

CHINESE PAINTING FROM THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT TO THE FIRST NATIONAL ART EXHIBITION (1919–1929)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The political situation of China was clearly destabilised after the establishment of the Republic of China. The country was torn by internal struggles between military governors and defenceless in the face of foreign powers. Quickly growing reformatory movement was headed by young students, returning from their foreign studies, and intellectuals educated in the new, Western-style education system. The looming threat of a national humiliation led to the outburst of the May Fourth Movement. It was a student movement started in Beijing in 1919, in opposition to the Paris peace conference (1919–1920) and the treaty of Versailles (1919). On 4th May over 3000 students gathered on the Tiananmen Square. They rallied and demonstrated with the slogans “Nation in danger! Fight, countrymen!” The unrest spread to major cities, and workers joined the students by going on strike. In fear of further developments, the government refused to sign the treaty of Versailles and dismissed the ministers acting in favour of Japan.

The events of 4th May 1919 are connected with a more complex phenomenon including the 1917–1921 events, namely “new thought wave”, literary revolution, student movement, merchant and worker strikes, boycott of Japanese goods and other social and political action of the newly forming group of intellectuals.

Most importantly, this period saw many actions popularising Western thought. The new intellectuals claimed that the modernisation of China was only possible via the Western influence. Even Chinese philosophy, ethics, natural sciences, social theories and institutions should be reshaped to resemble the Western patterns. The main goal was not only a partial renewal or ad-hoc reforms, but a substantial programme dismantling the ancient traditions and replacing them with a completely new quality.

In the light of this goal, Western art gained a completely new meaning. The solutions combined with innovative theories were gladly introduced. They developed in a rebellious atmosphere and made the 1930s the stage of strengthening the artistic influence of the West. The peak of this period was the First National Art Exhibition in 1929, where the status of Chinese Western-style painting school was announced internationally for the first time.

WESTERN ART AND MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT

Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 continued his campaign for Western art which, according to him, increased interest in the New Art Movement. He believed that such interest would be stronger than the want to profit from art, and would allow the artists to maintain mental balance; he also called to “remember about the aesthetic education within the cultural movement.”¹⁾ His theories reached Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, another leader of the New Culture Movement, who defined the New Culture Movement 新文化運動 in his writings in 1920. He believed the movement should aim at encompassing new elements in science, religion, ethics, literature, art, music, and other aspects of Chinese culture. He mourned the neglect of music and art by the members of the new movement and feared that human existence would be deprived of spiritual values.²⁾

Art was neglected in favour of more significant political, social and literary reforms. The movement itself did not make any direct attempts at abolishing the classical tradition and replacing it with a new art, as happened in literature.³⁾ Chinese art in fact benefited from the rebellious atmosphere, because when the traditions were attacked, Western ideas were glorified. Hundreds and even thousands of young people felt the insufficient nature of the traditional

¹⁾ Cai Yuanpei (1930: 5).

²⁾ Chen Duxiu (1920: 1–6).

³⁾ A new literary style as a new means of expression released the learning process in the 20th century.

means of expression, especially when confronted with complex experiences of a country undergoing tumultuous reforms. Therefore they devoted themselves to creating a new art for a modern Chinese society. Many artists travelled to Europe – mainly France, the main destination for Western art – and less well-off students went to study in Japan. Upon their return they were greeted with this enthusiasm for a new movement.

The rapidly increasing number of art schools provided a fertile ground for the members of the movement. They gathered around Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Beijing and Canton, and focused their efforts on creating art societies and organising art exhibitions, creating opportunities for the exchange of ideas. Journals created as a result of the May Fourth Movement were the best vehicle for presenting new styles and theories to a greater number of recipients. In several years the New Art Movement has become strong enough to challenge the icons of traditional art and finally change the 20th century Chinese art.

ART SCHOOLS AND SOCIETIES IN SHANGHAI, BEIJING, NANJING, HANGZHOU, SUZHOU AND CANTON. OTHER ARTISTIC CENTRES

The increase in the number of foreign students was directly linked to a rapid development of the existing fine arts academies and the creation of new ones. The Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts started accepting women in 1920, and in 1921 changed its name to Shanghai Fine Arts College 上海美術專門學校. New courses were added, including Chinese and Western painting, artistic education, design, sculpture and craft, and the school was extended. In the 1920s the teaching staff included: Wang Yachen 汪亞塵, who graduated from Tokyo Fine Arts School in 1922 and Ding Yanyong 丁衍鏞, who also graduated in Tokyo in 1926.⁴⁾ From 1920 Shanghai School of Fine Arts 上海美專 employed Li Chaoshi 李超士, and later also Wu Fading 吳法鼎 – the first artists educated in France.

Liu Haisu 劉海粟, the head of Shanghai School of Fine Arts, was a supporter of the New Art Movement in Shanghai. In 1924, as the first students graduated, Liu organised an exhibition of their works. Some of the paintings presented nude men and women, and the exhibition was immediately closed by the military governor. Liu Haisu helped his students by writing a strongly worded open letter to the governor. The education minister accepted Liu's arguments and allowed him to use nude models in art schools. The victory, however, was not complete.

⁴⁾ *Sotsugyosha meibo henshu iinkai* (1982: 74, 78).

In 1926 general Sun Chuanfang 孫傳芳(1885–1935), the military governor for Five Provinces, prohibited the painting of nude models. Liu accepted the challenge and started a war in the press. The general threatened Liu with arrest and closure of the school, but fortunately Liu managed to avoid such consequences: when Chiang Kai-shek took Shanghai in 1927 general Sun was dismissed.

In 1926 the Xinhua Arts Academy 新華藝術專科學校 separated from Shanghai School of Fine Arts. Among its teachers were Zhang Yuguang 張聿光 (1884–1968), and Wang Yachen 汪亞塵 after his return from Europe in 1931. This school, modelled on the Shanghai School of Fine Arts, gradually gained significance. In 1937 the campus of the Shanghai School was bombed by the Japanese, but it continued functioning until 1941 in a temporary building in the French Quarter.

Several graduates of the First Public Zhejiang School 浙江第一師範大學 – Wu Mengfei 吳夢非 (1893–1979), Feng Zikai 豐子愷 Liu Zhiping 劉質平 (1894–1978) – students of Li Shutong 李叔同 – were inspired by the May Fourth Movement and established a Shanghai Public Fine Arts School. Around 1926 it changed its name to Shanghai College of Arts 上海藝術大學, but was closed around 1930 for political reasons. In its short history it managed to educate 700–800 art teachers. In 1925 some teachers, such as Ding Yanyong 丁衍鏞 (1902–1978), left and opened the Chinese Art College 中華藝術大學, also closed in 1930.

With the return from Paris of the first group of writers, dramatist Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968) organised *Académie du Midi* 南國藝術學院 in Shanghai in order to promote European realist literature and drama. Tian Han invited Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻(1895–1953) during his first stay in China in 1925. As a result, he added a department headed by Xu Beihong to his school.

In the period of 1919–1929 Shanghai School of Fine Arts graduates established their own art schools. One of the examples is *White Goose Painting Society* 白鵝畫會 created in 1923 by Liu Haisu's pupils, Pan Sitong 潘思同 (1904–1980), Chen Qiucuo 陳秋草 (1906–1988) and others. The Society developed into the White Goose Painting Preparatory School 白鵝繪畫補習學校,⁵⁾ which offered basic courses in Western painting and encouraged students to work in the atmosphere of liberal experiments. Until the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 almost a thousand students graduated from this school, and many of them continued their studies abroad.⁶⁾

⁵⁾ In 1928 the name was changed into White Goose Research Institute.

⁶⁾ Wan Qingli (2005: 82–85).

With a growing number of artists creating Western-style art, the New Art Movement was gathering momentum. Art societies and public exhibitions became a popular means of communication and garnered interest among the city inhabitants. Artistic groups had been present in Chinese culture, but during previous decades they were limited to mere social groups, where amateur painters met to chat about art and over snacks. The Shanghai Taijiquan Society for Calligraphy, Painting and Seal Engraving operating in 1885–1926 can serve as an example here. Artistic groups for Western-style artists resembled the impressionists: unity gave them the will to fight for acceptance in an unfriendly or indifferent environment. The best known was the Heavenly Horse Art Association 天馬畫會 established by Liu Haisu and some members of Shanghai School of Fine Arts, Wang Yachen, Jiang Xiaojang 江小鷗 (1893–1939), Ding Song 丁悚 (1891–1972) and others. The association organised eight exhibitions per year, until 1927, when the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek and his army stopped their activities and many members left for Europe.

Another influential organisation was the Artistic Dawn Society 晨光美術會 established by Zhang Yuguang 張聿光 (1884–1968), Chen Baoyi 陳抱一 (1893–1945) and others. It was an informal atelier, where artists could paint models employed by the society. By 1925 it has about 300 members.⁷⁾ The society organised four major popular exhibitions. This society was famous for their enthusiastic promotion of the New Art Movement. In August 1926 it organised a series of lectures drawing attention to problems of art. The lectures were given by famous artists, like Zhang Daofan 張道藩 (1897–1968), Li Jinfa 李金髮 (1900–1974), Chen Baoyi and others. The content of their lectures was printed in the *World of Art* 藝術界 the following day and in the art section of the Shanghai *Shen bao* 申報.

At that time Beijing has had the first National Academy and Society for Studying Painting Techniques of the Beijing University. The Academy expanded its curriculum to include both traditional and Western art, and employed Wu Fading who had just returned to China in 1919 with Lin Fengmian 林風眠, as the director; conservative Beijing saw fauvism. At the end of 1920s the Academy admitted around 350 students,⁸⁾ and among the graduates were Liu Kaiqu 劉開渠 (1904–1993) and Lei Guiyuan 雷圭元 (1905–1989), who later continues their education in France. Li Yishi was not only an active member of the May Fourth Movement, but also taught at Beijing University and taught

⁷⁾ Wan Qingli (2005: 82–85).

⁸⁾ Wan Qingli (2005: 82–85).

drawing at the Society for Studying Painting Techniques. Wu Fading also taught at the Society, whenever he was in Beijing. The Society for Studying Painting Techniques evolved into the Society for Studying Plastic Arts 造型美術研究會, and in 1924 taught traditional and Western painting, calligraphy, seal engraving, and published a journal of Plastic arts devoted to the studies of art history and theory. The honorary leader of the society was Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), and many Beijing University students and others interested in art were among its members.

Young artists could also study Western painting in the North China Academy established in 1922 by Cai Yuanpei.⁹⁾ The same year Wang Ziyun 王子雲 (1897–1974), still as a student of the National Arts Academy, established the Apollo Arts Society 阿波羅藝術學會 with his teacher Wu Fading. It organised three exhibitions of Western painting, and during the second one in 1923 Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) was present.¹⁰⁾ In the summer of 1924 a series of lectures took place, and as a result the Apollo Arts Institute 阿波羅藝術研究所 was established.

Educated at the Tokyo Fine Arts School between 1916–1921 Wang Yanqi introduced a decorative style of Western painting to Beijing. In 1924 he established a College of Arts in Beijing 北京美術學院, which offered traditional and Western painting courses, sculpture, advertising, craft and music.

Shen Xiqiao, a graduate of Painting and Crafts Faculty of the Higher Public School 國立南京高等師範學校, established the first Fine Arts School in Nanjing in 1922. Within the four short years of its existence the school educated 65 students, and among the lecturers was well-known aesthetics and Buddhism scholar, Lu Cheng 呂澂 (1896–1984).

In 1927 a group of young artists requested Cai Yuanpei to open a Fine Arts Department at the National Central University (as a support for the national Academy in Beijing). With his agreement an Arts and Craft Faculty was established in the Fourth Public Jiangsu School in Nanjing, which became the basis for a New Arts Department for the National Central University.¹¹⁾ Li Yishi became the head of the faculty, and for a short time after his return from France in 1928, Xu Beihong was the head of the faculty.¹²⁾

⁹⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 24).

¹⁰⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 13).

¹¹⁾ Jiang Danshu (1959: 33).

¹²⁾ Jiang Danshu (1959: 16).

With Xu Beihong's leadership the faculty strengthened its position, putting emphasis on perfecting technique and understanding Western artistic trends. The faculty attracted many talented artists, such as Wang Caibai 汪采白 (1887–1940), Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), Zhang Shuqi 張書旂 (1899–1974), Pan Yuliang, Li Yishi, and later its graduates Lu Sibai 呂斯百 (1905–1973).

Hangzhou became an important centre for the New Art Movement after the establishment of the National Fine Arts Academy in 1928. The academy focused on promoting Western art and took up the task of introducing Western art in China. Under Lin Fengmian's leadership (until 1939), the Academy developed into a progressive centre for new art, teaching not only painting techniques, but also the ideas of expressing oneself through art.¹³⁾

The members of the Hangzhou National Fine Arts Academy were prominent enough to present their works at exhibitions in Tokyo. In 1931 they presented their works in Nanjing, and in 1934 again in Shanghai. Lin Fengmian's gloomy and tragic paintings recalling the so-called Shanghai incident¹⁴⁾ of 1932¹⁵⁾ caused a stir in the meeting room of the Shanghai City Council. Not all the Hangzhou teachers represented modernist art – a large group worked with a traditional Chinese painting, and only a small group focused on Western art.

The Academy published several journals devoted to art, and the main publications were *Athena* 雅典娜 and *Apollo* 阿波羅, edited by art historian Lin Wenzheng. It also financially supported societies devoted to promoting art and music.

Suzhou Fine Arts Academy 蘇州美術專科學校 was established in 1922 by Yan Wanliang 顏文樑 (1893–1988), who promoted Western style resembling 19th century romantic painting. Yan Wanliang became interested in Western watercolour and oil painting when he was working in the art department of the Commercial Press in Shanghai. In the years 1919–1937 he organised in Suzhou annual art exhibitions devoted to Chinese *guohua* 國畫 painting and Western *xihua* 西畫. After his return from Paris he led the Suzhou Institute for Teaching Art 蘇州藝術學校. In 1931 the Suzhou Fine Arts Academy moved to a classical building with a facade decorated with ionic columns, which increased

¹³⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 27).

¹⁴⁾ The Shanghai incident – describes events taking place in Shanghai between 28th of January to 3rd of March 1932. At the end of 1931 the people in Shanghai started to boycott Japanese goods, and the Japanese attacked the inhabitants in retaliation.

¹⁵⁾ Li Puyuan (1936: 63).

its importance. The academy operated until the war, when the Japanese robbed it, and a valuable collection of casts and copies of the works brought by Yan Wanliang from Paris was completely destroyed. After this the Academy did not reopen.

In Canton craftsmen in the 18th century painted oil portraits of foreigners and their ships, landscapes and genre art (mostly the daily life of the Chinese), commissioned by the foreigners. As an anonymous commentator states: 'they used the same barbaric realism to paint their ancestors'.¹⁶⁾

Western art in Canton was not taught until 1921, when a group of Japan-educated artists created scientifically-oriented Red Society 紅會. The society organised its first exhibition the same year. Among its members were Li Tiefu 李鐵夫 (1869–1952) and Guan Liang 關良 (1900–1986) and many other locally-famous artists. The name of the society turned out to be very unfortunate. Before 1930 the Kuomintang destroyed all leftist movements in fine art schools, and although the society members were mostly uninvolved politically portrait and landscape painters, even a change of the first sign in the society's name did not save it – it was closed in 1931.

In 1926 the municipal authorities established the Cantonese Municipal Fine Arts College 廣州美術專門學校, with a former member of Red Society, Hu Gentian 胡根天 (1892–1985) as the director. Hu Gentian employed Dinga Yanyong 丁衍鏞 (1902–1978) to teach Western painting, as he was a graduate of the Tokyo school and co-founder of the City Fine Arts Museum.

The third art centre was Lingnan University (former Cantonese Christian College, and later Sun Yatsen University), where Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879–1951) and his brother Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889–1933) were employed as teachers. The eclectic Cantonese art developed until 1937, when a Japanese occupation forced the artists to move further into continental China or seek refuge in Hong Kong.

By the end of 1920s China's largest cities had fine art academies or departments modelled on European schools, for instance the Wuchang Art Academy established in 1920 and the Wuxi Art Academy established in 1926.

In Amoy in Fujian an art department was established in a public school, and employed Japan-educated teachers. There was also a Public Art School, established by the graduates of Fine Arts Department of Shanghai University. Even the distant Sichuan had two centres of artistic education: the Arts Depart-

¹⁶⁾ Li Puyuan (1936: 11).

ment at Sichuan University in Chengdu¹⁷⁾ and the South-Western Arts Academy in Chongqing, established in 1925. By 1945 almost 3 thousand students had graduated from this school.¹⁸⁾

THE INFLUENCE OF WESTERN ART ON CHINESE ART

The Chinese publishing market flourished thanks to the May Fourth Movement. Within several years over 400 new periodicals in Chinese appeared.¹⁹⁾ The new art proponents quickly realised the effectiveness of this medium. Before 1927 the following periodicals were published: *Painting Magazine* 繪畫雜誌 at Beijing University, *Artistic Education* 美術雜誌 by Chinese Artistic Education Society, *Art Magazine* 美術 by art schools in Shanghai, *Art* 藝術 and *New Art Fortnightly* 新華藝術半月刊 by Society for Art, *Art Critic* 藝術評論 by Western Art Studying Society and Dawn of Art Society, and *World of Art* 藝術界 by *Shen bao*. There were also periodicals on art published by art schools in different cities: *Jinmei Public School Monthly* in Amoy, *Art* 藝術 in Chengdu, *Nanbei Magazine* 南北雜誌 (Nanjing), *Fine Arts* 造型美術 (Beijing) and *Congling* 蔥嶺 (Shanghai). Some of them were discontinued after only several issues, while others were published for many years.

The process of introducing Western art was fragmented and not very selective. After the May Fourth Movement the introduction of Western art and theory was the most intense due to numerous translations and adaptations. There were many articles on Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Fauvism (the three most popular directions), as well as 19th century Neoclassicism, Romanticism and Realism. In 1919 there were many publications on Rodin, and in 1920 Chinese artists were acquainted with the works of Brancusi, Laurens and German expressionists.²⁰⁾ In 1921–1922 Yu Qifan wrote a series of articles on modern painting from different countries of the world (France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Hungary), providing the artists with up-to-date and wide knowledge

¹⁷⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 190–192.)

¹⁸⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 22–23).

¹⁹⁾ Wang Q.E. (2001: 41).

²⁰⁾ *Dongfangzazhi* (1921. 18: 18).

of world art centres.²¹ In 1923, fragments of Ruskin's *Modern painters* have been translated into Chinese by Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898–1975).²²

In the world of literature Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978)²³ published his *Revolution and Literature* in 1926.²⁴ During that period, just as in literature, the artists were occupied with discussions on art for art's sake and art for life. He expressed the general opinion when he said that both aspects complement each other. By quoting Lessing, Kant, Plato, Fichte, Tolstoy, Kropotkin and William Morris, he wrote that the basic objective of art is independence, as well as a clear relationship with reality. He believed that art would never adjust to the tastes of common people, because it would lose its unique taste and degenerate. Therefore, he believed that people should be educated in order to understand the refined taste of art.²⁵

The period 1919–1929 saw a large number of works about the Western art theory. Zhang Daofan 張道藩 (1897–1968) translated *Modern European Painting* (1928). Feng Zikai and many of his peers used Japanese publications and translated them into Chinese, for instance *Twelve lectures on modern art* by Ueda Bin translated by Feng Zikai (1929) and *Analysis of Russian art* by Akida Ujaku, translated in 1929 by Chen Zhifo 陳之佛 (1896–1962).²⁶

The most important and prolific writer on aesthetics of that period was Lu Cheng 呂澂. Using original sources and Japanese translations he wrote *Foundations of aesthetics* (1923) and *Overview of aesthetics* (1923) and many other articles relating to modern aesthetics, with vast bibliographic references: *Newest trends in aesthetics* (1924), *Newest aesthetic theories and beauty principles* (1925). After him, the topic of aesthetics was continued by Fan Shoukang; he published *The essence of art* (1928). Translations of works of Japanese writers were also available,²⁷ as well as articles introducing the ideas of Western philosophers.

John Fairbank wrote about a great influence of Western sciences on the Chinese intellect:

²¹ *Dongfangzazhi* (1921. 19: 25)

²² Feng Zikai (1923. 20: 62–75).

²³ Guo Moruo (1892–1978) – writer, poet, playwright, historian, doctor.

²⁴ Guo Moruo (1926: 30).

²⁵ Guo Moruo (1926: 45–50).

²⁶ *Dongfangzazhi* (1921. 19: 25).

²⁷ More detailed information on translation of Japanese books, see: Saneto Keishu (1945: 193–197).

Then suddenly and almost simultaneously China felt the experiences equal to reformation, the French and Russian Revolutions put together. Marks and Darwin were new, but not more so than Aristotle or Rousseau. Young Chinese were learning about them all at the same time.²⁸⁾

The same situation took place in the world of Chinese art. Within short 10 years China absorbed all the history of Western art, all the theories and works. Artists who were hoping to revive Chinese art possessed vast knowledge, and did not need critical research to understand Western art theory, nor did they have time for such research. Directions in Western art were often discussions without proper understanding of their full meaning. Therefore they were either accepted or rejected in their entirety, usually in confusion and misunderstanding.

Another aspect of introducing Western art in China is maliciously described by Lu Xun:

A truly terrifying phenomenon in the world of Chinese literature and art is importing the –isms, without introducing their meaning. Therefore everyone uses his or her own interpretation. Reading a book mainly on one author is considered expressionism. When a book involves other characters as well, it is realism. Being moved and inspired to write poetry by a woman's slightly uncovered leg is called romanticism, but admiring woman's legs without the possibility of creating poetry is called classicism. Head falling from the sky, on the head a cow – oh dear, this is futurism, etc., etc.²⁹⁾

Such a superficial understanding of the West was very clear in the world of art. This stage was probably inevitable, although difficult for the initial stage of introducing Western culture on such a large scale.

In the whole process of introducing Western art in China, artists imitating Western painting wanted to strengthen their position in the world of art, which is reflected in the large number of art schools and societies that were established within only one decade. The artists also accepted the Western method of communicating with the viewers, namely exhibitions. Whether at individual or group exhibitions, the artists presented their *experiments* within the imported styles.

²⁸⁾ Fairbank (2005: 56).

²⁹⁾ Lu Xun (1929: 84).

Artists imitating Western styles felt that if they could unite, they would have much a larger influence on Chinese art. Already in 1922 a large group of artists following the Western style organised an exhibition in Shanghai. Wu Fading 吳法鼎 showed his *Rain* and *Thunder towers*, and Li Chaoshi 李超士 presented his *Still life*. Another significant exhibition, organised in 1926, is thus evaluated by a modern critic:

Artists' interests are focused around landscapes, still life and portraits. Vivid colours and intense brushstrokes show strength. But there is no precise form or proper contrast.³⁰⁾

This description can refer to almost any Western style. It reveals that neither critics, nor artists, had proper preparation to interpret Western-style art. Artists experimented randomly with numerous imported styles. It is particularly art school students who had to face using new means of expression, so different from the well-known ink painting. The specific styles of Manet, Monet, Cézanne, van Gogh, Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck were considered a repository of styles that could be freely used and selected during studies. Therefore, every painter could, at any moment, become an Impressionist or a Fauvist.

The policy of frequent exhibitions, although a good advertisement, forced students to search for the simplest styles to imitate. A seemingly simple and free Post-Impressionism and Fauvism found many followers, unlike Cubism, which requires intellectual and analytical skills.

Many young artists, Wang Yachen and other Pegasus Society 天馬社 members included, were interested in Impressionists. Liu Haisu 劉海粟 studied works by Cézanne, van Gogh, Matisse and Derain through reproductions available in Japan and China (he stayed in Japan 1919–1920). Maybe inspired by Cézanne's *The bathers* or by *Joy of life* by Matisse, Liu Haisu painted *Dancing in the nature* in 1924 – a group of nude figures in different poses. The composition is crowded and the figures are presented in an unskilled manner. In 1929 Liu Haisu went to Paris for the first time and he encountered original European painting. His works improved vastly, which can be seen in his *Qianmen*, exhibited in the Autumn Salon in 1929. His painting was similar to van Gogh's technique – he painted thick impastos with decisive brushstrokes, and it constituted the main part of the picture.

³⁰⁾ Zhuang Wenya (1934: 225–226).

Ding Yanyong 丁衍鏞 faithfully imitated known from the reproductions Matisse's style, where simplified forms and calligraphic outlines resembled Chinese painting. One of his paintings from 1928 – *Western Lake* – seems to perfectly present the calm feeling of a familiar landscape.

When compared to these artists, those that were educated in Europe had a much better grasp of the basics of Western painting techniques, and oil painting in particular. However they were marginalised by a large group of painters returning from Japan and graduates of Chinese art schools. Therefore the majority of paintings created in the 1920s were imitations, without significant artistic value due to poor technical skill. Teaching techniques became an important element only after Xu Beihong's return from France. Nudes (in charcoal) created during his studies in France serve to emphasise the acquired skills and qualifications for promoting academic realism.

FIRST MUSEUMS AND EXHIBITIONS IN CHINA. FIRST NATIONAL ART EXHIBITION IN 1929

Before 1929 no imperial or private collections were publicly displayed. Imperial collections were a symbol of power, aimed at educating and entertaining the emperors and their families. Only a selected group could admire the works. In imperial China only the family and friends of the owner had access to a collection.

Works of art were exhibited for the first time in a Museum in Nantong called *Bolanguan* 博覽館. In 1905 the industrialist Zhang Jian 張謇 founded the first Chinese museum in Nantong. In that period the Chinese elite used the Western institution of the museum to ensure the continuity of knowledge about culture, history and nature. Museum in Nantong was supposed to help young people acquire knowledge useful during their school education. Alongside works of art, museums held also items of natural history. Before Zhang Jian funded a museum, he submitted his request twice at the imperial court, and each time he was rejected. Only after the fall of the Qing dynasty did the newly formed government pay more attention to museums. In July 1912 the first official museum in Beijing was opened – National Historical Museum 國立歷史博物館.

In October 1914, the Foreign Ministry along with the Beiyang government organised the first public art exhibition of the imperial collection. The internal court of the Forbidden City was still occupied by the emperor, thus the exhibition was presented in the external courtyards. This part of the collection was named Beijing Hall of Antique Exhibitions and later became the National

Museum. The Beijing Palace Museum 國立北平故宮博物院 was finally opened on 10th October 1925, after the government ordered the last emperor to leave the palace.³¹⁾ Only then was the Forbidden City fully open to viewers. However, due to an unstable political situation, the curators decided to move the most valuable pieces to the south of the country. During the years 1948–1949 part of the collection was moved to Taipei.

The first exhibition devoted to modern Chinese art was the so-called *achievement exhibition* 成績展覽會 organised in Suzhou in January 1909.³²⁾ Later, exhibiting teacher and student work in art schools, especially Western-style art, became popular. Also, just like in Western salons and Japanese exhibitions, art societies displayed the works of their members.

In April 1912, the Society of Writers and Artists 文美會 gathered a group of artists and intellectuals in an apartment. The exhibition was held in three rooms only, and pictures were exchanged, sold, or simply viewed. This was a purely commercial exhibition, primarily aimed at presenting modern painting, with a large selection of calligraphy.

The first recorded painting exhibition in China took place in Suzhou at the beginning of 1919, as the First Painting Competition. It was not a real competition, but it facilitated the gathering of modern Western-style and traditional paintings from the whole country.

In the 1920s and 1930s numerous modern exhibitions were organised, particularly by art societies. The Pegasus Society 天馬社 organised eight exhibitions in Shanghai between 1919–1927 – mainly displaying modern Western-style paintings, and sketches, photographs and sculptures.

As the Chinese curators learned more about Western exhibition practices, they used them to promote Chinese traditional art. Two of the largest traditional art societies – the Society for Studies of Chinese Painting 中國畫學研究會 and the Lake Society 湖社 were responsible for frequent exhibitions of the latest works as well as older pieces.

Both societies co-organised 6 Japanese-Chinese exhibitions in the period of 1921–1931, presenting the works of modern and old masters. During the first four exhibitions (Beijing 1921, Tokyo 1922, Beijing and Shanghai 1924, Tokyo and Osaka 1926) only modern Japanese and Chinese works were made available to the public. The other two (Tokyo 1928, Tokyo 1931) were completely different, as they presented only old Chinese pieces from Japanese and Chinese private col-

³¹⁾ Shambaugh (2005: 71).

³²⁾ Tsuruta Takeyoshi (1974: 19).

lections. They were organised mainly for Japanese viewers, and all these events had a semi-official status due to the involvement of both governments.

Only after a whole decade of intense activities did the young movement receive recognition. In 1929, under the patronage of the Ministry of Education, the First National Art Exhibition was organised in Shanghai, and it was open almost all April.³³⁾ It was hailed as a great breakthrough for the New Art Movement. The shown items included traditional and modern painting, Western-style painting, sculpture, architectural designs, photography and embroidery made by artists from around the country. The majority of traditional paintings were imitations of ancient masters – reforms in art were considered too Japanese, which was a harsh criticism for traditional artists.³⁴⁾

The section devoted to Western-style painting included around 600 items – almost as many as in the traditional part. Japanese influence dominated the initial stage of the new art, in styles from Realism to Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Fauvism (noticeable in the landscaped, portraits and still life of Ding Yanyong 丁衍鏞). Representative of the academic Realism was Pan Yuliang 潘玉良. Lin Fengmian's five paintings were considered idealist for their misshapen figures, intense colours and symbolic elements. They were also criticised for their three-dimensional presentation of figures. The best reviews were awarded the little known painter Feng Gangbai 馮鋼伯 (1882–1954) for his great technique and harmonious colour composition in his self-portrait, showing a photo-like resemblance. There were also the originals most often found in calendars and advertisements, places next to copies of Western masterpieces.

Chinese paintings imitating the Western style posed a number of questions for the New Art Movement. We could see as the isolated experiments of the previous period grew into a uniform movement with the devotion of many artists, believing that Western art is a magical way of reviving Chinese art. In their conviction that a new art could be created from the meeting of East and West, they accepted the Western art and surrendered to a foreign medium and foreign aesthetics with an open heart. This attitude is notable in students, learning in Japan, who dominated that period. Because they studied abroad, they could see the problems related to mass acceptance of a foreign culture, and problems that were not resolved in Japan. When Japanese teachers taught Chinese students, they 'diluted' it and increased the misunderstanding. Styles

³³⁾ Hu Gengdian (1929. 3: 37).

³⁴⁾ Huang Binhong (1929. 3: 33–35).

that took ages to develop in Europe were accepted or rejected indiscriminately, because Asian students saw only differences in styles, and not the environment in which they grew. Chinese students also accepted the opinions of their teachers about Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh as ‘mad geniuses.’ Many students held strict academic training in contempt and were looking for the means to express their talent on their own.³⁵⁾

Conflicts within the New Art Movement were visible. In 1929 Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 worried by a pointless imitation of modern styles (Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism) emphasised again that art must be faithful to reality.³⁶⁾ He believed that new styles did not present reality, and were therefore unreal and unethical. He spoke in favour of a realistic style, understood by everyone. Xu Zhim 徐志摩 (1897–1931), a poet of romantic school, refuted Xu Beihong’s arguments by defining art as a personal means of expression of every artist. Xu Beihong, again, introduced a distinction into *real art*, faithfully depicting reality, and *false art*, deforming reality.³⁷⁾

By 1929 the New Art Movement has become strongly rooted in the world of Chinese art, and even showed certain variations. Artists educated in Europe gathered within the environment of Nanjing University and together searched for academic realism in art. In Hangzhou Lin Fengmian 林風眠 represented a modern Western style. The influence of Japan-educated artists diminished, and in Beijing and Shanghai more progressive artists suggested a political alternative for Chinese art. Most importantly, all the artists shared a rudimentary conviction that new art should be created to depict the present. This decade, thus, provided the basis of knowledge and understanding, further developed in the following periods.

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³⁵⁾ Fu Yanchang (1927: 9).

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