international peace treaty that ceded former German possessions in China to Japan gave its name to a widespread May Fourth Movement for radical political and literary modernizations on Western models, which included such figures as Lu Xun. Further demonstrations in 1925 protested the massacre by police in Shanghai's International Settlement of a crowd protesting against the shooting of a worker. In 1949, the founding of the People's Republic was proclaimed from Tiananmen Gate, and National

Day celebrations were held there thereafter. The old gates and walls of the forecourt were demolished to form a great public plaza, and during the 1950s a marble Monument to the People's Heroes, with sculpted scenes of revolutionary struggle, was erected in its center, with the congress building called the Great Hall of the People and the National Museum of Chinese History defining the west and east sides of the square. The History Museum constructed a socialist narrative of oppression and liberation from the artifacts of the past. Tiananmen was thus saturated with political symbolism, memory, and event, where the old imperial order embodied in the palace complex met the new Communist regime. The monumental image of Chairman Mao hung at the center of the gate to the palace and the placement of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall directly on the main axis of the palace complex a year after his death in 1976 only sharpened that confrontation. A spontaneous demonstration at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, honoring Premier Zhou Enlai after his death in 1976, was brutally suppressed, and the mass pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen in the late spring of 1989, ending in the massacres of June 4, moved the great political stage of twentieth-century China briefly and tragically into the arena of global media theater.

Ideas of political space can be manifested in imagery or in institutions as much as in physical gathering spaces such as Tiananmen. The shift toward an emerging public arena is marked by the juxtaposition of Ren Yi's portrait of Wu Changshi as a distressed official (see FIG. 10-5 above), which shows him in an official but not

10-32 Tiananmen Square Beijing

The area south of the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) of the Forbidden City was cleared following the founding of the People's Republic of China to create a great public plaza and site for public buildings and monuments. The proximity of Tiananmen to the palace had already caused the area to be used as a site for political protests in the early years of the Republic, a tradition that continued down to the pro-democracy protests of 1989. Today the Monument to the People's Heroes and the Mausoleum of Chairman Mao are aligned with the main axis of the Forbidden City, while the politically and culturally potent buildings of the Great Hall of the People and the Museum of History flank the western and eastern sides of the square.



10-33 Chen Shizeng (Hengke, 1876–1924), *Viewing Paintings at an Exhibition*

1917. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 34½ x 18¼" (87.7 x 46.6 cm). The Palace Museum, Beijing

a public role, with Chen Shizeng's *Viewing Paintings at an Exhibition* of 1917 (FIG. 10-33), which both illustrates a public space and participated actively in constituting it. The very notion of the public presupposes a changed configuration of the political landscape, with an accompanying sphere of civic activity and institutions independent of narrow interests. *Viewing Paintings* represents a public art exhibition organized in Beijing's Central Park to benefit the victims of major floods, an unquestionably civic purpose. At the same time, the painting embodies the idea of broad civic representation in its documentation of inclusive participation, with Chinese and West-

erners, men and women, those in traditional and in Western dress, intermingled equitably in a public space. While many native place and trade associations and some artists' associations performed charitable activities for their members, filling the gap between family (or lineage) and governmental involvement with organizational activity, *Viewing Paintings* suggests a national role for the arts beyond local and personal interests.

Another dimension of that role lay in building public arts institutions such as art schools and museums. The transformation of the Qing palace complex into a public museum and the placement of the National Museum of History across from the Great Hall of the People are reminders of the centrality of art history and archaeology to the formation of national identity and political life.

Parts of the Qing palace collection were reorganized and exhibited to the public as early as 1914, soon after the founding of the Republic in 1912. Full transfer of the imperial collection from the ambiguous ownership of the last, abdicated Qing emperor and his household to a public National Museum, still housed in the precincts of the palace, did not occur until 1925. Chinese museums have always been instruments of politics and diplomacy, along with their curatorial and educational purposes. The removal of important portions of the palace collections to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War and the establishment there of a National Palace Museum that is competitive with the Palace Museum in Beijing is the clearest modern example of an art heritage being used as an instrument of political legitimation. International loan exhibitions from various incarnations of the Palace Museum have been used to gain respect and support for Chinese regimes since the time of the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s, and more recently archaeological loan exhibitions have used terra-cotta soldiers from the First Emperor of Qin's burial complex to accomplish some of the same goals as living diplomats.

From the outset in 1912 the Republic sought to build a nation to replace the fallen dynastic regime of the Qing, with the arts conceived as much more than an embellishment to politics. The reformers and intellectuals who shaped the new order, such as Cai Yuanpei (1867–1940) and Chen Duxiu (1880–1942), saw the arts as nothing less than a substitute for religion in the creation of an ideal society, fully as important as military, technological, moral, and international education. The arts also had a practical role to play in modernization and national self-strengthening movements, since Western modes of rendering were recognized as the most useful for the mechanical drawing and illustration needed for industrial design and production.

The reformist orientation and overseas educational background of many of the founders of the Republican government, combined with the push for modernization, gave Western art forms a clear advantage in the competition for political sponsorship. Returning artists who had studied in Europe or Japan imported some

modernist modes, but the staple curriculum of the emerging art schools was some version of Western academic and realist styles. These were non-traditional in the Chinese context, and thus congenial to the goals of the reformist New Culture Movement, but mostly separate from the non-traditional modernisms of Europe and the United States. It is useful to keep this distinction in mind, because while anti-traditional modernisms were mostly unofficial movements in the West, the untraditionally Chinese, but non-modernist, modes of Western representation had a continuous history of official support and institutional sponsorship from the early days of the Republican era through the cultural policies of the PRC. There were thus at a minimum three major modes of politically and ideologically charged art after the imperial age ended in 1911: Western academic or realist styles; imported modernisms; and versions of traditional styles promoted by those associated with a National Essence School seeking the revitalization of native cultures.

Each of these distinctive modes of art had some foothold in the curricula of official art-education institutions and in exhibition venues, so that debates concerning the political functions and importance of art also played out in the politics of the art world. Most Chinese art schools and academies down to the present have maintained parallel departments of oil painting—usually in realist styles—and *guohua*, or “national style painting,” utilizing traditional media of brush and ink or colors on paper, along with departments of sculpture, print making, and the like. Modernist modes had a more localized base at the National Hangzhou Arts Academy and in various Shanghai-based art schools and societies. The more limited success of modernist modes relative to the others was in part due to its localized status, which made modernist monuments particularly vulnerable to destruction during such episodes as the Japanese bombing of Shanghai in the 1930s and the campaigns of the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution years of the late 1960s. Modernism's “failure” in China, if it can even be considered such, also lay in its lack of penetration into the intrinsically public arenas of architecture and industrial product design.

Combined with the major destruction of modernist paintings, this meant that modernism's most visible legacy in China lay in graphic design of journals and advertising, and in some Expressionist modes of the woodcut movement of the 1930s.

Politically motivated art and art-world politics in twentieth-century China were part of a constantly shifting landscape of positions and events that makes the history of this era both difficult and fascinating. No schematic account of movements or personalities can do justice to that complexity, but the careers of a few key figures may outline some important issues. Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), who had studied in Germany and France, was ideally positioned as Minister of Education in the early years of the Republic and Chancellor of Beijing University after 1917 to set official policies for the arts. He felt that aesthetic education should have a central role in shaping the citizens of a new society, and that the cultivation of aesthetic detachment would lead to a deeper perception of reality and to a release from feelings of greed and prejudice that were obstacles to the formation of a new Chinese social order. Cai was an energetic promoter of Western art forms, which he saw as possessing an aesthetic and social relevance that traditional Chinese painting could not fulfill. His emphasis on cultural regeneration saw a special role for education of the younger generation, which found expression in the pages of the journal *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), first published in 1915 and edited by Chen Duxiu, whom Cai later appointed as dean of the college of letters at Beijing University and who became one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921.

Cai Yuanpei's governmental activities for the Republic included the establishment of an Office of Social Education in 1912, charged with promoting cultural education. One of his appointees was the writer Lu Xun, put in charge of the section overseeing museums, libraries, drama, and music. Lu was one of the first to give public lectures on art, in which he emphasized its social and ethical functions. Lu Xun's central role in fostering the woodcut movement as an instrument of modernization, social consciousness,

and revolutionary propaganda has been discussed above (see pages 390–391). Lu also promoted exhibitions and museums as venues for a broad social awareness of the arts.

Art academies were the main theaters where political programs and art-world politics were played out, following the founding of the Republic in 1912. Governmental intrusion into the affairs of the academies could be through the appointment of directors, the supervision of cultural ministries, or the promotion of specific styles and subjects as occurred under the PRC. Since art academies were the main training grounds for art teachers, politically motivated art was directly or indirectly disseminated to a very broad public. The major officially sponsored academies were only part of a wide spectrum of art associations, societies, and organizations that emerged all over China, many quite transient but nonetheless energetic. Because of their longevity, official status, and prominent locations, the major academies in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou had more enduring roles in the politics of art, but these were living institutions, shaped and changed by historical events and internal personalities. The cultural reforms of the early years of the Republic, political repression in the late 1920s, Sino-Japanese conflict in the 1930s and early 1940s, the Civil War and Communist victory in 1949, anti-Rightist campaigns of the 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s, to list only the most prominent landmarks of the political landscape, all profoundly shaped art institutions and the careers of those who worked within them.

Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, and Liu Haisu all played foundational roles in the major urban academies and had careers that extended into the regime of the PRC. These key figures all had substantial European experience and were sympathetic to Western art modes and movements, exemplifying the central role played by students returned from Japan or Europe in the formation of art institutions in twentieth-century China. And all three men significantly altered their early artistic strategies in the context of a changing cultural landscape after their return to China.

Xu Beihong (1895–1953) was a central figure in the art world and in art education for most of the years of the Republic and the early years of the People's Republic as well. He studied in Shanghai and Tokyo as a young man and in 1918 came into the orbit of Cai Yuanpei, who appointed him a teacher at Beijing University. Along with other reform-minded associates of the New Culture Movement, he saw traditional Chinese painting as in full decline and urged a synthesis of Western painting modes with whatever of value could be salvaged from native approaches. As for many artists and writers of his generation, Japan provided important formative experiences and a model for Asian cultural modernization that softened full-scale Westernization with emerging identifications of national traditions. In 1919 Xu was sent as a sponsored student to Paris, where he studied the academic style and participated in official Salon exhibitions. He returned to China in 1925 for another university appointment by Cai Yuanpei.

Xu Beihong was an accomplished draftsman and oil painter in a conservative realist style. After his return to China he attempted many variations of synthetic styles, usually blending traditional Chinese media of ink and colors on paper with European academic drawing techniques of modeling and foreshortening. His later subjects were often Chinese, or hybrid. Xu's stature as an internationally known artist and frequent representative of China at cultural events and congresses abroad meant that his work had a historical importance quite independent of its quality and sometimes of the artist's intent. His *Yu Gong (Foolish Old Man) Removes the Mountain* (FIG. 10-34) is a mural-scale adaptation of European history-painting modes to a Chinese subject and medium of ink and colors on paper. The fate of the painting exemplifies the ways in which art can be captured by political discourses that take on a life of their own. Xu's painting illustrates the story of an old man who resolved to remove a mountain blocking his view by hewing it away bit by bit with the help of his descendants over the years. The work was executed in India in 1940 while Xu was engaged in patriotic missions in support of the resistance against Japanese invasion. Many of the



figures are versions of heroically muscular academic nudes, and some are clearly Indian, suggesting a program of pan-Asian cooperative effort against the Japanese. In any case, this work attracted the notice of Mao Zedong, whose interpretation of it as a parable of the power of communal effort to accomplish any goal ensured that the painting could only be read as a socialist icon, and no doubt assured Xu Beihong's position in the art hierarchy of the PRC as well. After liberation he was made head of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and also Chairman of the China Artists Association, where he was well positioned to promote a realist, stridently anti-modernist aesthetic that left a very problematic legacy for official art in the PRC.

Lin Fengmian (1900–1991) went from Shanghai to Paris in 1918, where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and at the museums. Lin found contemporary trends in European painting much more congenial than Xu Beihong and had a special affinity for Matisse. After his return to China in 1925, Lin again encountered Cai Yuanpei, who in 1927 offered him the chance to start a new national art academy in Hangzhou. Lin gathered a teaching staff that included many fellow students returned from France and promoted a program: "To introduce Western art; to reform traditional art; to reconcile Chinese and Western art; to create contemporary art" (Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*, p. 49). Lin Fengmian was a pivotal figure as an institution builder and teacher, and several of his students are among the best known painters of the late century, informed

by the same openness to colorism and formal design that is seen in Lin's own works.

The third member of this generation of leaders in art education was Liu Haisu (1896–1994), who was associated with Shanghai-area institutions for most of his career. He opened his own art school in Shanghai at the age of sixteen and was one of the first to introduce life drawing into the curriculum. An exhibition he organized that included nude-figure painting studies was considered scandalous by some critics. His first visit to Europe, again with the help of Cai Yuanpei, did not come until 1929, but he returned there in 1933 and met Picasso and Matisse. After 1923 his main center of activity was his Shanghai Academy of Art, successor to his earlier forays into art education. In his early decades Liu followed the seeming paradox of championing Western art when in China, while promoting and exhibiting *guohua* art when in Europe. Aside from securing his role as an artistic rebel, which Liu cherished, this pattern reveals the fundamental linkage of artistic affiliations to emerging nationalist formations of culture. Western art styles, whether conservative or modernist, were significant in China first and foremost for their "otherness" from traditional Chinese painting and served as a visual manifestation of the new culture of the Republic. In Europe, on the other hand, the practice and exhibition of *guohua*-style works not only responded to audience expectations but also constituted an identity of Chineseness. Despite their shared promotion of Western art in China, Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu were bitter rivals in the

10-34 Xu Beihong (1895–1953), *Yu Gong (Foolish Old Man) Removes the Mountain* 1940. Ink and color on paper. Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing



10-35 Ding Cong (b. 1916), *Xianxiang tu, Images of Present Times* 1944. Handscroll, gouache on paper; 11¼ x 58¾" (28.6 x 149.3 cm). Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, gift of William P. Fenn

This wartime pictorial satire was directed primarily at the social corruption and political repression of the Nationalist regime. Combining a political cartoon style influenced by leftist Mexican artists with the traditional handscroll format, the painting targets impotent artists, war profiteers, the uncaring rich, and incompetent officials.

politics of the Chinese art world. Dating back to the 1920s, they struggled over the directorship of the Beijing Academy, their status and reputations in Europe, and above all over the proper direction for art in China. While Liu championed versions of early modernist styles and artistic freedom of choice, Xu Beihong's promotion of an academic realism won out as the official mode of the PRC.

Satire and Protest

While political art is often associated with heavy-handed doctrinal propaganda, there was also a rich tradition of humorous or satirical drawings and paintings related to cartoon styles. There are loose antecedents to these modes in popular imagery from Ming and Qing times, such as the woodblock-printed cards used in drinking games of chance that were decorated with figures from popular literature and legend. Explicit political commentary was more directly derived from Western traditions of caricature and cartooning that entered Chinese visual culture with European-sponsored publications of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, chiefly in Shanghai, such as the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and *Shanghai Puck*. Another important source was the Japanese *manga* or cartoon tradition, which became familiar to the many Chinese artists who studied in Japan. The turbulent years of the late 1920s

and 1930s provided a strong impetus to political dissent against internal political repression, Western imperialism, and Japanese invasion. A Cartoon Society and many journals devoted to cartoon art were founded in the decade between 1926 and 1936, more or less in tandem with the Woodcut Movement, which had similar international sources and political motivations. Some of the journals were devoted to popular and mass culture in broad terms, including not only satirical drawings but movie-star and news photos as well as art and literary reviews.

Among the more complex products of this movement were the satirical paintings of Ding Cong, such as his *Images of Present Times* from 1944 (FIG. 10-35). Like many wartime satires, it is directed more at the corruption and repression of the Nationalist regime led by Chiang Kai-shek than at anti-Japanese sentiment. The exaggerations and grotesqueries of this episodic handscroll owe as much to leftist Mexican artists, such as the cartoonist Miguel Covarrubias, who visited Shanghai in 1930, as to any other sources. Ding Cong, the son of another Shanghai cartoonist, studied with Liu Haisu and spent the early war years in Hong Kong, returning to Sichuan in southwest China for the remainder of the war. His handscroll is as critical of artists and intellectuals as more blatant kinds of social parasites. At the beginning of the composition a student pores over useless old classics, neglecting



10-36 Wang Keping (b. 1949), *Silence* 1978. Wood, height 15¾" (40 cm)

modern textbooks; an impoverished professor is unable to provide for his ragged family. The fop-pish artist in Western dress is blindfolded, and the seated writer next to him submits his words to the cyclopean magnified eye of a censor. Other figures expose corruption and inequality: the seated war profiteer calculating his take; the rich couple who shrink from the stench of a crippled soldier's war wounds and refuse aid to a refugee; and officials who let relief supplies of food and clothing rot while they argue. The final figure is a journalist who is silenced by the official notice stuffed in his mouth. The last image found a striking echo more than three decades later in another era of political interference and official censorship. Wang Keping's wood sculpture *Silence* (FIG. 10-36) of 1978 manages to combine primitivist references to the powerful body imagery of tribal arts with a blunt display of forcibly sealed expression. Wang Keping was an organizer of the Stars, a group of outsider artists who were among the first to challenge official control of exhibition spaces after the Cultural Revolution. In 1979 they hung their work on the railings outside the China Art Gallery in Beijing, the most prestigious venue of the official China Artists Association, and after a further series of protests they won access to exhibition spaces.

Shadowing what might be called the active political spaces of propaganda production and official cultural policy are spaces of resistance and

reception. The very potency of a space such as Tiananmen Square as a site of indoctrination made it a magnet for the display of protest. In other contexts, satire was a more effective strategy of resistance, insinuating itself in the cracks of the official cultural facade. An example of the complexities of cultural politics is the scandal surrounding a modest composition, well described by the title *The Winking Owl*, painted for a friend in 1974 by Huang Yongyu (b. 1924). The painting was confiscated by followers of Chairman Mao's wife Jiang Qing and exhibited among other supposedly counter-revolutionary works in a so-called Black Paintings exhibition. The very ambiguity of the painting made it a target of suspicion in the paranoid atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution, as an image of ridicule, possibly aimed at Jiang Qing herself and her cultural activities, or at socialism. Any suggestion of humor or irony was perhaps enough to condemn a work of art amidst the single-minded zealotry of the Cultural Revolution, and Huang had already gotten into trouble for his illustrated poem-fables that could be read as satires on political figures. The larger



context for the anti-Black Paintings campaign was the rivalry between Jiang Qing and the ailing Premier Zhou Enlai, who was seen as a champion of traditional culture.

For artists active during Chairman Mao's lifetime and especially during the Cultural Revolution years, even hints of irony and ambivalence in the intensely politicized sphere of public imagery could have drastic personal consequences. Artists of the younger generation who were children or youths during the Cultural Revolution may look at images of Chairman Mao as inescapable icons in their visual culture, to be freely manipulated or reworked with a mixture of nostalgia and cynicism in an era of greater openness. The oil painter Liu Dahong (b. 1962) borrows iconic images of Chairman Mao and surrounds them with environments that are by turns disturbing, comic, and ominous in his *Four Seasons* series of 1991. In each of four oil paintings Mao is the hieratic center of a ring of figures, ranging from admiring throngs waving his little red book to the funereal victims of his power. The first in the series, *Spring* (FIG. 10-1), appropriates a key icon of the Cultural Revolution, a 1967 oil painting, *Chairman Mao Going to Anyuan*, showing him as a young Communist organizer of striking workers in the 1920s. In that oil painting, reproduced by the millions and displayed everywhere during those years, the young Mao is shown as a heroic figure, overshadowing the mountains and nearly saintly in his determination. Liu Dahong's image moves this instantly recognizable icon toward full deification, with a radiant halo and golden rays emanating from his upraised palm, beneath a sky alive with auspicious dragons. Though an oil painting, Liu's image brilliantly appropriates the imagery of the traditional Chinese medium, with convoluted cypress trees and contorted dragons dominating a landscape of rolling hills and the rising sun. Mao's acolytes are a motley assortment of peasants and adventurers, and the skeleton grasping the tree trunk suggests the darker side of Mao's ascension.

Following the economic liberalizations promoted in the 1980s by Premier Deng Xiaoping, and with the recognition that PRC politics are centrally about economic life, many artists turned

to consumerism as a target for satire. The social changes that accompanied the move from a public ethic of self-sacrifice, drab uniformity of dress, and restraint of consumer desire under Mao to an official encouragement of growth through advertising, status symbols, and consumption were disorienting in their speed and redirection. Wang Guangyi (b. 1956) shrewdly juxtaposes the advertising logos of global consumer-products corporations with the equally ubiquitous worker/peasant/soldier iconography of the Cultural Revolution years in his *Great Castigation Series: Coca-Cola* of 1993 (FIG. 10-37). Political propaganda is shown to have been the advertising of the Mao years, equally amenable to being transformed into the accessible visual language of Pop art, with the stern purpose of the figures turned toward planting the red flag of revolution on the financially firmer footing of a brand-name banner. An installation by Wang Jin (b. 1962) called *Ice Wall: Central China* of January 28, 1997, was a public art project commemorating the opening of the first shopping mall in the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou (Henan). Wang built a wall of ice within which he embedded popular consumer objects such as cell phones and jewelry, temptingly visible in the manner of department store display windows, yet frustratingly beyond reach. The project offered a materialization of the Marxist idea of the commodity fetish, while alluding to the "great walls" of ideology and economic development that had kept China frozen out of the flow of the global consumer economy. A wintertime work that was fated to seasonal obsolescence in any case, the *Ice Wall* incited its own premature destruction as visitors hacked it apart to liberate the goods within.

The free-market conception of art is carried to a further stage in the work of the Shanghai conceptual artist Zhou Tiehai (b. 1966), who offered himself as traded shares on the Shanghai Stock Exchange. The visual content of his work included stock charts tracking his rising value in the market, along with mock covers of international news and financial magazines touting his success. His slogan "The relations in the art world are the same as the relations between states in the post

Cold War era" aims equally at the overshadowing of diplomacy by global corporate politics and the commodification of transnational art careers. The much less glamorous domestic and feminine spaces of the new consumer economy are the subjects of the installation artist Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961). *Bound and Unbound* (FIG. 10-38) was the product of a couple of years of her patient labor, in which she wrapped dozens of household objects with white thread and scattered them around the variable spaces of gallery installations as spectral presences, useless but recognizable trophies suggesting both the freedom and the burdens of purchasing power. An accompanying video projection of a disembodied hand endlessly cutting thread alludes to the deep history of feminine domestic tasks (perhaps also distantly to the legend of the Confucian sage Mencius's mother, who cut the threads of her sewing as a maternal admonition to her son not to cut short his studies) and to the central role of women in the labor force of China's export industries.

TRANSNATIONAL ARTS AND AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS

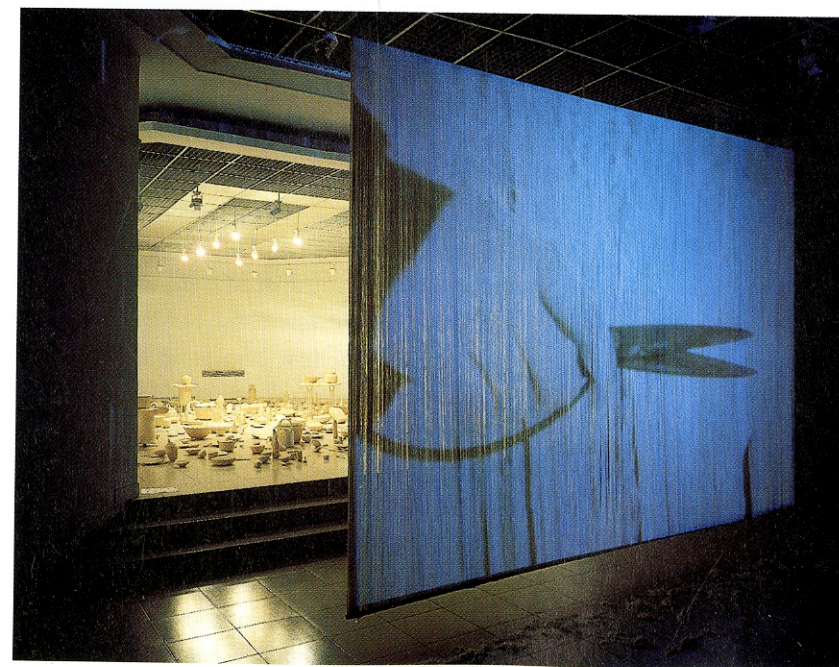
One of the many paradoxes of twentieth-century Chinese art is that, even as it has been intensely preoccupied with national identity, it has all the while been deeply engaged with larger international art communities. As we have seen, it has been impossible to discuss Chinese political arts without frequent reference to artists trained in Japan or Europe, the emulation of European Expressionist prints and graphic design, and in the PRC the promotion of international styles of Socialist Realism. Although specific modernist or leftist allegiances sometimes aligned these and other emulations with truly international movements, in almost every case local Chinese circumstances and agendas were equally important. Thus European or Japanese styles always had a dual significance: for their intrinsic visual qualities and for their status as alternatives to traditional Chinese modes.

Previous chapters traced a substantial history of international arts in Qing-period (1644–1911)



10-37 Wang Guangyi (b. 1956), *Great Castigation Series: Coca-Cola*
1993. Oil on canvas; 6'5" x 6'5" (2 x 2 m). Collection of the artist

10-38 Lin Tianmiao (b. 1961), *Bound and Unbound*
1995–97. Installation with video projection and household objects wrapped in thread, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist



China and earlier in the form of export arts and of European artists active at the Manchu court. In some cases these were complexly multicultural and hybrid products. The distinction between earlier international and twentieth-century transnational arts is by no means hard and fast but hinges mostly on the relative stability of locations of production and consumption. Earlier international arts were largely produced at specific points of origin and aimed at particular audiences or markets in China or the West. Twentieth-century transnational arts and art movements may involve amalgams of Western, Japanese, and Chinese sources and motivations or be the products of hybrid environments, such as the mixture of Chinese and foreign communities in Shanghai, with audiences found among multicultural and multinational circuits around the world.

The transnational character of much art in the twentieth century was foreshadowed at the end of the nineteenth century in the *Dianshizhai huabao*, published in Shanghai from 1884 to 1898 by the Englishman Frederick Major, mentioned above, in emulation of periodicals such as *The Illustrated London News*. Wu Youru and many collaborators produced the lithographic illustrations, with extensive Chinese explanatory texts, but they drew their subjects from domestic and foreign sources in a mixture of news and fantasy, emphasizing crimes, disasters, and curiosities, in the same manner as the *Feiyingge huabao* illustrations by the same artist reproduced above (see FIG. 10-21 and page 385). Executed in a detailed, reportorial style, the line drawings made abundant use of perspectival techniques, while the subjects blended the here-and-now of specific places, names, and dates with the transnational media space of journalistic sensationalism.

One of the earliest efforts at a conscious synthesis of Western realism and Chinese traditions appeared among a group centered in Guangzhou in far southern China and known, following another name for the region, as the Lingnan school. Guangzhou (Canton) had a long history as the major port for international trade and site for European cultural incursions in the mid-Qing period, and many leading reformers in

the years leading up to the fall of the imperial system and founding of the Republic came from there as well, including the founder of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1921). Gao Jianfu (1879–1951), the leading figure in the Lingnan school, and a follower of Sun Yat-sen, joined Sun's radical Alliance Society, dedicated to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, while studying art in Tokyo in 1906. Gao's revolutionary involvement after he returned to Guangzhou in 1908 extended to the organization of a China Assassination Group aimed at senior Manchu officials and overseeing bomb production for the revolutionaries. The integration of art theories with violent revolutionary politics may seem incongruous, if not bizarre, but for Gao Jianfu and his associates art and politics were equally necessary elements of a program of national reform. As we have seen above, Japan offered an appealing model of modernization and Westernization without sacrificing cultural identity. The *Nihonga* (modern Japanese-style painting) artists with whom Gao and his associates studied in Japan followed a related strategy of blending Japanese themes and media with Western techniques of realistic representation. The Chinese counterpart of that strategy promoted by the Lingnan painters was the goal of a New National Painting (*Xin Guo-hua*) that would blend Chinese traditional media with an accessible realism of style. This was in many ways a pictorial parallel to the vernacular-literature May Fourth movement that aimed at freeing literature from elitism and class-boundedness. A strong sense of social mission animated both movements. In 1912 Gao Jianfu opened the Aesthetics Bookshop in Shanghai and briefly published *The True Record Illustrated Magazine* as a vehicle for his theories. His paintings, such as *Flying in the Rain* (FIG. 10-39), acknowledge modern technologies while insisting on a recognizable Chinese cultural matrix, with the biplanes that hover over a misty ink landscape perhaps deliberately inviting misidentification as dragonflies.

A much more thoroughgoing involvement with European modernisms emerged briefly in 1930s Shanghai and Guangzhou, spearheaded by artists who had experienced Japan or Europe. The

1935 NOVA exhibition of the China Independent Art Association included artists such as Zhao Shou (b. 1912). Originally from Guangzhou, Zhao went to Japan in 1933 to study and was exposed to the recently arrived art and theory of Dadaist, Constructivist, and Surrealist movements, as well as to Post-Impressionist and Fauvist styles that had circulated in Japan since the early 1920s. After returning to China in 1935 as a self-proclaimed Surrealist, Zhao exhibited in Guangzhou and Shanghai works such as *Color* (FIG. 10-40), which in its coloristic intensity and reference to tribal masks seems most indebted to Fauvist and early Cubist approaches. Contemporary journals of criticism such as *Yifeng* (Art Winds) that reviewed and published such exhibitions also included translations of modern art theory, such as André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, and reproductions of works by an array of European modernists.

The theoretical and polemical aspects of modernist practice were most clearly exemplified in the Storm Society, founded in Shanghai in 1931 by a group of artists who had trained in Japan or France. Their manifesto struck a tone of combative urgency common to many avant-garde movements:

The air that surrounds us is too desolate. The commonplace and the vulgar enclose us on all sides, numberless feeble wriggling worms, endless hollow clamor... We can no longer be at ease in this atmosphere of compromise... Release the disturbing power of Realism! Let us arise! Summon up the passion of wild beasts, the will of steel, to create an integrated world with line, color and form! We recognize that art is certainly not the imitation of nature, nor is it the inflexible repetition of objective form. We must devote our whole lives to the undisguised expression of our fierce emotion! We do not take art to be the slave of religion, nor is it the explanation of a culture... We want to use the new art to express the spirit of a new era...

(Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*, p. 62).

The intermingling of multiple and sometimes contradictory aims fairly reflects the situation of Chinese modernists, who were faced with rapidly



10-39 Gao Jianfu (1879–1951), *Flying in the Rain*

1932. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 18 x 14" (46 x 35.5 cm). The Art Gallery, Chinese University of Hong Kong

assimilating a wide range of experiences and theories, while being pulled about by the competing claims of nationalism, political factions, and aesthetics. The leading figure in the Storm Society, Pang Xunqin (1906–1985), had studied modernist styles in Paris in the late 1920s. After his return to China in 1930, he continued to paint images of the fragmentation of modern urban life in Paris and Shanghai, with some indebtedness to Cubist collage techniques. An anonymous photomontage from the 1934 issue of the Shanghai periodical *Young Companion* further manifested the linkage of modernism to transnational urban experience. Titled *Intoxicated Shanghai* in English and *Stimulation in the Metropolis* in Chinese, the disjunct images associate the modern with fragmented urban experience, with leisure consumption

10-40 Zhao Shou (b. 1912), *Color*
1934. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 30¾" (92 x 78 cm).
Guangzhou Art Museum



in the form of movies, horse racing, and jazz, with the mechanical media of photography and film, the high technology of skyscrapers, and most of all with a voyeuristic male sexuality (FIG. 10-41). Pang Xunqin himself destroyed most of his paintings related to this kind of idiom in 1966 at the outset of the Cultural Revolution, rightly fearing that they might be used to incriminate him on ideological grounds.

In truth, modernist art faced an inhospitable climate in China almost from the beginning. There

was almost no market or regular gallery venues for such art, and contact with international modernism depended on study abroad, occasional visiting artists, and irregular publications. The Storm Society manifesto suggests that Chinese modernism was pushed toward an apolitical stance of formalism and self-expression in order to distinguish itself from the competing claims of the New Culture Movement's nationalistic reformers and leftist revolutionaries. If there ever was a viable space for such a stance, it disappeared

with the Japanese invasions of the late 1930s and the widespread calls for art to serve the aims of nationalism and resistance. This was one manifestation of what might be called the structural disadvantage of avant-garde movements in China. Whereas in the West (outside of Soviet Russia) avant-garde movements were always outsider movements that could take up attractively radical reformist positions without fear of being asked to realize them, in China much of the space of the avant-garde was occupied by officially adopted reformist programs in the arts, from the time of Cai Yuanpei after the founding of the Republic through the cultural policies of the Communist Party in the PRC. Since Western realism was, in the context of traditional China, a radical break with the cultural past, carrying the additional advantages of accessibility and instructional potential, it was always the first choice of reformers, consigning modernism to the role of a self-indulgent and difficult private art. We might note a further historical paradox: China may have had a greater impact on the formation of international modernist theories than modernism ever had on early-twentieth-century China. The imagist poetics of Ezra Pound and the film theory of Sergei Eisenstein assigned a central role to Sino-Japanese concepts of the ideogram as the model for techniques of imagistic juxtaposition or montage that produced intense and novel insights.

Modernist modes had a more hospitable reception outside the PRC when practiced in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or among expatriate Chinese artists. The Fifth Moon Group, formed in Taipei in 1956 and active until 1970, pursued a technically adventurous abstraction in a variety of painting media under the clear stimulus of American Abstract Expressionism. The best known member of the group, Liu Kuo-sung (b. 1932), turned to Chinese media in the early 1960s with energetic ink abstractions on textured paper grounds (FIG. 10-42) that recall some of the dynamic forms in black-and-white abstractions by Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell, at the same time perhaps pointing to the earlier indebtedness of Abstract Expressionists to East Asian calligraphy and ink painting.



The situation of Chinese artists in the 1920s and 1930s, forced to come to terms with a bewildering array of art theories, movements, and styles in a very short time while contending with the internal pressures of cultural nationalism and art politics, strikingly paralleled the experience of post-Cultural Revolution PRC artists of the late 1970s and 1980s. Deconstructionism, Conceptual art, and post-Modernism were only a few among many new terms of discourse promoted by a flood of translations from, and occasional visits by, Western artists and critics. New opportunities for travel and exhibition abroad opened up, but whereas artists who had studied in Japan or Europe earlier in the century mostly returned to careers in China, the episodic repression of experimental art by the cultural authorities and limited economic opportunities in post-Mao China encouraged a substantial expatriation of transnational

10-41 Anon., *Intoxicated Shanghai (Stimulation in the Metropolis)*
In 1934 issue of *Young Companion*. Photomontage

Accompanying a story of male urban adventure published in the periodical *Young Companion*, the modernist device of photomontage and mixed fragments of Chinese and English text are used to convey the dislocations and fragmentations of experience in the international metropolis of Shanghai. Speed, sensation, and voyeuristic sexual stimulation are conveyed as the central attributes of the modern city.

10-42 Liu Kuo-sung (b. 1932), *Landscape*
1966. Ink and color on paper, 20 1/8 x 35 7/8" (51 x 91 cm). Private collection



artists, self-identified as Chinese but living, working, and exhibiting in international arenas. The question of what Chinese cultural identity can mean in such circumstances continues to be a significant concern for many such artists. It is an issue admittedly entangled with the self-serving marketing advantages of fitting into an established art-world category, and one made still more attractive by the common assumption by Western audiences that such art must have a politically dissident purpose.

Though the issue of Chinese identity becomes increasingly less relevant for artists who successfully operate within global art-marketing and exhibition systems, transnational positions have sometimes been placed in the foreground thematically in the work of artists such as Wenda Gu (b. 1955). Gu trained as an ink painter and in the mid-1980s experimented with monumental pseudo-characters as a way of divorcing the visual impact and semantic potential of Chinese writing from the authority of established meanings. By so doing, Gu deprivileged insider cultural knowledge and opened up his work to international audiences on a more or less equal footing with Chinese viewers. After moving to North America in the late 1980s, Gu began a project called

the *United Nations Series* that explicitly thematizes multicultural engagements. Gu created a series of monumental installations of invented scripts fashioned from human hair gathered from the country where the projects are realized. Woven into screens sometimes more than 20 feet (6 m) high and surrounding visitors in architectural configurations are pseudo-scripts of ancient Chinese, Arabic, and Roman characters that simultaneously invoke and deny the political authority of writing.

THE ARTS OF HISTORY

It seems appropriate for a written history of art to conclude with a discussion of the arts of history and language. The last two centuries have been a period of profound disruption of traditional forms of social and cultural life, but they also saw a compensating deep engagement with the study of the past. We should recall that archaeology, while focused on early history and the prehistoric, is also primarily a modern-era intellectual pursuit, one of many efforts to reconstruct the past through theoretical and historical constructions. A widespread response to the fragmentations of modern life has been the invention

of traditions to provide a reassuring sense of continuity as well as to serve contemporary political needs. The painful transition from imperial dynasty to nation state in the years around 1900 required not only the invention of a new apparatus of government and new concepts of personal identity but also new narratives of history that could accommodate changed conditions and values. The archaeological discovery of concrete remains of a Shang-dynasty culture and the rediscovery of the Dunhuang Buddhist cave temples around just this time were unpredictable but fortuitous, and every regime in the years since has made use of such discoveries for ideological purposes. The presentation and interpretation of archaeological discoveries offer a particularly potent arena for ideological construction, because deep history and prehistory are imbued with an aura of uncontaminated origins. It is little wonder that archaeological sites linked with central culture narratives, such as the tomb of the First Emperor of Qin, have become overlaid with theme-park mythologies to the point that it is possible to experience multiple representations of the site without ever seeing the actual excavations and their recovered contents. Museum displays and the historical representations and narratives they construct are another primary vehicle for the art of history.

Starting in eighteenth-century China, the critical study of historical and textual tradition through the application of epigraphic and other evidential techniques of analysis, in which tradition was not simply accepted as an inherited environment but was subjected to a distancing critique, may mark the beginnings of an intellectual modernity. Turn-of-the-century archaeology and engagement with Western historiographic perspectives are further components of this process. In the visual arts, an awareness of the fragmentation and corruption of the inherited past, an engagement with the deep history of language forms, and primitivist impulses were all related phenomena.

A very plainspoken manifestation of this complex of interests is found in some of the clay pottery wares produced in the Yixing district on the western side of Lake Tai across from Suzhou in Jiangsu Province in southeastern China. A center of teapot

production since the late sixteenth century, Yixing was nearly unique in the ceramic industry in developing an awareness of individual potters, who marked their works with seals or carved inscriptions and formed distinctive styles and specialties. Individuation also implied a pursuit of originality and inventiveness, and many of the sixteenth- to eighteenth-century wares involve elaborate representational conceits, in which the clay teapots, cups, and water droppers are fashioned in the form of tree trunks and branches, fruits and vegetables, or other plants and creatures. The pliable clays of the region, most commonly a purplish brown known as "purple-sand" but including many other colors, are ideal for molding and shaping. Mostly left unglazed, the surfaces are sometimes decorated with carved pictorial designs and calligraphy, turning pottery from an artisan's medium into a full-fledged form of post-literati art. Many other vessels, especially in the nineteenth century, reflect the archaeological turn in culture with imitations of the shapes of ancient bronze vessels and other antiquities. The brick-shaped teapot illustrated here (FIG. 10-43) is modeled after the humble form of a late-fourth-century brick, down to a facsimile of its dated inscription. Along with its antiquarian and epigraphic interests, the pot bears seals of its maker, one Yang Pengnian, and its patron, Qiao Zhongxi, a calligrapher and connoisseur; both were active in the early nineteenth century. The total geometric simplicity of the vessel shape is appealing to modern minimalist or functionalist tastes, but in its own time it aimed more at conveying the rugged integrity of ancient forms and scripts.

The movement known as "stelae studies" was an important manifestation of an archaeological turn in culture from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century. Scholars viewed stone slabs or stelae engraved with ancient calligraphic texts, along with other inscribed archaeological artifacts such as ritual bronze vessels or stone tombs, as more reliable and direct conduits to the past than the copy-books which allowed distortions to be transmitted over time. In addition, stelae and other archaeological texts dating from the distant Zhou through Six Dynasties

10-43 Brick-shaped teapot, Yixing ware

Qing, early 19th century.
Clay, height 1 3/4" (4.4 cm),
length 6 3/16" (15.6 cm). Bei
Shan T'ang, Taipei



era were often relatively anonymous and public or religious in character, in contrast to the private and individualized scripts of famous masters of the more recent past transmitted in copy-books. Stelae styles, which were often relatively simple in form because of the character of the carved stone medium, were thus associated with values of authenticity and direct power that made them attractive to proponents of cultural reform and self-strengthening.

We have already seen how artists such as Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884) and Wu Changshi (1844–1927) sought to infuse their painting with some of the blunt directness of form and language-like combinatorial potential of ancient scripts (see FIG. 10-17 above; see also page 381). Wu Changshi's 1915 set of four calligraphy scrolls in the manner of the Stone Drum script, following a model from the later Zhou dynasty (see FIG. 3-2 above), completes a circuit between text and image by exploring the pictographic character of this early form of writing (see FIG. 10-4 above). At the same time, the blunt simplicity of this archaic style seems to liberate a raw, rhythmic energy that might be seen as a kind of primitivism, seeking sanction in the temporally remote (rather than the geographical and cultural distance of European primitivism) for liberation from cultural constraints.

A more explicit kind of primitivism emerges powerfully in the *Zoon* paintings (FIG. 10-44) of the contemporary Taiwan artist Huang Chih-yang (b. 1965). A tribe of overpoweringly massive

ink figures, painted separately on overlapping hanging scrolls each more than 17 feet (5 m) high, crowd the surface of the paintings and the perceptual space of the viewer with vibrant, heavily textured forms. The figures seem not only prehistoric but at times prehuman, with heads diminished to a blur of ink, while breasts, muscles, entrails, and sexual organs are magnified in images that can be read as internal anatomy, corporeal form, or as a kind of primordial body landscape. Up close, the forms are full of dynamic ink gestures, but the harsh tonal contrasts and obsessive cell-like patterning give the figures both the archaeological quality of fossilized imprints and the ghostly anatomical aura of contemporary medical imaging. The *Zoon* images are forceful reminders of the primitive residue that survives even in a postindustrial world.

One side of the archaeological turn in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese art involved the recovery of deep cultural structures and the liberating energy of primitivism. The other face of this movement includes an awareness of the fragmentation and loss that accompanies the rupture of the present from the past. The damaging effects of time are thematized in a genre of painting popular in the late years of the nineteenth century known as the "Eight Broken." These are collagelike images of overlapping artifacts such as pages of books, paintings, rubbings of calligraphy, as well as occasional coins and ancient vessels. In many cases artists showed the assembled artifacts as torn, folded, burned, worm-eaten,

or otherwise damaged and fragmentary—appropriate emblems for an era that saw as much destruction as it did recovery. Even the tattered remnants of the past, however, are revealed in the end to be illusionistic tricks of painting rather than tangible survivals, suggesting the many barriers and filters blocking an authentic experience of history. Overlapping tangles of depicted antiquarian objects show inherited culture to be not so much a treasured legacy as a burden, requiring complex acts of decipherment and reconstruction. After the end of the dynastic era, moreover, the whole assemblage of imperial culture and collecting required much vaster acts of reconstitution within the displays and narratives of public museum spaces.

The burden not only of historical art but of art history is confronted in an installation by the contemporary artist Huang Yong Ping (b. 1954). Huang was a founding member of the group "Xiamen Dada" that organized art and anti-art events centered in the southeastern coastal city of Xiamen (Amoy) in Fujian, which had a long history as an international trading port. Two stan-

dard art-history texts, the Chinese *History of Chinese Painting* and the English *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, were washed in a washing machine for two minutes, and the resulting intermingled pulp of texts was exhibited in 1987. This gesture of destructive refusal of the limiting categories of art-historical discourse is somewhat cynical and even self-canceling, in that it references the history of Dada events from the early years of the century. Aspirations toward Sino-Western synthesis, which had been central to cultural programs since the beginning of the century and were very much in play during the cultural liberalization periods of the 1980s, along with the unsystematic encounter with critical theories, doctrines, and art movements from all over that characterized the Chinese art scene in those years, are materialized as undigested mush. Other Xiamen Dada events included the public burning of works from their inaugural exhibition, in a painful preemptive strike against cooptation by the art market or domestication by critical language. This act was also inevitably reminiscent of the

10-44 Huang Chih-yang (b. 1965), *Zoon*

1996. Hanging scrolls, ink on paper; each 17'1" x 59" (5.2 m x 150 cm). Collection of the artist

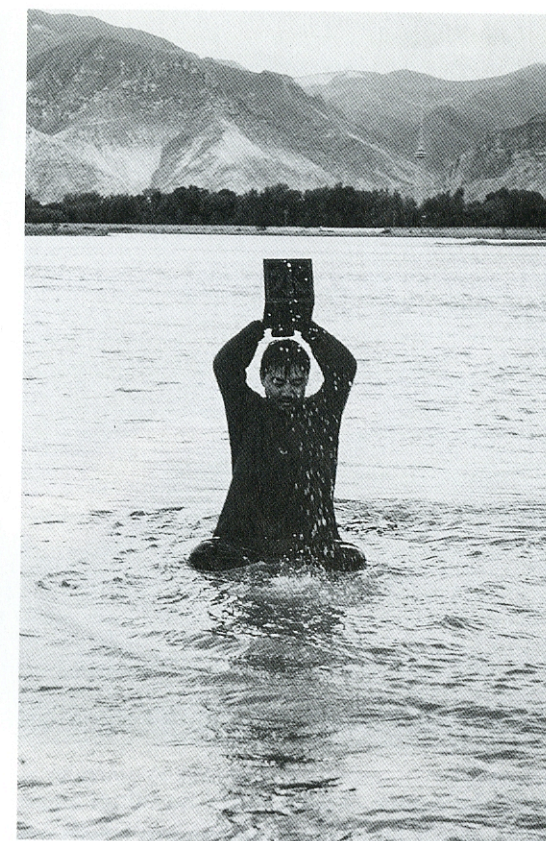
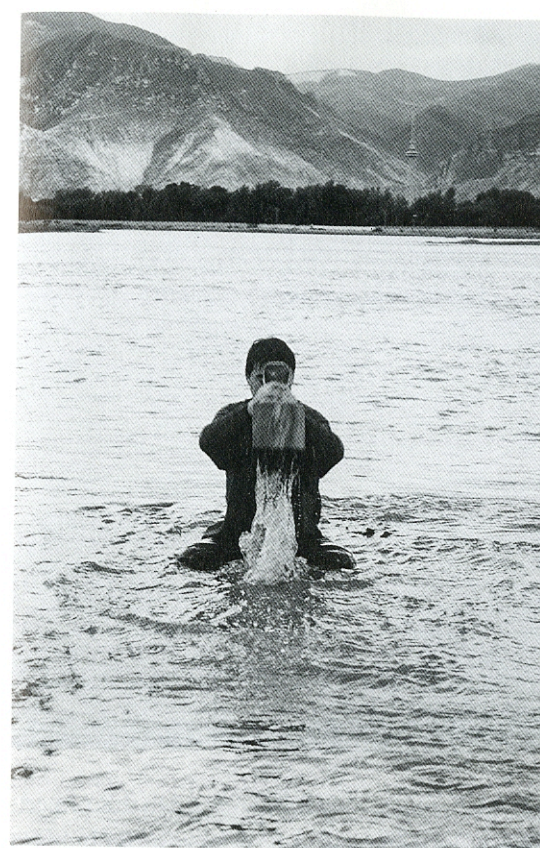
10-45 Song Dong (b. 1966), *Printing on Water* 1996. Performance in the Lhasa River, Tibet



burning of traditional artifacts during the Cultural Revolution years and, still further back, of the destruction of dangerously competitive texts by the Legalist authorities of the Qin, the first empire of China.

Every act of refusal of history and language thus seems fated to be recaptured by those very cultural systems. The strenuousness with which many contemporary artists confront the weight of tradition reveals the centrality of this issue to the full history of twentieth-century Chinese art. Because so much of Chinese cultural tradition takes the form of inculcated performance—memorization, recitation, repetition of writing—some of the most powerful resistance against tradition takes the form of performance art. The installation *Writing the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" One Thousand Times* by Qiu Zhijie (b. 1969) documents in video and calligraphic samples acts of reiterated cultural inscription carried out over the period from 1986 to 1997. The *Orchid Pavilion Preface* text is a canonical touchstone for calligraphic practice by the fourth-century patriarch of calligraphy Wang Xizhi, endlessly

reproduced over the centuries even though the original was long since lost (see FIG. 5-24 and pages 174–176 above). Both the satisfaction and futility of such imitation are embodied in Qiu's thousand-fold practice of the text on a single sheet of paper. That repetition results in a gradual illegibility and final cancellation of the text into a velvety chaos of black ink, suggesting the void of undifferentiation from which language emerges and to which it seemingly must return. A related enactment of the negation of cultural formations is the performance *Printing on Water* by Song Dong (b. 1966) of 1996 (FIG. 10-45). Seated in the shallow waters of the Lhasa River in Tibet, Song struck the flowing surface repeatedly with a large seal carved with the character for "water," conveying the absurdity of efforts to contain the world with language. Carved seals may be the most coercive form of writing, because they imply direct impression and physical contact with the receiving surface. In this case, the location of the performance in a Tibetan river suggests the added dimension of efforts to stamp Tibet with the overlaid forms of Chinese culture.



The Great Wall of China and China's reputation as the site of invention of gunpowder and fireworks are among the deep historical structures in play in *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10: Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters* (FIG. 10-46) by Cai Guo Qiang (b. 1957). In this pyrotechnic event, the Great Wall was both visually extended and dematerialized in an explosive blaze. The work also transcended the Great Wall's status as a land barrier and marker of cultural boundaries, with an invoked audience that moves beyond the transnational and global into the extraterrestrial realm. Song Dong's water printing and Cai Guo Qiang's fire building suggest a contemporary engagement not only with deep structures of history and language but also with the most elemental, though never entirely precultural, forces.

Installations by Xu Bing (b. 1955) known as *A Book from the Sky* are all about language, or a kind of anti-language, but they also have a fundamental and talismanic power that is better conveyed in alternative renderings of the title as *A Mirror to Analyze the World* or as

Heavenly Scriptures. These take the refusal of legibility all the way through an invented lexicon of a thousand or more characters, each painstakingly carved in wooden blocks and hand-printed to form a sea of text that both invites and frustrates reading (FIG. 10-47). The installation comprises a wavelike array of traditionally bound books on the floor, panels of dense wall text, and arcing banners of suspended printing above to create an all-encompassing surround of meaning that remains just beyond reach. Xu Bing evokes many historical vehicles for the authority of writing, such as books, handscrolls, collections of engraved stone stelae, and even wall displays of newspapers and official pronouncements. The authority of every format is undermined by its resolute illegibility. The appearance of the first version of *A Book from the Sky* in the late 1980s in Beijing, at a time of frequently alternating permissiveness and repression of unofficial art, has encouraged a reading of the installation as a protest against the corruption and abuse of language in the political arena. Many other possible implications are in play, including a liberation

10-46 Cai Guo Qiang (b. 1957), *Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10: Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters* 1993. Pyrotechnic event



10-47 Xu Bing (b. 1955), *A Book from the Sky* 1988. Installation of carved woodblocks, bound hand-printed books, and ink on paper, dimensions variable. Exhibited November 1991–January 1992, Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison

from the regime of determined meanings and a demonstration of the emptiness of laborious cultural production. Three of the primary markers of Chinese artistic culture noted in our introduction—highly developed craftsmanship, involvement with the past, and the centrality of

the written text—are fully engaged in this project, only to be subverted. *A Book from the Sky* holds in suspended equilibrium an excess of cultural forms and a total vacancy of determined meaning. Somewhere in that space lie a future Chinese art and a history of that art yet to be written.



GLOSSARY

Amitabha (Emituo Fo) Buddha who presides over the Western Pure Land; Buddha of Infinite Life.

antiquarianism The study of objects from the past, which in pre-modern China was an activity that supplemented and corrected the received historical record by the investigation of inscribed objects, especially ritual bronze vessels and texts cut into stone.

archaeological culture A concept created by archaeologists to identify a collection of data derived from a site or group of sites with a human group.

arhat See *luohan*.

assemblage An archaeological term for a group of objects found in association with one another and in a context from which one may infer function and mutual relationships.

Avalokitesvara See *Guanyin*.

Bai Di A non-Han northern people who founded the state of Zhongshan in the Spring and Autumn period.

bei A stone monument with either an incised text and/or images.

bi A flat disk usually made from a nephritic hardstone with a central perforation. It is traditionally interpreted as the symbol of Heaven.

bian xiang ("transformation tableaux") Illusory conjurations, many of which survive in Buddhist murals.

bixie ("averted of evil") A name applied to a guardian creature, including those placed along the spirit path.

Bodhidharma (d. 532 CE) The First Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, an Indian or Sogdian monk who is traditionally believed to have transmitted Chan from India to China.

bodhisattva A being whose nature is enlightenment (*bodhi*) as in the Historical Buddha prior to his final enlightenment.

bracket cluster (*dou gong*) A combination of blocks (*dou*) and arms (*gong*), usually atop a column, that serves to transmit the roof weight to the column grid and foundation.

bronze In ancient China, an alloy of copper, tin, and lead that was in use by the early second millennium BCE.

cakravartin A Buddhist king who "spins the Wheel of the Law."

camel hump A scalloped wooden block that carries an arm, beam, or purlin.

Cao Cao (155–220 CE) A general of the late Han dynasty who took part in the coup of 189 CE and later established his own kingdom, the Wei, in northern China.

celadon European term for any high-fired green-glaze ware; applied especially to Yue, Yaozhou, and Longquan wares.

chiefdom A regional polity, with a leader (chief) who is usually hereditary; characterized by status differentiation, specialized production, and elite control of wealth.

Chan A Buddhist sect that emphasizes meditation and personal transmission of doctrine. Traditionally believed to have been transmitted from India by Bodhidharma, but possibly of Chinese origin. In Japanese, Zen.

chinzo A Chan term for official portraits of priests, which may have served to document the transmission of doctrine from master to pupil.

chinoiserie European styles of the